IN RELIGION'S REALM.

Expressions From the Various Religious Newspapers.

The Religious Thought of the Day as Expressed in the Sectarian Press—Some Matters of Interest to Both Ministers and Laymen.

"The rock on which the unity project has split," says the *Living Church* (P. E.) of Chicago, "is the rock of Catholicity. It is the simple truth that there can be no compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. Their fundamental postulates, so far as the church is concerned, are irreconcilable. Their conception of unity is not the same. The whole discussion has been at cross purposes on this account. We welcome this enunciation of Episcopal opinion because it will serve to clear the air. We wish the letters which have appeared in the *Independent* could be printed in a pamphlet and widely distributed. There is very great force in the fact that so large a number of articles, written without the possibility of conference, should exhibit such absolute agreement. To us, in these times of restless change, steadfast adherence to truth and principle seems vastly more important than Christian unity. We believe, indeed, that unity can only come about through truth. It must not come through the popular methods of negation and indifference, but through affirmation and conviction; not through a process of cancelling everything about which people disagree, but by the acceptance, on all hands, of the truth of Christ as it has been handed down in the church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth."

"A pertinent question," says the New York *Independent* "is, What degree of agreement must there be to justify and require Christian fellowship? There are certain Lutherans who hold that there can properly be no fellowship with those who do not accept the Lutheran confessions, 'confessing and believing' what they set forth, and 'condemning and rejecting' what they reject. Fellowship, they contend, involves responsibility for the errors that those fellowshiped may hold. But most Protestants take a more liberal position. The United Brethren in Christ used to exclude from membership all connected with secret societies; but it did not feel that it was false to this principle in being in full fellowship with churches that have no law against secret societies. Why may not the Episcopal Church maintain its law of the Historic Episcopate, and at the same time fellowship those who do not profess to have it? It may hold that this ancient order is necessary to its own existence, and that the churches which have it not are defective, and still have fellowship with them on the ground that they are Christians and in possession of the Christian faith. It is along this line that relaxation may and probably will come."

"The new light on church union only reveals the exceeding difficulty and possible remoteness of its accomplishment," says the New York *Christian Intelligencer* (Ref.). "It is made more than ever apparent that it must be a growth, and that only by a more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit will heart knit to heart, and such love for one another be inspired, that the unity of spirit will form for itself a body, so that the oneness will be seen of men, and Christ's Church be one indeed. That the Head of the Church can and may anoint all its members unto such a result, leads us to somewhat qualify its remoteness. The wonderful consummation may be nearer than it seems. Meanwhile, those who really and sincerely desire visible union of churches, may and should seek to diminish the divisions of Christendom, cultivate the things that make for peace, practice Christian fellowship, and pray for the anointing from above which will alone bring the desired oneness. Our recent experiences with federation served to show the difficulty of even such a tentative union, and lead one to question the sincerity of much professed zeal in the cause. Yet we believe in union, hope for it, and desire to help toward it, but as far as we have light, it is much nearer by way of federation than by the historic episcopate."

"It is easier to build a church out of well-cemented bowlders than of Parian marble in unmortared fragments," says the New York *Evangelist* (Pres.). "A few of God's poor who are closely knit in heart make a more useful church than a multitude of earth's mighty who touch one another only by the finger tips. When in the ancient creed it was written; 'I believe in the communion of saints,' it showed that the writer of that symbol was not a dogmatic or theorist, but a practical builder. The thousand Greeks with locked shields are always victors over the million soldiers of Darius who died or run at random. You can never make a strong and successful church of saints each standing upon his own pillar. When the church becomes only a nominal bond, and the real fellowship is found in the club, the 'set,' or the lodge, it might be as well for the church to disband."

"Our recent editorials on 'Baptist Orthodoxy' have led to the inquiry from many quarters whether Baptists have no external authority, outside of the local church, of enforcing discipline or securing orthodoxy. To that question," says the *Watchman* (Bapt.) of Boston, "there can be only one answer. We have none. The authority of associations and of councils is purely advisory; and, historically, both in this country and in Europe, the Baptists have always been jealous of attributing to these bodies any authority whatever except what would naturally be conceded to them on account of the numbers, wisdom or representative character of those who compose them. Among us it is not even a council which ordains a man to the ministry, it is the church acting on the advice of the council, and the church may or may not follow that advice. Even when a council is called to consider a case of discipline, the same principle applies. And a church from which an association withdraws its fellowship does not, therefore, cease to be a Baptist Church. We have always had Baptist Churches in good standing which have not been in associational relations."

"Professor Brand of Oberlin has lately started a discussion which just now is going the rounds of the press," says the *Interior* (Pres.) of Chicago. "The Professor's proposition is that young men newly out of the seminary shall take the smaller charges, and thus the maturer and more experienced men may secure city pulpits. The Professor is evidently a natural match-maker rather than a practical administrator. He has not consulted 'the lady in the case.' It was Charles Spurgeon who said that his big church was 'like a big steamboat;' the Captain could walk anywhere he chose and it would still preserve its equilibrium. But a little church, he said, was like a little dug out; the rower had to sit in the middle, and part his hair exactly, or it would tip over. The truth is that there are no more difficult charges in the world to fill than the smallest churches where everybody is cook and chief mate. As a boy we happened to be present at a conference of elders when one of the most noted of our now living preachers was refused even a hearing. Talking with one of the best known contributors to our columns, he told us that he was forced to take a city church for his first labor after having been rejected by the country parish to which he applied, whose salary was scarcely more than half that of the urban parish that snapped him up later on his first trial sermon."

"Religion does not disfranchise a man in this country," says the New York *Christian Advocate* (Meth.); "but Bishop McQuaid of Rochester has been a determined and consistent opponent of the public school system from the beginning. We suspect that the movement to elect him Regent of the University in place of the Roman Catholic Bishop recently deceased is designed for its effect upon Rome. Archbishop Corrigan would naturally be solicitous to show that the dominant influence in this city is in sympathy with that wing in the Roman Catholic Church, and thus hedge up the way of the liberal movement."

Speaking of the prevalence of suicide the New York *Observer* (Pres.) says: "The fact is that this indignant protest against the injustice and inexorableness of the Creator's laws is simply the outcropping of all that is feeble, wilful and resentful in human nature. It is the giving up of all heroic ideals of life, and their replacement by a pernicious and namby-pamby sentimentality which, if allowed to grow, will make of society a barren waste. The false philosophers who defend and coddle it with fearful sympathy are directly responsible for the tragedies it produces. Oppressed with cares, enfeebled by physical sufferings, or harassed by vexatious associations, men and women stumble across their wretched pleadings, and with minds unsettled, destroy themselves. The real murderer is the defender of the right of suicide. Yet so far from feeling conviction, he finds something noble and heroic in closing the account with life when it becomes hard, and in willingness to let others suffer than suffer himself. Unhappily, nothing is more contagious than this nerveless surrender when misfortune comes, this cowardly giving way before the ills of life. Men forget that the characters which the world has most admired have been those which have been made by bearing ills which they have deserved less and done more so remove than others."

"The defection of Father Lambert from the Church of Rome is another sign of the uneasiness which is felt by many of the more learned and spiritually minded of the Roman clergy under the Roman yoke," observes the New York *Churchman* (P. E.). "We take no pleasure in seeing any one turn his back upon any branch of the historic church in order to embrace, as Father Lambert has done, the emotionalism of the ultra-Protestant bodies; and we prophesy that, after the first excitement of his new experience is over, he will long for some more permanent organization than is found in such bodies as Dr. Fulton's 'Mission of Christ.' That aspect of the case is not a subject for rejoicing. The lesson we read from the struggles after liberty which are made by such men as McGlynn, Burtsell and Lambert is, that there is no room in the Roman fold for freedom of thought and aspiration. Each of these men has evidently done his best for years to conform to a system which suppresses every sort of individual freedom, and each, in his own way, has sought relief. Dr. McGlynn still holds a quasi-allegiance to Rome; Dr. Burtsell is still patiently enduring a galling discipline, and Father Lambert has thrown aside his entire confidence in the Roman system. The result in each case marks the effect upon intelligent, God-fearing men, who differ in temperament, of a hard and fast, inelastic, man-made theory of church government whose aim is to suppress every kind and form of independence. There must be something radically wrong in the Roman Church when a splendid preacher like McGlynn, a learned canonist like Burtsell, and an acute controversialist like Lambert can find no settled home within her pale."

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ABOUT OUR ALPHABET.

How and Where We Got it Explained.

A Concise Historic Paper on the Evolution of the Letters—Their Origin.

Rev. B. A. Elzas recently delivered an extended lecture before the Museum Association in this city on the history of the alphabet. It was freely illustrated with charts, and by drawings and diagrams. It was of a character that rendered a synopsis by any other than the author a too difficult task. Mr. Elzas, by request, furnishes the RECORD-UNION with this epitome of the lecture. It will be found to well repay perusal:

In attempting to search for the beginning of letters we have to go back into the dim mists of prehistoric times. According to the view of the ancients, letters were a divine invention. The Hebrew claimed that they were given to Moses on Mount Sinai; the Roman, that they were first taught by Mercury; the Brahman, that they were communicated to his ancestors by Brahma; the Babylonian ascribed them to Nebo, and the Egyptian to Tot.

Our alphabet is a growth—an evolution by a long and gradual process, and our letters were originally hieroglyphics. The English characters were derived from the Romans, who obtained them from the Greeks. The Greeks themselves, both according to their own traditions, and as is evident from even a cursory glance at their letters, derived them from the Phœnician.

The discovery of the Moabite stone in 1868 has enabled us to clear up many interesting points.

In comparing the archaic Greek letters with the characters on the Moabite stone, and with the Phœnician characters of later periods, with those, *e. g.*, on the Assyrian gems and seals, and with those of a still later date on the tomb of Eshmunassar, and, finally, with the same characters of Greek and Romans times we at once see that these letters resemble most those on the Moabite stone, showing that it must have been somewhere between 1000 B. C. and 900 B. C. that the Greeks got their alphabet from the Phœnicians—a circumstance that has an interesting bearing on the question of the handing down of the Homeric poems.

But whence did the Phœnicians get their letters? Were they the inventors, or were they merely borrowers? In looking at the letters, aleph, beth, etc., we notice that they all have a meaning in the language to which they belong, and this leads us to suspect that their forms were once abridged and worn-down representatives of objects.

In comparing the letters on the Moabite stone with pictures of the various objects whose names are borne by the letters, we have no difficulty in recognizing a clear resemblance in sixteen letters out of the twenty-one that have come down to us—a wonderful number when we take all things into consideration; a number far too large to have been the result of mere accident. The gradual wearing down of the picture was brought about in a natural way, by the necessity of obtaining brevity and speed in writing.

The study of language and its expression amongst savages and the deaf and dumb will help us to understand the process by which letters were evolved.

The first language is a gesture language. In Gulliver's travels, when that worthy visited the school of languages at Lagardo he was made acquainted with a scheme for improving language by abolishing all word whatsoever. Words being only the names of things, people were to carry the things themselves about, instead of wasting their breath in talking about them. The learned adopted the scheme, and sages might be seen in the streets bending under their heavy sacks of materials for conversation, or unpacking their loads for a talk. This was found somewhat troublesome. "But for short conversations a man may carry implements in his pockets and under his arm enough to supply him, and in his house he cannot be at a loss. Therefore the room where the company meet who practice this art is full of all things ready at hand requisite to furnish matter for this kind of artificial discourse." This plan, however, seems not to have come into general use, "owing to the ignorant opposition of the women and the common people, who threatened to raise a rebellion if they were not allowed to speak with their tongues after the manner of their forefathers." A fine bit of satire on truth. But, as Mr. Tylor remarks, this system of talking by objects is nevertheless a very important part of gesture language, and gesture language itself is a very important means of communication even to-day. "It consists in drawing in the air the shape of objects to be suggested to the mind, in imitating the movement of the body in an action to be described, or the use of a thing, its origin, or any of its notable peculiarities. This serves as a means of fixing ideas of different kinds in his mind and recalling them to his memory."

This gesture language which has been brought to a high state of perfection by the Indian, is common to mankind, being practically the same all the world over.

From the gesture to the written language is a simple step. From being formed in the air, the pictures come to be inscribed on the rocks and the barks of trees. Many such inscriptions exist. And just as the gesture language is the same all over the world, so also is the rude picture writing. We have abundant illustration of this in the Egyptian, Babylonian, Chinese and Aztec remains.

Many epigraphists, in my own humble opinion, with far too little reason have attempted to trace the Phœnician characters to the Hieratic Egyptian. After an unprejudiced comparison, I fail to see much resemblance between the two sets of characters. The reasoning of the writer of the article, "Alphabet," in the "Britannica," is very unconvincing.

"Yet it seems quite certain that there is no connection between the names which the letters bore in Phœnicia and the original object of which the Egyptian character is the debased representation. Thus, the first letter of the Phœnician alphabet was named from its fancied resemblance to an ox's head, the second to a house, and so on. But the symbol which strangely seemed to the Phœnicians like an ox (aleph), is only the form rapidly drawn of an eagle; and the beth, in like manner, is the quickly-drawn figure of a crane. It would seem, then, that the Phœnicians borrowed sound and symbol but no name." (Vol. 1, p. 607). This, it seems to me, is a very large assumption to make. That the Semites not only appropriated the idea of a written alphabet, but also remodeled and renamed their acquisitions—making out of the Egyptian eagle the head and horns of an ox; out of the throne, the head and neck of a camel; and out of a group of lotus plants a tooth, and so on. It is to me far easier to surmise that the Semites were the original inventors, and that it was from them the Egyptians borrowed—though even this is not necessary.

It is tolerably certain now that Babylonian civilization is older than the Egyptian, the Babylonians themselves had hieroglyphs, composed of straight lines originally, because they were intended to be engraved on the rock with a chisel, hence not easily recognizable now. It was from these straight-lined pictures that the ordinary wedge-shaped characters were evolved by the usual simplification.

I do not claim, however, that the Phœnicians got their letters from Babylonia, but the fact that the names aleph, beth, etc., are Semitic words, not merely the names of the letters but words in the language, having meanings assigned to them, affords a strong presumption that the letters are of Semitic origin. We are not able, it is true, to trace them out of the particular hieroglyphs out of which they were developed, but this is not necessary in the light of my theory.

And here we ask a very pertinent question, the bearing of which upon our subject has been apparently overlooked by most writers—where was the original home of the Semitics?

Two theories have been propounded: (1) That they came from Babylonia, or, according to others, from Lower Mesopotamia; (2) That they came from Central Arabia. The former opinion has been upheld by such scholars as Von Kremer, Guidi and Hommel; the latter by Sayce, Sprenger, Schrader and De Goeje. Those interested in this part of the subject will find a complete discussion of it in Wright's "Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages," chapter I.

According to the former of these theories we should look for the origin of letters to Babylonia; according to the latter, we should look to Arabia. Recent discoveries tend to prove that the latter is the correct theory. Dr. Glaser has recently given to the world the result of his explorations, and we have now almost convincing proof that the Semitic alphabet originated in the Minaean Kingdom, in south Arabia, whence it spread to Egypt, Phœnicia, and thence to Palestine. We know something of the Kingdom of the Minaeans and their high state of civilization as early as the Hyksos, 2000 B. C. They had, moreover, at a very early date developed a large foreign trade in spices, etc.

Before giving the reasons for the conclusion that the alphabet originated among the Minaeans, I will state, for the information of those who may not be acquainted with the fact, that the Semitic languages may be roughly divided into two broad divisions—North Semitic and South Semitic. Under the former are included Hebrew, Aramaic, Phœnician, Assyrian and Babylonian; the latter comprises Minaean and Sabean, Ethiopic and Arabic. I must mention the further fact that comparative Semitic philologists have reconstructed a list of sounds that must have existed in what they call, for the sake of convenience, the Prote-Semitic language. Now in examining the various alphabets we observe two very significant facts: (1) That it is only in the South Arabian alphabets that the names correspond to the forms of the letters; and (2) that the South Arabian alphabets have separate letters for those sounds which have been lost in North Semitic. The original alphabet was constructed for a people that had these sounds, and therefore this South Arabian alphabet must be an original and not a borrowed one. It is a strange confirmation of the theory that Arabia was the original home of the Semites. If this be the case, what is more natural than that the alphabet should have originated there?

And now before stating my theory, I would say that the labors of Egyptologists tend to show that the Egyptians and Semitic Babylonians were descendants from one common stock. These dwelt together in prehistoric times, of course, in Arabia. If we go back far enough we shall find there only a gesture language, perhaps a rude hieroglyphic. The Egyptians, now separated from the parent stock, and so did the Babylonians. These, in common with the rest of the Semites, worked out their literary salvation in their own way. The process of more rapid or slow development would go on in the usual way of evolution among different peoples, being brought to a speedier or later state of perfection by the exigencies of their respective civilizations.

The Babylonians and Assyrians never had an alphabet at all—they never arrived at a stage when such became necessary. The Egyptians developed a rude alphabetism, their higher civilization doubtless bringing this to pass. The great foreign trade of the Minaeans, a trade that was developed long before that of the Phœnicians (Tyre only came to the front in 1050 B. C.) put them, so to speak, at their wit's end; and as necessity is the mother of invention—after a considerable period of course, during which the alphabet was in a probationary stage—they brought it to the wonderful state of perfection we saw before. Phœnicia had simply to borrow what it needed; it was at their service.

Space forbids my giving a description of how the picture came to pass into the letter; what determined the selection of the characters that have survived; how it is that alphabets are restricted to twenty or thirty letters, and what has determined their order.

The praises of the inventors of letters have been sung by many poets. Never can we pay the meed of gratitude in full. To the ancient Semite belongs the praise and the honor and the glory; for it was he who first made it possible for us who have come after, to possess thoughts which will command all minds and times, and which, "like bars of sunshine, may win the world to light."

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