

Our Contributors.

THE SOURCE OF THE SOPORIFIC.

BY KNOXIAN.

The Soporific is a dull, sluggish, canal-like river that rises in the low headlands of Monotony, flows through the valley of Stupidity, and empties into the ocean of Slumber. The Soporific is a good deal more like a canal than a river. Dr. Willis used to say half a dozen times in each lecture on Homiletics: "Ah, gentlemen, beware of the Soporific; beware of the Soporific." The good man knew the Soporific was a dangerous place. He avoided it himself, and he wished the young men to avoid it too. The frequency and earnestness with which he used to say, "Ah, gentlemen, beware of the Soporific," showed that he feared some of the students might one day be drowned in the sluggish waters of the Soporific. His fears were far from groundless. A few did finish up in that way. In fact, whole congregations have been well-nigh lost in the Soporific.

The source of the Soporific is Monotony. Monotony in preaching and speaking is of two kinds: monotony of matter and monotony of manner. Both kinds are bad. Both kinds produce the Soporific. The Soporific is also a bad thing. It makes some hearers dull, heavy, sluggish, sleepy. It makes others restless, cross, irritable. Out of ten men opium may stupify nine and make the tenth excited. It is so with the Soporific. It usually makes nine men sleepy and the tenth irritable. It is a bad thing. No wonder Dr. Willis used to say so often: "Ah, gentlemen, beware of the Soporific."

In this paper we may confine our attention to one kind of monotony—monotony in matter. If this topic turns out well we shall leave monotony in manner for another day. If it does not turn out well then we shall say something now on both points. A preacher that never had the pleasure of our acquaintance used to say he always took a number of verses for a text, so that if he got persecuted in one city he could flee to another. That is exactly how we are going to discuss this topic. If we run short of matter on monotony in matter, then we shall flee to monotony in manner.

By the matter of any sermon or speech let us understand its thought, the emotions with which the thoughts are uttered, and the form in which they are expressed. We think we hear a host of critics shout: "That arrangement is not philosophical, it is not logical, it is not scientific." All right, brother. Go on with your hair-splitting, and we will go on with our paper. Monotony in mental operations consists in doing substantially the same kind of mind work in every effort. One man argues all the time, and the people soon become weary of argument. Another paints in every effort, and, no matter how well he may paint, people tire looking at pictures. A third exhorts, and the most useless and tiresome of all forms of address is continued exhortation. A fourth strings anecdotes together like beads with no connection but the string, and people tire of the stringing. Continued arguing, continued painting, continued exhorting, and continued anecdoting become monotonous, and monotony always ends in the Soporific.

Monotony of feeling is quite as dangerous as monotony of mental operations. If a preacher feels sad in every sermon people soon tire of his sadness. If he is sour every Sabbath they soon tire of his sourness. If he smiles on them at every service they soon cease to admire the smile. It is not necessary, however, to enlarge on this point. Few ministers can feel monotonously even if they try. The experiences of ministerial life are sufficiently varied to prevent monotony of feeling.

Monotony in the form of address never fails to produce the Soporific. Sentences of the same length, the same force, the same form, will bring on the Soporific in spite of the best delivery. The best elocutionist that ever breathed cannot utter such composition for forty minutes without producing weariness. They may be good sentences, well constructed, skilfully rounded, cleverly balanced, but the simple fact that they are all alike makes them monotonous. As you sit and listen they march past in single file, each one painfully like its forerunner. At first you may admire them if they are good sentences, but after you have listened ten or fifteen minutes the monotony becomes tedious and you feel like shouting: "Oh, do

give us a change. Ask a question. Make a point of exclamation. Shorten up one period, and make another a little longer. For any sake make a climax. Give us a change of some kind."

It is quite possible to have monotony in variety. For example, if a preacher always argues in the same place in his sermon, and paints in the same place, and exhorts in the same place, monotony will come as certainly as if he argued all the time, or painted all the time, or exhorted all the time. Monotony of arrangement is quite as bad as monotony of any other kind. The people soon learn where to expect the argument, or the picture, or the exhortation. If they always find it in the same place they soon tire of finding it. Perhaps the best remedy is to do occasionally just what they don't expect you to do. Where they expect an argument to come in put in an illustration. Where they expect an illustration come down upon them with a syllogism. They nearly always expect the appeals at the close. Spring an appeal on them here and there throughout the sermon. Let it come down like lightning out of a clear sky. This may not be according to the rules of Homiletics, but it is better to break the rules occasionally than to break up the congregation. Rules are good, but a too rigid adherence to rules may bring on the Soporific.

Monotony of subject never fails to produce the Soporific. No matter how talented a preacher may be, he cannot discuss the same topic continually without becoming monotonous. The importance of the subject cannot save him. Constant hammering at one fact, or one doctrine, or one duty, or one sin, always brings on the Soporific. It is a curious fact that if a preacher makes a hobby of preaching on one thing his utterances soon have less influence in regard to his hobby than the utterances of a man who preaches on truth in its proper proportions. This is one of the penalties that a specialist usually has to pay for not presenting truth in its proper relations. If a man preaches on Temperance every Sabbath, or drags the subject in when everybody can see that his text has nothing to do with it, he very soon has less influence in regard to Temperance than one who does not drag it in. His utterances become monotonous and the monotony brings on the Soporific. It always does.

Why should anybody wonder that monotony in discourse is always distasteful? There is no monotony in the good book. Moses is never monotonous. David sings with marvellous variety. Job was sorely troubled, but his speeches abound in climaxes. Paul was not monotonous when he addressed Felix. He didn't bring the Soporific on the governor. He made him tremble.

There is no monotony in the book of nature. We have hill and dale, flower and forest, lake and river, ocean and mountain top. What a dull world this would be if all the men in it were the same in size, the same in weight, and had exactly the same features, the same complexion, the same gait, the same tone of voice—the same everything? What would life be worth if all the women in the world were so much alike that when our wives and daughters went into company we should have to label them so that we might distinguish them from other people's wives and daughters? The Creator has ordained that there shall be infinite variety in the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth. If there is pleasing variety everywhere in God's Word and God's work, can we wonder that His rational creatures who have any taste don't like monotony in speeches, sermons and singing?

THE ORIGIN OF RELIGIONS.

PROF. F. MAX MÜLLER'S HIBBERT LECTURES.

BY DR. F. R. BEATTIE, BRANTFORD.

(Concluded.)

The fourth lecture deals with the worship of tangible, semi-tangible and intangible objects; and it is in this connection that the author's theory appears. The various sense objects found in the universe supply the materials of the theory. In relation to the sense of touch these sensible objects are divided by Müller into three classes. Some sense objects, such as stones, flowers, drops of water, etc., are *tangible*, others, such as trees, mountains, rivers, etc., are *semi-tangible*, and others, such as the clouds, sun, sky etc., are *intangible*. The first class gives what are usually regarded as *fetiches*, the second supplies *semi-deities*, and the third results in *deities*. The

first, Müller contends, are never alluded to in the early Vedic poems. The second and third classes, however, are frequently spoken of all through the literature of India. The author quotes extensively from the Vedic hymns to make good his position that religion in India had its origin, not in fetish worship, but in the worship of semi-tangible and intangible objects from which the idea of the infinite is derived. Fire, the sun and the dawn are referred to as giving the idea of the deities and of worship.

In the fifth lecture the ideas of infinity and law are taken up for special treatment. In regard to the former of these ideas, he says: "The idea of the infinite is not simply evolved by reason out of nothing, but is supplied to us in its original form by the senses." "Beyond, behind, beneath and within the finite, the infinite is always present to the senses." The idea of the infinite or boundless is found, Müller says, in the Vedic Aditi, one of the oldest names given in these ancient poems to the *dawn*. In regard to the latter idea he describes how, in the Vedic literature, law and orderly system stand related to the daily movement of the sun, and this idea is expressed by the word *Rita* in the Vedas. Aditi, or the Dawn, is the infinite; Rita, or the order of the world, is law. These are the first clearly-defined principles of the Vedic religion.

The sixth lecture deals with several different kinds of theisms, viz.: Henotheism, Polytheism, Monotheism, and Atheism. Müller contends that the primitive form of religion as already unfolded was neither monotheism nor polytheism, but henotheism. Henotheism is the belief in and worship of those single objects, whether intangible or semi-tangible, in which man first suspected the presence of the infinite. Henotheism is to be carefully distinguished from both monotheism and polytheism. Monotheism is the doctrine of one God and only one; polytheism is the doctrine of many gods forming a vast commonwealth with one supreme; henotheism is the doctrine of single gods, each either equal to or, at least, quite independent of all the others. This, Müller maintains, was the primitive form of religion, so far as the sacred literature of India enables us to decide.

The last lecture treats of "Philosophy and Religion"; but confines its view almost entirely to the Vedas, so that very little new matter is added in connection with a most important, yet very profound, question.

In proceeding to offer a few critical remarks it must be premised that the writer does not presume to call in question any of the facts of literature and history, which the author, with his vast scholarship, puts at our disposal, and uses so well in the volume before us.

A general remark may first be made. In speaking of religion and its origin it is very necessary to distinguish between *natural* and *revealed* religion, or between theism and Christianity. There are various theisms, but only one Christianity. Theism is one thing; but the Christian religion is another and a greater thing. The latter involves and includes the former, but the former is not as wide as the latter. Theism is natural religion, or the religion of mere reason. Christianity is supernatural religion, and contains elements which mere reason cannot supply. Revealed religion has its roots in theism or natural religion, while its wide-spreading branches wave in the atmosphere of the supernatural. Theism may be considered by itself; but Christianity always rests on a theistic basis.

Now, it is to be remarked that the majority of those who have discussed the question of comparative religion of late years have moved along naturalistic lines, and have followed rationalistic methods. The result is that theism is exalted, and revealed religion is either ignored, or the supernatural element in it denied. Müller, in these recent lectures, is more clearly on this ground than we find him in his earlier writings. He denies that the idea of God is in any sense intuitive, and he refuses to admit revelation, and in particular he rejects the idea of primitive communications from God to man. It is scarcely fair in professing to treat the subject fully, to deny the supernatural, and then to proceed to solve the problem of the origin of mere natural religion, as if this were the whole task. Even if the origin of theistic beliefs can be explained along purely natural lines, the question as to the origin and vindication of the supernatural elements in Christianity still remains an open one. The origin of the supernatural in Christianity must be