THE LIFE OF JESUS

CRITICALLY EXAMINED

by

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FOREWORD TO THE SERIES

In a time when a premium is placed on experimentation for the future and when theological work itself values "new theology," the reasons for reissuing theological works from the past are not self-evident. Above all, there is broad consensus that the "Lives of Jesus" produced by our forebears failed both as sound history and as viable theology. Why, then, make these works available once more?

First of all, this series does not represent an effort to turn the clock back, to declare these books to be the norm to which we should conform, either in method or in content. Neither critical research nor constructive theology can be reprints. Nevertheless, root problems in the historical-critical study of Jesus and of theological reflection are perennial. Moreover, advances are generally made by a critical dialogue with the inherited tradition, whether in the historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus or in theology as a whole. Such a dialogue cannot occur, however, if the tradition is allowed to fade into the mists or is available to students only in handbooks which perpetuate the judgments and clichés of the intervening generation. But a major obstacle is the fact that certain pivotal works have never been available to the present generation, for they were either long out of print or not translated at all. A central aim, then, in republishing certain "Lives of Jesus" is to encourage a fresh discovery of and a lively debate with this tradition so that our own work may be richer and more precise.

Titles were selected which have proven to be significant for ongoing issues in Gospel study and in the theological enterprise as a whole. H. S. Reimarus inaugurated the truly critical investigation of Jesus and so was an obvious choice. His On the Intention of Jesus was reissued by the American Theological Library Association in 1962, but has not really entered the discussion despite the fact that questions he raised have been opened again, especially by S. G. F. Brandon's Jesus and the Zealots. Our edition, moreover, includes also his previously untranslated discussion of the resurrection and part of D. F. Strauss's evaluation of Reimarus. That Strauss's Life of Jesus must be included was clear from the start. Our edition, using George Eliot's translation, will take account of Strauss's shifting views as well. Schleiermacher's Life of Jesus will be translated, partly because it is significant for the study of Schleiermacher himself and partly because he is the wellspring of repeated concern for the inner life of Jesus. One of the most influential expressions of this motif came from Wilhelm Herrmann's The Communion of the Christian with God, which, while technically not a life of Jesus, emphasizes more than any other work the religious significance of Jesus' inner life. In fresh form, this emphasis has been rejuvenated in the current work of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling who concentrate on Jesus' own faith. Herrmann, then, is a bridge between Schleiermacher and the present. In such a
THE LIFE OF JESUS.

INTRODUCTION.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MYTHICAL POINT OF VIEW IN RELATION TO THE GOSPEL HISTORIES.

§ I.

INEVITABLE RISE OF DIFFERENT MODES OF EXPLAINING SACRED HISTORIES.

Wherever a religion, resting upon written records, prolongs and extends the sphere of its dominion, accompanying its votaries through the varied and progressive stages of mental cultivation, a discrepancy between the representations of those ancient records, referred to as sacred, and the notions of more advanced periods of mental development, will inevitably sooner or later arise. In the first instance this disagreement is felt in reference only to the unessential—the external form: the expressions and delineations are seen to be inappropriate; but by degrees it manifests itself also in regard to that which is essential: the fundamental ideas and opinions in these early writings fail to be commensurate with a more advanced civilisation. As long as this discrepancy is either not in itself so considerable, or else is not so universally discerned and acknowledged, as to lead to a complete renunciation of these Scriptures as of sacred authority, so long will a system of reconciliation by means of interpretation be adopted and pursued by those who have a more or less distinct consciousness of the existing incongruity.

A main element in all religious records is sacred history; a history of events in which the divine enters, without intermediation, into the human; the ideal thus assuming an immediate embodiment. But as the progress of mental cultivation mainly consists in the gradual recognition of a chain of causes and effects connecting natural phenomena with each other; so the mind in its development becomes ever increasingly conscious of those mediate links which are indispensable to the realization of the ideal; and hence the discrepancy between the modern culture and the ancient records, with regard to their historical portion, becomes so apparent, that the immediate intervention of the divine in human affairs loses its probability. Besides, as the humanity of these records is the humanity of an early period, consequently of an age

1 [This passage varies slightly from the original, a subsequent amplification by Dr. Strauss being incorporated with it.—Tr.]
comparatively undeveloped and necessarily rude, a sense of repulsion is likewise excited. The incongruity may be thus expressed. The divine cannot so have happened; (not immediately, not in forms so rude;) or, that which has so happened cannot have been divine:—and if a reconciliation be sought by means of interpretation, it will be attempted to prove, either that the divine did not manifest itself in the manner related,—which is to deny the historical validity of the ancient Scriptures; or, that the actual occurrences were not divine—which is to explain away the absolute contents of these books. In both cases the interpretation may be partial or impartial: partial, if undertaken with a determination to close the eyes to the secretly recognised fact of the disagreement between the modern culture and the ancient records, and to see in such interpretation the original signification of these records; impartial, if it unequivocally acknowledges and openly avows that the matters narrated in these books must be viewed in a light altogether different from that in which they were regarded by the authors themselves. This latter method, however, by no means involves the entire rejection of the religious documents; on the contrary, the essential may be firmly retained, whilst the unessential is unreservedly abandoned.

§ 2.

DIFFERENT EXPLANATIONS OF SACRED LEGENDS AMONG THE GREEKS.

Though the Hellenistic religion cannot be said to have rested upon written records, it became enshrined in the Greek poems, for example, in those of Homer and Hesiod, and these, no less than its orally transmitted legends, did not fail to receive continually varying interpretations, successively adapted to the progressive intellectual culture of the Greeks. At an early period the rigid philosophy of the Greeks, and under its influence even some of the Greek poets, recognized the impossibility of ascribing to Deity manifestations so grossly human, so immediate, and so barbarous, as those exhibited and represented as divine in the wild conflicts of Hesiod’s Theogony, and in the domestic occupations and trivial pursuits of the Homeric deities. Hence arose the quarrel of Plato, and prior to him of Pindar, with Homer; 1 hence the cause which induced Anaxagoras, to whom the invention of the allegorical mode of interpretation is ascribed, to apply the Homeric delineations to virtue and to justice; 2 hence it was that the Stoics understood the Theogony of Hesiod as relating to the action of the elements, which, according to their notions, constituted, in their highest union, the divine nature. 3 Thus did these several thinkers, each according to his own peculiar mode of thought, succeed in discovering an absolute meaning in these representations: the one finding in them a physical, the other an ethical signification, whilst, at the same time, they gave up their external form, ceasing to regard them as strictly historical.

On the other hand, the more popular and sophistical culture of another class of thinkers led them to opposite conclusions. Though, in their estimation, every semblance of the divine had evaporated from these histories; though they were convinced that the proceedings ascribed to the gods were not godlike, still they did not abandon the historical sense of these narratives.

With Eudemus 4 they transformed the subjects of these histories from gods to men, to heroes and sages of antiquity, kings and tyrants, who, through deeds of might and valour, had acquired divine honours. Some indeed went still further, and, with Polybius, 5 considered the whole system of heathen theology as a fable, invented by the founders of states to awe the people into subjection.

§ 3.

ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATIONS AMONG THE HEBREWS.—PHIL.

Whilst, on the other hand, the isolation and stability of the Hebrews served to retard the development of similar manifestations amongst this people, on the other hand, when once actually developed, they were the more marked; because, in proportion to the high degree of authority ascribed to the sacred records, was the skill and caution required in their interpretation. Thus, even in Palestine, subsequent to the exile, and particularly after the time of the Maccabees, many ingenious attempts were made to interpret the Old Testament so as to remove offensive literalities, supply deficiencies, and introduce the notions of a later age. Examples of this system of interpretation occur in the writings of the Rabbins, and even in the New Testament; 1 but it was at that place where the Jewish mind came into contact with Greek civilization, and under its influence was carried beyond the limits of its own national culture—namely at Alexandria—that the allegorical mode of interpretation was first consistently applied to the whole body of historical narrative in the Old Testament. Many had prepared the way, but it was Philo who first fully developed the doctrine of both a common and a deeper sense of the Holy Scriptures. He was by no means inclined to cast away the former, but generally placed the two together, side by side, and even declared himself opposed to those who, everywhere and without necessity, sacrificed the literal to the higher signification. In many cases, however, he absolutely discarded the verbal meaning and historical conception, and considered the narrative merely as the figurative representation of an idea. He did so, for example, whenever the sacred story appeared to him to present delineations unworthy of Deity, tending either to materialism or anthropomorphism, or otherwise to contain contradictions. 8

The fact that the Jews, whilst they adopted this mode of explaining the Old Testament, (which, in order to save the purity of the intrinsic signification, often sacrificed the historical form), were never led into the opposite system of Eudemus (which preserved the historical form by divesting the history of the divine, and reducing it to a record of mere human events), is to be ascribed to the tenacity with which that people ever adhered to the supernatural point of view. The latter mode of interpretation was first brought to bear upon the Old Testament by the Christians.

§ 4.

ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATIONS AMONG THE CHRISTIANS.—ORIG.

To the early Christians who, antecedent to the fixing of the christian canon, made especial use of the Old Testament as their principal sacred record, an

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2 Diog. Laërt. L ii. c. ii. No. 7.
5 Hist. vi. 56.
6 Döpke, die Hermeneutik der neutestamentlichen Schriftsteller, s. 123. ff.
7 Größer. Danne.
8 Größer. Danne.
allegorical interpretation was the more indispensable, inasmuch as they had made greater advances beyond the views of the Old Testament writers than even the most enlightened of the Jews. It was no wonder therefore that this mode of explanation, already in vogue among the Jews, was almost universally adopted by the primitive Christian churches. It was however again in Alexandria that it found the fullest application amongst the Christians, and that in connexion with the name of Origen. Origen attributes a threefold meaning to the Scriptures, corresponding with his distribution of the human being into three parts: the literal sense answering to the body; the moral, to the soul; and the mystical, to the spirit. The rule with him was to retain all three meanings, though differing in worth; in some particular cases, however, he was of opinion that the literal interpretation either gave no sense at all, or else a perverted sense, in order to make the readers discover of its mystical significations. Origen's repeated observation that it is not the purpose of the biblical narratives to transmit old tales, but to instruct in the mysteries of life; his assertion that the merely literal acception of many of the narratives would prove destructive of the Christian religion; and his application of the passage "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," to the relative worth of the allegorical and the literal modes of biblical interpretation, may be understood as indicating only the inferiority of the literal to the deeper significations. But the literal sense is decidedly given up when it is said, "Every passage of Scripture has a spiritual element, but not every one has a corporeal element;" a spiritual truth often exists embodied in a corporeal falsehood; "The Scriptures contain many things which never came to pass, interwoven with the history, and he must be dull indeed who does not of his own accord observe that much which the Scriptures represent as having happened never actually occurred." Among the passages which Origen regarded as admitting no other than an allegorical interpretation, besides those which so sensibly humanised the Deity, he included those which attributed unworthy action to individuals who had held intimate communion with God.

It was not however from the Old Testament views alone that Origen had, in consequence of his Christian training, departed so widely that he felt himself compelled, if he would retain his reverence for the sacred records, to allegorize their contents, as a means of reconciling the contradiction which had arisen between them and his own mind. There was much likewise in the New Testament writings which so little accorded with his philosophical notions, that he found himself constrained to adopt a similar proceeding in reference to them. He reasoned thus:—the New Testament and the Old are the work of the same spirit, and this spirit would proceed in the same manner in the production of the one and of the other, interweaving fiction with reality, in order thereby to direct the mind to the spiritual signification. In a remarkable passage of his work against Celsus, Origen classes together, and in no ambiguous language, the partially fabulous stories of profane history, and of heathen mythology, with the gospel narratives. He expresses himself as follows: "In almost every history it is a difficult task, and not unfrequently an impossible one, to demonstrate the reality of the events recorded, however true they may in fact be. Let us suppose some individual to deny the reality of a Trojan war on account of the incredibilities mixed up with the history; as, for example, the birth of Achilles from a goddess of the sea. How could we substantiate the fact, encumbered as it is with the numerous and undeniable poetical fictions which have, in some unascertainable manner, become interwoven with the generally admitted account of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans? There is no alternative: he who would study history with understanding, and not suffer himself to be deluded, must weigh each separate detail, and consider what is worthy of credit and may be believed without further evidence; what, on the contrary, must be regarded as merely figurative; 'τίνα ἐκ τραπεζογνωσίας always bearing in mind the aim of the narrator—and what must be wholly mistrusted as being written with intent to please certain individuals." In conclusion Origen says, "I was desirous of making these preliminary observations in relation to the entire history of Jesus given in the Gospels, not with the view of exciting from the enlightened a blind and baseless belief, but with design to show how indispensable to the study of this history are not only judgment and diligent examination, but, so to speak, the very penetrating into the mind of the author, in order to discover the particular aim with which each narrative may have been written."

We here see Origen almost transcending the limits of his own customary point of view, and verging towards the more modern mythical view. But if his own prepossessions in favour of the supernatural, and his fear of giving offence to the orthodox church, combined to hinder him from making a wider application of the allegorical mode of interpretation to the Old Testament, the same causes operated still more powerfully in relation to the New Testament; so that when we further inquire of which of the gospel histories in particular did Origen reject the historical meaning, in order to hold fast a truth worthy of God? the instances will prove to be meagre in the extreme. For when he says, in illustration of the above-mentioned passage, that amongst other things, it is not to be understood literally that Satan showed to Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth from a mountain, because this is impossible to the bodily eye; he here gives not a strictly allegorical interpretation, but merely a different turn to the literal sense, which, according to him, relates not to an external fact, but to the internal fact of a vision. Again, even where the text offers a tempting opportunity of sacrificing the literal to the spiritual meaning, as, for example, the cursing of the fig-tree, Origen does not speak out freely. He is most explicit when speaking of the expulsion of the buyers and sellers from the temple; he characterizes the conduct of Jesus, 

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1. Homil. 5. in Levit. § 5.
2. Homil. 2. in Exod. iii.: Nilote putare, ut sape jam diximus, veterum vobis fabulas re-citaris, sed doceri vos per haras, ut agnoscatis ordinem vitae.
3. Homil. 5. in Levit. i.: Hac omnia, nisi alio sensu accipiamus quam litera textus ostendi, obstaculum magis et subversionem Christiana religioni, quam hortationem edificationem praebent.
4. Contra Cels. vi. 70.
5. De principi. L. iv. § 20: πάσα μὲν (γραφή) ἔχει τὸ πνευματικόν, ὡς πάσα δὲ τὸ σωματικὸν.
6. De principi. in Joann., Tom. x. § 4.: σωφρόνως κολλάτη τὸ ἀληθέον πνευματικὸν ἐν τῷ σωματικῷ, ὡς ἐκεῖ τοῖς γυμνοῖς.
7. De principi. in iv. 15: σωφρόνως ἢ γραφή τῷ Ἰσραήλ τὸ μὴ γενόμενον, τὴ μὴ μὴ δυνάτω γένεσθαι, τὴ δὲ δυνάτω μὴ γένεται, ὡς μὴ μὴ γεγονότα.
8. De principi. in iv. 15: καὶ τὴ δὲ πλείους λέγειν; τῶν μὲν πάντων ἀμβλεπὼν μοιρὰ δεκα ταύτα δυνάμεως συναγαγεῖ, γεγονότα μὲν ὡς γεγονότα, ὡς γεγονότα δὲ κατὰ τὴν λέξιν.
9. De principi. in iv. 16.
10. Homil. 6. in Gen. iii.: Quae nobis edificatio erit, legentibus, Abraham, tantum patriarcham, non solum mentitum esse Abimech regi, sed et publicanum conjigrs prodidit? Quid nos edificat tantis patriarchae sexor, si putueris contaminantium exposita per conscientiam mortuam? Quia Judaei putant et si qui cum eiusmod littera enunti, non spiritum.
11. Contra Celsum, i. 450.
according to the literal interpretation, as assuming and seditious. He moreover expressly remarks that the Scriptures contain many more historical than merely scriptural truths.

§ 5.

TRANSITION TO MORE MODERN TIMES.—DEISTS AND NATURALISTS OF THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES.—THE WOLFINBÜTTEL FRAGMENTIST.

Thus was developed one of those forms of interpretation to which the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, in common with all other religious records, in relation to their historical contents, became necessarily subjected; that, namely, which recognizes in them the divine, but denies it to have actually manifested itself in so immediate a manner. The other principal mode of interpretation, which, to a certain extent, acknowledges the course of events to have been historically true, but assigns it to a human and not a divine origin, was developed amongst the enemies of Christianity by a Celsus, a Porphyry, and a Julian. They indeed rejected much of the history as altogether fabulous; but they admitted many of the incidents related of Moses, Jesus, and others, to be historical facts: these facts were however considered by them as originating from common motives; and they attributed their apparently supernatural character either to gross fraud or impious sorcery.

It is worthy of observation that the circumstances attending the introduction of these several modes of interpretation into the heathen and Jewish religions, on the one hand, and into the christian religion, on the other, were different. The religion and sacred literature of the heathen and Hebrews had been gradually developed with the development of the nation, and it was not until the intellectual culture of the people had outgrown the religion of their fathers, and the latter was in consequence merging towards decay, that the discrepancy which is the source of these various interpretations became apparent. Christianity, on the contrary, came into a world of already advanced civilization; which was, with the exception of that of Palestine, the Judaico-Hellenistic and the Greek. Consequently a disagreement manifested itself at the very beginning; it was not now, however, as in former times, between modern culture and an ancient religion, but between a new religion and ancient culture. The production of allegorical interpretations among the Pagans and the Hebrews, was a sign that their religion had lost its vitality; the allegories of Origen and the attacks of Celsus, in reference to Christianity, were evidences rather that the world had not as yet duly accommodated itself to the new religion. As however with the christianizing of the Roman empire, and the overthrow of the chief heresies, the christian principle gained an ever-increasing supremacy; as the schools of heathen wisdom closed; and the unchristianized German tribes lent themselves to the teaching of the church;—the world, during the tedious centuries of the middle ages, was satisfied with Christianity both in form and in substance. Almost all traces of these modes of interpretation which presuppose a discrepancy between the culture of a nation, or of the world, and religion, in consequence disappeared. The reformation effected the first breach in the solid structure of the faith of the church. It was the first vital expression of a culture, which had now in the heart of Christendom itself, as formerly in relation to Paganism and Judaism, acquired strength and independence sufficient to create a reaction against the

soil of its birth, the prevailing religion. This reaction, so long as it was directed against the dominant hierarchy, constituted the sublime, but quickly terminated, drama of the reformation. In its later direction against the Bible, it appeared again upon the stage in the barren revolutionary efforts of deism; and many and various have been the forms it has assumed in its progress down to the present time.

The deists and naturalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries renewed the polemic attacks of the pagan adversaries of Christianity in the bosom of the christian church; and gave to the public an irregular and confused mass of criticisms, impugning the authenticity and credibility of the Scriptures, and exposing to contempt the events recorded in the sacred volume. Toland, Bolingbroke, and others, pronounced the Bible to be a collection of unauthentic and fabulous books; whilst some spared no pains to despoil the biblical histories, and the heroes whose actions they celebrate, of every ray of divine light. Thus, according to Morgan, the law of Moses is a miserable system of superstition, blindness, and slavery; the Jewish priests are deceivers; and the Jewish prophets the originators of the distractions and civil wars of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel. According to Chubb, the Jewish religion cannot be a revelation from God, because it debases the moral character of the Deity by attributing to him arbitrary conduct, partiality for a particular people, and above all, the cruel command to exterminate the Canaanitish nations. Assaults were likewise made by these and other deists upon the New Testament: the Apostles were suspected of being actuated by selfish and mercenary motives; the character of Jesus himself was not spared, and the fact of his resurrection was denied. The miracles of Jesus, wrought by an immediate exercise of divine power in human acts and concerns, were made the particular objects of attack by Woolston. This writer is also worthy of notice on account of the peculiar position taken by him between the ancient allegorists and the modern naturalists. His whole reasoning turns upon the alternative; either to retain the historical reality of the miracles narrated in the Bible, and thus to sacrifice the divine character of the narratives, and reduce the miracles to mere artifices, miserable juggleries, or commonplace deceptions; or, in order to hold fast the divine character of these narratives, to reject them entirely as details of actual occurrences, and regard them as historical representations of certain spiritual truths. Woolston cites the authority of the most distinguished allegorists among the fathers in support of this view. He is wrong however in representing them as supplanting the literal by the figurative meaning. These ancient fathers, on the contrary, were disposed to retain both the literal and the allegorical meaning. (A few examples in Origen, it is true, are an exception to this rule.) It may be doubted, from the language of Woolston, which alternative was adopted by himself. If we reason from the fact, that before he appeared as the opponent of the commonly entertained views of Christianity, he occupied himself with allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures, we may be led to consider the latter alternative as expressing his real conviction. On the other hand, he enlarges with so evident a predi-

1 In his Amyntor. 1698. See Leland’s View of the Deistical Writers.
2 See Leland.
3 In his work entitled The Moral Philosopher.
4 Posthumous Works, 1748.
5 Chubb, Posthumous Works, l. 102.
6 Ibid., ii. 269.
7 The Resurrection of Jesus Considered, by a Moral Philosopher, 1744.
8 Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour. Published singly, from 1727-1729.
9 Schröckh, Kirschengesch., seit der Reform. 6 Th. s. 191.
lection on the absurdities of the miracles, when literally understood, and the manner in which he treats the whole subject is so tinged with levity, that we may suspect the Deist to put forward the allegorical interpretations merely as a screen, from behind which he might inveigh the more unreservedly against the literal signification.

Similar deistical objections against the Bible, and the divine character of its history, were propagated in Germany chiefly by an anonymous author (Remarus) whose manuscripts were discovered by Lessing in the Wolfenbüttel library. Some portions of these manuscripts, called the "Wolfenbüttel Fragments," were published by Lessing in 1774. They consist of Essays, one of which treats of the many arguments which may be urged against revealed religion in general; the others relate partly to the Old and partly to the New Testament. It is the opinion of the Fragmentist, in relation to the Old Testament, first, that the men, of whom the Scriptures narrate that they had immediate communications with God, were so unworthy, that such intercourse, admitting its reality, compromised the character of Deity; secondly, that the result of this intercourse,—the instructions and laws alleged to have been thus divinely communicated,—were so barbarous and destructive, that to ascribe them to God is impossible; and thirdly, that the accompanying miracles were at once absurd and incredible. From the whole, it appears to him clear, that the divine communications were only pretended; and that the miracles were delusions, practised with the design of giving stability and efficiency to certain laws and institutions highly advantageous to the rulers and priests. The author finds much to condemn in the conduct of the patriarchs, and their simulations of divine communications; such as the command to Abraham to sacrifice his son. But it is chiefly Moses upon whom he seeks, in a long section, to cast all the obloquy of an impostor, who did not scruple to employ the most disgraceful means in order to make himself the despotic ruler of a free people: who, to effect his purpose, feigned divine apparitions, and pretended to have received the command of God to perpetrate acts which, but for this divine sanction, would have been stigmatized as fraudulent, as highway robbery, as inhuman barbarity. For instance, the spoiling of the Egyptians, and the extirpation of the inhabitants of Canaan; atrocities which, when introduced by the words "Jehovah hath said it," became instantly transformed into deeds worthy of God. The Fragmentist is as little disposed to admit the divinity of the New Testament histories. He considers the aim of Jesus to have been political, and his connexion with John the Baptist a preconcerted arrangement, by which the one party should recommend the other to the people. He views the death of Jesus as an event by no means foreseen by himself, but which frustrated all his plans; a catastrophe which his disciples knew not how else to repair than by the fraudulent pretence that Jesus was risen from the dead, and by an artful alteration of his doctrines.  

§ 6.

NATURAL MODE OF EXPLANATION ADOPTED BY THE RATIONALISTS.—EICHHORN.—PAULUS.

Whilst the reality of the biblical revelation, together with the divine origin and supernatural character of the Jewish and Christian histories, were tenaciously maintained in opposition to the English deists by numerous English apologists, and in opposition to the Wolfenbüttel Fragmentist by the great majority of German theologians, there arose a distinct class of theologians in Germany, who struck into a new path. The ancient pagan mythology, as understood by Evemerus, admitted of two modes of explanation, each of which was in fact adopted. The deities of the popular worship might, on the one hand, be regarded as good and benevolent men; as wise lawgivers, and just rulers, of early times, whom the gratitude of their contemporaries and posterity had encircled with divine glory; or they might, on the other hand, be viewed as artful impostors and cruel tyrants, who had veiled themselves in a nimbus of divinity, for the purpose of subjugating the people to their dominion. So, likewise, in the purely human explanation of the bible histories, besides the method of the deists to regard the subjects of these narratives as wicked and deceitful men, there was yet another course open; to divest these individuals of their immediate divinity, but to accord to them an undegraded humanity; not indeed to look upon their deeds as miraculous,—as little on the other hand to decry them as impostions;—but to explain their proceedings as altogether natural, yet morally irreprehensible. If the Naturalist was led by his special enmity to the Christianity of the church to the former explanation, the Rationalist, anxious, on the contrary, to remain within the pale of the church, was attracted towards the latter.

Eichhorn, in his critical examination of the Wolfenbüttel Fragments, 1 directly opposes this rationalistic view to that maintained by the Naturalist. He agrees with the Fragmentist in refusing to recognize an immediate divine agency, at all events in the narratives of early date. The mythological researches of a Heyne had so far enlarged his circle of vision as to lead Eichhorn to perceive that divine interpositions must be alike admitted, or alike denied, in the primitive histories of all people. It was the practice of all nations, of the Grecians as well as the Orientals, to refer every unexpected or inexplicable occurrence immediately to the Deity. The sages of antiquity lived in continual communion with superior intelligences. Whilst these representations (such is Eichhorn's statement of the matter) are always, in reference to the Hebrew records, understood verbally and literally, it has hitherto been customary to explain similar representations in the pagan histories, by presupposing either deception and gross falsehood, or the misinterpretation and corruption of tradition. But Eichhorn thinks justice evidently requires that Hebrew and pagan history should be treated in the same way; so that intercourse with celestial beings during a state of infancy, must either be accorded to all nations, pagan and Hebrew, or equally denied to all. The mind hesitates to make so universal an admission: first, on account of the not unfrequent errors contained in religions claiming to have been divinely communicated; secondly, from a sense of the difficulty of explaining the transition of the human race from a state of divine tutelage to one of self-dependence: and lastly, because in proportion as intelligence increases, and the authenticity of the records may be more and more coherently relied upon, in the same proportion do these immediate divine influences invariably disappear. If, accordingly, the notion of supernatural interposition is to be rejected with regard to the Hebrews, as well as to all other people, the view generally taken of pagan antiquity presents itself, at first sight, as that most obviously applicable to the early Hebrews; namely, that their pretended revelations were based upon deceit and falsehood, or that their miraculous histories should be referred to the misrepresentations and corruptions of tradition. This is the view of the subject actually applied by the Fragmentist to the Old Testament; a representation, says Eichhorn, from which the mind on a nearer contemplation recoils. Is it conceivable that the greatest men of

1 Recension der übrigen, noch ungedruckten Werke des Wolfenbüttler Fragmentisten, in Eichhorns allgemeiner Bibliothek, erster Band 1tes u. 2tes Stück.
antiquity, whose influence operated so powerfully and so beneficially upon their age, should one and all have been impostors, and yet have escaped the detection of their contemporaries?

According to Eichhorn, so perverted a view could arise only in a mind that refused to interpret the ancient records in the spirit of their age. Truly, had they been composed with all the philosophical accuracy of the writers of the present day, we should have been compelled to find in them either actual divine interpositions, or a fraudulent pretence. But they are the production of an infant and unscientific age; and treat, without reserve of divine interventions, in accordance with the conceptions and phraseology of that early period. So that, in point of fact, we have neither miracles to wonder at, on the one hand, nor deceptions to unmask on the other; but simply the language of a former age to translate into that of our own day. Eichhorn observes that before the human race had gained a knowledge of the true causes of things, all occurrences were referred to supernatural agencies, or to the interpolation of superhuman beings. Lofty conceptions, noble resolves, useful inventions and regulations, but more especially vivid dreams, were the operations of that Deity under whose immediate influence they believed themselves placed. Manifestations of distinguished intelligence and skill, by which some individuals excited the wonder of the people, were regarded as miraculous; as signs of supernatural endowments, and of a particular intercourse with higher beings. And this was the belief, not of the people only, but also of these eminent individuals, who entertained no doubt of the fact, and who exclaimed in the full conviction of being in mysterious connexion with the Deity. Eichhorn is of opinion that no objection can be urged against the attempt to resolve all the Mosaic narratives into natural occurrences, and thus far he concedes to the Fragmentist his primary position; but he rejects his inference that Moses was an impostor, pronouncing the conclusion to be over-hasty and unjust. Thus Eichhorn agreed with the Naturalists in divesting the biblical narratives of all their immediately divine contents, but he differed from them in this, that he explained the supernatural lustre which adorns these histories, not as a fictitious colouring imparted with design to deceive, but as a natural and as it were spontaneous illumination reflected from antiquity itself.

In conformity with these principles Eichhorn sought to explain naturally the histories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. Viewed in the light of that age, the appointment of Moses to be the leader of the Israelites was nothing more than the long cherished project of the patriot to emancipate his people, which when presented before his mind with more than usual vividness in his dreams, was believed by him to be a divine inspiration. The flame and smoke which ascended from Mount Sinai, at the giving of the law, was merely a fire which Moses kindled in order to make a deeper impression upon the imagination of the people, together with an accidental thunderstorm which arose at that particular moment. The shining of his countenance was the natural effect of being over-heated: but it was supposed to be a divine manifestation, not only by the people, but by Moses himself, he being ignorant of the true cause.

Eichhorn was more reserved in his application of this mode of interpretation to the New Testament. Indeed, it was only to a few of the narratives in the Acts of the Apostles, such as the miracle of the day of Pentecost, the conversion of the Apostle Paul, and the many apparitions of angels, that he allowed himself to apply it. Here too, he refers the supernatural to the figurative language of the Bible; in which, for example, a happy accident is called—a protecting angel; a joyous thought—the salutation of an angel; and a peaceful state of mind—a comforting angel. It is however remarkable that Eichhorn was conscious of the inapplicability of the natural explanation to some parts of the gospel history, and with respect to many of the narratives took a more elevated view.

Many writings in a similar spirit, which partially included the New Testament within the circle of their explanations, appeared; but it was Dr. Paulus who by his commentary on the Gospels in 1800, first acquired the full reputation of a Christian Evangelist. In the introduction to this work he states it to be the primary requisite of the biblical critic to be able to distinguish between what is fact, and what is opinion. That which has been actually experienced, internally or externally, by the participants in an event, he calls fact. The interpretation of an event, the supposed causes to which it is referred either by the participants or by the narrators, he calls opinion. But, according to Dr. Paulus, these two elements become so easily blended and confounded in the minds both of the original sharers in an event, and of the subsequent relations and historians, that fact and opinion lose their distinction; so that the one and the other are believed and recorded with equal confidence in their historical truth. This intermixture is particularly apparent in the historical books of the New Testament; since at the time when Jesus lived, it was still the prevailing disposition to derive every striking occurrence from an invisible and superhuman cause. It is consequently the chief task of the historian who desires to deal with matters of fact, that is to say, in reference to the New Testament, to separate these two constituent elements so closely amalgamated, and yet in themselves so distinct; and to extricate the pure kernel of fact from the shell of opinion. In order to this, in the absence of any more genuine account which would serve as a correcting parallel, he must transplant himself in imagination upon the theatre of action, and strive to the utmost to contemplate the events by the light of the age in which they occurred. And from this point of view he must seek to supply the deficiencies of the narration, by filling in those explanatory collateral circumstances, which the relator himself is so often led by his predilection for the supernatural to leave unnoticed. It is well known in what manner Dr. Paulus applies these principles to the New Testament in his Commentary, and still more fully in his later production, "The Life of Jesus." He firmly maintains the historical truth of the gospel narratives, and he aims to weave them into one consecutive chronologically-arranged detail of facts; but he explains away every trace of immediate divine agency, and denies all supernatural intervention. Jesus is not to him the Son of God in the sense of the Church, but a wise and virtuous human being; and the effects he produced are not miracles, but acts sometimes of benevolence and friendship, sometimes of medical skill, sometimes also the results of accident and good fortune.

This view proposed by Eichhorn, and more completely developed by Paulus, necessarily presupposes the Old and New Testament writings to contain a minute and faithful narration, composed shortly after the occurrence of the events recorded, and derived, wherever this was possible, from the testimony of eye-witnesses. For it is only from an accurate and original report that the ungarbled fact can be disentangled from interwoven opinion. If the report be later and less original, what security is there that what is taken for the matter-of-fact kernel does not belong to opinion or tradition? To avoid this objection, Eichhorn sought to assign a date to the Old Testament histories approximating as nearly as possible to the events they record: and here he, and other theologians of the same school, found no difficulty in admitting suppositions the most unnatural: for example, that the Pentateuch was written during the passage through the wilderness. However this critic admits that...
some portions of the Old Testament, the Book of Judges, for instance, could not have been written contemporaneously with the events; that the historian must have contemplated his heroes through the dim mist of intervening ages, which might easily have magnified them into giant forms. No historian who had either witnessed the circumstances, or had been closely connected with them in point of time, could embellish after such fashion, except with the express aim to amuse at the expense of truth. But with regard to remote occurrences it is quite different. The imagination is no longer restricted by the fixed limits of historical reality, but is aided in its flight by the notion that in earlier times all things were better and nobler; and the historian is tempted to speak in loftier phrase, and to use hyperbolical expressions. Least of all is it possible to avoid embellishment, when the compiler of a subsequent age derives his materials from the orally transmitted traditions of antiquity. The adventures and wondrous exploits of ancestors, handed down by father to son, and by son to grandson, in glowing and enthusiastic representations, and sung by the poet in lofty strains, are registered in the written records of the historian in similar terms of high flowing diction. Though Eichhorn took this view of a portion of the Old Testament Books, he believed he was not giving up their historical basis, but was still able, after clearing away the more or less evident legendary additions, to trace out the natural course of the history.

But in one instance at least, this master of the natural mode of interpretation in reference to the Old Testament, took a more elevated view—namely, of the history of the creation and the fall. In his influential work on primitive history, although he had from the first declared the account of the creation to be poetry, he nevertheless maintained that of the fall to be neither mythology nor allegory, but true history. The historical basis that remained after the removal of the supernatural, he stated to be this: that the human constitution had at the very beginning become impaired by the eating of a poisonous fruit. He thought it indeed very possible in itself, and confirmed by numerous examples in profane history, that purely historical narratives might be overlaid by a mythical account; but owing to a supranaturalistic notion, he refused to allow the same possibility to the Bible, because he thought it unworthy of the Deity to admit a mythological fragment into a book, which bore such incontestable traces of its divine origin. Later, however, Eichhorn himself declared that he had changed his opinion with regard to the second and third chapters of Genesis. He no longer saw in them an historical account of the effects of poison, but rather the mythical embodying of a philosophical thought; namely, that the desire for a better condition than that in which man actually is, is the source of all the evil in the world. Thus, in this point at least, Eichhorn preferred to give up the history in order to hold fast the idea, rather than to cling to the history with the sacrifice of every more elevated conception. For the rest, he agreed with Paulus and others in considering the miraculous in the sacred history as a drapery which needs only to be drawn aside, in order to disclose the pure historic form.

§ 7.

MORAL INTERPRETATION OF KANT.

Amidst these natural explanations which the end of the eighteenth century brought forth in rich abundance, it was a remarkable interlude to see the old allegorical system of the christian fathers all at once called up from its grave, and revived in the form of the moral interpretation of Kant. He, as a philosopher, did not concern himself with the history, as did the rationalist theologians, but like the fathers of the church, he sought the idea involved in the history: not however considering it as they did an absolute idea, at once theoretical as well as practical, but regarding it only on its practical side, as what he called the moral imperative and consequently belonging to the finite. He moreover attributed these ideas brought into the biblical text, not to the Divine Spirit, but to its philosophical interpreters, or in a deeper sense, to the moral condition of the authors of the book themselves. This opinion Kant bases upon the fact, that in all religions old and new which are partly comprised in sacred books, intelligent and well-meaning teachers of the people have continued to explain them, until they have brought their actual contents into agreement with the universal principles of morality. Thus did the moral philosophers amongst the Greeks and Romans with their fabulous legends, till at last they explained the grossest polytheism as mere symbolical representations of the attributes of the one divine Being, and gave a mystical sense to the many vicissitudes of their gods, and to the wildest dreams of their poets, in order to bring the popular faith, which it was not expedient to destroy, into agreement with the doctrines of morality. The later Judaism and Christianity itself he thinks have been formed upon similar explanations, occasionally much forced, but always directed to objects undoubtedly good and necessary for all men. Thus the Mahometans gave a spiritual meaning to the sensual descriptions of their paradise, and thus the Hindoos, or at least the more enlightened part of them, interpreted their Vedas. In like manner, according to Kant, the Christian Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, must be interpreted throughout in a sense which agrees with the universal practical laws of a religious pure reason: and such an explanation, even though it should, apparently or actually, do violence to the text, which is the case with many of the biblical narratives, is to be preferred to a literal one, which either contains no morality at all or is in opposition to the moral principle. For example, the expressions breathing vengeance against enemies in many of the Psalms are made to refer to the desires and passions which we must strive by all means to bring into subjection; and the miraculous account in the New Testament of the descent of Jesus from heaven, of his relation to God, etc., is taken as an imaginative description of the ideal of humanity well-pleasing to God. That such an interpretation is possible, without even always too offensive an opposition to the literal sense of these records of the popular faith, arises according to the profound observations of Kant from this: that long before the existence of these records, the disposition to a moral religion was latent in the human mind; that its first manifestations were directed to the worship of the Deity, and on this very account gave occasion to those pretended revelations; still, though unintentionally, imparting even to these fictions somewhat of the spiritual character of their origin. In reply to the charge of dishonesty brought against his system of interpretation, he thinks it a sufficient defence to observe, that it does not pretend that the sense now given to the sacred books, always existed in the intention of the authors; this question it sets aside, and only claims for itself the right to interpret them after its own fashion.

Whilst Kant in this manner sought to educe moral thoughts from the biblical writings, even in their historical part, and was even inclined to consider these

1 Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft, drittes Stück. No. VI.: Der Kirchenglaube hat zu seinem höchsten Ausleger den reinen Religionsglauben.
thoughts as the fundamental object of the history: on the one hand, he derived these thoughts only from himself and the cultivation of his age, and therefore could seldom assume that they had actually been laid down by the authors of those writings; and on the other hand, and for the same reason, he omitted to show what was the relation between these thoughts and those symbolic representations, and how it happened that the one came to be expressed by the other.

§ 8.

RISE OF THE MYTHICAL MODE OF INTERPRETING THE SACRED HISTORY, IN REFERENCE FIRST TO THE OLD TESTAMENT.

It was impossible to rest satisfied with modes of proceeding so unhistorical on the one hand, and so unphilosophical on the other. Added to which, the study of mythology, now become far more general and more prolific in its results, exerted an increasing influence on the views taken of biblical history. Eichhorn had indeed insisted that all primitive histories, whether Hebrew or Pagan, should be treated alike, but this equality gradually disappeared; for though the mythical view became more and more developed in relation to profane history, the natural mode of explanation was still rigidly adhered to for the Hebrew records. All could not imitate Paulus, who sought to establish consistency of treatment by extending the same natural explanation which he gave to the Bible, to such also of the Greek legends as presented any points of resemblance; on the contrary, opinion in general took the opposite course, and began to regard many of the biblical narratives as myths. Semler had already spoken of a kind of Jewish mythology, and had even called the histories of Samson and Esther mythi; Eichhorn too had done much to prepare the way, now further pursued by Gabler, Schelling, and others, who established the notion of the mythus as one of universal application to ancient history, sacred as well as profane, according to the principle of Heyne: A mythus omnis priscorum hominum cum historia tum philosophia procedit. And Bauer in 1820 ventured so far as to publish a Hebrew mythology of the Old and New Testament. The earliest records of all nations are, in the opinion of Bauer, mythical: why should the writings of the Hebrews form a solitary exception? — whereas in point of fact a cursory glance at their sacred books proves that they also contain mythical elements. A narrative he explains, after Gabler and Schelling, to be recognizable as mythus, first, when it proceeds from an age in which no written records existed, but in which facts were transmitted through the medium of oral tradition alone; secondly, when it presents an historical account of events which are either absolutely or relatively beyond the reach of experience, such as occurrences connected with the spiritual world, and incidents to which, from the nature of the circumstances, no one could have been witness; or thirdly, when it deals in the marvellous and is couched in symbolical language. Not a few narratives of this description occur in the Bible; and an unwillingness to regard them as mythi can arise only from a false conception of the nature of a mythus, or of the character of the biblical writings. In the one case mythi are confounded with fables, premeditated fictions, and wilful falsehoods, instead of being recognised as the necessary vehicle of expression for the first efforts of the human mind; in the other case it certainly does appear improbable, (the notion of inspiration presupposed,) that God should have admitted the substitution of mythical for actual representations of facts and ideas, but a nearer examination of the scriptures shows that this very notion of inspiration, far from being any hindrance to the mythical interpretation, is itself of mythical origin.

Wegscheider ascribed this greater unwillingness to recognise mythi in the early records of the Hebrew and Christian religion than in the heathen religions, partly to the prevailing ignorance respecting the progress of historical and philosophical science; partly to a certain timidity which dares not call things manifestly identical by the same name. At the same time he declared it impossible to rescue the Bible from the reproaches and scoffs of its enemies except by the acknowledgment of mythi in the sacred writings, and the separation of their inherent meaning from their unhistorical form.

These biblical critics gave the following general definition of the mythus. It is the representation of an event or of an idea in a form which is historical, but, at the same time characterized by the rich pictorial and imaginative mode of thought and expression of the primitive ages. They also distinguished several kinds of mythi.

1st. Historical mythi: narratives of real events coloured by the light of antiquity, which confounded the divine and the human, the natural and the supernatural.

2nd. Philosophical mythi: such as clothed in the garb of historical narrative a simple thought, a precept, or an idea of the time.

3rd. Poetical mythi: historical and philosophical mythi partly blended together, and partly embellished by the creations of the imagination, in which the original fact or idea is almost obscured by the veil which the fancy of the poet has woven around it.

To classify the biblical myth according to these several distinctions is a difficult task, since the mythus which is purely symbolical wears the semblance of history equally with the mythus which represents an actual occurrence. These critics however laid down rules by which the different mythi might be distinguished. The first essential is, they say, to determine whether the narrative have a distinct object, and what that object is. Where no object, for the sake of which the legend might have been invented, is discoverable, every one would pronounce the mythus to be historical. But if all the principal circumstances of the narrative concur to symbolize a particular truth, this undoubtedly was the object of the narrative, and the mythus is philosophical. The blending of the historical and philosophical mythus is particularly to be recognised when we can detect in the narrative an attempt to derive events from their causes. In many instances the existence of an historical foundation is proved also by independent testimony; sometimes certain particulars in the mythus are intimately connected with known genuine history, or bear in themselves undeniable and inherent characteristics of probability: so that the critic, while he rejects the external form, may yet retain the groundwork as historical. The poetical mythus is the most difficult to distinguish, and Bauer gives only a negative criterion. When the narrative is so wonderful on the one hand as to exclude the possibility of its being a detail of facts, and when on the other it discovers no attempt to symbolize a particular thought, it may be suspected that the entire narrative owes its birth to the imagination of the poet. Schelling particularly remarks on the unartificial and spontaneous origin of mythi in general. The unhistorical

1 Ammon, Progr. quo inquiratur in narrationum de vitæ Jesu Christi primordiis fontes, etc., in Posti's and Ruperti's Sylogos Comm. theol. No. 5, und Gabler's n. theol. Journal, 5 Bd. s. 83 und 397.

2 Institutiones Theol. Chr. Dogm. § 42.
which is interwoven with the matters of fact in the historical myths is not, he observes, the artistical product of design and invention. It has on the contrary glided in of itself, as it were, in the lapse of time and in the course of transmission. And, speaking of philosophical mythi, he says: the sages of antiquity clothed their ideas in an historical garb, not only in order to accommodate those ideas to the apprehension of a people who must be awakened by sensible impressions, but also on their own account: deficient themselves in clear abstract ideas, and in ability to give expression to their dim conceptions, they sought to illuminate what was obscure in their representations by means of sensible imagery.

We have already remarked, that the natural mode of interpreting the Old Testament could be maintained only so long as the records were held to be contemporaneous, or nearly so, with the events recorded. Consequently it was precisely those theologians, Vater, De Wette and others who controverted this opinion, who contributed to establish the mythical view of the sacred histories. Vater expressed the opinion that the peculiar character of the narrations in the Pentateuch could not be rightly understood, unless it were conceded that they are not the production of an eye witness, but are a series of transmitted traditions. Their traditional origin being admitted, we cease to feel surprised at the traces which they discover of a subsequent age; at numerical exaggerations, together with other inaccuracies and contradictions; at the twilight which hangs over many of the occurrences; and at representations such as, that the clothes of the Israelites waxed not old during their passage through the wilderness. Vater even contends, that unless we ascribe a great share of the marvellous contained in the Pentateuch to tradition, we do violence to the original sense of the compilers of these narratives.

The natural mode of explanation was still more decidedly opposed by De Wette than by Vater. He advocated the mythical interpretation of a large proportion of the Old Testament histories. In order to test the historical credibility of a narrative, he says, we must ascertain the intention of the narrator. If that intention be not to satisfy the natural thirst for historical truth by a simple narration of facts, but rather to delight or touch the feelings, or to illustrate some philosophical or religious truth, then his narrative has no pretension to historical validity. Even when the narrator is conscious of strictly historical intentions, nevertheless his point of view may not be the historical: he may be a poetical narrator, not indeed subjectively, as a poet drawing inspiration from himself, but objectively, as enveloped by and depending on poetry external to himself. This is evidently the case when the narrator details as bona fide matter of fact things which are impossible and incredible, which are contrary not only to experience, but to the established laws of nature. Narrations of this description spring out of tradition. Tradition, says De Wette, is uncritical and partial; its tendency is not historical, but rather patriotic and poetical. And since the patriotic sentiment is gratified by all that flatters national pride, the more splendid, the more honourable, the more wonderful the narrative, the more acceptable it is; and where tradition has left any blanks, imagination at once steps in and fills them up. And since, he continues, a great part of the historical books of the Old Testament bear this stamp, it has hitherto been believed possible (on the part of the natural interpreters) to separate the embellishments and transformations from the historical substance, and still to consider them available as records of facts. This might indeed be done, had we, besides the marvellous biblical narratives, some other purely historical account of the events. But this is not the case with regard to the Old Testament history; we are solely dependent on those accounts which we cannot recognize as purely historical. There contain no criterion by which to distinguish between the true and the false: both are promiscuously blended, and set forth as of equal dignity. According to De Wette, the whole natural mode of explanation is set aside by the principle that the only means of acquaintance with a history is the narrative which we possess concerning it, and that beyond this narrative the historian cannot go. In the present case, this reports to us only a supernatural course of events, which we must either receive or reject: if we reject it, we determine to know nothing at all about it, and are not justified in allowing ourselves to invent a natural course of events, of which the narrative is totally silent. It is moreover inconsistent and arbitrary to refer the dress in which the events of the Old Testament are clothed to poetry, and to preserve the events themselves as historical; much rather do the particular details and the dress in which they appear, constitute a whole belonging to the province of poetry and mythus. For example, if God's covenant with Abraham be denied in the form of fact, whilst at the same time it is maintained that the narrative had an historical basis,—that is to say, that though no objective divine communication took place, the occurrence had a subjective reality in Abraham's mind in a dream or in a waking vision; in other words, that a natural thought was awakened in Abraham which he, in the spirit of the age, referred to God,—of the naturalist who thus reasons, De Wette asks, how he knows that such thoughts arose in Abraham's mind? The narration refers them to God; and if we reject the narration, we know nothing about these thoughts of Abraham, and consequently cannot know that they had arisen naturally in him. According to general experience, such hopes as are described in this covenant, that he should become the father of a mighty nation which should possess the land of Canaan, could not have sprung up naturally in Abraham's mind; but it is quite natural that the Israelites when they had become a numerous people in possession of that land, should have invented the covenant in order to render their ancestor illustrious. Thus the natural explanation, by its own unnaturalness, ever brings us back to the mythical.

Even Eichhorn, who so extensively employed the natural explanation in reference to the Old Testament, perceived its inadmissibility in relation to the gospel histories. Whatever in these narratives has a tendency to the supernatural, he remarks, we ought not to attempt to transform into a natural occurrence, because this is impossible without violence. If once an event has acquired a miraculous colouring, owing to the blending together of some popular notion with the occurrence, the natural fact can be disentangled only when we possess a second account which has not undergone the like transformation; as, concerning the death of Herod Agrippa, we have not only the narrative in the Acts, but also that of Josephus. But since we have no such controlling account concerning the history of Jesus, the critic who pretends to discover the natural course of things from descriptions of supernatural occurrences, will only weave a tissue of indemonstrable hypotheses:—a consideration which, as Eichhorn observes, at once annihilates many of the so-called psychological interpretations of the Gospel histories.

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8 Kritik der Mosaischen Geschichte. Einl. s. 10. ff.
9 Einheit. in das N. T. 1. 1. 408. ff.
10 Antiqu. xix. viii. 2.
INTRODUCTION. § 8.

It is this same difference between the natural and mythical modes of interpretation which Krug intends to point out, referring particularly to the histories of miracles, when he distinguishes the physical or material, from the genetic or formal, mode of explaining them. Following the former mode, according to him, the inquiry is: how can the wonderful event here related have possibly taken place with all its details by natural means and according to natural laws? Whereas, following the latter, the question is: whence arose the narrative of the marvellous event? The former explains the natural possibility of the thing related (the substance of the narrative); the latter traces the origin of the existing record (the form of the narrative). Krug considers attempts of the former kind to be fruitless, because they produce interpretations yet more wonderful than the fact itself; far preferable is the other mode, since it leads to results which throw light upon miraculous histories collectively. He gives the preference to the exegetist, because in his explanation of the text he is not obliged to do violence to it, but may accept it altogether literally as the author intended, even though the thing related be impossible; whereas the interpreter, who follows the material or physical explanation, is driven to ingenious subtleties which make him lose sight of the original meaning of the authors, and substitute something quite different which they neither could nor would have said.

In like manner Gabler recommended the mythical view, as the best means of escaping from the so called natural, but forced explanation, which had become the fashion. The natural interpreter, he remarks, commonly aims to make the whole narrative natural; and as this can but seldom succeed, he allows himself the most violent measures, owing to which modern exegesis has been brought into disrepute even amongst laymen. The mythical view, on the contrary, needs no such subtleties; since the greater part of a narrative frequently belongs to the mythical representation merely, while the nucleus of fact, when divested of the subsequently added miraculous embellishments, is often very small.

Neither could Horst reconcile himself to the atomistic mode of proceeding, which selected from the marvellous narratives of the Bible, as unhistorical, isolated incidents merely, and inserted natural ones in their place, instead of recognizing in the whole of each narrative a religious moral mythis in which a certain idea is embodied.

An anonymous writer in Berthold's Journal has expressed himself very decidedly against the natural mode of explaining the sacred history, and in favour of the mythical. The essential defect of the natural interpretation, as exhibited in its fullest development by Paulus's Commentary, is, according to that writer, its unhistorical mode of procedure. He objects: that it allows conjecture to supply the deficiencies of the record; adopts individual speculations as a substitute for real history; seeks by vain endeavours to represent that as natural which the narrative describes as supernatural; and lastly, evaporates all sacredness and divinity from the Scriptures, reducing them to collections of amusing tales no longer meriting the name of history. According to our author, this insufficiency of the natural mode of interpretation, whilst the supernatural also is felt to be unsatisfactory, leads the mind to the mythical view, which leaves the substance of the narrative unassailed; and instead of venturing to explain the details, accepts the whole, not indeed as true history, but as a sacred legend. This view is supported by the analogy of all antiquity, political and religious, since the closest resemblance exists between many of the narratives of the Old and New Testament, and the myths of profane antiquity. But the most convincing argument is this: if the mythical view be once admitted, the innumerable, and never otherwise to be

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MYTHICAL POINT OF VIEW. § 9.

Thus the mythical mode of interpretation was adopted not only in relation to the Old Testament, but also to the New; not, however, without its being felt necessary to justify such a step. Gabler has objected to the Commentary of Paulus, that it concedes too little to the mythical point of view, which must be adopted for certain New Testament narratives. For many of these narratives present not only those mistaken views of things which might have been taken by eye-witnesses, and by the rectification of which a natural course of events may be made out; but frequently, also, false facts and impossible consequences which no eye-witness could have related, and which could only have been the product of tradition, and must therefore be mythically understood.¹

The chief difficulty which opposed the transference of the mythical point of view from the Old Testament to the New, was this:—it was customary to look for mythis in the fabulous primitive ages only, in which no written records of events as yet existed; whereas, in the time of Jesus, the mythical age had long since passed away, and writing had become common among the Jews. Schelling had however conceded (at least in a note) that the term mythis, in a more extended sense, was appropriate to those narratives which, though originating in an age when it was usual to preserve documentary records, were nevertheless transmitted by the mouth of the people. Bauer in like manner asserted, that though a connected series of mythis,—a history which should be altogether mythical,—was not to be sought in the New Testament, yet there might occur in it single mythis, either transferred from the Old Testament to the New, or having originally sprung up in the latter. Thus he found, in the details of the infancy of Jesus, much which requires to be regarded from a mythical point of view. As after the decease of celebrated personages, numerous anecdotes are circulated concerning them, which fail not to receive many and wondrous amplifications in the legends of a wondering people; so, after Jesus had become distinguished by his life, and yet more glorified by his death, his early years, which had been passed in obscurity, became adorned with miraculous embellishments. And, according to Bauer, whenever in this history of the infancy we find celestial beings, called by name and bearing the human shape, predicting future occurrences, etc., we have a right to suppose a mythis; and to conjecture as its origin, that the great actions of Jesus being referred to superhuman causes, this explanation came to be blended with the history. On the same subject, Gabler ⁵ remarked that the notion of ancient is relative; compared with the Mosaic religion Christianity is certainly young; but in itself it is old enough to allow us to refer the original history of its founder to ancient times. That at that time written documents on other subjects existed, proves nothing,

³ Hebäische Mythologie. I Thl. Einl. 8 5.
⁴ Ist es erlaubt, in der Bibel, und sogar im N.T., Mythen anzunehmen? Im Journal für auserlesene theol. Literatur, 2, 1 s. 49 ff.
whilst it can be shown that for a long period there was no written account of the life of Jesus, and particularly of his infancy. Oral narratives were alone transmitted, and they would easily become tinged with the marvellous, mixed with Jewish ideas, and thus grow into historical myths. On many other points there was no tradition, and here the mind was left to its own surmises. The more scanty the historical data, the greater was the scope for conjecture; and historical guesses and inferences of this description, formed in harmony with the Jewish-Christian tastes, may be called the philosophical, or rather, the dogmatical myth of the early Christian Gospel. The notion of the mythus, concludes Gabler, being thus shown to be applicable to many of the narratives of the New Testament, why should we not dare to call them by their right name; why—that is to say in learned discussion—avoi s expression which can give offence only to the prejudiced or the misinformed?

As in the Old Testament Eichhorn had been brought over by the force of internal evidence from his earlier natural explanation, to the mythical view of the history of the fall; so in the New Testament, the same thing happened to Usteri in relation to the history of the temptation. In an earlier work he had, following Schleiermacher, considered it as a parable spoken by Jesus but misunderstood by his disciples. Soon however he perceived the difficulties of this interpretation; and since both the natural and the supernatural views of the narrative appeared to him yet more objectionable, he had no alternative but to adopt the mythical. Once admit, he remarks, a state of excitement, particularly of religious excitement, among a not unpoetical people, and a short time is sufficient to give an appearance of the marvellous not only to obscure and concealed, but even to public and well-known facts. It is therefore by no means conceivable that the early Jewish Christians, gifted with the spirit, that is, animated with religious enthusiasm, as they were, and familiar with the Old Testament, should not have been in a condition to invent symbolical scenes such as the temptations and other New Testament myths. It is not however to be imagined that any one individual seated himself at his table to invent them out of his own head, and write them down, as he would a poem; on the contrary, these narratives like all other legends were fashioned by degrees, by steps which can no longer be traced; gradually acquired consistency, and at length received a fixed form in our written Gospels.

We have seen that in reference to the early histories of the Old Testament, the mythical view could be embraced by those only who doubted the composition of these Scriptures by eye-witnesses or contemporaneous writers. This was equally the case in reference to the New. It was not till Eichhorn became convinced that only a slender thread of that primitive Gospel believed by the Apostles ran through the three first Gospels, and that even in Matthew this thread was entangled in a mass of unapostolical additions, that he discarded as unhistorical legends, the many narratives which he found perplexing, from all share in the history of Jesus; for example, besides the Gospel of Infancy, the details of the temptation; several of the miracles of Jesus; the rising of the saints from their graves at his crucifixion; the guard at the sepulchre, etc. Particularly since the opinion, that the three first Gospels originated from oral traditions, became firmly established, they have been found to contain a continually increasing number of myths and mythical embellishments. On this account the authenticity of the Gospel of John, and consequently its historical credibility, is confidently maintained by most of the theologians of the present day: he only who, with Bretschneider, questions its apostolic composition, may cede in this Gospel also a considerable place to the mythical element.

§ 10.

THE NOTION OF THE MYTHUS IN ITS APPLICATION TO SACRED HISTORIES NOT CLEARLY APPREHENDED BY THEOLOGIANS.

Thus, indeed, did the mythical view gain application to the biblical history; still the notion of the mythus was for a long time neither clearly apprehended nor applied to a due extent.

Not clearly apprehended. The characteristic which had been recognised as constituting the distinction between historical and philosophical myth, however just that distinction might in itself be, was of a kind which easily betrayed the critic back again into the scarcely abandoned natural explanation. His task, with regard to historical myth, was still to separate the natural fact—the nucleus of historical reality—from its unhistorical and miraculous embellishments. An essential difference indeed existed: the natural explanation attributed the embellishments to the opinion of the actors concerned, or of the narrator; the mythical interpretation derived them from tradition; but the mode of proceeding was left too little determined. If the Rationalist could point out historical myth in the Bible, without materially changing his mode of explanation; so the Supernaturalist on his part felt himself less offended by the admission of historical myth, which still preserved to the sacred narratives a basis of fact, than by the supposition of philosophical myth, which seemed completely to annihilate every trace of historical foundation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the interpreters who advocated the mythical theory spoke almost exclusively of historical myth; that Bauer, amongst a considerable number of myth which he cites from the New Testament, finds but one philosophical mythus; and that a mixed mode of interpretation, partly mythical and partly natural, (a medley far more contradictory than the pure natural explanation, from the difficulties of which these critics sought to escape,) should have been adopted. Thus Bauer thought that he was explaining Jehovah’s promise to Abraham as an historical mythus, when he admitted as the fundamental fact of the narrative, that Abraham’s hopes of a numerous posterity were re-awakened by the contemplation of the star-born heavens. Another theologian imagined he had seized the mythical point of view, when, having divested the announcement of the birth of the Baptist of the supernatural, he still retained the dumbness of Zachariah as the historical groundwork. In like manner Krug, immediately after assuring us that his intention is not to explain the substance of the history, (according to the natural mode,) but to explain the origin of the narrative, (according to the mythical view,) constitutes an accidental

5 Beitrag zur Erklärung der Versuchungsgeschichte, in ders. Zeitschrift, 1832, 4. Heft.
6 Einleitung in das N. T. 1, s. 422 ff. 453 ff.
7 Besonders durch Gieseler, über die Entstehung und die frühesten Schicksale der schriftlichen Evangelien.
8 Vid. den Anhang der Schulz-schen Schrift über das Abendmahl, und die Schriften von Siefert und Schneckenburger über den Ursprung des ersten kanonischen Evangeliums.
9 In den Probabilien.
10 Geschichte der hebräischen Nation, Thell. i. s. 123.
11 In Henke’s Magazin, 5ten Bdes. 11tes Stuck. s. 163.
12 Versuch über die genetische oder formelle Erklärungsart de Wunder. In Henke’s Museum, 1. 3. 1803.
journey of oriental merchants the basis of the narrative of the visit of the wise men from the east. But the contradiction is most glaring when we meet with palpable misconceptions of the true nature of a mythus in a work on the mythology of the New Testament, such as Bauer's; in which for instance he admits, in the case of the parents of John the Baptist, a marriage which had actually been childless during many years;—in which he explains the angelic appearance at the birth of Jesus as a meteoric phenomenon; supposes the occurrence of thunder and lightning and the accidental descent of a dove at his baptism; constitutes a storm the groundwork of the transfiguration; and converts the angels at the tomb of the risen Jesus into white grave-clothes. Kaiser also, though he complains of the unnaturalness of many of the natural explanations, accords to a very considerable proportion of natural explanations a place by the side of the mythical; remarking—and the remark is in itself just—that to attempt to explain all the miracles of the New Testament in one and the same manner betrays a limited and partial comprehension of the subject. Let it be primarily admitted that the ancient author intended to narrate a miracle, and the natural explanation is in many instances admissible. This may be either a physical-historical explanation, as in the narrative of the leper whose approaching recovery Jesus doubtless perceived; or it may be a psychological explanation; since, in the case of many sick persons, the fame of Jesus and faith in him were mainly instrumental in effecting the cure; sometimes indeed good fortune must be taken into the account, as where one apparently dead revived in the presence of Jesus, and he became regarded as the author of the sudden re-animation. With respect to other miracles Kaiser is of opinion that the mythical interpretation is to be preferred; he, however, grants a much larger space to historical, than to philosophical mythus. He considers most of the miracles in the Old and New Testament real occurrences mythically embellished: such as the narrative of the piece of money in the fish's mouth and of the changing of water into wine: which latter history he supposes to have originated from a friendly jest on the part of Jesus. Few only of the miracles are recognised by this critic as pure poetry embodying Jewish ideas; as the miraculous birth of Jesus, and the murder of the innocents.

Gabler in particular calls attention to the error of treating philosophical mythus as if it were historical, and of thus converting into facts things that never happened. He is however as little disposed to admit the exclusive existence of philosophical, as of historical mythus in the New Testament, but adopting a middle course, he decides in each case that the mythus is of this kind or of that according to its intrinsic character. He maintains that it is as necessary a guard against the arbitrary proceeding of handling as philosophical a mythus through which a fact unquestionably glimmers, as it is to avoid the opposite tendency to explain naturally or historically that which belongs properly to the mythical clothing. In other words: when the derivation of a mythus from a thought is easy and natural, and when the attempt to elude it from a matter of fact and to give the wonderful history a natural explanation, does violence to the sense or appears ridiculous, we have, according to Gabler, certain evidence that the mythus is philosophical and not historical. He remarks in conclusion that the philosophical-mythical interpretation is in many cases far less offensive than the historical-mythical explanation.

Yet, notwithstanding this predilection in favour of the philosophical mythus in relation to biblical history, one is surprised to find that Gabler himself was ignorant of the true nature both of the historical and of the philosophical mythus. Speaking of the mythological interpreters of the New Testament who had preceded him, he says that some of them, such as Dr. Paulus, discover in the history of Jesus historical mythi only; whilst others, the anonymous E. F. in Henke's Magazine for instance, find only philosophical mythus. From this we see that he confounded not only the natural explanation with the historical-mythical view, (for in Paulus's "Commentar," the former only is adopted,) but also historical with philosophical mythus; for the author E. F. is so exclusively attached to the historical-mythical view that his explanations might almost be considered as naturalistic.

De Wette has some very cogent observations directed equally against the arbitrary adoption either of the historical-mythical or of the natural explanation in relation to the Mosaic history. In reference to the New Testament an anonymous writer in Bertholdt's Critical Journal is the most decided in his condemnation of every attempt to discover an historical groundwork even in the Gospel mythus. To him likewise the midday path struck out by Gabler, between the exclusive adoption of historical mythus on the one hand and of philosophical mythus on the other, appears inapplicable; for though a real occurrence may in fact constitute the basis of most of the New Testament narratives, it may still be impossible at the present time to separate the element of fact from the mythical adjuncts which have been blended with it, and to determine how much may belong to the one and how much to the other. Usteri likewise expressed the opinion that it is no longer possible to discriminate between the historical and the symbolical in the gospel mythus; no critical knife however sharp is now able to separate the one element from the other. A certain measure of probability respecting the preponderance of the historical in one legend, and of the symbolical in another, is the ultimate point to which criticism can now attain.

Opposed however to the onesidedness of those critics who found it so easy to disengage the historical contents from the mythical narratives of the Scriptures, is the onesidedness of other critics, who, on account of the difficulty of the proposed separation, despaired of the possibility of success, and were consequently led to handle the whole mass of gospel mythus as philosophical, at least in so far as to relinquish the endeavour to extract from them a residuum of historical fact. Now it is precisely this latter onesidedness which has been attributed to my criticism of the life of Jesus; consequently, several of the reviewers of this work have taken occasion repeatedly to call attention to the varying proportions in which the historical and the ideal in the pagan religion and primitive history, (the legitimate province of the mythus), alternate; an interchange with the historical which in the Christian primitive history, presupposing the notion of the mythus to be admitted here, must unquestionably take place in a far greater degree. Thus Ullmann distinguishes not only firstly the philosophical, and secondly the historical mythus, but makes a further distinction between the latter (that is the historical mythus, in which there is always a preponderance of the fictitious, and thirdly the mythical history, in which the historical element, though wrought into the ideal, forms the predominating constituent; whilst fourthly in histories of which the legend is a component element, we tread properly speaking upon historical ground, since, in these histories we meet only with a few faint echoes of mythical fiction. Ullmann is moreover of opinion, and Bretschneider and others agree with him, that independently of the re-
pulsion and confusion which must inevitably be caused by the application of the term mythus to that which is Christian—a term originally conceived in relation to a religion of a totally different character—it were more suitable, in connexion with the primitive Christian records, to speak only of Gospel legend, (Sage) and the legendary element.  

George on the contrary has recently attempted not only more accurately to define the notions of the mythus and of the legend, but likewise to demonstrate that the gospel narratives are mythical rather than legendary. Speaking generally, we should say, that he restricts the term mythus to what had previously been distinguished as philosophical myth; and that he applies the name legend to what hitherto been denominated historical myth. He handles the two notions as the antipodes of each other; and grasps them with a precision by which the notion of the mythus has unquestionably gained. According to George, mythus is the creation of a fact out of an idea: legend the seeing of an idea in a fact, or arising out of it. A people, a religious community, finds itself in a certain condition or round of institutions of which the spirit, the idea, lives and acts within it. But the mind, following a natural impulse, desires to gain a complete representation of that existing condition, and to know its origin. This origin however is buried in oblivion or is too indistinctly discernible to satisfy present feelings and ideas. Consequently an image of that origin, coloured by the light of existing ideas, is cast upon the dark wall of the past, which image is however but a magnified reflex of existing influences.

If such be the rise of the mythus, the legend, on the contrary, proceeds from given facts represented, indeed, sometimes in an incomplete and abridged, sometimes in an amplified form, in order to magnify the heroes of the history—but disjoined from their true connexion; the points of view from which they should be contemplated, and the ideas they originally contained, having in the course of transmission wholly disappeared. The consequence is, that new ideas, conceived in the spirit of the definite ages through which the legend has passed down, become substituted in the stead of the original ideas. For example, the period of Jewish history subsequent to the time of Moses, which was in point of fact pervaded by a gradual elevation of ideas to monotheism and to a theocracy, is, in a later legend, represented in the exactly opposite light, as a state of falling away from the religious constitution of Moses. An idea so unhistorical will infallibly here and there distort facts transmitted by tradition, fill up blanks in the history, and subjoin new and significant features—and then the mythus reappears in the legend. It is the same with the mythus: propagated by tradition, it, in the process of transmission, loses its distinctive character and completeness, or becomes exaggerated in its details—as for example in the matter of numbers—and then the mythus comes under the influence of the legend. In such wise do these two formations, so essentially distinct in their origin, cross each other and mingle together. Now, if the history of the life of Jesus be of mythical formation, inasmuch as it embodies the vivid impression of the original idea which the first christian community had of their founder, this history, though unhistorical in its form, is nevertheless a faithful representation of the idea of the Christ. If instead of this, the history be legendary—if the actual external facts are given in a distorted and often magnified form—are represented in a false light and embody a false idea,—then, on the contrary, the real tenor of the life of Jesus is lost to us. So that, according to George, the recognition of the mythical element in the Gospels is far less prejudicial to the true interests of the Christian faith than the recognition of the legendary element.  

With respect to our own opinion, without troubling ourselves here with the dogmatic signification, we need only remark in this introduction, that we are prepared to meet with both legend and mythus in the gospel history; and when we undertake to extract the historical contents which may possibly exist in narratives recognized as mythical, we shall be equally careful neither on the one part by a rude and mechanical separation, to place ourselves on the same ground with the natural interpreter; nor on the other by a hypercritical refusal to recognize such contents where they actually exist, to lose sight of the history.

§ 11.

The application of the notion of the mythus too circumscribed.

The notion of the mythus, when first admitted by theologians, was not only imperfectly apprehended, but also too much limited in its application to biblical history.

As Eichhorn recognized a genuine mythus only on the very threshold of the Old Testament history, and thought himself obliged to explain all that followed in a natural manner; as, some time later, other portions of the Old Testament were allowed to be mythical, whilst nothing of the kind might be suspected in the New; so, when the mythus was once admitted into the New Testament, it was here again long detained at the threshold, namely, the history of the infancy of Jesus, every farther advance being contested. Ammon, the anonymous E. F. in Henke's Magazine, Usteri, and others maintained a marked distinction between the historical worth of the narratives of the public life and those of the infancy of Jesus. The records of the latter could not, they contend, have been contemporaneous; for particular attention was not at that time directed towards him; and it is equally manifest that they could not have been written during the last three years of his life, since they embody the idea of Jesus glorified, and not of Jesus in conflict and suffering. Consequently their composition must be referred to a period subsequent to his resurrection. But at this period accurate data concerning his childhood were no longer to be obtained. The apostles knew him first in manhood. Joseph was probably dead; and Mary, supposing her to be living when the first and third gospels were composed, had naturally imparted an imaginative tinge to every incident treasured in her memory, whilst her embellishments were doubtless still further magnified in accordance with the Messianic ideas of those to whom her communications were made. Much also that is narrated had no historical foundation, but originated entirely from the notions of the age, and from the Old Testament predictions —that a virgin should conceive—for example. But, say these critics, all this does not in any degree impair the credibility of what follows. The object and task of the Evangelists was merely to give an accurate account of the three last years of the life of Jesus; and here they merit implicit confidence, since they were either themselves spectators of the details they record, or else had learned them from the mouth of trustworthy eye-witnesses. This boundary line between

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the credibility of the history of the public life, and the fabulousness of the
history of the infancy of Jesus, became yet more definitely marked, from the
circumstance that many theologians were disposed to reject the two first
chapters of Matthew and Luke as spurious and subsequent additions. ²

Soon, however, some of the theologians who had conceded the commence-
ment of the history to the province of mythi, perceived that the conclusion,
the history of the ascension, must likewise be regarded as mythical. ³ Thus
the two extremities were cut off by the pruning knife of criticism, whilst the
essential body of the history, the period from the baptism to the resurrection,
remained, as yet, unassailed: or in the words of the reviewer of Greiling's Life
of Jesus: ⁴ the entrance to the gospel history was through the decorated
portal of myths, and the exit was similar to it, whilst the intermediate space
was still traversed by the crooked and toilsome paths of natural interpreta-

tions. ⁵

In Gabler's ⁶ writings we meet with a somewhat more extended application
of the mythical view. He distinguishes (and recently Rosenkranz ⁷ has
agreed with him) between the miracles wrought by Jesus and those operated
on him or in relation to him, interpreting the latter mythically, but the former
naturally. Subsequently however, we find Gabler expressing himself as if
with the above mentioned theologians he restricted the mythical interpreta-
tion to the miraculous narratives of the childhood of Jesus, but this
restriction is in fact a limitation merely of the admitted distinction: since
though all the miracles connected with the early history of Jesus were operated
in relation to him and not wrought by him, many miracles of the same
character occur in the history of his public life. Bauer appears to have been
guided by the same rule in his Hebrew mythology. He classes as mythical
the narratives of the conception and birth of Jesus, of the Baptism, the
transfiguration, the angelic apparitions in Gethsemane and at the sepulchre:
miracles selected from all periods of the life of Jesus, but all operated in
relation to him and not by him. This enumeration, however, does not
include all the miracles of this kind.

The often referred to author of the treatise "Upon the different views
with which and for which a Biographer of Jesus may work," has endeavoured
to show that so limited an application of the notion of the myths to the
history of the life of Jesus is insufficient and inconsequent. This confused
point of view from which the gospel narrative is regarded as partly historical
and partly mythical owes its origin, according to him, to those theologians
who neither give up the history, nor are able to satisfy themselves with its clear
results, but who think to unite both parties by this middle course—a vain
endeavour which the rigid supranaturalist pronounces heretical, and the rational-
list derides. The attempt of these reconcilers, remarks our author, to explain
as intelligible everything which is not impossible, lays them open to all the
charges so justly brought against the natural interpretation; whilst the admis-
sion of the existence of myths in the New Testament subjects them to the
direct reproach of being inconsequent: the severest censure which can be
passed upon a scholar. Besides, the proceeding of these Eclectics is most
arbitrary, since they decide respecting what belongs to the history and what
to the myths almost entirely upon subjective grounds. Such distinctions

⁴ Comp. Kühnöhl, Prolegom. in Matthaeum, § 3; in Lucam, § 6.
⁵ e. g. Ammon, in der Diss. Ascensio J. C. in coelum historia biblica, in seinen Opusc.
nov.
⁸ Encyclopädie der theolog. Wissenschaften, s. 161.
⁹ In Gabler's neuestem theolog. Journal, Bd. vi. 4ten Stück. s. 350.

are equally foreign to the evangelists, to logical reasoning, and to historical
criticism. In consistency with these opinions, this writer applies the notion
of the myths to the entire history of the life of Jesus; recognizes myth or
mythical embellishments in every portion, and ranges under the category of
myths not merely the miraculous occurrences during the infancy of Jesus,
but those also of his public life; not merely miracles operated on Jesus, but
those wrought by him.

The most extended application of the notion of the philosophical or
dogmatical myths to the Gospel histories which has yet been made, was
published in 1799 in an anonymous work concerning Revelation and My-
thology. The writer contends that the whole life of Jesus, all that he should
and would do, had an ideal existence in the Jewish mind long prior to his
birth. Jesus as an individual was not actually such as according to Jewish
anticipations he should have been. Not even that, in which all the records
which recount his actions agree, is absolutely matter of fact. A popular idea
of the life of Jesus grew out of various popular contributions, and from this
source our written Gospels were first derived. A reviewer objects that this
author appears to suppose a still smaller portion of the historical element
in the gospels than actually exists. It would, he remarks, have been wiser to
have been guided by a sober criticism of details, than by a sweeping sceptici-
sm. ⁷

§ 12.

OPPOSITION TO THE MYTHICAL VIEW OF THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

In adopting the mythical point of view as hitherto applied to Biblical
history, our theologians had again approximated to the ancient allegorical
interpretation. For as both the natural explanations of the Rationalists, and
the jesting expositions of the Deists, belong to that form of opinion which,
whilst it sacrifices all divine meaning in the sacred record, still upholds its
historical character; the mythical mode of interpretation agrees with the
allegorical, in relinquishing the historical reality of the sacred narratives in
order to preserve to them an absolute inherent truth. The mythical and the
allegorical view (as also the moral) equally allow that the historian apparently
relates that which is historical, but they suppose him, under the influence of
a higher inspiration known or unknown to himself, to have made use of this
historical semblance merely as the shell of an idea—of a religious conception.
The only essential distinction therefore between these two modes of explana-
tion is, that according to the allegorical this higher intelligence is the im-
mediate divine agency; according to the mythical, it is the spirit of a people
or a community. (According to the moral view it is generally the mind of
the interpreter which suggests the interpretation.) Thus the allegorical view
attributes the narrative to a supernatural source, whilst the mythical view
ascribes it to that natural process by which legends are originated and
developed. To which it should be added, that the allegorical interpreter (as
well as the moral) may with the most unrestrained arbitrariness separate from
the history every thought he deems to be worthy of God, as constituting its
inherent meaning; whilst the mythical interpreter, on the contrary, in search-

This new view of the sacred Scriptures was opposed alike by the orthodox
and by the rationalistic party. From the first, whilst the mythical interpretation was still restricted to the primitive history of the Old Testament, Hess \(^1\) on the orthodox side, protested against it. The three following conclusions may be given as comprising, however incredible this may appear, the substance of his book, a work of some compass; upon which however it is unnecessary to remark further than that Hess was by no means the last orthodox theologian who pretended to combat the mythical view with such weapons. He contends, 1st, that mythi are to be understood figuratively; now the sacred historians intended their writings to be understood literally: consequently they do not relate mythi. 2ndly, Mythology is something heathenish; the Bible is a Christian book; consequently it contains no mythology. The third conclusion is more complex, and, as will appear below, has more meaning. If, says Hess, the marvellous were confined to those earliest biblical records of which the historical validity is less certain, and did not appear in any subsequent writings, the miraculous might be considered as a proof of the mythical character of the narrative; but the marvellous is no less redundant in the latest and undeniably historical records, than in the more ancient; consequently it cannot be regarded as a criterion of the mythical. In short the most hollow natural explanation, did it but retain the slightest vestige of the historical—however completely it annihilated every higher meaning—was preferable, in the eyes of the orthodox, to the mythical interpretation. Certainly nothing could be worse than Eichhorn's natural explanation of the fall. In considering the tree of knowledge as a poisonous plant, he at once destroyed the intrinsic value and inherent meaning of the history: of this he afterwards became fully sensible, and in his subsequent mythical interpretation, he recognized in the narrative the incorporealities of a worthy and elevated conception. Hess however declared himself more content with Eichhorn's original explanation, and defended it against his later mythical interpretation. So true is it that supranaturalism clings with childlike fondness to the empty husk of historical semblance, though void of divine significance, and estimates it higher than the most valuable kernel divested of its variegated covering.

Somewhat later De Wette's bold and thorough application of the mythical view to the Mosaic writings; his decided renunciation of the so-called historico-mythical, or more properly speaking of the natural mode of interpretation; and his strict opposition to the notion of the possibility of arriving at any certainty respecting the residue of fact preserved in these writings, gave rise to much controversy. Some agreed with Steudel in totally rejecting the mythical view in relation to the Bible, and in upholding the strictly historical and indeed supranatural sense of the Scriptures: whilst Meyer and others were willing to follow the guidance of De Wette, at least as far as the principles of Vater, which permitted the attempt to extract some, if only probable, historical data from the mythical investment. If, says Meyer \(^2\), the marvellousness and irrationality of myth are contained in the Pentateuch, narratives which no one would have thought of inventing, together with the want of symmetry and connexion in the narration, and other considerations, permit us not to mistake the historical groundwork of the record, surely, allowing the existence of an historical basis, a modest and cautious attempt to seek out or at any rate to approximate towards a discovery of that historical foundation is admissible. In the hope of preserving those who adopted the historical-mythical view from relapsing into the inconsistencies of the natural interpreters, Meyer laid down the following rules, which however served rather to exhibit afresh the difficulty of escaping this danger. 1. To abstract every thing which is at once recognizable as mythical representation as opposed to historical fact; that is the extraordinary, the miraculous, accounts of immediate divine operation, also the religious notions of the narrators in relation to final causes. 2. To proceed from that which is simple to that which is more complicated. Let a case be supposed where we have two accounts of the same event, the one natural, the other supernatural, as, for instance, the gathering of the elders by Moses, attributed, Numbers, xi. 16., to the suggestion of Jehovah, and Exodus, xvii. 14., to the counsel of Jethro. According to this rule all divine inspiration must be subtracted from the known decisions of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others. (Precisely the proceeding which met with the censure of De Wette quoted above.) 3. As far as possible to contemplate the fact which forms the basis of a narrative, in its simple and common character, apart from all collateral incidents. (This however, is going too far where no basis of fact exists.) For example, the story of the deluge may be reduced thus: a great inundation in Asia Minor, according to the legend, destroyed many wicked. (Here the supposed final cause is not abstracted.) Noah the father of Shem, a devout man, (the telonomic notion again!) saved himself by swimming. The exact circumstances of this preservation, the character of the vessel, if such there were, which saved him, are left undetermined in order to avoid arbitrary explanations. Thus, in reference to the birth of Isaac, Meyer is satisfied with saying, that the wish and hope of the wealthy and pious Emir Abraham to possess an heir by his wife Sara was fulfilled unusually late, and in the eyes of others very unexpectedly. (Here again De Wette's censure is quite applicable.)

In like manner Eichhorn, in his Introduction to the New Testament, declared in yet stronger terms his opposition to the view advocated by De Wette. If the orthodox were displeased at having their historical faith disturbed by the progressive inroads of the mythical mode of interpretation, the rationalists were no less discontented to find the web of facts they had so ingeniously woven together torn asunder, and all the art and labour expended on the natural explanation at once declared useless. Unwillingly does Dr. Paulus admit to himself the presentment that the reader of his Commentary may possibly exclaim: "Wherefore all this labour to give an historical explanation to such legends? how singular thus to handle myth as history, and to attempt to render marvellous fictions intelligible according to the rules of causality!" Contrasted with the toilsomeness of his natural explanation, the mythical interpretation appears to this theologian merely as the refuge of mental indolence, which, seeking the easiest method of treating the gospel history, disposes of all that is marvellous, and all that is difficult to comprehend, under the vague term—mythos, and which, in order to escape the labour of disengaging the natural from the supernatural, fact from opinion, carries back the whole narration into the camera-obscura of ancient sacred legends.\(^8\)

Still more decided was Greiling's \(^4\) expression of disapprobation, elicited by Krug's commendation of the genethic—that is to say, mythical theory; but each stroke levelled by him at the mythical interpretation may be turned with far greater force against his own natural belief. He is of opinion that among all the attempts to explain obscure passages in the New Testament,
scarcely any can be more injurious to the genuine historical interpretation, to the ascertaining of actual facts and their legitimate objects (that is, more prejudicial to the pretensions of the natural expounder than the endeavour to supply, by aid of an inventive imagination, the deficiencies of the historical narrative. (The inventive imagination is that of the natural interpreter, which suggests to him collateral incidents of which there is no trace in the text. The imagination of the mythical interpreter is not inventive; his part is merely the recognizing and detecting of the fictitious.) According to Greiling the *genic*, or mythical mode of explaining miracles, is a needless and arbitrary invention of the imagination. (Let a groping spirit of inquiry be added, and the natural explanation is accurately depicted.) Many facts, he continues, which might be retained as such are thus consigned to the province of fable, or replaced by fictions the production of the interpreter. (But it is the *historical* mythical mode of interpretation alone which substitutes such inventions, and this only in so far as it is mixed up with the natural explanation.) Greiling thinks that the explanation of a miracle ought not to change the fact, and by means of interpretation, as by sleight of hand, substitute one thing for another; (which is done by the natural explanation only,) for this is not to explain that which shocks the reason, but merely to deny the fact, and leave the difficulty unsolved. (It is false to say we have a fact to explain; what immediately lies before us is a statement, respecting which we have to discover whether it embody a fact or not.) According to this learned critic the miracles wrought by Jesus should be naturally, or rather psychologically, explained; by which means all occasion to change, clip, and amplify by invention the recorded facts, till at length they become metamorphosed into fiction, is obviated,—(with how much justice this censure may be applied to the natural mode of explanation has been sufficiently demonstrated.)

Heydenreich has lately written a work expressly on the inadmissibility of the mythical interpretation of the historical portions of the New Testament. He reviews the external evidences concerning the origin of the Gospels, and finds the recognition of a mythical element in these writings quite incompatible with their substantiated derivation from the Apostles, and the disciples of the Apostles. He also examines the character of the gospel representations, and decides, in reference to their form, that narratives at once so natural and simple, so complete and exact, could be expected only from eye-witnesses, or those connected with them; and, with respect to their contents, that those representations which are in their nature miraculous are so worthy of God, that nothing short of an abhorrence of miracles could occasion a doubt as to their historical truth. The divine operations are indeed generally mediate, but according to Heydenreich this by no means precludes the possibility of occasional intermediate exertions of the divine energy, when requisite to the accomplishment of some particular object; and, referring to each of the divine attributes in succession, he shows that such intervention in no wise contradicts any of them; and that each individual miracle is a peculiarly appropriate exercise of divine power.

These, and similar objections against the mythical interpretation of the gospel histories, which occur in recent commentaries and in the numerous writings in opposition to my work on the life of Jesus, will find their place and refutation in the following pages.

§ 13.

**THE POSSIBILITY OF THE EXISTENCE OF MYTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CONSIDERED IN REFERENCE TO THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES.**

The assertion that the Bible contains myth is, it is true, directly opposed to the convictions of the believing Christian. For if his religious view be circumscribed within the limits of his own community, he knows no reason why the things recorded in the sacred books should not literally have taken place; no doubt occurs to him, no reflection disturbs him. But, let his horizon be so far widened as to allow him to contemplate his own religion in relation to other religions, and to draw a comparison between them, the conclusion to which he then comes is that the histories related by the heathens of their deities, and by the Musselman of his prophet, are so many fictions, whilst the accounts of God's actions, of Christ and other Godlike men contained in the Bible are, on the contrary, true. Such is the general notion expressed in the theological position: that which distinguishes Christianity from the heathen religions is this, they are mythical, it is historical.

But this position, thus stated without further definition and proof, is merely the product of the limitation of the individual to that form of belief in which he has been educated, which renders the mind incapable of embracing any but the affirmative view in relation to its own creed, any but the negative in reference to every other—a prejudice devoid of real worth, and which cannot exist in conjunction with an extensive knowledge of history. For let us transplant ourselves among other religious communities; the believing Mohammedan is of opinion that truth is contained in the Koran alone, and that the greater portion of our Bible is fabulous; the Jew of the present day, whilst admitting the truth and divine origin of the Old Testament, rejects the New; and, the same exclusive belief in the truth of their own creed and the falsity of every other was entertained by the professors of most of the heathen religions before the period of the Syncretism. But which community is right? Not all, for this is impossible, since the assertion of each excludes the others. But which particular one? Each claims for itself the true faith. The pretensions are equal; what shall decide? The origin of the several religions? Each lays claim to a divine origin. Not only does the Christian religion profess to be derived from the Son of God, and the Jewish from God himself, through Moses; the Mohammedan religion asserts itself to be founded by a prophet immediately inspired by God; in like manner the Greeks attributed the institution of their worship to the gods.

"But in no other religion" it is urged "are the vouchers of a divine origin so unequivocal as in the Jewish and the Christian. The Greek and Roman mythologies are the product of a collection of unauthenticated legends, whilst the Bible history was written by eye-witnesses; or by those whose connexion with eye-witnesses afforded them opportunities of ascertaining the truth; and whose integrity is too apparent to admit of a doubt as to the sincerity of their intentions." It would most unquestionably be an argument of decisive weight in favour of the credibility of the biblical history, could it indeed be shown that it was written by eye-witnesses, or even by persons nearly contemporaneous with the events narrated. For though errors and false representations may glide into the narrations even of an eye-witness, there is far less probability of unintentional mistake (intentional deception may easily be detected) than where the narrator is separated by a long interval from the