THE AMERICAN JOURNAL

OF

SEMITIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

VOLUME XXXVIII OCTOBER 1921 NUMBER 1

MORRIS JASTROW, JR.

BY JAMES A. MONTGOMERY
University of Pennsylvania

Morris Jastrow, Jr., was born in Warsaw, August 13, 1861, the son of Rabbi Marcus Jastrow. The latter, a German subject, was minister of a German-Jewish congregation in Warsaw. Soon after the birth of Morris the Polish revolution of 1861 broke out, and the father, being a warm sympathizer with the struggling Poles, was imprisoned for three months and then ordered to leave the country. The family then settled in South Germany, but they were enabled to return again to Warsaw in 1863. However, their stay was short; the Poles made another attempt to free their country, and all those suspected of sympathizing with such efforts were obliged to leave the land. As the son remarks in a memorandum on his life, "You see, therefore, that I breathed the spirit of liberty from the time of my birth." In 1866 Rabbi Jastrow received a call to the Congregation of Rodef Shalom in Philadelphia and removed there with his family. He was a distinguished preacher, a scholar of profound erudition, which had its fruits in his invaluable *Talmudic Dictionary*, and a saintly man. He and his family became peculiarly identified with the city of their adoption, where the father died, full of honors, in 1903. A younger son, Joseph, devoted himself to the study of

MORRIS JASTROW, JR., PH.D.

1861–1921

psychology and is now professor in that department at the University of Wisconsin.

After his boyhood schooling, Morris Jastrow entered the college of the University of Pennsylvania, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1881. (In 1914 his Alma Mater conferred upon him the degree of LL.D.) He then went to Europe for his *Wanderjahre*, where he studied at the universities of Breslau, Leipzig, and Strassburg, and also spent a winter in Paris attending the Collège de France, the École des Hautes Études, and the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes. He took his degree in philosophy at Leipzig in 1884, his thesis being a portion of the unpublished grammatical works of the Jewish-Arabic grammarian, Abu Zakariyya Hayyuj. He was the scholar of Professor H. L. Fleischer and of the Delitzsches, father and son, at Leipzig, of professors Frankel, Grätz, and Rosin at Breslau, and of Professor Nöldeke at Strassburg. In Paris he came into close contact with Ernest Renan, Jules Oppert, the two Derenbourgs, and Joseph Halévy. These foreign relationships were maintained by him in subsequent years. Among his friends may be named James Darmesteter, Professor Cornelius P. Tiele, of Leyden, Professor William Osler, of Oxford, Professor Israel Abrahams, of Cambridge. For long, until the time of the Great War, he was accustomed to spend the summers in Europe, especially in the delightful environment of Munich. It was in these summer vacations that he found his only time for uninterrupted scholarly work, but he had the pleasure of cultivating the acquaintance of foreign scholars. He took an active part in the several congresses devoted to the subjects of his interest. He was official delegate of the United States Government to the last three International Congresses of Orientalists held in Rome, Copenhagen, and Athens, respectively. He was also official delegate to the Third and Fourth International Congresses for the History of Religions held at Oxford and Leyden. As president of the Semitic section of the Third Congress he delivered the presidential address, and also served as one of the presidents of this section in the Fourth Congress.

He returned home in 1885 at the time when the great development of American Semitic scholarship, synchronizing with Professor William R. Harper's remarkable leadership, was beginning. It had

been expected that he would enter the Jewish ministry, and for a brief space he assisted his father in his congregation. But he determined to devote himself to scholarship, despite the fact that he was making a choice between a certain career and a precarious livelihood. In the year of his return he became lecturer in Semitics in the University of Pennsylvania. About the same time two other scholars were coming into the orbit of the university, Professor John P. Peters, who, while professor in the Philadelphia Divinity School, was also offering lectures at the university, and Dr. Herman V. Hilprecht, who had come to Philadelphia to serve on the staff of the *Sunday School Times*. These two scholars participated in the first campaign, 1888–89, of the Pennsylvania Expedition to Babylonia, and soon after the second campaign Dr. Peters went to New York. Despite these brave beginnings the adequate support of Semitics was still in its infancy. Dr. Jastrow became connected with the library of the university in 1888 as assistant librarian. In 1898 he was appointed librarian, in which capacity he served for twenty-one years, laying down his labors in the library in 1919.

One of the marvels of Dr. Jastrow's life, probably little known to his scholarly circles and hardly realized by his coteries of friends in Philadelphia, is that he pursued his remarkable range of studies during the greatest part of his life in addition to the duties and cares of university librarian. In his charge the library came to be one of the ranking university libraries in the country. In his administration the entire library was re-catalogued and brought up to modern standards, and the collection of books increased from 150,000 to some 400,000 volumes. Under him the library made itself worthy of the remarkable revolution effected by Provost Pepper, who changed the small college and the two or three professional schools into a many-sided university. In this development the library took its part, and Dr. Jastrow as its head revealed his administrative ability and his sympathies as a lover of books and of their readers. His policy was that the books were there to be read, and probably no library was ever expanded on a more democratic basis. Although the work must often have been a burden to a man with such definite ideals and plans as Jastrow had set before himself, he never complained, performed his duties with patience and enthusiasm, while

the qualities of ability and personality which endeared him to his scholastic friends gathered about him a devoted staff. While we might wish that he had been spared this routine task, we obtain withal the rare picture of a man to whom his work was never onerous, and who did two men's work in one, as scholar and library administrator.

In 1891 Dr. Jastrow was appointed full professor, in the chair of Semitic languages and literatures. He was the first to organize a curriculum of Semitic courses in the university and taught in almost all the branches of that subject, although confining himself in general to Arabic, Hebrew, and Assyriology, to which duties he later added, through his zeal, the teaching of comparative religion. In his professorship Dr. Jastrow remained until the time of his death, which occurred suddenly June 22, 1921.

The city of his adoption became peculiarly his home. He entered into all its activities, social, academic, intellectual, and even political. He was a founder of the Philadelphia Oriental Club, of the Contemporary Club, a member and high officer of the Philosophical Society, and a member of the Franklin Inn Club. He was active as a member and a sought-for lecturer of the Ethical Culture Society, being an intimate and dear friend of Felix Adler. The quieter coteries of friendship which gave the joy to his life must be left to a biographer with more space and knowledge at his command. The writer has often pondered with wonder over Dr. Jastrow's untiring and many-sided energy, with a life so plotted out and so exactly filled with his duties and undertakings that he could be at once the chief of a great library, a teacher of many classes holding practically two chairs, a fruitful scholar, and one who found time for, and delight in, the life of society and the companionship of his many coteries of friends. He found a remarkable helpmeet in his wife, who was Miss Helen Bachman, of Philadelphia, a lady of singular charm and fine mental and literary ability. She was his companion in all his works and problems, and collaborated with him in the publication of selected essays of James Darmesteter.

By his students Dr. Jastrow will always be first remembered as a teacher. His remarkable quickness of mind and wide knowledge expected much of his scholars, and this positive stimulus brought

out the best in them. He could labor patiently in the grind of teaching, and was ready to give his time to anyone who desired it, treating his students with kindliness and helpfulness. He loved teaching as such and was always ready to assume even works of supererogation in instruction. Indeed, he rarely if ever turned down a demand for his teaching, however slight the warrant was in numbers or personnel. He appeared most delightfully in those classes sustained by his superabundant energy in which he gathered about him his advanced students and often his colleagues in various fields and read with them important texts, as for instance one year the texts of the several languages of the *Panchatantra*. In this cooperation he was easily first, but always without arrogance or superciliousness. He was ready to learn from his students, he welcomed their suggestions, helped them forward in their thinking, and encouraged them to stand on their own feet. When he did not know, he sought to learn, and there was not a field in which he did not show a thirst for knowledge. He never seemed bored with things or men. There was a remarkable generousness in his relations with both students and colleagues. He insisted punctiliously in his work on giving recognition to others and took pleasure in accepting the theories and suggestions of others. His object was the truth, and it was of secondary importance to him who discovered it.

Upon the twenty-fifth anniversary of his doctorate two of his former students published his bibliography (1910). This contained over 150 titles, and the number must since have mounted to nearly 200. (It is to be hoped that his full bibliography will be published.) The titles are in Arabica, Assyriaca, Hebraica and Old Testament, Judaica, and history of religions. It was as expounder of the Hebrew Testament, as Assyriologist, and as student of religions that he distinguished himself, and to these capacities he added in his latter years that of publicist.

His early and constant love for Arabic never deserted him, and he was never happier than in his Arabic classes. While the Bible, Assyriology, and comparative religion came to claim his attention more and more, Arabic remained for him a subject of deep philological and literary interest, as well as a well-used instrument in his explorations in Semitic and religious fields. He was expecting to go to

the Orient in the coming winter and spend some months in Cairo to learn the spoken Arabic and to devote himself to Arabic literature in its great center. The same year was to take him to the American School in Jerusalem and possibly to Mesopotamia in order to institute the proposed school at Baghdad. But this crown to his life was denied him.

His earlier contributions to Old Testament science were mostly historical and archaeological, coming to be more and more enriched from his researches in the Babylonian field and in comparative religion. In his later years he set before himself a series of commentaries on the three biblical books which had always fascinated him, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs—the three humanistic books of the Bible. His purpose has been fulfilled. *A Gentle Cynic, Being the Book of Ecclesiastes*, appeared in 1919; *The Book of Job* in 1920; and the last of the trilogy, the Song, he left almost complete and largely in print. In this series, his final work, we may particularly note the character of his genius. He appears in those books as a serious critic with his well-defined notions as to the problems presented and with his carefully thought-out and positive solutions. On this score one might wish he had proceeded farther to give a thoroughgoing commentary in each case. But the immediate value of the thing appeared to him as of equal importance; he wished as a teacher to communicate his knowledge and enthusiasm to the many. Patient and plodding he was, but he was impatient of remaining in the detail; he desired for himself the view of the whole and he possessed the faith in humanity that his readers could be guided by him and follow him with understanding. And the remarkable success of the two commentaries published corroborated his faith.

On the scientific side of his biblical work his interest lay in the critical analysis of the text. In this process he was acute and independent. While accepting the results of the Higher Criticism, he by no means was willing to abide by its conventional results, but pursued the analysis more minutely and from fresh standpoints, coming to the result that the phenomenon was that of constant stratification. One may differ from him in his theory of glosses and additions, but his arguments were always strong and well put. A

capital specimen of his critical power is to be observed in his study of the law of leprosy (*JQR*, N.S., IV, 357 ff.), in which he uncovers the layers of the present code, showing it to be an accumulation of various deposits reaching far back to immemorial ages.

Assyriology does not appear to have claimed Dr. Jastrow's first interest. But with the growth of that science and the rich promise it gave of enriching the knowledge of the history of religion, he turned his attention more and more in that direction, until at last it was in this field that he published his monumental work, one of the monumental productions in Babylonian science, namely, *Die Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens* (1905–12, three volumes and atlas of illustrations), the successor of a less ambitious work of similar title in English. Dr. Jastrow was not a worker on the original tablets. But he read hard and solidly on all the printed texts, keeping up to a marvelous degree with every new text that appeared, and performed the consolidating and interpretative work which many a tablet-reader is not fitted for. His *magnum opus* is in part an encyclopedia of the subject, but as he proceeded with his task he read himself ever more into his subject, so that the chapters of the last two volumes became distinctly original monographs. This is especially true of his epoch-making discoveries in hepatoscopy and kindred forms of divination. His rare ability in the interpretation of difficult texts is to be seen in his study of the Langdon paradise epic ("Sumerian Myths of Beginnings," *AJSL*, XXXIII, 91 ff.), while his prompt and assiduous scholarship appears admirably in his translation of the new Assyrian code (*JAOS*, 1921, 1 ff.). In the still more recent "Old Babylonian Version of the Gilgamesh Epic" (*YOS*, Vol. IV, Part III) he exhibits his critical power in the tracing of the history of the Babylonian hero epic. While his interest was not primarily philological, it is amazing to observe the amount of his word studies as, e.g., in the Index to his *Religion*, and without this foundation he built no superstructure. For his own illumination he explored every field of science which might aid him; whether for medical or legal texts, he obtained the advice of experts and left no stone unturned that might further the interpretation.

His intimate knowledge of the whole scope of Assyriology gained through this work on religion naturally led him on to his *Civilization*

of Babylonia and Assyria (1915). This is a fascinatingly written book in which he presents a comprehensive view of his great subject, stimulating and useful to both scholar and layman. We may only note here his *Aspects of Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria* (1911), being the American Lectures on the History of Religions for 1910, and his *Hebrew and Babylonian Traditions* (1914), the Haskell Lectures at Oberlin College for 1913. These books present his well-digested estimate of the character and worth of the religions he treats.

As has been said, Jastrow's interest came to culminate in the history of religion. It is in that field, in its many phases, that his chief contributions lie, whether in his great work on the Babylonian religion with the attendant volumes and monographs or in his biblical studies. He was one of the leaders in the introduction of the history of religion as an academic *Wissenschaft* in this country. His earliest book contribution to the subject was his *Study of Religion* (1902), designed as an introductory textbook. He was a founder and secretary of the Committee of American Lectures on the History of Religion, which brought the subject to the attention of our colleges and the public by securing the best lecturers in the several fields from at home and abroad. While never formally professor of the subject, he became the leader of the group in religions at his university, and by his solid contributions one of the foremost savants of the subject. He edited a series of textbooks in that field, to which he contributed the first (English) edition of his *Religion of Babylon and Assyria*. His strength lay especially in the field of religious practices and in the criticism of legend, while his wide knowledge enabled him to give a comparative study from most diverse fields.

In his study of religion, while scientific and singularly objective, he was always reverent, by his own nature avoiding the cynicism which disfigures so often the studies in this field. Religious at heart, he was interested in all things human and recognized that the spirit of religion stood for something essential to the nature and spiritual environment of man and hence was worthy of penetrating and sympathetic study.

Dr. Jastrow's wide and constructive intelligence called him to many editorial duties. The series of "Handbooks on Religion" has

been referred to. He edited in collaboration with Professor Gottheil the very useful "Semitic Study Series," consisting of original texts in various Semitic languages. He served as an editor of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* and of the *International Encyclopedia*, and as associate editor of the *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* and of *Art and Archaeology*. He was a contributor of numerous articles to those publications and to Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* and the last edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

His intense interest in all human affairs quickened his deep knowledge of the Orient to the production of several valuable volumes of a publicistic character. They were contributions to the literature of the Great War and after, and include *The War and the Bagdad Railway*, which became a handbook for statesmen, *The Eastern Question and Its Solution*, *The War and the Coming Peace*, and *Zionism and the Future of Palestine*. He well exhibited in those works the contribution which archaeological discipline can make to the most modern and vital of political problems.

Of many, indeed of most scholars, the sum that can be told of their life's labor is that they left so many books of such and such worth. There is the selfish claim upon the scholar's life to do his work while he is in the light of day; he may not easily be blamed for not doing the practical things. Dr. Jastrow's bibliography would suffice as ample memorial of a great scholar. But an amazing feature of his life, yet not a feature, but the very characteristic of the man, was the tremendous energy he gave to furthering every practical step for the advancement of science and whatever ends he believed in. All of us who knew him at all, whether in some club, or the councils of the university, or in the various societies to which he belonged, scientific or more broadly humanistic, will recall his enormous activity in making things go and succeed. There is hardly a forward movement in any of the associations he was connected with in which he did not take a leading part. The last sight the writer had of his friend was in New York at the first meeting of the trustees of the newly incorporated American School of Oriental Research (June 17), in the counsels of which he had taken a laboring oar. I realize sadly now that that visit to New York was an effort of his heroic sense of duty. The last communication I had with

him was concerning the plans for a progressive movement in the American Oriental Society. These last engagements of his are typical of the man's whole life. He was constantly sought to serve on committees or as an officer. Was some enterprise to be undertaken for the consolidation or broadening of science, he was naturally suggested as a man who could do things. And he never took his positions of trust and honor nominally. His wise and generous advice could always be had, and it was advice which he thought out and followed up. If help were needed in men or money, he knew where to turn. His ambition was for co-operation and amity as the prerequisite for efficiency, and he gave himself whole-heartedly. Dr. Jastrow was indeed highly honored by all the societies and groups of which he was a member, but it must be equally said that the high honors he gained he paid for in the currency of hard work and painstaking, unselfish devotion. Apart from the personal loss which will be felt by many a scholar and many a friend, there will go up the disconsolate query, Who can do for us in his place, in counsel and effectiveness?

In analyzing Dr. Jastrow's personality we may naturally point to certain inheritances. He drew from his race their remarkable physical stamina, which rather comes from spiritual grit than from mere physique. He never seemed to weary physically. He kept mentally fresh by going from task to task, from one social appointment to another; he was never mentally or corporeally lazy. His eager and critical mind was also part of the same heritage. On that inheritance was grafted by his own selection the best of modern education and scientific training. An Oriental by race, he wished to make the wide world his home, that cosmopolitan trait of Judaism which so remarkably runs alongside of its seeming provincialism. His humaneness, too often ignorantly denied to the race, was of the same origin. He found his recreation in human society, he was a rare friend and companion. In the course of his life he became engaged in several polemic issues, but while the world loves a fracas, he abhorred quarreling. He was a man of peace, would go a long way to avoid a break, and more than most men I have known pursued the not always popular art of peacemaking; he genuinely desired peace for himself and his fellow-men, and if he fought, it was for the truth as he saw it.

To this background of inheritance and environment he gave the contribution of a persistent and determined will. This aimed in his science at the pursuit of the truth, in his life at the attainment of the best. That indomitable will of his gave the impulse to his remarkable mind that made it so productive and creative. For him there was no pleasant thought of the scholar's ease, or the sloth which satisfies itself negatively with the adage that life is short and art is long. Life was, alas, too short in his case, but his determination filled it with extraordinary activities of remarkable value. Withal, it was not a puritanical or merely stoic will; his biographer can write it down that he enjoyed his life.

With his stout will went a certain fine confidence—he was not timorous in expressing himself orally or by the pen. But this confidence was no conceit. He could learn from others, he was always a growing man. When he spoke or wrote, he had something to say, and he gave utterance out of his own enthusiasm for knowledge with the simple, unaffected desire to communicate his knowledge to others as a teacher, or when among his peers to effect the exchange of ideas for the mutual enrichment of all. To a unique degree Dr. Jastrow was at once scholar and teacher and learner, attaining his honors in the former capacities because he was always humble in learning.

It is a man's personality that his friends feel and remember. When he is gone, his work is done, to be appraised by the world's cold thumb. But there remains in memory the indefinable person, that intimation of immortality, the vital unit, incomprehensible and yet most real of all, which is the man, while the work is but the function. Dr. Jastrow's work is over. *Si quaeris, circumspice monumenta.* But his friends, those friends of many groups of which he was a choice member, are not thinking of him only as a man of science, with all the scientific debt they owe him. They think of that personality which may have affected others in various ways, but which to them has been a source of delight and vital impulse. In his simple humanity he made them love him, and a force and a light have gone out of our lives.