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DR. STEINTHAL'S ESSAYS.

Zu Bibel und Religionsphilosophie. By Professor H. STEINTHAL.
(Berlin : Reimer. 1890.)

SOME time ago I drew up and published a list of the Jewish celebrities of the last century. I remember wondering at the time what would have been said if I had dared to place the living ones in what I thought to be their order of merit. But certainly among the first two or three would have come the name of H. Steintal. He is, next to Wundt, the most distinguished psychologist in Germany. He is co-founder with Professor Lazarus of the science of *Völkerpsychologie*. He is the greatest living authority on the intricate question of the origin of language ; indeed, on the whole range of questions connected with the philosophical and psychological bases of Philology, he is the first authority in Europe. Besides this, he is the only writer on Ethics in contemporary Germany whose views are known or considered outside the Fatherland. In Old Testament criticism, again, he has made his mark ; in particular, his paper on the Samson saga is almost the sole relic of the celebrated sun-myth theory that still remains unassailed.

The papers collected in his latest work, the one before us, touch upon many sides of Steintal's very many-sided activity ; but their title, *Zu Bibel und Religionsphilosophie*, indicate their main topics. Thus we have the Narrative Art of the Bible, the Sublime in the Scriptures, the Creative Myths of Genesis, besides special studies of Lamentations and Balaam, which are clearly contributions " zu Bibel." The other part of the title is represented by essays on Truth and Evolution, on Myth and Religion, and on the Origin and Meaning (*Wesen*) of Monotheism. But besides these essays, there are others, not so closely covered by the title, that seem to me to deserve even greater attention than any of these. Two of these are subtle and penetrating psychological studies on Devotion and on Humility ; the others are on Tolerance and on Prejudice. These form, both in style and matter, the gems of the collection, and give characteristic examples of Professor Steintal's style and method.

Before, however, speaking more particularly of these, some words should be given to the other essays of the book which I only put in the second place, not because I admire them less, but because I consider the others more characteristic. It is always interesting to come across an expert on ground where he is somewhat less at home than in his specialty. One fancies one sees the man under such circumstances *an und für sich*, " as in himself he really is," to use Matthew Arnold's characteristic Englishing of the German technical phrase. And a

very pleasant acquaintance Professor Steinthal proves himself to be, when found off the beaten track. For one thing he writes a German that can be read, an almost unique phenomenon among German philosophers. It is, indeed, remarkable that almost the only German writers of note who have had anything of French grace and lucidity about them have been Jews. Mendelssohn, Börne, Heine, wherever the German tongue resounds, these carry off the palm for lucid and easy-flowing prose. Professor Steinthal shares in great measure in this Semitic lucidity, which not even anti-Semites will put down to the bad side of Jewish influence. Without any straining after epigram, Professor Steinthal's exposition is as clear as a running brook, and in like manner often deceives one as to the depth of the stream.

According to Professor Steinthal, this lucidity has been conspicuous among Jews from Bible times, at least as regards narrative style. He points out how effectively the Bible tells a story in the fewest possible words, selecting, as examples, the election of Jehu, the rumours of Joseph's death reaching Jacob, and the sacrifice of Isaac. For my own part, I think the epic skill of the Judaic narrators comes out still more strongly in a passage like that of the death of the Shunamite's son (II Kings, iv. 8-37). The cry of the sun-stricken lad, "My head! my head!" has always had a special appeal to me.

Another of Professor Steinthal's Biblical essays deals with the Biblical sublime, and here he shows that it is not for nought that he has gained such fame as a psychologist. English psychological language makes it almost impossible to render into English the four elements of the sublime, according to Steinthal:—"Ruhe des Gemüths, Idealität des Gefühls, Klarheit des Bewusstseins und Fülle bei Form des Inhalts." Perhaps we may paraphrase it somewhat as follows:—In presence of the sublime our mood is calmed, yet our spirits are aroused and our outlook widened, we see clearly, yet know we see not all. This is the sublime regarded from the subjective side; from the objective point of view a certain amount of simplicity and clearness of outline strikes Steinthal as one of the *sine quâ non's* of "Das Erhabene," and then he goes on to give examples of this in the Bible. One of his most striking remarks is upon the religious use of phrases like "our God," "my God," which M. Renan found so henotheistic. Steinthal points out that the use is peculiar to the Hebrews; neither Greeks nor Germans ever speak of "our Jupiter," "our Odin."

These examples must suffice as specimens of Steinthal's Biblical literary criticism, a subject practically in its infancy. Overmuch as the Bible has been written about, its literary qualities are scarcely ever touched upon. Even Professor Cheyne, who shows in other respects so fine a literary taste and tact, rarely or never treats of the

Biblical books from the literary point of view. It would be well if he or others would touch on this side of the Bible's greatness, one of the secrets of its appeal to many folk who fail to be touched by forms of religious thought, so different from the contemporary, or requiring such historic imagination for its identity to be seen.

As a sample of Steinthal's philosophy of religion, to which we must now turn, the lecture on "Religion and Myth" will amply serve our turn. His views on religion are akin to those of Professor Seeley and the Broad Church generally. Religion is the feeling for the Infinite, for the Divinity within us, and for all without us that represents the Infinite or the Divine; hence it is the source of all pleasure in the ideal strivings of science, the symbols of art and the ideals of duty. *C'est magnifique mais ce n'est pas le dogme*, some will say, and indeed Professor Steinthal is here by no means so clear, let us say the word, by no means so sincere as is his wont. More harm is done to religion by such vague vapourings than by all the blasphemies that ever were. In opposition to this definition of religion stands out Steinthal's definition of myth as a *form* of thinking and expression ("Denk- und Darstellungsform"), which is gone through by all peoples and by all persons in their attempts to grasp the Infinite or the Divine. This enables Professor Steinthal to produce some pretty contrasts between the finite form of religion, the myth, and the eternal and infinite substance of it. Pretty, but somewhat vague and not too light-giving, is here the verdict towards which one is tempted.

But whether one agree with Professor Steinthal or not—and it will be observed that I dare to disagree with him at times—there can be no doubt about one thing. These essays put Professor Steinthal's meaning clearly and attractively. One knows at least what one is called upon to agree with. This is a rare enough quality in philosophic essays to call for grateful notice when one does meet with it. The distinctions may often be subtle, but they are always clear and clearly expressed, with pertinent examples and definite sign-posts in the argument.

These qualities are shown at their highest pitch of perfection in the four Essays I selected for special commendation at the beginning of this notice. They are specially interesting, I think, for their distinctly Jewish tone. Fortunately, for some reasons, unfortunately for others, men may write on the Bible, or on religious philosophy, without being Jews, or knowing much of what Jews think on such subjects. But no one but a Jew, I fancy, could have thought the thoughts and felt the feelings that find such clear expression in Professor Steinthal's essays on "Devotion, Humility, Tolerance, and Prejudice." The very titles are an epitome of Jewish history, and the feelings they

imply, are at the root of the special Jewish *ḥithos*. No wonder, perhaps, that so good a Jew as Professor Steinthal is at his best in dealing with such specifically Jewish subjects. I should be defeating my own object if I were to go into any detail with regard to these essays of Professor Steinthal. I hope to induce some of the readers of this REVIEW to become readers of the Essays. I shall not, therefore, attempt to put them in such a position that they can do without reading them. One word only I will say that will appeal to such of the Jewish clergymen of England as are interested in the art of sermon writing. These Essays of Professor Steinthal—and this remark applies to all of them, though more especially to the selected four—these Essays are something more than essays : they are lay sermons.

JOSEPH JACOBS.