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THE PENTATEUCH

IN CONTRAST WITH

THE SCIENCE AND MORAL SENSE
OF OUR AGE.

By *A PHYSICIAN.*

PART II.

“Zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten können der Beweis von nothwendigen Vernunftwahrheiten nie werden” –Contingent historical truths can never be demonstration of necessary rational truths. –LESSING.

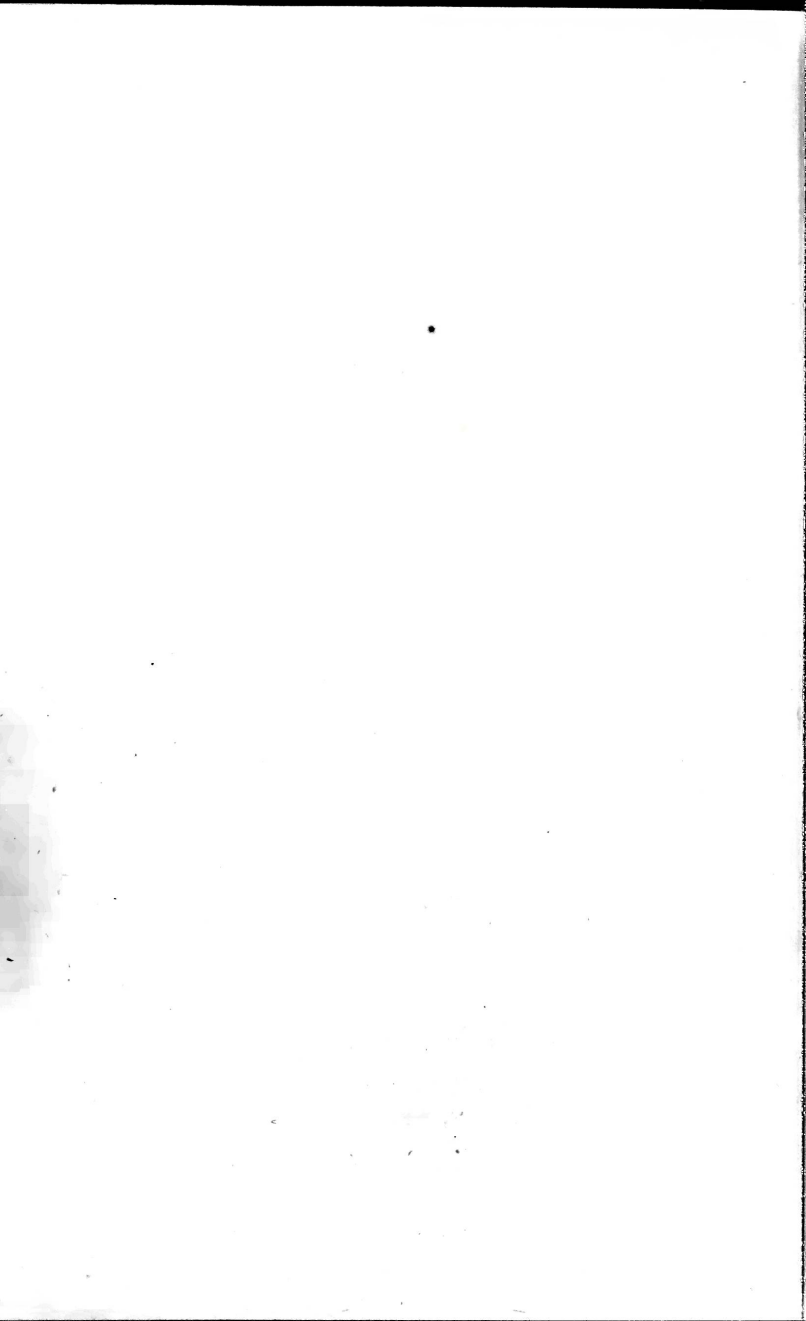


PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,

NO. 11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

1873.

Price Sixpence.



THE BOOK OF EXODUS.

MOSES—THE FLIGHT FROM EGYPT—THE WILDERNESS—LEGISLATION.

THE descendants of Jacob, surnamed Israel, called Israelites and children of Israel, increased amazingly, according to the text, “multiplying and waxing exceeding mighty, so that the land was filled with them,” the effect of which is said to have been—?

That the jealousy of the Egyptians their masters was roused, and the Pharaoh, or king, fearing that, in case of war with a neighbour, they might join the enemy, fight against him, and so “get him out of the land,” therefore were taskmasters set over them to afflict them, and make their lives bitter with hard bondage in brick and mortar and service in the fields; the straw held needful in brick-making, among other things, being finally withheld, whilst the tale of bricks made was required to be the same as before.

Bricks and mortar, we may presume, from their being particularly mentioned, were the materials employed by the Egyptians in their buildings?

The great structures of Egypt, nevertheless, appear to have been invariably built of stone without mortar. The temples and palaces of Babylon and Nineveh, however, were uniformly built of brick and mortar. In the hard bondage in brick and mortar of the text we have, therefore, one of the many traits to be had, when they are looked for, of the age and authorship

of the Pentateuch ; the compiler of which was neither Moses nor any contemporary of his, but one who must have lived after the Babylonian Captivity, and had had, as it seems, occasion to learn something of the art and mystery both of brick-making and brick-laying—arts little practised either in alluvial Egypt or rocky Palestine, but pursued as a principal industry around Babylon and Nineveh on the clay bottoms of the Euphrates and Tigris.

The Pharaoh of Egypt is said to have fallen on what seems an extraordinary device to keep down the numbers of the now obnoxious Israelites?

He speaks to the Hebrew midwives—Shiphrah and Puah—the names of these women, strange to say, having survived the wreck of ages ! and orders them, when they do their office by the Hebrew women, to kill all the male children, but to save the females alive.

A most unkingly command ; no less unkingly than unlikely ever to have been given. In a despotic country like Egypt, however, the midwives would have nothing for it but to obey ?

So we should have thought ; but they, according to the text, set the king's order at defiance : " They feared God," it is said, and spared the lives of both the male and female Hebrew children.

Pharaoh would punish the midwives, as matter of course, for their contempt of his royal commands ?

So might we also fairly have supposed that he would ; but the midwives plead in excuse that " the Hebrew women are lively, and are delivered ere the midwife can come in to them."

This needed not to have hindered them from carrying out the Pharaoh's orders ?

Certainly not ; for the new-born child must have come immediately into their hands—the first moment under any circumstances at which they could have obeyed the ruler. But, as if the tale were made to

bear witness to its own absurdity, we learn that not only did Pharaoh not punish the contumacious midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, but even rewarded them by building houses for them!

Failing to enlist the two midwives—two midwives for the service of a people who must have been *millions* in number, if every part of the narrative be true—what is said to have been the Pharaoh's next move against his obnoxious slave-subjects, the children of Israel?

He charges them, saying: "Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive;" transferring his orders, set a nought by the midwives, to the parents of the children themselves.

Such an order is surely as little likely as the one that goes before it, either to have been given by a king to any section of his subjects as it was to be obeyed by them?

No command of the kind is recorded in the annals of any other politic or even semi-savage community. More than this, the Nile was a sacred stream, furnishing the sole water-supply of the country; and the signal progress the Egyptians had made in civilisation, even at the early date to which the records we are discussing refer, assures us that all pollution of the river by dead bodies and the like must have been forbidden. The dead were not even buried in the soil of the cultivated lands of Egypt, but, being embalmed, were stowed away beyond the reach of the inundation.

Looking at the Hebrew scriptures in the way we do, as ordinary literary compositions, what might we say was the writer's object in the narrative before us?

That it is contrived, all unartistic as it is, by way of prologue to the story of the wonderful manner in which the life of the male child Moses was preserved. The future leader and legislator of the chosen people

could not be left with the uneventful entrance into the world that is the lot of ordinary men. His life must be in danger from his birth, and miraculously guarded; he must be the nursling and adopted son of a queen or of a king's daughter at the least. And so it all falls out. Born of parents of the house of Levi, as it is said, the mother of the future leader conceals his birth for three months, and then exposes him in an ark or cradle of bulrushes which she lays among the flags by the river's brink. The daughter of Pharaoh comes down "to wash herself at the river," and, seeing the cradle, she sends her maid to fetch it. There she finds the infant; presumes that it is one of the Hebrews' children, and, instead of ordering it to be thrown into the river, as a dutiful daughter would have done, in obedience to her royal father's orders, she procures a nurse for it, who turns out to be its own mother, and gives it the name of Moses—the saved from the stream—because, as she says, "I drew him out of the water."

With such a nurse the child was likely to do well?

He thrived, grew up, and became as a son to Pharaoh's daughter—no inquiry being made, we must presume, by the princess's father or mother how she came by such a treasure!

The first incident recorded in the independent life of Moses grown to man's estate is of a somewhat compromising nature?

Seeing an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren, and looking this way and that, to make sure that he himself was seen of none, he slew the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand.

This was surely murder, against the laws of God and man?

It was no less; but it is not so characterised, and is not meant to be so considered, in the narrative, nor has it wanted apologists among modern writers. Murder, however, as the saying is, will out, and the

deed must have got wind ; for, seeing two of his own people contending on the very next day, and saying to him who began the fray : Why smitest thou thy fellow ? he is met by the counter question : Intendest thou to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian ? Learning by this that what he had done was known, he had to seek safety in flight from the justice of the country. He flies, therefore, and comes to the land of Midian, where he abides, as shepherd, apparently, with Reuel, the priest of the country, one of whose daughters, Zipporah by name, he by-and-by receives to wife.

The next incident in the life of Moses that is recorded is a very remarkable one ?

Whilst keeping the flock of his father-in-law (now called Jethro) in the desert by Horeb, the mountain of God, the angel of Jehovah appears to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, which burned yet was not consumed. Astonished at the appearance of a bush on fire yet not consumed, he turns "aside to see the great sight why the bush was not burnt," and is then addressed by a voice calling to him out of the midst of the bush, saying : Moses ! Moses ! and Moses answers, "Here am I." Ordered to put off his shoes from his feet, for the ground on which he stood was holy ground, he is then informed by the speaker that he is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob ; that he had seen the affliction of his people in Egypt, and was come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey, and to settle them there in place of the Canaanites, Horites, Hittites, Amorites, and others already in possession of the country. "Come, now, therefore," proceeds the narrative, "I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou mayest bring my people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

To this extraordinary intimation, so delivered, Moses makes answer— ?

“Who am I,” says he, “that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? When I say to them that the God of their fathers had sent me to them and they ask me his name, what shall I say?”

“Thou shalt say I AM THAT AM hath sent me. Moreover, thus shalt thou say: Jehovah, the God of your fathers, appeared unto me, saying: I have considered you and what is done to you in Egypt; and I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto a land flowing with milk and honey; and they shall hearken to thy voice; and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the King of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him: Jehovah Elohim, the God of the Hebrews, hath met us; and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to Jehovah our God.”

How can we, with the views of our age, conceive God addressing man in human speech, or imagine Moses asking God for his name, and God answering first in abstract terms, and then more definitely, as if he were but one among a number of gods, and the particular God of the Hebrew people? How, indeed, think of Moses—scion, as said, of the house of Levi—not knowing by what name the God of his kindred and country was called? The designation, I AM THAT AM, would scarcely have got him credit with his people; and the name Jehovah now imparted to him, far from helping, would only have earned him mistrust; for El, Elohe, Chiun, or Baal, in so far as we know, appear to have been the names by which God or the gods were known to the times in which Moses is reputed to have lived; neither he nor they who for ages came after him having ever heard of Jehovah. How, further, imagine God dealing deceitfully with Pharaoh and ordering his messenger to sue for leave to go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifice, when it was his purpose that the

people should escape from Egypt altogether? How, still further, and to go back, bring our minds to contemplate the Supersensuous Infinite Cause we call God as limited in space and hidden in a bush that burned yet was not consumed? How, in fine, believe that God bade Moses put off his shoes from his feet, for the ground he stood on was holy, as if any one foot-breadth of earth were holier than another?

How, indeed! But so stands it written in the text.

Something, however, may be said for the bush that burned yet was not consumed?

In so far as we know that Light and Fire were the symbols of Deity to the whole of the ancient policied world, and the Hebrews were scions of the Semitic stock, the Light and Star worshippers of Chaldea and Mesopotamia.

Determining to deliver his people, Jehovah would, of course, smooth the way for their going by disposing the heart of Pharaoh favourably towards them?

So might we reasonably have expected; on the contrary, however, he is made to say that he is sure the King of Egypt will not let them go.

This seems strange to modern conceptions of God's providential dealings with the world. What may have been the writer's motive in ascribing such words to God?

To give him an opportunity, doubtless, of showing his God, in conformity with the notions of unenlightened men, setting at nought the laws we now recognise as constituting the very essence of the Godhead, "smiting Egypt with the wonders he would do in their midst, getting him honour on the Egyptians, and giving them to know that he was the Lord."

God get him honour by smiting the Egyptians! Do we read aright?

So says the text as well here as in several other places yet to be considered.

God is also made by the scribe to give particular instructions as to what the people are to do when at length they find themselves at liberty to depart?

They are not to go empty, but are to borrow of their neighbours jewels of silver and jewels of gold and raiment, which they are to put upon their sons and their daughters, and so spoil the Egyptians!

This is an extraordinary injunction made to come from God?

It is no less; and the writer must have believed that Jehovah had no more respect for the *meum* and *tuum* than he could have had himself when he put such an order into the mouth of his Deity.

What happens when Moses, not taking the word of his God of the burning bush as sufficient credentials to his countrymen, suggests that they will not believe him, and will say that Jehovah had not really appeared to him?

Jehovah asks: What is that in thy hand? And he said, a rod. Cast it on the ground, says Jehovah; and he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent, to his horror, for he fled from it; but being commanded to take it by the tail, it forthwith became a rod as before.

And this was to satisfy the people that the God of their fathers had appeared to him, Moses, and given him his commission to them! What would be thought nowadays of the man who should say that God had personally appeared to him, given him an important commission, and as guarantee for the truth of his statement performed a feat of the kind before an assembly of people?

He would be regarded either as a madman or a juggling impostor, most certainly as no ambassador from God.

There is more of this preliminary miraculous, or rather—and not to speak it irreverently—conjuring matter?

Much : Moses is bidden in addition, and as a further assurance to himself that it is Jehovah-God who speaks with him, to put his hand into his bosom, and when he takes it out again it is "leprous as snow;" but returning it to his bosom and then withdrawing it, "it is as his other flesh."

Do any of the diseases known to us by the name of leprosy come and go in such sudden fashion?

Several diseases now pass under this name, but they are all alike of slow growth and generally of difficult cure when they are not altogether incurable.

These signs, however, Moses is to exhibit to the people in case of their proving incredulous of his mission to them; and when he returns to Egypt, should they not be convinced by such signs and induced to hearken to his voice, he is then to take water from the river and pour it on the land when it should become blood. Furthermore, being slow of speech himself, he is to prompt Aaron his brother, "who can speak well," and make of him his mouth-piece in his efforts to have Pharaoh grant their petition. "But I will harden his heart" says Jehovah, "that he shall not let the people go;" and so all must necessarily prove in vain.

Moses from the above showing would seem to have been of a somewhat sceptical temper, hard of belief, not easily satisfied?

As every reasonable man ought to be when extraordinary courses are prescribed to him, and contraventions of the common course of nature are adduced as evidence of a divine commission or command. But God is far more indulgent to the doubts of Moses than men in after times have commonly shown themselves to the misgivings and questionings of their brothers.

Pharaoh's heart being hardened by Jehovah so that he must refuse to let the people go, Moses is next to say to him—?

“Israel is my son, my first-born; let my son go; and if thou refuse to let him go I will slay thy son, even thy first-born.”

What! in spite of the hardening the man's heart has undergone at the hands of Jehovah, which must needs make him incapable of yielding? And is it possible to think of God threatening retaliation in any event—retaliation above all for non-compliance with an order which he himself has made it impossible should be obeyed, and upon the unoffending first-born of the land because of its ruler's obstinacy?

To the simple moral sense of intelligent man it is indeed impossible to form such incongruous and unworthy ideas of God and his dealings with the world. The tale as it stands is no less irreverent than absurd. It is not God who hardens the heart of man, but man who is faithless to his better self when he yields the sway to his animal appetites and passions, and turns a deaf ear to the suggestions of his reason and higher moral nature. Neither does God, like a spiteful man, retaliate in any human sense for non-compliance with his behests. Pharaoh by the usage of his age and in virtue of ordinances propounded in these ancient writings as from Jehovah himself was entitled to exact all he required of his slave-subjects the Israelites.—But to proceed, we have now to note an extraordinary interruption of the narrative at this place by the interpolation of a few verses, the significance of which has sorely tried the ingenuity of bible-expositors. “By the way, in the Inn,” it is said, “Jehovah came upon him (Moses) and sought to kill him; and Zipporah took a knife and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at his feet, and said: A bloody bridegroom art thou to me! And he let him go. She said: blood-bridegroom, because of the circumcision.” (De Wette.)

What meaning can we possibly attach to this piece of information. What is to be thought of Jehovah coming upon Moses and seeking to kill him?

In any literal sense it is impossible to say,—the words have no meaning: had God sought to kill Moses, he would not assuredly have failed of his purpose.

And what farther of Zipporah circumcising her son, casting the foreskin at “his” feet, and calling him a blood or bloody bridegroom to her?

Also impossible to say; for the reason given: “she called him a bloody bridegroom because of the circumcision,” does not help to any solution of the difficulty.

What yet farther of the phrase: “So he let him go”?

Still beyond our power to conjecture; unless it were said that Jehovah, propitiated by Zipporah’s act, abandoned his purpose of killing Moses.

Has any other explanation of this episode in the life of Moses been suggested?

A learned writer conceives that Jehovah’s seeking to kill Moses may be significant of a serious illness that befel him at a certain time; and farther that his recovery was only wrung from his God by the sacrifice of more than the foreskin of his son; whence the passionate exclamation of Zipporah.*

Such an interpretation seems scarcely warranted by anything in the text as it stands?

It is not; but the text of the old mythical tale is obviously imperfect; made so, it may be, by its modern editor, who, finding matter in it offensive to the ideas of the times in which he lived and wrote, has substituted circumcision for sacrifice. The interpretation of the German writer is fully borne out by the whole of the blood-stained ritual of the Hebrew religious system, the sacrifice of the first-born of man and beast which so long formed one of its most essential

* See ‘Ghillanij Ueber den Menschen Opfer der alten Hæbræer: On the Human Sacrifices of the Ancient Hebrews,’ p. 683.

features, and the conclusion now generally come to in regard to the rite of circumcision as signifying a sacrifice to the reproductive principle in nature of a small but significant part in lieu of the holocaust of former days. The epithet bridegroom used by Zipporah may find its explanation in a custom said to have prevailed among Jewish mothers in a later age, whilst stilling their newly circumcised sons, of speaking to them as their little bridegrooms.*

So improper and unprofitable a tale as that of God seeking to kill a man and failing in his purpose, and of a woman performing a painful and needless operation on her child and then rating her husband and calling him or her son her bridegroom, cannot surely be presumed to come by the inspiration of God for the guidance of mankind in morals and religion?

Most assuredly it cannot. And so we may fancy that the tale of Moses threatened to be slain is given as a pendant to the one in which Jacob is said to have been met in the dark by a man, who turns out to be Jehovah himself, with whom he has a wrestling bout; for each succeeding hero in the early Hebrew records is more or less a copy of one who has gone before. But it is more difficult in the present instance to find a satisfactory interpretation of the story than it was to elicit a meaning in conformity with known mythological ideas for the other.

Moses and his brother Aaron, now associated with him and fully instructed, proceed from Midian to Egypt on their mission to the Pharaoh, with whom they have an interview?

They inform him that they have met with the God of the Hebrews and petition for leave to "go three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to their God, lest he should fall on them with pestilence or the sword."

* See Dozy, 'Die Israeliten zu Mekka.' S. 99.

But their God had not threatened anything of the kind ?

He had not ; but the pretext is notable as the first instance on record in which Religion is made the cloak to cover an ulterior design.

Pharaoh's heart being hardened by Jehovah, he of course refuses the suit ?

As matter of course, and it may be said of necessity. "Who is Jehovah," asks Pharaoh, "that I should obey his voice and let the people go ? I know not Jehovah ; neither will I let Israel go."

Pharaoh indeed could not have known anything of Jehovah ?

No more than Moses himself, according to the tale ; for it is only whilst receiving his commission that he learns from the speaker of the burning bush that it was he who had appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El-Schaddai, God the mighty, but by his name Jahveh was he not known to them. Neither indeed could Pharaoh have spoken of his Hebrew slave-subjects as a *people* and by the name of *Israel*, the title being of much more modern date than the period referred to : Pharaoh's Hebrew subjects were his *slaves*.

Pharaoh, reasonably enough, therefore does not credit the envoys, and in pursuance of the gist of the story proceeds to impose yet heavier tasks on the Israelites. What does Moses on the Pharaoh's refusal of his petition ?

He returns into the land of Midian, we must presume, for the Hebrew God was not ubiquitous, and reproaches him with having sent him on an useless errand : "Lord," says he, very irreverently as it seems, "why hast thou so evil entreated this people ? why is it that thou hast sent me ? for since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people ; neither hast thou delivered them at all."

Does not Jehovah take Moses to task for this disrespectful and reproachful address?

By no means; he merely says to him: "Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh. Through strength of hand shall he let them go, and by strength of hand shall he drive them out of his land; return ye therefore to Pharaoh, and when he asks for a sign saying: Show a miracle for you, then thou shalt say unto Aaron: Take thy rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent."

Returning to Egypt and doing as directed, the sign ordered by Jehovah will, we may presume, have a notable effect on Pharaoh?

Strange to say, however, it has none. He calls the magicians of Egypt, his own wise men, and they with their enchantments do as much as the delegates of Jehovah; they do more, in fact, for they every one cast down their rods, and each rod turns into a serpent!

But the serpent of Jehovah's men proves itself superior to the serpents of Pharaoh's conjurers?

By swallowing the whole of them!

And details of such jugglery as this are presented to us in evidence of God's power and purpose, through the minds of inspired men, to guide and inform us?

The writer, no doubt, believed in magic and conjuring, and so makes his God a magician and conjuror. The serpent-feat of Moses and Aaron, however, paralleled by the court magicians, is not striking enough to induce Pharaoh to let the Israelites go; and, indeed, how should it? His heart is hardened by Jehovah, and he cannot yield; neither is it intended that he should. Moses is therefore to address him again; and, as it is foreseen that he will still hold out, the envoy is to turn the water of the Nile into blood by striking it with his magic wand, the effect of which will be that the river shall stink, the fish die, and the water become unfit for the people to drink.

So formidable a visitation, unless immediately redressed, must have proved universally destructive, and not to the fishes only in the stream, but to the whole of the living creatures on its banks—to man and beast, oppressors and oppressed alike, and must needs have forced the Pharaoh instantly to relent?

We learn, nevertheless, that it does not; neither do we discover that the water of the country turned into blood, stinking and destructive to the fishes, has any ill effect on the people or their cattle, as if fishes alone of living things must have water! The Pharaoh persists in his refusal—a course in which he is encouraged by his magicians, who with their enchantment do again precisely what Moses and Aaron are said to have done; for they, too, says the narrative, turned all the water of the country into blood;—whence the water came on which they practised we are not informed.

The inhabitants and animals of a country cannot, however, live without water; and the dilemma into which the writer has fallen by cutting off the supply from the river being seen by him, he makes the people dig wells to meet their wants. But could they have found water by their digging?

They could not; for the river being the sole source whence the water of Egypt is derived, if it were turned into blood the wells which it fed must have furnished blood also.

Can water be turned by any process, natural or magical, into blood?

We throw the magic overboard, and say that God, by his eternal laws, has declared that it cannot. Water is a simple binary compound of the two chemical elements, oxygen and hydrogen; blood a complex quaternary compound of oxygen, hydrogen, carbon, and azote—the elements, moreover, here existing in a peculiar state of molecular arrangement not seen in the inorganic realm of nature. But art is incom-

petent to create chemical elements, or to force such as exist into combinations out of conformity with natural law. Water is water in virtue of one of the great all-pervading laws of the inorganic world, and blood only makes its appearance when the organising force inherent in nature comes into play and living, sentient, self-conscious creatures rise into existence.

The turning of the waters of Egypt into blood must therefore be an impossibility?

It is no less, in virtue of laws consentient with the existence and definite properties of matter.

The next move made by Moses and Aaron will surely induce Pharaoh, in spite of the hardening of heart he has received at the hands of Jehovah, to relent?

Although the river has been turned into blood, has become stinking, so that all the fishes have died, and the people cannot drink of it, he still persists in his obstinacy. Moses is then commanded by Jehovah to say to Aaron: Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, the rivers, and the ponds, and cause frogs to come up over the land of Egypt.

The writer would seem here to be drawing after what he saw in Palestine, his native country, where there are the Jordan and numerous smaller streams and rivulets; in Egypt there is one great river, but no secondary streams, though, doubtless, there were then as now innumerable ditches for irrigation and ponds for supply. The frogs, however, come up in spite of the circumstances that must have made it as impossible for them as for the fishes to live; for the river has been turned into blood, and we have not had it restored to its natural condition.

They come up and cover the land of Egypt, making their way into the houses, the beds, the kneading troughs, and even the ovens!

The feat of the frogs would surely be found to exceed the powers of the magicians to imitate?

It is said not; they too brought up frogs over the land—small thanks to them!—for by so doing they could only have made matters worse, if worse may be imagined.

So formidable a nuisance so increased must have brought Pharaoh to his senses and induced him to relent?

For a while it seems to have had this effect; but only for a while. "Intreat Jehovah," says he beseechingly to Moses and Aaron, "that he may take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to Jehovah."

Moses improves the occasion with this show of relenting on the part of Pharaoh?

He is not slow to do so, and says: Resolve me when I shall intreat for thee and for thy people the removal of the frogs—in the river only shall they stay. To which Pharaoh meekly and oddly enough replies: "To-morrow," instead of to-day! "Be it according to thy word," rejoins the envoy, "that thou mayest know that there is no God like unto Jehovah our God."

Moses is made to speak here as if he acknowledged the existence of other gods besides Jehovah?

He is made to speak as, doubtless, the writer believed the fact to be: Jehovah, to Moses and the early Hebrews, was no more than one, albeit the greatest, among the gods. He is the God of Miracle also, opposed to the God of Law, and so assuredly not the true God.

Intreated by Moses, Jehovah causes the frogs to die out of the houses and fields, and they are gathered into heaps, so that the land stank. Pharaoh, we may presume, will now keep his word and suffer the people to depart?

The respite he obtains makes him give signs of yielding; but the wonder-working powers of Jehovah through his agents not being yet sufficiently shown

forth, he is made by the writer to relapse into his hardness of heart. The dust of the ground, consequently, is now smitten, and is turned into lice (*kinnim*, properly gnats), which crawl over man and beast, and now only is it that the Egyptian conjurors are found wanting. They cannot imitate the Hebrew wonder-workers: they did with their enchantments try to bring forth lice, says the text, but they could not—very happily, we may be permitted to add—and they say to Pharaoh: This is the finger of God. But Pharaoh's heart being hardened by Jehovah, he heeded them not. Why they should have found it harder to turn dust into lice than rods into serpents or water into blood, and to call up swarms of frogs from the ditches at the word of command, does not appear. And how the despotic Pharaoh of Egypt should have been so indulgent as to suffer Moses and Aaron to afflict his people with such a succession of scourges, instead of throwing them into prison or shortening them by the head, is surely as much of a miracle as any of those we have had detailed.

How are frogs and lice produced under God's own natural law?

Frogs once a year, on the return of spring, from spawn that has been maturing in the body of the female parent from the same period of the preceding year; lice from eggs called nits, which are attached to the hair and clothes of the lousy, and are hatched at all seasons of the year; frogs and lice being alike the product of pre-existing kinds, male and female, and alike requiring a certain time before they can be hatched; frogs, moreover, having to pass some weeks in the tadpole state previous to appearing in their proper definite shape.

Do we in the present day ever see any such production of living creatures, whether of higher or lower type in the scale of being, as is here said to have taken place?

We do not ; but we are privileged to see what, by a metaphor, may be spoken of as the finger, and far more appropriately as the mind, of God, in the harmonious and invariable sequences of nature ; and seeing so much, we are bound to acknowledge neither interruption nor contravention of the all-pervading laws—expressions of the Godhead—that rule the universe in its measureless immensities as in its individual atoms.

But Pharaoh, when he finds his wise men at their wits' end, and referring the production of the lice to the finger of God, will give in and let his bondsmen go ?

Not yet ; though with the plague of flies which has now to be endured he yields so far as to say to Moses that he and his people were at liberty to sacrifice to their God, so as they did it in the land. But this did not suit the views of Moses, who answers : Lo, it is not meet to do so ; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians unto Jehovah our God.

What may be understood by the objection made by Moses ?

The text does not help us to any interpretation of its meaning. There is no hint in any preceding part of the book that the Hebrews were ever interfered with by the Egyptians in their religion—we know nothing, indeed, of the religion of the Israelites during the long period of their servitude in Egypt—or that they were required to conform to the religious system of their masters. Neither is Moses' objection taken so much to any sense he may have entertained of the impropriety of the sacrifice referred to in itself, as to the danger to the Israelites that might accompany its performance, for he says : Lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes and will they not stone us ? What the abomination of the Egyptians may have been we are

not informed. Shepherds are said to have been an abomination to the Egyptians, but not sheep; they are reputed, indeed, to have objected to mutton as food, but they sacrificed rams to their god Amun.

Pharaoh again shows signs of relenting. I will let you go, says he now, that ye may sacrifice to Jehovah your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away; intreat for me, adds the sorely-trying and singularly submissive sovereign. So Moses intreats Jehovah, and the plague of flies is abated. But Jehovah, according to the record, having other and more terrible wonders in store whereby he should further "proclaim his power and make his name known throughout all the earth," Pharaoh's yielding is only for a day.

Among the number of new plagues inflicted in this view we find enumerated—?

A murrain, which killed all the cattle of the Egyptians, but spared those of the Israelites, not one of these being lost; an epidemy of blotches and blains upon man and beast, to bring about which we for the first time find certain physical means prescribed by Jehovah: Moses is to take handfuls of ashes from the furnace and scatter them toward heaven, the effect of which would be that wherever the dust fell there should follow boils and blains upon the flesh.

Would casting cart-loads of furnace ashes into the air cause blotches and blains upon the men and cattle of a country a thousand miles and more in length?

It were absurd to suppose that it would; wood-ashes, used as directed, could only have caused inflammation of the eyes among such as were somewhat near at hand. To abrade the skin, wood-ashes must be mixed with quicklime and applied moist to its surface.

What further plagues or calamities do we find enumerated?

A grievous hailstorm, such as had not been seen in Egypt since its foundation, with thunder and light-

ning and fire that ran along the ground and smote everything that was in the field—man and beast, herb and tree, flax and barley; only “in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel dwelt, was there no hail;” next we have a *flight of locusts* that came up with an east wind—another physical agency—and ate up all that had been spared by the hail; and then a *thick* darkness in all the land for three days, so thick that people “saw not one another, even darkness that could be felt,—but the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.”

Jehovah, the God of Moses, as pictured by the Jewish writer, shows himself utterly ruthless in this?

No doubt of it; but the writer's purpose was to show Jehovah, as patron God of the children of Israel, superior to the gods of Egypt. His visitations must obviously have affected the individual Pharaoh much less than his subjects, whose hearts had not been hardened for the occasion, like that of the ruler. To have punished Pharaoh at all, indeed, when he was only exercising his prescriptive rights, and must be presumed to have lost all power of self-control—his heart having been expressly hardened by Jehovah—was manifestly unjust; and to make Jehovah spread desolation over the land of Egypt, when he was himself the author of its ruler's obstinacy, can only be characterised as derogatory to the Idea of God that must be entertained by rational man, and at variance with the goodness and mercy always associated with the essential nature of Deity.

Considerations these which seem satisfactorily to dispose of the Plagues of Egypt as occurrences founded on fact?

Effectually. And then murrain and pestilence and the light of the sun make no distinctions, but by pre-existent eternal ordinances affect all that live alike.

The narrative, interrupted at this point, gives us an opportunity of asking what we, as reasonable men,

gifted with understanding and moral consciousness, assured moreover of the changeless nature of God and his laws, are to think of the long array of unavailing miracles thus far detailed with wearisome prolixity, and of the motive assigned for their exhibition ?

On such grounds we can but think of them as tales of Impossibilities—Myths, Embodiments in language of Ideas belonging to a rude and remote antiquity, and worthy henceforth of notice only as records of erroneous conceptions of the attributes of God and the nature of his dealings with mankind and the world of things. The means brought into requisition prove inadequate to satisfy Pharaoh of the superiority of the Hebrew wonder-workers over the magicians of his own country, or of their God over the God whom he and his people adore. Did we think of God using means to ends at all, which our philosophy forbids—purpose, or end, mean and act being one in the nature of God, and not distinct from one another, or sequences in time*—it were surely falling short of a worthy conception of The Supreme to imagine him making use of any that were inadequate to the end proposed.

What is to be said of the reiterated allegation that God so hardened the heart of Pharaoh that he would not suffer the Israelites to be gone ?

That it is not only derogatory to the name of God, but in contradiction with his avowed purpose, which was from the first that the children of Israel should quit Egypt and settle in the land of Canaan as his peculiar people, in fulfilment of contracts entered into with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the last of them made some four hundred and thirty years before the time at which Moses is believed to have appeared on the scene ; for so long, according to the record, was the interval between the date of Jacob's arrival in Egypt and that of the Israelites leaving it.

* See 'Dialogue by Way of Catechism,' Part II. page 35.

But we have no information about the children of Israel during the four hundred and thirty years of their reputed sojourn in Egypt?

We have not a word of or concerning them through the whole of this long time.

How then believe that we should have such particular intelligence about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, Lot and his daughters, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Joseph and his brethren, &c. &c., comprising a period of a thousand years and more, according to the computations of our Bible chronologists?

How, indeed, unless we assume that it reaches us through the imaginations of writers who lived during and after the era of the kings, the Babylonian Captivity, and still later periods in the history of Judah and Israel.

Pitiless as he has hitherto appeared, Jehovah will now interpose, soften the heart of Pharaoh, and so spare the unoffending Egyptian people from further disasters?

Not yet. Mercy, with the object the writer has in view, must still be made foreign to the nature of his God. Pharaoh does indeed now call Moses, and says: Go ye; serve Jehovah; only let your flocks and herds be stayed. But Moses answers that they must have the means of sacrificing to Jehovah their God. "Our cattle," continues he, in the haughtiest tone, "shall go with us; there shall not a hoof be left behind." Jehovah, however, continuing to harden Pharaoh's heart, he will not suffer them to go. "Get thee from me," says the now indignant and sorely-trying sovereign; "take heed to thyself; see my face no more; for in the day thou seest my face thou shalt die."

Moses, we may presume, will be more cautious in his communications with such a threat hanging over him?

So we might have expected; but he is more arrogant and outspoken than ever, for he replies: "Thou

hast spoken well—I will see thy face no more.” Yet he does ; for, as the writer now makes Jehovah say : “ Yet will I bring one plague more upon Egypt ; afterwards he will let you go,” Moses has to return to the presence with the following message : “ Thus saith Jehovah : About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth on the throne even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill, and all the first-born of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel there shall not a dog move his tongue.”

Threatened with such calamities as the death of his own first-born son, and the death of the first-born of man and beast throughout his dominions, taught, moreover, by the experience of preceding plagues, Pharaoh will now assuredly take security against the threatened visitation by laying hands on Moses, whom he has already doomed to die did he venture again to come before him ?

So might we reasonably have expected ; but this would not have tallied with the end the writer has in view. Pharaoh is therefore made to forget his purpose of putting Moses to death, and very inconsiderately, as it seems, to treat the announcement just made as an idle threat. The envoy, consequently, is left at large, and even goes out from the Pharaoh’s presence “ in a great anger.” And so it comes to pass, as had been predicted, that at midnight Jehovah smote all the first-born both of man and beast in the land of Egypt.

The wholesale slaughter of the Egyptians and their cattle accomplished—by what means we are not informed, unless we take the text literally as it stands, and assume Jehovah himself to have been the agent—

we learn that against the children of Israel not even a dog was to move his tongue. The ground for the distinction is plain enough : the Israelites were the cherished, the Egyptians the hated, of Jehovah ; but there is a particular reason given for the heavy visitation which had now befallen the Egyptians ?

The reason assigned is this : " That it might be known how Jehovah had put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel."

What difference had God—and here we add, not the Jewish Jehovah—really put between the Egyptian people and the children of Israel ?

God had made the Egyptians, as the superior race, the *masters* ; and the Israelites, as the inferior race, the *slaves*. He had given the Egyptians the valley of the Nile for an inheritance, and the ingenuity and industry needful to turn it into " the garden of the Lord," which it was ; he had further made them astronomers, architects, engineers, sculptors, painters, inventors of the loom and of paper ; contrivers of more than one system of writing, and familiar, besides, with many of the most useful and elegant arts of settled and civilised life—workers in gold and silver and precious stones, &c. Morally and religiously, moreover, he had enabled them to approximate to the idea of the Oneness of Deity though seen under various aspects—here propitious, there adverse—and led them to the great conception of Duty or Responsibility for their doings in the present life to be answered for in a life to come.

And the Hebrews or Israelites ?

God had left in the lower grades of neat-herds, shepherds, labourers in the fields ; settlers by sufferance if not by compulsion in an outlying district of their masters' territory, ignorant of astronomy, architecture, mechanics, sculpture, and of every one of the arts that " put a difference " between the nomad barbarian or savage and the policed citizen of

the settled State : he had conferred on them no fine sense of the distinction between the mine and the thine ; and to conclude, had left them without the conception of a judgment and immortality beyond the present state of existence.

The first-born of man and beast in the land of Egypt, then, are smitten, and Jehovah has now, according to the veracious writer, had sufficient opportunity of displaying his power over the Gods of Egypt and the Egyptians themselves. The Israelites may therefore at length be suffered to depart ?

Brought to his senses at last,—or shall we say taught by the terrible calamities that had befallen his people, yielding to the pressure of circumstances and getting the better of the hardness of heart imposed on him by Jehovah, Pharaoh is now as urgent with the Israelites to be gone as he had hitherto been resolute to keep them from going. Rising up in the night and summoning Moses, he says : “Get you forth from among my people both you and the children of Israel, and go and serve Jehovah, as ye have said ; take also your flocks and your herds and be-gone.” The Egyptians too were urgent upon the people that they might send them out of the land in haste, for they said : “We be all dead men.”

The Israelites on their part, though the permission to depart must have come on them unexpectedly, are not slow to take Pharaoh at his word or remiss in yielding to the urgency of their masters ?

They pack up their kneading troughs at once in their clothes with the dough that is in them ; but they do not neglect the order they had received to borrow of their neighbours jewels of silver and jewels of gold and raiment, with which and their own belongings they set off immediately on their journey towards the promised land.

Can we imagine the Egyptians ready to lend their jewels of silver and gold and their garments to

people—their slaves—whom they were driving out of their country with as little prospect as wish ever to see them again?

It certainly is not easy under the circumstances to imagine any such favourable disposition on the part of the Egyptians.

When men *borrow*, it is still with the understanding that they are to make return, as when they lend that they are to have return made?

There appears to have been no such understanding in the present instance, on one side at all events. Jehovah, it is even said, “gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent them all they required, and they spoiled the Egyptians.”

But this makes Jehovah an aider and abettor in the theft?

No doubt of it. But the Jewish writer believed it not only lawful but meritorious to spoil the enemies of his people, and he does not scruple to make his God of the same mind as himself. But the tale is libellous and false; for God, the universal father, emphatically forbids theft through the sense of the mine and the thine implanted in the mind of man—not to allude to the express commandment which a later and more conscientious writer in the Hebrew Bible sees fit to put into the mouth of his God when he makes him say: Thou shalt not steal!

The Israelites fly or are driven out of Egypt at last?

The first-born of the land both of man and beast being dead, there was no longer any ground for delay. What extraordinary and utterly incomprehensible means were used to accomplish the *discriminating* slaughter of the first-born of the people and their cattle in the course of a single night we are not in this place informed; and the reason given for the singular despatch in which Jehovah is presented to us as having held the Egyptians—the hard service in brick

and mortar imposed on the Israelites, to wit—does not accord with the flourishing state in which they meet us at the moment of the Exodus, millions as they must have been in numbers, if they could bring six hundred thousand able-bodied men into the field with arms in their hands, possessed besides of flocks and herds innumerable, and enjoying such credit with the native people that they lent them freely of all they had.

The slaughter of the first-born of Egypt must therefore be another of the mythical tales contrived by the writer to exalt and glorify in his own mistaken way the tutelary God of his people, Jehovah?

Let the candid reader, with any conception which he as living in this nineteenth century of the Christian era can form of the nature of God, answer the question for himself by yea or by nay.

The narrative provokingly enough and on the very eve of the Exodus is interrupted to speak of a change to be made in beginning the year; and, in immediate connection with this change, of the institution of the Passover and the dedication to Jehovah of the first-born of man and beast among the children of Israel?

Jehovah, says the record, now speaks to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: "This month shall be to you the first month of the year," without naming the month. But we by-and-by discover that it is Nisan, called Abib of old, that is meant; this being the month in which the Exodus is believed to have taken place, as it is known to be the one in which the vernal equinox occurred in ancient times. The notification, however, is prefatory and subordinate to the order for the celebration of the Passover, which the writers of the Hebrew scriptures show particular anxiety to connect with the escape from Egypt,—which they would present in fact as a feast commemorative of this event in the legendary annals

of their people, the whole procedure as set forth being made to harmonise with this intention.

The rites connected with the celebration of the Passover were peculiar and solemn?

On the tenth day of the first month the head of each house, or where the families were small, the heads of two or more houses, were to take a lamb or kid, a male of the first year, without spot or blemish, and sever it from the flock until the evening of the fourteenth day, when it was to be killed. With a bunch of hyssop dipped in the blood the lintels and door-posts of the houses were to be struck, and no one was to leave his home until the morning. The carcase was to be eaten in the night with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and it is particularly ordered that the flesh shall not be eaten raw, nor sodden with water, but roast with fire. The meal is farther to be despatched in haste, the people having their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands.

This is plainly enough an account by a relatively modern writer of the way in which he imagines the feast of the Passover might have been kept by his forefathers on the eve of their flight from Egypt, and so of the way in which it was ever after to be observed in memory of that event. "And it shall come to pass," says the record, "when your children say unto you : what mean ye by this service, that ye shall say : It is the sacrifice of Jehovah's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses."

The Passover, however, could not have been celebrated in any such way by the Israelites on the eve of their flight?

There was no possibility of its having been so celebrated, for they fled in such haste that they had no time to leaven the dough that was in their kneading

troughs, much less to bake it. A *family feast*, moreover, is turned by the writer into a *Sacrifice* to Jehovah, in every indispensable element of which it is wanting.

The reason for striking the lintels and door-posts of the Israelites' houses with the blood is not very satisfactory?

Being done to guide Jehovah in his visitation to slay the first-born of Egypt, it meets us as a poor contrivance of the writer: "When I see the blood," says he in the name of his God, "I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you when I smite the land of Egypt." Jehovah must, therefore, as he imagined, have required an outward and visible sign to guide him in his acts of mercy as of vengeance.

The colour of the blood may have had something to do with the act enjoined?

Red was the proper colour of the Sun-God, among the ancients generally; and with the Egyptians came into special use in the spring of the year for the decoration of their dwellings, as well as the statues of their Gods. The Hebrew writer would therefore seem, after a play upon the word *Pass* or *Passover* (*Pesah* in Hebrew, with which our word *Transit* corresponds exactly), to be substituting *red blood* for the *red paint* of the Egyptians, Phœnicians, and other cognate peoples, and using, as a safeguard for the children of Israel, a sign which the Egyptians, from time immemorial, had been wont to employ with a view to ornament and propitiate their gods.

In immediate connection with this unsatisfactory account of the institution of the *Passover*, we have the dedication to Jehovah of the first-born among the children of Israel themselves. He had slain the first-born of the Egyptians, and must, as it appears, have the first-born of the Israelites also?

"Sanctify to me all the first-born; whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both

of man and beast, it is mine," are the terrible words in which Jehovah is made to announce his will.

It seems singular that the Jewish writers of the Bible should manifest the same desire to connect the sacrifice of their first-born with the most awful of the incidents said to have accompanied the flight from Egypt, as they show to associate the Passover with this event?

"It shall be," says the text, "when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying: What is this? that thou shalt say to him: By strength of hand Jehovah brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage; and it came to pass when Pharaoh would hardly let us go that Jehovah slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast; *therefore* I sacrifice to Jehovah all that openeth the matrix, being males"—the words *being males* must have been added, the requisition in several other places being *general*.

Such a reason for such a sacrifice is surely neither logical nor satisfactory. *Because* Jehovah slew all the first-born of Egypt, *therefore* were the Israelites to sacrifice all that opened the womb both of man and beast among themselves! They were to pay a much heavier tax, in fact, than that exacted of the Egyptians; for the sacrifice of their children by the Israelites was to be in perpetuity, whilst that of their old oppressors had been required but once. How should such an event as the escape from slavery, only to be thought of as subject of rejoicing, be fitly associated with the tears and heart-wrings of parents that must needs accompany the immolation of the first-born of their children?

The dedication to Jehovah of the first-born of man and beast can scarcely therefore have any connection with the mythical slaughter of the first-born of Egypt, the legendary flight from the country, or the feast of the Passover?

There can be little question that it has none. The consecration or making *Cherem* implying the necessary sacrifice to their God of all that opened the womb is not so associated in other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Sanctify to me all the first-born; whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast, it is mine," says the text already quoted (Exod. xiii. 2). "The first-born of thy sons shalt thou give to me," says another (*Ib.* xxii. 29). "All that openeth the matrix is mine," yet another (*Ib.* xxxiv. 19). In every instance, therefore, without reference to Egypt, the Exodus, or any other event. The requirement is absolute, unconnected with any historical or quasi-historical incident. The sacrifice of the first-born of man and beast was in truth a custom sanctioned by general usage among the whole of the Semitic tribes or peoples and their colonies inhabiting Western Asia and the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

But the first-born of man are ordered to be redeemed?

Not as the ordinance stands where it is first met and has not been tampered with, and as the custom of child-sacrifice is repeatedly referred to in other places, more especially by the prophetic writers. The redemption clauses are all interpolations by later hands; they had no place in the text even so late as the time of Ezekiel; and then there is the positive ordinance concerning things *Cherem* or devoted to Jehovah, which puts redemption out of the question. "None devoted, which shall be devoted of men shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death" (Levit. xxvii. 29).

May not the Passover also have been a festival having no connection with the Exodus from Egypt?

There can be as little doubt of this as of the sacrifice of the first-born of Israel having no reference to the slaughter of the first-born of Egypt. The festival

called Pesach by the Jews is a much older institution than the notice we have of it in the Book of Exodus. Its Hebrew name is exactly rendered as said, by the English word *Transit*; and the transit celebrated was no passage of Jehovah over the Egyptians to destroy, or over the Israelites to spare, but of the Sun over the Equator at the epoch of the vernal equinox—a season of rejoicing that may be said to have been universal among all the policed peoples of antiquity, and that is still observed with fresh accessories and under a new name in the world of to-day; for the Easter of the present age is in reality no other than the Pascha, Neomenia, and Hilaria of the old world—a tribute *Deo Soli Invicto*. Mounting from the inferior or wintry signs, triumphant as it were over darkness and death, the Sun then appears to bring back light and life to the world; and the God he symbolized seems to have been held entitled in return to a portion at least of the good things so obviously and immediately dependent on his presence. Hence the offerings in the spring of the year of the first fruits of the fields, the sacrifice of the firstlings of the flocks and herds, and at length, and as the influence of the offering on the God was believed to rise in the ratio of its worth to the giver, of the first-born of his sons by man—victim of all others the most precious to him, and so thought to be the most potent of all to propitiate the God.

The Passover may, therefore, have been truly a solar festival, and by no means peculiar to the Israelites?

The period of the year at which it was celebrated suffices of itself to proclaim it a feast in honour of the Sun, and the universality of its celebration over the whole of the ancient world shows that the Israelites only followed suit in its observance. But the great spring festival of the year has been obscured by the miraculous and mythical wrappings in which it has

been presented by the Jewish post-exilic Jehovistic writers, seeking to hide its meaning by turning this among other Pagan observances of their age and country into institutions appointed by their God Jehovah through the agency of his servant Moses.

The Jewish writers, however, are not even agreed as to the grounds they assign for the observance of the Passover ?

In one place it is to be kept as a memorial feast because the Israelites were spared the visit of the destroying angel when the first-born of Egypt were slain; in another it is to be observed in memory of their delivery from Egyptian bondage. But it was in the spring time of the year that the barley harvest of the East occurred; and with the bringing of the first sheaf as an offering to the Sun-God at the season of his awakening from his death-like wintry sleep, and the season of rejoicing then universally observed, was by and by associated the legendary escape in exaggerated numbers of the Israelites from Egypt and the veritable sacrifice of the first-born of their sons.

The Jewish Passover is often said to have been derived from the Egyptians ?

That the Israelites had various festivals in common with the Egyptians and other ancient peoples is certain. That they borrowed so much from Egypt as it is often said they did is very questionable. Such a conclusion would seem rather to be grounded on assuming the large amount of influence which a people so far advanced in civilisation as the Egyptians must have had on the rude descendants of Jacob, than on any strong resemblance between the social, political, and religious ideas and doings of the Egyptians and Israelites. To unprejudiced minds the Israelites, when they meet us on the eve of the Exodus, and for ages afterwards, appear as having profited so little by their contact with the Egyptians that additional doubt is thrown over the whole story of their relationship with

the land of the Nile. For some ages after the reputed epoch of the Exodus we never see the Israelites save as a horde in quest of a settled home, at war with all around them, and but little, if at all, removed from utter barbarism.

Having spoiled the Egyptians to the utmost of the borrowing and lending powers of the two parties, the Israelites set off, a mixed multitude with flocks and herds, "even very much cattle." We are not without data from which their aggregate number may be computed?

We have such in the "Six hundred thousand on foot that were men" (Ex. xii., 37); "six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty from twenty years old and upwards, all able to go forth to war in Israel." (Numb. i., 46.)

Such a number of able-bodied men, harnessed or armed, as said, implies a gross population approaching three millions of souls?

Something like that of the great city of London or the whole of Scotland a few years ago!

And this vast multitude quit their homes in a single night and betake themselves to the desert with no other preparation in the shape of supplies than the dough that is in their kneading troughs?

"They were thrust out of Egypt, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual." (Ex. xii., 39.)

Without a word of the first requisite for even a single day's journey in the burning desert—water?

There is nothing said about water.

What of the means of transport for the sick and infirm, who must have numbered ten thousand at least; for the three hundred women busy in bringing children into the world, and something like the same number of men and women going out of it—for so many are ever thus engaged in a population approaching three millions in number during each day of the year?

There is nothing said of the sick and infirm, of the parturient and the dying.

Then must the story in its proportions be a fable involving contradictions innumerable and impossibilities in the nature of things. The whole population of the valley of the Nile, from Nubia to the Mediterranean, did not probably at any time in its most palmy days of old amount to so many as the Israelites are said to have been when they *fled*, were *driven out*, or were *brought out from Egypt with a high hand*, so various are the words used in the accounts we have of the way in which the Exodus was effected. Six hundred thousand and odd able-bodied men with arms in their hands needed to have asked no leave of the Pharaoh of Egypt either to go or to stay. Instead of fleeing to the desert on the faith of promised settlements in a land, even though reported to be flowing with milk and honey, they would have been apt to think that the fertile land of Egypt, watered by the mysterious river which rose and fell no man knew how, was possession preferable and enough. Instead of consenting to the expulsion, they are allowed in more than one place to have suffered, from the soil where they had lived so long and grown to such a multitude, they would most assuredly have either expelled or enslaved where they had not slain their oppressors. Instead of robbing them of their jewels of silver and jewels of gold and fine raiment, and stealing away like thieves in the night, they would have installed themselves in their masters' places and taught them in turn what it was to make mud bricks without straw!

But this would have interfered with Jehovah's providential arrangements for the settlement of his chosen people in the land of Canaan?

The providence of God is over all his works indifferently and alike. God was then as now the Father of the Egyptian as of the Jew; more partial as parent

to the Egyptian than to the Jew, indeed, were his love to be truly tested by the Hebrew standard—the measure of temporal good enjoyed.

The Jews did not think, and have not yet learned to think, that God is verily the impartial parent of mankind ?

No ; they were, and still are, presumptuous enough to fancy themselves the objects of their Jehovah's peculiar care ; and the world may be said, in spite of its persistently cruel treatment of their race, to have been complacent enough to take them at their word. Lately, however, there has been something like an awakening out of this baseless dream ; a suspicion has at length got abroad in the world of the possibility of its having been mistaken. With the recent discovery of the Vedas and Zendavesta, the Buddhistic scriptures, and the Chinese moral writings, we have come to know that other more ancient, more moral and better policied peoples than the Israelites had also their sacred books, though none of them presume, as do those of this people, to make God the mouthpiece of some few good and reasonable, yet of many bad, barbarous, childish, objectionable, and indifferent ordinances, and the immediate agent in innumerable cruel and unjustifiable acts.

The Israelites, however, escape or are driven out of Egypt at last, and in such numbers, it is said, as plainly appears impossible. Have we any clue to the way in which the exaggerated multitude of the fugitives may have been arrived at ?

Curiously enough we have. In one of the latest Midraschim—Hebrew Commentaries or Expositions of the Law we possess (*Jalkut Thora*, 386), there is a passage to this effect : “ God said to Moses : Number the Israelites. Then said Moses : They are as the sands of the sea ; how can I number them ? God said : Not in the way thou thinkest of ; but wouldst thou reckon them, take the first letters of their tribes

and thou hast their number.”* And sure enough, if the numerical values of the initial letters of the names of the twelve tribes be added together, the sum that comes out is five hundred and ninety-seven thousand; to which if the three thousand slain on occasion of the worship of the golden calf which Aaron made be joined, the exact number of the men in arms, as first given, six hundred thousand, is obtained.

This, however, is not the only number of able-bodied men that is mentioned?

Elsewhere (Ex. xxxviii., 26, and Numb. i., 46) it is set down at “six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty men.”

There may perhaps be some recondite and not very obvious way in which this number too may have been arrived at?

It tallies exactly with the number of bekahs or half shekels said to have been produced by the capitation tax imposed for erecting and furnishing the Tabernacle. The whole amount collected is stated to have been 100 talents 1,775 shekels, = 301,775 shekels, which \times by two gives 603,550 shekels, the precise number of the able-bodied men of the second Census.†

Once on their way, whither do the Israelites go?

If it were towards the promised land they certainly took a very roundabout road to reach it. Elohim, it is said, led them not by the way through the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for Elohim said: “Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war and they return to Egypt.” Elohim therefore led them through the way of the Wilderness of the Red Sea, from Rameses, whence they set out, to Succoth and Etham in the edge of the Wilderness;

* Comp. ‘Popper Der biblische Bericht über die Stiftshütte; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Composition und Diaskeuse des Pentateuch.’ S. 196. 8vo. Leipz., 1862.

† ‘Popper.’ Op. cit. P. 196.

Jehovah (it is no longer Elohim) going before them as a pillar of cloud by day, as a pillar of fire by night to guide and light them on their way. But Moses must have thought that a native of the country would be a good addition as a guide through the trackless waste; he would not trust entirely to Jehovah's pillar of cloud and of fire—for he says to his brother-in-law, Hobab the Midianite: "Come thou with us; thou mayest be to us instead of eyes; and it shall come to pass, if thou wilt go with us, that what goodness Jehovah shall do unto us the same shall we do unto thee." (Numb. x., 29-32.)

Jehovah, we might have imagined, as miracles were so much in course, would have steeled the hearts of the Israelites and made the hearts of all opposed to them like wax, as he is said to have done on other and later occasions. Why he did not see fit so to do at this time, when it would have spared so much toil and suffering, we are not informed. But where are the places mentioned—Rameses, Succoth, and Etham?

Rameses, a town and district on the Nile; Succoth, a station (now unknown), presumably northward from Rameses, in the direction of Palestine; Etham, a place east from Rameses, between thirty and forty miles away, and not far from the northern extremity of the western head of the Red Sea. Instead of advancing from this, however, and nearing their final destination, the Israelites are strangely enough now ordered to turn and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon on the opposite coast.

What extraordinary reason is given for this divergent course, and, in the event of any pursuit by the Egyptians, ill-chosen position in a strategical point of view?

It was, according to the text, that Jehovah might get him honour on Pharaoh and let the Egyptians know that he was the Lord. "For Pharaoh will say

of the children of Israel: They are entangled in the land—the wilderness hath shut them in; and I will harden the heart of Pharaoh that he shall follow after them, and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh and upon all his host.”

Pharaoh pursues the fugitives, to bring them back we must presume, though he and his had lately been so eager to be rid of them. They are sore afraid when they see his host behind them, and turn upon Moses and reproach him for having led them out of their bondage. “Were there no graves in Egypt, say they, that thou hast taken us away to die in the Wilderness? Better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the Wilderness.”

But Moses encourages the faint-hearted crew?

He bids them not to fear; for Jehovah shall fight for them. He has but to lift up his rod and stretch out his hand towards the neighbouring sea to have its waters divide and part asunder, so that the people shall go through on dry ground. “And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians,” the narrative proceeds, Jehovah himself being now brought in as speaker, “and they shall follow after; and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh and his host and his chariots and his horsemen; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.”

The pillar of cloud which had hitherto headed the column of fugitives is made to interpose between them and their pursuers at this point?

It moves most accommodatingly from the front to the rear, coming between the camp of the Israelites and that of the Egyptians, and as there was now an opportunity for another miracle, or violation of a physical law, we are told that, “Whilst it was a cloud of light to the fugitives, it was a cloud of darkness to the pursuers, so that the one came not near the other all night.”

And Moses—?

Stretches out his hand over the sea, and it is driven back by a strong east wind which blew all night, so that the children of Israel advanced on dry land, "the waters being as a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left."

A wind of the sort, however, would not have piled the waters of the Red Sea to the right and left, but have swept them clean away?

It would had it blown hard enough; so that the writer had better have left all to the magic rod, and not had recourse to any natural agency that would have failed of the effect described.

The Egyptians pursue?

As arranged by the narrator—"Even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen into the midst of the sea."

Jehovah now interferes actively?

"Looking out through the pillar of cloud and fire in the morning watch, he troubles their host; and takes off their chariot wheels, so that they drave heavily!" And now had the moment for the discomfiture and destruction of the enemy arrived: "Stretch out thine hand over the sea," says the revengeful man speaking in the name of his God, "that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians!" "And the sea," it is said, "returned in his strength and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh: there remained not one of them."

The great work of immediate deliverance and destruction thus accomplished—?

Moses and the children of Israel sing a grand song of triumph to Jehovah; and Miriam the Prophetess, the sister of Aaron, and all the women, with timbrels in their hands and with dances, answer them in chorus: "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Though we miss any word of thanksgiving for their deliverance by the Israelites in this song of triumph, we meet with phrases that point conclusively to the late period of its composition; for we discover that the people have been already "guided in the strength of the Lord to his holy habitation;" the meaning of which is that they are dwelling in the city of Jerusalem conquered by King David from the Jebusites, and having the Temple on Mount Moriah built by King Solomon as the habitation of their God. And we see farther that the peoples of Palestine, the Dukes of Edom, the mighty princes of Moab, and the natives of Canaan, have all already had cause "for trembling and amazement," according to the words of the poem.

What in brief may be said of the account we have of the Exodus from Egypt?

That the story in so far as the accessories are concerned—the serpent charming, the river turned into blood, the frogs, the gnats or lice, the flies and the locusts—must be the work of a writer who had some acquaintance with Egypt and its natural history: the river in the beginning of the inundation coming down of a red colour; frogs abounding in a land so thoroughly irrigated as Egypt; gnats and flies swarming at particular seasons of the year, and locusts invading occasionally and devouring all before them. The thunder and lightning and hail, though not impossible, must still have been extremely rare in Egypt. The receding of the Red Sea from its northern shores, moreover, by the action of the tides, was known to the writer. At complete ebb the sea became fordable (or was so before the cutting of the Great Canal) for a short time, twice in the twenty-four hours, at the new and full of the moon. The writer used facts in the natural history of Egypt in his narrative; but possessed of a love of the marvellous and a fine spirit of exaggeration, he has turned

the natural into the supernatural, and, it may be, the actual into the impossible, for the purpose of displaying the power of his God Jehovah, not only over the Gods of the Egyptians, but over the domain of the true God—the world and the laws that inhere in it, and all to favour the escape of a party of thankless slaves from their fetters !

Is it either reasonable or reverent to think of God “getting him honour” by the destruction of the beings who can only have come into existence through conformity with his natural laws ?

It is both against reason and reverential feeling to entertain such thoughts of God.

Or to hold that the men were inspired by God who formed such ideas of his nature and attributes, as the words they presume to ascribe to him, and the acts they make him do, proclaim them to have entertained ?

It is not merely unreasonable, but verily impious to believe that they were.

Or that they could have been inspired by the holy spirit of truth associate with knowledge, who make God say at one time that he brought the Israelites out of Egypt with a high hand, and at another, that they were driven out of the land after having been ordered by their Deity to rob the natives of their jewels of silver and jewels of gold and fine raiment ?

Inspiration from God can only be fitly spoken of as coming through the mind of man, and in harmony with the right and the reasonable in his nature, never with the irrational in thought and the reprehensible in deed.

Or that between the dusk and the dawn, a population approaching three millions in number, with flocks and herds innumerable, could have crossed an arm of the sea, were it but a mile in breadth, laid dry by the receding tide for half-an-hour or less ?

The thing is physically, and so absolutely, impossible.

Pharaoh and his host effectually disposed of, the Israelites we must presume will now proceed on their way towards the land reported as flowing with milk and honey ?

Most singular to say, however, they do not ; they even turn clean away from it, advance along the eastern shore of the Red Sea towards the southern extremity of the Sinaitic peninsula and come, it is said, into the wilderness of Shur.

Where is Shur ?

Not where the Israelites could have been at this time, if it was on the way to Shur that Hagar was found by the Angel of Jehovah when she had been so ruthlessly driven from his tent by Abraham, then encamped in the land of Canaan. The desert of Shur is on the east side of the Dead Sea towards its northern extremity.

The first stage of the fugitive Israelites after leaving Rameses is farther said to have been Succoth. Succoth, we should consequently conclude, must be within an easy march of Rameses ?

Yet the only Succoth of which we read elsewhere in the Old Testament is the one to which Jacob came on his way from Mahanaim after his interview with his brother Esau, Lord of Seir, in Moab, some hundreds of miles away from Rameses in Egypt and the Red Sea. It is, therefore, impossible that the children of Israel could have reached the Succoth and Shur mentioned in the histories of Abraham and Jacob ; and as neither desert nor camping place is known on the borders of Egypt by these names, the only conclusion possible is, that the redactor of the part of the Pentateuch which now engages us must have had two documents before him, severally detailing incidents pertaining to different periods in the earlier nomadic wanderings of the Hebrews in search of better feeding grounds or more settled homes. The confusion in the account of the Exodus as we

have it, and the impossibility of following the Israelites in their course by the names of the stations or camping places given, has even led to the suggestion that the *Misir*, translated *Egypt*, from which they are described as having escaped was not the Misr of the Nile, but an outlying district of Phœnicia called Goshen (see Josh. x., 41 and xi., 16), in which they had been slaves; and farther, that the sea they are said to have crossed dry-shod was not the Red Sea at all, but an inland lake characterised in the original as the reedy, rushy, or sedgy sea (*Schilf Meere*, DeWette), a title totally inapplicable to the briny Arabian Gulf on whose shores reed or rush never grew.*

The Israelites, however, in the account we possess, have made great speed in reaching the east coast of the Red Sea after quitting Rameses in Egypt?

They seem to have spent but a few days—three days?—if we may judge by the narrative, in getting thus far.

What is the distance from Rameses to Suez on the western head of the Red Sea?

About thirty-five English miles.

How long would it take a column of men, women, and children, approaching three millions in number, burthened with all their belongings in the shape of furniture, baggage, tents for shelter, &c. &c., to say nothing of sick and infirm, hampered besides by numerous flocks and herds, to march in the most perfect order—impossibility under the circumstances indicated—from the borders of Egypt to the coast of the Red Sea?

A satisfactory answer will be found in the Bishop of Natal's exhaustive work, 'The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua.' Very many days, at all events—if not even weeks, or, by possibility, months!

* Vide 'Radenhausen, Die Bibel wider die Glaube.' 8vo. Hamb., 1865. Also 'Goethe: Zum West-Ostlichen Divan; Israel in der Wüste,' Bd. vi., S. 158 Stuttg. and Tubing, 1828.

Yet the Exodus is said to have been effected in the course of a single night ?

Between midnight and the next morning, as we read the account ; Etham, on the coast of the Red Sea, being reached by the following day at farthest ; how much longer it was before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, was attained we do not learn.

Surely this was impossible ?

On natural grounds certainly. But the process of evacuation is to be seen as it presented itself to, or rather as it was elicited from, the writer's imagination—viz., as miraculous ; which, being interpreted, means against nature, therefore against God, and so impossible. For, with our faith in the changeless laws of nature, expressions, as we perforce apprehend them, of the power and attributes of God, we acknowledge no reported interferences with the necessities they impose as other than fables devised by ignorance in view of particular ends—the end in the case before us being to show forth the superiority of the Jewish God Jehovah over the Gods of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and the peculiar favour in which he held the children of Israel.

What befalls the fugitives next ?

They come to Marah, where the water is found so bitter that it cannot be drunk, and the people murmur against their leader.

But the bitterness of the water is said to have been removed or remedied ?

Jehovah is said to have showed Moses a tree, which, being cast into the water, made it sweet.

Does the knowledge we now possess of the chemical nature of the salts which cause brackishness in water, and of the principles which give plants their special properties, warrant us in believing that any tree grows, or did ever grow, capable of neutralising or eliminating the alkaline and earthy chlorides and sulphates which commonly embitter and make water undrinkable ?

It does not. On the contrary it enables us to speak positively, and to say that no such tree did ever grow or could ever have grown. Distillation alone is competent to make bitter or brackish water sweet and wholesome; and the art of distillation, though it came from Arabia, could hardly have been known in the days of Moses and Aaron, or, if it were, it is not said, at all events, that it was called into requisition.

The Israelites next reach Elim, where there are said to be twelve wells, and threescore and ten palm-trees. Suppose a mixed multitude of nearly three millions of men, women, and children—to say nothing of cattle—how many would there be to a well?

Two hundred and fifty thousand.

And if thirty of these may be supposed to have drunk in the course of every hour of the twenty-four, and each to have had access to the well twice a day, how long would it be before all could have quenched their thirst?

A very long time—the reader who is curious to *know* the exact number of hours, days, weeks, months, and years may amuse himself by making the calculation.

And reasonable men are still asked to give credit to so impossible a tale as that of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt—that some two and a-half or three millions of men, women, and children, several thousands of sick, infirm, parturient, dying, and dead, besides vast herds of kine, sheep, and goats, left their homes in a single night and subsisted for forty years in a desert that does not furnish food for the four thousand souls with a few camels and goats who now possess it?

They are, indeed, and have it propounded to them as part of a revelation from the God of Reason for their guidance in learning to know something of him

and the nature of his agency in the world they inhabit.

Does not the exaggeration in regard to the numbers of the Israelites who leave Egypt find its corrective subsequently ?

Elsewhere we learn that the Israelites were not chosen by Jehovah "because they were more in number than any people, for they were *the fewest of all people*;" and truly when the history of the tribe is perused with unbiassed mind, such an indifferent reason is seen to be as good as, or possibly better than, any other that could be given for the choice—all things else considered. The population of Palestine—Phœnicians, Syrians, Edomites, Moabites, Israelites, &c., did not at any time of old amount to the numbers said to have left Egypt under the leadership of Moses in a single night.*

The palm-trees need not detain us, for, as the Exode is said to have taken place in the spring of the year, their fruit could not have been ripe; and had it been so, what would the fruit of threescore-and-ten palm-trees have been among three millions of hungry human beings, the produce of each tree having to be divided between 42,857 mouths! Food, as well as water, failing, and supplies being indispensable, how says the record they were furnished?

Flesh meat by means of a flight of quails which

* An excellent authority estimates the population of Palestine never to have exceeded two millions (Movers 'Die Phœnizier,' B. ii., S. 303); and the inhabitants of the Sinaitic Peninsula, in which the children of Israel, approaching three millions in number, are said to have wandered and found subsistence for themselves and flocks for forty years, do not now, and probably never did, exceed four thousand souls, who are not even dependent on the produce of the land for their means of living, but on the wages they earn in forwarding merchandise and travellers through the desert they inhabit; food and necessaries of every kind reaching them from Egypt and Palestine. See Robinson's 'Travels in Palestine.'

covered the camp, and bread by a fall of manna from the skies. Of the latter every man was to gather, or to have gathered for him, an omer by measure. Did he gather more on any working day, it was found next day to stink and to have bred worms; but, that wonders might not cease, and as it was unlawful in the writer's mind to do any work on the Sabbath, two omers were to be gathered on the preceding day, and the one reserved was found to keep sweet and good, as if there had been a preservative or antiseptic quality in the air of the Sabbath.

There was also an omer ordered to be gathered and kept for a memorial and a witness to coming generations of the wonderful way in which the chosen people had been fed in the Wilderness. This omer of manna, like that gathered on the eve of the Sabbath, was also miraculously preserved from stinking and breeding worms, and is ordered to be laid up first before Jehovah—the Lord (xvi., 33), and then before the Eduth—the Testimony (*Ib.*, 34).

What may the object be which is thus designated indifferently Jehovah and Eduth?

The Hebrew word Eduth, here met with for the first time and translated Testimony with us, is commonly understood to signify the Law or Tables of the Law. But the Law had not yet been delivered to Moses; the stones on which it was written were still in the quarry, and the ark in which it was kept was in the tree, so that the word Eduth must mean something other than the Law, though it may have the sense of Testimony.

The literal meaning of the Hebrew word Eduth might lead us to the sense in which it is here used?

The word among other meanings implies *brightness*, and as the type of all splendour is the Sun, and the Sun was the chief God of all the ancient peoples, so the Eduth has been held by some learned mythologists to signify either an Image of the Sun-God, or

a Symbol of the Deity in one of his most notable attributes.

Is there anything in the Hebrew Scriptures that countenances such an interpretation ?

Hadad, Hadod, or Adod was a Phœnician name for the Sun-God ; and the passage from this to Edud or Eduth is easy. Jehovah, in the text quoted above, is spoken of by the name of Eduth, and Eduth is used as synonymous with Jehovah.*

Journeying through the Wilderness of Sin there is no water, and the people chide with Moses for bringing them out of the land of Egypt to kill them and their children and their cattle with thirst in the desert. This gives occasion to another great miracle ?

To the notable one, so much made of by painters and poets in later times, where Moses strikes the rock with his wonder-working rod, and water flows for the people to drink.

What are we to think of this ?

As of the *report* of a miracle, *i.e.*, a statement implying contravention of an eternal and changeless Law of God.

No more possible therefore than that a touch of the same rod could have turned the water of the Nile into blood and the dust of the ground into gnats or lice ?

Certainly not ; unless we are prepared to give up our trust in the changeless nature of God and his Laws, and to live in a state of chaos in which, as the poet has it : " Function is swallowed in surmise and nothing is but what is not."

Does not the mention of a Wilderness of Sin and a Meribah, or bitter well, in connection with the early tale of the Exodus and the southern extremity of the Sinaitic peninsula, arouse suspicions of the trustworthiness of the record ?

* See, farther on, what is said about the contents of the Sacred Arks or Coffers of the Ancients.

It certainly does so, coming as we do by and by upon a Wilderness of Sin and a Meribah on the borders of Palestine, when the spies are sent out by Moses to report on the land,—the long-looked for goal of all the desert toils.

Passing over this difficulty, ascribable to the writer having different documents before him and drawing from one or other without critical tact or discrimination, we find that the Israelites as they advance come in contact with some of the desert-dwelling tribes by whom they are met and opposed?

And first by the Amaleks in Rephidim, against whom Joshua as Captain is ordered out, whilst Moses with the rod of God in his hand takes his stance on a hill overlooking the field. "And it came to pass," says the story, "when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed."

Observing this, what do Aaron and Hur who have conveniently accompanied the leader to the hill-top?

They set him on a stone, and one on either side stayed up his hands until the discomfiture of Amalek, which was only completed with the going down of the sun.

Can we conceive any connection between a rod in the hand of a man on a hill-top and the success of one of the parties engaged in a skirmish on the plain below?

It is impossible to imagine any: force is force, and courage is courage, and the greater force and the greater courage by the law of necessity, which is ever the law of God, prevail over the less: the Israelites, braver, more numerous, better armed or better led, defeated the Amalekites.

What does Moses after the battle?

He builds an altar and calls it by the name of Jahveh-Nissi, not in thankfulness for his victory, however, but because "Jehovah hath sworn that he will

have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

Is this, according to our modern notions, a seemly oath to have been ascribed to God ?

To God, conceived of as the impartial parent of the universe, and in the light of the ideas of our day, it certainly is not ; though it perfectly accords with such notions of Deity as might be entertained by a presumptuous, barbarous, cruel, and ignorant people, or of a later writer, with a dramatic turn of mind, throwing himself into the ideas and feelings of his rude progenitors.

The name which Moses gives his altar has a singular affinity with that of one of the principal Gods of the ancient world ?

Jahveh-Nissi is not far from Jao-Nissi (Ja or Jao, being the name of a Phœnician deity), nor this from Dio-nissi or Dionysos, the God of fertility and increase of the Greeks and other ancient peoples. The Israelites, with all their exclusiveness, cannot be supposed to have remained through the whole of their history uninfluenced by surrounding nations—Phœnicians, Egyptians, Assyrians, and Medo-Persians, their predecessors in civilisation and so much better policed and more powerful than themselves.

Moses is now visited by Jethro his father-in-law, who brings him his wife and children ?

He is ; and in the interlude here introduced we meet with another of those simply natural and purely human incidents artistically used which lend so many parts of the mythical and legendary history of the Hebrews the charm and imposing aspect of reality. Jethro or Reuel, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, hearing of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, takes Zipporah, Moses' wife, and her two sons, and with them comes to him in the Wilderness where he was encamped by Horeb the Mount of God ; and says to him : “ I, thy father-in-

law Jethro, am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her." "And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent."

Jethro tenders his son-in-law some sensible advice?

"Now I know," says he, "that Jahveh is greater than all the Gods; for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them." But Jethro sees that no single man can do the whole of the work which Moses has imposed on himself, sitting from morning until evening with the people standing about him, judging between them and making them to know the statutes of God and his laws. "This thing," says he, "is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. Now hearken to my voice. Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God; but provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them, to rule them and to judge them at all seasons; and it shall be that every great matter they shall bring to thee, but every small matter they shall judge; so shall it be easier for thyself, and thou shalt be able to endure."

Moses hearkens to Jethro's reasonable counsels?

He does, and in so doing shows us that all is not effected by immediate divine agency and miraculous means in this legendary narrative. Jethro's interference here, however, may fairly be held to be impertinent. A God-commissioned man must be presumed competent for every emergency and neither to need nor to take advice from another. In hearkening to Jethro Moses descends from his eminence as Envoy and Agent of his God, and so brings suspicion on all that is ascribed to him as leader of the children of Israel. Jethro, a Midianitish priest, has a clearer vision of human capabilities than Moses himself, the chosen of Jehovah. But the recommendation of

Jethro is by a modern writer, and is inserted in this place to countenance a favourite assumption of the later Jews that their Sanhedrim dates as an Institution from even so far back as the age of Moses !

Having now—a few weeks we must presume—after quitting Egypt, come to the desert of Sinai and pitched before the mountain, God, it is said, calls to Moses therefrom, bids him remind the people of all that had already been done for them, and say that if they will obey the voice of Jehovah and keep his covenant, they shall be a peculiar treasure to him above all people, —a kingdom of priests and a holy nation ?

Promises greatly calculated to foster pride and exclusiveness as regards themselves, contempt, hate, and uncharitableness as regards other peoples, to give a colour, moreover, to proceedings for which rapine and murder are the only appropriate names.

The people on their part declare their readiness to obey in all things ?

Of course they do ; the people are ever as ready to pledge their word as they are careless to keep it. Not Moses only but Jahveh-Elohim himself, according to the record, had at all times a heavy handful in trying to keep the wayward and stiff-necked people they had led out of Egypt in something like order, a task, indeed, in which it may be said that neither God nor man ever completely succeeded, as we shall find in the course of our exposition.

A great event is now impending and an imposing prelude is required ?

What is called the delivery of the Law from Sinai, preceded by injunctions for the people to sanctify themselves, to wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day, when Jehovah will come down in sight of all the congregation on Mount Sinai.

This great event takes place ?

Wrapt about by a thick cloud, amidst thunder and lightning and trumpet sounds exceeding loud,

Jehovah *comes down*, as said, and Mount Sinai is "altogether on a smoke, and quakes greatly, because Jehovah descends in fire." After the trumpet has sounded long and waxed ever louder and louder—by whom it was blown we do not learn—Jehovah speaks to Moses by a voice, and calls him up to the top of the Mount. There he is ordered to go down and charge the people that they break not through and many of them perish; he and Aaron are alone to come up; the people and the priests—of whom we have heard nothing till now—are not even to set foot on the sacred mountain, "lest Jehovah break out on them."

This is a strange materialistic exhibition and derogatory statement to be connected with the supersensuous, ubiquitous power conceived by civilised man as Immanent Cause in Nature, and by us in these parts personified and called God?

Of whom as one and sole in any sense now understood, in spite of all that has been said to the contrary, the Hebrew people until a very late period in their history had not a notion. The representation here is only in harmony with the jealous, irascible, partial, and ruthless human impersonation of the greatest among the Gods, their own peculiar God who, until after the era of the kings and the captivities, they continued to apprehend under various names at different times—Chiun, Chamos, El-Schaddai, Isra-El, &c., to whom they gave the title of Melek—King, turned into Moloch, the God to whom they sacrificed the first-born of their sons and their cattle, and who was in truth no other than the Kronos or Saturn of neighbouring cognate tribes and peoples.

The people and *the priests*, it is said, are not to set foot on the mountain, lest Jehovah break out on them and consume them?

We have as yet had no intimation of the existence of *priests* among the Israelites. Aaron is still no

more than the subordinate of Moses, though his brother, and no priest as the word came afterwards to be understood. The mention of priests is consequently a slip of the pen of the late compiler of this part of the Pentateuch.

The thundering, smoking, quaking, and trumpet sounds having ceased, the delivery of the Decalogue or Ten Commandments follows?

Prefaced by the important announcement that "God spake these words saying: I am Jehovah thy God, thou shalt have no other Gods before me."

What is to be understood by the words: "God spake?"

"When God is described as speaking to man," says a learned and pious divine, "He does so in the only way in which He who is a Spirit can speak to one encompassed with flesh and blood; not to the outward organs of sensation, but to the intelligence that is kindred to himself."* Not in human language, consequently, as if God were a man, having the parts essential to articulate utterance, but by and through the mind of man, whose activities, aroused by impressions from without, and as emotions and thoughts proceeding from within, find expression by the instrumentality of his vocal organs in words as various as the races that people the earth.

The Decalogue is generally associated in a more especial manner with the name of Moses?

It has long been customary so to connect it. By the concurring testimony of the scholar and critic, however, the Decalogue has of late been recognised as an Eclectic Summary made in times

* Davidson (S.), D.D., 'Intro. to Old Test.,' I., 233. See also our 'Dialogue by way of Catechism,' pt. I., p. 13. It is strange and unaccountable to us to find Spinoza saying that he thinks it was by a "*real voice* that God revealed to Moses the Laws he desired should be given to the Jews." Tract. Theologico-Politicus, pp. 34 and 38, English Version.

very much later than the age of Moses, and only derived in part from the earlier documents that underlie the Pentateuch in its present form. A little study and reflection indeed suffice to show the ordinary reader, that the Decalogue in the compact form in which it meets us in Exodus (xx., 1-17) must be the work of a relatively modern hand. Some of the ordinances here artistically grouped have no bearing on the concerns of a tribe but just escaped from slavery and wandering in the Wilderness as Nomads. Several of them again exist among a great variety of others that are often not only objectionable, but indecent, or positively iniquitous in character, scattered throughout the next two or three chapters of the Book, which have an unmistakable air of much higher antiquity than the first seventeen verses of the twentieth chapter, and give us glimpses of a state of things among the early Hebrews that is never suspected when the polished summary presented under the ten heads of the Decalogue is alone considered.

The Decalogue being held of such high significance, everything connected with its delivery, we are to presume, must be beyond the sphere of question or of doubt ?

Unfortunately this is not the case. The original delivery of the Ten Commandments is not connected with any tables of stone on which they are subsequently said to have been written ; they are delivered *vivâ voce* by Jehovah himself amid thunder and lightning, and it is not until we come to the twenty-fourth chapter that we meet with a word about Tables of the Testimony, interpreted as Tables of the Law, which are ordered to be laid up in the Ark of the Covenant. By and by again, when we hear of two Tables of Testimony having been given to Moses (xxxii., 18), their contents are not specified ; and the account in the next succeeding chapter (xxxiii., 15, 16),

where two Tables of Testimony are again spoken of, leads to the idea that it must have been some more lengthy document than the Decalogue that was engraved upon them; for they are now said to have been written on both their sides by the finger of God,—a fact, however, if it could by possibility have been a fact, of which the writer could by no possibility have known anything. It is not in fine until we come to the thirty-fourth chapter that the words said to have been in the first Tables are promised to be rewritten in the second: “Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first which thou brakedst,” says the writer in the name of Jehovah.

We have no absolute assurance consequently as to the contents of these Tables of the Testimony?

None whatever. For when we look on to the fourteenth and following verses of the thirty-fourth chapter, we find several of the Commandments included among the ten side by side with a number of others, which are not there to be found. Here the text runs thus in brief: “Thou shalt worship no other Gods, for Jehovah is a jealous God; thou shalt not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and go a whoring after their Gods; thou shalt not take of their daughters to thy sons; thou shalt make thee no molten Gods; the feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep; all that openeth the matrix is mine; six days shalt thou work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest; thou shalt observe the feast of weeks; thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before Jehovah Elohim, the Elohim of Israel; thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven; the first fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of Jehovah thy God; thou shalt not see the kid in its mother’s milk.” This enumeration of acts to be done and left undone concludes with these

words: "And Jehovah said unto Moses, write thou these words, for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he, Moses, was with Jehovah forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water; and he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments." Besides the change in the *Tenor* of the words as here delivered, we have, therefore, Moses as the writer and not Jehovah, in opposition to the statement elsewhere made. The confusion that reigns in connection with the delivery of the Decalogue points not only to a variety of hands engaged on the text, but to much uncertainty of the commandments that were really at different times comprised in the summary. Each writer doubtless followed the tradition of his day or of his ken; and would have his readers infer, as he himself believed, that something in the shape of the then accredited Decalogue was that which was engraved upon the stone tables.

So much of the thirty-fourth chapter as refers to the Decalogue has a marked paraphrastic and supplementary look about it?

It certainly has. But it is not the only chapter bearing on the Decalogue that meets us in the same way; for, turning to the nineteenth of Leviticus, we find a repetition in varied terms of many of the old ordinances, with sundry additions, some of them, in all probability, from an ancient document, but others unmistakably from one of the most modern of all the editors of the Pentateuch.

The late writer of the Book of Deuteronomy, however, says positively that the tables were inscribed with the Ten Commandments, and the still more recent writer of the Books of the Kings (I. Kings, viii., 7-9) informs us that when the Ark of the Covenant was "brought into its place under the wings of the Cherubim" within the Temple of Solomon, "the two

tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb" were still to be seen. As this must have been done hard upon five hundred years before the writer's day (he having lived some time after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar), and he shows himself familiar with the Mosaic Saga, he can only be held as giving expression to the popular belief; and elsewhere we learn that when the ark was examined at a later period it was found empty; the mythical stone tables writ by the finger of God, had they ever been there, as well as everything else,—the *Agalma tou Theou*, &c., which we believe had been there, had disappeared.

Looking narrowly into these Ten Commandments, of which so much is made, we ask first on what authority they rest?

On that of the immediate spoken word of God, says the text. "Elohim spake these words," is preface to the first of the versions we have of them (Ex. xx.); "These words Jehovah spake," is the introduction to the second (Deut. v.). But we have determined the sense in which these statements can alone be taken: they are the utterances of men, not the words of God; for God never speaks, and never spoke in words to man.

The two versions, we must presume, will be found to agree?

In every essential particular they do, save one: the reason given for the observance of the seventh day of the week as a Sabbath or day of rest.

The religious sense, the moral sense, and the reason of man we may farther presume will be efficiently met and appealed to in the ordinances of the Decalogue?

Inasmuch as with a single exception they are entirely *negative* in their character, the important elements in the nature of man now named may be said to be left uncared for. The entire domain of

u/ Deity, or of acts to be done, is untouched in the Decalogue, and reason and intelligence are left wholly out of the question.

The words, "I am Jehovah thy God," meet us at the very outset as an announcement that could fitly have come from the tutelary God of the Jews only ?

And never from the God of humanity at large. The next clause again, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me," was assuredly not wanted; for there are no other Gods, but One God only; a truth, however, which the writer could not have known, or he would have guarded himself from speaking as he does.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath; thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them, for I Jehovah am a jealous God."

The writer makes God speak in terms of his own apprehension, little dreaming that the heaven *above* him *now* became a heaven *below* him *by and by*! The injunction here is obviously enough directed against practices long familiar to the countrymen of the writer, and still followed in the late times in which he lived. Through by far the greater part of their history the Hebrews were mere idolaters; they made images of the sun and moon, and of their own peculiar star Baal-Chiun (Saturn); they burned incense, and poured out drink offerings to the Queen of Heaven (the Moon), as their fathers, their kings, their chiefs, and they themselves had done in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem; and they had had plenty to eat, and were well, and saw no evil so long as they continued to do so. "But since we left off to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings to her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by famine; and as to the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of Jehovah, we will

not hearken unto thee," say the people in reply to Jeremiah's exhortation to them to forsake the Queen of Heaven and their other Gods for Jehovah (Comp. Jerem. xlv., 15-19).* The Hebrews undoubtedly worshipped many Gods, even into late periods of their history, and under a variety of emblems, from the unhewn stone block to the sculptured column; from figures of the Serpent and the Tree, to those of the Bull, the Goat, and, we may safely conclude, the nobler image in human form enthroned between the Cherubim upon the mercy-seat, and present as part of the furniture of every house under the title of Teraphim or Ephod.

Observing such discrepancy between commandment and practice, it is not easy to conceive the writings in which the Commandments are set forth as being in any sense inspired by God, or as dating from any remote period, such as the age of Moses?

God trusts his eternal ordinances neither to stone, to parchment, nor to paper, but implants them in the nature of things and the mind of man.

We should conclude, then, against the *inspiration* of which these disjointed, mythical, legendary, and contradictory Hebrew records are held up as evidence?

And say that it had no existence out of the imagination of those who proclaim it.

Moses could then have been no God-inspired man?

Had he been so, the writings ascribed to him could be none of his. Of the life and laws of Moses we have, in fact, but "a few scattered and unconnected

* "Is it not," says Professor Dozy, "as if we had here the Romans speaking in times when the Empire had become the prey of the Barbarians? For to the neglect of the Old Religion they, too, ascribed all the misfortunes that had come upon them; Christianity, in their opinion, being to blame for the disruption of the State, which the Old Gods had so well and truly protected."—Dozy, 'Die Israel. zu Mekka,' 162.

fragments; and even these, for the most part, obscured and altered by the tamperings of later times."* The idolatry that prevailed through the period of the Judges, and for ages after this, suffices to prove that the Commandment against making and worshipping graven images is of relatively modern date.

Jehovah is made to announce himself as "a jealous God"—and we naturally ask of what in heaven or earth might God, body and soul of the universe in one, be jealous?

Of other Gods, doubtless, according to the Jehovistic writer whose work we have before us. Of them, indeed, might the Jewish Jehovah well be jealous, for his service was constantly deserted for theirs,—was never popular, indeed, until more than one of the few pious and respectable kings ever boasted by Judah had lived and died, and the country, at war with itself, was verging to its fall.

"Visiting the iniquities of the fathers on the third and fourth generation"—proceeds the tale.

But God does not visit the sins of parents upon children in any sense intended in the text, a truth which a later writer than the compiler of the Decalogue, and at variance with him, announced when he said: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." (Deut. xxiv., 16.)

"Showing mercy to thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments."

Surely God is merciful to all who study to know and faithfully obey his laws, written as they are, and far more at large, in the great open book of Nature

* "Profecto non nisi fragmenta Vitæ et Legum Mosis supersunt pauca, dissipata disjectaque, et hæc ipsa pleraque temporum seriorum injuria denuo obscurata et turbata."—Ewald, in 'Comm. Soc. Gotting,' vol. viii., p. 176.

than in the Hebrew of Exodus or Deuteronomy; even as they who know them not, or knowing who neglect them, assuredly bring penalties upon themselves.

“Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain.”

The name of their God Jehovah was held of such sanctity by the Jews in later times that they believed it could not be spoken by man without sin. The high priest alone was authorised to utter it aloud, and that once only in the course of the year, on the great day of atonement. It is to enforce this usage that we have the story of the man born of an Israelitish mother by an Egyptian father stoned to death for having blasphemed the name of Jehovah—by which we are to understand nothing more than having dared to take the sacred name into his unhallowed lips (Levit. xxiv., 10-14). The verses here are plainly interpolated, and the text of verse sixteen that follows has been tampered with. In reading the scriptures aloud the NAME was at all other times either *slurred* so as to be inarticulate, or a *title* was substituted for it, Adonai,—Lord, being the one that first came into use, though this, too, was by and by esteemed so holy that it must not be pronounced articulately. Ha Schem—the name—is the word that is now spoken in the synagogue instead of either Jahveh or Adonai.

“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (‘as Jehovah thy God hath commanded thee,’” adds the Deuteronomist, referring doubtless to the text of Exodus); “six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of Jehovah thy God, in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter,” &c. And here occurs the important difference between the texts of Exodus and Deuteronomy:—“In six days,” says the former, “Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea

and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; *wherefore* Jehovah blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." "Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence . . . *therefore* Jehovah thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day," says the latter. The reasons given for the observance of the seventh day as a day of rest are as plainly at variance with one another as the writers of the several texts are seen to be at a loss for any reason for the Sabbath observance that might prove entirely satisfactory. The late writer of Deuteronomy may have seen the absurdity of having God, like a man foredone with the labour of six days, resting on the seventh day; and so have shifted the ground for its special observance from God to the Exodus. A priest, he may farther have seen that men might possibly be better kept to the religious observances enjoined them, and so made more submissive, by having these relegated to one day of the week rather than spread over the seven. The Semitic races do not appear, like the Aryans, to have held each day of the week dedicated to a particular divinity—the first to the Sun, Sunday, the second to the Moon, Monday, &c. But their seventh day has, nevertheless, the same significance as the Saturn's day of the Phœnicians, Greeks, and Romans, even as their Chiun, El, Bel, Baal, Ja, and Jahveh have their type in the Kronos-Saturnus so familiar to us through our classical studies. The planet Saturn was THE STAR of the Hebrew people, and to the God it typified also belonged the seventh day of the week. The Sabbath, however, may be said to have lost its religious significance when God was conceived of as ONE and SOLE, when all days were declared to be alike in his sight—as most assuredly they are—and when charity between those who thought one day holier than another and those who looked on all days as holy alike came to be enjoined.

Is it not likely that neither in the Decalogue of Exodus nor of Deuteronomy have we the *Originals* of the Ten Commandments?

It is not only likely, but may be said to be certain that we have not. The Decalogue, as already said, is an eclectic summary by a late writer of certain ordinances scattered among many others over the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, which he held of the highest import and significance. The Commandment concerning the Sabbath, in particular, is to be met with as often as three times in different chapters of Exodus, in close proximity with the one which contains the Decalogue, and in what may be safely assumed as earlier forms than that in which it meets us there. "Six days shalt thou work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest," says the text, that is probably the earliest of any (Exodus xxxiv., 21). "Six days shalt thou do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest, that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid [concubine] and the stranger [slave] may be refreshed," says another version, somewhat amplified and having a purely human motive for the observance of the day appended (Exodus xxii., 12). "Six days may work be done, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, . . . for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed," says the one that appears to be followed most closely in the Decalogue (Exodus xxxi., 15-17). Such are the different forms in which the *order*, as well as the *reason* for observing the seventh day of the week as a day of rest are delivered, the last quoted being in all likelihood from the hand that gave the Commandments final shape in the Decalogue of Exodus.

Have we any clue to the probable composer of the Decalogue?

In him the lynx-eyed criticism of modern times thinks it sees the writer to whom so much of the

Pentateuch in its present shape can be fairly ascribed —“Ezra the Priest, the Scribe, even a *scribe of the words of the Commandments of Jehovah and of his statutes to Israel.*”*

With the final triumph of Jehovism, the Jewish scribes could not suffer the seventh day to continue sacred to Baal-Saturn, the old tutelary God of the country; neither could they have the Tabernacle and Ark dedicated to the same Divinity. The day holy to him and the Tent and Ark in which he dwelt had, therefore, to be given to the modern God Jehovah. “In the veiled sagas of the Pentateuch,” says an able writer, “we discover many elements of the idolatrous worship which prevailed so long among the Israelites. The mass of the people honoured Saturn as their national God; they carried about with them in a Tent his Image in the form of a Bull, as it seems; to him they sacrificed the first-born of their sons, and to his service they devoted the seventh day of the week.”† Until the time of the exile, says another accomplished scholar, the Jews were without a passable religious motive for the observance of the seventh day of the week as a Sabbath. It was Ezra who found for them the one that came finally to be adopted; for without misgivings may we assume that it was he who wrote the Persian story of the Creation and Paradise as it exists in the beginning of Genesis. And who, indeed, had such opportunity of learning something of the Persian sagas as he who lived so long in exile in the kingdom of Persia, and was finally sent by its king to Judea “with the Law of his God in his hand”—we venture to add; and with what was not in his hand, in his head.‡

The Sabbath, as a day of rest, must have been much more a matter of necessity in times when all

* Ezra vii. 11 and 14.

† Vatke, ‘Bibl. Theologie’ I., 201.

‡ Comp. Dozy, op. cit 34, 35.

below the ruler and the land-owning classes were slaves, as they appear to have been among the Israelites, as among the nations of antiquity generally?

Then, indeed, was the day of rest a most humane and beneficent institution. Imposed on religious grounds, it stood between the arbitrariness that so commonly comes of wealth and irresponsible power and the impotency that inheres in dependence. At the present time, the Sabbath as a religious institution has lost much of its significance: slavery no longer exists in the civilised world, and, in trading and manufacturing communities, the labouring classes give it little heed. They no longer look forward to *one* especial day of rest in the week, but make several Sabbaths in its course; in many cases they even dictate the terms on which they will consent to work at all, and make the accumulated fund of the capitalist available for profit. Unhappily they do not commonly use their power aright, turning the two or three days of the week in which they do no work into days of idleness and dissipation, instead of using them for the cultivation of the higher and nobler elements in their nature. But with our faith in the possible limitless advance of man in science and morals, and our belief in the influence of education freed from the trammels of Churches and the blight of dogmatic indoctrination, we have no doubts of the brighter phase of humanity that will in the course of ages make its appearance.

“Honour thy father and thy mother (‘as Jehovah thy God hath commanded thee,’ adds the Deuteronomist, referring again to the version of the Decalogue he found in Exodus) that thy days may be long upon the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee.”