

THE GOD OF HOREB

I

THE problem of the origin of Israel's god and of Israel's belief in that god is to-day one of the most important problems in the study of the Old Testament. It is a problem which has appeared in connection with the modern approach to the Bible. As the Bible stands, it presents a satisfying answer to the problem. Underlying the whole Old Testament is to be found a pure and robust theism. In its pages there is set forth before us the utter distinction between God and His creation. He alone is self-existent, the living and true God, in no sense dependent upon the creature. On the other hand, He is the Creator, and all His creation is wholly dependent upon Him for existence and preservation. In this high theism of the Old Testament the historic Christian Church has gloried. The God of the Law and the Prophets is, according to the historic Christian Church, none other than the God of the New Testament, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In recent years, however, this traditional view has been subjected to severe and searching examination and criticism. It cannot be denied that the rationalistic movements of the eighteenth century have affected profoundly the acceptance of the traditional beliefs of the Church. The literary analyses proposed by Eichhorn, de Wette, Hupfeld and others had not only raised doubt with respect to the traditional view of the Old Testament, but at the same time had prepared the way for the acceptance of the development theory of Reuss, Graf and Wellhausen.¹ The time was indeed propitious for the appearance and acceptance of Wellhausen's reconstruction. An evolutionary philosophy was prevailing, and men's minds were being turned to the study of comparative religions. Hence, the development theory gained ascendancy, finding ready acceptance not only with those who rejected the supernatural, but also with some who were truly Christian.

¹ For a clear and cogent survey of the development theory see William Henry Green, *The Hebrew Feasts*, New York, 1885, Chap. I.

At such a time, when the world's great ethnic religions were being critically investigated, it was to be expected that those of naturalistic predisposition would in like manner investigate Israel's religion. Thus, the Old Testament was no longer considered to be the gracious revelation of God to lost mankind, but a record of the gropings of the Hebrew nation after God. It is generally held, however, that Israel did attain to a very high view of God which reached its climax in the prophecies which appear in the second part of Isaiah. This high view of God, however, far from being the view prevailing during the whole course of Israel's history, was a climax, attained unto only after long years of struggle and development.

What was it in the history of Israel which paved the way for, or gave impetus to, the high conception of God which was finally to appear? That is the problem which naturalistic historians have unconsciously created for themselves. What was the origin of Israel's God, and how did he come to be Israel's God? To these questions the Christian Church has a ready and satisfying answer. But for him who rejects that answer there is here a serious historical problem which must be solved.¹ It is our purpose to investigate one of the proposed solutions of the origin of Israel's religion, commonly known as the Kenite theory.

II

THE KENITE THEORY

By far the most satisfactory attempt made by naturalistic historians to account for the origin of the worship of Israel's God is the so-called Kenite theory. Propounded first in 1862 by Ghillany, writing under the pseudonym of von der Alm,² this theory found wide acceptance.³ It was set forth in classic fashion by Karl Budde,⁴ and is to-day the prevailing naturalistic account of the origin of the worship of Israel's God.⁵

¹ cf. Geo. A. Barton, *Studies in the History of Religion Presented to Crawford Howell Toy*, New York, 1912, p. 187. "There is no more fascinating problem in the whole field of the history of religion than the origin and development of the worship of Yahweh."

² In *Theologische Briefe an die Gebildeten der deutschen Nation*, I, 216, 480.

³ Among others it has been accepted by Stade, Guthe, Budde, H. P. Smith, Cheyne, Burney, Barton.

⁴ Karl Budde, *Die Religion des Volkes Israels bis zur Verbannung*, Giessen, 1900. An English translation appeared under the title, *The Religion of Israel to the Exile*, New York, 1899.

⁵ It is "the theory that still prevails". Theophile J. Meeke, *Hebrew Origins*, New York, 1936, p. 86. It is accepted in the recent work of Elmer A. Leslie, *Old Testament Religion*, New York, 1936, p. 80ff. Not all advocates of the theory hold it just as set forth by Budde. Ludwig Köhler, e.g. (*Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Tübingen, 1936,

What was that creative germ, Budde sought to inquire, from which impetus was given to the mighty religious development which eventually issued in the high monotheism of the prophets? Budde was of the conviction that the origin of the Yahweh religion was closely bound up with the origin of the people itself.¹ Since both the historical books and the prophets testify to the bondage in Egypt, and since it would be inconceivable for a free people voluntarily to have assigned to their ancestors such disgraceful bondage, there must have been a basis of truth in the tradition. From this bondage Israel was mightily delivered by its god, Yahweh. The astonishing thing about the deliverance, however, was not the miracle which accompanied it, but the fact that it was accomplished by a god hitherto unknown to Israel, whose very name, Yahweh, Israel had heard for the first time.

In his flight from Egypt Moses had come to know this god. Yahweh had appeared to him in a burning bush at Sinai, which was holy ground, because it was the abode of Yahweh. According to Israel's own view² the god who appeared to Moses was not the God of heaven and earth, but a local god who lived at the spot where Moses found him. He was worshipped by the people who lived in the neighbourhood of Sinai, the Kenites, the tribe which Moses had joined through marriage, a section of the Midianites and the first true worshippers of Yahweh.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was the priest of Yahweh among the Midianites. At a feast, established not by Aaron or Moses, but by the Kenites, Moses and the elders of Israel partook of a solemn sacrifice to Yahweh. This covenant was an alliance of Israel with the Kenites at Sinai, an alliance which naturally implied the acceptance on Israel's part of the Kenite religion, the worship of Yahweh. It was indeed a covenant with Yahweh himself, whereby he became Israel's god, and Israel became his people. It was the oldest known example of the conversion of a people to another religion.

This god, Yahweh, was a god of war, the very kind of god that Israel needed. For years hence, Israel looked upon him

p. 27ff.) believes that the name Yahweh was derived from the Kenites, but that we are not justified in assuming that Israel simply took over the Kenite religion.

¹ *op cit.*, p. 1. The theory is stated in chapter one.

² Proofs cited are: Exod. xxiii. 20, xxxii. 34, xxxiii. 1-3; Jude. v. 4ff.; 1 Kings xix.

as a war god, whose weapon was lightning.¹ The question thus arises, How did it come about that pure monotheism finally appeared in Israel, whereas such was not the case with the Kenites? Wherein lay the difference between the Israelites and the Kenites in their relation to Yahweh? From the very beginning there was an essential difference, and it lay in the fact that, whereas the Kenites, like countless other tribes and peoples, had had their god from time immemorial, Israel had turned to him and had deliberately chosen him. Israel's religion thus became in time an ethical one, because it was a religion of choice, based upon a determination of the will, which laid the foundation for all time for an ethical relationship between the people and its god.²

III

WAS HOREB A SANCTUARY

In turning our attention to Budde's ingenious theory, we ask ourselves whether it is indeed true that at Sinai Moses found a god who was locally bound to the place. Was Sinai indeed the chief sanctuary of the Kenites? According to the third chapter of Exodus, Moses led the flock of Jethro to the backside³ of the desert, to the mountain of God, Horeb. Here the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was burning with fire, yet was not consumed, and so determined to turn aside to see what caused the strange phenomenon. Seeing that he had turned aside, God called to Moses, warning him with the words, "Draw not nigh hither; put thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."⁴

As the account stands in Exodus, it is clear, simple and straightforward. Moses with his flocks approaches the mountain, apparently because he is in search of pasture. There is no evidence whatsoever that he was expecting a revelation or vision, or that he was making a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of

¹ Proofs cited are: Exod. xix.; Jude. v. 4ff.; 1 Kings xix. 11ff.; 1 Kings xviii. 38; Ps. 18; Hab. iii.

² op cit., p. 31, "Israel's Religion ist darum eine ethische geworden, weil sie eine Wahlreligion, keine Naturreligion war; weil sie auf einem Willensentschluss beruhte, der ein ethisches Verhältnis zwischen dem Volke und seinem Gotte für alle Zeiten begründete."

³ אַחֲרָי behind, after: taken by some to mean to the west of the desert.

⁴ Exodus iii. 5.

a local god. Such thoughts as these are read into the text; they are not to be found there.

The mountain to which Moses came was Horeb, the mountain of God. But if it were a sanctuary of Yahweh, why was it not called after his name? Why was it not called "the mountain of Yahweh"? If there were a regular sanctuary here, where the god Yahweh was worshipped, and if Yahweh's dwelling place were on the mountain, surely the common designation of the place would have been "the mountain of Yahweh."¹

There is, indeed, a very real reason why the mountain was called the "mountain of God." It was so called by anticipation, because on this very mountain God Almighty revealed Himself and promulgated the Law.² But the God who here revealed Himself was not a local deity, but the living and true God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

The reason, then, why the mountain was sacred, was not because a local god, Yahweh, resided there, but because God Almighty revealed Himself there. There is no evidence whatsoever that this mountain was the permanent dwelling place of a tribal god. Such statements have absolutely no basis in fact and cannot be proven. Yet, as a matter of fact, such statements are often made.³

Not only is there no foundation in fact for the theory that Sinai was sacred because it was the permanent residence of Yahweh, but there is also no evidence that the Kenites worshipped Yahweh at this spot. Granted that the mountain was in Kenite territory, although this cannot be proven, what authority have we for saying that there was here a Kenite sanctuary?⁴

It is indeed true that in verse five, Moses is warned by God, "Draw not nigh hither; put thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." But this is not evidence that there was here a local sanctuary. Is not the reason for this warning abundantly clear? Moses,

¹ Only in Num. x. 33 is the mountain called יהוה ריה

² cf. Calvin, Com. in loc. Keil and Delitzsch, Com. in loc.

³ cf. e.g. MacNeile, *Com. on Exodus*, London, 1931, 3rd ed. in loc. W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 117ff. It is refreshing to read Keil's timely words, Com. in loc., "The supposition that it had been a holy locality even before the calling of Moses cannot be sustained."

⁴ cf. Kortleitner, *De antiquis Arabiae incolis eorumque cum religione Mosaica rationibus*, Vienna, 1930, p. 92: "Atque si religio Jahvae a Kenitis ducenda esset, constare necesse esset eos sub monte Sinai habitasse et Jahven prius coluisse quam Israelitas."

a sinful man, is in the presence of Almighty God. It is a common representation of the Old Testament that a sinful man cannot stand before God. It is the presence of God, and that alone which hallows the ground.¹

If then there was no sanctuary at Sinai, why did the revelation occur there? It occurred there, we think, for the simple reason that that is where Moses was. In the providence of God, Moses led the flock to Horeb. While there God spoke to him. Where else would God have spoken to him? The life in Egypt was past; Moses had spent years in the desert. Time and circumstances had prepared the man, and the providential moment had arrived. God in His infinite wisdom was ready to speak. Is it not natural that He should reveal Himself to His servant at the place where His servant was?² We do not mean for a moment to suggest that by mere chance Moses happened at the time to be at Sinai. Such is certainly not the case. It was indeed in the providence of God that he was at Sinai, and we believe that it is clear why this is so. God desired to reveal Himself at the very place where the Law should later be promulgated (cf. Exod. iii. 12). But we are constrained to show that the revelation was given, not because this was a sanctuary, but because Moses was here present. There is no evidence that Horeb was the sanctuary of a local god.

IV

THE REVELATION AT HOREB

As Moses came to Horeb, the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush, which, although burning, was not consumed. Seeing this strange sight, Moses determined to turn aside to investigate. After he had turned aside, God spake to him and encharged him with leading the enslaved Israelites from Egypt. What we read in the Bible is the account of a theophany. It is God who in condescending fashion appears to His servant. As the account stands it is coherent and has meaning.

The advocates, however, of the theory which we are now

¹ cf. Calvin's interesting statement, Com. in loc., "not as He was in His essence, but as the infirmity of the human mind could comprehend Him."

² "Wo in aller Welt hätte sich Gott ihm einfacher offenbaren sollen, als dort, wo sich Mose gerade mit seinem Schafen aufhielt?" Wilhelm Möller, *Die Entwicklung der A. T. Gottesidee in vorerilicher Zeit*, Gütersloh, 1903, p. 59.

considering believe that at Horeb Moses met, not the God of heaven and earth, but a local deity, who dwelt at the mountain. If such was indeed what actually took place, several questions immediately arise. If at Horeb, Moses met a local god, what is the meaning of the burning bush? How did Moses know that Yahweh had communicated to him? What made Moses believe that he was the recipient of revelation from Yahweh? These considerations strike at the very basis of the view under question and reveal its inherent weakness.

When Moses saw the burning bush, he turned aside to investigate. Before him was something new, something strange, something unexpected. If this fact is not recognized, we are involved in hopeless confusion. The very point involved in Moses' turning aside was to investigate the strange sight before him. Hence, these attempts at explanation, which seek to account for the phenomenon upon a naturalistic basis—such as, berries glistening in the sun, volcanic fire, the campfires of Bedouin, etc.—fail entirely in that they do not take into account the fact that something unusual was before Moses' eyes, so unusual, indeed, that he turned aside the more clearly to examine it. For forty years he had lived in the desert and with desert life was well acquainted. Here, however, was something which he had never seen before. What was it?

According to the Scriptures Moses saw a bush which was burning and yet was not consumed. It was a miracle occurring before his very eyes.¹ From the midst of the bush, God called unto him. He who believes in supernatural revelation will doubtless agree that we have here to do with a theophany. It was God in the Person of His Son who was about to reveal Himself in His character of Redeemer.² As Moses beheld the theophany, he would perhaps think of his own people in the flames of Egyptian servitude, and suffering under the heat thereof, yet not consumed, because they were protected by God who would be their Deliverer. There was, no doubt, a spiritual meaning to the burning bush. Of this meaning Moses possibly thought, when years later he wrote, "But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace,

¹ By the word miracle we mean an event wrought by the immediate power of God in the external world.

² cf. Calvin, *Com. in loc.*, "Nor, indeed, had the saints ever any communication with God except through the promised Mediator."

even out of Egypt, to be unto Him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day (Deut. iv. 20)."

The acceptance of this view, however, involves the acceptance of the supernatural, and Budde tells us that we are concerned here, not with the God of heaven and earth, but with a local god who lived at the spot where Moses found him.¹ If this is so, what caused Moses to think that this local god had communicated with him? A problem of pressing importance thus appears, which is passed over in silence by many advocates of the Kenite theory. Budde says not a word on the subject. The seriousness of the matter is, however, apparently recognized by Barton, who makes an attempt at explanation.² According to Barton, Moses was in the frame of mind to receive a "religious experience". There are many men of "a certain type of psychic constitution", who, after brooding long upon a religious problem, have, through a sudden flash of insight, found their problem solved. So sudden and clear has the insight been that they thought they heard a voice uttering the words in which their thought took shape. Such an experience, Barton tells us, is called an "audition", and is believed to have come from God. Oftentimes this experience forms the basis for a prophetic career. Such was the case with Moses. Mount Horeb, which was in Midianite territory, was a volcano, and, since within historic times no eruption has occurred within the Sinai peninsula, the mountain was in the south-east, in Arabia. During the course of his shepherd life, Moses brooded upon the wrongs suffered by his brethren in Egypt and upon the nature of Yahweh, the god of his father-in-law. The smoking mountain was believed to indicate Yahweh's presence. Yahweh was an invincible god, who made his worshippers victorious in war. If Moses' brethren could gain the help of Yahweh, perhaps there might be escape from the bondage in Egypt. Such a thought must often have passed through Moses' mind.

One day, while tending his flock, Moses saw a flame shooting forth from the mountain-side which looked like a bush on fire. As he approached, a voice warned him that he was on holy ground. This voice declared itself to be Yahweh

¹ op cit., pp. 14, 15.

² Barton, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins*, Philadelphia, 1934, p. 333ff.

speaking. In obedience to Yahweh Moses went to Egypt to deliver his people.

Such, according to Barton, is the religious experience through which Moses passed. It is an ingenious theory, and has this to its credit, that it does indeed seek to explain how the conviction arose in Moses' mind that he had received communication from Yahweh. It is a serious effort to grapple with one of the greatest difficulties which the Kenite theory creates. But, ingenious as it is, and plausible as it is, it fails to stand the test of close examination in that it does not really accomplish its intended purpose.

We are disposed to agree with Dr. Barton that Moses did, while in the desert, meditate upon the condition of his brethren in Egypt. He had fled for safety, and no doubt the desert life gave him ample time for meditation and reflection. But as he pondered upon the plight of his fellows in Egypt, surely he must have wondered when God would remember His covenant with Abraham. For, as the book of Exodus stands, it is based upon the history recorded in Genesis. There would thus be a reason for Moses' meditation. Knowing the previous history of the people, he would inquire how long before deliverance from God should come.

But as we shall shortly seek to show, the assertion that Yahweh was a Kenite deity or the god of Jethro, cannot be proven. And it is mere gratuitous assumption to say that Horeb was a volcano. This thought is based upon the description in Exodus xix, where God is said to descend upon the mountain.¹ There is, however, nothing in the language of the chapter which would imply that the theophany occurred on a volcano. It does indeed say that God came down upon the mountain. But this simply means that He came down from above, that is, from heaven. The description is that of a theophany accompanied by thunder and lightning and great smoke. The fact that smoke is mentioned does not prove that Horeb was a volcano (cf. Gen. xv. 17; Isa. vi. 4; Joel ii. 30). In the appearance at the burning bush, God promises that He will come down (Exod. iii. 8) to deliver the people. How can this possibly be construed as referring to a volcano? It is a mere reading into the text of that which is not to be found there.

Even, however, if we should grant that Moses was in the

presence of an active volcano, there still remains much that Barton's theory does not explain. Having lived for years near the mountain, Moses knew its characteristics. Doubtless, if Barton's attempted explanation be correct, Moses had seen flames shooting forth many times before. Why should this particular flame cause him to think that a bush was burning? Closer investigation would have convinced him of error. But here is the point which must not be forgotten. If Moses had been brooding upon the condition of his brethren and upon the character of the god, Yahweh, the sight of the burning bush would immediately have occupied his whole attention and would temporarily at least have taken his mind from its thoughts. Here indeed, was something strange and new, which would have occupied the whole attention. Hence, when the audition came, Moses was certainly not in the psychological frame of mind to receive it. Temporarily, at least, his broodings were forgotten, and he was merely seeking to satisfy curiosity as to why a certain bush on the mountain-side was burning.

It is the burning bush which stands as the weak link in Barton's theory. Had there been no burning bush, Moses might indeed have been in the proper mood to receive an audition, but the serenity of that mood was disturbed by the intrusion of trivial curiosity—why does a certain bush burn?

Granted, however, that an audition did take place. Granted that Moses did really think that Yahweh had spoken to him, can we possibly be expected to believe that Moses imagined that he held the conversation which is reported in Exodus three? Even if the conversation be restricted to the verses which the critics usually assign to E, it is extremely unlikely that such lengthy discourse could have come to Moses by means of an audition.² According to the account, as it is generally assigned to E, God calls Moses by name. He then introduces himself, not by the name Yahweh, but as the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac and the god of Jacob. This causes Moses to hide his face, for he is afraid to look upon God. God then tells him of the bondage in Egypt and commissions him to go to free

¹ יָרַד עָלָי A study of the uses of this idiom shows that it means "to come down upon from above." cf. e.g. Genesis xv. 11, where this is particularly clear.

² The verses generally assigned by the destructive criticism to E are 1, 4b, 6, 9-12, 13-15 (verse 15 is generally recognized as the work of the Redactor) 19-22. Of the account given by E. Barton, op. cit. says, p. 324, "It is now generally conceded that in this matter (i.e. the worship of Yahweh) E and P reflect the real history."

the people. Moses, however, complains of his weakness, and receives the promise that Israel will worship God upon this mountain. He asks the name of God, receives an answer and also the assurance of the successful outcome of his commission.

There are certain elements of this conversation as given by E which cannot be possibly omitted, if the subsequent history is to have any relation to the call of Moses, and these are as follows:

1. God calls to Moses and commissions him to go to Egypt.
2. Moses asks God's name and receives an answer.
3. Some assurance must have been given that the undertaken task would be successful.

Even if the conversation be reduced to this bare skeleton, we still have more than a mere "audition" can account for. There is a great deal involved in the statement that God knows the condition of the people in Egypt, and that he will send Moses to be the liberator. But when Moses speaks to God, the very sound of his voice would have destroyed any "audition" which was taking place. And Moses did speak. He asked the name of the one who addressed him. The voice did not introduce the conversation with the words, "I am Yahweh"; it said rather, "I know the condition of the Israelites and am sending you to them." Who was the possessor of this voice? It is precisely this which Moses does not know and which he asks. According to the critics the whole point of the E narrative is that the name Yahweh was first revealed to Moses. But it must be noted that the name was not revealed until Moses asks the name. This fact cannot be evaded, if any credibility at all is to be ascribed to the narrative; and if this fact be admitted, it casts a severe blow at the view that Moses was the recipient of an "audition". Had the voice immediately identified itself as the voice of Yahweh, we could concede the possibility of what Barton calls an "audition", but such is not the case. It appears then that with utter disregard of the text, even of E, Barton is simply guessing as to what took place. As a guess the theory is entitled to as much consideration as any other guess which disregards the text. But as a sober explanation of what actually occurred at Horeb, it fails utterly. The lengthy

conversation reported in the text, even that of E, is a serious objection to the theory of an "audition". Barton is not concerned about this, however, as he is trying to get at the real history behind the text; to him the text merely reflects this real history.¹ When the full implications of such a course of action are taken into consideration, we feel that there is nothing left us but dismal scepticism. Who, after all, if the text be rejected, knows what did occur? We may explore the realms of fancy and imagination to our hearts' content, but such procedure will never enlighten us as to what actually happened at Sinai. It is only when the text is accepted as it stands, that we have a clear, coherent account of what actually transpired.

V

WAS YAHWEH A KENITE DEITY?

Not only does the Kenite theory fail to explain how Moses believed himself to be the recipient of communications from Yahweh, but it fails also to establish its thesis that Yahweh was originally a Kenite deity. When God reveals Himself to Moses at the burning bush He immediately identifies Himself as One who has stood in peculiar relationship to Israel. Far from being the god of the Kenites, He is "the god of Abraham the god of Isaac and the god of Jacob."² He speaks of the enslaved people as "my people", people who were already His. Of their condition He is not ignorant, for He has heard their cry and knows their sorrows (verse 7). Furthermore, He intends their deliverance from bondage (verse 8), and their entrance into the promised land. How devoid of meaning this chapter would be, were it not based upon the history that is recorded for us in the book of Genesis.

Nor do we have portrayed for us in this chapter a Moses who is struggling to win Yahweh's help.³ The figure before us is not hoping against hope that Yahweh will help him. On the contrary, it is God who pleads with His reticent servant. This seems to be an inexplicable representation, if Yahweh is

¹ op. cit., p. 324.

² Exod. iii. 6, 7. Note also the language of verses 10, 15, 16, 18. cf. Albrecht Alt, *Der Gott der Vater*, Stuttgart, 1929. It is not our purpose in the present article to discuss Alt's thesis. A popular presentation of it, however, may be found in Elmer A. Leslie, *Old Testament Religion*, New York, 1936.

³ cf. Barton, op. cit., p. 334.

a Kenite deity. If such were the case, why should he be so eager, far more so than Moses, that the Israelites be freed from Egypt? Advocates of the theory under consideration pass over this representation of the text in silence, save as, in a general way, they assert the text to be the product of a generation posterior to that of Moses, a generation which wrote the history in accordance with its understanding.

Furthermore, if Yahweh were a Kenite deity, how are we to explain the fact that he promises to lead Israel, a people not his, to Palestine, a land not his (Exod. iii. 8)? Apparently he has confidence, not only that he can free Israel from Egypt, but also that he can lead Israel into this land. Concerning this land he has considerable information; he knows the names of its inhabitants, and he knows its nature, a good land, flowing with milk and honey. Why is he so eager to give this land to the Israelites and not to the Kenites, his own people? Why does he meet every objection of Moses, in determination that Israel be freed from Egyptian bondage and brought to Palestine? As the text stands in the Bible, these questions are easily answered. If the Kenite theory be correct, they cannot be answered. Indeed, at this point as elsewhere, the Kenite theory proceeds with nonchalant disregard of that which is written.

Granted that Yahweh were the god of the Kenites and that Moses had made his acquaintance, what would have been the reaction of the slaves in Egypt, when first they were informed that a new god was to lead them to freedom? It is indeed strange that Moses was able to persuade the people to leave Egypt under a new god.¹ This seems the more strange when we consider that Yahweh was the god of the Kenites, a people distinguished by no particular power or prestige. We do not claim that this would have been impossible, merely that it would have been strange. What did Israel do with her established religion? Did she simply spurn her previous gods to accept a new god? Some scholars believe that there was a previous knowledge of Yahweh even among the Israelites, as is indicated by the name Jochebed.² However, not all accept this.

Whether the name Jochebed be a Yahweh name or not, there is no evidence that Kenite names were compounded with

¹ cf. Theophile J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins*, p. 60.

² e.g. Meek, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

Yahweh before the ninth century B.C.¹ Nor is there evidence that Jethro was a priest of Yahweh. He is indeed called the priest of Midian, but nowhere the priest of Yahweh. Nor can this be inferred from his exclamation in Exodus xviii. 11. It is apparent that Jethro is not rejoicing because Yahweh the god of the Kenites had shown himself to be more powerful than other gods. If this is what he had meant, surely this is what he would have said. Jethro rejoices because he recognizes that Jehovah is the true God, who has manifested this fact by delivering the people from bondage.²

VI

WAS YAHWEH A LOCAL DEITY?

Who was the god who appeared to Moses at Sinai? What actually did there transpire? If, as Barton suggests, Moses already knew his name, it is passing strange that he asks that name.³ Indeed, the text of Exodus three rules out once and for all the thought that the god who appeared in the burning bush was a local, tribal deity. Rather, that which is described is a theophany.

When in verse eight, God states His intention to come down to deliver the people what else does He mean but that He will come down from heaven? Nor do the Scriptures teach that His dwelling-place is elsewhere than in heaven.⁴ If God lives on Sinai, why does the text say that He comes down? What would be the purpose of stating such a thing?

¹ Proper names which may be considered as Kenite are :

Jithro	Exod. iii. 1 (Jether Exod. iv. 18)
Re'u'el	Exod. ii. 18
Hovav	Num. x. 29
Hever	Jude. iv. 11
Ja'el	Jude. iv. 17
Hammath	1 Chron. ii. 55
Rekav	1 Chron. ii. 55
Ja'bes	1 Chron. iv. 9

Proper names compounded with Yahweh are :

Jehonadav	2 Kings x. 15 (Jonadav Jer. xxxv. 6)
Ja'azanjah	Jer. xxxv. 3
Jirmejahu	Jer. xxxv. 3
Havassinjah	Jer. xxxv. 3

These names, however, do not appear until the ninth century B.C. which leads Kortleitner to whom at this point I confess indebtedness, to say, *op. cit.*, p. 93, "ut appareat Kenitas primo cultum Jahvae ignorasse".

² cf. Kortleitner, *op. cit.*, p. 92, "Neque in Arabia antiqua neque sub monte Sinai ullam gentem cognovimus, quae deum quendam nomine Jahvae coleret. Nam etsi nomina multorum deorum Arabum antiquorum memoriae prodita sunt, tamen nomen Jahvae inter ea non reperitur."

³ Barton, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

⁴ Thus 1 Kings xxii. 19 E; Exodus. xix. 18-20 J. cf. Muller's excellent discussion of this subject, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-69.

Furthermore the god who appears to Moses is a god whose power and knowledge is apparently unlimited. He knows Moses' name and has the power to perform a miracle at the bush. He claims also to be the "god of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob". By this claim He shows knowledge of the patriarchs and of the covenant made with them. This claim is not limited to the document E, but appears also in J (verse 16). Yet Budde tells us that it was a new god, hitherto unknown to Israel, who brought Israel from Egypt. For this view, Budde has not one iota of support from either E or J. Certainly it cannot be sustained, as he asserts, that a new name means a new god.¹ Yet how can a god who claims to be the "god of Abraham, the god of Isaac and the god of Jacob" be a god whose dwelling is localized on Sinai?

That He was not such a god becomes evident when we note that He was fully cognizant of the enslaved condition of the people and was confident that He could deliver them. Surely the Kenites were not more powerful than the Egyptians! How could the Kenite deity possibly think that he could overcome the Egyptians? How could he be so certain of the result? Had he engaged in previous combat with them? It is difficult to believe that a local deity could speak thus. And if it is difficult to believe that he could speak thus about the Israelites in Egypt, it is certainly far more difficult to believe that he could confidently assert that he would lead the Israelites into Palestine. How possibly could a local deity get the idea that he was disposer of the land of Palestine, a land that did not belong to him? The knowledge and power of the God of Horeb are not the knowledge and power of a limited deity.

Nor is it the teaching of Scripture that at Sinai Israel chose Yahweh and Yahweh chose Israel. Contrary to what Budde says, such an act of choice would not have been the first example of national conversion² nor would the act in itself be sufficient to account for Israel's future religious development.³ When the news reached Jethro that God had mightily delivered Israel, His people (Exod. xviii. 1) from Egypt, he comes to Moses' encampment at Sinai. Moses met him and related "all that the Lord had done" for the people in Egypt. This news caused Jethro to rejoice and to exclaim (verse 11), "Now I know that

¹ op. cit., p. 10.

² Barton, op. cit., p. 343.

³ cf. J. M. Powis Smith, *The Moral Life of the Hebrews*, Chicago, 1923, p. 66.

the Lord is greater than all gods." He then took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron, with the elders of Israel, came to eat bread with Jethro before God.

As the account stands, it gives the impression that the Lord is Israel's god, not the god of the Kenites. He has done great things for Israel, not for the Kenites. Nor do the Israelites go to the Kenites, rather, the reverse is the case; Jethro comes to Moses. This is hard to understand, if Yahweh be a Kenite deity. That Jethro and the Israelites partake together of bread is to be expected. It was an act of thanksgiving to God. And since Jethro was Moses' father-in-law, and there was a certain relationship between the Kenites and the Israelites (e.g. cf. Num. x. 29—Exod. xviii. 14ff.) it was natural that both Jethro and the Israelites would partake of bread together.¹ But there is not a word in the text to suggest that by this act the Israelites chose Yahweh and he chose them. The Kenites later went into Judah with the Israelites, but if Yahweh were a Kenite god, why did Israel not remain with the Kenites (cf. Jude. i. 16. iv. 11)?

It must have become apparent by this time that the Kenite theory makes no claim to be based upon the text as that text is found in our Bibles. Rather, it is based upon the modern critical reconstruction of that text. According to that reconstruction there are at least two documents interwoven in the third chapter of Exodus, one of which, the document E, is believed to reflect the actual history. But even the statements of this document, as we have sought to indicate, are not adhered to by defenders of the Kenite theory. It is a theory without basis in the text, and possibly for this reason, is not as popular as was once the case.²

VII

THE GOD OF HOREB

The strongest argument against the Kenite origin of Israel's god, however, is the fact that such a theory is naturalistic in character. It places the Mosaic religion upon a level with the

¹ cf. Meek, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

² cf. Oesterley and Robinson, *Hebrew Religion*, New York, 1930, p. 139, who at least consider the Kenite theory favourably, say, "all we know for certain is that Yahweh had an independent existence before His adoption of Israel as his people". It will be seen, however, that many of the objections which apply against the Kenite theory also hold force against this statement.

religion of neighbouring peoples, and implies that because this religion was a religion of choice, it had the impetus to keep going until finally, after years of development, it blossomed forth with a high monotheism, a monotheism to which Israel attained, not because it was revealed to her from without, but by means of human achievement. Revelation from without is apparently rejected, and Israel's ethical monotheism becomes in reality a human product. And if this monotheism was a human product, it was also a limited product, for the human mind, despite the high opinion which man has of it, is a limited thing. The monotheism of the prophets, however, particularly as it appears in Isaiah, chapter xl. ff., is unique. The heathen religions have never offered its equal, and the reason for this is not far to seek. The god of whom the prophet speaks is an unlimited god, the Creator of all things, One who is not dependent upon His creation.¹ The conception of such a God is not the conception to which a finite mind, unaided, can attain. Hence, it was not due to deep insight on the part of the prophets that this high view was made known to man.

At this point an objection may arise. It may be asserted that after all, the Kenite theory is not naturalistic in character. It is true, the argument might run, that the god who appeared to Moses was not the god of heaven and earth. At this early stage, Israel was not ready for such a revelation. But God Almighty was indeed leading His people, step by step, first through the Mosaic phase of Yahwism, until finally He brought them to the place where they could conceive of Him as He really was. Now we are far from denying that there is progress in the Old Testament revelation, but there is at least one thing that must be said against the suggestion which we have just outlined.

This suggestion does great despite to the character of God. God, so the suggestion would run, is leading His people step by step. And one of these steps is Mosaic Yahwism. Moses did not believe that his God was the Almighty Creator; rather he believed that his god, once the Kenite's god, was a local, limited deity. Now such a conception of God is obviously false. Moses held a false view of God. What then must we think of God if He leads His people by methods such as this? What must we think of Him if He deliberately permits His own

¹ e.g. Isa. xl. 12-31. Note Augustine's statement, "Finitum non capax infiniti."

to hold false conceptions of His very being? A god who would do this is a god without character, a god who is no god at all.

It is one thing to hold an incomplete conception of God, but it is an entirely different thing to hold a false conception. The knowledge which the actual Moses, not the Moses of modern reconstruction, held of God was incomplete, but, as far as it went, it was true. Moses did not have the full revelation of God as Triune, which was set forth in the New Testament. In His infinite wisdom Almighty God was not yet pleased to give this fuller revelation of Himself. It is true that a reverent, believing scholarship will recognize the fact that intimations of this sacred doctrine were given to Moses. The Angel of the Lord whom Moses saw in the flame of fire was none other than the Mediator between God and man. But the full doctrine of the Holy Trinity was not yet vouchsafed to Moses. His knowledge was indeed incomplete. But, incomplete as it was, it was true. Moses knew God, as far as God had revealed Himself, and for this very reason, what Moses believed about God was correct.

A false conception of God, however, is an entirely different thing. Had Moses believed that God was a limited God, such a belief would not have been an incomplete conception; it would have been a wholly false conception, for God is, as a matter of fact, not a limited God but an infinite God. Hence, the view that Mosaic Yahwism was a step in the leading of His people is a view that does great despite to the character of God. For if God leads His people by permitting them to believe a lie, surely He is One who is not worthy of trust. As a matter of fact, however, He does not lead His people by such methods. He who in His truth is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, is God that cannot lie. The suggestion, therefore, which we have just considered, is naturalistic in character. In whichever aspect it be considered, whether as a human step on the road to so-called ethical monotheism, or as a step under Divine guidance, the Kenite theory is essentially anti-supernaturalistic.

The real problem in the modern study of the Old Testament is the problem of the supernatural. To this problem all men come with certain presuppositions. There are some who do not believe in the supernatural. Despite whatever use they may make of terms, an analysis of their thought reveals the fact that they do not believe in, nor do they understand the implications of belief in, a God who is in the highest sense of

the word the Creator. Hence, such men have no ultimate basis of predication which is absolute. What is it, after all, which gives meaning to life and to the world? What is the final, unchanging, ultimate Standard by which all things are to be judged? Unless there be such a Standard, this life and this world cannot in the ultimate sense have meaning.

The Christian believes that there is such an ultimate Standard. He believes that there is only one Source from which the world and life derive meaning, and that Source is God. This God of the Christian is not a limited God, nor One who in any sense is dependent upon His creatures. Rather, He is a Person, who is self-existent, who has created all things and who gives meaning to all which He has created. Between the Creator and the creation there is a vast gulf. The Creator is independent of His creation whereas the creation is dependent upon the Creator. The creation is temporal, it had a beginning, but the Creator is eternal. The man who holds this high view of God finds an ultimate basis for his predication, an ultimate Standard which clothes all existence with meaning.

There can be no neutral ground. A man either holds this high view of God or he does not hold it. If he does hold it, he then recognizes that God is his Creator, and that he is but a creature. If he does not hold it, even though his mind be filled with conflicting terms and notions, he unconsciously places himself in the position of supreme interpreter of life. He holds a world and life view, but in the last analysis, this world and life view has no other authority for its existence than his own mind. An analysis of the presuppositions of anti-supernaturalistic thought reveals that they can logically lead to nothing but intellectual suicide.

For this reason the Kenite theory cannot stand. Despite the personal beliefs of its advocates, and we gladly recognize that there are happy inconsistencies in the human mind, the theory is itself anti-supernaturalistic. It rules out of the picture the working of God in any adequate sense. Hence it fails at the crucial point. It is an ingenious theory, but as a sober explanation of Israel's monotheism it fails miserably. God is not discoverable by man's unaided efforts, for man, the creature, is yet in his sins.

We are constrained to reject, therefore, the view that Moses met a local deity at Horeb. The God of Horeb is, we

believe, the God of heaven and earth, who well knew the condition of His people and was prepared to deliver them from bondage. If we believe in the supernatural, we shall not be disturbed by the mention of miracle. Rather, realizing that the ground whereon we stand is holy ground, shall we listen to Him who spake from the bush, declaring Himself to be, not a local deity, but the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob," the One who in the days of His flesh, repeated these words and said, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

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