

Our Contributors.

Historical Criticism, IX. *

Genesis xi : 1—9.

This passage is from the pen of the Jehovist, and is based like other passages we have examined on an ancient tradition. Whatever its origin, the tradition was in later times associated with a lofty temple, eight stories high which had been erected in Babylon in honor of the city's tutelary deity, Merodach, and which having fallen into ruin was rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar (604—561 B. C.). This ancient tradition with its germ of historical truth was current in Palestine, and was accepted and preserved by the Jehovist in these verses. But it is not the underlying tradition that gives them their value; nor does their value for us depend upon the truth of that tradition. These verses are valuable because they were written by a true historian. An historian is not a mere chronicler of events, but an interpreter of them. And the best historians are men of the prophetic spirit, who have an eye for the moral significance of things; such an historian is the Jehovist. He takes this tradition and looking at it with a mind nourished by a historic religion, and inspired by the Divine Spirit, he sees and exhibits the moral principles that underlie it. He shows us that these men were banded together for selfish ends. Though they acted in the name of religion, they were worshipping their own power. God, he tells us, was interested in their work; but He could not allow a work done in that spirit to prosper. Selfwill in nations must be repressed as it was in the individual in the case of Cain. And so God brings their work to naught.

The Jehovist here embodies in his picturesque, concrete form a great truth, of universal application and very important for us to lay to heart, viz., that institutionalism is contrary to the moral order of the universe. What do we mean by institutionalism? It is a wrong relation to institutions, a failure to see that they exist for men, not men for them; that they are only scaffolding to the end that men may be built up in likeness to God. We are prone to fall into this error still, and to magnify the external, just as these men did long ago in the plains of Shinar. We think so much of our Church or of our Party that we will sacrifice our Principles if so be that the Church or the Party will be advanced.

But this spirit contains its own Nemesis. When men become institutionalists and lay stress on externals, on matter of form, they soon begin to quarrel among themselves, and so it ends in schism and dispersion. It was this spirit that caused the schism between Jews and Samaritans, between Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees are typical institutionalists in religion. The Chinese too are typical institutionalists. No nation makes so much of external, of mere use, and wont. and no nation is so exclusive so hostile to other peoples. But the principle is at work in our very midst, in politics, in

moral reform, in the temperance question for example. Men who should be fighting side by side are in opposite camps for trifling differences not of principle, but of form.

But God can bring good out of evil. As the curse pronounced upon the earth was for man's advantage, so does this tendency to dispersion yield a blessing. In the Church for instance, the different branches by laying emphasis on different aspects of truth, check and correct each other and prevent one nation from being monopolistic.

But the aim of each one of us should be to so rid our minds of institutionalism, of the tendency to worship the external, that we shall get rid of the "jingo spirit" in politics, in religion, in everything, and shall no longer glory in the nation, or in the Church, save as they are means to the chief end of man, the glory of God. Then we shall not be divided man from man, but shall love all men, because God is Father of all, and because Christ is the Brother of all. Then we shall be building, not as these men on the plains of Shinar, but upon foundations that shall endure forever, and shall indeed be getting nearer to Heaven and to God.

A Faithful Elder.

BY PROF. W. G. JORDAN, D. D.

Years ago, when I was attending the Presbyterian College in London, I had charge of a small congregation in Kent, eighteen miles from the great city. At that time I received a visit from Mr. Francis Johnston, of Liverpool, who came as one of the deputies appointed by the Synod. He impressed me as a man of high intelligence and broad sympathies; and I thought that it was a great thing that the Church possessed men who were willing to leave their business for two or three weeks, to play the part of Paul or Barnabas towards congregations in places distant from their homes. Mr. Johnston was a specially fine specimen of a Presbyterian elder, and although our opportunities for personal intercourse were few from that day to this I numbered him among my friends. Eighteen months ago, when visiting my native land, after an absence of twelve years, I had the good fortune to meet him again. He was the last friend with whom I conversed just before going on board the steamship; he was of course a busy man but he cheerfully left his office and took me to dine with him at his club, and I thoroughly enjoyed the talk with him on such subjects as the Education Bill, Biblical Criticism and Evangelistic Work. Now there comes to me the sad news that Mr. Johnston has been called to his rest, at the age of 65, when in spite of physical weakness it still seemed possible for him to render much service to his fellow men. To the very last he was engaged in philanthropic work, and showed his unabated interest in great public enterprises.

At an early age Mr. Johnston was thrown upon his own resources. "At a period of life when most boys dream only of football and of cricket, he was entirely engaged in Sunday school work, and was

superintendent of a school. Before he had reached his eighteenth year, he was appointed to the office of the eldership. From youth he passed into manhood with a grave sense of responsibility. Although differing widely in years from those around, he numbered among his friends some of the finest intellects in the church." This is the testimony borne by many reliable witnesses. Mr. Samuel Smith, M. P., speaks of Mr. Johnston's influence over young people, and says: "I know of one member of Parliament who told me that he owed everything to Francis Johnston." He adds, "Few men have left a deeper mark for good in the locality where he lived. Though like most strong natures, Mr. Johnston attracted much opposition, and sometimes made mistakes, I think all will allow that he spent a most strenuous life in the pursuit of a high ideal, and that his impelling motive was obedience to what he believed to be the Divine Will."

Mr. W. S. Caine, M. P., writes; "In the establishment of the Seacombe mission, now so prosperous a church, Francis Johnston was the inspirer, creator, and genius of the whole movement, and his wonderful energy, his fine sympathy, his personal magnetism, and his single hearted Christian character, were the means of giving the start in religion to hundreds of men and women, many of whom have greeted him on the heavenly shore, and many others are still walking that path of the just that shineth more and more to the perfect day." Surely that is strong testimony from a man who knows all the facts and weighs well his words.

A remarkable thing I would note in the life of this active and successful man of business. He did his own work well and yet showed these three qualities in public service: (1) An evangelistic spirit; (2) Practical philanthropy of the most varied kind; and (3) High intellectual culture.

On the first head note his words spoken at a mission started in a district where there was much drunkenness and degradation. The Lord sent this mission into a district desolated by poverty and sin. He taught the workers to look for Himself in every careworn outcast. He was for ever whispering in their hearts "Forasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto Me." That soul-piercing voice could not be resisted. In self-abasement, but with high hope, they pursued their quest. The new day dawned for this community. Their record of shame in the police-courts ceased. Miracles of grace were wrought in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The disciples were looking for the Lord in the faces and homes of the people; and through the disciples the people were led to discern the Lord."

This man was, however, not narrow in his views of Christian work; he engaged in all kinds of schemes for the benefit of the poor. He was the guide of young men; he took them to his home and his heart. He toiled for the education of the poor in days when much less interest was taken in that subject. He could work earnestly for anything that would help men, from a penny book or a temperance lodge to a hospital or a university. Whether he was teaching in the Sunday School or setting on the magistrate's bench he was moved by the same spirit of Christian love.

*Notes of the ninth of a series of sermons by Rev. G. M. Milligan, D.D., of Old St. Andrew's Church, Toronto.