

THE BABYLONIAN AND HEBREW VIEWS OF MAN'S FATE AFTER DEATH.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE Jewish ideas concerning the state after death exhibit in several important details a close agreement with Babylonian views. The Hebrew word *sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) "the pit," corresponds exactly with the Assyrian *suâlu*; both denote the place under the ground where the dead reside. In Assyrian the term is explained as the place of judgment, among the Jews as the place where every living being shall finally be demanded¹—a place of ingathering. Habakkuk compares the vicious man's desire to sheol or death who "cannot be satisfied but gathereth unto him all people" (ii. 5).

The conception of sheol is modeled after the nature of the grave. Bodies were buried in pits or in holes dug in the ground, only that the pit of sheol was supposed to be deeper than any grave: it was situated underneath the aboriginal *tehom*, the waters of the deep, viz., the underground flood which in the beginning of the world was divided into the waters above and the waters below the firmament.

Sheol is called by the Assyrio-Babylonians, as well as by the Hebrews, "the land whence no traveller returns."² Istar goes down "to the land without return," and Job describes it as the place

"Whence I shall not return, even the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness" (x. 21-22).

Both the good and the evil must share the same destiny, a fate such as is described in 2 Samuel xiv. 14:

"We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person."

¹ The root שָׁאַל means to ask, to demand.

² *Mat la tari*, i. e., the land of no return.

Isaiah describes sheol as a place where all the dead are together, good and evil, and he rejoices that the King of Babylon is slain and will go down to sheol, the inhabitants of which are excited about the event, and greet him. The prophet says:

"Sheol from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, 'Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.'" (Isaiah xiv. 9-11.)

A similar description of the dead being swallowed up by the grave is given by Ezekiel:

"Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit.

"Whom dost thou pass in beauty? go down, and be thou laid with the uncircumcised. They shall fall in the midst of them that are slain by the sword: she is delivered to the sword: draw her and all her multitudes. The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword.

"Asshur is there and all her company: his graves are about him: all of them slain, fallen by the sword: Whose graves are set in the sides of the pit, and her company is round about her grave: all of them slain, fallen by the sword, which caused terror in the land of the living.

"There is Elam and all her multitude round about her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, which are gone down uncircumcised into the nether parts of the earth, which caused their terror in the land of the living; yet have they borne their shame with them that go down to the pit. They have set her a bed in the midst of the slain with all her multitude: her graves are round about him: all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword: though their terror was caused in the land of the living, yet have they borne their shame with them that go down to the pit: he is put in the midst of them that be slain.

"There is Meshech, Tubal, and all her multitude: her graves are round about him: all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword, though they caused their terror in the land of the living. And they shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities shall be upon their bones, though they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. Yea, thou shalt be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and shalt lie with them that are slain with the sword.

"There is Edom, her kings, and all her princes, which with their might are laid by them that were slain by the sword: they shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with them that go down to the pit.

"There be the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Zidonians, which are gone down with the slain; with their terror they are ashamed of their might; and they lie uncircumcised with them that be slain by the sword, and bear their shame with them that go down to the pit.

"Pharaoh shall see them, and shall be comforted over all his multitude, even

Pharaoh and all his army slain by the sword, saith the Lord God." (Ezekiel xxxii. 18-31.)

The dead can appear to the living and are regarded as shades having a resemblance to the living person. They are called Elohim or gods, i. e., supernatural beings. (1 Sam. xxviii. 13.) When Saul visited the witch of Endor, Elohim or spirits rose up, and we read that Samuel appeared wearing the garments which he wore during his life. Saul said unto the witch:

"What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself." (1 Samuel xxviii. 14.)

There are some glimpses of hope that man might be released from sheol, but the expressions are rather indistinct and vague. The only passage which seems to be unequivocal in modern Bible translations is a misinterpretation of the text; it occurs in Job xix. 25-27, where we read:

"For I know *that* my redeemer liveth,
And *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth:
And *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*,
Yet in my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another:
Though my reins be consumed within me."¹

The passage is translated by Professor Budde as follows:

"But I know that my Vindicator liveth;
And at the last (?) he shall appear upon the ground: (?)
And . . .
And from out my flesh (?) I shall see God,
Whom I shall see to my own good,
And mine eyes shall see him and not as one estranged; (??)
My reins are consumed within me."

Montefiori says of this famous passage:

"It has been supposed from ancient times that Job in this passage has worked his way up to a belief in a future life in our sense of the words (i. e. a life different from and opposed to the shadowy and joyless life in Sheol). But neither the wording nor the connexion, nor the previous or subsequent speeches of Job, seem to warrant this interpretation."

In reviewing other translations he adds:

"Professor Cheyne thinks that not only are many words corrupt, but that 'the passage has plainly been edited and re-edited to gratify the very natural longing of a later age for references to the resurrection of the body.'"

The context suggests that Job is confident of being justified by some kinsman (אֲבִי) of his, and that his enemies will be pun-

¹The italics indicate words that do not appear in the Hebrew text.

ished. Professor Cheyne translates the passage on the basis of his proposed emendations as follows :

“ But I know that my Avenger lives,
 And that at last he will appear above (my) grave ;
 My witness will bring to pass my desire,
 And a curse will take hold of my foes.
 My inner man is consumed with longing,
 For ye say, How (keenly) we will persecute him !
 Have terror because of the sword,
 For (God's) anger falls on the unjust.”

There is another passage, which though it does not hold out any definite hope of immortality, attributes to Yahveh the power of “making alive.” We read in 1 Sam. ii. 6: “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.”

Upon the whole, the outlook beyond the grave is dreary. The Psalms assure us again and again that Yahveh enjoys life and not death, we must praise him while living, for the dead cannot praise God. We read for instance in Psalm vi. 5:

“For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?”

And again in Psalm cxv. 17-18:

“The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore.”

How common this sentiment was among the very best and noblest minds of the Hebrews appears from the fact that even Isaiah expresses it in plain and unmistakable terms. He says:

“For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.

“The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.”

Psalm lxxxviii. is the fragment of a hymn to be sung by the sons of Korah for sick people. The conclusion is missing, perhaps because it contained ideas which were not in accord with the redactor's religious views, but we may be sure that, if it held out a comfort of some kind, it cheered the patient with a prospect of recovery and did not contain a promise of immortality. The psalm is interesting, because it pictures the Hebrew conception of sheol, and the feeling of desolation with which the state of death is contemplated,—a feeling which is natural, though we may be astonished to find it in the Bible. Psalm lxxxviii. reads:¹

“O Yahveh, God, my Help,
 Daily do I cry at night before Thee.

¹ Cf. *Polychrome Bible*, Psalms, p. 92.

Let my prayer come before Thee,
 Incline Thine ear to my wailing!
 For my soul is sated with sorrows,
 And my life stands close before Sheol.
 I am reckoned already with those who have gone to the pit,
 I am like a man without help;
 With the dead am I reckoned,
 Like the slain who lie in the grave,
 Whom thou dost no longer remember,
 And who are snatched out of Thy hand.

5. "Into the lowest pit hast Thou plunged me,
 Into darkness, into deep shadows.
 Thy wrath lies heavy upon me,
 Thou hast summoned up all Thy billows.
 Thou hast put my acquaintance far from me,
 Thou hast made me to them an abhorrence.
 I am imprisoned, and cannot come forth.
 Mine eyes are wasted with sorrow;
 I call Thee continually, O Yahveh;
 To Thee do I stretch out my hands.
10. "Wilt Thou for the dead work a wonder?
 Will shades rise to render Thee thanks?
 Do they tell in the grave of Thy goodness?
 Of Thy faithfulness, in the world down below?
 Can Thy wonders be made known in the darkness?
 And Thy righteousness in the land of oblivion?
 And I—to Thee, Yahveh, I cry;
 In the morning my prayer goes to meet Thee.
 Wherefore, O Yahveh, dost Thou disdain my soul?
 And veilest Thy countenance from me?
15. "Wretched am I, and dying of
 The dread of Thee weighs on me heavily; I faint.
 The fires of Thy wrath go over me,
 Thy terrors have stricken me dumb;
 They surround me, like water, all day,
 They all beset me together.
 Thou hast removed from me friends and companions,
 My acquaintance are darkness and Sheol.

The objection which is made to the belief in immortality by the canonical authors of the Old Testament seems strange to us who have acquired the custom of reading the Hebrew Scriptures in the light of the New Testament doctrines among which the belief in immortality is the keystone of religion. But we shall understand the situation better when we consider the intimate connexion

of the belief in immortality among the Babylonians with the worship of Tammuz and Istar. The wailing for Tammuz was a kind of All Souls' day, and the hope of the bereaved for a restoration of their beloved dead to life was based upon myths and celebrated with idolatrous practices which were an abomination to the sober and rationalistic Yahvist. The close relation to idolatry of all rituals that have reference to the dead is indicated in a passage of Jesus Sirach (xvii. 24-27) where we read:

"I hate idolatry with all earnestness: Who will praise the Most High in Sheol? For all the living can praise, but the dead that are no longer cannot praise. Therefore praise the Lord whilst thou livest and art whole."

Idolatry is mentioned in one breath with sheol, and in the same connexion the expectation that the dead can praise God, is most emphatically denied.

Even in the latest phase of the development of the canon, the Jewish philosopher takes little comfort concerning man's condition after death, for Ecclesiastes taking the ground that "man is dust and must return to dust," proposes the question in chapter iii. verse 21: "Who knoweth that the spirit of man goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast goeth downward to the earth?" The answer to this question is stated bluntly and unequivocally in verses 18-20, which read:

"I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts: even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: For all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

It is true that in the Old Testament two cases are on record of men who were not doomed to stay in sheol: there is the legend of Enoch, whose death is not recorded, and the ascension of Elijah in the fiery chariot. But these exceptions are not mentioned anywhere as indicating a hope for other mortals to escape the doom of a retention in sheol, which is called "the eternal house" *בֵּית עוֹלָם* (*beth-olam*).¹ For the mass of mankind, sheol remains a monster whose maw is constantly open to devour life with all its glory and noise and splendor (Isaiah v. 14; Proverbs i. 12 and xxx. 16).

It is strange that the Old Testament offers so little encouragement for the hope of a resurrection or an outlook toward the immortality of the soul; and this is the more strange as the Assyrio-Babylonians decidedly believed in a life after death, and depicted

¹ Cf. Jonah ii. 7; Jeremiah li. 39.

the place of the blessed as an island far away in the sea, where the tree of life stood and where the waters of life welled up from a source situated at the roots of the tree.

What is the strange reason that the Hebrews, otherwise so devoutly religious, were so outspokenly reluctant in accepting the doctrine of a life after death and the resurrection of the dead? The belief in immortality crops out only in the Apocrypha, and seems to be strictly banished from the canon of the Old Testament.

The reason is obviously this: the belief in immortality as described in the religious documents of the Assyrio-Babylonians was too mythological, too polytheistic, too fantastic, for the rationalistic spirit of the redactors of the Old Testament.¹ The priests who selected from the Hebrew literature those writings which seemed to them to serve the purpose of edification were strict monotheists, and radical iconoclast in all matters of mythology. They abhorred polytheism, and any allusion to it; and since the belief in immortality as expressed in the Assyrio-Babylonian legends cannot easily be extracted from the Babylonian religion without retaining at the same time a good deal of the mythological elements, the redactors of the Hebrew canon preferred to omit the whole and embraced an attitude of positive unbelief rather than to defile the Scriptures with paganism. And we must grant that if they had admitted a belief in immortality in the shape in which we find it in the Assyrio-Babylonian documents, they would necessarily have re-introduced pagan mythology under conditions where it would naturally have taken a firm hold upon the imagination of the people. For nothing is more powerful in religion than the belief in man's condition after death.

A review of the Assyrio-Babylonian documents which are at our disposal will justify our proposition.

* * *

The Babylonian notion of the underworld, being the prototype of the Hebrew sheol, was originally not less dreary and desolate, only it is couched in mythological expressions, being a place under ground ruled by a god and a goddess with their divine servants.

The Babylonian deities of the underworld are the goddess Al-latu and the god Nergal. Nergal is called "King of the deep," "King of the river (viz., of the dead)," "King of the watery habitation," "Lord of the great city," "Deluge," "Fitted with the dead," "King of prophets," and addressed in a hymn as follows:

¹ Cf. the author's article on "The Fairy-Tale Element in the Bible," in the current numbers of *The Monist*, Vol. XI., April and July issues.

“O, Hero, powerful deluge, who rulest the hostile country,
 Hero, Lord of the underworld,
 From Sid-lam who proceedest,
 Powerful steer, lord of strength,
 King of Kuta.”

Nergal is identical with Adar, the god of the destructive heat of the sun. Like Adar, he is not only the god of war and of the chase, but also of all evil powers, the god of death and of the underworld. Allatu is also named Irkalla; she is called “Queen of the scepter of justice,”¹ “Mistress of the great city,” “Mistress of the earth,” “Mistress of power,” etc. Her servants are Namtar and Asakku, which means “pestilence” and “consumption.” Namtar is Allatu’s special favorite. It is his business to imprison those who are subject to special punishment, and his activity on earth is directed against the life of mortals for the sake of bringing new subjects into the domains of his mistress.

The Anunnaki, the seven spirits of the underworld, are enemies of god Ea and are supposed to guard with jealousy the spring of life in sheol. When the Deluge begins, they appear on earth with their torches, for the sake of causing destruction, and the gods weep with Istar over the destructive work of the anunnaki.

A pictorial description of the Assyrio-Babylonian belief after death is preserved in a relief which is published in the *Revue Archéologique* for December, 1879. The reverse of the relief represents a scaled monster in the shape of a leopard, with four wings, whose head appears threateningly above the upper margin of the tablet. It consists of four pictures. The third scene from above represents a burial. The dead lies wrapped in a shroud. A candelabra stands at the side, and two genii [perhaps priests, dressed like god Ea in fish skins] consecrate the place. The battle between the demons indicates the mutual destruction of the evil powers, and thus exhibits their inability to do any harm to the spirit of the dead. In a scene above this funeral rite there are the seven ighigs who hold on their uplifted right arms the highest one, which is the seat of the gods, indicated by the signs of the sun, the moon, the planets, and other symbols. The lowest picture, apparently the main scene, shows the underworld surrounded by the waters of death, indicated by swimming fishes. A boat moored at the shore carries a horse upon which a strange monster kneels upon one knee. The other foot is placed upon the head of the animal; two young lions are suckling at her breast. In her lifted arms she holds up two ser-

¹ *Kân mihri*. Lenormant calls her “Queen of the Wand.” (*Magie*, p. 64.)

pents. According to all we know of the Babylonian religion, we cannot fail to recognise here the goddess Allatu, the serpents indicating that she is the goddess of the earth. To the right of the group in the boat, beyond the water, there is a place covered with trees, which can be only the Island of the Blessed. The trees symbolise a happy country, and we know that the waters of death touch sheol as well as the shores of the Island of the Blessed.

The figure with a scorpion's tail and eagle's feet, standing behind Allatu in the left corner of the relief, is supposed to be either Nergal the awful husband of Allatu, or one of the scorpion men mentioned in the so-called Nimrod epic and said to be guardians of the way to the Islands of the Blessed.

While the Babylonian conception of man's condition after death was fashioned after the positive knowledge that can be obtained of the fate of the body in the grave, the dead were by no means identified with their bodily remains. They were supposed to be dream-like shades called *ekimmu*, and some of them were doomed to wander about on earth and haunt people, disquieting their surviving relatives if they had not duly performed all the ceremonies necessary for their journey into the underworld, or, driven to despair by their disconsolate condition, inflicting even strangers with nightmares and all manner of diseases. Thus (as with all primitive people) the physician was not a medical man but a medicine-man. Diseases being attributed to obsession, it became necessary to cast out the evil spirit. Sorcery was a profession, and patients were cured, not by drugs, but by prayers to the gods. Here is a specimen of an incantation addressed to the trinity of Ea, Shamash,¹ and Marduk (quoted from King's *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery*, p. 119 f.):²

"O Ea, O Shamash, O Marduk, deliver me,
 And through your mercy let me have relief.
 O Shamash, a horrible spectre for many days
 Hath fastened itself on my back, and will not loose its hold upon me.
 The whole day long he persecuteth me, and in the night-season he striketh
 terror into me.
 He sendeth forth pollution, he maketh the hair of my head to stand up,
 He taketh the power from my body, he maketh mine eyes to start out,
 He plagueth my back, he poisoneth my flesh,
 He plagueth my whole body."

The *Ekimmu* is appeased by furnishing him with the necessary means for his journey to the underworld:

¹ Shamash is the Sun-god, the prototype of the humanised Samson of the Bible. Ea is the God of Wisdom, Marduk his son, the great conqueror of Tiamat.

² See also King, *Babylonian Religion and Mythology*, p. 45.

"A garment to clothe him, and shoes for his feet,
 And a girdle for his loins, and a skin of water for him to drink,
 And [. . .]¹ food for his journey have I given him.
 Let him depart into the West,
 To Nedu, the chief Porter of the Underworld, I consign him.
 Let Nedu, the chief Porter of the Underworld, guard him securely,
 And may bolt and bar stand firm (over him)."



GOD SHAMASH STARTING ON HIS JOURNEY.

(Cylinder Seal, British Museum.)²

On the summit of a mountain the goddess Istar appears with outstretched wings. The figures on either side are doubtful; the one on the right-hand side may be Ea, the one on the left-hand side accompanied by a lion may be Marduk. The name of the owner, "Adda the Scribe," appears in the left-hand corner.



GOD MARDUK SLAYING TIAMAT.

(Cylinder Seal, British Museum.)

Burial ceremonies, it appears, were observed with great punctiliousness. Food offerings were made to the dead, and mourning was worn by the survivors; lamentations were performed by professional mourners both male and female; funeral music was played on flutes; dirges were sung; and the body was treated, obviously

¹The word indicating the food offered to the Ekimmu is not yet understood.

²All the illustrations of this article have been reproduced from King's *Babylonian Religion and Mythology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1899).

for preservation, with oil, salt, or honey. The reverence in which salt water is held even to-day by many religious people, the custom of the extreme unction with consecrated oil, and the Greek custom of giving honey sops to the dead (mentioned in the tale of Psyche's descent to Hades) may date back to primordial days of human civilisation and have perhaps been imported into the West from ancient Babylon. An Assyrian king describes the funeral of his fathers in these lines :

<p>“ Within the grave, The secret place, In kingly oil, I gently laid him. The grave-stone Marketh his resting-place. With mighty bronze I sealed its entrance, I protected it with an incantation. Vessels of gold and silver,</p>	<p>Such as he loved, All the furniture that befiteth the grave, His just title to sovereignty I displayed before the Sun-god, And beside the father who begat me I set them in the grave. Gifts unto the princes, Unto the Spirits of the Earth,¹ And unto the gods who inhabit the grave, I then presented.”</p>
---	--

The Nimrod epic (as the legend of the hero Gilgamesh is frequently called) describes in its closing lines the difference between the warrior who died on the battlefield and received due burial, and the slain of the conquered enemy whose corpses are left uncared for. Gilgamesh, speaking of the sights he has seen in the country without return, says :

“ On a couch he lieth
And drinketh pure water,
The man who was slain in battle—thou and I have oft seen such an one.
His father and his mother [support] his head,
And his wife [kneeleth] at his side.
But the man whose corpse is cast upon the field—
Thou and I have oft seen such an one—
His spirit resteth not in the earth.
The man whose spirit has none to care for it—
Thou and I have oft seen such an one—
The dregs of the vessel, the leavings of the feast,
And that which is cast out upon the street, are his food.”

* * *

The Babylonians sought solace in their bereavement through conjurors, who perhaps in the way of the modern spiritualists or after the fashion of the Witch of Endor made the dead rise from sheol to comfort the survivors and give directions to them as to what they wished them to do. And these conjurations were closely

connected with the belief in Tammuz and Istar, than whom there are no other gods held in more abomination in the Old Testament.

The most important document still at our command is a fragmentary poem called *Istar's Descent to Hell*. The main subject is introduced for the sake of justifying the possibility of conjuring the dead from sheol. Dr. Jeremias¹ explains the situation as follows:

"A man grieves over the death of his sister. He consults a magus as to how to release the spirit of the deceased from the jail of Hades. The priest tells him the story of Istar's descent to sheol for the sake of proving that the gates of sheol are not unconquerable, and advises him to address Istar, the conqueror of Hades, and Tammuz her consort, with prayer and sacrifice, in order to gain their assistance. He is requested to comply with funeral ceremonies at the coffin of the dead and to begin his mourning with the assistance of the Uhats, the companions of Istar. The spirit of the dead, hearing the lamentations of her brother, requests him to rescue her from the horrors of Sheol through mourners' music and sacrifices in the days of Tammuz, which is the time when the people sing and weep, as told by Ezekiel viii. 14, and mourn for their dead under the shape of Tammuz. The concluding lines of the poem, which are summed up in these words, form the core of the whole, while the legend of Istar's descent to sheol is only an introduction to it, and constitutes a part of the conjuration of the dead. From other documents of Babylonian literature we learn that on the names of Istar and Tammuz, the hero and heroine of the legends of the descent to sheol, depend the hopes of a rescue from sheol." (*l. c.*, pp. 7-8.)

It appears that people celebrated with special preference the days of the god Tammuz, who represented the disappearance of vegetation and its resurrection to life. The legend of Istar's descent to sheol reads in the translation based on Dr. Jeremias's version as follows:

(OBVERSE OF THE TABLET.)

- "To the land without return, to the land [which thou knowest (?)],²
 Istar, the daughter of the moon-god, meditated [to go].
 The daughter of the moon-god meditated to go
 To the house of darkness, to the seat of Irkalla,
 5. To the house whose visitor never returns,
 On the path the descent of which never leads back,
 To the house whose occupants are removed from the light,
 To the place where dust is food, and dirt is meat,
 Where they (viz., the occupants) see no light, where they dwell in darkness,

¹For further details see Dr. Alfred Jeremias, who publishes the text of the passages here quoted and offers a literal German translation with editorial notes and other explanations. The conception of the document as set forth in the quoted passages is based upon the interpolation of Dr. Jeremias, which he justifies in his critical notes. Dr. Jeremias's interpretation of the concluding words is justified by another cuneiform tablet which while relating a conjuration of the dead begins with the same description of sheol as does the legend of Istar's descent to Hell.

²The passages in brackets are mutilated in the original and the words are suggested by the context or sometimes by parallel passages.

15. Where they are clothed like birds, dressed with wings,¹
Where upon gate and bolt dust is spread.

“ When Istar had reached the gate of the land without return,
She spake to the keeper of the gate :

- ‘ Keeper of the waters, open thy gate,
15. Open thy gate,—I will enter !
If thou dost not open, if I cannot enter,
I shall demolish the gate, I shall break the bolt,
I shall smash the threshold, I shall break the doors ;
I shall lead out the dead, shall make them eat and live,
20. And unto the crowds of the living the dead shall I join.’

The keeper opened his mouth and spake
In reply to the sublime Istar :
‘ Stay, my lady, do not upset [the door] !
I will go to announce thy name to Queen Allatu.’

25. The keeper entered and spake to Queen Allatu :
‘ The water has been crossed by thy sister Istar [.]

The Goddess Allatu is greatly agitated about Istar’s appearance in sheol. The poem continues :

- When Goddess Allatu [heard] this
Like unto a tree cut down
30. Like unto reeds mowed down [she drooped and spake] :
‘ What has driven her heart, what
These waters have I [made encompass sheol]
Like the inundation of the Deluge, like the swelling (?) waters of a great flood,
I will weep over the men who left their wives,
35. I will weep over the wives who were taken from their consorts,
Over the little children I will weep, who prematurely [were taken away].²
Go, keeper, open the gate,
And strip her according to the primordial decree.’
The keeper went, he opened the door to her :
40. ‘ Enter, my lady, the underworld [Kítu] may rejoice ;
The palace of the land without return may enjoy thy arrival !’

Through the first door he made her enter and, stripping her,
Took from her head the golden crown.

‘ Why, O keeper, dost thou take from my head the golden crown ?’
‘ Step in, my lady, such are the commands of the mistress³ of the earth.’³

¹ Is the dress of wings perhaps an expression of the belief that the soul is winged, found also in Egypt, where the soul of man is compared to a human-headed hawk, in which form it is at liberty to visit other places?

² Why the Goddess Allatu proposes to weep is not quite clear. Is it perhaps a promise to have all the funeral rituals with their wailings and lamentations properly attended to for the sake of preventing further attempts at having the dead reclaimed?

³ Viz., the Goddess Allatu.

45. Through the second door he made her enter and, stripping her,
Took off the ornaments from her ears.
'Why, O keeper, dost thou take the ornaments from my ears?'
'Step in, my lady, for such are the commands of the mistress of the earth.'
Through the third door he made her enter and, stripping her,
Took off the chains from her neck.
'Why, O keeper, dost thou take the chains from my neck?'
50. 'Step in, my lady, for such are the commands of the mistress of the earth.'
Through the fourth door he made her enter and, stripping her,
Took off the ornaments from her breast.
'Why, O keeper, dost thou take the ornaments from my breast?'
'Step in, my lady, for such are the commands of the mistress of the earth.'
Through the fifth door he made her enter and, stripping her,
Took off the gem-covered belt from her hips.
55. 'Why, O keeper, dost thou take the gem-covered belt from my hips?'
'Step in, my lady, for such are the commands of the mistress of the earth.'
Through the sixth door he made her enter and, stripping her,
Took off the bracelets from her hands and feet.
'Why, O keeper, dost thou take the bracelets from my hands and feet?'
'Step in, my lady, for such are the commands of the mistress of the earth.'
60. Through the seventh door he made her enter and, stripping her,
Took away the robe from her body.
'Why, O keeper, dost thou take the robe from my body?'
'Step in, my lady, for such are the commands of the mistress of the earth.'
Now, when Istar was descended to the land without return—
Allatu beheld her, and vehemently upbraided her;
65. Istar, forgetful, assaulted her
Then Allatu opened her mouth and spake,
Addressing Namtar, her servant, giving him this command:
'Go, Namtar, open (?) my [. . . .]
Let her out the Goddess Istar,
70. With a disease on her eyes [punish her],
With a disease on her hips [punish her],
With a disease on her feet [punish her],
With a disease on her heart [punish her],
With a disease on her head [punish her],
75. Upon her whole person [inflict diseases].'
When Istar, the lady, [was thus inflicted],
The bull no longer covered the cow, the he-ass the she-ass,
The lord no longer sought the maiden of the street.
The lord fell asleep in giving command,
80. The maid-servant fell asleep [. . . .].

REVERSE OF THE TABLET.

- Pap-sukal, the servant of the great gods, scratched his face before Samas,
Clothed in mourning and filled with [.]
Samas went; he went to Sin, his father [and wept];
Before Ea, the king, he shed tears;
5. 'Istar has descended into the land and has not returned.
Since Istar descended into the land without return,

- The bull no longer covers the cow,
 The jack-ass no longer covers the she-ass,
 A man no longer seeks the maiden of the street,
 The lord falls asleep in giving command,
 10. The maid-servant falls asleep
 Then Ea in the wisdom of his heart created a male being,
 He created Uddusunâmir,¹ the servant of the gods:
 'Go forth, Uddusunâmir! to the door of the land without return turn thy
 face,
 The seven doors of the land without return shall open before thee,
 15. Allatu may see thee, she may enjoy thy arrival.
 When her heart has become calm and her soul is comforted,
 Conjure her in the name of the great gods,²
 Lift up thy head over the source of waters (?), make up thy mind (and
 speak):
 'Not, O my lady, shall the spring be debarred from me; from its water I
 will drink.'
 20. When Alluta heard this,
 She smote her loins and bit her finger³ (and spake):
 'Thou hast demanded a demand which cannot be fulfilled—
 Hence, Uddusunâmir, I will confine thee in the great prison,
 The slime of the city shall be thy food,
 25. The gutters of the street shall be thy drink,
 The shadow of the wall shall be thy habitation,
 The thresholds, thy dwelling-place,
 Prison and confinement shall break thy strength.⁴
 Allatu opened her mouth and spake,
 To give command to Namtar, her servant:
 'Go, Namtar, demolish the eternal palace,
 Demolish the pillars, make the thresholds quake;
 Lead out the Anunnaki, put them upon the golden throne,⁵
 Sprinkle upon Goddess Istar the water of life;
 35. Take her away from me!'
 Namtar went and demolished the eternal palace,
 He demolished the pillars and made the thresholds (?) quake,
 He lead out the Anunnaki and placed them upon the golden throne,
 He sprinkled upon Goddess Istar the waters of life and led her away:
 40. Through the first door he led her and replaced the robe upon her body;

¹ Uddusunâmir means "his light will illumine." The significance of this being does not seem to be clear. Is he perhaps a mere puppet, an automaton to bear the curse of Allatu without suffering harm?

² The name of the great gods is the most powerful means of conjuration, and Ea alone, the god of unfathomable wisdom, seems to dispose of it. The Babylonian origin of the Talmudic and cabalistic belief in the power of the mysterious name is fully established.

³ The same gestures of grief are recorded in Jeremiah xxxi. 19 for the Hebrews, in *Odyssey* xiii. 19⁸ for the Greeks. In a similar way, we read of Ea in another document, "when he heard this he bit his lip" (cf. A. S. K. T. lxxvi. 24).

⁴ Allatu curses Uddusunâmir, but the conjuration which he uttered is too powerful, and she must obey. Thus the power of the realm of death is broken and Istar is free.

⁵ The context does not reveal the meaning of this act that the Anunnaki, the seven evil spirits of sheol, should be placed upon the golden throne.

- Through the second door he led her and replaced the bracelets upon her hands and feet ;
 Through the third door he led her and replaced the gem covered belt upon her hips ;
 Through the fourth door he led her and replaced the ornament upon her breast ;
 Through the fifth door he led her and replaced the chains upon her neck ;
 Through the sixth door he led her and replaced the ornaments in her ears ;
 45. Through the seventh door he led her and replaced upon her head the golden crown.

The conjurer here addresses his client and promises the release of his dead sister from the power of Allatu. The poem continues :

“ ‘When she (goddess Allatu) does not afford release, turn to her (to Istar) [thy face],

To Tammuz, the consort of her youth,
 Pour pure water and costly balm [invite a priest].
 Cover him with the sacrificial robe, a crystal flute may he [blow].

50. The Uhats may weep with grievous [lamentations].
 The goddess Belili may break the precious utensil¹
 With diamonds shall be filled thy

Now the spell takes effect. The spirit of the departed sister rises from sheol :

“ Thus she heard the lamentations of her brother, the goddess Belili broke the precious utensil,

With diamonds were filled the [and the departed spirit said :]

55. ‘My only brother, let me not perish,
 In the days of Tammuz play the crystal flute,
 Play the instrument
 In those days play to me, the male mourners and the female mourners
 May they play upon instruments
 May they breathe incense”

* * *

The most important Babylonian document that has reference to the belief in immortality in addition to *Istar's Descent to Sheol* is a fragment of the visit of Gilgamesh or Nimrod (with whom the Babylonian hero for fair reasons is identified) to the Island of the Blessed. It is a part of the Nimrod epic, so called, and is recorded on the eleventh tablet, the connexion between the several tablets being unclear. The legend tells of Istar's love for the hero, who, however, scorns the goddess. To punish him, she petitions her father Anu, and when Gilgamesh and Eabâni, the friend of his bosom, conquer a divine bull, Istar's wrath is roused. Finally Eabâni dies and Gilgamesh is visited with leprosy, the most awful disease of the Orient.

¹The significance of Belili's breaking a precious utensil in the ritual of lamentation is not clear.

The twelfth tablet begins with the wailing for Eabâni. Gilgamesh visits one temple after another and invokes the several gods, until through the mediation of Marduk "the spirit of Eabâni rises before him like a breath from the earth."¹ The fourth column contains a dialogue between Gilgamesh and the risen spirit of his friend, which begins with the words:

"Tell me, my friend, the condition of the country (sheol) which thou hast seen."

The spirit answers:

"Not can I tell thee, my friend, not can I tell thee what the condition is of the country. . . . I will sit down and weep, I will sit down and weep."

The rest of the column and the greater part of the next one are mutilated. Then follows a scene which by its rhythm indicates that it was a hymn in honor of the hero who died honorably on the



GILGAMESH AND EABÂNI IN CONFLICT WITH TWO BULLS.
(Cylinder Seal, British Museum.)

field of battle and receives a decent funeral, while all the bodies of the conquered ones are thrown away without burial.

Gilgamesh, himself being infected with leprosy, decides to visit his ancestor Pir-napistim for the sake of finding a cure for his disease, and to solve the mystery of his ancestor's apotheosis. Tablet 9 tells of Gilgamesh's mourning for Eabâni, as follows:

"Nimrod wept for Eabâni, his friend,
Bitterly, lying down upon the field;
'I will not die like Eabâni;
Mourning has come over my soul,
Fear of death I have tasted, lying down upon the field."²

¹ Cf. the fragment quoted by Jeremias, *l. c.*, p. 103.

² To lie down on the ground as a sign of great grief is an ancient custom frequently mentioned in the Bible (2 Sam. xii. 16; xiii. 31; Ez. xxvii. 30) and by Homer (*Od.* 4, 541. *Iliad* 22, 414; 24, 165 and 610).

To the Power of Pir-napistim, the son of Kidin-Marduk,
Shall I wend my way with hasting step.'"¹

Gilgamesh at once carries out his plan. The moon-god in a dream points out the way. Having reached a mountain the name of which is Masu, he meets the scorpion-man. The verses run as follows:

"To the mountain Masu he came,
Whose exit is guarded day by day,
Whose crest reaches to the ramparts of heaven,
And whose side unto Mount Arâlu—
The scorpion-men guard its door;
Overawing they are, their aspect is death,
Terrible is their brightness, crushing down mountains,
At sunrise and at sunset they guard the sun:
Gilgamesh saw them, with fear and
With terror his face was clouded;
He was deprived of his presence of mind by their grim appearance.
The scorpion-man spoke to his wife:
'He comes to us, an omen of the gods (viz., marked with disease) is his
body.'"²

Gilgamesh reveals to the scorpion-men his proposition to visit "Pir-napistim, who knows about life and death";³ and the scorpion-man warns him of the dangers of the journey. He declares that the way, twelve miles long, leads on a lonely journey to the country Mâsu which is wrapped in eternal darkness; but Gilgamesh insists upon going and is allowed to pass through the door.

The country Mâsu is known to us from the historical accounts of Asurbanipals' and Sargon's expeditions to be the Syrio-Arabic desert to be in the southeastern part of Mesopotamia, and we may assume that at the time when our epic was written the desert was known only by rumors, and the idea was prevalent that no living being could maintain its existence in it. Gilgamesh further passes through a country which is full of beautiful trees the fruits of which are precious stones, and arrives at the sea-shore where his progress is checked by a gate kept under the superintendence of Sabitu, a female guardian, who describes the impossibility of crossing the ocean, saying:

"Gilgamesh, never has there been a passage
And no one since all eternity could cross the sea—
Samas the hero has crossed the sea,
But who besides Samas can cross it?
Difficult is the passage and troublesome the way,
Impassable are the waters of death which are

¹Jeremias, *l. c.*, p. 83.

²Jeremias, *l. c.*, p. 84.

³Nimrod epic, 61, 5.

Interposed like bars.

Why, Gilgamesh, wilt thou cross the sea?

When approaching the waters of death, what wilt thou do?—

Nimrod! There is Arad-Ea, the ferry-man of Pir-napistim,

. . . . he felled in the wood a cedar-tree,

. . . . may thy face see it.

If possible cross over with him; if it is not possible

. . . . behind him"

Sabitu's door is similar to the gate which we know from Istar's descent to sheol, only it is in front of the waters of death, and appears to be the landing-place of Arad-Ea, the ferry-man, or Babylonian Charon. Gilgamesh confides to Arad-Ea his intention, and Arad-Ea requests him to cut in the woods a rudder sixty ells long. The hero obeys and both enter the ship. Having rowed for several months, they reach the waters of death, and now the greatest danger begins. The two oarsmen do not rest, but row in-



GILGAMESH AND EABÂNI GILGAMESH AND ARAD EA
COMBATING A LION. CROSSING THE WATERS

OF DEATH.

(Cylinder Seal, British Museum.)

cessantly until all peril is past. They reach the shores of the Island of the Blessed. Here Gilgamesh sees Pir-napistim, who listens to his words and sympathises with the hero. Pir-napistim's reply ends with the exposition of man's destiny that no one was allowed, except the god of Fate, to protect man from death. He says:

"So long as we build houses, so long as we make contracts, so long as brothers quarrel, so long as enmity obtains, are the days of death unknown."

Pir-napistim here tells the story of his apotheosis, how the Deluge came, how he escaped, and how Marduk raised him and his wife to the dignity of gods. The tale of the Deluge being told, Pir-napistim cures the disease of Gilgamesh. He gives him the magic food of life, which, lying in his boat, he eats in a magic sleep. Pir-napistim requests his servant, Arad-Ea, to enter a ferry-boat moored at the shore, saying:

The Babylonian conception of the Island of the Blessed is apparently as hazy as the Greek conception of Elysium, the Egyptian Sechnit-Aahlu, the abode of bliss, and in either case the relation seems to be similar to Arâlu, the mountain of the gods, the Assyrian Olympus, for Tiglathpileser declares on an eight-sided prism that his family is called to reside on the mount of the gods forever. Habitation on the mount of the gods, accordingly, is practically the same as to live on the Island of the Blessed. Thus, Heracles is sometimes said to live in the Elysian fields and sometimes to have ascended to Mt. Olympus.

The spring of life, situated in the recesses of sheol and guarded by the seven spirits called Anunnaki, is supposed to be the means for the possibility of a liberation from the land of the dead. When Istar was sprinkled over with the water of that spring, she was cured of all her illnesses and, in spite of the anger of the goddess of sheol, restored to life. She passed back through the seven doors of the realm of death and returned to the assembly of the gods. As Tammuz annually is resurrected from death, so the hope of a release from the bonds of sheol is attached to Istar, the conqueror of Allatu. For this reason, the Magus, when requested to assist in the conjuration of the dead, relates the story of Istar's descent into sheol and her liberation, and advises the party consulting him to address her with prayer and to consecrate the conjuration with a libation for Tammuz.

Marduk is called "the merciful, he who loves the resurrection of the dead." And in another place, "the merciful, through whom there is resuscitation." Further, he is called "the god of the pure life." The goddess Gula is addressed as "the lady, the resuscitator of the dead"; and Nebi, "he who prolongs the days of life and resurrects the dead."¹ Almost all the gods are supposed to have the power to restore life; but Istar and Tammuz are more than others the deities of resurrection; and in this sense Istar is praised as "she who gives life, the merciful goddess to whom it is good to pray."

It is a pity that "Istar's Descent to Hell" is a mere fragment, but the sense of the poem is sufficiently clear to reveal an unusual depth of feeling and an extraordinary power of faith. We can understand what a fascination the festival of the weeping for Tammuz must have exercised upon the minds of the Israelites, for even we children of the twentieth century to whom Istar and Tammuz have become the shady figures of a dead mythology, feel the dint of sympathy, and, touched by Istar's grief, cannot help assenting to the underlying truth which is the theme of the story that love is stronger than death, and if there is any power that can conquer Allatu, the goddess of sheol, it is Istar, the goddess of love.

¹Cf. Jeremias, *l. c.* p. 101.