

SERMONS

PREACHED AT BRIGHTON

BY THE LATE

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XXIV.

CHRISTIANITY AND HINDOOISM.

A FRAGMENT OF AN ADVENT LECTURE.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."—Deut. vi. 4, 5.

It is my intention, in giving the present course of lectures, to consider the advent of our Lord in connection with the cause of missionary labors. This connection is clear. His advent is the reign of God in the hearts of men; and it is the aim of the missionary to set up that kingdom in men's hearts. There is also a more indirect connection between the two, because at this time the Church Missionary Society is celebrating its jubilee. It is now fifty years since the first mission was established at Sierra Leone, where, although they who composed that little band were swept off one after another by jungle fever—their groans unheard, themselves unwept, and almost unhonored—yet there rose up other laborers after them; and a firm footing was at length gained in that dark heathen land.

On the Epiphany of next year we are to celebrate this jubilee in Brighton; and it has seemed to me a good preparation, that we should occupy, in thought, some field of missionary exertion, and look at the difficulties which those have had to contend against, who have gone out in that work. There can be no doubt as to which shall be first chosen for our contemplation. India, with its vast territories and millions of people, comes first, both as being one of our own possessions, and by the heavy responsibilities attaching to us on account of it.

We propose, therefore, to give some account of Hindoo superstition; and here I would remark, there are three ways of looking at idolatry.

I. There is the way of the mere *scholar*—that of men who read about it as the school-boy does, as a thing past—a curious but worn-out system. This scholastic spirit is the worst; for it treats the question of religious worship as a piece of antiquarianism, of no vital consequence, but just curious and amusing.

II. There is the view taken by the religious *partisan*. There are some men who, thinking their religion right, determine therefore that every one who differs from them is wrong. They look with scorn and contempt on the religion of the Hindoo, and only think how they may force theirs upon him. In this spirit, the world can never be evangelized. A man may say to another, "I can not understand your believing such folly," but he will not convince him so of his error. It is only by entering into the mind and difficulties of the heathen that we can learn how to meet them and treat them effectually.

III. There is the way of enlightened Christianity. In this spirit stood St. Paul on the hill at Athens. The beauty of Greek worship was nothing to him. To him it was still idolatry, though it was enlightened; but he was not hard enough not to be able to feel for them. He did not denounce it to them as damnable; he showed them that they were feeling after God, but blindly, ignorantly, wrongly. "Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you."

The religion on which we are going to dwell to-day is one of the most subtle the world has ever received. It has stood the test of long ages and of great changes. The land has in turn submitted to the Macedonian, the Saracen, the Mohammedan conqueror; yet its civilization, and its ways of thinking, have remained always the same—in stagnation. We marvel how it has happened that their religion has remained sufficient for them. Let us look at it.

I. We take, as the first branch of our subject, the Hindoo conception of Divinity. We start with the assertion, that the god whom a man worships is but the reflection of himself. Tell us what a man's mind is, and we will tell you what his god is. Thus, amongst the Africans, the lowest and most degraded of mankind, forms of horror are revered. The frightful, black, shapeless god, who can be frightened by the noise of a drum, is their object of worship.

Our Scandinavian forefathers, whose delight was in the battle and the sea-fight, worshipped warlike gods, whose names still descend to us in the names given to the days of the week; they expected after death the conqueror's feast in Walhalla, the flowing cup, and the victor's wreath.

Look at Christianity itself. We profess to worship the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we do not all worship the same God. The God of the child is not the God of the man. He is a beneficent being—an enlarged representation (to him) of his own father. The man whose mind is cast in

a stern mould worships a God who sits above to administer justice and punishment. The man who shrinks from the idea of suffering worships a placable God, who combines the greatest possible amount of happiness for the race with the least possible amount of pain.

[Now, consider the man who worships God as He appears in Jesus Christ.]

There are two things distinctly marked in the Hindoo religion: The love of physical repose; and mental activity, restlessness, and subtlety. Theirs are ideas passing through trains of thought which leave our European minds marveling in astonishment.

Their first principle is that of God's unity. We are told by some that they have many gods, but all those who have deeply studied the subject agree in this—that they really have but *one*. This Hindoo deity is capable of two states—1. Inaction; 2. Action. The first state is that of a dreamless sleep, unconscious of its own existence; all attributes have passed away—it is infinite nothing. We remark in men generally a desire for *rest*; in the Hindoo it is a desire merely for indolence. Far deeper lodged in the human breast than the desire of honor or riches is seated the desire for rest: there are, doubtless, eager, earnest spirits, who may scorn pleasure, but, nevertheless, they long for rest. Well and rightly has the Hindoo thrown this idea on God; but he has erred in the character of that repose.

There are two kinds of rest: 1st. There is the rest desired by the world. 2d. There is the rest we find in Christ. The active mind, if out of its proper sphere, corrodes itself, and frets itself with plans and projects, finding no rest. The rest of Christ is not that of torpor, but harmony; it is not refusing the struggle, but conquering *in it*; not resting *from* duty, but finding rest *in* duty.

The sabbaths of eternity have kept the Supreme Mind in infinite blessedness: on our restless, unquiet, throbbing hearts, God has been looking down, serene and calm. When chaos took lovely form and shape, then that rest began—not in the torpor of inaction, but in harmonious work. "My Father worketh hitherto." God works in all the smallest objects of creation, as well as in the largest. Even in midnight stillness harmonious action is the law; when every thing seems to slumber, all is really at work, for the spirit of life and the spirit of death are weaving and unweaving forever.

We remark that to this god of Hindostan there rises no

temple throughout the length and breadth of the land. If you ask in astonishment, why is this? the Hindoo replies, "Pure, unmixed Deity is *mind*, and can not be confined to place;" and well does he here teach us that God is a Spirit: but in his idea there is an exhibition of a god without qualities—a deity whom man may meditate on, and be absorbed in, but not one to be loved or adored.

Here is his first error; here we can teach him something—that God is a personal Being.

Personality is made up of three attributes—consciousness, character, will. Without the union of these three, the idea is imperfect. Personality the Hindoo Deity has none; therefore he can not be loved.

Now when we look at God as revealed in Jesus Christ, He appears to us as having a mind like ours; the ideas of number, of right and wrong, of sanctity, are to God precisely what they are to man. Conceive a mind without these, and it may be a high and lofty one, but there can be no communion with it. But when Christ speaks of love, of purity, of holiness, we feel that it is no abstraction we worship.

II. We shall consider as the second branch of our subject the Hindoo theory of creation.

We have spoken of the Hindoo Deity as capable of two states—that of perfection, or rest; that of imperfection, or unrest. The Hindoo thinks that a time arrives when rest becomes action, and slumber becomes life; and when, not willing to be alone, feeling solitary in his awaking, God wishes to impart life; therefore He creates.

Here again, we recognize a partial truth. In the Scriptures we never read of a time when God was alone. What is love but this, to find ourselves again in another? The "Word," we read, "was with God" before the world began. What the word is to the thought, that is Christ to God. Creation was one expression of this—of His inmost feelings of beauty and loveliness; whether it be the doleful sighings of the night-wind, or the flower that nestles in the grass, they tell alike of love. So has He also shown that love on earth, in the outward manifestation of the life of Christ—not only in the translated Word which we have—beautiful as it is, but in the living Word. Read without *this*, history is a dark, tangled web, philosophy a disappointing thing. Without *this* light society is imperfect, and the greatest men small and insignificant. From all these we turn to Christ; *here* is that perfect Word to which our hearts echo, where no one syllable is wrong.

There are two Hindoo theories of creation: the gross view held by the many; the refined one held by the philosopher and the Brahmin. Yet these two so mix and intermingle that it is difficult to give to European minds a clear notion of either of them separately. We will leave the popular view for another time, and we will try to deal now with the metaphysical and transcendental one. It is this—creation is illusion—the Deity awaking from sleep. The universe is God: God is the universe; therefore He can not create. The Hindoo says, You, and I, and all men, are but gods—ourselves in a wretched state of dream and illusion. We must try to explain this in part by our own records of times which we can all remember, when we have lain in a state between dreaming and waking—a phantasmagoric state, changing, combining, altering, like the kaleidoscope, so that we hardly knew realities from unrealities. “Such,” says the Hindoo, “is your life—a delusion.” I merely tell of this because it colors all Hindoo existence; the practical results we shall consider another time. For this the visionary contemplator of Brahm, and the Fakeer, sit beneath the tree, scarcely eating, speaking, or thinking; hoping at length to become absorbed into that calm, dreamless, passive state which to them represents perfection.

One truth we find acknowledged in this theory is the unreality of this world. Nobly has the Hindoo set forth the truth that the world is less real than the spirit. “What is your life? it is even a vapor.” Ask you what we are to live for? The child, on whose young face the mother now gazes so tenderly, changes with years into the man with furrowed brow and silvered hair; constitutions are formed and broken, friendships pass, love decays, who can say he possesses the same now that blessed him in his early life? All passes whilst we look upon it. A most unreal, imaginative life. The spirit of life ever weaving—the spirit of death ever unweaving; all things putting on change.

In conclusion, we observe here a great truth—the evil of self-consciousness. This self-consciousness is all evil. He who can dwell on this and that symptom of his moral nature is already diseased. We are too much haunted by ourselves; we project the spectral shadow of ourselves on every thing around us. And then comes in the Gospel to rescue us from this selfishness. Redemption is this—to forget self in God. Does not the mother forget herself for a time in the child; the loyal man in his strong feelings of devotion for his sovereign? So does the Christian forget himself in the feeling that he has to live here for the performance of the will of God.

[And now contrast the Hindoo religion with the Christian.]

The Hindoo tells us the remedy for this unreality is to be found in the long unbroken sleep. The Christian tells us the remedy is this, that this broken dream of life shall end in a higher life. Life is but a sleep, a dream, and death is the real awaking.

XXV.

REST.

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”—Matt. xi. 28, 29.

No one, perhaps, ever read these words of Christ without being struck with their singular adaptation to the necessities of our nature. We have read them again and again, and we have found them ever fresh, beautiful, and new. No man could ever read them without being conscious that they realized the very deepest and inmost want of his being. We feel it is a convincing proof of His divine mission that He has thus struck the key-note of our nature, in offering us rest.

Ancient systems were busy in the pursuit after happiness. Our modern systems of philosophy, science, ay, even of theology, occupy themselves with the same thought; telling us alike that “happiness is our being’s end and aim.” But it is not so that the Redeemer teaches. His doctrine is in words such as these: “In the world ye shall have”—not happiness, but—“tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world;” “In Me ye shall have peace.” Not happiness—the outward well-being so called in the world—but the inward rest which cometh from above. And He alone who made this promise had a right to say, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” He had that rest in Himself, and therefore could impart it; but it is often offered by men who have it not themselves. There are some, high professors of religion too, who have never known this real rest, and who at fifty, sixty, seventy years of age, are as much slaves of the world as when they began, desiring still the honors, the riches, or the pleasures it has to give, and utterly neglecting the life which is to come.