

A GREAT RELIGION.<sup>1</sup>

IF any proof were needed of the value of the comparative method in historic research, it is afforded by these handsome volumes. The science of comparative philology produced that of comparative mythology, and the establishing of a system of analytical study of myths and folklore, which extracted meaning from the meaningless, and turned the mere fable into precious fragments of historic record.

The study of myth and folklore revealed certain laws that were common to most systems by which the growth and development of a religion could be studied. First, it established the fact that a religion, be it the most elementary beliefs of a savage people or the fully developed creed of dynastic Egypt or Chaldea, or the sacerdotal system of the Hebrews, was essentially the product of the human mind—religion becomes, therefore, a branch of anthropology, and requires to be studied by the methods of that important science.

No religion of the ancient world so much demands to be studied by the anthropological method as that of Egypt. Its antiquity far exceeds that of all other nations, for many of its component elements belong to the prehistoric age. Viewed as a whole, it is a perfect conglomeration of strange and contradictory elements. Grossly savage beliefs of animal worship and cannibalism are found side by side with the most simple monotheism, and magic and demonology with an elaborate system of eschatology which in the latest times exercised a powerful influence on that of Christianity. Not only was the student faced with this confusion of elements, but there was another serious difficulty to encounter. Unlike the great Aryan or Semitic religions, the Egyptian religion possessed no canonical books like the Vedas or Avesta or the Hebrew scriptures. The Egyptians were not a literary people; there was a scribe caste, powerful through its priestly and official associations, but essentially a caste. Unlike the Babylonians, they had no national epic poems, no exegetical literature.

The only work which in any degree could be considered as the sacred book of the Egyptians was the "Book of the Dead," a mosaic of material of various ages and sources. The student, therefore, who would solve the riddle of the Sphinx and reduce chaos to system and order, must be a bold man, and prepared to face much labour and study. Great scholars had already laboured in the field. Dr. Heinrich Brugsch, in his work "Religion und Mythologie, der Alten Ägypter," had attempted to set forth the chief features of this wonderful religion; he had, however, been hampered by his material. The fine editions of the "Book of the Dead," such as the Ani and Nu papyri of the Theban age, were unpublished, and he had recourse chiefly to late material of the Ptolemaic age, a time when the Egyptians themselves knew little of their own religion. Moreover, Brugsch approached the subject from a classical, Aryan, and philosophical point, a method totally unsuitable for a religion with an African vocabulary. As Dr. Budge justly remarks, "No African language is suitable for giving expression to theological and philosophical speculations, and even an Egyptian priest of the highest intellectual attainments would have been unable to render a treatise of Aristotle into language which his brother priests without teaching could understand." M. Maspero was the next savant who essayed the task, and he had older material, and was the first to apply the anthropological method. He

<sup>1</sup> "The Gods of the Egyptians: Studies in Egyptian Mythology." By E. A. W. Budge, Litt.D., D.Litt., &c., Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities in the British Museum. 2 vols. Pp. xvii+525 and viii+431; with 98 coloured plates and 131 illustrations. (London: Methuen and Co., 1904.) Price 3*l.* 3*s.* net.

recognised the savage cults in animal worship and magic, and in the pyramid texts of the sixth dynasty.

The astonishing progress of discovery in Egypt during recent years has given an enormous retrospective enlargement to our knowledge of human life in the Nile Valley. Not only is the historic age known with an astonishing degree of detail to its very threshold, but our knowledge now extends far into the dark regions of the prehistoric.

From the graves on the edge of the Lybian plateau we gather not only the records of the life on earth of these people, but also the evidence of their simple creed and hopes of a life hereafter. Here, then, we must look for the beginnings of the religion of Egypt and the birth of the gods. It is now possible to ascertain the conditions of the environment in which the first elements of Egyptian religion grew up.

At the commencement of his work Dr. Budge deals with one of the greatest difficulties of the Egyptian religion—the problem of animal worship. At the time of man's first advent into north-east Africa and the Lybian plateau, the Nile valley presented a very different appearance from that of to-day. Banked by the Arabian and Lybian hills, the latter wooded and swarming with animals, and with great swamps and marshes full of Amphibia and serpents, &c., it was very different from the Egypt of historic times. Man found himself compelled to struggle for existence, not only with human foes, but also with a host of hostile animals. The fear of these produced a worship of them; we have a similar cult in Chaldea in the animal demons, lions, leopards, serpents, scorpions, &c. Man, however, soon demonstrated his superiority to the brute creation; some he killed in self-defence, some he domesticated or rendered serviceable to himself. The Egyptian of these prehistoric times was a cannibal; proof of this is shown by the long and valuable passage describing King Unas hunting, killing and eating the gods. Dr. Budge clearly shows the argument on which cannibalism was based. By eating the hearts and livers of men or gods the king acquired their powers; so also with animals. How early the Egyptian attained to the idea of some immortal element in man we cannot say, but we can see from the burials of the Neolithic age that it was fully developed then. This developed the belief in the god-man or god-king who lived and died and became immortal. He had as Unas the powers of man and of animals, and thus man worship and animal worship were fused by placing the animals' heads on human bodies, as the Babylonians placed human heads on animal bodies. The belief in the god-man—the anthropomorphic cult became the indigenous creed of Egypt—in the form of the worship of Osiris, and Dr. Budge's arguments for its north-east African origin are most convincing. Whatever other forms of religion were developed in Egypt or introduced from without, it remained the faith of the people, and continued so until the god-man Osiris became absorbed into the man Jesus Christ. It was the golden thread which ran through the tangled skein of religious life in Egypt for many thousands of years. In elucidating this fact, Dr. Budge has, as it were, established a base line for his study of all the other varied elements in this complex creed. These most important other elements are fully dealt with, but space will only allow us to deal with two, the Ra cult of Heliopolis and the worship of Horus the Hawk, "sky god" and "his blacksmith followers" with its centre at Edfu.

The solar cult of Ra-Tem of Heliopolis shows many traces of affinity with the solar cults of Asia, and this may be accounted for by the position of Heliopolis, but there is a preponderance of native elements. By many it has long been regarded as the religion of



Egypt, owing to the immense power it attained when blended with that of Amen of Thebes, and administered by the most powerful priesthood the ancient world ever produced. Dr. Budge, however, very clearly demonstrates its position as the religion of the court and aristocracy of Egypt, as that of Osiris was the creed of the people. From an early period there was a fusion of the two creeds, and with the Theban school this was carried to the extreme, where Amen Ra assumes the function of Osiris and all the other gods as well, but with the fall of the ambitious hierarchy the old creeds once more asserted their power. This portion of the book is a most interesting and valuable account of one of the greatest religious movements of ancient times.

The revival of the Heliopolitan ritual, and especially the teaching as to the Heaven of the victorious Osirian, is very fully described, and there is here matter of immense value. Here the deceased who has become justified "becomes god the son of god," he takes his seat by the side of God, and eats of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Field of Peace. He lives on light, becomes a being of light, and, as Dr. Budge points out and we must add very quietly, that as this cult was known among the people of Lower Egypt until two centuries after the Christian era, we have here the source from which the writer of the Apocalypse drew his description of the life of the Christian who had "overcome" the world. There is material under the study of the important mother goddess cults which should certainly attract attention from the New Testament critics, for here we have the basis of the Theotokos controversy. This is not the place to discuss theology, so we pass to the more interesting subject of the worship of Horus Behutet, the opponent of Set, with his curious guild of "Blacksmiths." Dr. Budge's remarks on this subject are of importance, as they show how often history is found interwoven with myth. Essentially a solar myth, there is interwoven with it the story of the invasion of Egypt from the south by a superior race who used iron or metal weapons against the flint weapons of the aborigines. To quote Dr. Budge:—

"It is of course impossible to say who were the blacksmiths that swept over Egypt from South to North, but the writer believes that they represent the invaders in predynastic times who made their way from a country in the East, by way of the Red Sea, by some road across the eastern desert. They brought with them the knowledge of working in metals and of brickmaking, and having conquered the indigenous people of the South, that is those around Edfu, made that city the centre of their civilisation."

In later times the material conflict was blended with the mythic, and hence the confused legend of Ptolemaic times. Sufficient has been said to show the rich material Dr. Budge has collected in these two great volumes, but we can only dip into them in this review. The valuable analysis which Dr. Budge gives of those strange works the "Book of the Tuat" and the "Book of the Pylons" will be welcome, for hitherto no authoritative English description of these works has been accessible. The curious illustrations of the journey of the sun through the night hours, which are found on the sarcophagus of Seti I. in the Sloane Museum and in the royal tombs of the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties, certainly depict all the horrors of hell to the simple and uninitiated. The works were, however, essentially sacerdotal, and inscribed in places not accessible to the people, so whatever their teaching might be, it did not affect the popular religion. Dr. Budge is probably right in denying the theory that

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the Egyptians believed in eternal punishment, but they supplied all the material for a most elaborate illustrated edition of the Egyptian inferno to those who held that doctrine. Hence we find the early Christians giving such vivid descriptions of the fate of the damned.

There are some points on which, however, we must differ from the author. After the very lucid description which he gives of the Egyptian Tuat or Land of Night, he gives us a most valuable excursus on the Hebrew Gehenna and the Babylonian Hell, and would attribute the Rabbinical ideas to Egyptian influence. Great as was the influence of Egyptian theology on early Christianity, the Apocalypse and Coptic writings, it is very doubtful if it attracted the Jewish mind. The Seven-headed Serpent of Revelation is the Serpent of the Week of the Babylonians with seven heads and tails—certainly not the seven-headed serpent of the Egyptians.

In conclusion, we must give a high word of praise to the preparation of the work; the beautiful plates and illustrations, the various tables and indices, render



FIG. 1.—Horus of Behutet Armed (Edfu). From "Gods of the Egyptians."

it a work that should win the gratitude of all Egyptologists, and add still more to the writer's reputation as an indefatigable worker and a painstaking scholar.

#### SCIENCE IN SOFT RAIMENT.<sup>1</sup>

IN these six agreeable volumes there is an extraordinary family likeness, which the authors themselves perhaps would be very unwilling to recognise. — 1 "Wild Nature's Ways." By R. Kearson, F.Z.S. With 200 illustrations from photographs taken direct from nature by Cherry and Richard Kearton. Pp. xvi+296. (Cassell and Co., 1903.) Price 20s. 6d. net.

"A Little Brother to the Bear, and other Animal Studies." By William J. Long. Illustrated by Charles Copeland. Pp. xix+280. (Boston, U.S.A., and London: Ginn & Co., 1903.) Price 7s. 6d.

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