

The Babylonian Story of the Fall.

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THE discovery among the Babylonian records of a series of Cosmogonic and Deluge legends, and their remarkable resemblance in thought and language to Hebrew traditions, has made their study an essential element in Old Testament exegesis. It is now nearly twenty years since the late Mr. George Smith discovered these valuable documents, and Assyriology was recognised not only as a valuable aid in the study of the historical portions of the Old Testament, but also as the source of much valuable material, to elucidate the legends of origins in the earliest books of the Old Testament. During the period which has elapsed since the first discovery of the Creation and Deluge legends great progress has been made. New and often older copies of the documents have been found and studied, and the great increase in the number and calibre of Assyriologists has produced a careful and scientific study of these important inscriptions with an almost general consensus of agreement as to their translation. The copies of the Creation legends which were first accessible to us came from the royal library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh, and although in their main details of Babylonian origin, as indeed were nearly the whole of the writings in the library, yet they were not without some indications of a later redaction. A proof of this is afforded by the two versions of the story of the fight between "Merodach and Tiamat, the demon of darkness," and also in the slightly different wording of the Babylonian and Assyrian versions of the first and second tablets as shown by Mr. T. G. Pinches. Still more important was the discovery by this Assyriologist of a new version of the Creation story, which is manifestly a product of the school of Eridu. Sufficient evidence is thus afforded that there were variations in the traditions of the sacerdotal schools of Chaldea, and that these had been consigned to writing at an early period. One tradition in the Chaldean book of Origins has been anxiously searched for, but it would seem to have escaped the most diligent search. It is that of the Babylonian legend of the Fall. Had the Babylonians any legend of the Temptation and Fall of the human race, and in what way did it resemble the Hebrew tradition? Mr. George Smith, in the

first issue of his *Chaldean Genesis*, was of the opinion that a tablet which he placed in the Creation series, but which was not endorsed as such, contained traces of this legend. Further examination of the tablet shows that, while it does not contain this particular legend, it is a very important hymn of the school of Eridu, and has in it passages associated with the good god Ea, the "All-wise one." While there is as yet no complete legend of the Fall among the Babylonian Creation stories, there are a number of passages more or less fragmentary in the religious inscriptions which seem to me to place it beyond doubt that such a legend was known to the Babylonians, and in a form not differing very widely from that of the Hebrews. In the Babylonian legends the Spirit of Darkness, and consequently in an ethical sense the Spirit of Evil, is the goddess Tiamat. In the Creation legends of Cutha she bears the title of *Musentik*, "the nurse or suckler," while in the other legends she is called *Muallidat*, "the bearing mother," or *Mummu Tiamatu*, "the heaving sea." It is evident that like the Asiatic mother goddess she represents "the ever pregnant, all-producing humid chaos." In another legend of the Creation series she is associated with male personification Kingi or Kingig, "the maker of darkness." On a Babylonian boundary stone about B.C. 1200 she is represented as a female crowned, with full breasts, the lower extremities being replaced by interbound tails of two serpents. A type found in Greek art as the giants in the Giganto-machia sculptures from Pergamos. In fact, Tiamat and her spouse bear a close resemblance to the Egyptian serpent Apepi, who bears the title of Hemhemte, "the roarer," which calls to mind the association of "shrill cries" with the warfare of the demon against Merodach. In the Egyptian mythology we find Apepi described as "the roarer before whom Ra is in a flutter; and Seb standeth still in terror." In fact, we have here the same nature myth which we find in the legends of Ahuramazda, Mithra, and Vishnu, as well as the Greek Apollo.

The first point to be considered is that of the relation of this nature serpent of darkness with the

origin of evil. In the lexographical tablets there are many references to this mythic creature. We have the *Zir Musi*, "serpent of night"; the *Zir Zalmati*, "the serpent of darkness"; and, more interesting, "the serpent with seven heads and seven tails," the "serpent of the week," who nightly coils round the earth to be defeated in the morning by the "protector of good men" (*Silik mulu dugga*), or Merodach, the sun-god. In several inscriptions the serpent is called *Aibur-lani*, "the enemy of the gods." Upon the Michaux stones (B.C. 1200), at the end of the curses invoked upon the one who removes this landmark, is the statement, "The emblems of the great gods and the serpent upon this written stone are engraved." Upon the important charter stone of the city of Bit Karzi-yabsu, dated in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I., B.C. 1150, the serpent-god is mentioned by name as Šupu, evidently cognate with the Hebrew שָׁפָה, "to glide, smooth." Still more important in relation to the cunning wickedness of the serpent in the legends is the lexographic equivalent of Aibu or Aipu, אִיבּוּ or אִיפּוּ, found in the tablets *erem* or *erema*, which, although occurring in the Akkadian columns, seems to be a borrowed word, related to the Hebrew עָרַם, which has the meaning of "to stay by subtilty or guile," and is used in Genesis iii. 1. The Hebrew name of the serpent *Nakhas*, with its cognate *Nakhason*, "diviner" (Num. i. 7), are both connected with the root נָחַס, the Assyrian *Nakhasu*, which has the meaning of "to remove, to wipe out," without the idea of employing force. In Hebrew its connexion with magic is most marked, occurring in such phrases, "Observed times and used enchantments" (2 Kings xxi. 6), "Seek for enchantments" (Lev.-Num. xxiv. 1). In the light of the inscriptions, we can add a new force to the words of Genesis iii. 1, "The serpent (*Nakhas*) was more subtle (*arom*) than any beast of the field." The connexion with magic and the spell gains undoubted support, and is borne out by the words of the woman, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat," with which we at once associate the expression in the Babylonian penitential psalms, "The forbidden thing I knew not I did eat." The use of this word *erim* is further developed, as we have *lu erim*, the magician, and *Sim-erim*, "the destiny of the erim," explained by "Mamit," the incantation, and "the great fate" or "curse," like the Ate of the Greeks. As with magic, so was the serpent associated with

death, for he is called *binut Arali* or *Binut bit Muti*, "creation of the house of death." Here, then, I have shown darkness, subtilty, and death, as well as opposition to the gods associated with the serpent.

The next point to be dealt with is that of the temptation in the garden. In his *Chaldean Genesis* (p. 88), Mr. George Smith published an engraving of a seal which he associated with the Fall. A man and a woman were represented seated on either side of a tree, from whose branches hung bunches of fruit; and behind the woman a serpent is raised. I do not wish to base any argument upon this representation, as we have no indication whatever of the date or place of origin of the seal. It may, however, be taken to represent the garden of the West. The garden of the gods is known to us already from the Babylonian epic of Gilgames, where it is described as the land where the trees grow jewelled fruits, and where, like Eden, all is pleasant to see and taste. It is, however, forbidden to men to touch the trees, for it is guarded by scorpion men — Kerubim, "whose heads reach to the threshold of heaven, and whose feet spread out in the grave." To look upon, they are burning and terribleness, and to gaze upon them is death. The mythic garden of the gods is often mentioned in the inscriptions, and it was probably from this that the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, took the title of "the gardener of Babylon"; and Sargon the First, the semi-mythic king, was a gardener.

I now come to what I regard as the most direct reference to the subject of the Fall, and which, though fragmentary, is full of important matter. It is a portion of the Creation tablets, possibly the third, and I translate it as follows:—

The great gods, all of them, determiners of fate,
They entered, and death like (*muttis*) the god Sar was
filled.

In sin one with another, in compact joins.
The command was established, in the garden of the god
(*gan ili*).

The Asnan (tree) they ate, they broke.
Its stalk they destroyed.

They drank the sweet juice which injures the body.
Great was their sin. Themselves they exalted.

To Merodach their Redeemer (*mutir gimili*) he appointed
their destiny.

Fragmentary as this legend is, there remains sufficient to show that it contains all the essential features of the story of the Fall. The gods are

angry, especially the god Sar; that is the god of the "Kissat Samie," "the host of heaven," "the Lord of Hosts," and ready to punish with death. The sin is the sin of more than one person. The crime was the breaking of the branch of the Asnan tree, and eating of its fruit—a juicy fruit, pleasant to the taste, but injurious to the body. The word *khabisu* means "to crush down." The curious expression, "they exalted themselves," reminds us of the words in Genesis, "a tree to be desired to make one wise" (iii. 6); and again, "Behold the man is become as one of us to know good and evil." Even more remarkable still is the last line, "To Merodach their Redeemer he appointed their destiny." This phrase is fortunately completely preserved, and admits of no other rendering. *Mutr gimili sunu*, "restorer of their satisfaction," equivalent with the usual Assyrian expression, "tir gimili," "to restore satisfaction or perfection," and certainly places Merodach in the position of the Messiah. It is the most Messianic passage yet discovered. The more we examine the position of Merodach in the religion of Eridu, the more apparent becomes its resemblance to the Redeemer. He is the Son of the All-wise God and the Earth Mother (Davkina), and bore as his own name that of Mar-dugga, "the Holy Son." In the theology of this school, he is the mediator between his father and men—healing sickness, forgiving sin, not by his own power, but by that of his father Ea; and here we find him appointed to act as the Redeemer of those fallen in the garden of the gods. It has been hitherto thought by some that the story of the Fall may have had a Mazdian origin, as there are traces in the Zend-Avesta and the later Bundahest; but a complete reversal of this idea seems now to be more correct. There are many striking points of argument between the teaching of the schools of Eridu and the lore of Zoroastrianism. The resemblance between Mithra and Merodach in their character of the good light is no mere chance one; and the usual title of Ea, "He who knows all things," and the "all-wise" Ahuramazda, are very close.

The name of the tree here, the Asnan, is very important; it means "the double tree," from *sananu*, "to repeat," and may account for the confusion of the two trees in the Hebrew account. Interesting as this fragment is, it is not the only one which throws light upon the incidents in this

chapter. In the commands regarding the eating of the tree, we read: "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (iii. 3); "in the day ye eat thereof . . . ye shall be as gods." Among the tablets found at Tel-el-Amarna are portions of a curious legend of one Adapa, the fisherman who broke the wings of the south wind. In this legend he is described as going to heaven to obtain pardon, and is told by his protector Ea that there he will be offered "the food of life and the drink of life; but not to eat or drink of either, because to him they will become the food of death and the drink of death." But on his entrance to heaven the god Anu, who orders the celestial banquet to be placed before him, is astonished at his not eating it, and asks the reason, the reply being, "My master Ea said to me, Eat not or drink not." The food of the gods was immortal nourishment to them, but the food of death to mortals, by which they became like unto the gods. The association of the trees with heaven and the gods is also found in this legend, where we find the "god of the Tree of Life" one of the gods who guards the gate of heaven along with the Son of Life, Tammuz (Adonis), whose sacred tree was the pine, as typical of the "ever youthful in nature." I have already referred to the hymn to Ea, translated by the late George Smith. In this is one passage of interest, "They smell thy sweet breath in the thickets in the evening." This was the sea-breeze from the sacred waters of Ea, the Persian Gulf blowing in the evening, and in which they heard his voice—surely a striking parallel to the words, "They heard the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool (wind) of the evening."

I have endeavoured in this paper to show that there are many striking parallels to the legend of the Fall in the cuneiform records. And although there is no complete story, there is hardly a detail of the legend which does not find its equivalent in the theology of the most ancient school of Eridu.

I must ask some indulgence for this paper, as it has been written on the banks of the Nile, in the heretic city of Tel-el-Amarna, and therefore many books which I should have wished to consult are inaccessible; but, I trust, with the notes at my disposal, I have succeeded in throwing light upon a most important section of the Old Testament story.