

CHAPTER XII.

ETHIC MONOTHEISM.

The great objection to the modern account of the Jahaveh religion—I. Necessity of postulating moral elements in Jahaveh's character, and how their origin is explained by Stade—Distinctive features in the Jahaveh religion as stated by him—Jealousy, and sole reverence—Examination of this: (1) Are these really distinctive? (2) If they are really so, the theory is at fault, for no sufficient explanation of their origin is given—II. Transition to ethic monotheism—Distinction of monolatry and monotheism—Proofs of monolatry—Jephthah—First Commandment—Naming of gods of the nations—Kuenen's argument examined—Popular conception of power nourished by political events—Agreement of prophets with popular idea in fundamental principles—Rise beyond this on the appearance of the Assyrian power—Appeal again to earliest writing prophets, in whom monotheism is not nascent, but fully developed—The prophets claimed to be the true interpreters of the fundamental principles of the religion—The attribute of grace or love which is made central by Hosea, gives the explanation of the origin of the popular and the prophetic views.

THE difficulties in the way of accepting the modern account are seen to be greatest when we inquire what it was that distinguished the Jahaveh religion from the religions of neighbouring nations. We are told *ad nauseam* the points in which it resembled them; one feature after another is toned down to the level of nature or national religion. Yet the pre-prophetic religion must

have had something distinctive to mark out the Israelites from their neighbours, and give them the pride in their national faith which they possessed. It must have contained, moreover, some germ which by way of development enabled it to rise to the so-called ethic monotheism of the prophets. We must now examine the modern theory as to these elements.

I. Stade, in drawing his picture of the pre-prophetic Jahaveh as a national deity evolved from a nature-God, is bound, as we have seen, to put in here and there features of a more elevated and moral character. All that he can say as to the origin of these higher conceptions is, that they arise not from mental reflection, but from religious feeling and impulse. In this way, for example, "the feeling arises" that Jahaveh, although the God of the land of Israel only, will accompany His worshipper into a foreign country; and also "the confidence arises" that He will be more powerful than the gods of the heathen, just as Israel itself, when in captivity, bursts its bonds. These two ideas blend into the conviction that Jahaveh, brought willingly or by force into a strange land, will there show His power by inflicting evil on the heathen gods, as happened to Dagon at Gath, and as is indicated in the passage of Isaiah to which reference has already been made. And, more particularly, he strives to find, amid all the features that are common to Jahaveh and the heathen gods, some distinctive characteristics which will ensure the Jahaveh religion having an independent existence and a possible development. In this connection he lays particular stress on two things:—

(1.) While the early Israelite conceptions of Jahaveh's power and holiness are in strict analogy with the heathen conception of their gods, there is one element, he says, which distinguishes the religion of Israel. The anger

of Jahaveh takes the form of jealousy of the worship of any other God; which worship He avenges and punishes. And this idea, which attains its full development in the teaching of the prophets, is an element of the Mosaic religion. On Stade's theory the power of Jahaveh is first of all thought of as a terrifying attribute, for He is the God of the storm, and the idea is not for some time reached that divine might must be exercised on the side of good. His holiness also is merely majesty jealous of its honour, and insisting on due reverence, so that the bounds between Him and man are not to be trespassed with impunity. Instances illustrating this are found in the judgments that befell the people of Beth-shemesh and Uzzah, for looking into or touching the ark, the symbol of His presence; and the idea is found as late as Isaiah (viii. 14), who speaks of a sanctuary as an object of terror.¹ This representation of Jahaveh, however, assumes a milder form and kindlier aspect from the fact that He is Israel's God, and will defend His own people. But it is to be noted that, while He is true and faithful to His own, the counterpart of His faithfulness to Israel is His anger against Israel's foes. This is seen chiefly in war. The oldest monument of Hebrew poetry, the song of Deborah, represents Him as coming from Sinai to discomfit the army of Sisera, and Meroz is cursed because it did not come to the help of the Lord against the mighty.² A trace of the same idea is found in the title of the 'Book of the Wars of Jahaveh,' and in Abigail's speaking of David fighting Jahaveh's battles. So the ark, according to the oldest views, was taken into the battle, and Jahaveh was the "Lord of hosts."

(2.) Another fundamental point of difference between

¹ Stade, *Geschichte*, vol. i. p. 484.

² *Ibid.*, p. 437.

the pre-prophetic religion of Israel and heathen systems, according to Stade, is this:¹ Whereas in Greece, Rome, and Egypt, the worship of ancestors and reverence for founders of tribes remained alongside the worship of the gods—the latter remaining at the head of what came to be a family, consisting of gods, half-gods, and heroes, so that the inferior gods really came to receive the greater homage from the mass of the people—this development never took place in Israel. They have no mythology, and the reason is that Jahaveh did not admit the worship either of ancestors or of heavenly bodies along with His own. His worship is directly opposed to such, and so gradually eliminated it. And we have neither the slightest trace in Israel of Jahaveh being regarded as a *primus inter pares*, nor of His having a consort as Baal had in Astarte.

This distinguishing feature of the Jahaveh religion, Stade concludes, cannot be traced to any peculiarity in the Semitic race, for other members of the Semitic family exhibit polytheism exactly like that of Greece. It can only be explained on the supposition that from the moment Israel received the Jahaveh religion His character was differently apprehended from that of the polytheistic gods. But when we expect him to tell us what the element in Jahaveh's *character* was which thus distinguished Him, this is what he tells us: The distinguishing thought which made this religion of Jahaveh different from these can only have been that Jahaveh was the only God of Israel, and therefore His worship excluded that of all other gods. Had not this idea been firmly held from the beginning, considering the temptations that lay on every side, from the time the tribes entered Canaan, to polytheistic views, the result could not

¹ Geschichte, vol. i. p. 438 f.

have been the view of Jahaveh's unity that came to prevail. It goes back for initiation to the founder of the religion. This much is due to the work and the thought of Moses.¹

These statements of Stade deserve to be well weighed. They suggest two questions:—

(1.) Are the points which he marks out as distinctive of the Jahaveh religion actual points of difference from other Semitic religions as these are understood by himself? He and other writers of his school are never tired of telling us that Jahaveh was the God of Israel or of Canaan, just as Chemosh was the god of Moab. And Kuenen says plainly² that though Jahaveh was believed by Israel to be mightier than the gods of other nations, there was nothing in this to distinguish the Israelite religion, for this was the belief of the Moabite with regard to Camosh (Chemosh), and of the Ammonite with regard to Malcám (Moloch). As to the national god being able to follow his worshipper and defend him in a strange land, the inscription of Salmsézab, referred to by Renan, is urged in proof that this was a common belief. As to its being a distinction that Jahaveh was at the first declared to be the sole deity to be revered in Israel, the neighbouring nations also had each their national and exclusive god. If Stade should reply that these nations admitted the recognition and worship of other gods alongside their national god, why, this is the very thing that he and his school say the Israelites all did up to the time of the prophets. It is they also who point to the obscure passage in the book of Kings to prove that the god of the Moabites was stirred up by the horrible sacrifice of the king's first-born to defend his own people; so that the jealousy of one national god against another, which Stade makes a distinctive

¹ Geschichte, vol. i. p. 439.

² National Religions, p. 118.

mark of the Jahaveh religion, is, on his own principle, a common belief.

(2.) If these points *are* really distinctive of the Jahaveh religion in any significant sense, then what becomes of the whole position of Stade and his school, that the Jahaveh religion was at first a mere nature-worship? On this ground it is not a question of showing how pre-prophetic Jahavism was purified and exalted by the prophets; it is a question of explaining this *initial* distinctiveness which runs back to Mosaic times. How can Stade explain the manner in which a mere nature-god was adopted by Israel, and made from the beginning the sole object of worship? When he says that the character of Jahaveh was from the first differently apprehended from that of the heathen gods, this is just what the Biblical writers say. But when he goes on to say that the distinguishing thing was that this God alone was to be Israel's God, he is giving no adequate explanation. The question is, Why was Jahaveh regarded as Israel's God to the exclusion of all others? and Stade answers, Because from the first He was so regarded. Surely it was something in His character, something that He did or was believed to have done, that gave Him this pre-eminence. But Stade, held fast in his naturalistic theory, cannot admit this, and so lands himself in helpless confusion. The distinctive elements of the Jahaveh religion, as he puts them, are not distinctive at all; or if they are, they are distinctive in a much higher sense than he ascribes to them.

II. The modern theory, it seems to me, thus breaks down utterly at this the initial point; and I do not think it can establish itself any more successfully in explaining the development at the other end—*i.e.*, in accounting for

the alleged transition from belief in a merely national god to the "ethic monotheism," as it is called, of the prophets. On this subject writers of the modern critical school¹ draw an intelligible distinction between monolatry and monotheism—*i. e.*, the worship of one God, and the belief that there *is* only one God.² The ancient Israelites, says Stade, were theoretically polytheists, but practically monotheists: they believed in the existence of Chemosh, the god of Moab; of Milkom (Moloch), the god of the Ammonites; and Baalzebub, the god of the Ekronites, and others, just as they believed in the existence of Jahaveh, their own God. The distinction which they drew was not between God and idols, or between God and no-gods, but between Jahaveh and the "gods of the nations." This explains the expression "the God of the Hebrews" (Exod. iii. 18, &c.), and the other expression, "Jahaveh the God of Israel" (Judges xi. 21, &c.), and even the mode of speaking of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The idea of a universe, he says, was beyond the comprehension of a people who knew only the countries round about Canaan; and the passages that represent God as the Creator of all things are the product of later times. Such passages as Amos v. 8, 9, which are from an *early* book, are inconvenient for this theory, and accordingly are set aside as disturbing the progress of the discourse, and probably not genuine.³ But this is a trifle.

The argument at first sight seems forcible, but on examination it will be found not to sustain the position which it is used to support. No doubt the Biblical writers continually speak of the gods of the nations by name, as if they believed in their existence and operation. So

¹ Stade, *Geschichte*, vol. i. pp. 428 ff., 507.

² See Note XXI.

³ Kuenen, *National Relig.*, p. 113. Comp. above, chap. vi. p. 146.

does Milton in his 'Paradise Lost.' The passage (Judges xi. 24) in which Jephthah says to Moab, "Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess?" seems to be quite decisive on this point; and so it has been referred to constantly from Vatke¹ to Wellhausen² to prove that originally "Israel is a people just like other people, nor is even his relationship to Jehovah otherwise conceived of than is, for example, that of Moab to Chemosh." But, as Dr Davidson has pointed out,³ Wellhausen invalidates his own argument when in another place⁴ he makes this whole passage an interpolation based on Numbers xxi. 29, which would bring it well down in the age of the canonical prophets. Indeed, as Davidson points out, there is a passage of Jeremiah (xlviii. 7) which would prove that even he believed in the godhead of Chemosh,—a proof that such a mode of reasoning has no force.

So, too, the language of the Decalogue, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," may seem at first sight to imply that the *existence* of other gods was taken for granted, only that Jahaveh alone was to be worshipped by Israel. On this I cannot do better than quote the thoughtful words of Dr Davidson:—

"To our minds such a statement as this, that Israel shall have no God but Jehovah, immediately suggests the inquiry, whether there be any other god but Him. But such questions might not present themselves to minds of a different cast from ours and in early times, for our minds are quickened by all the speculations about God which have filled the centuries from the days of Moses to our own. We may not have evidence that the mind of Israel in the earliest time put these general and abstract questions to itself. But we are cer-

¹ Bibl. Theol., p. 258.

² Hist. of Israel, p. 235.

³ Expositor, third series, vol. v. p. 49.

⁴ See Bleek's Einleitung, 4te Aufl., p. 195.

tainly entirely precluded from inferring from the form of the first commandment that the existence of other gods was admitted, only that Israel should have none of them. For if we consider the moral element of the Code, we find the commandments all taking the same negative form; but who will argue that when Moses said to Israel, Thou shalt not kill, he made murder unlawful merely in Israel, without feeling that it was unlawful wherever men existed?"¹

The truth is, we have here to do with an instance of the imperfection of language and the freaks the human mind plays in the use of names. How was an Israelite to speak of the heathen gods unless by using their names? And as soon as we give a thing a name, it has a certain existence for us. St Paul tells us how hard it was for Christians in his day, accustomed to the names of heathen gods, to grasp the fact that "an idol is nothing in the world;"² and even at the present day, I doubt very much whether the majority of people who speak of Jupiter and Apollo consciously carry in their minds the conviction that these are mere names of what never had existence.³ The early preachers of Christianity in pagan countries had the utmost difficulty in rooting out the belief in heathen gods. So long as the names lingered, the unsophisticated mind assigned to the *numen* an actual existence; and hence, perhaps, we may explain how the missionaries and their converts turned these pagan objects of worship into demons or evil spirits. We need not wonder, in the face of this psychological phenomenon, if the simple-minded Hebrews use language that may be drawn into a

¹ Expositor, *l.c.*, p. 44.

² 1 Cor. viii. 4-7.

³ An amusing instance of the facility with which the name takes the place of the thing is furnished by Voltaire. In the Latin Bible the witch of Endor is called Pythonissa (in the LXX. *Εγγαστριμυθος*); and Voltaire argued that since the name Python could not have been known to the Hebrews in the days of Saul, this history cannot have been earlier than the time of Alexander, when the Greeks traded with the Hebrews. One wonders how many of Voltaire's readers perceived his mistake.

wrong sense. If they asked themselves at all what they meant by such language, the common people would be perhaps as perplexed as, *e.g.*, an ordinary person would be if asked to explain what Allah, or Moloch, or Asshur is in his mind. The modern Jew would not admit that his nation's God is the Allah of the Mohammedan; but are we to say that the Jew is not yet a monotheist?¹ I believe it may safely be asserted that there is not a single passage in the Old Testament which can be taken to prove that the leaders of religious thought—prophets and prophetic men—ever regarded Jahaveh as on a level with the gods of the nations, as no more to Israel, no more in the world, than Chemosh or Milcom or Baal to their worshippers. Nay, there is one passage, in an early writing too, which ought to be decisive of this matter. Elijah, on Carmel, is represented as using language in regard to the Phœnician Baal (1 Kings xviii. 27) which, if it is taken as a mockery of the conceptions of the Baal-worshippers, is in striking contrast with even the boldest anthropomorphisms applied by Israelites to their God, and, in any case, shows that this prophet had got very nearly to, if he had not actually apprehended, the truth that “an idol is nothing in the world.” This may not be monotheism in an abstract philosophical sense—for religion was to Israel not a product of thought but an instinct—yet it is infinitely more than the bare monolatry of which modern writers speak.

We come now to consider the arguments by which it is sought to be proved how, from a circumscribed national monolatry, in which Jahaveh was regarded as the only God of Israel, there was reached the “ethic monotheism”

¹ Do not we continue to speak of the God of the Christian, although we believe that there is none other?

of the prophets, in which He is viewed as the God of the whole earth, the only God. Here we take for our guide Kuenen, who has devoted a special work¹ to the subject.

In the popular conception, says Kuenen (p. 118), Jahaveh was a great and mighty God, mightier than the gods of other nations. And this popular conception was stimulated and supported by political events. "When David waged the wars of Yahweh with a strong hand (1 Sam. xviii. 17; xxv. 28), and when victory crowned his arms, he made Yahweh Himself rise in the popular estimation, Solomon's glory shone upon the deity to whom he had consecrated the temple in his capital." In this popular conception of their national deity, the attribute of *might* was the principal element. The people no doubt ascribed to their God moral attributes (as is proved by the priestly Torah), but these were only some among many of His attributes, and in the popular conception the stage of an ethical *character* had not been reached (p. 115). Jahaveh as a very mighty One, and Jahaveh inseparably bound to Israel His people, these were the fundamental ideas of the popular religion. In proof of this, Kuenen appeals to the historical books of "the Old Testament—whose authors certainly stood higher in this respect than the great masses." In these books "the idea comes into the foreground more than once, that Jahaveh had to uphold His own honour, and therefore *could not* neglect to protect and bless His people. Thus, in the conception of the people, Yahweh's might, or, if you prefer to put it so, Yahweh's obligation to display His might, must often have overbalanced both His wrath against Israel's trespasses and the demands of His righteousness" (p. 115 f.)

With this popular view the prophets so far agreed.

¹ Hibbert Lecture for 1882, *National Religions and Universal Religions.*

although on essential points they differed from it. As to the agreement, I quote Kuenen's words (p. 105):¹ "*Yahweh Israel's God, and Israel Yahweh's people!* It surely needs no proof that the canonical prophets endorse this fundamental conception of the popular religion, that not one of them ever thinks of denying it. The whole of their preaching takes this as its starting-point, and leads back to it as its goal. On this latter point I wish to place the utmost emphasis." He then goes on to show that though the prophets looked forward to the extinction of the national life of Israel, and the captivity of the people into a strange land, yet in their mind this was to be followed, sooner or later, by a restoration. This is indeed to be accompanied by a transformation in the people themselves. "But however great the change may be—though the wolf lie down with the lamb and the sucking child play by the adder's hole; nay, though there be new heavens and a new earth, yet the relation between Jahaveh and Israel remains the same" (p. 106 f.) So that the canonical prophets of the eighth and succeeding centuries are not only the legitimate successors of Elijah and Elisha, but it would be a contradicting of these prophets themselves were we to begin by loosening the tie that unites them to the Israelite nation.

"We are indeed doing the prophets ill service if we conceal the fundamental thought of all their preaching. In this respect, *Hiacos intra muros peccatur et extra*. Rationalists have branded as 'particularism,' and supranaturalists have done their best to explain away or evaporate, what is really nothing less than *the very essence of the Israelitish religion*, to which even the greatest prophets could not be untrue without sacrificing that religion itself" (p. 109 f.)

¹ See also Kuenen's *Religion of Israel* (Eng. trans.), vol. i. p. 219 ff.

And now, having seen to what extent the prophets agreed with the popular religious conceptions of their time, we have to consider in what respects, according to Kuenen, they differed from them. For there is no doubt that in essential points they stood opposed to the religious opinions of their day, and held views that brought them into sharp antagonism with not only the common people, but even the official heads of the nation. "The prophets," says Kuenen (p. 73), "while admitting the national worship of Jahaveh as a fact, nevertheless condemn it from time to time in the strongest terms. It answers in no degree to their ideal."

"The images of Yahweh which adorned most of the bamoth as well as the temples at Dan and Beth-el, imply that the ideas men had of Him were crude and material in the extreme. Of the religious solemnities we know little, but enough to assert with confidence that they embodied anything but spiritual conceptions. Wanton licence on the one hand, and the terror-stricken attempt to propitiate the deity with human sacrifices on the other, were the two extremes into which the worshippers of Yahweh appear by no means exceptionally to have fallen. No one will undertake to defend all this, especially as at that very time there was already another and a higher standard in ancient Israel opposed to the lower, and judging it" (p. 75 f.)

What then was this "ideal," this "higher standard," in ancient Israel which the prophets had got hold of? The true prophet, we are told (p. 112), was, as Jeremiah characterises him (Jer. xxviii. 8, 9), a prophet of evil. And why? Because he was "the preacher of repentance, the representative of Yahweh's strict moral demands amongst a people that but too ill conforms to them." That is to say, holiness is now no longer one attribute among many others, as it was in the popular conception: "in the consciousness of the prophets, the central place

was taken, not by the might but by the holiness of Yahweh. Thereby the conception of God was carried up into another and a higher sphere (p. 119)." And "as soon as an ethical *character* [as distinguished from merely a moral attribute among others] was ascribed to Yahweh, He *must* act in accordance with it. The Holy One, the Righteous One, might renounce His people, but He could not renounce Himself" (p. 115 f.)

"This profoundly ethical conception of Yahweh's being," Kuenen proceeds to reason (p. 114), "could not fail to bring the prophets into conflict with the religious convictions of their people." For whereas the latter had emphasised the attribute of might, and relied upon the fact that Yahweh and Israel were inseparable, so that He was bound to help them, even at the expense of His holiness, the prophets put it differently — that, being above all things holy, He was bound to assert His holiness even at the expense of His people. Thus, when the people, as troubles gathered on the political horizon, thought they could appease their God and secure His favour by more numerous and costly sacrifices and multiplied vows (p. 115), reckoning with certainty (Micah iii. 11) upon the help of the God who was in their midst, or when in straits they cast about for new help, lavishing even sacrifices of their own children (p. 122), the prophets denounced such confidence as vain, and saw in the very troubles that came upon the nation the righteous hand of Yahweh Himself, asserting not only His might, but pre-eminently His holiness against an ungodly nation. Thus the two modes of viewing political events and national experience were diametrically opposed. The one, the popular view, based its faith on earthly prosperity and success. "But," says Kuenen (p. 118 f.), "it lies in the

nature of the case that a faith reared upon such foundations was subject to many shocks, and under given circumstances might easily collapse. Born of the sense of national dignity, growing with its growth and strengthening with its strength, it must likewise suffer under the blows that fell upon it, must pine and ultimately die when, with the independence of the nation, national self-consciousness disappeared." The other, the prophetic view, making Yahweh's holiness His central attribute, and ascribing to Him an *ethical character*, was not dependent on the fluctuations of political events. "When others," says Wellhausen, "saw only the ruin of everything that is holiest, they saw the triumph of Jehovah over delusion and error;" to which Kuenen adds (p. 124):—

"What was thus revealed to their spirit was no less than the august idea of the *moral government of the world*—crude as yet, and with manifold admixture of error, but pure in principle. The prophets had no conception of the mutual connection of the powers and operations of nature. They never dreamed of the possibility of carrying them back to a single cause or deducing them from it. But what they did see, on the field within their view, was the realisation of a single plan—everything, not only the tumult of the peoples, but all nature likewise, subservient to the working out of one great purpose. The name "ethical monotheism" describes better than any other the characteristics of their point of view, for it not only expresses the character of the one God whom they worshipped, but also indicates the fountain whence their faith in Him welled up."

Thus then, though the prophets were regarded by their contemporaries as speaking nothing less than blasphemy (p. 117) when they declared that Jerusalem should be destroyed and its people carried into captivity, and though in effect they were the destroyers of the old national religion, yet they were led by the contemplation of political

events, and by the working out of their own ethical conceptions, to lay the foundations of a religion of world-wide application and significance. They still held to the inseparability of Jahaveh and Israel; but in their glowing descriptions of the blessings of the coming age, they represented Israel as no longer the special object of God's care and recipient of His favours, but as the organ and instrument of blessings to the whole world. Thus anticipations which, in the popular conception, were limited, became transformed. "Many of the descriptions of Israel's restoration, and of the rôle which the heathen will take therein, have none but literary and æsthetic claims on our admiration" (p. 126); whereas, on the other hand, it lay in the nature of the case that ethical monotheism, even in the period of its genesis, must give a fresh turn to expectations with regard to Yahweh and the peoples. In its full development, of course, this idea of universalism took its highest flight of all, as is seen most conspicuously in the exalted ideas and comprehensive views of the prophets which culminate in the glowing anticipations of the second Isaiah (p. 128).

There is much truth and much suggestiveness in what Kuenen here puts forward. What he says throws much light both on the relation of the prophets to the "popular religion," and also on the gradual progress in the conceptions of the prophets themselves. In speaking of the "popular religion," we must, with Kuenen, admit that "all sincere religion is true religion, and must secure its beneficent result;" that "not in vain did men thank Yahweh for the blessing of harvest, perform their work with eyes fixed upon Him, trust in His help under afflictions, and turn to Him for succour in times of peril"

(p. 76). And in regard to the prophetic religion, we frankly admit that the course of political events taught the prophets much, and that through outward events and the germination of the inner conception which they entertained, they reached purer and more comprehensive views as time went on. But all this does not reach the point we wish to attain. What we wish to know is the best and highest that any in the nation had reached at the earliest times at which we can catch a view of the Jahaveh religion, and how much of that survived as a national inheritance. We wish to know whether the popular religion and the prophetic had not a common starting-point, one source from which they sprang and then separated; we want to know whether this prophetic ideal is not derived from the pre-prophetic times; and if it is not, we wish a definite explanation of its origin and its development out of the lower conceptions to which it stood opposed. And this I think Kuenen with all his ingenuity has not furnished.

1. In the first place, when Kuenen sets down as the very essence of the Israelitish religion the fundamental article on which people and prophets agreed, *Yahweh Israel's God, and Israel Yahweh's people*, he only states in his own way what the Biblical writers one and all insist on, and what the Hebrew historians represent in various fashions as an election or choice of Israel by Jahaveh, or a covenant relation between the two. It is but just to Kuenen to draw attention to the fact that he ascribes to Moses this amount at least of influence on Israel, in saying that "the consciousness that a peculiar and intimate relation existed between the God in whose name Moses came forward and the tribes of Israel, never died out." He would not call this a covenant in the Biblical

sense,¹ and he insists that the conviction went no further than this brief acknowledgment, since Moses failed in impressing on the people his own ideas of God's moral nature. "In one word," he says, "whatever distinguished Moses from his nation remained his personal possession and that of a few kindred spirits. . . . Under Moses' influence Israel took a step forward, but it was only one step."² In view, however, of Kuenen's clear recognition of the one fundamental piece of common ground occupied by prophets and people, we are entitled to ask him what was the common conviction from which both started, seeing that both in their respective modes held so tenaciously to it. There must have been some objective fact in the history that gave a start to this common conception, or some point of time at which this relationship was pressed home on the consciousness of the nation, to give it this firm, incontrovertible position with people and prophet alike. And if the conception is synchronous with the adoption of the Jahaveh religion—if, that is to say, as Stade has concluded, from the moment that Jahaveh was accepted as the God of Israel, the impression that He and none but He was to be their god—then we go back to the time of Moses for the common fountain of this conviction. That is to say, at a historical time and under some historical conditions, the whole nation became possessed of the idea that Jahaveh and His people were inseparably

¹ Smend (*Moses apud Prophetas*, p. 19) says distinctly, "That a covenant was once on Mount Sinai concluded by Moses, is affirmed from of old by the most certain and unanimous tradition." Wellhausen, however, perceiving that the admission of a covenant entered into under definite historical conditions would shatter his system, says that the word for a covenant between Jehovah and His people is not to be found in the older prophets (*Hist. of Israel*, p. 417 f.) See Note XXII. Cf. below, p. 388.

² *Relig. of Israel*, vol. i. p. 294.

joined to one another. And then the question arises, What were those historical conditions? and which of the two shall we take as the better interpreters of what that relation was—the mass of the unthinking and careless people, or the *élite* of the nation's religious men? Surely an idea held so tenaciously by all classes in common must rest upon something more definite and positive than the mere choice by a nation, or by their leader for them, of some "Thunderer." Kuenen himself is obliged to admit that, even in the popular conception, the idea of holiness was present from the very first, though not as a central attribute. If, then, the conception of holiness was there from the first, are not the prophets more likely than the common people to have preserved, to have inherited from the best of their predecessors, from their spiritual teachers, the *place* of that attribute in Jahaveh's character? The attribute of might never disappeared from the conception which the prophets had, nor can a time be pointed to when the attribute of might existed apart from that of holiness. Since Kuenen and his school feel themselves constrained to postulate a moral attribute from the very first, it is much more reasonable to believe that the thinking and more religious part of the nation would assign to the moral a higher and more central place than to the physical. In brief, the *character* of Jahaveh was moral in its initial conception.

2. In the second place, I think his reasoning is quite insufficient to show that mere political events produced either the popular or the prophetic conceptions. No doubt these nourished the one idea or the other, or stimulated it to greater developments; but something deeper, in the one case and the other, must be assumed, before we can understand either set of phenomena.

The *popular* idea, he says, was stimulated and supported by political events, so that David's wars and Solomon's magnificence reflected a glory upon the national God in the popular estimation;¹ and that is no doubt true in a sense. But it is not so easy to follow him when he goes on to say that the popular conception, born of the sense of national dignity, was bound to suffer under the blows that fell upon it, and ultimately to die, when, with the independence of the nation, national self-consciousness disappeared (p. 119). We are confronted by historical facts that are irreconcilable with this sweeping assertion. If the popular conception was "born of the sense of national dignity," and had no firmer foundation, it would have disappeared long before the time of the Assyrian invasions. There were times in the nation's history when the national fortunes were at the very lowest point, such as the times succeeding Joshua, and the period immediately preceding the appearance of Samuel. If outward reverse had been able to break up the feeling of national consciousness, it was at such times that the thing would have happened. But it did not; and in fact it is just at times of deepest depression that the religious life of Israel makes new departures. Wellhausen, *e.g.*, places the rise of Nabiism in the time when Israel was held down hardest by the Philistines. On Kuenen's own principles, therefore, we are bound to assume that (since a faith born of mere national dignity cannot stand such shocks) the popular faith had something else to sustain it. The popular faith must at these earlier times have had a confidence resting on something else than a mere belief in the arbitrary

¹ National Religions, p. 118. Compare also Wellhausen, *Hist. of Israel*, p. 20.

might of Jahaveh. We conclude, therefore, that what Kuenen calls the prophetic belief must have been in existence from such an early period—was indeed pre-prophetic; that in fact pre-prophetic and prophetic are identical, both resting on some historical experience.

Even more inadequate, in my opinion, is his attempt to prove that the *prophetic* belief was brought about by political events. Kuenen seems to be so well satisfied with Wellhausen's statement of the case here,¹ that he contents himself with repeating his words almost *verbatim*. The passage is as follows:—

“Until the time of Amos there had subsisted in Palestine and Syria a number of petty kingdoms and nationalities, which had their friendships and enmities with one another, but paid no heed to anything outside their own immediate environment, and revolved, each in its own axis, careless of the outside world,² until suddenly the Assyrians hurst in upon them. They commenced the work which was carried on by the Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks, and completed by the Romans. They introduced a new factor, the conception of the world—the world, of course, in the historical sense of that expression. In presence of that conception, the petty nationalities lost their centre of gravity, brute force dispelled their illusions, they flung their gods to the moles and to the bats (Isa. ii.) The prophets of Israel alone did not allow themselves to be taken by surprise by what had occurred, or to be plunged in despair; they solved by anticipation the grim problem which history set before them. They absorbed into their religion that conception of the world which was destroying the religions of the nations, even before it had been fully grasped by the secular consciousness. Where others saw only the ruin of everything that is holiest, they saw the triumph of Jehovah over delusion and error.”

I humbly think that the language here used is badly chosen at the very point where we want the utmost clearness. If the words are to be taken literally, it is little

¹ Wellhausen, *Hist. of Israel*, p. 472. Kuenen, *National Religions*, pp. 120-125.

² See Note XXIII.

wonder that the nationalities lost their centre of gravity, or even their gravity itself, over the performance here ascribed to a "conception." A "conception" of the world was introduced by the Assyrians; at its presence the petty nationalities lost their centre of gravity; the prophets of Israel alone did not allow themselves to be taken by surprise; they "absorbed" into their religion that conception, "even before it had been fully grasped by the secular consciousness,"—and the thing was done. Let us, however, try to get behind the phrases and understand the thing that is supposed to have actually happened. The Assyrians appeared upon the narrow stage on which Israel and other little nationalities moved. With their appearance arose the conception of the world in the usual historical sense—*i.e.*, I suppose the petty nationalities came to understand that there was a world much larger than their own circumscribed territory, and agencies at work superior to those with which they were familiar. If the most of the petty nations threw their idols to the moles and to the bats, it would be because they were convinced that these, their own gods, were of no avail to resist the stronger power, which, under the patronage of foreign gods, was trampling down petty nationalities like their own. The "conception," therefore, which is not a thing floating in the air, but a product of reflection, arose in the minds of Israel's neighbours as well as in the minds of the prophets. This is all plain enough; but when we come to the vital point, Why did the prophets of Israel take a different view? we have no explanation of the fact. We are simply told they "absorbed the conception into their own religion, even before it had been fully grasped by the secular consciousness." That is to say, before even the secular consciousness had fully grasped the fact that

there were greater powers outside their narrow confines than their local national gods, the prophets at once started to declare that it was their own national God that was controlling these forces—at once they leaped from the idea of a local national deity to that of a deity controlling the world; or, at all events, they saw a divine plan, a Providence in all these things, which so staggered others. Then, I suppose, it was that the shifting took place in the conception of the attributes of Jahaveh, and He came to be conceived as One with not only moral attributes, but with ethical character. I cannot see that the thing is made any clearer, or that the development is made out. What we want to know is, What enabled the prophets alone to read the signs of the times as they did? Their teaching, in face of the events, is a clear proof that from the first utterance of it they had a higher idea of their God to start with. The solution of the political problem was indeed ready before the problem presented itself, just because the idea of a God whose character was ethical was a much older idea. The earliest writing prophets knew of a God different from the gods of the nations around them; and they themselves speak of such a God as revealing Himself to prophets before them. Even the writer or writers of the patriarchal stories, and the writer of the accounts of Elijah, at a time when there was no threatening of a collapse of the State from foreign invasion, have pure ethical conceptions of Jahaveh, and regard Him as controlling the destinies of the world. The conception of Jahaveh as a Ruler of the world is much older than the time in which Kuenen and his school would place it; and it is in vain that we ask the outward events of the history to give an explanation of that religious conscious-

ness which, from the earliest times, underlies all these events.

3. But in the third place, let us leave abstract inquiries into what must have happened, and this subtle following of the movement of a conception: let us come to actual facts. If it be true that the appearance of the Assyrians gave the first impulse to this wider view, the view is so far removed from what is called the pre-prophetic conception that we ought to see it growing under our eyes. At the Assyrian period, we have the contemporary writings of Amos and Hosea; and from them onwards, we have the writings of other prophets who lived through the trying times of the Assyrian invasions, and down to the Babylonian captivity. Amos speaks only in the vaguest terms of the great Assyrian power; Isaiah saw it in the land; Jeremiah witnessed the final collapse of Israelite independence. We ought to be able to trace the gradual expansion of the prophetic view, from its first stage to its last. Now what do we find? We find indeed an advance from Amos to Jeremiah as to the *conditions* on which the relation of Jahaveh to Israel rests, and in regard to the relation of the Jahaveh religion to the outside world; but within the range of written prophecy we do not find the development of the idea of Jahaveh Himself. In regard to the conception that He controls the whole world, there is no difference in the teaching of Amos and Jeremiah. I know that Wellhausen and Stade would reject all passages in Amos¹ which express such high views of Jahaveh's character, on the ground that they disturb the connection. Robertson Smith,² though he does not reject them, says mildly

¹ Such passages as Amos iv, 13, v, 8 ff., ix, 1-7. See chap. vi, p. 146.

² Prophets of Israel, p. 398 f.

that they are not necessary for the understanding of the context; and he refers, apparently with favour, to Wellhausen's explanation of their presence in the text—that they are *lyrical intermezzi*, like those that are found so frequently in the Deutero-Isaiah. *Lyrical intermezzi* forsooth! Any one with the least sympathy with the writers will recognise in them the outpourings of hearts that were full of the noblest conceptions of the God whom they celebrate, and will perceive that they come in most fitly to emphasise the context.

On this point Kuenen has to defend himself, and he explains at length¹ his position as compared with that of Baudissin and contrasted with that of H. Schultz. His explanation amounts to this, that, if the prophets of the eighth century use expressions concerning Jahaveh's supremacy over the heathen world as well as Israel, and concerning the gods of the heathen, which practically amount to a denial of the existence of the latter, this shows that they belong to a period of transition or of *nascent monotheism*. Traces of this are still to be found distinctly in Deuteronomy itself.² This nascent monotheism in the prophets of the eighth century Kuenen describes as "a repeated overstepping of the line between monolatry and the recognition of one only God." He says: "I recognise monotheism *de facto* in these strong expressions of the prophets, and only deny that they had acquired it as a permanent possession. Now and then they rise to the recognition of the sole existence of Jahaveh, and the denial of "the other gods"; "but generally they do not get beyond the monolatry in which they, or at any rate the earlier ones among them, had been brought up." He maintains, however, in opposi-

¹ National Religions, note vii, p. 317 ff.

² Theol. Review, 1874, pp. 347-351.

tion to Schultz, that "the still older monotheism of the period before the prophets has no existence."

Now, if we examine this so-called nascent monotheism, which is admitted to be *de facto* monotheism, we find it full-grown at its birth. Amos, the earliest writing prophet, utters it in clear tones, as a familiar and admitted truth, in saying that Jahaveh had brought the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir, as he had brought Israel from Egypt, and in ever representing righteousness as the basis of the divine character. A being whose character is ethical, and whose rule unerringly controls the destinies of all nations alike (Amos ix. 7), is infinitely more than a national god, such as heathen nations conceived their deities; and in no case does Amos give any countenance to the so-called monolatry, as if the monotheism he taught was held loosely in his hands. But what are we to think of Kuenen's position that this *nascent* monotheism is also still to be found a century *after* Amos in the book of Deuteronomy? It is there *de facto* in Amos; still a century later it is only nascent; whereas in Elijah, a century before Amos, it has no existence, although in another connection both are declared to be equally organs of the Jahaveh religion. And we are to accept all this on the "I recognise" and "I maintain" of Dr Kuenen. In regard to the ethical character of Jahaveh, Amos and Hosea were just as bold and firm in chiding the sins of their contemporaries as Isaiah, who on this theory is supposed to have attained a conception of holiness which was only nascent in these earlier prophets; and the prophets that follow Isaiah are not more emphatic in the same strain, and yet they do not, like Isaiah, call Jahaveh the Holy One of Israel. In fact, this explanation of the rise of pure monothe-

ism is artificial in the extreme, and the "ethic monotheism" is merely a pretentious phrase. The same truth that Amos proclaimed finds expression in the words put in the mouth of Abraham by the Jehovistic narrator, "Shall not the Judge of all the world do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25); it was *de facto* held by Elijah and the seven thousand who like him would not bow the knee to Baal; it was held also by Samuel when he set up the stone Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto Jahaveh hath helped us:¹ and these men could not have asserted it, one after the other, so emphatically as they did, in times of deepest national depression, unless it had been deeply impressed on the hearts of the best of the nation from the early times at which the Biblical writers assume it.

4. Lastly, let us come back to Kuenen's emphasised assertion that the prophets agreed with the people in the tenacity with which they clung to the belief that Jahaveh and Israel were inseparable. The point is not disputed; but surely such a conviction must have been based upon something definite and positive, and it is most reasonable to assume that that something was believed to be *inherent in the nature of Jahaveh Himself*. If the nation believed that He would never give them up, however far they fell from Him; if the prophets believed that He would never give them up, and even would have a special favour for them when He became the God of all the families of mankind,—there must have been in the minds of all a belief of some quality strong enough to bind Jahaveh in this inseparable manner to His own people. Neither 'might,' nor holiness in its terrifying aspect, will explain this. Now such a quality or character we do find ascribed to Him by the earliest prophets, although it is a quality to which I think Kuenen makes

¹ König, Hauptprobleme, p. 44 f.

no reference. It is an attribute, without taking account of which we can neither understand the Old nor the New Testament. I call it, without hesitation, the quality of *grace*. In various ways the belief in it comes out; by various names the shades of its signification are expressed; but this variety only shows how *central*, to use Kuenen's own word, this attribute was in the conception. And I am not to reason from abstract principles here, or from the whole tenor of Biblical teaching. I take as witness one of the earliest of the writing prophets, who lived at the very time Kuenen's supposed development should have been taking place, and it is marvellous to me that Kuenen and other writers could have passed by a witness whose testimony is so precise. The whole of Hosea's book turns upon that idea,—God had *loved* Israel in the time of the nation's youth; and the touching story (or figure) of the wayward wife, going her own evil course, yet not rejected,—just because her husband had loved her at first,—and finally brought back, and by the power of love taught to love her husband,—all this is *applied* for us by the prophet himself to the history of Israel.¹ Here is another attribute than either might or holiness—and it is here at the very dawn of written prophecy, and placed by the prophet at the dawn of the national history—an attribute which surely raises the character of Jahaveh to a higher level, and casts light upon the apparent contradictions which Kuenen has exhibited. Jahaveh was, above all things, "faithful." He had done great things for Israel (Amos ii. 9-11) in the past out of mere grace, not because they had deserved it. The prophet Amos also, though he dwells more on the righteousness of Jahaveh, does not leave out of account the divine love and mercy.

¹ This is the substance, under any interpretation, of chapters i. to iii. See also chapter xi. 8 ff., "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?"

These attributes are implied in the great things that had been done for the nation in the past, and emphatically taught in the 7th chapter in the repeated visions of the prophet, in which the Lord "repents" of the evil about to be inflicted on His people: "It shall not be, saith Jahaveh." We get thus, instead of mere reasonings as to how conceptions arise, positive historical facts as the means of producing the idea which was held so tenaciously to the last. If the people perverted this doctrine, and sinned that grace might abound; if they presumed that, because Jahaveh could not deny Himself, therefore they might sin and repent,—this is no more than thousands have done in the times of the Gospel. But their tenacity to the belief that *He would* not forsake them can hardly be explained without such a belief underlying it. Even their redoubled zeal in the matter of vows and offerings, taken in connection with this belief in Jahaveh's faithfulness, is not without its significance,—not as showing that they believed these would turn the faithful One from His purpose, but as showing that they recognised them as the outward expression of *their* faithfulness, or promise of faithfulness, on their part. At all events, this unconquerable conviction, which the prophets held in a purer, and the people in a more corrupted form, guarantees the conclusion that both alike recognised in the character of Jahaveh an attribute which had a more personal relation to them than either the attribute of might or that of holiness, an attribute which Hosea simply calls *love*; which will explain, on the one side, His forgiveness of offences, and on the other His unalterable care and regard. And therefore we are entitled to conclude that this *fundamental* conception of Jahaveh underlying the views of people and prophets together, was substantially that embodied in the declaration of His

character, which is by the Biblical writers placed as far back as the time of Moses (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, R.V.): "Jahaveh, Jahaveh, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation." It seems to me that if we place at the outset such a conception of Jahaveh, which is two-sided, and capable of expansion in two different lines, we can account for the development of the popular idea equally with that of the prophets from one common source; that we can give some explanation of the clearness with which the very earliest of the writing prophets represent the character of the national God, and also the persistency with which the people held to their view to the last. We obtain, in a word, development from a definite starting-point, whereas on Kuenen's view we neither find a reasonable meeting-point for the two divergent tendencies, nor can follow the steps in the development of either the one or the other.

"The principles which we see operating from the earliest times," says Professor A. B. Davidson, "are the principles wielded by the prophets. They are few but comprehensive. They form the essence of the moral law—consisting of two principles and a fact,—namely, that Jehovah was Israel's God alone; and that His being was ethical, demanding a moral life among those who served Him as His people: and these two principles elevated into a high emotional unity in the consciousness of redemption just experienced."¹

¹ Expositor, third series, vol. v. p. 43.