

THE LEGENDS OF GENESIS.

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[CONTINUED.]

HISTORY OF THE TRANSMISSION OF THE LEGENDS IN ORAL TRADITION.

THE most important element in the history of the legends is probably this: in older times as the outward circumstances in which they arose were shifted, the legends also incurred certain alterations. Thus they forgot who the king of Gerar really was (xx. 26), and put in the king of Egypt instead (xii. 10 ff.). Incidentally it seems, according to Winckler, that a confusion arose between Mizraim (Egypt) and the North Arabian tribe of the Muzrim, to whom Gerar belonged; and Hagar also has been changed from a Muzritish Arabian woman to a woman of Mizraim, that is, an Egyptian. Or at a time when the Philistines had possession of Gerar this people also was brought into the legend of Gerar, whereas the oldest version of the story (xxi. 22 ff., 26) knows as yet nothing of this fact. The figure of Hagar, once the type of a tempestuous Bedouin woman (xvi.) has lost this characteristic color in the later tradition which was not familiar with the desert. The stories of Jacob's breeding devices while in Laban's employ, once the delight of the professional hearers and therefore quite detailed, were later much abbreviated for hearers or readers who had no interest in the subject. (See *Commentary*, p. 307.) Of the theories regarding the gradual origin of human arts and trades (iv. 17 ff.) only fragments have been preserved. Very often the characteristic elements of the legend, when far from the places where they were understood, grew colorless or were replaced by others. This is particularly clear in the legends of sanctuaries, of which we shall speak later. Still other legends were probably entirely for-

gotten because the interest in them had died out. And in addition to this the imagination, which is mightily stirred by such narratives, develops them almost involuntarily. We can here and there recognise such continuations and developments due to the free play of the imagination.

LIGHT ON THE HISTORY OF RELIGION.

The most important feature of this study is the history of religion. In very many legends of Genesis a monotheistic tendency is to be observed, an avoidance of mythology to which we have referred (*The Open Court*, pp. 270 and 535). This feeling continued to grow in Israel and was the cause for the fading out of a number of legends. In the case of the myth of creation, of which we have older variants of a different attitude, the history of this elimination of the mythological elements is still to be observed. The narrative of the Deluge too has lost much of its color in the oldest Hebrew account (that of J), and doubtless from this very reason. Others, like the legend of the marriage with angels (vi. 1-4) and of Mahanaim (xxxv. 21-22a), which were once in existence in older Israelitish tradition, are in their present form entirely mutilated. Of the Nephilim, the Hebrew "Titans," which are said to have been very famous once (vi. 4), we have nothing but the name.

MODIFICATION OF THE THEOPHANY.

Furthermore, we may observe how naïvely the older legends speak of Jahveh's appearance on earth, but how the later time objected to this and made the revelation of the divinity ever more intangible. While according to the oldest belief the divinity himself walked without reserve among men—as in the present form of the legends of Paradise and of the Deluge—the later time decked the theophany in the veil of mystery: God appeared only in the darkness of night and vanished with the rising of the sun (xix.); or he appeared to men without their recognising him (xviii), and in this way the divinity, though revealing himself, nevertheless did not wholly unveil his nature. Still later versions put some subordinate divine being in place of the divinity himself, J calling it "the angel of Jahveh," and E "the angel of God"; though this device was not observed consistently; passages enough have been left which presuppose the appearance of Jahveh himself, the older version peeping forth from behind the newer one.

This same point of view has led to the change of God's appear-

ance on earth to the apparition in a dream, or to the declaration that the angel remained in heaven and spoke to the patriarch from there: the mystery of the dream-life left a veil for the divinity who revealed himself, or in the other case he was not seen at all, but only heard. The last stage in this development is represented by those legends in which the divinity no longer appears at a definite point in the story, but dominates the whole from the ultimate hidden background, as in the stories of Rebecca and of Joseph.

Thus we progress in Genesis by many stages from crass mythology to a belief in providence which seems to us altogether modern. It is a marvel indeed that the legend of Penuel (xxxii. 25 ff.) is transmitted to us in such primitive form; in this the device has been to leave it undefined who the God really was that attacked Jacob.

THE DIVINITY AND THE SANCTUARY.

We recognise in this process of refining the nature of the theophany at the same time the dissociation of the divinity with the sanctuaries: the oldest belief that the God belonged to this particular place and could operate nowhere else, is not clearly found in a single legend of Genesis. On the contrary, the opinion of the legend is that the places are sacred to the divinity because he had once in primitive time appeared here to some ancestor. Even the very old legend of Hebron, which actually has God appear and eat, does not allege that the divinity came forth out of the tree. In the story of Hagar's flight, the mother of Ishmael meets the divinity at the well, but no explanation is given as to what connexion he had with the well. The great age of this whole point of view is to be gathered from the story of Bethel: the oldest religion had thought to find the God of the place in the stone itself, as the name of the sacred stone, *beth-el*, or "house of God," shows; but those of the later age believed that God dwelt high above Bethel, in heaven, and only a ladder preserved the connexion between the real dwelling of God and its symbol. This belief in the heavenly dwelling of the divinity rested, as the legend shows, upon a polytheistic basis: Jacob sees many divine beings going up and down the ladder.

Many legends of sanctuaries are transmitted to us in very faded form: from the story of Ishmael (in both versions) and likewise from the legends of Hebron (xviii.), Mahanaim (xxxii. 2 f.), Penuel (xxxii. 25 ff.) and others, we no longer gather that the scenes of the stories are places of worship. The legend of the

sacrifice of Isaac, originally a legend of worship, has lost all its aetiological purpose in the version transmitted to us and remains nothing but a character sketch. In the legend of Penuel too the aetiological element is now forgotten. The anointing of the stone at Bethel, once a sacrificial ceremony, seems in its transmitted form to be no more than a sort of rite of consecration. The Mas-sheba, once sacred stones, symbols of the divinity, are finally mere memorial or tomb stones. The cave of Machpelah, once a place of worship, is nothing but the burial-place of the patriarchs in our form of the narrative. And so on.

The fading out of these legends of worship shows plainly that these stories are not preserved for us in the form in which they were probably told originally on the spot for the purpose of establishing its sanctity, but as they circulated among the people in later times and far from the places concerned. At the same time we see from this colorless character of the legends concerning the popular sanctuaries that the latter had ceased to occupy the foreground of religious interest with the people, or at least with certain groups of the people. The bond between religion and the sanctuaries was already loosened when the passionate polemic of the prophets severed it. How else could the people of Judah have accepted the "Deuteronomian Reformation," which destroyed these places with the exception of the royal temple at Jerusalem! (2 Kings xxiii.).

GOD'S RELATION TO MAN.

Genesis furnishes the most varied utterances concerning the relation of the divinity to mankind. In the oldest legends we hear how God holds men in check, how he guards and favors certain individuals in accordance with his sovereign pleasure, and how he glorifies and aggrandises his people above all others. In certain of the oldest legends God's action in such cases seems not to involve at all any thought of the moral or religious attitude of men: God reveals himself to Jacob at Bethel simply because Jacob happens to come to Bethel; similarly at Penuel the divinity assails Jacob without any evident reason; God is pleased with Abel's offering simply because he loves Abel the shepherd; he protects Abraham in Egypt and gives a fortunate outcome to the patriarch's deception; in any conflict of the patriarch with third parties God takes the part of his favorite even when the latter is plainly in the wrong as in the case of Abraham in dealing with Abimelech (xx.

7), or when he has indulged in very questionable practices, as in the case of Jacob with Laban, and so on.

But alongside these there are other legends upon a higher plane, according to which God makes his favor to depend upon the righteousness of men: he destroys sinful Sodom, but saves Lot because of his hospitableness; he destroys the disobliging Onan, and exiles Cain because of his fratricide; Joseph is helped by him because he has deserved assistance by his chastity and his magnanimity; to Abraham he gives a son because of his kindness to strangers. These legends all belong, taken absolutely, to a later time which has a finer ethical sense, yet they are all primitive in Israel. The belief that God looks with approval upon the just and rewards the wicked according to his sin is certainly familiar to the religion of Israel from the beginning (cp. 1 Sam. xxiv. 20; 2 Sam. iii. 39). From a broader point of view we may include here another group of legends which tell how God has compassion on the outcast and despairing; a particularly affecting instance of this is the legend of the exile of Hagar (xxi. 8 ff.).

A third variety of legend emphasises strongly what it is that wins God's approval, to wit, faith, obedience, invincible trust,—these God imputes as righteousness. At God's command Noah built a ship upon dry land; following God's word Abraham left his secure home and migrated to alien lands, trusting in God's promise that he should become a nation despite the fact that he had not even a son as yet. Thus they won the favor of God. The legend of the suit for the hand of Rebecca also shows how such steadfast trust in God is rewarded. In the legend of the sacrifice of Isaac we have a wonderful character sketch showing how the man of true piety submits to even the hardest and most terrible trials if God so commands. The famous prayer of Jacob, xxxii. 10–13, portrays the humble gratitude of the pious man who confesses himself to be unworthy of the divine favor. The narratives and pieces which speak thus of favor mark the climax of high religious feeling in Genesis; it is these especially which give value to Genesis even to the piety of the present day. We see in them a comparatively late development. This conclusion is supported by other reasons in the case of most of them: the Babylonian legend of the Deluge, for instance, knows nothing of the trial of the hero's faith; Jacob's prayer is quite secondary in its connexion, and what a contrast this prayer with its deep feeling makes with the remaining conduct of the eel-like Jacob! What a difference between it and the legend which stands beside it, Jacob's wrestling with the di-

vinity! It is to be noted also how peculiarly inconcrete the story of Abraham's exodus is; while the narrative of the covenant, chapter xv, is perhaps a later composition without any basis of tradition!

NOT MERELY A TRIBAL GOD.

Thus we can discern here a series of thoughts about God leading from the crudest up to the highest. But in any case these legends teach that it is an error to think that ancient Israel conceived only of a relation between God and Israel; on the contrary it is everywhere a matter of the relation of God to individual men. It is true that these persons are in part race types, but the legend looks upon them as persons and depicts God's relation to them in large measure just in the way in which the people of that time believed that God dealt with individuals. We should deprive many of these narratives of their whole charm if we failed to recognise this fact: the reason the legend of Hebron was heard so gladly by ancient listeners is that it tells how God rewards hospitality (thine and mine also!); and the story of how God hears the voice of the weeping boy Ishmael in the wilderness is touching because it shows God having compassion on a child: this God will also hear the cry of our children!

RELIGIOUS AND PROFANE MOTIVES MINGLED.

Another line of development is seen in the fact that the elder stories have a naïve way of mingling profane and religious motives, and clearly without taking any offence at it: thus the legend of Abraham in Egypt celebrates the shrewdness of the patriarch, the beauty of his wife and the steadfastness of God. The legend of the Deluge praises not only the piety, but also the shrewdness, of Noah (in the story of his sending out the birds); the legend of the flight of Hagar (xvi.) gives quite a realistic picture of the condition of affairs in Abraham's household and then tells of God's assistance. These legends come, therefore, from a time when profane and sacred matters were still frankly united, when the men of Israel fought at the same time for God and the popular hero ("a sword for Jahveh and Gideon!" Judges vii. 20), when lively humor was not inconsistent with piety, as for instance the merry butcher Samson who is at the same time God's nazir (devotee), or the humor of the legend of Abraham in Egypt. Now we see by the variants especially of this last legend that later times no longer tole-

rated this mingling of profane and sacred motives, or at least that it offended by the attempt to glorify God and profane qualities of men at the same time. Accordingly this later time constructed stories which are specifically "sacred," that is, which deal only with God and piety, and in which profane interests are relegated to the background. Such legends are those of Abraham's exodus, of the covenant, of the sacrifice of Isaac, and so on. Here the formerly popular saga is on the point of becoming "legend," that is, a characteristically "sacred" or "priestly" narrative. Whether this phenomenon was connected with the fact that the legends were at that time making their way into certain definite "sacred" or "priestly" circles, we are unable to say.

The earlier times knew also legends of the patriarchs which were altogether of profane character, such as the legend of the separation of Abraham and Lot, or that of Jacob and Laban. In later tradition religious elements made their way into even these legends and gave them a religious coloring. For instance, objection was taken to the notion that Canaan belonged to Abraham simply because Lot did not choose it, and an addition supplied to the effect that God himself after Lot's withdrawal personally promised the land to Abraham (xiii. 14-17). Similarly, later narrators hesitated to say that Jacob had run away from Laban and accordingly interpolated the explanation that God had revealed the plan to him (xxx. 3).

ETHICAL NOTIONS.

Furthermore, a whole history of ethics can be constructed from these legends. Many of the legends of the patriarchs are filled with the pure enjoyment of the characters of the patriarchs. Consequently many things in these characters which are to us offensive caused no hesitation in the time which first told the stories, but were on the contrary a source of pleasure or of inspiration. The people of old took pleasure in Benjamin's career of plunder (xlix. 29), in Hagar's defiant spirit (xvi.) and in the courage of Thamar and the daughters of Lot, who took seed of a man where they could find it, and further in the shrewd deceit of Abraham in Egypt, in Joseph's cunning when he introduced his brothers to his prince as shepherds (xlvii. 1 f.), in Rachel's trick by which she deceived her father so perfectly (xxx. 34), and especially in the wiles and schemes of the arch-roguer Jacob. It is impossible to ignore the great rôle played by deceit and cunning in these legends of the patriarchs, and the amusement the people of old got out of it, and

the character which they thus reveal to us. Then we see from many examples how the later tradition took offence at these stories, re-interpreted them or remodeled them and tried to eliminate the questionable features as far as this was possible. This is most evident in the variants of the legend of the danger of Sarah: here the later narrators have remodeled the whole story, which plainly appeared highly questionable to them, changing, for instance, Abraham's lie into a mental reservation (xx. 12), the disgraceful presents which the patriarch receives for his wife into a testimonial of good repute (xx. 16), and even finally deriving Abraham's wealth from the blessing of God (xxvi. 12); similarly, the deportation of Abraham (xii. 20) has been changed into its opposite, (xx. 15), and so on.

The defiant Hagar of chapter xvi. has been changed into a patient and unfortunate woman, in order that no offence might be taken with God's compassion upon her (xxi. 8 ff); the attempt has been made to explain Abraham's treatment of Hagar by adding that God had commanded him to put her away (xxi. 11). Especial pains has been taken to clear Jacob of the charge of dishonesty in his relations with Laban: in several long speeches the narrator undertakes the demonstration that there is no shadow upon Jacob; Jacob's wives and finally Laban himself are obliged to recognise his uprightness (xxx. 4 ff.; 36 ff.). Here too the resort is, to ascribe to the authority of God that which seems questionable to men: God always caused the herds to bring forth in Jacob's interest (xxx. 7), and God himself revealed to Jacob the color of the newborn for the coming year (xxx. 10 ff.). With somewhat less energy the narrators have taken hold of the story of Tamar; yet here too they have done their best to wash Judah white: Judah, they urge, did not go to Timnath until his wife was dead. And a similar endeavor has been made to give at least for Lot himself a somewhat more decent shape to the story of Lot's daughters, which was very offensive to those of the later age: they say that Lot was deceived by his daughters.

THE PATRIARCHS NOT SAINTS.

The olden time undoubtedly took delight in the patriarchs, but it did not consider them saints, but told of them quite frankly all sorts of things that were far from ideal. Some of the old stories are in this respect exceedingly true to nature: they portray the fathers as types of the Israelitish nationality, just such as individ-

ual men in Israel are. Thus the story of the flight of Hagar (xvi.) sketches the people in Abraham's household: Sarah as the jealous wife, Hagar as the defiant slave, and Abraham as the peace-loving husband. The later time with its "sacred" or "priestly" feeling could not tolerate such things. On the contrary, this age saw in the patriarchs always models of piety, and of that intense and tender piety which belonged to this later age. Thus there has entered into the portraits of the patriarchs a peculiar dissonance: the very Abraham who thrust his son Ishmael into the wilderness (xxi. 14), who does not hesitate to turn Sarah over to the foreign king and even to accept presents for her (xii. 16), we are asked to regard as the same who is the lofty model of faith for all ages! And the cunning Jacob is the same who speaks the wonderful prayer of gratitude! We resolve this dissonance and free these legends from the unpleasant suspicion of untruthfulness by recognising that the different tones are the product of different periods.

The earlier time did not hesitate to recognise here and there the rights of aliens when brought into conflict with the patriarchs: for instance, Pharaoh's right as opposed to Abraham's (xii. 18 f.), and Esau's as opposed to Jacob's (xxvii. 36); indeed some of the patriarchs have been simply abandoned: Simeon, Levi and Reuben were cursed by their great-grandfather (xlix. 3-7)! Israelitish patriotism was at that time so sound that it tolerated such views. But the later times, with their onesided, excessive reverence for "the people of God," could not endure the thought that the patriarchs had ever been wrong or done wrong. Thus we see how one of the narrators takes pains to show that Abraham was not altogether in the wrong in his relations with Abimelech (in the speech, xxi. 11-13). From the same motive, in order to avoid saying anything bad about the patriarchs, only a fragment of the story of the curse of Reuben has been transmitted (xxxv. 21-22*a*), and the story of Simeon and Levi has been cast into several forms (xxxiv.): first excuses for the brothers were sought—they were defending the honor of their sister (J)—and finally they were even justified and their betrayal of Shechem represented as quite the natural thing. Here, too, God is finally made to take their side (E, cp. xxxv. 5). We do not always relish such modifications, and sometimes it seems to us as if they made the matter worse, rather than better. Thus, the lie of Abraham in introducing his wife as his sister (xii. 13), in which the earlier narrators take evident pleasure, is after all more tolerable than the mental reservation which is put in its place, which seems to us Jesuitical (xx. 12). But despite

these instances we must not surrender our gratification at this gradual improvement in ethical judgment which we can see in Genesis.

On the history of ethical taste which is to be found in these legends we have already treated in the preceding pages (§ 3), and have but a few points to add here. We gain a deep insight into the heart of the primitive people when we collect the chief motives in which the eye of the legends takes pleasure. This is not the place for such a summary; attention may, however, be called to the fact of how little is said of murder and assassination, and on the contrary, how much is said of peaceful occupations and household affairs, especially of the begetting of children; eating and drinking, too, play quite a rôle. These narrators are thoroughly posted in the life of peasants and shepherds and are therefore a prime source for our "archæology"; but they are not at home in political affairs: in this they are simple and natural.

The older legends are often quite coarse: for instance, the legend of the defiant Hagar (xvi.), or Jacob's deception of his blind father and the delight of the listeners (xxvii.), or the exceedingly coarse way in which Laban's quick-witted daughter deceives her father (xxxi. 34 f.): it must have been a stocky race that took pleasure in such stories. How very different are the later stories which overflow with tears, such as the legend of the exile of Hagar (xxi.), of the sacrifice of Isaac, and especially the legends of Joseph! Here a different generation is expressing itself, one that loves emotion and tears.

Still another distinction between the older and the later time is that the former was interested in the familiar things of its nearest surroundings, while the latter tries to give a piquant charm to its stories by locating the legend far away and introducing the description of foreign customs, as in the story of Joseph.

CRITERIA OF THE AGE OF THE LEGENDS.

Accordingly we have an abundance of grounds on which we can establish the age or the youth of the narratives. Sometimes we are enabled to outline a very brief preliminary or pre-natal history of the legend in question, as for instance in the case of the legend of Hagar (xvi.), in which first an "El," then Jahveh himself, and then his messenger, was the divinity that appeared. Often a series of various arguments lead to a given conclusion, that a legend is late or early; thus the legend of Abraham in Egypt is to

be regarded for many reasons as very old; it is very brief, has a primitive local coloring, and does not idealise its personages, and so on. On the other hand many arguments lead to the conclusion that the legend of Joseph is very late: it has the latest, spun-out style, few ætiological elements, contains the belief in Providence, and so on. But very often the various considerations cross one another: in that case it is evident that the legend contains a confused mixture of early and late elements: thus the narrative in chapter xv., containing no complications, seems to be relatively late, but the theophany in fire and smoke is surely a very primitive conception. The different phases of development have not been distinct and clear cut: early features often continued to hold their own for a long time; hence it will be necessary to conceive of this outline of the history of the legends not as simple and straightforward, but as very confused and full of vicissitudes.

TRIBAL LEGENDS.

If we take one more survey of the history of these transformations, we shall surely have to admit that we can get sight of only a small part of the entire process. These transmutations must have begun at a very early period, a period so early that our sources give us no insight into it. This should warn us against supposing that we are able to arrive always at the very primitive significance of the stories from the historical and ætiological allusions which we find in the narratives. In this connexion we may refer to the legends in which there have been no such allusions from the beginning, especially the legend of Jacob and Laban. And a special warning is needed against rashly interpreting as tribal legends those legends whose heroes are plainly ancestors of tribes, for it may be, as has been shown above, that the story was applied to the tribal hero long after its origin.

And if it is scarcely possible for us to declare the original significance of the legends from the sources handed down to us, neither may we claim to know in every case who the originals were of the figures in the legends of the patriarchs. Some of them are really names of countries, or races, and of tribes, as for instance, Israel, Ishmael, Ammon, Moab, Rachel, Leah, Hagar, Keturah, and the tribes of Israel. In an inscription of Thotmosis III (ca. 1500 B.C.) mention is made of a Canaanitish tribe or district J'qb'ar, which would correspond to a Hebrew Ja^{ca}qob'el, (Hebrew l=Egyptian r); and the name Jacob-el would be related to Jacob as Jephthahel

and Jabn^eel are related to Jephthah and Jabne: they are all names of tribes or of places, like Israel, Ishmael, and J^erahm^eel. Even on this evidence we should conclude that Jacob was originally the name of a Canaanitish district, which existed in Canaan before the Israelitish immigration.¹

PATRIARCHS DISGUISED DIVINITIES.

Still another question is, whether these tribal names were not also originally names of divinities, as for instance Assur is at the same time the name of the God of Assur (Assyria). This is to be assumed for Gad, which is at the same time the name of the god of fortune, and also for Edom—cp. the name Obed-edom, “servant of Edom,” Wellhausen Composition², p. 47, 2. ed. Names of divinities have been suspected further in Selah (cp. the name Methuselah=man of Selah), R^eu (cp. the name R^eu-el), Nahor (cp. the name 'Ebednahor=servant of Nahor), Terah (perhaps the same as the North-Syrian god Tarhu), Haran (cp. the name Beth-haran=temple of Haran). Sarah and Milkah are, as we know, names of the goddesses of Haran, with which the Biblical figures of Sarah and Milkah have perhaps some connexion. This suggests very easily the thought that Abraham, the husband of Sarah, has been substituted for the (moon-) god of Haran. The name Laban too suggests a god; L^ebana means moon; the fact that Laban is represented as being a shepherd would correspond to his character as a moon-god: for the moon-god may be represented as the shepherd of the clouds. In ancient as well as in modern times the attempt has been repeatedly made to explain the figures of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also as originally gods. There is no denying that this conjecture is very plausible. The whole species of the legend—though not indeed every individual legend—originated in the myth; at least many legends are derived from myths. And such an interpretation is very natural for the stories of Jonah in the whale's belly, of Esther (Istar), of Samson (Semes's sun) and others. What is more natural than to attempt this interpretation with the legends of Genesis whose origin goes back in part to prehistoric times when myths were the order of nature? But—as we look at it—the attempts in this line hitherto made have not been exactly fortunate and have sometimes failed to demonstrate their theses. Of such pieces as can be interpreted with reasonable certainty as remnants of mythical narratives there are not many among

¹Cp. Ed. Meyer ZAW 1886, p. 1 ff.

the tales of the patriarchs (we are not now speaking of the legends of the beginnings): the note that Abraham with 318 servants slew his enemies (xiv. 14) may in Winckler's opinion go back to a moon-myth, the moon being visible 318 days in the year; Jacob's wrestling with God suggests that this Jacob was really a Titan, and consequently we can scarcely avoid seeing here a faded out myth; Joseph's dream that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were compelled to bow down before him must have been originally an oracle referring to the Lord of Heaven before whom the highest powers of heaven bow, although it seems that this dream was introduced very late into the story of Joseph.

CAUTION NEEDED IN INTERPRETATION.

But before we are warranted in declaring with regard to a figure in Genesis that it bears the impress of an earlier god, we must demand that not merely certain elements of a story permit a mythical interpretation, but that whole legends have striking resemblances to known myths, or that they can be interpreted as myths in perfectly clear and unquestioned fashion. Such a demonstration as this has not been given by investigators hitherto.¹ Let us hope that those who attempt it in the future may be more successful! But let us by no means fail to recognise the fact that Israel in historical times, when these legends were told, saw in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not gods but men, its ancestors. And we must further demand that those investigators who propose to find mythological foundations to our legends must first of all investigate most carefully the history of the legends which lies before us so clearly in the sources. Only for the oldest elements of the legends

¹ The older theory of Goldziher (*Der Mythos bei den Hebräern*, 1876), which depended chiefly on the etymologies of names, is long since discredited. Stucken (*Astralmythen*, I. Abraham, 1896, II. Lot, 1897) bases his assertions upon individual elements of the legends, for which he hunts together an amazing abundance of parallels from all over the world; but these parallels are often only very incidental. As Etana, carried up to heaven by an eagle, according to the Babylonian myth, looks down upon the earth, so Abraham and Lot, according to Stucken, look upon the land from Bethel, and so Abraham looks up to heaven and upon Sodom. But such analogies will not stand attack. Winckler, *Geschichte Israels*, II., 1900, who continues to build upon this uncertain foundation, depends especially upon the characteristic numbers: the four wives of Jacob are the four phases of the moon, his twelve sons the months; the seven children of Leah are the gods of the days of the week, the 300 pieces of silver which Benjamin the youngest receives are the 30 days of the last month, the 5 state dresses are the 5 intercalary days; Joseph's coat suggests the garments of Tamar and Istar (and every other garment!); his being thrown into the cistern denotes the descent of Tammuz into the under world; the dipping of his coat in blood and his father's belief that he had been eaten by a wild beast suggest the slaying of Adonis by the boar, and so on. After such a review we cannot yet see satisfactory solutions of the problem in either of these works, although we gladly recognise the extensive learning and the keenness of them both. And yet we would emphasise the point, that there is no reason on principle against a mythical interpretation of the legends of the patriarchs.

may a mythical origin be ultimately expected. Accordingly we are unable to say what the figures of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which chiefly interest us, may have signified originally. But this is by no means strange. These matters are simply too primitive for us.

Apologetic meditation is wont to lay great importance upon the historical verity of Abraham; in our opinion there is no longer any room for this assumption, and moreover it is hard to see what significance this position can have for religion and the history of religion. For even if there had once been a leader by the name of Abraham, as is generally believed, and who conducted the migration from Haran to Canaan, this much is beyond question with every one who knows anything of the history of legends, that a legend cannot be expected to preserve throughout so many centuries a picture of the personal piety of Abraham. The religion of Abraham is in reality the religion of the narrators of the legends, ascribed by them to Abraham.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]