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## BOOK REVIEWS

### THE RELIGIONS OF MANKIND<sup>1</sup>

For a long time to come it will be a daring feat for any single man to write a history of the religions of the world. When one remembers the vast array of scholars who have labored in the fields of documentary criticism, history, and doctrine to achieve what we know of the development of Christianity, the task before the writer who would deal with all religions seems appalling. Why not then a co-operative work done by a group of specialists? The answer is that there is no such group of specialists who are sufficiently agreed on method to make their work a unity. Until that consensus as to method is achieved we shall be grateful that individual scholars like Professor Soper are brave enough to undertake the task. His work deals with all the great living religions as well as those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome. It is delightfully easy to read and has the great virtue of clarity. Most writers of history of religions get lost in the forest of facts, confuse and weary the reader, so that the main line of the religious development is lost. Professor Soper avoids that danger and has produced a work which is probably the best in English for the beginner in the field.

One questions the advisability of including the chapter on "animistic religion." Certainly it should not be under that antiquated Tyloean title, but "primitive religion," the author notes, is no better. As a matter of fact there is no such thing as animistic or primitive religion which can be described in one sweeping picture. Perhaps "Beginnings of Religion" might be a better title, but then does not the subject belong to the psychology rather than to the history of religion? Magic, taboo, fetishism, totemism, sacrifice, are not precisely the same in all religious groups and the historical thing would seem to be to deal with them as they appear, carrying their peculiar meaning, in the story of the beginning of each religious development.

A serious defect of the book is that the religions are interpreted too much in terms of gods, beliefs, and ideas, rather than in terms of social situations. Religion is rooted in life; and gods, cult, and creeds emerge as a people solves its life problems. The history of a religion should

<sup>1</sup> *The Religions of Mankind*. Edmund Davison Soper. New York: Abingdon Press, 1921. 344 pages. \$3.00.

follow the developing social life, its interests, needs, and problems and show how their satisfaction, solution, or frustration produced the characteristic religious forms and beliefs of the people. Only so is it possible to understand their joy in a religion different from that of other peoples. This probably accounts for the fact that the author condemns some things and often regrets that other religions did not achieve the exalted ideas of God and salvation attained in Christianity. The reason is in the social situation and the task of the historian of religion is to understand it.

Professor Soper has chosen deliberately to give to his book an apologetic cast in the interest of Christianity as he interprets it. His philosophic presupposition is that God has been progressively revealing himself to the peoples as they were able to receive the truth and that he has revealed himself most completely in Jesus Christ. There can be no objection to this position if one is writing apologetics. It is just so that modern Buddhist and Moslem writers are presenting their own religions. But for all things there is a time—a time for apologetics and a time for history of religions. They do not belong together. The sacred duty of the scientific student of religions is not to pity, nor to preach, nor to condemn, but to understand and to interpret. And yet, in spite of its apologetics, which may indeed commend it to the general reader, the Christian pastor, and beginning students to whom it is addressed, the book is a welcome addition to the literature of the science.

A. EUSTACE HAYDON

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### ISRAEL AND EGYPT<sup>1</sup>

This is the work of a busy pastor in Glasgow. The amount of labor that has gone into the making of this book is amazing. Mr. Knight has read almost everything of importance upon the subject and he has reported his reading accurately. The care that is shown in the proof-reading is typical of the whole work. The book is a veritable mine of information upon Egypt and Palestine and will constitute a monument to the diligence of the author.

The historical value of this book is open to serious question. The reviewer will not concern himself with its contribution to the history of Egypt, except to point out that Mr. Knight takes Petrie as his guide for

<sup>1</sup> *Nile and Jordan. An Archaeological History of the Inter-Relations between Egypt and Palestine from the Earliest Times to the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.* G. A. Frank Knight. London: James Clarke and Co., 1921. xii+572 pages. 5 maps. 36s.