

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

three great religions of the Mediterranean peoples—the old Mosaic religion, the intermediate Christian religion, and the younger Mohammedanism. These three great Mediterranean religions, all three arising on the east coast of the most interesting of all seas, and originating in an imaginative enthusiast of the Semitic race, are intimately connected, not only by this external circumstance of an analogous origin, but by many common features of their internal contents. Just as Christianity borrowed a good deal of its mythology directly from ancient Judaism, so Islam has inherited much from both its predecessors. All the three were originally monotheistic; all three were subsequently overlaid with a great variety of polytheistic features, in proportion as they extended, first along the coast of the Mediterranean with its heterogeneous population, and eventually into every part of the world.

The Hebrew monotheism, as it was founded by Moses (about 1600 B.C.), is usually regarded as the ancient faith which has been of the greatest importance in the ethical and religious development of humanity. This high historical appreciation is certainly valid in the sense that the two other world-conquering Mediterranean religions issued from it; Christ was just as truly a pupil of Moses as Mohammed was afterwards of Christ. So also the New Testament, which has become the foundation of the belief of the highest civilized nations in the short space of nineteen hundred years, rests on the venerable basis of the Old Testament. The Bible, which the two compose, has had a greater influence and a wider circulation than any other book in the world. Even to-day the Bible—in spite of its curious mingling of the best and the worst elements—is in a certain sense the “book of books.” Yet when we make an impar-