

perplexed." Instead of the utterly lifeless character of the Authorized Version, so peculiarly inconsistent with the vivid graphic style of St. Mark, we have then the struggle in Herod's mind admirably presented to us in a double series of contrasts.

Herod feared John,
And kept him safe.

He was greatly perplexed,
And heard him gladly.

We pause here for the present. In a second and closing paper upon this subject we propose to consider some later readings in the Gospel of St. John and in the Epistles of the New Testament, and to draw the general conclusion.

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DIVINE MYTHS.¹

IF I were to say, without preface or explanation, that I look upon the earlier records of Genesis as myths, devoid of direct historical value, I suppose I should be set down at once by the mass of good Christian people as a free-thinker, or, at least, as holding a very low and shadowy view of Inspiration. And yet I think they would be very much mistaken. As a fact, I hold, and hold very earnestly, what seems to many quite an extreme and old-fashioned doctrine of Inspiration. I believe firmly and devoutly that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, *is* the word of God; I believe that the Spirit of God not only moved by secret impulses the

¹ It is well, I think, that even this method of interpreting the earlier Chapters of Genesis should be stated for consideration and discussion; and I do not see how it could be stated more ably or more reverently than in the following pages. But it must be remembered that THE EXPOSITOR is not pledged to this interpretation of them, nor indeed to any other.—EDITOR.

minds of the sacred writers, but also overruled to a great extent the *ipsissima verba* of Holy Writ. And nowhere do I feel (rightly or wrongly) the Divine inspiration more strongly and pervadingly than in the early records of Genesis: every sentence (as St. Augustine says) contains a mystery. And yet I do regard these records as myths; and I think that all the efforts made, and still being made, to reconcile their statements with history and with science are only so much earnestness and ingenuity thrown away. This is my position, and I know it will seem very strange and very shocking to many, perhaps to most. All I ask is to be allowed to shew, if I can, with such poor skill as I have, that it is a tenable position for a loyal Christian to hold. In my own private opinion, which I do not in the least wish to force upon any one else, it is also the only really defensible position which the believer can take up against modern assaults upon the Bible. I will set forth my argument briefly in the following form.

1. There is a Divine and there is a human element in the Bible.

2. The Divine is constant; the human is variable, because adapted to the varying intelligence, to the changing cast of thought, of successive ages.

3. The human element in Scripture follows the general laws of historical development, both in matter and in form. In other words, the Divine Inspiration seized upon that form of literature which commended itself to the intelligence of the particular age, and made use of it as a vehicle of sacred truth.

4. The most archaic form in which human intelligence has spontaneously and legitimately clothed itself is the myth.

5. The myth, therefore, is found at the beginning of sacred, as of all other, history.

6. The myth has its own place, beauty, and truth (though not historic), even in secular literature: much more, when inspired, it is an admirable vehicle of moral and spiritual teaching.

It is necessary, first of all, to dwell a little upon the *form* which the sacred writings take as they stand in the Old Testament. The form which literary productions (or their oral equivalents) take varies immensely with the age and the country. To this day, in many parts of the East, amusement, instruction, information, are conveyed in the form of stories. The Book of Job is (according to one received opinion) the inspired example of this kind of literature. It is a sacred drama, which does not hesitate to introduce the Divine Being Himself as an actor and speaker, and to put words into his mouth—words which are strictly conformable to the tone of thought and knowledge of nature (such as it was) which then prevailed. I do not think it in the least irreverent, considering as I do the Book of Job to be one of the most Divine of the Divine writings, to say that it is *in form* a religious drama of the most primitive style, such as commended itself to the best and truest intelligence of that far-off age as the natural vehicle of religious truth. At any rate, I am justified by the known opinion of many most orthodox Divines in saying that the Book of Job is *in form* such a fiction as we could not imagine in any Christian writer, even in an inspired apostle.

Again, the writings of Solomon are in their form strictly conformed to the mind of his age. It is hard for the most devout modern mind to understand how

an inner inspiration can be united with so strange an outward form as that presented by the Book of Proverbs. Still more strange it might seem that Divine truth should hide itself beneath the impassioned words of an antique love-song. Yet good Christians accept this, and rightly feel that the form so strange to us was in perfect harmony with the tone of mind of a period at once rude and artificial, highly civilized on some lines, hardly removed from barbarism on others. I need not speak of the poetry which forms so large a portion of the Old Testament, because there is nothing strange to *us* in that. In this respect we are more akin to the Old Testament writers than the apostles themselves. The poetry of the ancient Scriptures disappears almost entirely in the Septuagint (and the same is largely true of the Vulgate), but it reappears marvellously in our Authorized Version.

Now what does this come to? That, just as God adapted his permissions and even his commands to the slowly-rising moral sense of the people, so He chose as the vehicle of Divine instruction just that outward form—of history, drama, poetry, proverb, love-song—which arose spontaneously out of the intellectual character of the age. Is it not all in keeping? Is it not just what we should expect of Him who, even in matters of moral import, *took men as He found them and made the best of them?*

If, then, we find specimens of all other literary forms (however unlikely) among the sacred writings, why not of the myth too? All other history runs up into myth; why not the sacred history?

Let us ask ourselves *why* we find myths at the beginning of all history. Was it that men were liars then

more than afterwards? Was it that they had any thought to deceive, or any purpose in deceiving? Modern criticism has banished any such idea. There is nothing disreputable about a genuine myth. It was simply the spontaneous growth of its age. It was the form which the truth of those days naturally assumed, for every genuine myth contains *some* germ of truth, historical, natural, or moral. Sometimes it was a conviction of certain past facts; sometimes a yearning after a possible future; sometimes a picturesque reading of natural phenomena, which embodied itself in the myth. But at any rate there are two things which all will allow, since the days of Niebuhr, about myths. 1st. They are not "untrue," if "untrue" carries any sense of falsity or of contempt. 2nd. They are not "true," if "true" involves any assignable historical value. And so, in our more scientific histories, the myths are placed at the beginning; they are given for what they are worth, as standing in *some* relation to actual history, though *what* relation it is now impossible to say. All histories which are at all perfect begin in much the same way: they begin with individuals, either actual or symbolic, who built cities, founded families, migrated into new lands, gave the first impulse to some new growth of human industry, order, and civilization. Some of these heroes of ancient story may have been existing personages, only shewing larger and grander through the mists of ages than in real life. But others (and these are the more frequent) are purely mythical, symbolic beings, in whom some popular tradition or belief or feeling, more or less true, has embodied itself. Those who have ever followed up a Devonshire river to its moorland source know exactly

what to expect from the next river they come upon. They recognize every one of its stages, as they track it upwards, and they know exactly what sort of scenery they are coming to, until they reach at last the little rivulet that runs among bogs and rushes beneath its turfy banks. So it is with histories of whatever nation. They run up through certain well-known and easily-recognized stages, until they lose themselves as histories and assume the form of unhistoric myths. And I venture to believe that it is just the same in the sacred history. Every candid reader of the Bible will at least allow that it is so in appearance. Its records present the same stages, in the same order, as those of other histories. We cannot escape the comparison ; we cannot prevent thoughtful minds from perceiving the outwardly perfect analogy, both in position and in character, between the myths of other histories and the first chapters of Genesis. We may tell them it is wrong ; we may say that the outward likeness, however irresistibly convincing in any other case, is entirely misleading here ; we may contend that, while poetry, allegory, proverb, love-song, drama, are fitting forms for the embodiment of Divine truth, the myth is not and cannot be. But we are driving men into a painful and a dangerous dilemma : either they must give the lie to the most established conclusions of historical science, or else they must give up their faith in the Old Testament Scriptures altogether. In any other history we should say, without a moment's hesitation, that the stories of Adam and Eve, of Cain and Abel, and so on, were myths, such as were in every land the natural embodiment of truth and thought before history existed. We should say this, *not* because of their

supernatural element, but because the whole cast of these stories is essentially mythical. Now, this being certainly the case, it is also certain that we cannot prevent thoughtful minds from applying to the sacred writings the same canons which they apply to all other writings; we cannot persuade them that what is palpably (in form) a myth is yet historically true, any more than we can persuade them that what is palpably poetry is to be understood as simple prose. What is it, then, which compels us to make this really hopeless attempt? What holds us back from allowing that the early records of the Bible really are mythical? It is, no doubt, the fear, first, of disparaging these records themselves; second, of compromising later records. Let us look this fear in the face.

And, first, I say that for the highest purposes a myth may be, and often is, just as valuable as a history. Can the world produce from secular history anything that has been more valuable, more fruitful in noble thoughts and noble deeds, than the myth of Marcus Curtius, who leaped into the gulf in order to save his country? Who would dare to place that myth upon a lower level of worth than the later records of actual Roman history? Who is not glad that he has read it himself, glad that his boys should read it after him, glad that it remains to every generation a glorious example of that self-sacrificing heroism which lies latent in every age and in almost every heart of man? What Christian is there that does not see in this myth an unconscious prophecy (inspired, we know not how, in heathen minds by the Spirit of God) of that one sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world once offered upon the Cross? To take another

example. Does the story of William Tell lose its value because historians pronounce it to be a myth? Has it, therefore, done less to rid the world of tyrants, less to inspire the hearts of men with patient courage? Does it make *any* practical difference, if it *was* a myth? It will surely be conceded that the moral value of a myth is at least as great as that of a real history; while undistinguished from the records of actual fact it is a wondrous history, full of example; when distinguished, it becomes a beautiful parable, full of teaching.¹

I have said this much about secular myths in order to shew that they have a place of their own, not amongst the lies and falsities which have everywhere aped and obscured the truth, but amongst the spontaneous and innocent (and often most valuable) productions of human intelligence at a certain stage of its development. There was, I repeat, nothing disreputable about the myth; it was the natural expression of the thoughts and beliefs of very early times. If subsequent ages mistook them for real histories, and were misled, that arose from the lack of science, and ought not to be visited upon the innocent myth.

This being granted, it seems to follow from the very character of the Old Testament writings that they should begin with myths. The same Divine Spirit who fearlessly seized upon all other forms (however apparently unsuitable) in which the thought of each succeeding age naturally clothed itself—that same

¹ I might add that the myth is not always devoid of historical value, although it is not history. I suppose that the story of Hengist and Horsa is a myth; but if we take it as representing the state of things which led to the English conquest of Britain, we are probably as near the truth as we are ever likely to be. The Arthurian myth, on the other hand, seems to have no historical value at all, but its moral value will hardly be underrated in this day.

Spirit, I hold, was not afraid to clothe his teachings and revelations in the most archaic form of all, the form of myth. If He had not done so, He would have done violence to the naturalness and continuity of the human element in the Bible, that naturalness and continuity which are so perfectly preserved everywhere else.

I am aware, however, that it *is*, and *must be*, a shock to the devout mind, educated in the ideas of the present day, to be told that anything narrated in the Bible—narrated apparently as a fact—is a myth. Living, as we do, amidst lies and fictions manifold, our sense of truth is intensified, and is thereby irresistibly narrowed. A good person of little education has often no conception of any truth but historical truth. He cannot away even with fairy stories or allegories. He devoutly believes that the man who fell among thieves, the Publican, the Pharisee, and the Prodigal Son, were existing personages. He is not easy in his mind about Christian and Christiana, Matthew, Mercy, and Great-heart, because he has suspicions that they “never lived.” Mother Be-done-by-as-you-did is an abomination unto him, because on the face of her she is fabulous.

I suppose most of us are not so narrow as that: it would not even occur to us to say that the “Prometheus Vincitus” of Æschylus or the “Hamlet” of Shakespeare was “false,” because not historical. In their own way we feel that they have a great and abiding truth, albeit not historical. It may be said that “Prometheus Vincitus” and “Hamlet” do not profess to be histories, but only plays, creations of the poet’s fancy. It may be said, as it certainly will be felt, that if the early records of Genesis are myths, they ought

to be inscribed as myths, so that there should be no mistaking them. But that would be to shew an entire ignorance of the course of human thought. The myth never did distinguish itself from history, because it was ignorant of any such distinction. The myth was something that arose, like a flower, which grew like the blade in the field, men knew not how, as they lived their simple lives and their thoughts stirred within them. The myth was a natural, not an artificial, product; no one questioned it; no one said it was either true or false historically, because there was neither the motive to make the inquiry nor the possibility of deciding it. It would be a simple anachronism for the myths of Genesis to declare themselves to be unhistoric, and anachronisms are just the things we do *not* find in the Bible, because its human development is above all perfectly natural. It is, as I have pointed out, a perfectly orthodox position (whether right or wrong) that the Book of Job is a religious drama, not a history; yet there is not a single hint to be found in the book itself that it is other than a sober narration of facts. The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus is more commonly considered as a parable; but on the face of it it is a history, and there is nothing but internal evidence and the analogy of other parables to bring its historical character into question. The same may be said for the (always so-called) *parable* of the Prodigal Son. Yet this doubtfulness whether these Divine stories are fact or fiction makes no possible difference to the preacher. Finding them where they are, in the Gospel, he knows he may use them, and he does use them, *for all moral and spiritual purposes*, exactly as if they were literally true. And so, with regard to the early records

of Genesis, finding them where we do, in the Bible, we have the warranty of the Holy Ghost for treating them as true for all moral and spiritual purposes; but that is wholly independent of the question of historical truth.

Such is the substance of my argument. I wish to supplement it, first, by urging what seems to me the special value of the myth, regarded as to its outward form; second, by anticipating the most obvious objections to its use.

The value then of the myth, as used in Scripture, is the negative but most important fact that, being unhistoric, it does not give any definite information as to facts. The Mosaic cosmogony, *e.g.*, tells us that God made the world, but gives us absolutely no real information as to how He made it. It may seem strange that this should be claimed as an advantage. Yet I make bold to say that one great necessity which controlled the Divine utterances was the necessity of *not* anticipating the researches, the discoveries, the speculations, of history, of geology or of other sciences. It is surely evident to every one who has at all followed the progress of modern thought, that the Bible records were never intended to assist, much less to govern, the course of discovery and research. As a simple fact, those records have hindered the growth of science, because a kind of truth has been imputed to them which they do not possess. Science has carried one position after another against the vigorous opposition of those who claimed to have Genesis clearly on their side. Let any one consider the long "conflict" between Scripture and Science. Let him recall all the ingenious and painful "reconciliations" by which the Mosaic cosmogony has

been forced into agreement with, or even into support of, each established conclusion of geology. Let him think of the hopeless efforts made to maintain the universality of the Flood, and the dispersion of all animal life from one comparatively recent centre—efforts now practically abandoned in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Now all this practical uselessness of the Scriptures for any scientific purpose seems to me one of their most Divine features. Surely if we believe that this world is God's world; that human powers of thought, of patient research, of brilliant theory, were given by God in order to be used; that He foresaw and fore-ordained that knowledge was to grow as it has grown and is growing; then we must believe that God always meant to give free play to all this use of human power, this growth of human knowledge. He could not have meant to anticipate, to trammel and fetter, that growth by a revelation which should occupy the same field as the sciences of this century. In the name of God who gave it, I would protest against the very idea that the Bible should be used as a primer of ancient history, or a little handbook of geology. God made the world, but how He made it, and through what courses, He has left to the laborious research and quick intelligence of man to find out. God made man, but how long ago, or through what stages, or by what developments, He has left to man himself to find out, that man may exercise all his powers on the problem—and, it may be, confess himself ignorant after all. A similar principle seems to me to run all through the canon of Scripture. If there is one elementary truth of astronomy which is absolutely necessary, not only to a *correct*, but also to a

worthy, conception of the vastness and beauty of God's creation, it is the fact that the earth goes round the sun; and yet the Holy Writings gave no hint whatever of this fact, but, on the contrary, adopted the popular language, which entirely ignores it. The history of Israel twice cuts across the plane of secular history, once in Egypt, once in Assyria and Babylonia. After all the labour and ingenuity spent upon the subject, what is the practical result? That the Sacred Records are allowed to be in general agreement with the manners and circumstances of those countries, but that it is impossible to piece together the Bible history and the history of the ancient world as learnt from other sources. Twenty different theories, *e.g.*, have been started as to who the Pharaoh of the Exodus was: several are plausible, none convincing. Are we not, then, driven to believe that the Divine Records do, in a most singular way, keep within their own lines, and avoid interference with the sphere of ordinary history? For, indeed, the Bible was intended to teach morality and religion and knowledge of God: it was not intended to throw any real light on history or on geology or on any other science.

I turn now to the objections which are sure to be urged against the theory of inspired myths.

And the first will be this, that it imports a hopeless confusion into the Old Testament writings; that it makes it impossible to know whether we are reading fact or fiction; that if we admit myths at all we can never say where they end.

I do not deny that the objection is serious. It arises out of the very nature, the very *naturalness*, of the outer form employed by Divine inspiration. Unques-

tionably there are many different forms of literature to be found in the Bible, and it is not always possible to say where one ends and another begins. We are not unfrequently left to internal evidence to decide what is prose and what poetry, what drama and what history, what fact and what fiction. Joshua's command to the sun to stand still is considered by some a plain narrative of fact, by others, a quotation from a book of poetry. Other instances might be multiplied to shew that fact and fiction (using the latter word in a perfectly innocent sense) are not always to be distinguished in the Old Testament. Scripture is never careful, as a modern book must of necessity be, to label its various portions with their precise literary character. Even in the New Testament there are some curious instances of a similar peculiarity, as it seems to us. Of the speeches recorded in the third Chapter of St. John, and in the second Chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, no one knows, or can know, how much belongs to the original speaker and how much has been added by the writer: the one slides insensibly into the other. Now in a modern writer this would be simple dishonesty. In the case of St. John and St. Paul (even setting aside their inspiration) no one dreams of dishonesty: to do as they did was perfectly natural to their tone of thought.

It is not wonderful, then, if we cannot tell precisely where Divine myth slides into sacred history? It is a matter for internal testimony chiefly, and for comparison with the ascertained results of scientific research. If a man start with the assumption that everything in the Bible is true in the hardest literal sense, he will be in fearful danger of stumbling; if he start with the as-

sumption that the Mosaic writings are impudent forgeries, he will go wildly astray ; if he believe that all the Scriptures, being God-inspired, are profitable for his soul, but that their historical value is merely a matter of evidence external and internal, he need neither stumble nor go astray : he may make mistakes, but his mistakes will be of small importance, and will not imperil his faith. For me, personally, sacred history begins with Abraham. His intense individuality stamps him as real. Adam may be a shadow ; Enoch, Methuselah, Noah himself, shadows ; but Abraham is a man of like passions with ourselves, and a man whose religious character, peculiar as it was and intensely personal, has yet stamped itself upon all his children, Jewish and Christian: Under the most extreme dissimilarity of outward circumstance and social manners, we look back through many thousand years, and recognize Abraham as our veritable living father in the faith of God.

But a far more serious difficulty remains behind. It will be said, "If you admit myths in the Old Testament, how can you exclude them from the New? The resurrection of Christ is accounted a myth, a religious myth, embodying a pious hope, by a certain school of unbelief. Will you not put a powerful weapon into their hands?"

A weapon it might be, but one which could not really nor honestly serve them. If I believe that the Divine Inspiration employed myths when myths were natural and innocent, I am not any nearer believing that Divine Inspiration employed myths when myths were neither natural nor innocent. The first authors of written records gravely reported myths without the least

intention to deceive: if a modern writer did the same he would be accounted a liar. The very dissimilarity, the extreme contrast, between the conditions of time and place and thought of the Mosaic records on one side, and the Gospels on the other, render it impossible to carry over any argument from the one to the other. Myths were not the natural production of the apostolic age or of the age of Josephus; the distinction between the actual and the imaginary was fully felt, and could not have been innocently ignored. It would neither have been natural nor morally possible for inspired men (or even merely honest men), narrating contemporary facts, of which they professed to be eye-witnesses, to add on a mythical Resurrection to an actual Crucifixion. For these two events are treated by the Christian writers as mutually complementary; they are two sides of one shield; in prophecy, in record, in argument, they go ever hand in hand. To hold that the one was a plain historical fact and the other a myth does the utmost violence to the whole character of the age and of the men, as Professor Godet has ably shewn. But to hold that the earliest records of Genesis are myths is only to bring them into perfect harmony with the mind of the earliest age.

I propose to conclude this paper with a brief examination of one of these Divine myths, as I have ventured to call them, in order to shew how entirely one who believes in Inspiration may accept the moral and spiritual teaching of a passage which he distinctly considers un-historic. No passage from the early Mosaic records is more often referred to in the New Testament than the creation of Eve. None presents more startling difficulties, if accepted as describing a "physical fact." I think

it would be very difficult to find an educated layman, who had at all studied the subject, who still believed that passage to be literally true. I freely acknowledge for myself that I do not regard it as throwing any scientific light upon the origin of sex or the physical relation of woman to man. I should certainly suppose that man, whenever he did appear upon the scene, appeared, like all the other animals, male and female. And the geological evidence is tolerably convincing that men and women lived and multiplied long ages before any date which can be assigned to Adam and Eve as existing personages.

But although I do not regard the story as *historic*, yet I do most fully believe that it is *inspired*; and, therefore, I can most fully accept *all* the lessons, moral or spiritual, which our Lord and his apostles draw from that story. The myth of the creation of Eve is as true for all religious purposes as is the parable of the Good Samaritan. Under the form of a myth it sets forth to all ages the Divine purpose, the Divine ideal, the Divine meaning, in the relation of the sexes and in the institution of marriage. This much is guaranteed by the fact of its being in the Bible, being part of the word of God, and is perfectly independent of any question of its historical value. To sum up briefly the moral teaching of this myth. It expresses the subordinate and (so to speak) derivative position of woman, as St. Paul so forcibly teaches. It expresses also the entire oneness and equality of nature between man and woman, as St. Paul is also careful to teach. Again, it expresses the Divine origin and ideal of marriage, as the indissoluble union of one and one, in the name of God. It remains as an inspired protest, not only against

polygamy, but against every falling away from the pure ideal, as our Lord Himself pointed out when rebuking the facility of divorce.

It expresses, too (what needs to be maintained in these days), the holiness of marriage from the beginning, quite irrespective of any outward forms. The State may interfere to regulate, the Church may intervene to bless; but marriage itself is a "natural sacrament," essentially the same amongst virtuous heathens as amongst the most orthodox Christians.

All this is surely most important, and not one whit less true because it is taught us under the form of an inspired myth. But there is more truth, and deeper truth, to be found in it still. St. Paul teaches us that earthly marriage is a picture and symbol of "the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church;" and he chooses the very words of Adam concerning Eve in order to set forth the union and unity which exists between Christ and his spiritual members.¹

This opens up to us a whole field of spiritual interpretation. Adam and Eve are types of Christ and the Church, just as Hagar and Sarah are of the older and later Covenants. Adam slept, and his side was opened; Christ slept in death upon the cross, and his side was opened by the Roman spear. From the side of Adam Eve was formed, and presented to him as his wife. From the side of Christ came forth those life-giving streams, the water and the blood, by which He doth sanctify and cleanse the Church, his bride, that He may present it to Himself a glorious Church, the Lamb's

¹ The strong words of Ephesians v. 30 are almost certainly taken from Genesis ii. 23, as the following verse of the Epistle is simply quoted from the following verse in Genesis.

wife. I will not go on with the allegory ; I will not ask any one to accept it who does not like it, or who thinks it unsafe to venture one step beyond the explicit "spiritual" interpretations of the New Testament. But I will ask to be allowed to believe it myself ; and I will claim this much credit for my position, that while I no longer attribute any historical or scientific value to these early records, I retain a full and unhesitating faith in their moral and spiritual truth.

RAYNER WINTERBOTHAM.

IN FEW WORDS.

A NOTE ON HEBREWS xiii. 22.

EVERY reader of this Epistle, coming upon this Verse at its close, must feel its strangeness. It is rendered in our Version: "And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words." The "few words" are nearly as many as those contained in the Epistles to the Romans and to the Corinthians; and, judging by the usual length of the apostolical letters, and by the length of the letters addressed to the Churches by Clement, Barnabas, and others, the Epistle to the Hebrews cannot be considered short. The usual explanation of *διὰ βραχέων*, *briefly, within a short compass*, is that the writer means to say that he has written "in few words," considering the importance and difficulty of the subjects he has been handling. Which is true enough; only this remark would have applied to a writing of almost any length. Besides, what reason could he have for think-