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Frederick Denison Maurice

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The *Religions of the World and Their Relations to Christianity* (1847) derives from a series of eight lectures by the renowned theologian and political radical F. D. Maurice (1805–1872). They were given in a series established by Robert Boyle in 1691 as a stipulation of his will and intended ‘for proving the Christian Religion against notorious Infidels.’ Maurice both abides by and transforms this charge, examining ‘the great Religious Systems ... not going into their details ... but enquiring what was their main characteristic principle.’ In this important early work of comparative religious scholarship, Maurice investigates the theological foundations of the major world religions — Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism — as well as what he calls the ‘defunct’ faiths of ancient Greek, Rome, Egypt, Persia and Scandinavia. The resulting text is a rich work of theological enquiry and a valuable testament to a central nineteenth-century religious thinker.

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THE  
RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

AND THEIR

RELATIONS TO CHRISTIANITY,

CONSIDERED IN

EIGHT LECTURES

FOUNDED BY THE RIGHT HON. ROBERT BOYLE.

BY

FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE, M.A.,

*CHAPLAIN OF LINCOLN'S INN, AND  
PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.*

---

Τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὁ γὰρ  
Θεὸς αὐτοῖς ἐφάνερωσε.—Romans i. 19.

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LONDON:

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M.DCCC.XLVII.

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TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

MY LORD,

THROUGH your Lordship's kindness I was appointed to the BOYLE LECTURESHIP; the same kindness has permitted me to relinquish it at the end of one year. I take the liberty of presenting to your Lordship the Discourses of that year. The study of the subject which is considered in them has been most interesting and comforting to myself; I shall be thankful indeed if it should prove of any use to my countrymen. Desiring for the Church universal, for that portion of it especially over which your Lordship presides, and for your Lordship personally all the blessings of this season,

I have the honour to be,

My LORD,

Your Lordship's very obliged Servant,

F. D. MAURICE.

*December, 1846.*

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## P R E F A C E.

THE substance of these Lectures was delivered, according to the directions of Boyle's Will, in one of the London Churches, on the first Mondays of certain months in the last and present year. Though it is not imperative on the preacher to print his Discourses, it has been the custom to do so. Indeed the intention of the founder seems to be scarcely fulfilled by addressing a series of Sermons on subjects requiring some attention, at distant intervals, to the eight or ten persons who in the present times compose an ordinary week-day congregation. In preparing them for publication I have omitted the texts, which were little more than mottoes, and have altered the forms of language which belong especially to pulpit composition.

The object of the Lectures will, I hope, be sufficiently intelligible to those who read them. But it is a duty to speak of some writers who have discussed the same subjects, and to whom I am indebted.

In the first Lecture I have not touched upon the question which is considered in Mr. Forster's *Mahometanism Unveiled*. My business was with popular views upon the subject, not with learned and ingenious speculations. Of Mr. Forster's theory I do not feel competent to express an opinion; so far as it evinces a desire to deal fairly with facts which Christian apologists have often perverted, and a confidence, that the cause of Christianity must be the better

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for such fairness, it must, I am sure, have done good, even if the basis upon which it rests should be found untenable.

Mr. Carlyle's Lecture on Mahomet in his *Hero Worship*, is probably much better known to my readers than Mr. Forster's treatise. Some persons may have been led by that Lecture to identify Mahometanism with reverence for the person of Mahomet; they will strongly object to the sentiments which I have expressed in one passage of this book. But I do not anticipate any such objection from Mr. Carlyle himself. No writer has more distinctly recognized the Islamite principle of subjection to an absolute Will as the vital one in this faith; or has exhibited a more earnest, I had nearly said, a more exclusive, veneration for that principle. A man seems to him to be strong or weak, admirable or contemptible, precisely as he is possessed by it or as he substitutes some notion of happiness, some theory of the Universe, in place of it. Those who feel that they are under the deepest obligation to Mr. Carlyle for the power with which he has brought the truth of this principle to their minds, for the proofs which he has given, that as much in the seventeenth century as in the seventh, it could break down whatever did not pay it homage, cannot be persuaded to look upon any phrases of his which appear to convey an opposite impression, however much they may be quoted, however partial he may seem to them himself, as the most genuine expressions of his mind. They rather recognize in the phrases an attempt, confessedly unsuccessful, to bridge over the chasm which separates, as Mr. Carlyle thinks, the ages in which this faith could be acted out from

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our own in which it has become only a name. That no phrases or formulas, from whatever period or country they may be borrowed, can accomplish this object, Mr. Carlyle is a sufficient witness; that it must be accomplished in some way, his lamentations over the present state of the world abundantly prove. Those who think that it is the first duty of an author to provide them with sunshine, find these lamentations intolerable; there are some who seem to be pleased with them as they might be with any unusually strong exhibition of passion upon the stage. There are others who hear in his wailings the echoes of their own saddest convictions, but who for that reason cannot be content to spend their time merely in listening to them or repeating them. For one who desires to lead an honest life, and learns that men in former days were honest, because they believed in a Personal Being, who is, and was, and is to come, must ask himself whether such a belief has become impossible for him. And if we are assured by Mr. Carlyle that under the conditions of Mahometanism or even of Christian Puritanism it is now impossible, then we must again ask, Why so? Is it because the truth which made these faiths so energetic is not what it was, or is it because it dwelt in them apart from other truths, without which in our days, it can scarcely even exist, much less live? These questions may never present themselves to a dilettante admirer of Mr. Carlyle; those whom his writings have really moved, and who regard him with hearty, though perhaps silent, gratitude and affection, are, I know, haunted by them continually. If these Lectures should lead any one such ques-

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tioner even to hope for an answer, they will do the work for which I especially designed them.

In illustration of the remark that the Mahometan conquerors were not *merely* 'Scourges of God,' however they may have deserved that title, I would suggest to the reader a comparison of their wars with those of Zinghis Khan. May I advise him also to read with some attention the passage in Gibbon (Chap. LXIV. Vol. XI. pp. 391, 392, 8vo Ed.) on the philosophical religion of that Mogul whom Frederic II., the accomplished Suabian, the enemy of Popes, the suspected infidel, denounced as the common foe of mankind, against whom he invoked a crusade of all princes? Gibbon's panegyric, illustrated as it is by his faithful narrative of the proceedings of Zinghis Khan and his successors in Persia, Russia, Hungary, &c.; of their incapacity to preserve a record of their own acts, and of their ultimate conversion by the bigotted Mussulman, is full of the deepest instruction.

In connexion with the remarks upon the constitution of Mahometan Society as exhibited in the Ottoman Empire, I would recommend the study of Ranke's excellent Essay upon that subject in his *Fürsten und Volken*.

The second Lecture is a collection of hints, which may not, I hope, be quite useless to some whose personal observation of India, or whose knowledge of its languages may enable them to detect my mistakes, and if they please, to laugh at my ignorance. The scholars of British India and the intelligent natives have good right to despise any one who sets up his own notions in opposition to their testimonies, and who makes these notions an

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excuse for severe reflections upon a state of society with which he is unacquainted. They may possibly be tolerant of one who by comparing their testimonies, so far as he has been able to gather them, has corrected many crude notions which he had previously entertained\*, and who desires nothing more than that any sentiments of disgust and contempt which Englishmen in India may conceive for the notions and practices which they witness, should rather be counteracted than strengthened by their English education. Professor H. Wilson has undertaken an edition of Mr. Mill's *History of British India*, in the hope, as he intimates in his preface, of correcting, by the evidence of facts, the harsh judgments of the Hindoos, into which the historian, he thinks, was led by theory. To the civil and military servants of the Company such a work may be as useful as the design of it is benevolent. But the missionary, though it is to be hoped he will not neglect to profit either by Mr. Mill's labours, or by the experience and oriental wisdom with which Professor Wilson has enriched them, is open to another kind of temptation, which the one will not much increase, nor the other enable him to resist. The actual sight of a country wholly given to idolatry,

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\* It is possible that some readers of this book, may have met with an article on Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy, which I wrote several years ago in the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana*. From the principles of that article generally, I have not seen any reason to depart; but the few passages in it which refer to Indian life and philosophy, seem to me very unsatisfactory and erroneous. They are quite at variance with those I have expressed in the third and fourth Lectures of this course.

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must be far more startling and appalling to him than any pictures he can have formed of it previously. Not to weaken these impressions, but to prevent them from overwhelming him, and so destroying that sympathy with the victims of idolatry, which is the most necessary qualification for his task, should be the great object of his home instructors. For this end, I think, we should aim, not merely at cultivating Christian love and pity in his heart: these will scarcely be kept alive, if there be not also an intellectual discipline, (I call it *intellectual*, yet it is in the very highest sense a moral discipline,) to shew him what the thoughts and feelings of which Hindooism is the expression, have to do with himself, how they are interpreted by the experience of individuals and the history of the world. I look earnestly to St. Augustine's College, in the hope that it may fulfil both these tasks. Should it do so, it will be indeed worthy of its name; it may be the instrument of restoring faith to England as well as of imparting it to her dependencies. For do *we* not need, as I have hinted in my last Lecture, to be taught that the Gospel is not a dead letter, by discovering what living wants there are in us, and all men, which it meets and satisfies?

It might have been desirable that I should have appended to this, and the two following Lectures, some illustrative notes: I had intended to do so, but I feared that I should increase the size and price of the volume, without conferring a proportionate benefit upon the reader. I can enumerate in a few lines the books from which my proofs would have been drawn. From them (and they are within the

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reach of persons who are as ignorant of Oriental literature as I am,) much more may be learnt in the course of a few hours' fair study, than from long appendices of extracts, selected at the pleasure of an Author.

The Essay of Mr. Colebrooke on the Vedas, in the eighth volume of the *Asiatic Researches*, and Mr. Rosen's Latin translation of the *Rig Veda*, are at present\* the chief helps which the Western student possesses for a knowledge of the earliest Hindoo faith. It is important to observe, that while Mr. Colebrooke's extracts are chiefly taken from the liturgical part of the Vedas, those upon which the late Rammohun Roy raised his argument for the corruption of the later faith, were doctrinal passages. His conclusion, as I have hinted in my Lecture, is therefore unsatisfactory, though it ought not to be called unfair or disingenuous. If he had quoted the prayers which Mr. Colebrooke has made us acquainted with, English readers would no doubt have discredited his boast of the primitive Monotheism of his country. But they would have done so hastily. Those prayers imply a Monotheism as certainly as the direct teaching; and the one may justly be adduced as the interpretation of the other. The question is, *what* Monotheism? The prayers and doctrine I think make the same answer: a Monotheism which made it impossible to

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\* I understand that a young German, now in London, whose knowledge of Sanscrit is profound, and his industry *plus quàm Germanica*, has it in contemplation to publish and translate all the Vedas. English money it is to be hoped will not be wanting, when the other and more indispensable requisite is supplied by a foreigner.

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distinguish the object worshipped from the mind of the worshipper, and *therefore* which implicitly contained, and out of which was inevitably developed, the later Polytheism. We may be thankful to Ram-mohun Roy for helping us to detect the old faith at the root of one which seems so unlike it, but cannot allow him to confuse us, however innocently, by the use of a phrase, which is susceptible of the most opposite significations.

The translation of the Menu Code, by Sir W. Jones, brings that part of the subject within the reach of all. I hope the reader will verify the account I have given of it by examining it for himself, together with the excellent digest of it, in the first volume of Mr. Elphinstone's history.

The third Appendix to the history of this eminent statesman contains an admirable commentary upon the Greek accounts of India, contained in the fifteenth book of Strabo, and the *Indica* of Arrian.

The Vishnu Purana, edited by Professor Wilson, exhibits another and much more recent stage of the mythology—that which I have spoken of as produced by the artificial incorporation of the old faith with the different kinds of worship which had arisen from popular movements and reactions. To trace the progress of these movements with little help from external history, is of course difficult; no one solution of the problem can be certain; all as hints may be useful. The one I have supposed seems to be internally probable and consistent; still there is an objection to it which I have no wish to conceal. Professor Wilson offers reasons for thinking that the



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Puranas which have the Siva\* element predominant in them, are considerably older than those which have the Vaishnava characteristics. It may hence be concluded that the Siva worship itself preceded that of Vishnù. If this were the case, I should be wrong in my fancy respecting the first transition from the merely abstracted Brahminical religion to the popular; at least, wrong in assuming what may have been true in a particular case, as explaining the history generally. Other authorities think that the two forms of worship may have had a contemporaneous development in different places; a view not incompatible with the one I have taken, especially as it is assumed on all hands that the names considered as attributes or characters of the divinity, as forms through which he was beheld, existed almost in the first stage of the religion.

The subject of the Philosophical sects among the Hindoos, is treated by Mr. Colebrooke in a series of papers in the first and second Volumes of the *Royal Asiatic Transactions*. These papers (which should be compared with the paper on the Védánta System, by Col. Vans Kennedy, Vol. III. p. 412) are full of interest.

These writings of actual observers should, I think, be studied before the speculations of even the most intelligent thinkers. But I should be ungrateful if I did not say that the passages on India in the Mythologies of Baur and Windischmann, and

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\* I must beg the reader to correct the spelling of this name in the Second and Third Lectures. It was overlooked in the correction of one sheet, and foolishly preserved afterwards, for the sake of consistency.

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still more in Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, with the little book of Frederick Schlegel, called *Die Indien*, have illuminated many dark and dull reports, and have enabled me to feel the connexion between the thoughts of other periods and countries and those which characterise our own times.

The temptation to speak of Buddhism merely or chiefly in this connexion, is one which I was aware of when I entered upon it, in my third Lecture, and which I have striven to resist. I am sure that any advantage that we may derive from a comparison of the difficulties which have beset Asiatics in different ages, with those which are besetting Europeans now, must depend upon the earnestness with which we determine, first to understand the former in themselves. If we are more eager to make applications, than to ascertain what we have to apply, we may write a polemical treatise which will convince all who agreed with us before and will furnish writers in reviews, who have exhausted their old arguments of invective against some opponent, with a set of new phrases; but we shall not remove one perplexity from any earnest mind; we shall only throw into it a new element of confusion. The ultimate tendencies of Buddhism to entire evaporation, to mere negation, are manifest enough. The like tendencies assuredly exist, perhaps are becoming stronger every day, in Christendom. But to take the result of a certain doctrine or habit of mind, without considering its stages, varieties, counteractions; its lights as well as its shadows; how it weaves for itself at one time a dogmatic or sacerdotal vesture; how it sinks at another into a

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mere speculation; above all, what an Eternal Verity keeps it alive in all its forms; is not using it for the warning and instruction of men, but turning it into a mask for frightening children. If it is well for us to show what possibilities lurk in Buddhism because they lurk in us, still more ought we to consider its actual history, because it is the history of a process which may be passing in the minds of persons whom we are most ready to think of as having reached the last development of unbelief; because it may be going on in us when we are giving ourselves credit for the greatest amount of faith.

Entering upon the subject with these feelings, I desired to hear of Buddhism not in digests, which represented it as a system at rest, but from intelligent observers who saw it in motion and described its different appearances. The papers on the subject in the Royal Asiatic Society are for this purpose invaluable, especially those of Mr. Hodgson, to which I have referred in the text (*Transactions*, Vol. II. p. 222); that on Buddha and the Phrabat by Captain Low (Vol. III. p. 57); that on the consecration of priests by Mr. Knox (Vol. III. p. 271); the disputations respecting Caste by a Buddhist (Vol. III. p. 160). To these may be added different accounts of the Lama in *Asiatic Researches*, (Vol. I. p. 197, and XVII. pp. 522—524,) and the later narrative of Mr. Turner. For a general statement, I know nothing better than the article on Buddhism, in the *Penny Cyclopædia*. Dr. Pritchard's works will supply valuable information upon this as upon most other subjects. Of course it would be absurd to

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slight the French writers upon Buddhism, though on a subject which offers such facilities for systematising, and in which systematising is so likely to mislead, it may be lawful to view them with some suspicion.

Of the Confucian doctrine, on the other hand, they are probably the best, as they are the most zealous and enthusiastic expounders. The *Quatre Livres* of Confucius, translated by Pothier, is a moderately-sized and readable book, and the preface to it is very useful and instructive. The Chinese reverence of paternal authority is abundantly illustrated in the fourth volume of the *Mémoires sur les Chinois, par les Missionnaires de Peking*. All our recent writers, Davis, Medhurst, Gutzlaff, though valuable in reference to China generally, are rather vague and unsatisfactory on the subject of its religion. The Chinese exhibition at Knightsbridge is, in this respect, more valuable than any of them.

The recent interpretation of the arrow-headed inscriptions at Persepolis by Major Rawlinson will add, no doubt, greatly to our knowledge of the Persian or Zend doctrines. They seem to confirm the opinion which was so long entertained upon other grounds, that Darius Hystaspes was an instrument in the restoration of the true Persian faith, after it had been subverted by the Pseudo Smerdis. It seems also clearer than it was before, that the reformation, which is connected with the name of Zoroaster, consisted mainly in the assertion of the absolute supremacy of Ormuzd. It does not follow that Ahriman worship was prohibited or wholly denounced : that it was continually reappearing in the popular

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mind, is evident. The later Magian faith may have been an attempt to reconcile the reformed with the popular doctrine; or rather, may it not be supposed, that Zoroaster's was the regal creed, and that the priests never more than partially recognized it?

What has been said respecting the three cycles of Egyptian gods, is explained at large in the *Ægypten* of Chevalier Bunsen, Vol. i. p. 423—433. He has a remark (p. 432) upon the mistaken effort to form Triads in different mythologies, by bringing together gods from different localities, or periods of history, which I have found very useful. Keeping it in memory, I think I have learnt more to find in THE Triad, an interpretation of all mythology, than if I had laboured ever so diligently to find parallels for it in the external parts of the systems.

If I had been writing a history instead of a lecture, it would have behoved me, when speaking of the relations of Christianity with Persia, to have noticed the Nestorian missions in that country. I believe the history of these missions would throw an important light upon the whole subject; but it would have led me into many details, which, especially in a recapitulation, I was anxious to avoid. To pass over any facts merely because they might tend to the honour of heretics, would be grossly inconsistent with the professions, and, I hope, with the spirit of these Lectures\*.

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\* I ought perhaps to have noticed two large Works, written by Englishmen, on the subject of my Second Lecture; the *Hindoo Antiquities* of Mr. Thomas Maurice, and the work on the *Literature, Manners, and Religion of the Hindoos*, by Mr. Ward. They illustrate two habits of mind directly opposite to each other; almost equally

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unfavourable, I think, to a true apprehension of the Brahminical faith, and of its relation to Christianity. Mr. Maurice seems to regard the abominations of idolatry as objects merely of literary interest and antiquarian curiosity. Mr. Ward can see only the hateful and the devilish; of what good it may be the counterfeit, what divine truth may be concealed in it, and may be needed to supplant it, he has not courage to enquire. Each, I think, is refuted on its own ground. Dilettante scholarship is found not to be sound scholarship. That which has no hold on the present, proves not to be true of the past. Mere observers of evil do not describe the evil accurately or vividly enough; the points may be correct, but the impression is false; for want of light, we do not feel the darkness. I believe most persons find it exceedingly difficult to read either of these books; quite impossible, to remember them.

I ought to have said, when speaking of Rammohun Roy, that his Tracts were written originally for his own countrymen, not for Englishmen. They were first printed in Calcutta: collected and republished in London, I believe under his direction, in 1832.

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