

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *FROM THE DEAD SEA LEGENDS TO COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY.*

#### I. THE GROWTH OF EXPLANATORY TRANSFORMATION MYTHS.

A FEW years since, Maxime Du Camp, an eminent member of the French Academy, travelling from the Red Sea to the Nile through the Desert of Kosseir, came to a barren slope covered with boulders, rounded and glossy.

His Mohammedan camel-driver accounted for them on this wise :

“Many years ago Hadji Abdul-Aziz, a sheik of the dervishes, was travelling on foot through this desert: it was summer: the sun was hot and the dust stifling; thirst parched his lips, fatigue weighed down his back, sweat dropped from his forehead, when looking up he saw—on this very spot—a garden beautifully green, full of fruit, and, in the midst of it, the gardener.

“‘O fellow-man,’ cried Hadji Abdul-Aziz, ‘in the name of Allah, clement and merciful, give me a melon and I will give you my prayers.’

“The gardener answered: ‘I care not for your prayers; give me money, and I will give you fruit.’

“‘But,’ said the dervish, ‘I am a beggar; I have never had money; I am thirsty and weary, and one of your melons is all that I need.’

“‘No,’ said the gardener; ‘go to the Nile and quench your thirst.’

“Thereupon the dervish, lifting his eyes toward heaven, made this prayer: ‘O Allah, thou who in the midst of the desert didst make the fountain of Zem-Zem spring forth to satisfy the thirst of Ismail, father of the faithful: wilt thou

suffer one of thy creatures to perish thus of thirst and fatigue?’

“And it came to pass that, hardly had the dervish spoken, when an abundant dew descended upon him, quenching his thirst and refreshing him even to the marrow of his bones.

“Now at the sight of this miracle the gardener knew that the dervish was a holy man, beloved of Allah, and straightway offered him a melon.

“‘Not so,’ answered Hadji Abdul-Aziz; ‘keep what thou hast, thou wicked man. May thy melons become as hard as thy heart, and thy field as barren as thy soul!’

“And straightway it came to pass that the melons were changed into these blocks of stone, and the grass into this sand, and never since has anything grown thereon.”

In this story, and in myriads like it, we have a survival of that early conception of the universe in which so many of the leading moral and religious truths of the great sacred books of the world are imbedded.

All ancient sacred lore abounds in such mythical explanations of remarkable appearances in nature, and these are most frequently prompted by mountains, rocks, and boulders seemingly misplaced.

In India we have such typical examples among the Brahmans as the mountain-peak which Durgu threw at Parvati; and among the Buddhists the stone which Devadatti hurled at Buddha.

In Greece the Athenian, rejoicing in his belief that Athena guarded her chosen people, found it hard to understand why the great rock Lycabettus should be just too far from the Acropolis to be of use as an outwork; but a myth was developed which explained all. According to this, Athena had intended to make Lycabettus a defence for the Athenians, and she was bringing it through the air from Pallene for that very purpose; but, unfortunately, a raven met her and informed her of the wonderful birth of Erichthonius, which so surprised the goddess that she dropped the rock where it now stands.

So, too, a peculiar rock at Ægina was accounted for by a long and circumstantial legend to the effect that Peleus threw it at Phocas.

A similar mode of explaining such objects is seen in the mythologies of northern Europe. In Scandinavia we constantly find rocks which tradition accounts for by declaring that they were hurled by the old gods at each other, or at the early Christian churches.

In Teutonic lands, as a rule, wherever a strange rock or stone is found, there will be found a myth or a legend, heathen or Christian, to account for it.

So, too, in Celtic countries: typical of this mode of thought in Brittany and in Ireland is the popular belief that such features in the landscape were dropped by the devil or by fairies.

Even at a much later period such myths have grown and bloomed. Marco Polo gives a long and circumstantial legend of a mountain in Asia Minor which, not long before his visit, was removed by a Christian who, having "faith as a grain of mustard seed," and remembering the Saviour's promise, transferred the mountain to its present place by prayer, "at which marvel many Saracens became Christians."\*

Similar mythical explanations are also found, in all the older religions of the world, for curiously marked meteoric stones, fossils, and the like.

Typical examples are found in the imprint of Buddha's feet on stones in Siam and Ceylon; in the imprint of the body of Moses, which down to the middle of the last century was shown near Mount Sinai; in the imprint of Poseidon's trident on the Acropolis at Athens; in the imprint of the hands

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\* For Maxime Du Camp, see *Le Nil: Égypte et Nubie*, Paris, 1877, chapter v. For India, see Duncker, *Geschichte des Alterthums*, vol. iii, p. 366; also Coleman, *Mythology of the Hindus*, p. 90. For Greece, as to the Lycabettus myth, see Leake, *Topography of Athens*, vol. i, sec. 3; also Burnouf, *La Légende Athénienne*, p. 152. For the rock at Ægina, see Charton, vol. i, p. 310. For Scandinavia, see Thorpe, *Northern Antiquities*, *passim*. For Teutonic countries, see Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*; Panzer, *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythologie*, vol. ii; Zingerle, *Sagen aus Tyrol*, pp. 111 *et seq.*, 488, 504, 543; and especially J. B. Friedrich, *Symbolik und Mythologie der Natur*, pp. 116 *et seq.* For Celtic examples I am indebted to that learned and genial scholar, Prof. J. P. Mahaffy, of Trinity College, Dublin. See also story of the devil dropping a rock when forced by the archangel Michael to aid him in building Mont Saint-Michel on the west coast of France, in Sébillot's *Traditions de la Haute-Bretagne*, vol. i, p. 22; also multitudes of other examples in the same work. For Marco Polo, see in Grynæus, p. 337; also Charton, *Voyageurs anciens et modernes*, tome ii, pp. 274 *et seq.*, where the legend is given in full.

or feet of Christ on stones in France, Italy, and Palestine; in the imprint of the Virgin's tears on stones at Jerusalem; in the imprint of the feet of Abraham at Jerusalem and of Mohammed on a stone in the Mosque of Khait Bey at Cairo; in the imprint of the fingers of giants on stones in the Scandinavian Peninsula, in north Germany, and in western France; in the imprint of the devil's thighs on a rock in Brittany, and of his claws on stones which he threw at churches in Cologne and Saint-Pol-de-Léon; in the imprint of the shoulder of the devil's grandmother on the "elbow-stone" at the Mohrinensee; in the imprint of St. Otho's feet on a stone formerly preserved in the castle church at Stettin; in the imprint of the little finger of Christ and the head of Satan at Ehrenberg; and in the imprint of the feet of St. Agatha at Catania, in Sicily. To account for these appearances and myriads of others, long and interesting legends were developed, and out of this mass we may take one or two as typical.

One of the most beautiful was evolved at Rome. On the border of the mediæval city stands the church of "Domine quo vadis"; it was erected in honour of a stone, which is still preserved, bearing a mark resembling a human footprint—perhaps the bed of a fossil.

Out of this a pious legend grew as naturally as a wild rose in a prairie. According to this story, in one of the first great persecutions the heart of St. Peter failed him, and he attempted to flee from the city: arriving outside the walls he was suddenly confronted by the Master, whereupon Peter in amazement asked, "Lord, whither goest thou?" (*Domine quo vadis?*); to which the Master answered, "To Rome, to be crucified again." The apostle, thus rebuked, returned to martyrdom; the Master vanished, but left, as a perpetual memorial, his footprint in the solid rock.

Another legend accounts for a curious mark in a stone at Jerusalem. According to this, St. Thomas, after the ascension of the Lord, was again troubled with doubts, whereupon the Virgin Mother threw down her girdle, which left its imprint upon the rock, and thus converted the doubter fully and finally.

And still another example is seen at the very opposite

extreme of Europe, in the legend of the priestess of Hertha in the island of Rugen. She had been unfaithful to her vows, and the gods furnished a proof of her guilt by causing her and her child to sink into the rock on which she stood.\*

Another and very fruitful source of explanatory myths is found in ancient centres of volcanic action, and especially in old craters of volcanoes and fissures filled with water.

In China we have, among other examples, Lake Man, which was once the site of the flourishing city Chiang Shui—overwhelmed and sunk on account of the heedlessness of its inhabitants regarding a divine warning.

In Phrygia, the lake and morass near Tyana were as-

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\* For myths and legends crystallizing about boulders and other stones curiously shaped or marked, see, on the general subject, in addition to works already cited, Des Brosses, *Les Dieux Fétiches*, 1760, *passim*, but especially pp. 166, 167; and for a condensed statement as to worship paid them, see Gerard de Rialle, *Mythologie comparée*, vol. vi, chapter ii. For imprints of Buddha's feet, see Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, London, 1878, pp. 115 *et seq.*; also Coleman, p. 203, and Charton, *Voyageurs anciens et modernes*, tome i, pp. 365, 366, where engravings of one of the imprints, and of the temple above another, are seen. There are five which are considered authentic by the Siamese, and a multitude of others more or less strongly insisted upon. For the imprint of Moses' body, see travellers from Sir John Mandeville down. For the mark of Neptune's trident, see last edition of Murray's *Handbook of Greece*, vol. i, p. 322; and Burnouf, *La Légende Athénienne*, p. 153. For imprint of the feet of Christ, and of the Virgin's girdle and tears, see many of the older travellers in Palestine, as Arculf, Bouchard, Roger, and especially Bertrandon de la Brocquière in Wright's collection, pp. 339, 340; also Maundrell's *Travels*, and Mandeville. For the curious legend regarding the imprint of Abraham's foot, see Weil, *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner*, pp. 91 *et seq.* For many additional examples in Palestine, particularly the imprints of the bodies of three apostles on stones in the Garden of Gethsemane and of St. Jerome's body in the desert, see Beauvau, *Relation du Voyage du Levant*, Nancy, 1615, *passim*. For the various imprints made by Satan and giants in Scandinavia and Germany, see Thorpe, vol. ii, p. 85; Friedrichs, pp. 126 and *passim*. For a very rich collection of such explanatory legends regarding stones and marks in Germany, see Karl Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Meklenburg*, Wien, 1880, vol. ii, pp. 420 *et seq.* For a woodcut representing the imprint of St. Agatha's feet at Catania, see Charton, as above, vol. ii, p. 75. For a woodcut representing the imprint of Christ's feet on the stone from which he ascended to heaven, see woodcut in Mandeville, edition of 1484, in the White Library, Cornell University. For the legend of *Domine quo vadis*, see many books of travel and nearly all guide books for Rome, from the mediæval *Mirabilia Romæ* to the latest edition of Murray. The footprints of Mohammed at Cairo were shown to the present writer in 1889. On the general subject, with many striking examples, see Falsan, *La Période glaciaire*, Paris, 1889, pp. 17, 294, 295.

cribed to the wrath of Zeus and Hermes, who, having visited the cities which formerly stood there, and having been refused shelter by all the inhabitants save Philemon and Baucis, rewarded their benefactors, but sunk the wicked cities beneath the lake and morass.

Stories of similar import grew up to explain the crater near Sipylos in Asia Minor and that of Avernus in Italy: the latter came to be considered the mouth of the infernal regions, as every schoolboy knows when he has read his Virgil.

In the later Christian mythologies we have such typical legends as those which grew up about the old crater in Ceylon; the salt water in it being accounted for by supposing it the tears of Adam and Eve, who retreated to this point after their expulsion from paradise and bewailed their sin during a hundred years.

So, too, in Germany we have multitudes of lakes supposed to owe their origin to the sinking of valleys as a punishment for human sin. Of these are the "Devil's Lake," near Güstrow, which rose and covered a church and its priests on account of their corruption; the lake at Probst-Jesar, which rose and covered an oak grove and a number of peasants resting in it on account of their want of charity to beggars; and the Lucin Lake, which rose and covered a number of soldiers on account of their cruelty to a poor peasant.

Such legends are found throughout America and in Japan, and will doubtless be found throughout Asia and Africa, and especially among the volcanic lakes of South America, the pitch lakes of the Caribbean Islands, and even about the Salt Lake of Utah; for explanatory myths and legends under such circumstances are inevitable.\*

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\* As to myths explaining volcanic craters and lakes, and embodying ideas of the wrath of Heaven against former inhabitants of the neighbouring country, see Forbiger, *Alte Geographie*, Hamburg, 1877, vol. i, p. 563. For exaggerations concerning the Dead Sea, see *ibid.*, vol. i, p. 575. For the sinking of Chiang Shui and other examples, see Denny's *Folklore of China*, pp. 126 *et seq.* For the sinking of the Phrygian region, the destruction of its inhabitants, and the saving of Philemon and Baucis, see Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, book viii; also Bötticher, *Baumcultus der Alten*, etc. For the lake in Ceylon arising from the tears of Adam and Eve, see variants of the original legend in Mandeville and in Jürgen Andersen, *Reisebe-*

To the same manner of explaining striking appearances in physical geography, and especially strange rocks and boulders, we mainly owe the innumerable stories of the transformation of living beings, and especially of men and women, into these natural features.

In the mythology of China we constantly come upon legends of such transformations—from that of the first counsellor of the Han dynasty to those of shepherds and sheep. In the Brahmanic mythology of India, Salagrama, the fossil ammonite, is recognised as containing the body of Vishnu's wife, and the Binlang stone has much the same relation to Siva; so, too, the nymph Ramba was changed, for offending Ketu, into a mass of sand; by the breath of Siva elephants were turned into stone; and in a very touching myth Luxman is changed into stone but afterward released. In the Buddhist mythology a Nat demon is represented as changing himself into a grain of sand.

Among the Greeks such transformation myths come constantly before us—both the changing of stones to men and the changing of men to stones. Deucalion and Pyrrha, escaping from the flood, repopled the earth by casting behind them stones which became men and women; Heraulos was changed into stone for offending Mercury; Pyrrhus for offending Rhea; Phineus, and Polydectes with his guests, for offending Perseus: under the petrifying glance of Medusa's head such transformations became a thing of course.

To myth-making in obedience to the desire of explaining unusual natural appearances, coupled with the idea that sin must be followed by retribution, we also owe the well-known Niobe myth. Having incurred the divine wrath, Niobe saw those dearest to her destroyed by missiles from heaven, and was finally transformed into a rock on Mount Sipylos which bore some vague resemblance to the human form, and her

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*schreibung*, 1669, vol. ii, p. 132. For the volcanic nature of the Dead Sea, see Daubeny, cited in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, s. v. *Palestine*. For lakes in Germany owing their origin to human sin and various supernatural causes, see Karl Bartsch, *Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Meklenburg*, vol. i, pp. 397 *et seq.* For lakes in America, see any good collection of Indian legends. For lakes in Japan sunk supernaturally, see Braun's *Japanesische Märchen und Sagen*, Leipsic, 1885, pp. 350, 351.

tears became the rivulets which trickled from the neighbouring strata.

Thus, in obedience to a moral and intellectual impulse, a striking geographical appearance was explained, and for ages pious Greeks looked with bated breath upon the rock at Sipylos which was once Niobe, just as for ages pious Jews, Christians, and Mohammedans looked with awe upon the salt pillar at the Dead Sea which was once Lot's wife.

Pausanias, one of the most honest of ancient travellers, gives us a notable exhibition of this feeling. Having visited this monument of divine vengeance at Mount Sipylos, he tells us very naïvely that, though he could discern no human features when standing near it, he thought that he could see them when standing at a distance. There could hardly be a better example of that most common and deceptive of all things—belief created by the desire to believe.

In the pagan mythology of Scandinavia we have such typical examples as Börs slaying the giant Ymir and transforming his bones into boulders; also "the giant who had no heart" transforming six brothers and their wives into stone; and, in the old Christian mythology, St. Olaf changing into stone the wicked giants who opposed his preaching.

So, too, in Celtic countries we have in Ireland such legends as those of the dancers turned into stone; and, in Brittany, the stones at Plessé, which were once hunters and dogs violating the sanctity of Sunday; and the stones of Carnac, which were once soldiers who sought to kill St. Cornely.

Teutonic mythology inherited from its earlier Eastern days a similar mass of old legends, and developed a still greater mass of new ones. Thus, near the Königstein, which all visitors to the Saxon Switzerland know so well, is a boulder which for ages was believed to have once been a maiden transformed into stone for refusing to go to church; and near Rosenberg in Mecklenburg is another curiously shaped stone of which a similar story is told. Near Spornitz, in the same region, are seven boulders whose forms and position are accounted for by a long and circumstantial legend that they were once seven impious herdsmen; near Brahlisdorf is a stone which, according to a similar explanatory



