

SEISS' PREFACE TO THE GOSPEL IN THE STARS²⁸

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It may seem adventurous to propose to read the Gospel of Christ from what Herschel calls "those uncouth figures and outlines of men and monsters usually scribbled over celestial globes and maps." So it once would have seemed to the writer. But a just estimate of the case cannot be formed without a close survey of what these figures are, what relations they bear to each other, whence they originated, and what meaning was attached to them by the most ancient peoples from whom they have been transmitted to us. Such a survey the author of this volume has endeavoured to make. From an extended induction he has also reached conclusions which lead him to think he may do good service by giving publicity to the results of his examinations.

The current explanations of the origin and meaning of the constellations certainly are not such as should satisfy those in search of positive truth. Herschel characterizes them as "puerile and absurd." They are nowhere to be found outside of Greece and Rome and modern works which have thence derived them. They are part of the staple in the theories and arguments of infidelity. The more ancient and more knowing peoples never so explained these celestial signs, but uniformly regarded them as divine in source and sacred in significance. Even Greece and Rome never could separate them from their worship, their gods, and their hopes of futurity, whilst some of their best authors devoutly referred to them as divine. The theory that they have come from natural observations of the seasons and man's occupations in different parts of the year is but a rationalistic conjecture, unsupported by facts or analogy. It is the mere guess of men pressed by the presence of a great and masterly system marked on the heavens for which they knew not how to account—a guess which will not stand the test of its own assumptions or common sense, much less the light now in the world's possession respecting the remoter antiquities of man. That some Greek and Roman authors, who never understood any of these things,²⁹ should indulge in such unfounded suppositions is not remarkable; but that

²⁸ Seiss, J. A., 1882. *The Gospel in the Stars; or, Primeval Astronomy*, (Philadelphia: E. Claxton & Company), reprinted under the title *The Gospel in the Stars* by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan), p. 5, 1972.

²⁹ See Grote's *History of Greece*, vol. i. pp. 394-444.

people of learning and science, jealous of building on anything but solid grounds, should still entertain and reiterate them for ascertained verities, is very surprising. And if men are constrained thus to accept and repeat them from sheer inability otherwise to solve the problem, it should convince them that they have not yet risen to the true character and dignity of these ancient records, and dispose them to a fresh and searching re-examination of the whole subject, to which this book is meant to furnish some humble aid.

The first suspicion that the original constellations may perhaps have come from a divine prophetic source was impressed upon the writer's mind in connection with his studies of the marvelous wisdom embodied in the Great Pyramid of Gizeh. But it came only in the shape of an inference, which needed to be tested on its own independent grounds before it could be reasonably accepted. That inference, however, was so worthy of being investigated, that a course of special study was instituted to ascertain, apart from all pyramid-theories, whether the facts and probabilities in the case would warrant a conclusion of so much moment.

A new field of inquiry thus opened, for the exploration of which but few helps beyond the ordinary books on astronomy could be found. Something, however, had been done by Bailly in his *History of Astronomy*, Dupuis in his *L'Origines des Cultus*, Volney in *Les Ruines*, and some other writers of the same class. To throw contempt on Christianity as a mere accommodation of certain old mythic ideas common to all primitive peoples, these men adduced a large amount of traditional and astronomic lore, proving the great antiquity of the constellations, and showing a striking correspondence between them and the subsequent scriptural story of Christ and salvation. Able theologians like Roberts and Faber, in making replies to these French skeptics, were obliged to admit the strong array of facts alleged, and could only surmise a variety of explanations to do away with the intended conclusion as a *non sequitur*. The arguments of these infidels is indeed fatally defective, especially in assuming that the old astronomy throughout, and all the myths and worships associated with it, have come solely from the natural observation and imagination of man, apart from all supernatural light, revelation, or inspiration. With this starting point unproven and incapable of verification, and with the positive assertions of all the primeval world and all the indications to the contrary, the whole argument necessarily breaks down. Like all the efforts of unbelief, it signally fails. But though the argument, as such, is false and worthless, it does not follow that the materials collected to build it are the same. For the most

part, they are solid enough in themselves, and the gathering of them was a valuable contribution to a better cause. The showings made of the close likeness between the old constellations and the Gospel are well founded, and can now be illustrated to a much greater and more minute extent. But, instead of proving Christianity a mere revival of old mythologies, they give powerful impulse toward the conclusion that the constellations and their associated myths and traditions are themselves, in their original, from the very same prophetic Spirit whence the Sacred Scriptures have come, and that they are of a piece with the biblical records in the system of God's universal enunciations of the Christ.

Gale, in his *Court of the Gentiles*, Farber, *On Pagan Idolatry*, Roberts, in his *Letters to Volney*, Haslam, on *The Cross and the Serpent*, and the author of *Primeval Man Unveiled*, have slightly touched upon the subject, and furnish some materials in the direction of the same conclusions.

Sir William Drummond, in his *Origines*, C. Piazzi Smyth, in his *Life and Work*, and J. T. Goodsir, *On Ethnic Inspiration*, also present some important facts and considerations relating to the general inquiry.

A more valuable aid to the study of the subject as treated in this volume is Frances Rolleston's *Mazzaroth; or, The Constellations*—a book from an authoress of great linguistic and general literary attainments, whom Providence rarely favored for the collection of important facts and materials, particularly as respects the ancient stellar nomenclature. The tables drawn up by Ulugh Beigh, the Tartar prince and astronomer, about A.D. 1420, giving Arabian astronomy as it had come down to his time, with the ancient Coptic and Egyptian names, likewise the much earlier presentations, made about A.D. 850 by Albumazer, the great Arab astronomer of the Caliphs of Grenada, and Aben Ezra's commentaries on the same, are, to a considerable extent, reproduced in her book. Fac-similes of the Dendera and Esne Zodiacs are also given in the last edition (1875) of her work. And from her tables and references the writer of these Lectures was helped to some of his best information, without which this book could hardly have become what it is.

If any others have treated directly, or even incidentally, of what is sought to be shown in this volume, its author had not discovered their records or their names.

With but little therefore, but the star-maps and descriptions as given by astronomers, and such notices of the constellations as are to be found in the remains of antiquity and general literature, he had to make his way as best he could. With what success he has done his work, and in how far his conclusions are entitled to credit or respect, he now submits to the decision of a candid and intelligent public.