

that must be denied. There is growing among many Christian thinkers a sympathy with Lotze's position, which may be valuable as a passing phase of feeling which will allow a detachment of the contents of the Christian faith from a metaphysic that is no longer adequate to an enlarged knowledge of nature and man; but will be fatal as a permanent attitude resisting the development of a metaphysic that will again bring the content

of the Christian faith into relation with a more adequate view of the universe, a more satisfying solution of the problem of existence. Lotze's philosophy gives no promise, offers no prophecy of such a metaphysic; but it is of interest and importance because it refuses to sacrifice, and attempts to do justice to the factors of our experience, which it will be the task of the future to reconcile.

## Samson: was he Man or Myth?

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THERE are many things that might tempt one strongly to assign the story of Samson to the region of myth and legend; but so far from the attempt bringing any satisfaction, it would only involve us in inextricable difficulties.

When in any narrative we have recourse to the notion of myth, our justification must be that it makes the narrative more reasonable, more harmonious, more natural. If instead of having this effect, the myth makes the narrative more inconsistent, more purposeless,—nay, actually absurd,—it must be bowed out of court as having no business there. This, as it seems to us, would be the effect on the sacred narrative of ascribing the exploits of Samson to myth and legend.

The myth, to the careful historian, is very far from a vague, convenient agent, whose aid may be summoned at any time and under any circumstances to explain a wonder or reduce a miracle. Myths are subject to definite laws and conditions, and have marked features that differentiate them from history. Bred in a country's prehistoric age, they have a vague, weird character, as if belonging in part to earth and in part to heaven; they have very slight connexion with time and place, and they are usually directed to glorify their hero, whom at last they place virtually, if not formally, in the ranks of the gods.

If the story of Samson really is the product of the mythical spirit, it is the strangest, the most inconsistent, and the most uncouth that that spirit ever bred.

1. First let us mark the very remarkable announcement of his birth. It was very rarely in the Old Testament that coming births were

announced by angels from heaven, and in the New Testament only in the case of John the Baptist and of our blessed Lord. But twice an angel from heaven is represented as announcing the coming birth of Samson, once to his mother, and a second time to his father and mother together. And the emotions raised by the visit and the annunciation alike belong to the highest region of gratitude and wonder. Should we not have had a right to expect (if it was a mythical story) that the life and character of the man would bear a visible relation to this solemn and remarkable transaction? Might not something holy and angelic have been looked for in one whose entrance into the world a messenger of heaven was sent to make known? Such a child might surely have been portrayed of the type of John the Baptist and Jesus, or, not to go so far afield, of the type of Samuel, whose birth also was in a manner foretold, a prophet of the Lord, lofty in character and devoted in service.

But so far from our finding in Samson any such type of character, we are surprised, if not shocked, at his wild, rollicking, jovial life, his grotesque and uncouth methods even of delivering his people, and the combination of savagery and recklessness which marks his exploits. So far from his showing anything of the solemn dignity of the prophet, he wants even the decency and gravity of a responsible citizen. He is a gay, frisky youth, fond of puns and jokes, "quips and cranks and wanton wiles," taking life right easily, and bent on enjoying it as much as he can. Several of his services to his country have the look of practical jokes—grim mixtures of comedy and

tragedy that no refined nature could endure. Was not the contradiction very extraordinary between the announcement of the angel to the parents and the actual career of the man? If we believe the story as we find it, we shall have no difficulty in putting these things together, because one great lesson of the Book of Judges is, that God did His work of delivering Israel through very imperfect instruments—through Ehuds and Jaels and Jephthahs, that were personally guilty of revolting deeds. Samson is but an extreme specimen, the culminating representative of this class of agents. But if his biography was simply a mythical story, surely the writer, if he was not absolutely crazy, would have made some attempt to harmonise the remarkable annunciation of the birth with the character of the hero and the tenor of his life. The most extreme rationalist would find it impossible to reconcile, as the creation of a poetic fancy, an annunciation so spiritual with a career so carnal.

2. The consecration of Samson to the order of Nazarites was another remarkable circumstance in his early life, incompatible with the idea of a mythical origin. In the angel's words on this point the order of the Nazarites is referred to as familiar to the Hebrews, and we know that it was regarded as one of high dignity. The Nazarites were a priestly order, set apart for God, and enjoying that high and mystic appreciation which priesthood implied in communities more or less pervaded by ignorance and superstition (see Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*, art. "Nazarites"). If Samuel and Jeremiah were Nazarites, or Daniel and his companions, they conveyed an excellent idea of the composure of mind and control of body which were appropriate to the office. Samson, on the other hand, beyond the fact of his proving faithful to his vow of abstinence from drink, outraged the office in his ordinary habits and demeanour. And more especially in respect of that very weakness which at last brought about his humiliation and his death. We may be very sure that in the region of the vine where his life was spent, it was not an easy matter to be an abstainer from the juice of the grape in every form. Many a time, when ready to die for thirst after his prodigious labours, the clusters of Sorek and other haunts of the vine must have appeared as if created for the very use of a man so spent; but the history contains not the slightest hint that even under the

utmost pressure he yielded to temptation in that form of indulgence. Yet of another form of bodily appetite he became the very bond slave. He failed to grasp the true idea of the Nazarite—one whose abstinence from the juice of the vine was the type of a well-ordered, harmonious, and therefore beautiful nature, in which no bodily lust was allowed to lord it over the soul, and no paltry passion to drag after it the higher and nobler faculties. Through "desire of women" he became a wretched evidence of the depths of folly and degradation to which a strong man may be reduced by a paltry lust.

Thus, even in that sphere which he might have been expected personally to adorn, Samson was an inconsistency and a comparative failure. If it be said that the legend made him a Nazarite because of his hair, and that the interest of the story turns on two facts connected with it,—the loss of his strength when it was cut, and the return of his strength when the hair began to grow,—the reply is, that his strength had but an incidental connexion with his Nazariteship. Extraordinary strength was no *ordinary* result of the Nazarites' uncut hair—it was not so in Samuel's case nor in Jeremiah's; it was a special provision in Samson's. The legend might have connected strength with his long hair without enrolling him a Nazarite at all. And indeed the Nazarite vow of abstinence seems an obstruction rather than a help to the symmetry of his character; had he been fond of drink his conduct might have been more easily accounted for, it being easy to see how he might have been induced to surrender his secret without exposing himself to the charge of actual idiocy—of deliberately consigning himself, weak and helpless, to the most relentless of foes.

3. A third point where any legend-theory must fail is, to explain the peculiar nature of the service which Samson rendered to his country. On the surface of the story it is plain that, personally, Samson had no bitter feeling against the Philistines, but rather the contrary. Some of them, and especially some of the least virtuous of them, fascinated him. Consequently when he attacks them it is in revenge for some personal injury. It is when his Timnath bride reveals his riddle that he slays thirty Philistines in order to obtain the stipulated changes of raiment. It is when she is given to another that he catches the three hundred foxes and sets fire to the Philistine crop (pro-

bably, according to the *Land and Book*, a pack of jackals, such as used to go about that country in hundreds), and attach to the fastened tails of each pair a brand dipped in oil; it was when the men of Judah delivered him to the Philistines, and they were about to despatch him, that he did such execution with the jawbone of an ass; and lastly, it was avowedly for the purpose of avenging himself for the loss of his sight that he ended his career by pulling down the edifice where the Philistine lords were assembled. *In itself*, this does not seem very glorious work. It is not the kind of work that would excite the spirit of legend, or create the desire to make a hero of the performer. A strong man that in return for personal injuries had inflicted much havoc on a people with whom he was usually on friendly terms, is not the man round whose memory the spirit of admiration, love, and honour rises to its utmost height. There must be more of self-abnegation, more of the disposition to identify himself with his people, more ordinary forgetfulness of self, to rouse the legendary spirit, and place a man among the gods.

4. One other consideration must be specially noted in opposition to the legendary theory—its incompatibility with the treatment received by Samson from the tribe of Judah.

It is to be observed regarding Samson that, unlike most of the other judges, he worked all alone, without even an armour-bearer like Jonathan, or a Phurah like Gideon, to attend him. We read of no troop that gathered round him, or that was animated by his presence and prowess to great exploits. Incredible though it seems, he must have moved about among the Philistines all alone, sleeping in their cities and frequenting their crowded haunts; and yet he remained safe. Probably they looked on him as carrying a charmed life, and were afraid even to shoot an arrow at him unseen, lest some mysterious and awful retribution should befall them. But surely it was not meant that Samson should always stand alone. Was not the great purpose for which his personal exploits were designed, to put courage into the nation at large and rouse them to resist the Philistines? And if any one of the tribes might have been expected to respond to the silent appeal of his exploits, was it not the lion-tribe, illustrious by the example of its founder Judah, renowned for the exploits of Caleb and Othniel, and for its enterprise against the great Adonibezek?

When Samson entered their territory, why did not imperial Judah adopt him as their leader, form a bodyguard around him, and, animated by his spirit, dash against their enemies and cripple them as Gideon had crippled the Midianites and Jephthah the Ammonites? Instead of rising to their duty, the tribe of Judah showed the most craven spirit that ever disgraced men in the face of a national foe. So far from being roused to faith and courage by the example of Samson, they scolded him for irritating their foes, and actually had the meanness to lay hold of him and to bind him, that they might deliver him into the hands of the Philistines. No doubt this treatment had a very depressing effect upon him; if the men of Judah, who were most exposed to the forays of the Philistines, treated him thus, what permanent good could he do to his country? He seems to have gone home and given himself up to an easy, self-indulged life, so that when Delilah came within his horizon, he had no heart to resist her, and went away with her "as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks."

Would anything like this ever have occurred to a maker of myths? What glory could such legends bring either to the hero or to the nation? The rejection of Samson by the tribe of Judah was a greater ignominy than his having his eyes put out by the Philistines, or his being called to make sport for them at their feast. It spoiled his public life, and reduced him to the position of one who had only showed how great things he might have done if he had been properly supported by his nation.

We think we have made out our contention, that the notion of the myth in the life of Samson only makes the narrative more inconsistent and purposeless—nay, actually absurd.

But is the narrative in any degree satisfactory when taken in the orthodox sense? How does Samson pose when viewed as one of the heroes of the faith, enrolled among the worthies of the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews? First, we must remember (as we have said) that he was one of a series of men whom God raised up and fitted out for special service, but who were the very opposite of "all round men," and in some instances conspicuously defective in every quality save the one in which they excelled. That quality was faith in God as the God of Israel, and in that faith they went forward to enterprises from which mere

flesh and blood must have shrunk. In Samson's case the gift of extraordinary bodily strength was added to faith, and became the instrument through which his faith worked. He used it fearlessly against the enemies of Israel. And though it is true that personal injuries were the occasion of rousing him in the first instance against the Philistines, there is evidence that a profounder motive was also at work. The personal injury served as a reminder that he had received his great strength for the good of his country. The service which arises from the combination of a personal interest with a public duty does not indeed show the highest form of virtue, but the combination is one which many worthy men have habitually practised. The last act of his life was not a mere act of personal revenge, otherwise he could not have appealed to Jehovah to bless it. We should be blind indeed if we did not see what a sting seemed to Samson to lie in the boast of the Philistines that Dagon had conquered Jehovah. Deeply conscious of great sin before God in his having flung away the gift that had been given him for great public service, and given occasion to the enemy to blaspheme, he showed himself desirous in this last effort, even at the sacrifice of his own life, to make

some amends for past remissness, and humble the enemies of his country and of his country's God.

One other point to Samson's advantage must be noticed: except in punishing the Philistines, he never seems to have used his supernatural strength for his personal advantage. He had many opportunities of doing so, but he seems steadfastly to have regarded it as a sacred trust. What profit might he not have made in agricultural life by doing the work of ever so many labourers or beasts of burden, or as a merchant by accumulating large stores of goods, or as a hunter by capturing animals? But we never read of anything of the kind; his strength was used only against the enemies of his country.

It is to no purpose to say that he did not crush the Philistine power. That, as we have seen, was mainly because the tribes did not take courage from his example. In spite of his defects, he has won from the common sentiment of Christendom the praise of a great patriot. We instinctively endorse Milton's tribute—

“ Living or dying thou hast fulfilled  
The work for which thou wast foretold  
To Israel, and now liest victorious  
Among thy slain.”

## Renan's "History of the People of Israel."

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AN exhaustive study of the posthumous volume of Renan's *Histoire du peuple d'Israel* would require more space than we are able to command; and even if we had the space, we should not care to occupy these pages with a discussion of matters so painful as the deceased Frenchman's attitude towards Christianity, as it is seen in this book and elsewhere. Other topics also, such as his opinions respecting the date of the later portions of the law, are more conveniently dealt with apart. We propose simply to note a few points, chiefly of a literary character, which present themselves to every attentive reader. And we need only to add one prefatory remark, viz. that the period covered by this concluding volume is that which extends from the return of the Babylonian captives to the death of Jonathan.

M. Renan's explanation of the cropping up of

an Aramaic writing, extending from Ezra iv. 8-vi. 18, and again at Ezra vii. 12-26, is that these are mere copyist's blunders, the scribe having accidentally inserted the Targum in place of the original. This is ingenious, and the supposition is not an impossible one. At the same time, it is not very likely that such a blunder could be committed, or, if committed, allowed to pass uncorrected. The most careless scribe must have known the difference between the two dialects. The most inattentive reader must at once have noticed and challenged the change of tongue. It is far more probable that the compiler of the Book of Ezra is here using and adapting an Aramaic document; and Professor Ryle<sup>1</sup> is fully justified in emphasising the fact that "the whole passage (vi. 1-18), which precedes the resumption

<sup>1</sup> *Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. xxi.