

**OUR OWN RELIGION IN ANCIENT PERSIA,
BEING LECTURES DELIVERED IN OXFORD
PRESENTING THE ZEND AVESTA AS COLLATED
WITH THE PRE-CHRISTIAN EXILIC PHARISAISM,
ADVANCING THE PERSIAN QUESTION TO THE
FOREMOST POSITION IN OUR BIBLICAL
RESEARCH**

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Our own religion in Ancient Persia, being lectures delivered in Oxford presenting the Zend Avesta as collated with the pre-Christian exilic pharisaism, advancing the Persian question to the foremost position in our Biblical research by Lawrence Mills

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AND WITH THE AUTHOR'S SANSKRIT EQUIVALENT"

OF "THE SANSKRIT EQUIVALENT OF YASNA XXVIII XXIX XLIV (Z.D.M.G.)"

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P R E F A C E.

THIS collection of separate University Lectures here brought together under one cover, hardly needs any introductory statements, for I have been obliged to explain in the course of editing them particulars usually reserved to a preface.

I have been especially careful to forestall any criticism on the part of my readers in regard to the unavoidable repetitions. Sometimes years have passed between the occasions upon which the several treatises have been delivered, and I could not eliminate all allusion to previously stated facts without tearing the lectures to pieces. Moreover, some of them have been read aloud to audiences in Bombay, and this mode of extending my teaching may be repeated, in which case the connection of thought between the lectures will not be so apparent, and the disfigurement of repetition will disappear. Yet while apologising for such occasional redundancy, I must add that I endeavour to increase the directness of the pointing, and also to expand the issues at every recurrence.

There are, however, several interior considerations in the treatment of the subject of which large numbers of my readers may have had no opportunity whatever to become aware, nor of what I have endeavoured to do to meet the obligations which rest upon me with regard to them.

Without meaning to be in the smallest degree irresponsible, some scholars may well share in that general apathy upon these subjects which it is the one object of these pieces to dispel,—for I wish above everything to

arouse and fix attention upon these matters as being of paramount and immediate interest. The epoch-making chain of ideas lies clearly before us in the chapters;—and if they are not astonishing, then I have failed in my effort to express myself, or else the susceptibility of my public is at fault.

My 'opposition' may object that by my own showing we possess these doctrines now;—and they may ask: 'where is the use of reviving their historical origin';—we are, moreover, 'used' to them. I answer that this latter in one sense of it is not the fact;—our long-standing indifference is not the result of a real familiarity. We need these discussions now to dispel our sinful inattention.* Take what I regard as the finest product of the entire system, next after, or next before, the beautiful thought of the 'Attributes' as the 'Archangels';—I refer to the 'subjective recompense';—how many myriads of refined disciples need just such relief as this doctrine offers, namely, the view that both Heaven and Hell lie chiefly within ourselves? It is nothing less than splendid as an intellectual result, making Avesta far and away the deepest and most refined lore of all equal antiquity;—for the Avesta is the 'document' of such a necessary thought—that is to say, its first full presentation in the history of religious distinctions. Where has even the early Bible anything to compare with it?† It is now widespread, of course, among the more enlightened of the clergy, but I very greatly doubt whether the main body of the laity feel it as they should. The threats of a flaming Hell may be

* What right have we to neglect matters which concern not only the past record of our own spiritual development but its present healthfulness?

† It was directly in connection with this crucial characteristic that an incident occurred which greatly surprised and charmed me. Having come into contact with a group of young academic Frenchmen, my son lent a copy of my *Gāthas* to one of them. On returning the book, the reader cited with much interest *Vasna* 46, where the souls of the evil are their own executioners. Out of all the 650 pages the keen-sighted young Parisian instantly fixed his attention upon this.

more effective toward the embruted masses, but the time has surely come when every human being should be forced to understand that his good or evil thoughts, words, and deeds are actually preparing and moulding his eternal future destiny;—that they constitute the very quintessence of Heaven or Hell;—and they will surely bring their own reward or their own revenge, as being the central element in the 'great assize' and the 'last sentence.'*

But we have our 'opposition,' some of whom may be honestly alarmed at the distraction of attention from the primary question of 'conversion' † and the long-established views which tend to bring it on, while others care only for the academical prominence of their personal studies. Their first tactics might be these:—while acceding at once to the undeniable identities between the chief doctrines of the Avesta and the Exilic Bible, they might retort that there has been 'no historical connection between them.' But this is exactly the grandest assertion which could possibly be made in the entire connection. If the identities exist without 'historical connection,' then they arose spontaneously, irresistibly, and inevitably from the instincts of universal human nature—a proposition which takes its place among the very highest themes in a serious psychology and natural philosophy.‡ The history of the human soul is acutely involved. If this absence of historical connection can be accepted, we have here the one paramount curiosity of all religious literature, so par-eminence—a truly magnificent fact, deeply touching us at every moral fibre. I call upon all labourers in this field to fix their attention closely upon it, and to pursue it exhaustively as a matter of urgent duty.

The second device, whether honestly presented or not,

* Not only does the Avesta preserve the first effective application of these vital opinions, but we actually need Avesta to-day to enforce them upon us. We are not at all so fully 'used' to them as we suppose,—far from it.

† And with this alarm I have full sympathy; see the Second Lecture.

‡ See *Zarathushtra, Philo, the Achaemenids, and Israel*, 1905-6, vol. i.

is to accede again to the identities, but ascribe them to the influence of Judaism upon Persia. Here again we have something as startling in the way of propaganda as the other was important as an element in the original development of man from an inferior condition,—and it is difficult to decide which of the two is the most interesting. If the Jews taught all Persia the illustrious catalogue, this not only shows what the Jews believed during the time that they were Persian citizens, but it presents a result of religious propagation beyond conception for all time, ancient or modern. What ardent missionary will not kindle with enthusiasm over such an opinion? Israel was then in that case not only stated to be, but proved to be, ‘a light to lighten the Gentiles,’ with results incalculable;—how can religious teachers venture to neglect such a thing?*

While upon a third hypothesis, I do not know what they would like to say. To accede to the identities, and acknowledge that they all come from Persia, would be to avow a debt of religious gratitude which according to one view involves our everlasting salvation;—recall the turmoil of the Pharisees in the riot reported in Acts xxiii when St. Paul appealed to their sentiment in this matter of the resurrection;—see the author of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where he rests our very salvation upon that article of the Creed.

No self-respecting historian could conceal such a theme for a moment if he were really aware of its existence;—while my own theory leaves it almost equally imperative. For if the Persian creed helped on, defended, and encouraged—perhaps saved—the Jewish which was original with the Captives, this was in its turn a momentous and an effective reality. Whichever view we take of it, the system of eschatological ideas, whether studied in connection

* If the vast Persian Empire was taught futurity by a handful of inspired captives, surely this was a religious result unequalled in ‘missionary’ records.

with Judah or not, is in a good sense of it sensational to the last degree;—to neglect it would be folly, to suppress it would be crime. Scores of seminaries of religious learning are touching upon the subject every year;—let them now dwell upon it and search it well as a prime duty, for by universal verdict it involves the history of all moral life in man. Even literary persons bereft of all immediate interest in theology do not fulfil their scope of enterprise until they examine this most striking of all literary rarities.

What I have to say as to the identities of the Avesta and the Veda is in the same general line, though of course to us at least the interests involved in Avesta are incredibly more acute than any which concern the Veda. Yet as Avesta and Veda are but parts of one and the same original lore, Veda itself has some share in the great propaganda. Though upon the view that it was Israel who taught Persia her eschatology, we can hardly see how Israel could have imparted that same eschatology to the still more distant Indians with whom she had no such connection as she had with Persia.

My policy in view of my 'opposition' has been two-fold, or rather it has been one single policy in two branches. I have been compelled to be both comprehensive and then impartial (see my chapter on Avesta's history). I have represented nearly every serious exegetical possibility, ancient or modern, with my own opinions independent of each. Though I have met with some small combinations who will not let me even agree with their own teachers, their falsifying is so irresponsible that it does little harm;—I warn all readers of their petty irregularity (see Chapter XI.), while I express my profound gratitude to the eminent persons who have shown their deep appreciation of my results in this truly dangerous task. As I have treated my subject upon a scale never before attempted, I have been exposed to the inevitable poignant jealousies which utterly dethrone the sanity of