

## The Theology of Moses.

PROF. P. H. STEENSTRA.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

THE greater number of recent writers on the religion of ancient Israel ascribe the origin of monotheism to the flourishing period of prophecy. Moses, they hold, instituted a national religion of peculiar and high character, which, however, was not monotheistic. It sanctioned the worship in Israel of but one God, Jahveh, who was conceived to be a personal being, but not yet completely differentiated from nature. It ascribed very great power and wisdom to Jahveh; but its unique excellence consisted in its attribution to him of ethical characteristics. Jahveh was the guardian of right, the punisher of wrong, the faithful, true, and beneficent superhuman king of his people. All this, however, does not constitute more than a high form of what may be called national henotheism. Beyond this Moses did not rise. Monotheism was the outcome of the conflict between the prophets of the eighth century and the masses of the people, in which the former represent religious progress, the latter, conservative adherence to old ideas. The struggle was precipitated by the prophets' perception of grave national moral defects and political dangers, and issued in the recognition and enunciation by them of "ethical monotheism," in contradistinction to the people's ancient fundamentally unethical conception of Jahveh as their national God, who as such was bound to secure their safety and prosperity regardless of their moral character and actions.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to deal fairly with a theory which presents itself as the outcome of the most minute and thorough investigation now possible of a long course of historical movements and events remote in time and very imperfectly known. It can be adequately judged only by an equally minute consideration of all the data and the questions raised by them, which of course cannot be done in one short paper. But it may be feasible within brief compass to call renewed attention to objections to the theory, which if they cannot

<sup>1</sup> Cf. especially Kuenen's *Hibbert Lectures*, 1882, Lectures II and III.

definitively overthrow it and reinstate Moses in his former honors, shall at least show that the question cannot yet be regarded as finally closed. There is danger just now that the cause of Moses shall be decided against him by default, especially among the younger theological generation in this country.

The strength of the theory lies in its constant appeal, open or covert, to natural historical evolution and progress. It disdains to entertain the old assumption of post-Mosaic apostasy and retrogression. It seems to account for the rise of monotheism in a purely natural way, in the best known age of Hebrew history. Instead of referring it back to Moses, and seeking to account for his knowledge by theory or conjecture, it undertakes to make us see the very steps by which the prophets reached it. Moreover, the records of the preceding history, from the exodus to the eighth century, readily yield to an interpretation which demonstrates that even the most eminent servants of Jahveh conceived of him as only one national god among many. The modern mind, deeply imbued with the ideas of progress and evolution, is predisposed to accept these views almost without examination. The mere statement of them seems sufficient to establish them.

But closer consideration does not tend to strengthen this first impression. Before taking up the main point, the alleged origin of monotheism in the eighth century, let us glance at the treatment of the pre-prophetic ages by the exponents of this theory. The biblical records of these ages are regarded as equivocal and incapable of serving as independent sources of history. They can only be construed in the light reflected on them by the better known period that came after them. How far this is true, we need not now inquire. It is at all events true that no period of any history can be fully understood out of its relations to what went before it or came after. It is, however, more to the purpose to note the controlling principles that direct the interpretation of the records. The leading one is that of historical development or evolution. By this, rather than by what they say, the mental and spiritual "horizon" of the Old Testament writers is determined; and sometimes the horizon thus obtained is confidently made the sole criterion of the genuineness of passages, especially in the older prophets. The applicability of the principle of evolution, rightly apprehended and used, to Hebrew history, religious or political, cannot be questioned. But evolution is not necessarily progress, advance to higher, fuller truth. Even in physical nature, the coincidence of evolution and improvement is far from estab-

lished: in the region of human will and freedom it cannot for a moment be admitted. History is full of apostasies and retrograde movements. They are evolutions, no doubt; they grow out of antecedent tendencies and conditions; but if any law is discoverable in them, it is that of action and reaction, of alternate growth and decay. Nor is development always set in motion and controlled by causes within the subject of it. Wholly external influences and forces play their part. No matter what the religion of the Israelites when they entered Canaan, it could not possibly, except by a miracle of utmost magnitude, escape more or less of transformation through the change in the people's own condition, and through contact with populations in many respects their superiors and cherishing divergent religious traditions. Take any form of Christianity, present or past: would it be possible to deduce from it the exact teaching of Christ as to his own person and mission, without previous careful elimination of Jewish, Greek, Roman, or Teutonic influences? Only the facts can prove whether a given period advanced or retrograded. And if the facts are few and in need of interpretation, they must be interpreted by a safer rule than any supposed law of constant progress. As regards Israel, no one who ascribes the substance of the decalogue to Moses can deny that the worship of the Phœnician Baal in the ninth century was in contravention of his teaching, as it certainly was a departure from the practice of the age before the division of the kingdom. There was apostasy in any case, whether Moses was henotheist or monotheist.

Another prepossession which largely controls the construction put on pre-prophetic history, must be mentioned and protested against. It operates silently, and probably no writer is conscious of its presence. It is the assumption that nothing is entitled to be called monotheism that does not explicitly seize all that is logically implied in monotheism,<sup>3</sup> at least so far as the writing prophets analyzed it. Almost every religious or ethical utterance, deed, or practice, met with in earlier times, which falls or seems to fall below the level of the prophets, is regarded as evidence that monotheism had not yet emerged. And let it be noted that this is done in the face of the assumption that the attainment of monotheism led to such a recon-

<sup>3</sup> A single illustrative example from Smend's *Alttestamentliche Religionsgeschichte*, p. 114: "How far Israel was from correct monotheism is shown by the degree of faith placed in man's power to bless and curse. That meant that the individual (family, tribe, nation) could utilize its special relation to Jahveh or another superhuman being in favor of friends and to the injury of foes."

struction of Israel's previous history as should bring it into conformity with the newly won truth (cf. Kuenen, *Godsdienst*, i. 384 ff.) ; from which one would naturally infer that the features now fastened on by the critics were not regarded by the prophet-historians who preserved them as radically inconsistent with their own theology. In this way, statements in the older historical Scriptures are made to testify to national henotheism (and that too of a gross nature form), which do not necessarily involve such a conclusion. Such, for example, are a number of passages indicative of the great reverence paid the ark as the sanctuary of Jahveh, and the awful power ascribed to it (Num. x. 35 ; 1 Sam. iv. 3, 5 ; vi. 19 f. ; 2 Sam. vi. 7 ; etc.). That the *prophetæ posteriores* have advanced beyond this point, may be admitted, — cf. Jer. iii. 16, the only place in the prophetic books where the ark is so much as mentioned, — but it does not follow that in the elder time the ark was a veritable fetish. The tendency to localize the presence of God is not inconsistent with genuine monotheism. It constantly occurs in the most elevated forms of Christian thought and speech. The prophets themselves habitually regard Zion as Jahveh's abode. Similar remarks apply to such words as these of David : " Let not my blood fall to the ground far away from Jahveh's face " (1 Sam. xxvi. 20). Here Jahveh is localized in the land of Canaan ; but nothing in the language justifies the inference that his power and presence are limited by its borders. The same localizing words are used in 2 Ki. xvii. 23, by a writer who certainly wrote after the Deuteronomist. Admitting that such phraseology originated under polytheistic beliefs, it proves nothing as to its later use. The influence of tradition and habit in the retention of forms of speech which thought has perhaps ages before outgrown, should not be lost sight of.

Many other passages are supposed to prove that anything like monotheism proper was unknown to the most eminent servants of Jahveh in the pre-prophetic period, but these may suffice to indicate the grounds for the present protest. It is more important to advert to two other features of real or supposed conformity of ancient Jahvism to other Semitic religions. One of these is the practice of human sacrifices. How extensively this practice prevailed in ancient Israel, I shall not now inquire. The only clear case in pre-prophetic history is that of Jephthah's daughter. The way in which the story is told leaves the impression that it was not an altogether unheard of, albeit by no means common, occurrence. But are human sacrifices necessarily inconsistent with monotheism, assuming it to exist among

a rude people in a rude age? Certainly not in the mind of the writer of Gen. xxii., whose judgment on that point is worth more than that of modern critics. What was the underlying thought of the practice? First, that the Deity is the absolute owner of all his servants; and secondly, that he is pleased with sacrifices offered to him in proportion to the value set upon them by the offerer. The question of one God or of many does not affect this reasoning. If it did, it would rather tend to enforce than to weaken its conclusion; for the greater the Deity, the higher his right to man's best service. That which ultimately made human sacrifices impossible in Israel was not monotheism as such, but the perception that what God requires is not sacrifices or gifts of any kind, but obedience to his ethical demands (cf. Mic. vi. 8).

The other point is in some respects more difficult. It is that down to the time of the Deuteronomist and Jeremiah the real existence of other gods beside Jahveh was universally admitted in Israel, and that therefore monotheism had not yet been taught. The premiss cannot be denied.<sup>5</sup> It finds support even in the Ten Words, the kernel of which I assume to be Mosaic. Not indeed in the opening declaration, "I am Jahveh, thy God": the name Jahveh is, or was originally, not so much a proper name as a predicate, and is no more evidence of belief in other gods than the common use of "The Almighty" is in English; nor is "Thy God" more polytheistic than our hymn phrase, "God of our fathers." But the first Word itself, "Thou shalt have no other God but me," implies the existence of a class of beings called gods. Now, if the word "god," from the time of Moses onward, always carried one and the same invariable import — implied the possession of the same definitely conceived complex of divine characteristics and powers; and if it were also established that the prophets of the eighth century were the first to perceive that, in its proper sense, it was applicable only to Jahveh, the matter would be settled. The Jahveh of Moses would be a national god, the compeer of Kemosh and Milkom, possibly wiser and stronger, but not qualitatively different. The second of these hypotheses, however, — of which more anon, — cannot, I think, be accepted as truth; can the first? Is it not enough to reply that unquestionably monotheist prophets and psalmists frequently speak of other gods, and occasionally challenge comparison of them with Jahveh? (Cf.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. König, *Hauptprobleme*, p. 38 ff., and for a full statement of the facts, Baudissin, *Semitische Religionsgeschichte*, i. 47 ff.

Mic. vii. 18 ; Ex. xv. 11 ; Ps. lxxxvi. 8). St. Paul in one and the same breath denies that there is any God but One and concedes that "there are gods many and lords many" (1 Cor. viii. 5). Heathen kings also (or, as many contend, angels) are styled *'elohim* and *'elim* (Ps. lxxxii. 1 ; lviii. 2). Heroes and magnates are called *'elim* (Job xli. 17 ; 2 Ki. xxiv. 15).<sup>4</sup> The late origin of passages in which this application of the words is found, does not weaken the inference from them. The sense in which they use the word *'elohim* must go back to remote antiquity ; for its compass could not be enlarged after the rise of exclusive, monotheistic ideas. As a class designation, the word "god" must be looked upon as expressing nothing more than superiority or power of some sort over men as such. The writer of Deut. iv. 19 (cf. xxix. 25) speaks of sun, moon, and stars as gods ; yet asserts that Jahveh alone is God, showing that the word is elastic, and in itself indefinite. Moses might conceive of "Jahveh thy God" as absolutely *sui generis*, and yet add, "thou shalt have no other god but me," without hinting or believing that such other gods did not actually exist. What he conceived them to be, supposing him to have reached the grand conception of one only God, as we speak of God, is another and not easily answered question, which, however, need not here be considered. The term *'Elohim* in ancient Israel, like our phrase "The Supreme," expressed relations, not ontological uniqueness ; it represented feelings and emotions rather than any sharply defined idea. What is our own thought of God ? When we have pushed reflection and analysis to their utmost capacity, are we any nearer to a completely true conception of God than the Israelites were ? True, we no longer speak or think of gods, and have taught even the uneducated not to do so. Our sense of logical consistency demands that the designation of a unique being be restricted to him, and shall not also be used in a broader sense. But we are not justified in measuring the import of the word *'Elohim* as used in ancient Israel by conceptions which we ourselves cannot clearly grasp, still less express in a single word.

We turn now to the evolutionary explanation of the rise of monotheism. The theory of Kuenen, who has expressed himself most fully and clearly on this important point, may be outlined as follows : The struggle in the Northern Kingdom between the foreign Baal cult, introduced by Jezebel, and the worship of Jahveh was specially im-

<sup>4</sup> The spelling אל for אֱל is probably intended to mark the common, non-sacred use of the word. Cf. Bährgen, *Beiträge*, p. 274 ; Brown, *Heb. Lex.*, s. v. אֱל.

portant because it distinctly raised the alternative, Jahveh *or* Baal, and thus led to inquiries concerning the nature of Jahveh, his character, and the difference between him and other gods, out of which the higher Jahvism of the prophets of the succeeding century was born (*Godsdienst*, i. 360 f.). The lengthy period of profound national depression and misery, that apparently set in during the reign of Jehu, and affected both kingdoms, — each in its own time and manner, — added urgency to these inquiries and reflections. Jahveh had ceased to champion his people; why? His power could not be doubted; why then did he not exert it? The endeavor to resolve this problem brought home to the thought and feelings of the prophets the qualitative difference between Jahveh and other gods. His spiritual nature and ethical character became the prominent elements in their conception of him, while the nature side of his being sank into the background. Herewith their idea of Jahveh began to develop in the direction of a spiritual monotheism (*Godsdienst*, i. 367 ff.). In the consciousness of the prophets the central place in the idea of God was taken, not as previously by his might, but by his holiness. “From that moment it ceased to be a question of more or less between Jahveh and the other gods; for now he stood not only above them, but in distinct opposition to them. If Jahveh the Holy One was God, if he was God *as* the Holy One, *then the others were not*. In a word, the belief that Jahveh was the only God sprang out of the ethical conception of his being.” “The name ‘ethical monotheism’ describes better than any other the characteristics of their [the prophets’] point of view, for it not only expresses the character of the one God they worshipped, but also indicates the fountain whence their faith in him welled up” (*Hibbert Lectures*, 1882, pp. 127 and 133).

Now, that struggles and experiences like those just spoken of might and did affect theological thought and feeling need not be doubted; but do they explain the conversion of a limited, national deity, one among many, into the supreme universal ruler, beside whom there is none other? I think not. The theory depends on two distinctions which, it seems to me, do not bear examination. In the first place, I must agree with König (*Hauptprobleme*, p. 80), that the distinction between moral *attributes*, — ascribed to Jahveh from of old (*Godsdienst*, i. 277 f.; cf. also p. 289), by the people as well as the prophets (*Hibbert Lectures*, p. 123), — and moral *character*, first ascribed to him by the writing prophets, is too tenuous to be seized and held fast. Kuenen himself, off his guard, obliterates it (*Hibbert*

*Lectures*, p. 97, top). What are moral attributes but elements and indices of moral character? And if Jahveh always differed from mere nature gods in having moral attributes, why was not the monotheistic inference arrived at long before the eighth century? Struggles and adversities such as finally led to it were not wanting in earlier ages. Is it not also incumbent upon the evolution theory to explain how the writing prophets of the eighth century attained their high appreciation of moral excellence while cotemporary priests, the expounders of Jahveh's moral *torah*, not to speak of the professional prophets and the mass of the people, were exemplars of moral dullness and perversity?

The other distinction is that made between nature gods and the concept of an ethical deity. What does it imply, and what is its value? The constant assumption underlying the whole theory is, that the nature gods are conceived of as simply material force centres, devoid of ethical qualities. The element of might is doubtless prominent, it might not be erroneous to say fundamental, in every conception of deity. The Semites, at all events, according to the still prevalent opinion of etymologists, gave expression to it in their generic word *El* and its cognates. Yet, as Balthgen well points out (*Beiträge*, p. 264), their most widely diffused divine names, — Baal, Melek, Adon, — distinctly imply moral relations between the gods and men. But we need not restrict ourselves to the Semites. Did ever man bow before a god to whom he did not ascribe at least such and so much ethical character as he himself possessed or could conceive of? Of course, I am not thinking of the merely formal worship of people who have outgrown ancient conceptions, without being able to replace them by higher ones, but of sincere, believing worship. What are nature gods? Not natural objects or forces as such, but the personal beings of whom they are the vehicles or manifestation. Not the sun, the moon, the stars, the spreading tree, the flowing fountain, but the glorious, beneficent or hurtful intelligences that live and move in them. Primitive man, however low his intellectual status, was not an absolute fool, to bow down to things known to be lifeless. The veriest fetishist who adores a stone, endows that stone with personality similar to his own, and by consequence with such ethical qualities as he himself possesses or feels that he ought to possess. No doubt nature gods often exercise their power in a way that to their worshippers seems arbitrary and capricious; but the sense of sin and ill-desert, wanting in no ancient religion of which any considerable literary remains are extant, shows that they are con-



ceived as ethical beings. Nor is it conceivable that the prophets misapprehended the characteristics attributed by other nations to their gods, and thus compared Jahveh with the creations of their own imaginations. Having once attained to monotheism, they might (as in fact they did) declare the heathen gods to be nonentities, or identify them with their images. But while making the comparison that, according to the theory, issued in this attainment, they must have believed in the reality of those gods as living, personal beings, and consequently in their possession of ethical characteristics. It follows that the comparison of Jahveh as an ethical deity with the nature gods of other nations could never lead to a qualitative differentiation between them. It might demonstrate Jahveh's superexcellence, but not his sole divinity.

The unsatisfactory character of the explanation how the prophets reached monotheism goes far to discredit the alleged fact; for apart from the theory of evolution and its influence on the interpretation of the historical books, there is no other evidence to support it. We search the prophetic writings in vain for traces of consciousness of the mighty change alleged to be going on. There is no enthusiastic absorption in a new conception—one of such supreme import!—no ceaseless iteration, explication, or defence of it. No change of thought was ever urged on a people in a manner so unconscious. The Deuteronomist, when legislating against the *bamoth* and in favor of cult centralization, actually grows wearisome through repetition. And yet, according to the development theory, he was no more at variance with the popular thought than were the originators of monotheism. If the prophets changed the people's ancient territorial god, who differed from other gods chiefly in having certain ethical attributes (the nature and effect of which do not clearly appear), into a sole universal God, of severe moral character, and sternly demanding conformity to himself in life and action, the struggle between prophets and people, of which we are told, could not fail to arise. And that there was a struggle is very evident; but it is not such as we are led to expect. The prophets never argue for the uniqueness and universal supremacy of Jahveh. They simply take it for granted. It is implied in numerous passages concerning foreign nations—not only in those that denounce punishment against them, but also in such as make them the subjects of providential government (cf. Amos ix. 7). The struggle that appears is the everlasting struggle between the preachers of righteousness and people bent on wickedness. The magnates are charged with drunkenness, luxury, and political intrigues;

the rich with rapacity and oppression toward the poor, the widow, and the orphan ; judges with respect of persons and bribe-taking ; priests with neglecting to teach the knowledge of God, right, and duty, and exalting the forms of religion, which yield them profit, at the expense of its spirit ; prophets with seeking their own interest and persecuting those who refuse to serve them ; traders with overreaching and fraudulent dealings ; society generally is regarded as honeycombed with insincerity, dishonesty, and corruption. Such are the themes to which the prophets of the eighth century unweariedly return. True, they also denounce the worship of false gods and idols ; but it is chiefly, if not solely, by way of emphasizing their one comprehensive accusation, of which all the others are but specifications, that Israel is faithless to its God, to whom nevertheless it looks for prosperity within and safety from foreign foes ; whom it worships with great outward pomp and ceremony, but whom in heart and life it has forsaken and turned away from. Nowhere do we meet with even a verse that would lead us to suspect that the prophets are preaching a new truth, or that the people are refusing to advance and improve upon what their fathers taught them. The prophets look back to the age of David as religiously preëminent as well as politically prosperous.<sup>5</sup> When the Hebrew asks, What does Jahveh require of me? the answer, fairly interpreted, is, Only what thou hast *always*<sup>6</sup> been taught : to do right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

The way has thus been cleared for a fairer estimate of the evidence that monotheism does not date from the eighth century, but goes back to the time of Moses, than many critics accord to it. It is mainly traditional. Our written historical sources, with the exception of a few fragments incorporated in later documents, originated centuries after Moses, and for the earlier ages are themselves based on oral tradition. But this does not destroy their value. To be sure, it is now almost as common to contemn tradition the moment it does not fall in with the dogmas of the youthful and very precariously built up "science of anthropology," as it was formerly, when sheltered under the ægis of infallible inspiration, to trust it too implicitly. Neither of these attitudes is maintainable. No national tradition, ancient or modern, written or unwritten, is above criticism.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Amos ix. 11 ; Hos. iii. 5 (both rejected by some, but without good reason) ; Ia. ix. 7 ; xi. 1 ; Mic. v. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Mic. vi. 8. This "always" rests not only on the tense of the verb, but also on the meaning of *mishpat*, as time-honored, gradually built up *jus* or *Recht*. Cf. Bântsch, *Bundesbuch*, p. 29 ff.

Even the "Monroe doctrine," scarcely more than three generations old, and ascertainable from authentic documents, is as frequently distorted as correctly stated. But while tradition idealizes, magnifies, displaces, fills up gaps, and invents details, it does not create out of nothing. It starts with facts; and it is the critic's business to disinter those facts out of the accretions that envelop them. Nor should it be overlooked that the oral tradition of ages practically unacquainted with any other means of preserving knowledge, busying itself with the great matters of religion and national history, and especially the tradition of conservative Orientals, always slow to accept innovations, is not to be compared with the popular tale-telling of more pliable times and peoples. As to the grand outlines of predeuteronomic *tendenzlos* Hebrew tradition concerning historic times, the burden of proof lies with its impugnors. There is no rational call to prove that Israel was settled and oppressed in Egypt; it is for those who question it to prove that they were not. Neither are we under obligation to demonstrate the correctness of tradition when it treats monotheism as the established religion of Israel from the exodus onward. Its later origin must be accounted for and proven by those who assert it.

The later Deuteronomic and Priestly forms of tradition present Moses predominantly as civil and religious lawgiver. That this view was not a new invention, however, is sufficiently evident from the writings of J and E, who likewise attribute to him collections of laws, although much simpler and less voluminous ones. The truth at the base of the tradition cannot be gainsaid. The national organizer and head of formerly nomade tribes must be a lawgiver, whether he approves or modifies what has previously obtained, adds to it by judicial decisions, or replaces it by new enactments. But the earlier time did not emphasize this phase of Moses' work. Not only, as just remarked, is the legislative element in J and E comparatively small, but it is introduced for the sake of the relation between Jahveh and Israel conditioned by it. The narrative portions of these writings depict Moses as the mediator of Jahveh's self-manifestation, the interpreter of his disposition toward Israel, the organ of his communications—in a word, the peerless prophet (cf. Num. xii. 6 ff.). This is also the light in which Hosea and Micah regard him. By a prophet Jahveh brought Israel out of Egypt (Hos. xii. 14). Micah refers to him as the divinely sent guide and leader of Israel out of Egypt and through the desert (vi. 4; cf. Jer. ii. 6). The Deuteronomist himself represents him as the prototype of the succeeding line

of prophets (Deut. xviii. 15 ff.). The two characters, lawgiver and prophet, are not at all incongruous according to Semitic modes of thought. All Semitic communities rest on religious foundations—have the character, more or less thoroughly, of theocracies. The lawgiver of such communities must be the mouthpiece of Deity; and the representative of Deity is *ipso facto* a lawgiver. That later ages thought of Moses chiefly in the latter character, resulted from the growing importance attached to the formal purity of the national cult. But that itself shows that it was only another form of the earlier conception of him as prophet, religious teacher. Israel presents the spectacle so rare, perhaps altogether singular, in history, of a nation born in a day, in more than a mere governmental sense. The first requisite in the leader of the hour was the power to enlist and direct the religious instinct of the people. Were Israelitish tradition utterly silent on the point, the assumption that Moses was the teacher of some form of national religion would nevertheless be unavoidable. But tradition implies in addition to this that the religion he taught was the same ethical, spiritual, exclusive, and therefore essentially monotheistic religion with which they who transmit the information were acquainted. For they know of no other. Their Jahveh is the Jahveh of Moses. Through all her history, so far as we have any means of tracing it, Israel regarded the Desert of Sinai as the birthplace of her national life and religion.

Thus far the general purport of tradition. But this is buttressed by two special traditions of great significance. One is that the name Jahveh was first made known to Moses (Ex. iii. 13-15). This tradition makes its earliest appearance in E; but the apparent allusions to it in Hosea (xii. 10; xiii. 4) and Ezekiel (xx. 5), the avoidance of the name in Job, the writer of which transports himself into the patriarchal age, and the wholly unstudied and undefended language of P in Ex. vi. 2, 3, establish its character as a generally current tradition. The use of the name Jahveh by J in pre-Mosaic narratives is readily explainable as conformity to the popular usage of his day. The notice in Gen. iv. 26 does not militate against this hypothesis (cf. Dillmann *in loc.*). Nor is there any good ground for doubting the tradition. Nearly every Semitic language and literature, as also the Egyptian— not to speak of sundry incursions into the Aryan domain,— have been searched for the original of the name Jahveh; but not one of the many explanations proposed is one half as simple, probable, and satisfactory as that of the native tradition. No doubt, Moses appeared as the messenger of the God of the

fathers of a part of his people ; but he named that God Jahveh, partly, we may believe, to facilitate the acceptance of him by all of the more or less heterogeneous elements of the entire people of the exodus, partly and more especially to furnish an index to his nature and character (Ex. iii. 14 ; cf. Gen. ii. 19 f.). What sense he attached to it cannot now be fully and definitely ascertained. With Dillmann (on Exodus, p. 33) I hold that the name is derived from the Kal (not the Hiphil) form of the verb *to be*, and signifies 'He who is, the existent, the living one.' It may be that "no Semitic deity was ever originally named after so abstract a conception" (Delitzsch, *Paradies*, 161) ; but in the absence of namings under anything like parallel circumstances, this carries no weight. The name implies previous reflection, no doubt ; but not of such a nature as to be beyond a Moses. It is not to be interpreted as a declaration of absolute existence — aseity, nor of any other metaphysical attribute. It is not even necessary to suppose that the people were taught to find in it a contrast of Jahveh with other gods as non-existent. It views Jahveh in his relation to Israel, and describes him as essentially being, life, and therefore (being God) possessed of all-sufficient power, in contrast with human transitoriness and weakness. It may have meant more ; and if the writer of Ex. iii. 13, 14 accurately represents the thought of Moses, it did mean more. It expressed the unsearchable nature of God and the unchangeable constancy of his character, the same from generation to generation. But circumscribe its signification within the narrowest possible limits, it is still a most remarkable name. Even more remarkable for its wealth of latent suggestion than for what it directly expresses. Jahveh is not merely a Superior, Proprietor, King, Lord ; not any one manifestation of existence, as fire, light, wind, rain. He is all that thought can conceive him to be — existence itself.

The other supporting tradition is that which represents Jahveh as having entered into a covenant with Israel on their leaving Egypt, or at Sinai-Horeb. Jahveh condescended to be Israel's God, and Israel engaged to observe Jahveh's statutes and ordinances. From the time of the Deuteronomist and Jeremiah this representation is very common. It is even projected into the future. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Deutero-Isaiah promise that Jahveh will replace the old covenant, annulled through Israel's faithlessness, by a new one, the requirements of which he will write in their hearts, not as of old on tablets of stone. How deeply rooted this conception was in later Jewish thought, may be inferred from its reappearance, both as his-

tory and as promise, in the New Testament. The pre-deuteronomic writings afford fewer traces of it. Yet it is vouched for by Hosea among the prophets of the eighth century,<sup>7</sup> by the probably considerably older writer of the Elijah history (1 Ki. xix. 14), and by E and J in their accounts of the covenant-making itself.<sup>8</sup> It is also implied in one of the older names of the sacred ark, "the ark of the covenant." Moreover, the nature of the tradition establishes its own authenticity. The conception it embodies is unique. No other ancient nation conceived of the origin of its relation to its god in this peculiar way.<sup>9</sup> The covenant idea, therefore, could not arise by the adoption of an elsewhere current conception. And what could suggest it as a mere figure of speech, and give it such powerful hold on the national mind, it is not easy to divine. Was it derived from the marriage figure — Jahveh the husband, Israel the wife? But that figure is not met with until after the covenant idea has already appeared, nor is its independent origin more self-evident.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the covenant, considered as a real historical transaction, is precisely what the circumstances of Israel's national origin called for, just as they called for

<sup>7</sup> Hos. viii. 1; vi. 7. Smend (*Alttestamentliche Religionsgeschichte*, p. 299, n.), referring to Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*<sup>8</sup>, p. 436 f., says, Hosea in vi. 7 finds that Israel's disobedience toward Jahveh may be "compared with covenant breaking." Therefore, Smend says, one must agree with Wellhausen when he declares viii. 1 to be interpolated. The *Prolegomena* I have not at hand at the moment, but in the 5th *Hefst* of his *Skizzen*, 1893, Wellhausen adopts the emendation כְּאֵדָם in vi. 7, and finds an unknown *locality* indicated. This eliminates the idea of comparison, which in the turn given to it in Smend's words is already excluded by the following clause, even as the text stands. As for viii. 1 Wellhausen retains it, and only finds its opening clause textually corrupt. — It is true, Hosea does not define the covenant; but his image of the marriage of Jahveh with Israel leaves no reasonable doubt that he refers to the covenant entered into in the desert (cf. ix. 10; xiii. 4, 5; xi. 1, 3).

<sup>8</sup> Ex. xxiv. 7, 8; xxxiv. 10, 27, 28. The analysis is disputed. It is possible that these passages represent but one writer, who in that case is certainly J, the elder.

<sup>9</sup> The prohibition (Ex. xxiii. 32), "Thou shalt not make a covenant in favor of them [the Canaanite nations] and their gods," does not contemplate leagues of a parallel kind. The covenant in such cases was made with the nation and only indirectly with its god. Cf. Valeton on the passage, especially on the construction כְּבֵרִית לְ כְּבֵרִית, and its implication, in *ZATW*. 1892, p. 229. — Baal-berith was not a Baal with whom a covenant had been made, but who watched over a covenant made between men.

<sup>10</sup> W. R. Smith's explanation (*Prophets of Israel*, p. 168, cf. Smend, p. 189) is to my mind more ingenious than satisfactory.

a new divine name. The absence of ancient, slowly formed and strengthened relations between a number of separate tribes, some of them but distantly cognate, if at all ; and between them all and a common deity, without which national existence was impossible, could only be supplied by a solemn league and covenant. There is therefore good reason to accept the tradition as authentic, and as such it lends powerful support to the general Israelite belief that Moses was the teacher of the one and only form of Jahvism of which they knew anything.

Tradition thus furnishes a comparative answer to the query, What was the theology of Moses? which however it is not easy to translate into positive terms. For what was the theology of Israel as expressed most fully by the prophets? It is difficult indeed for the modern Western mind to seize and reproduce it. The utterances of the prophets contain or imply, and their silences suggest, much that our wider knowledge, metaphysical principles, and more rigorous discursive thought-processes find untenable. The best we can do is to say that it was practical monotheism, which had by no means thought out all the elements contained in or combined with it. Spiritually and ethically all-sufficient, it was philosophically crude and defective. In one respect it had advanced or was advancing beyond the Mosaic institutes. The one true God of Israel was seen to be also the *only* God and Ruler of all mankind. Apart from this the monotheism of Moses was probably fully as high and perfect as that of the eighth century. True, he recognized the existence of other gods. But the very work he undertook may be taken as evidence of his real and high monotheism. The greatness and power of a god manifested itself in the greatness and power of his people. Measured by that rule, what comparison could there be between the gods of mighty Egypt and those of the enslaved clans! He who dared the liberating conflict with them must have felt absolutely certain that his God was god in a sense that applied to none other. The name Jahveh testifies to the same conviction. All other gods could only be of an inferior order, ruling by Jahveh's sufferance, sovereign only so far as he ordained (cf. Deut. iv. 19 ; xxix. 25), and therefore not to be worshipped in Israel.

That the Mosaic conception of God as unique in his being, unapproachable in the purity and grandeur of his ethical character, and consequently exclusive in his claims, could not at once be thoroughly appropriated by the mass of the people ; that it suffered frequent eclipses in a land which was its only home, and yet whose every hill almost lured to a disregard of it ; that, in fact, it became the national

conception only by a species of natural selection, after the nation had really ceased to exist — all this is not greatly to be wondered at, but must not now detain us. It is more pertinent to ask how Moses came in possession of it. The answer, or what I conceive to be the answer, can be but briefly outlined. Bâthgen, in his *Beiträge zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte*, p. 253 ff., has from genuinely historical data made it highly probable that in prehistoric time the religion of the Semites was neither ordinary polytheism nor monotheism, but what he terms monism. While it recognized more gods than one, it regarded them all as manifestations, more or less partial, of one sole entity, which it named *Il* (*El*). *Il* is found separately or in composition in personal names, in all Semitic tongues, and is the oldest known Semitic word for deity. Like our word God it is an appellative. Its use as the proper name of a particular god is secondary, and occurs only in isolated instances among Himyarites, Babylonians,<sup>11</sup> and Phœnicians. The conception called up by the word *Il* was no doubt vague and misty. It lacked concreteness and definite personality. Yet it was assuredly not pantheistic; for in the Semitic religions, unlike the Egyptian, the sensuous nature element or object connected with the gods, is always secondary — symbolic not material. *Il* was “the oldest and the highest God, but precisely as such beyond the grasp and apprehension of the mind.” Nevertheless, the idea of him, defective as it was, carried plurality back to unity.

Among the great Semitic nations, as we know them in history, this conception was greatly obscured, if not entirely lost. But among the simpler and more conservative nomade tribes it probably survived and influenced thinking much longer, at least in spiritually élite families. None of the smaller nations have that innumerable multitude of gods found among Babylonians, Assyrians, and Phœnicians. Among Israel's ancestors, the multiplying process never went so far as to produce a single goddess, or even the word goddess. Israel's tradition however retains the memory of such names as El 'Eljon (Melchizedek's God), El Shaddai, El 'Olam, El Elohe Israel, and El Bethel, all of which show the one *Il* in various distinct personal forms. Similar ideas may be safely ascribed to Jethro and his clan. Moses, then, set out from monism, the advance from which to mono-

<sup>11</sup> I let this stand, as it only reports what Bâthgen states, p. 280. But Prof. Lyon does not hesitate to say in a manuscript note: “I do not believe that *Il* ever occurs as a proper name in Assyrian-Babylonian.”



theism seems not only easy, but logically necessary. Yet it is certain that none but Israel, whether through Moses or the prophets, ever made the transition. Why was it not made by the Phœnicians, Babylonians, or Assyrians? Israel's religious genius? That is an unknown quantity with which Israel's history does little to make us acquainted. Specially favorable circumstances? It would be difficult to point out wherein these consisted for either Moses or the prophets. If I do not greatly err, the development theory here meets a problem which it cannot solve, because it admits only natural growth, whereas here the principle of divine efficacy acting directly on the spirit of man furnishes the only rational explanation.