

THE LEGENDS OF GENESIS

BY H. GUNKEL.

[CONTINUED.]

METHODS OF THE NARRATOR.

WHAT means do the narrators use for the representation of the character of their heroes? The modern artist is very apt to explain in extended descriptions the thoughts and feelings of his personages. When one turns from such a modern story-teller to the study of Genesis, one is astonished to find in it so few utterances regarding the inner life of the heroes. Only rarely are the thoughts of even a leading personage expressly told, as in the case of the woman when she was looking desirously at the tree of knowledge, or of Noah, when he sent forth the birds "to see whether the waters were dried up off the earth," or the thoughts of Lot's son-in-law, who judged that their father-in-law was jesting; the thoughts of Isaac, who feared at Gerar that he might be robbed of his wife (xxvi. 7); or the cunning thoughts with which Jacob proposed to evade the revenge of his brother Esau (xxxii. 9), and so on. But how brief and unsatisfactory even this appears compared with the psychological descriptions of modern writers!

And even such examples as these are not the rule in the legends of Genesis. On the contrary, the narrator is usually content with a very brief hint, such as, "He grew wroth" (iv. 5; xxx. 2; xxxi. 36; xxxiv. 7; xxxix. 19; xl. 2), or, "He was afraid" (xxvi. 7; xxviii. 17; xxxii. 8), "He was comforted" (xxiv. 16), "He loved her" (xxiv. 67; xxix. 18; xxx. 3; xxxvii. 3), "She became jealous" (xxx. 1), "He was filled with fear" (xxvii. 33), "He eyed him with hatred" (xxvii. 41; xxxvii. 4), and elsewhere. But even these brief hints are far from frequent; on the contrary, we find very often not the slightest expression regarding the thoughts and feelings of the person concerned, and this in situations where we

cannot avoid a certain surprise at the absence of such expressions. The narrator tells us nothing of the reasons why God forbade man to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, nor of the reasons of the serpent for wishing to seduce mankind. He says nothing of the feelings with which Abraham left his home, or Noah entered the ark. We do not learn that Noah was angry at Canaan's shamelessness, that Jacob was disappointed when Laban cheated him with Leah, that Hagar was glad when she received the promise that Ishmael should become a great nation; we are not even told that mothers rejoice when they hold their firstborn son in their arms. Particularly striking is the case of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac: what modern writer would fail under such circumstances to portray the spiritual state of Abraham when his religious devotion wins the hard victory over his parental love, and when his sadness is finally turned into rejoicing!

THOUGHT EXPRESSED BY ACTIONS.

Now what is the reason for this strange proceeding? We can find it in an instance like that of xix. 27 ff. In sight of the city of Sodom Abraham had heard certain remarkable utterances from the three men; they had said that they were going down to Sodom to examine into the guilt of the city. This strange remark he let run in his head; in the morning of the following day he arose and went to the same place to see whether anything had happened in Sodom during the night. And in fact, he sees in the valley below a smoke, whence he must infer that something has taken place; but this smoke hides the region, and he cannot make out what has happened. For the story-teller this little scene is plainly not of interest because of the thing that happens, but because of the thoughts which Abraham must have thought, and yet he does not tell us what these thoughts were. He merely reports to us the outward incidents, and we are obliged to supply the really important point ourselves. This story-teller, then, has an eye for the soul-life of his hero, but he cannot conceive these inward processes with sufficient clearness to express them in definite words.

This is a typical instance for Genesis. In very many situations where the modern writer would expect a psychological analysis, the primitive story-teller simply presents an action. The spiritual state of the man and woman in Paradise and after the Fall is not analysed, but a single objective touch is given by which we may recognise it. The narrator says nothing of the thoughts of Adam when the woman handed him the forbidden fruit, but merely, that

he ate it; he does not discourse to us on Abraham's hospitable disposition, but he tells us how he entertained the three men. He does not say that Shem and Japhet felt chastely and respectfully, but he has them act chastely and respectfully; not that Joseph had compassion upon his brethren, but that he turned away and wept (xlii. 24; xliii. 30); not that Hagar, when mistreated by Sarah, felt offended in the depths of her maternal pride, but that she ran away from her mistress (xvi. 6); not that Laban was dazzled by the gold of the stranger, but that he made haste to invite him (xxiv. 30); not that obedience to God triumphed in Abraham over parental love, but that he arose straightway (xxii. 3); not that Tamar remained faithful to her husband even beyond the grave, but that she took measures to rear up children from his seed (xxxviii).

From all this we see on what the story-teller laid the chief emphasis. He does not share the modern point of view that the most interesting and worthy theme for art is the soul-life of man; his childlike taste is fondest of the outward, objective facts. And in this line his achievements are excellent. He has an extraordinary faculty for selecting just the action which is most characteristic for the state of feeling of his hero. How could filial piety be better represented than in the story of Shem and Japhet? Or mother-love better than by the behavior of Hagar? She gave her son to drink—we are not told that she herself drank! How could hospitality be better depicted than in the actions of Abraham at Hebron? And there is nothing less than genius in the simple manner in which the innocence and the consciousness of the first men is illustrated by their nakedness and their clothing. These simple artists had not learned how to reflect; but they were masters of observation. It is chiefly this admirable art of indirectly depicting men through their actions which makes the legends so vivid. Little as these primitive men could talk about their soul-life, we gain the impression that they are letting us look into the very hearts of their heroes. These figures live before our eyes, and hence the modern reader, charmed by the luminous clearness of these old legends, is quite willing to forget their defects.

SOUL-LIFE NOT IGNORED.

But even when the story-teller said nothing of the soul-life of his heroes, his hearer did not entirely fail to catch an impression of it. We must recall at this point that we are dealing with orally

recited stories. Between narrator and hearer there is another link than that of words; the tone of the voice talks, the expression of the face or the gestures of the narrator. Joy and grief, love, anger, jealousy, hatred, emotion, and all the other moods of his heroes, shared by the narrator, were thus imparted to his hearers without the utterance of a word.

Modern exegesis is called to the task of reading between the lines the spiritual life which the narrator did not expressly utter. This is not always such a simple matter. We have in some cases gotten out of touch with the emotions of older times and the expressions for them. Why, for instance, did Rebecca veil herself when she caught sight of Isaac? (xxiv. 25). Why did the daughters of Lot go in unto him? Why did Tamar desire offspring of Judah? (xxxvii.) What is the connexion of the awakening modesty of the first men and their sin? In such cases exegesis has often gone far astray by taking modern motives and points of view for granted.

A further medium of expression for the spiritual life of the personages is articulate speech. Words are not, it is true, so vivid as actions, but to make up for this they can the better reveal the inner life of the personages. The early story-tellers were masters in the art of finding words that suit the mood of the speakers: thus the malice of the cunning serpent is expressed in words, as well as the guilelessness of the childlike woman, Sarah's jealousy of her slave as well as the conciliatoriness of Abraham (xvi. 6), the righteous wrath of Abimelech (xx. 9), the caution of the shrewd Jacob (xxxii. 9), and the bitter lament of Esau (xxvii. 36) and of Laban (xxx. 43) when deceived by Jacob. Notable masterpieces of the portrayal of character in words are the temptation of the first couple and the conversation between Abraham and Isaac on the way to the mount of sacrifice.

LACONISM OF THE LEGEND WRITERS.

But even in this connexion we find many things to surprise us. First of all, that the personages of Genesis often fail to speak where the modern writer would surely have them do so, and where the very nature of the case seems to require it. We may well imagine that Joseph complained aloud when he was cast into the pit and carried away to Egypt (cp. also xlii. 21), that the murder of Abel was preceded by a dispute, that Hagar left Abraham's house complaining and weeping that Abraham had put her away (xxi. 14); but there is nothing of the kind. The first couple do not utter a

word of reply when God pronounces his curse upon their future: they do not even indulge in self-accusations; not a word does Rebecca say in chapter xxvi., nor Noah during the Deluge, nor Abraham in chapter xviii. when a son is promised him or when he is commanded to sacrifice Isaac; neither does Hagar when she sees her child dying, nor later when God heard the weeping of Ishmael. One who examined these references might easily conclude that the personages of Genesis were intended to be portrayed as taciturn and even secretive; he would find the only talkative individual to be—God.

But if we go more deeply into these legends, we perceive that this extraordinary laconism is part of the style of the narrator. The narrators subordinated everything to the action. They introduced only such speeches as really advanced the action. Hence especially they avoided giving utterance to the feelings of the merely passive personages. Whether Joseph complains or keeps silence, when his brethren sell him, makes no difference with his destiny. What words were spoken by Abraham and Noah when they received the commands of God makes no difference; suffice it, they obeyed. The destiny of the first family is fixed when God has cursed them; no self-reproaches will help the matter. Or, what do we care about the dispute that preceded the murder of Abel, since we know the reason which prompted Cain's deed! And it appears perfectly natural that men should make no reply to the promises of God, as is usually the case; for what can man add when God has spoken?

The other side of this strangely laconic method is that the remarks which the narrator does introduce are an essential part of the narrative. The conversation between the serpent and the woman is to show how it came about that the forbidden fruit was eaten. Cain pours forth his guilt-laden heart before God, and as a result modifies his sentence. Abraham begs his wife to declare herself his sister; and thus it comes about that she was taken into the harem of Pharaoh (xii. 11 ff.). Abraham gave Lot the choice of going to the east or to the west; hence Lot chose the plain of the Jordan. At Sarah's request Abraham takes Hagar as concubine and at her request he gives her up again. In these cases the words are not idle; on the contrary they are necessary to suggest an inner motive for the action to follow. Especially necessary are the words of cursing and of promise; they are the very climax of the story, up to which all the rest leads. This explains why God is so often represented as speaking in Genesis; for speech is really

the chief medium through which God influences the action in these legends.

In some places the narrators have introduced monologues, the most unconcrete of all forms of speech, when the situation showed that there was no one present to whom the person could have spoken. This is quite commonly the case with God; for to whom should God reveal his most hidden decrees? But in a few cases we can infer (i. 26; ii. 6 f.) an elder form of the account, in which God addressed himself to his celestial associates.

But even in the laconic legends there are speeches which, while they are not exactly necessary, either characterise a person or attempt to give the opinion of the narrator, or which aim at some other point which the narrator wants to make. Many of the speeches in Genesis are exceedingly brief. Recall the lament of Hagar: "I am fleeing before the face of my mistress" (xvi. 8), or the words of the daughters of Lot (xix. 31), of Sarah (xxi. 10), of Abraham (xxi. 24), "I will swear," of Rebekkah (xxiv. 18 ff.), of Jacob (xxv. 33), "Swear to me this day," of Isaac (xxvi. 7), "She is my sister," of the shepherds of Gerar (xxvi. 20), "The water is ours," of Isaac's slaves (xxvi. 32), "We have found water," of Laban (xxix. 14), "Yea, thou art my flesh and blood," and so on. Of course, the speeches are not always so brief; they are especially apt to grow longer in the solemn and impressive formulæ of cursing and blessing. But in general we may see in brevity a characteristic mark of a certain type in Genesis.

Even such utterances do not always reveal the ultimate purpose of the actors, and reveal their spiritual life only in an indirect way. Hence the expressions are not always entirely clear for us, and require an especial gift for their interpretation. We are told that God forbade to man the fruit of the tree of life, but his reason for this is not given. What thought was in God's mind when threatening man with immediate death, whereas this result did not actually follow? So, too, we learn that the serpent desires to betray the woman, but not his reason. And even such psychological masterpieces as the story of the temptation are only indirect portrayals of soul-life.

NO NATURE-LOVE IN GENESIS.

Very many of the legends are no less laconic in their descriptions of incidental circumstances. In this respect also there is a great difference between the primitive literary art and that of modern story-tellers. Of course, the ancients have no touch of the in-

timate feeling for the landscape; there is no trace of nature-love in Genesis. The facts that the story of Eden is set among green trees, the story of Hagar in the barren desolation of the wilderness, the story of Joseph in the land of the Nile, affect the course of the story in certain respects, indeed: since the first pair clothe themselves with leaves, and since the desert is a place where one can get lost, and where there is no water. But these facts in no wise affect the mood or sentiment of the action.

ECONOMY OF DETAILS.

But aside from this intimate feeling for the life of nature, which was foreign to the primitive man, how easy it would have been to give a description of Paradise! What modern poet would have missed the opportunity! But the early story-tellers were content to say that there were beautiful trees there, and the source of mighty rivers. It is a piece of the same method that the narrator does not tell us with what weapon Cain slew Abel; he tells us merely that Noah planted vines and then that he drank of the wine, omitting the intervening steps of picking and pressing the grapes; he no more tells us how the contempt of Hagar was expressed (xvi. 4) than how Sarah took her revenge. We are wont to admire the circumstantiality of the narratives, and justly, but this by no means implies that the legends abound in striking and highly concrete touches: on the contrary, they present on the whole not an abundance, but a paucity, of concrete elements; but the little that we have is so judiciously selected that we are warranted in seeking for a purpose in almost every minute feature.

This economy of circumstantial details is the more striking because alongside such lightly sketched features, and especially in the more detailed narratives, there are often very minute descriptions. Thus, for instance, the meal that Abraham serves to the three men is described in detail, while the meal of Lot is but briefly sketched. For the purpose of exegesis it is very suggestive to keep this question constantly in mind, to observe the brief and detailed treatments, and to consider everywhere the interest of the narrator. In general this will warrant the conclusion that the narrator portrays the principal events concretely, while merely hinting at or omitting those which are incidental to the action: thus, for instance, in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac the three days' journey is covered at a bound, while the short passage to the place of sacrifice is described in all detail. The narrator is quite arbitrary in the matter. Similarly the experiences of Abraham's ser-

vant on the day when he sued for the hand of Rebecca are reported very minutely, while all the days consumed in the journey to the city of Nahor are disposed of in a breath.

This emphasis laid upon the action is seen also in the manner of the conclusion of the narrative. The legends stop promptly when they have attained the desired object, not with a gradual cadence, but with a sudden jerk. This observation also is important for exegesis. The point just before the close is recognised as the climax by the narrator. Yet there are here two varieties of conclusion: the customary sort follows the climax with a short sentence (the type is the sacrifice of Isaac); the less common, and plainly more impressive, closes with a pathetic address (the curse of Noah is here the type).

UNITY AND COHERENCE OF PARTS.

From the above observations we conclude that everything is subordinated in the primitive legends to the action. In other literatures there are narratives in which the action is merely a garb or a thread, while the chief concern is the psychologic study, the brilliant conversation, or the idea; but not so with the primitive Hebrew legend. The primitive man demanded from his storyteller first of all action; he demands that something shall happen in the story to please his eye. But the first essential in such a story is to him its inner unity; the narrator must furnish him a connected series of events each necessarily dependent on the preceding. One of the chief charms of the early legend is just this: to show how one thing resulted from another. The more plausible and necessary this connexion appears, the more attractive seems the whole story. A famine forces Abraham to go to Egypt; but he is afraid of being killed there on account of his beautiful wife. *Therefore* he reports his wife to be his sister. Deceived *by this* Pharaoh takes Sarah and makes presents to Abraham. *Therefore* God punished Pharaoh. *In consequence of this* Pharaoh releases Sarah but permits Abraham to retain the presents.—Sarah has no children, but desires them. *Therefore* she gives her maid to Abraham as concubine. *Thus* Hagar conceives of Abraham. *Hence* Hagar despised her mistress. *This* offends the proud Sarah most deeply. *Therefore* she causes Abraham to restore Hagar to her, and mistreats her. *As a result* Hagar flees into the desert. *Here* God has compassion on her and promises her a son.

Observe how in such cases each successive member is linked to the preceding one; how each preceding member appears as the

natural cause or at least the antecedent of the succeeding one. We are in the habit, following a sort of tradition, of calling this kind of narrative childish; but in so doing we are only partially right.

These narratives, then, are exceedingly tense in their connexion. The narrators do not like digressions, but press with all their energy toward the mark. Hence they avoid if possible the introduction of new features in a given story, but seek an uninterrupted connexion. Rarely indeed are new assumptions introduced, but good style demands the announcement of all assumptions as near the beginning as possible. In pursuit of this method it is considered permissible to skip over the necessary consequences of what has been told, provided only that those features stand forth which are essential to the continuation of the action. There must be nothing too much, and nothing too little. The narrator does not spring aside; but the hearer also must not be allowed to spring aside: the narrator holds fast to him so that he can think only what the narrator wants to have him think.

VARIATIONS ON A GIVEN THEME.

Many of the legends are fond of varying a given motive. Consider how the story of Eden makes everything dependent on the nakedness and the clothing of man, and how the relation of "field" and "field-tiller" (this is the etymology of the Hebrew word here used for "man") pervades this whole legend; how the story of Joseph's sale into Egypt treats the coat-sleeve (coat of many colors) and the dreams; how the story of Jacob's last testament (xlvi. 29 ff.) constantly connects his actions with his bed: in praying he bows at the head of the bed, xlvi. 31; in blessing he rises up in bed, xlviii. 2; in dying he stretches himself out upon his bed, xlix. 33 (English version: "gathered up his feet in his bed"), and so on. In this the rule is, quite in opposition to our sense of style, to repeat the expression every time the thing is referred to, so that one and the same word often runs through the story like a red thread. Undoubtedly this custom originated in the poverty of the language; but the narrators of our legends follow it in order to produce an impression of unity and simplicity. Precisely because of this inward connexion in the story it is possible in many places where our received text shows gaps or distortions to recognise the original form of the legend: the text-criticism is in this point very much more positive than in the case of the prophets, the laws and the songs, which lacked this connected condensation.

PLAUSIBILITY DEMANDED.

Furthermore, the course of the action must be probable, highly credible, even unavoidable. Nowhere must the hearer be able to make the objection that what is being told is inconsistent with what has preceded or with itself. Hagar, when elevated to too high station, could not fail to grow haughty; and Sarah could not help feeling offended. True, the probability aimed at by these old story-tellers was different from that of which we speak. Their understanding of nature was different from ours; for instance, they regarded it as entirely credible that all the kinds of animals could get into the ark; furthermore, the way in which they speak of God and his participation in the affairs of the world was simpler than is possible for us of modern times; they regarded it as quite plausible that the serpent should have spoken in primitive times; that Joseph, the grand vizier, should look after the sale of the corn in person.

Hence it would be quite unwarranted to speak of the "arbitrariness" and "childish recklessness" of the legends simply because the assumptions of the narrators are impossible to us in modern times. Only in a very few places can the eye of the modern reader, even though trained for criticism, detect improbabilities. In this line we may ask why Joseph, who was so much attached to his father, failed to communicate with him all the long years. Even after Hagar and her son were once rescued, were not the dangers of the desert sure to recur every day? But the auditor of ancient times doubtless did not ask such questions; he was more willing to surrender to the narrator, and was more easily charmed; he was also more credulous than we are; cp. for instance, xliii. 23.

SUSTAINED INTEREST.

On the other hand, in a well-told legend the incidents are not so simple that one can guess the whole course of events from the first few words; if it were so, the legend would lose its interest. No one cares to hear of things that are self-evident. On the contrary, our story-tellers are dealing with what they regard as a complicated situation, whose final outcome cannot be surveyed in advance by the hearer. This leads him to listen the more intently. Jacob wrestles with a supernatural being; which of the two will conquer? Jacob and Laban are equally gifted in cunning; which

will succeed in deceiving the other? The shrewd but unwarlike Jacob has to meet the dull but physically superior Esau: how will he manage him? Abraham has to go down into Egypt, and how will he fare there? Thus all these stories are more or less exciting. The childlike listener holds his breath, and rejoices when the hero finally escapes all the threatening dangers.

The narrators are very fond of contrasts: the child cast out into the desert becomes a mighty people; a poor slave, languishing in prison, becomes the ruler of Egypt with all her abundance. They try if possible to focus these contrasts into a single point: at the moment when Hagar is in utter despair, God takes compassion on her; the very instant when Abraham raises his arm to slay Isaac, he is checked by God. Lot lingers, and Jacob holds the divinity fast until the dawn is at hand: the next moment will surely bring the decision. And where this intense interest is wholly lacking, where there is no complication of interests, there we have no real legend. Thus the account of creation in Genesis i. is scarcely to be called a story; and yet, from v. 2 and 26, as well as from the poetic versions referred to on pages 267-268, and 276 of *The Open Court* for May, we can conjecture a form of the account in which more personages appear and in which the world is created after a conflict of God with Chaos. In like manner, the accounts of Abraham's migration and of his league with Abimelech are not real legends, but only legendary traditions which have originated probably from the decay of earlier and fuller legends.

LEGENDS NOT PURE INVENTION.

As we have seen in the second division of this treatise, the legends are not free inventions of the imagination. On the contrary, a legend adopts and works over certain data which come from reflexion, tradition or observation. These fundamental data have been treated in the preceding pages; our present task is to consider the part taken by the imagination in the development of the legends. With this subject we have reached the very heart of our investigations.

As has been shown above, many of the legends seem intended to answer definite questions. That is, these legends are not the thoughtless play of an imagination acting without other purpose than the search for the beautiful, but they have a specific purpose, a point, which is to instruct. Accordingly, if these narratives are to attain their object they must make this point very clear. They do this in a decided way, so decidedly that even we late-born mod-

erns can see the point clearly, and can infer from it the question answered. The sympathetic reader who has followed the unhappy happy Hagar on her way through the desert will find no word in the whole story more touching than the one which puts an end to all her distress: God hears. But this word contains at the same time the point aimed at, for upon this the narrator wished to build the interpretation of the name Ishmael ("God hears").—Or what word in the legend of the sacrifice of Isaac stamps itself so deeply upon the memory as the affecting word with which Abraham from the depths of his breaking heart quiets the questioning of his unsuspecting child: God will provide! This word, which made God himself a reality, is so emphasised because it answers the question after the etymology of the place (Jeruel).

Other legends reflect historic events or situations, and in such cases it was the duty of the narrator to bring out these references clearly enough to satisfy his well-informed hearer. Thus in the legend of the flight of Hagar the actors are at first mere individuals whose destinies are interesting enough, to be sure, but at the climax, with the words of God regarding Ishmael, the narrator shows that in Ishmael he is treating of a race and its destinies.

Hebrew taste is especially fond of playing about the names of leading heroes and places, even when no etymology is involved. Many of the legends are quite filled with such references to names. Thus the legend of the Deluge plays with the name of Noah (cp. viii. 4, 9, 21), the story of the sacrifice of Isaac with Jeruel (xxii. 8, 12, 13), the story of the meeting of Jacob and Esau with Mahanaim and Penuel (cp. p. 321 in my *Commentary*), and so on. Thus these legends are rich in points and allusions; they are so to speak transparent: even the one who reads them naïvely and simply as beautiful stories finds pleasure in them, but only the one who holds them up against the light of the primitive understanding can catch all their beautiful colors; to him they appear as small but flashing and brilliant works of art. The characteristic feature of the Hebrew popular legends as contrasted with other legends, if we understand the matter, consists in the flashing of these points.

The art of the story-tellers consists in avoiding every suspicion of deliberate purpose at the same time that they give great prominence to their point. With marvellous elegance, with fascinating grace, they manage to reach the goal they have set. They tell a little story so charmingly and with such fidelity to nature that we listen to them all unsuspecting; and all at once, before we expect it, they are at their goal. For instance, the story of Hagar's flight

(xvi.) wishes to explain how Ishmael, although the child of our Abraham, was born in the wilderness: to this end it draws a picture of Abraham's household: it shows how, by an entirely credible series of events, Ishmael's mother while with child was brought to desperation and fled into the wilderness: thence it came that Ishmael is a child of the desert.

In many cases the task of the narrator was very complex: he had to answer a whole series of different questions, or to assimilate a quantity of antecedent presumptions. Thus one variant of the legend of Babel asks the origin of the difference of languages and of the city of Babel, the other wants to know the source of the distribution of races and also of a certain ancient structure. Or again, the story of Abraham at Hebron undertakes to tell not only the origin of the worship at Hebron, but also to explain the birth of Isaac and the choice of his name. Here then the task was to unite the differing elements into unity. And it is just here that the story-tellers show their art. The prime motive furnishes the leading thread of the story; the subordinate motives they spin into a single scene which they introduce into the body of the story with easy grace.

ETYMOLOGIES SUBORDINATE FEATURES.

The etymologies usually constitute such subordinate motives. Thus in the story of the worship at Jeruel a scene is interjected which is to explain the name of the place, "God sees"; but this little scene, the dialogue between Abraham and Isaac, xxii. 7 f., expresses so completely the tone and sentiment of the whole story that we should not be willing to dispense with it even if it had no particular point of its own. In other cases the artists have joined together two leading motives; then they invented a very simple and plausible transition from one to the other: thus the first part of the legend of Hebron presents the establishment of worship there under the guise of the story that Abraham entertained the three divine visitors there; the second portion, which is to account for the birth of Isaac, simply proceeds with the given situation, having the three guests enter into a conversation at table and therein promise Isaac to Abraham. It is the most charming portion of the task of the interpreter of Genesis to search for these matters, and not only, so far as this is possible, to discover the for us oldest meaning of the legends, but also to observe the refinements of artistic composition in the stories.

SUMMARY.

We have to do, then, even in the oldest legends of Genesis, not with aimless, rude stories, tossed off without reflexion, but on the contrary, there is revealed in them a mature, perfected, and very forcible art. The narratives have a very decided style.

Finally attention should be called to the fact that the narrators scarcely ever express a distinct opinion about persons or facts. This constitutes a clear distinction between them and the later legends and histories worked over under the influence of the prophets. Of course the narrators of the early legends had their opinions; they are by no means objective, but rather intensely subjective; and often the real comprehension of the legend lies in our obtaining an impression of this opinion of the narrator. But they almost never gave expression to this opinion: they were not able to reflect clearly on psychological processes. Wherever we do get a more distinct view of such an opinion it is by means of the speeches of the actors which throw some light on what has happened; consider particularly the utterances of Abraham and Abimelech, chapter xx., or the final scene of the story of Laban and Jacob, xxxi. 26 ff. At the same time this suppression of opinions shows most clearly that the narrators, especially the earlier ones, did not care to proclaim general truths. It is true, there are at the basis of many of the legends and more or less distinctly recognisable, certain general truths, as, in the case of the story of the migration of Abraham, a thought of the value of faith, and in the story of Hebron, the thought of the reward of hospitality. But we must not imagine that these narratives aimed primarily at these truths; they do not aim to teach moral truths. With myths, as has been shown at page 270 of the *May Open Court*, this is different, for they aim to answer questions of a general nature.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]