

THURSDAY, MAY 19, 1881

"A BOOK OF THE BEGINNINGS"

A Book of the Beginnings. By Gerald Massey. Two Vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881.)

IN two large volumes Mr. Gerald Massey has collected together all the principal facts known about Egypt, with a view to trace the origin of mankind. Some portions of his theories are undoubtedly correct, especially those which go to prove that the Egyptians are the oldest known historical race, that they are an African people of a peculiar type, and by no means an Asiatic tribe filtered through the Isthmus of Suez, and in course of time building up a Semitic population in Africa; that evidence of their primitive development is to be found in their physical type; for Mr. Massey is a decided evolutionist, and regards man as evolved from some of the anthropoid apes, especially the black races, whose colour he considers marks their animal descent; that flint and stone weapons, principally of the Neolithic period, have been found in Egypt at different points is undoubted; and that the aboriginal inhabitants of the Nile Valley gradually rose to a higher state of civilisation, and that without a foreign predisposing them, is probably true. When however the author leaves the realms of ethnology and dashes into philology his results are startling, and his deductions so weird and transcendental that they fail to command acquiescence. It is the rash seizing of any word in any dialect which is totally inadmissible, as from such arbitrary selections any absurdity may be perpetrated.

Still more extraordinary is the separation, arbitrary as it appears, of dissyllable words into syllables, and comparing each syllable with any Egyptian one that will give such a meaning as the inquirer wishes. To such proceedings there are no limits, and some of the results are grotesque. The first requirement in the study of a language is to separate the original from the introduced words, and to apply to each a distinct etymology. In all languages nouns are of uncertain origin, verbs and original inflections, affixes and prefixes are more typical. Such derivations, for example, as butter and butterfly from the Egyptian *Put*, "food," and *Ter*, "entire" or "total," and moth from the Egyptian *Mut*, "death," and cooper from the Egyptian *Kheper*, "a bottle," are too far-fetched to entitle them to the designation of philological deductions. But with all this straining at gnats the number of English words, whether original or derivative, which can be tortured into supposed Egyptian origin, is remarkably small. Objecting, as is imperative, to all such vain delusions, it must be admitted that the author has a full right to oppose that system of comparative philology which has been built up from the Sanskrit, the supposed oldest representation of the Aryan languages, to the utter neglect of the older Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, and Chinese. The stately edifice built upon the sand of Sanscritism already shows signs of subsidence, and will ultimately vanish like the baseless fabric of a vision. For by it not the study of the general laws of speech, but only of a comparatively recent development is exhibited. The weakness of the author is however equally

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manifest here, as he deals with languages which he does not understand, and institutes comparisons on imperfect data, nor does he seem to be aware of the knowledge recently acquired of a prehistoric Chinese. He is however right when he points out that such a Hebrew, not British, name as Adam is more likely to be derived from *Tem* or *Atem*, the Egyptian word for "creator" and "created" being, than the Sanscrit *Adima*, proposed by Max Müller, the more so that the Pentateuch abounds in Egyptian words, and Sanscrit philology is vainly and ridiculously applied to it. But in treating of the Egyptian word for cat and its vocative form pussy, although the different forms cited may amuse those interested in the "great cat question," the learning expended is not on an original, but an introduced word. The cat was doubtless an African and Chinese animal unknown to the Greeks till a very late period, not introduced till late into the houses of the Romans, and not seen on Egyptian sculptures as a pet till about 1500 B.C. The immense deal of reading and the fanciful comparisons of the section of the Egyptian names of personages are too daring and startling. No doubt there is a peculiar fascination in playing with words, and if the combinations are neither correct nor harmonious, they are at all events amusing, as to find that the Chinese expression *fieng yue* is the same as the word fiend, after all only the Egyptian *fenti*, and "old Bendy," the English nick-name for the devil. The same remarks may also be applied to the attempts to refer British symbolical customs to Egyptian names, and the identification of the Egyptian deities in the British Isles, although a great deal of reading has been wasted. In the wriggling over the word Tasc on British coins, the well-known abridgment of Tasciovanus, the father of Cunobelinus, or Cymbelin, there is an unusual degree of floundering. It is referred to the Egyptian word *tes* and the English *tas*, a reaper, and this example will give an idea of the manner in which the subject is treated. At some spot in Herefordshire certain services were performed over "old Tom"—not the spirit, but as the departed year was called; and this is supposed to be part of the myth or legend of the Egyptian god Atum, or the Creator, Tom in the game of noughts and crosses, and so is Tommy Dodd. The only difficulty is to conceive how such a transformation can have got into any English head, for the word Tom suggests a vulgar familiarity and a contracted form of Thomas; and in the same strain run on the consideration of the types, names, and similar subjects, all on the same plan. From the consideration of Egyptian origins in Britain, a more than doubtful thesis, Mr. Massey however goes into deeper water when he ventures on Egyptian analogies in the Hebrew scriptures, although the subject is by no means novel, and has been mentioned by various Egyptologists, Chabas, De Rouge, Ebers, Brugsch, and others, besides the extensive use of Egyptology made by German theologians. The identification of biblical personages is another of the attempts of the author to grasp at faint analogies with Egyptian words that might possibly be compounded into the Hebrew syllables forming the Hebrew names; the slightest probability is grasped at as if an absolute proof, with the undaunted boldness of a preconceived theory. Such researches may dazzle those unacquainted either with Egyptian or Hebrew, but it is more than doubtful

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if such averments will commend themselves either to Egyptologists or Hebraists; they are so transcendental that they do not belong to the domain of pure or comparative philology, but appertain rather to the province of comparative mythology, and the interpretations so liberally accorded of the myths of one nation by the philology of another. They resemble the labours of the school of Bryant, which expended so much learning, obtained such few results, and established no important fact. So with an immense amount of Egyptian reading and learning the real amount of new facts acquired by ingenious comparisons is small, not to say of the most doubtful character. Amongst one of the most startling ideas is that the Arsu, who ruled during the anarchy which preceded the reign of Setnethk or Nekhtset, is no other than Moses. The search for Moses amongst Egyptologists has been most exhaustive, and Prof. Lanth, who also belongs to the imaginative rather than the critical school, has long ago thought that he identified not only the Jewish lawgiver, but all the members of his family, on an Egyptian sepulchral tablet. It is needless to remark that no other Egyptologist recognises in the polytheistic worshipper of Apis the monotheistic leader of Israel.

No doubt many identical verbal roots occur in Egyptian, Assyrian, and Accadian; those of Hebrew and Coptic have already been pointed out and alluded to; still the languages are essentially distinct in their constructions, and belong to different families. The Assyrian may be classed as the oldest form of the Semitic family, at all events the Babylonian must be considered so. Greater difficulty indeed exists about the Accadian, which has been referred with probability by some to the Ugrian family of languages, and with doubtful success by others to the oldest Chinese, as the theory is based on the comparison of few words, some of which are of uncertain meaning, and they cannot be historically traced as the descendants of one another. Some of the Accadian nouns, indeed, resemble the Finnish, but the verbs are totally dissimilar. Many Egyptian words, however, it would appear from the comparative table of Mr. Massey, resemble Accadian, and this may be considered a new departure, and one perfectly legitimate, as the two languages may have started from a common origin; indeed by some linguists the origin of the Semitic has been referred to Africa; but as already clearly pointed out, although certain phases of construction ally the Egyptian with the Semitic languages, there is not the most remote similarity with the Accadian, which is not only of a totally different family from the Semitic, but also the Egyptian or Hamitic tongues. When however Mr. Massey claims to trace Egyptian words in the Maori, he has no doubt been more fascinated by the theory of the Egyptians belonging to a primitive continent subsequently broken into the islands of the Polynesian group than the actual coincidences of the two tongues or the similar words in the two languages. It must always be remembered that, like the Chinese, the Egyptian is a very poor language, and expresses a great variety of ideas by a single monosyllable: no wonder, then, if coincidences occur. The African origin of the Maoris of course demands further consideration. Ethnologically and philologically they were formerly classed as a probable offset of the Malay race, but how Egyptian words passed to them is another

question. Some words certainly look like Egyptian; but that is not sufficient, as some Egyptian words resemble those in all other languages.

More in accordance with probability is the hypothesis that Egyptian words may be found in all the African languages, although their structures differ. This has been long recognised as a fact in the Berber, and also in some of the other African stems, but again the great difference of structure and the doubt how and when the Egyptian words were introduced cloud the inquiry in investigating languages that have had no inscriptions or written literature. Yet the old Egyptian must have been a development of one of the old African languages which subsequently became extinct.

Notwithstanding the difference of opinion about the results and the methods by which they have been obtained, great credit is due to Mr. Massey for the ingenuity with which he has endeavoured to build up his theory and, to his mind, discoveries. He has read through all the principal works on the subjects he treats, and his collection of words, legends, and data is enormous. He has produced a work which will be read with pleasure by some, with amazement by others, and incredulity by specialists. He has taken all reasonable care to insure a fair and correct list of words and facts: yet for all that the embroidery of his particoloured threads has produced a weird and grotesque pattern of strange and fantastic conceptions such as might have been planned by elves or fairies to dazzle and bewilder mortal imagination as much as to amuse and delight themselves. It is too warm and rosy for the chill glance of science.

THE SCOTTISH CELTIC REVIEW

The Scottish Celtic Review. No. 1, March, 1881; pp. 80, 8vo. (Glasgow: James Maclehose.)

THIS is a quarterly review of which the first number has just appeared, published by Mr. Maclehose of Glasgow; but the name of the editor is not given, nor of the writers of the articles. The work however is done in a way which shows that there are at least a few persons in the North who feel a deep interest in Celtic philology and the language and literature of the Scotch Highlands. The programme is an excellent one, and embraces among other things the application to the study of Gaelic of those methods of investigation which have been so fruitful in the fields of English and German philology. It is intended also to help, by means of translations, to make English readers better acquainted with Gaelic literature, and to collect for publication all fragments of unwritten literature which still may happen to linger in the Highlands, as well as to afford room for the discussion of questions relating to Gaelic grammar and orthography. This last, it seems to us, is a subject with which the Gaelic scholars of the Highlands trouble themselves a great deal too much. Modern Gaelic orthography, whether in Ireland or in Alban, is simply incorrigible, and had better be left alone for the rest of the natural lives of the surviving dialects. This involves no great inconvenience; for no scholar who wants to understand the history of a Gaelic word ever thinks of being guided by any of the modern spellings which may be in use, but goes back to the Irish of the Middle Ages, or farther still,