

for which we must be prepared. A rejection of the fundamental miracles which the Church has from the first learned to connect with the Incarnate Life, if it takes a firm hold upon the thought of

our time, cannot fail to issue in a widespread loss of faith in the central mystery of Christianity, and a corresponding loss of the higher life which that mystery inspires.

## The Latest Mythological Theory of the Patriarchs.

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IN recent years two attempts have been made to give the narratives concerning Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons a different meaning from that which they have in the first book of the Bible. In the first place, it has been maintained that the stories of the patriarchs had originally *tribes* in view, so that the experiences of bodies of people are recorded as if they had been those of individuals. This theory, which is held by a number of recent commentators on Genesis, is dealt with in my little work, *Neueste Prinzipien der alttest. Kritik* (1902), p. 34 ff. But, side by side with this main dogma, an attempt is being made at present by not a few scholars to show that the true meaning of the patriarchal history must be sought in the *mythology* of the peoples of Western Asia. This view has been of late maintained especially by H. Winckler, who recurs to it in his brochure, *Himmel und Weltenbild der Babylonier als Grundlage der Weltanschauung und Mythologie aller Völker* (1901).

Winckler starts with the principle that the Babylonians constructed their astronomical system while the spring equinox was still situated in the sign of Gemini, and he deduces the following conclusion: 'Hence it is the Dioscuri myth by preference which forms the starting-point in legends which introduce a new period of history or relate the primeval history of a people. It lies also at the root of the relation of Abraham to Lot, for Abraham said to the latter, "If thou wilt go to the right, then I will go to the left." Here we miss, first of all, any proof of the assertion that the Dioscuri myth emerges in this way outside Israel. But that by the way. Let us confine our attention to what Winckler says with reference to the Hebrew tradition. According to the above quotation, Abraham must be regarded as one of the Dioscuri. Thus Abraham and Lot come to

be the two latest pendants to Castor and Pollux. And why? Because the tradition concerning these two men contains such forms of expression as 'If thou wilt go to the right, I will go to the left' (Gn 13<sup>9</sup>). But are these words not perfectly natural upon a fitting occasion? Surely they are, and yet Winckler connects them with the mythological assumption that Castor and Pollux 'can never be found together; if the one is in the under world, the other is with Zeus' (p. 37). But this stroke at the O.T. tradition quite misses the mark. For Abraham and Lot *were* at first *together*, they migrated to Canaan in company. And, even after their territorial separation (Gn 13<sup>11</sup>), were they not once more *together* when Abraham rescued his nephew from the Eastern foes (14<sup>10</sup>)? Besides, there is mention of two brothers of Abraham, namely, Nahor and Haran. What right then has any one to convert Abraham and Lot, the uncle and the nephew, into twins?

Another indication of the mythological character of Abraham is discovered by Winckler in Gn 20<sup>12</sup>. Here he finds it asserted that the first patriarch was the husband of Ishtar or Astarte, since the latter, according to Babylonian notions, was married to her brother (p. 38). But in this passage Winckler has overlooked an important consideration. The words of Abraham to Abimelech run thus: 'And she is, indeed, truly my sister, the daughter of my father, *but not the daughter of my mother*, and she became—thus—my wife.' Accordingly, she whom Abraham had wedded was a half-sister or step-sister, and marriage with such a one was relatively natural. For, when a man had a plurality of wives, each wife along with her children constituted a separate family. This is brought before us very plainly in Gn 33<sup>6f.</sup>, where Leah with her children and

Rachel with her son Joseph pass by Esau as two separate groups. Also the unhappy princess Tamar in her words to Amnon (2 S 13<sup>13</sup>) assumes the possibility of a marriage between a half-brother and half-sister. Tamar and her full-brother Absalom were the children of David's wife Maacah (13<sup>1</sup>), while Amnon was the son of David by his wife Ahinoam (3<sup>26</sup>). Consequently there is no need to look upon a marriage of Abraham with a half-sister as a trace of a mythological conception of this patriarch.

But the attempt is made, further, to resolve the form of Jacob into a mythological figure. In the above-named brochure Winckler says: 'In the east we have the prominent appearance of the three stars of the Belt [of Orion], which are also known as Jacob's Staff, in allusion to the words "for (only) with this staff I passed over Jordan"' (Gn 32<sup>11</sup>). But can the designation 'Jacob's Staff' be traced back to primeval times? I find in older works the three stars of the Belt of Orion brought into connexion with Nimrod only. All that we find even in Rashi († 1105) in his commentary on Genesis is the remark (on 32<sup>11</sup>) that Jacob, according to an ancient interpretation, smote the Jordan with his staff, so that its waters divided, as in the story of Elijah (2 K 2<sup>8-14</sup>). He cannot have supposed that this stroke was given by Jacob with the Belt of Orion. Moreover, the application of the title 'Jacob's Staff' to the three stars of the Belt does not imply the notion that these stars *actually* formed the staff of which Jacob speaks in Gn 32<sup>11</sup>. It is much more natural to suppose that a staff-like constellation had the name 'Jacob's Staff' bestowed upon it on the same principle as that which gives us in the world of plants an 'Aaron's Rod,' the name applied to the beautifully flowering *Calla* (cf. Nu 17<sup>8</sup> (23)).

The main question, however, is whether the Old Testament itself has a mythological being in view when it uses the words 'for (only) with this staff I passed over Jordan.' This question is answered in the affirmative by Winckler, who writes thus: 'Jacob at his first crossing of the Jordan is thought of as the moon (in the spring time) which now returns again from the watery region and thus crosses the Jordan once more.' But a river separates two tracts of *land*. The crossing of a river cannot therefore be spoken of as a returning from the watery region. If it had been intended to express this last idea, Jacob must have been

represented as coming from the sea and landing upon the shore.

But Winckler has still other grounds for his theory. He adds: 'Typical in favour of this spring myth are the two camps into which Jacob divides his flocks. The beginning of the year consists in the meeting of moon and sun in the same sign. The two have thus each a house or a camp of their own. Jacob and Esau, the latter being as Edom the representative of the southerners and then of the sun—hence he is hairy,—are thus presented as the vernal moon and the vernal sun.' But how is this 'spring myth' supported by the allusion to the *two camps*? These two camps or hosts of which mention is made in Israelitish tradition (Gn 32<sup>11</sup>, etc.) are assigned to Jacob alone. They are *not* distributed between Jacob and Esau, as if these stood for the moon and the sun. Moreover, the two camps are connected not with the stars but with the name of a *city* (Mahanaim, v. 32). Again, Winckler's series 'Edom, southerners, sun' must be regarded as possessing an extremely weak middle link, and no chain is stronger than its weakest link. Finally, the quality of 'hairy' attributed in Gn 27<sup>23</sup> to Esau's hands is expressed in Hebrew by *sā'ir*, a word which probably contains an allusion to the land of *Sē'ir*, where Esau and his descendants settled. This is even *per se* more likely than the supposition that the 'hairy' is intended to suggest the sun's rays. The latter explanation is deprived of all plausibility by the statement that Esau looked 'quite like a mantle of hair' (Gn 25<sup>25</sup>). These words might be used to characterize Esau and his descendants, the Edomites, as rough and wild-looking Bedouins, but a different form of expression would have been employed if Esau had been identified with the sun shooting forth its rays.

From the above it will be seen how rotten are the foundations on which the latest attempt to reduce the patriarchs to mythological figures is based, and yet one has the presumption to add that the biblical narrative uses the ancient myths *with full consciousness*, in order to obtain an investiture for occurrences of which no exact tradition was any longer extant (*l.c.* p. 48 f.). For this assertion there is not a single gleam of positive proof, whereas countless circumstances, in addition to what has been urged in this article, are opposed to its truth.

By Abraham, we are told, the Hebrew narrator *means* the moon. Well now, let any one read Gn 11<sup>26</sup>-25<sup>6</sup> and then say whether it is the moon that is in view. How admirably the narrative has succeeded in *concealing* its purpose! For surely the writer concealed the aim attributed to him when he illustrated the number of Abraham's posterity by *comparing* them with the stars (15<sup>5</sup> and 22<sup>17</sup>). Is it possible that he could so have forgotten the rôle he was playing? And he must have tripped in the same way when he made Jacob dream of a ladder which reached *from earth* to heaven (28<sup>12</sup>). For the moon-god the ladder should have taken the opposite direction. Finally, with reference to Joseph, Winckler (*Gesch. Isr.* ii.

[1900] 62 f.) remarks: 'If one of the sons of the moon comes into the hands of the sun-god, he becomes forfeit to the latter. Each time Joseph detains one. When he gets the youngest into his hands, the matter is at an end.' Yes, it would have been at an end if the history of Joseph had been written on the lines of Winckler's mythological prescription. But, as that history reads in the O.T., *the matter is not at an end* when Benjamin arrives, but Joseph now sends for his father, and causes 'the moon' to settle in the land of Goshen, etc.

The narratives of Genesis, then, give no occasion for the theories concerning the patriarchs which have been advanced by the friends of mythology.

## Recent Biblical and Oriental Archaeology.

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IN a sumptuous volume,<sup>1</sup> worthy of the scholar to whose memory it is devoted, the scattered contributions of Sir P. Le Page Renouf to Egyptological science have been collected and published by Professor Maspero and Mr. Rylands. No better editors could have been found than the most learned and accomplished of living Egyptologists and the indefatigable secretary of the Society of Biblical Archaeology. Renouf was a scholar who, in these days of superabundant literary activity, wrote comparatively little, but what he once wrote never needed to be written again. The general public know him chiefly as a Hibbert lecturer, and, in his latter days, as keeper of the Oriental Department in the British Museum. It is, however, by his contributions to our knowledge of the ancient Egyptian language that he will be longest remembered in the world of science. The Book of the Dead was the special object of his studies, and here he had no rivals. He was printing a new and revised translation of it when death overtook him. Fortunately, the greater part of the text and commentary was already in type, and the manuscript of the re-

mainder was in a sufficiently complete state to allow Professor Naville to edit it for the Society of Biblical Archaeology.

Renouf was a good classical scholar, though a change of religion prevented him from taking his degree at Oxford. He had enthusiastically taken up the study of Comparative Philology at a time when it was a new pursuit, and, like many others of us, passed under the spell of Max Müller's mythological views. It was just this which gave his Egyptological work so much value; he was no narrow specialist, whose horizon was bounded by the little department of knowledge in which alone he was interested. He could look beyond the point of view of the mere Egyptologist, and bring the knowledge and experience acquired in other fields to his own favourite study.

One of his earliest literary productions, which is republished in the present volume, was an answer to Sir G. C. Lewis's famous assertion that a lost language could not be deciphered and read. The answer was complete and final, and time has proved that it was so. But it is a good thing that it should be reproduced in a form which will enable the general public to 'mark, learn, and inwardly digest' it. It points an object-lesson which is much needed to-day. The arguments of

<sup>1</sup> *The Life-Work of Sir Peter Le Page Renouf*. First Series, Egyptological and Philological Essays. Vol. I. Edited by G. Maspero and W. H. Rylands. Paris: Leroux, 1902.