

ISRAELITE AND INDIAN: A PARALLEL IN PLANES OF CULTURE.*

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I.

AXIOMS and postulates long limited man's study of man. This hampering has been peculiarly marked in reference to America, the assumption being that it must have been peopled from the eastern hemisphere, and that its languages, religions, and customs must have been inherited from nations registered in Eurasian records. Whatever was found here was assumed to have come through descent or derivation. The conceptions of autogeny and of independent growth, by which men in the same plane of culture act and think alike, with only the modifications of environment, had not arisen to explain observed facts.

Many authors have contended that the North American Indians were descendants of the "ten lost tribes of Israel." Prominent among them was James Adair, whose work, highly useful with regard to the customs of the southeastern Indians, among whom he spent many years, was mainly devoted to proof of the proposition. The Rev. Ethan Smith is also conspicuous. Even the latest general treatise on the Indians, published last year, and bearing the comprehensive title, "The American Indian," favors the same theory.

The authors of the school mentioned rest their case on the fact, which I freely admit with greater emphasis, that an astounding number of customs of the North American Indians are the same as those recorded of the ancient Israelites. The lesson to be derived from this parallel is, however, very different from that drawn by those who have advocated the descent in question.

The argument, strongly urged, derived from an alleged similarity between Hebrew and some Indian languages, especially in identity of certain vocables, may be dismissed forthwith. Perhaps the most absurd of all the coincidences insisted upon by Adair was the religious use of sounds represented by him to be the same as the word Jehovah. The "lost" Israelites when deported did not use orally the name given in the English version as "Jehovah," and the mode of its spelling and pronunciation is at this moment in dispute, though generally accepted as Jahveh; therefore, it would be most extraordinary if the tribes of Indians supposed to be descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel should at this time know how to pronounce a name which their alleged ancestors practically did not possess.

* Address of the Vice-President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Section II, Anthropology, delivered at the Toronto meeting, August, 1889.