

SECOND LECTURE ON BABEL AND BIBLE.

FRIEDRICH DELITZSCH.

IN EXPLANATION.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah ?

This that is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength ?

"It is I (Yahveh) that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth
in the winefat ?

"I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the peoples there was no man
with me :

Yea, I trod them in mine anger, and trampled them in my fury ;

And their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my
raiment.

For the day of vengeance was in mine heart, and the year of my redemption was
come.

And I looked, and there was none to help ; and I wondered that there was none to
uphold :

Therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury, it upheld me.

And I trod down the peoples in anger, and made them drunk with my fury,

And I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.

In language, style, and sentiment, forsooth a genuine Bedouin song of battle and victory ! Not at all ! This utterance of Isaiah lxiii. 1-6, and a hundred other prophetic utterances full of inextinguishable hatred toward the races round about : toward Edom and Moab, Asohu and Babel, Tyre and Egypt, mostly masterpieces of Hebrew rhetoric, are to be accepted as representing the ethical prophetism of Israel, and this at its high tide ! These outpourings of political jealousy and of passionate hatred on the part of long vanished generations, born of certain contemporary conditions and perhaps comprehensible from a merely human standpoint, must serve us children of the twentieth century after Christ, must serve even Occidental and Christian races, as a religious guide for refinement and edification ! Instead of losing ourselves "in grateful admiration" in the contemplation of God's manifestation in our

own people, from primitive Germanic times down to the present day, we continue, from ignorance, indifference or blindness, to concede to those early Israelitic oracles the character of a "revelation," which cannot be justified either in the light of science or in that of religion or of ethics.

The more deeply I dive into the spirit of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, the more I shrink from Yahveh, who slaughters the nations with the insatiable sword of his wrath, who has but one favorite child, and surrenders all other nations to night and shame and destruction, who said even to Abraham (Genesis xii. 2): "I will bless them who bless thee, and those who curse thee, them will I curse"—and I seek refuge with him who taught in life and in death: "Bless them that curse you," and I hide, full of trust and joy and earnest longing for moral perfection, in the God to whom Jesus taught us to pray, the God who is a loving and just father to all men on earth.

CHARLOTTENBURG, May 1, 1903.

THE LECTURE.

Why this opposition to "Babel and Bible" when logic itself compels this sequence of the words? And how can anyone expect to be able to suppress these serious questions, which involve the entire Bible with the catchword "Primitive Revelation," when this is shown to be false by a single forgotten verse of the Old Testament? And does in fact "the ethical monotheism of Israel" in its function as "a real revelation of the living God," constitute the unassailable bulwark in the conflict of opinions which Babel has aroused in these later days?

It is a pity that so many people permit their delight in the great advantage which Babel is constantly offering us as "interpreter and illustrator" of the Bible to be spoiled by a narrow regard for dogmatic questions to such a degree that they even entirely ignore that advantage. And yet, how grateful all readers of and commentators on the Bible must needs be for the new knowledge which has been revealed, and is constantly being revealed, to us by the laborious excavations among the ruins of Babylon and Assyria!

On principle I too avoid continually speaking of "confirmations" of the Bible. For indeed the Old Testament as a source of ancient history would be in a bad case if it required everywhere confirmation by cuneiform inscriptions. But when the Biblical Book of Kings (2 Kings xvii. 30) states that the inhabitants of the

city of Kutha who settled in Samaria worshipped the god Nergal, and we now know, not alone that this Babylonian city of Kutha lies buried under the ruins at Tell Ibrahim, twenty-one miles north-east of Babylon, but also that a cuneiform inscription expressly informs us that the patron god of Kutha was called Nergal,—this is really valuable information.

While there seemed to be no prospect of ever discovering the town and district of Chalach, to which a portion of the Israelites taken captive by Sargon were transplanted (2 Kings xvii. 6; xviii. 11), we now possess, from the library of Asurbanipal at Nineveh,



Fig 1 BLACK OBELISK
OF SHALMANESER II

Fig. 2 ASSYRIAN LETTER.
Written from Chalach, the Babylonian home of
the exiled Israelites.

a letter written from Chalach (Fig. 2), in which a certain Marduk-nadin-achi, laying emphasis upon his steadily manifested loyalty, petitions the king to help him regain his estate, which had been given him by the king's father, and which had supported him for fourteen years until at last the governor of the land of Mashalzi had taken it from him.

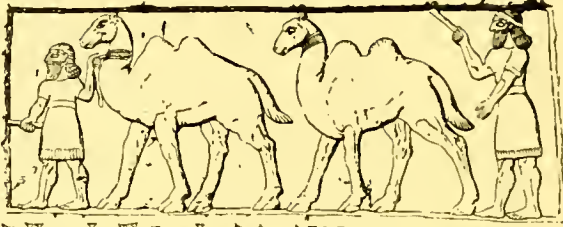
As to the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel, who are presented to our eyes so vividly by the famous black obelisk of Shalmaneser II. (Fig. 1) in its second row of relief figures (Figs. 3-6)—they are the ambassadors of King Jehu (840 B. C.) with



Hieroglyphic text above the first register.



Hieroglyphic text above the second register.



Hieroglyphic text above the third register.



Hieroglyphic text above the fourth register.



Fig. 3



Fig 4

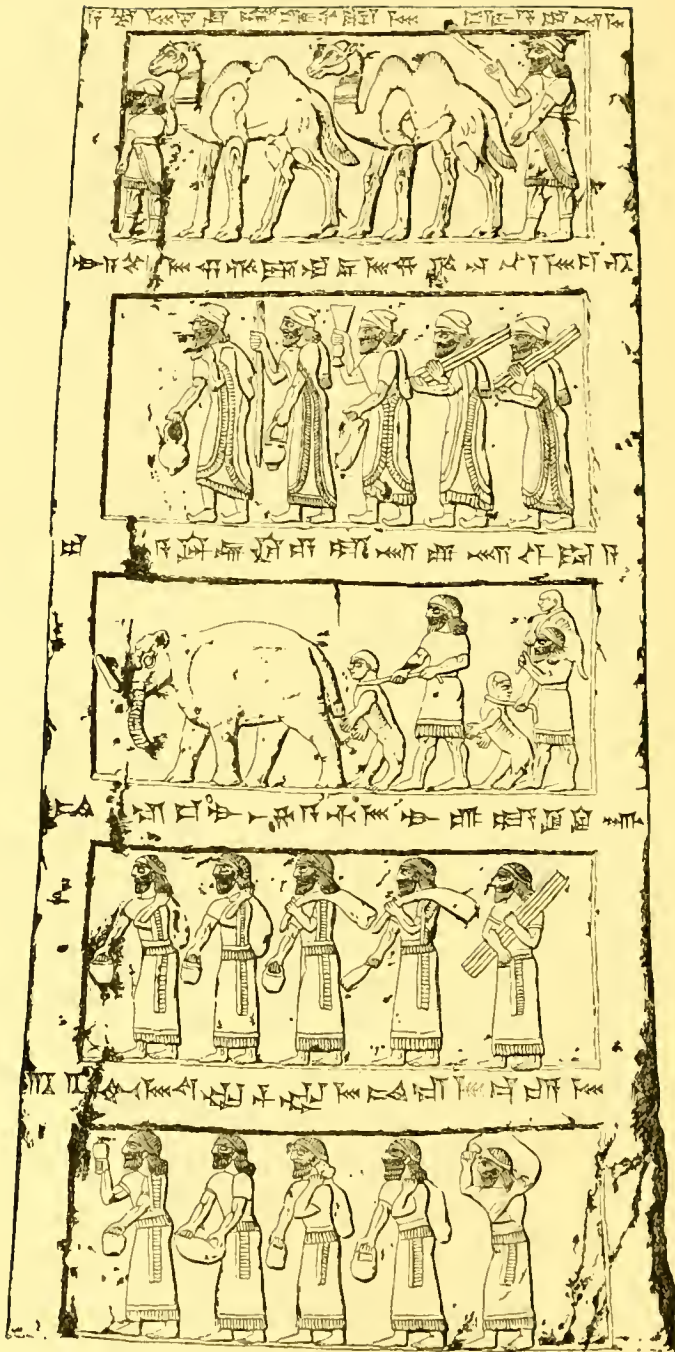


Fig 5



Fig. 6.

gifts of various sorts,—we now know all three of the localities where the ten tribes found their grave: Chalach, somewhat farther east than the mountainous source of the upper Zab, called Arrapachitis; the province of Goshen along the Chabor probably not far from Nisibis; and thirdly, the villages of Media.

Until recent times the conquest and plundering of Egyptian Thebes mentioned by the prophet Nahum (iii. 8 ff.) has been a puzzle, so that no one knew to what the words of the prophet referred:

“Art thou (Nineveh) better than No-amon (i. e., Thebes), that is situate in the waters of the Nile, with waters round about her . . . ? Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity; her young children were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets, and they cast lots for her honorable men, and all her great men were bound in chains.”

But then there was discovered at Nineveh the magnificent ten-sided clay prism of Assurbanipal (Fig. 7), which reports in its second column that it was Assurbanipal who, pursuing the Egyptian king Urdamanê from Memphis, reached Thebes, conquered it and carried away silver, gold, and precious stones, the entire treasure of the palace, the inhabitants, male and female, a great and immeasurable booty, from Thebes to Nineveh, the city of his dominion.

And how much the language of the Old Testament is indebted to the cuneiform literature! The Old Testament mentions repeatedly an animal called re'em, a fierce, untamable animal armed with fearful horns (Psalms xxii. 22) and most nearly related to the ox (Deuteronomy xxxiii. 17; Psalms xxix. 6; comp. Isaiah xxxiv. 7), to use which in field labor on the plain like a common ox seems to the poet of the Book of Job (xxxix. 9 ff.) a terrible, an inconceivable thought: “Will the wild ox be content to serve thee, or will he abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the wild ox with his guiding-band in thy furrow? Or will he harrow the valleys after thee?”

Despite the fact that the buffalo now roams in herds the for-

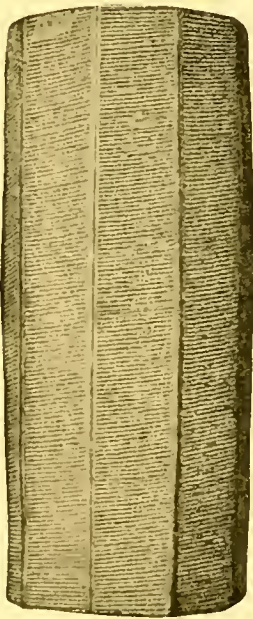


Fig. 7. ASSURBANIPAL'S TEN-SIDED CLAY PRISM.

ests beyond the Jordan, it was nevertheless diffused over Asia Minor from Arachosia only a short time before the beginning of our era; hence it had become customary as a result of comparison with Arabian usage, which styles the antelopes "cattle of the des-

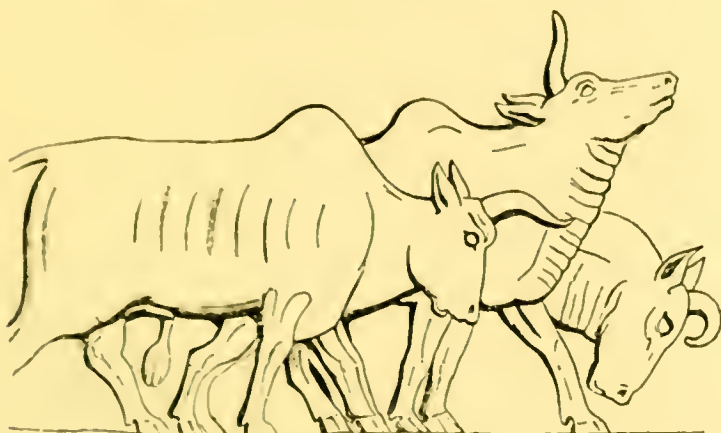


Fig. 8. THE RE'EM, OR WILD BULL.

(After a bas-relief in the palace of Sennacherib.)

ert" and applies the name *ri'm* to *antelope leukoryx*, to understand under the Hebrew re'em this species of antelope. But as this antelope, despite its long, sharp horns, is a slender-limbed and soft-eyed creature, it was beyond comprehension how it should occur



Fig. 9 HUNTING THE RE'EM.

to a poet to imagine it hitched to a plow and then to shudder at the thought.

The cuneiform inscriptions have informed us what the *re'mu* is: it is the powerful, fierce-eyed wild ox with stout curved horns, an animal of the wood and the mountain, which scales the highest

summits, an animal of tremendous physical strength, the chase for which, like that for the lion, was especially popular with the Assyrian kings on account of its hazardousness. The presence of this animal, which is most closely related to the *bos urus* of Cæsar (Bell. Gall. VI. 28) and to the *wiscent* (bison) of Middle-High-German literature, is scientifically established for the region of Mt. Lebanon: the cuneiform inscriptions mention the ré'em countless times, and the alabaster reliefs of the Assyrian royal palace present it very clearly to our eyes. (Fig. 9.)

King Nebuchadnezzar reports that he adorned the city gate of Babylon which is dedicated to the goddess Istar with burned bricks upon which were represented rêmus and gigantic serpents standing



Fig. 10. THE HILL OF BÂBIL.

upright. The rediscovery of this Istar Gate and its excavation to a depth of fourteen meters, where the underflow begins, constitutes one of the most valuable achievements of recent years in our exploration of the ruins of Babylon.

Hail to thee, thou hill of Bâbil (Fig. 10), and to all thy fellows on the palm-bordered banks of the Euphrates! (Fig. 11.) How the heartbeats quicken when, after weeks of picking and shoveling under the glowing sunbeams of the East, suddenly the structure that has been sought is revealed, when upon a giant block of stone covered with characters the name "Istar Gate" is read, and gradually the great double gate of Babylon, flanked northward on each side by three mighty towers, rises in a splendid state of preservation from the bowels of the earth! And wherever you may look,



THE TEMPLE
OF AMAR-
NATH
AT KASSI
EUPHRATE

FIG. 10. THE PALM BORDERED BANKS OF THE EUPHRATES, LEAVING THE RUINS OF BABYLON

on the surfaces of the towers as well as upon the inner walls of the gateway, droves of *rêmus* carved in relief, the uppermost row in

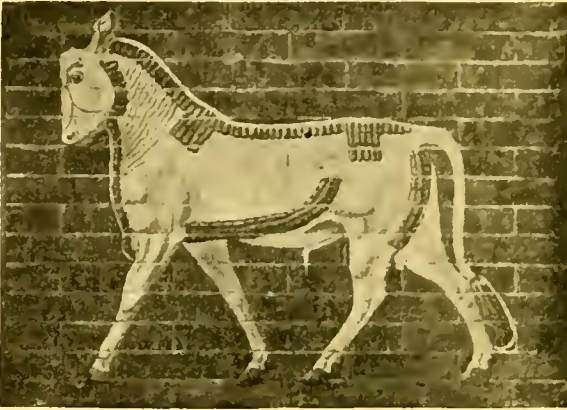


Fig. 12. THE WILD BULL (RE'EM) ON THE ISTAR GATE.
Brick mosaic in enameled colors.

brilliant contemporary enamel, standing forth in fascinating splendor of colors against the deep blue background. (Fig. 12.)

“Vigorously strides the wild ox with long paces, with proudly curved neck, with horns pointed threateningly forward, ears laid

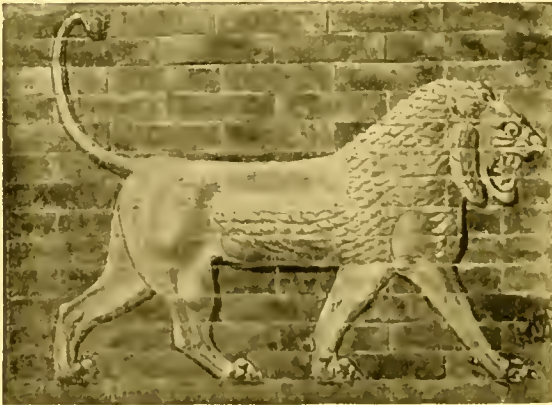


Fig. 13. THE LION OF BABYLON.
Brick mosaic in enameled colors.

back, and inflated nostrils; his muscles are tense and swelling, his tail raised and yet falling stiffly downwards,—all as in Nature, but

idealised "1 Where the smooth hide is white, horns and hoofs shine like gold; where the hide is yellow, these are of malachite green, while in both kinds the long hair is colored dark blue. But a truly imposing effect is produced by a white ox in relief, in which the long hair, as well as the horns and hoofs, is tinted a delicate green. Thus the re'em of the Istar Gate through which led the triumphal highway of Marduk proves to be a worthy companion for the widely known "lion of Babylon" which adorned the triumphal highway itself. (Fig. 13.)

And Biblical science is enriched by still another animal of the strangest sort, a fabulous animal, familiar to us from the days of our youthful religious instruction, and which could not fail to make a fascinating impression upon all who passed through the Istar



Fig. 14 THE DRAGON OF BABEL
Enamelled brick mosaic.

Gate toward the palace of Nebuchadnezzar,—I refer to the Dragon of Babel. (Fig. 14.) "With neck stretched far forward and looks darting poison the monster marches along,"—it is a serpent, as is shown by the elongated head with its forked tongue, the long, scale-covered trunk and the wriggling tail, but at the same time it has the fore-legs of the panther while its hind-legs are armed with monstrous talons; in addition to all this it has on its head long, straight horns and a scorpion's sting in the end of its tail. Thanks are due to all whose faithful labor contributes to secure such choice and exceedingly important archæological treasures!

Quite apart from many such individual interpretations and illustrations, Assyriology is restoring confidence in the authenticity

1 From a treatise on these relief figures by Walter André.

of the text of the Old Testament, which has for some time been so violently assailed. For, finding itself constantly face to face with more and more difficult texts full of rare words and phrases, it realises that there are also in the Old Testament scriptures great numbers of rare and even unique words and phrases; it takes delight in these, attempts to interpret them from their context, and in not a few cases finds its efforts rewarded by the presence of these very same words and phrases in Assyrian. In this manner it recognises what a fatal error it is on the part of modern exegesis to make conjectural interpretations of such rare words and difficult phrases, to "emend" them, and only too frequently to replace them with meaningless substitutes. In truth every friend of the Old Testament scriptures should assist with all his might in bringing to light the thousands of clay tablets and all other sorts of written monuments that lie buried in Babylon, and which our expedition will bring to light as soon as the first objects set before it are accomplished, thereby making possible for the textual interpretation of the Old Testament more rapid and more important progress than it has experienced within the two thousand years preceding.

Indeed, entire narratives of the Old Testament receive their interpretation from Babylon. In our early youth we inherit the burden of the foolish notion of a Nebuchadnezzar who was turned into a beast; for the Book of Daniel tells us (iv. 26-34) how the King of Babylon walked upon the roof of his palace, and after feasting his eyes once more on the splendor of the city he had built, received from heaven the prophecy that he should live, an exile from among men, with the beasts of the field and after the fashion of the beasts. Thereupon, according to account, Nebuchadnezzar ate grass in the wilderness like unto an ox, wet by the dew of heaven, while his hair grew like unto the feathers of the eagle and his finger-nails like unto birds' claws.

Yet no educator of youth should ever have ventured to teach such things, and especially not after the appearance of Eberhard Schrader's treatise on *The Insanity of Nebuchadnezzar*, without at the same time pointing out the fact that the purer and more primitive form of this story has long been known in a Chaldæan legend transmitted to us in Abydenus. This tells us that Nebuchadnezzar, after reaching the zenith of his power, went out upon the roof of his palace, where, inspired by a god, he exclaimed: "I here, Nabuchodrosor, announce to you the coming of the calamity which neither Bel nor Queen Beltis can persuade the Fates to avert. Perses (that is, Cyrus) will come . . . and bring servitude upon

you. O would that he, before my fellow-citizens perish, might be driven through the desert, where neither cities nor the track of men can be found, but where wild beasts graze and birds fly about, while he wanders about solitary in caves and gorges. But may a better lot . . . befall me."

Who could fail to perceive in this that the Hebrew writer has made a free version of the Babylonian legend, especially since he lets us see plainly in verse 16 that the very wording of the original was quite familiar to him! What Nebuchadnezzar wishes for the enemy of the Chaldæans, this the author of the pamphlets full of errors and carelessness which are combined to make the Book of Daniel has Nebuchadnezzar suffer himself, in order to exemplify as drastically as possible to his countrymen, who were being persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes, the truth that God the Lord is able to humble deeply even the mightiest king who rebels against Yahveh.

When shall we finally learn to distinguish the form from the content even within the covers of the Old Testament?

The author of the Book of Jonah preaches to us two lofty doctrines: that no one can escape from God, and that no mortal dare presume to dictate terms to God's mercy and patience, or even to set limits for them. But the form in which these truths are clothed is human, is fancifully Oriental, and if we should continue to believe to-day that Jonah while in the whale's belly prayed a conglomeration of passages from the Psalms, part of which were not composed until several centuries after the destruction of Nineveh, or that the King of Nineveh did such deep penance that he gave commands even to oxen and sheep to put on sackcloth, we should be sinning against the reason bestowed upon us by God.

But all these are details which sink into insignificance under an intenser light.

It was an exceedingly happy thought which struck the representatives of the various German ecclesiastical bodies who went to Jerusalem as guests of the German Emperor to take part in the dedication of the Church of Our Saviour, that of founding in Jerusalem a "German Evangelical Institute for the Archæology of the Holy Land." O would that our young theologians might go thither, and not merely in the cities, but better still out in the desert, familiarise themselves with the manners and customs of the Bedouins, which are still so completely the same as in the times of Ancient Israel, and plunge deeply into the Oriental mode of thought and expression: might listen to the story-tellers in the tents of the

desert or hear the descriptions and accounts of the sons of the desert themselves, full of fancy that bubbles up vigorous and unhampered and only too often exceeds unconsciously the bounds of fact!

And if even the modern Orient, wherever we go and listen and look, furnishes such an abundance of suggestions for the interpretation of the Bible, how much more will this be the case with the study of the ancient literature of the Babylonians and Assyrians which is in part contemporary with the Old Testament! Everywhere there are more or less important agreements between the two literatures which are most closely related in language and style, in mode of thought and expression.

I will cite here the sacredness of the number seven as well as that of the number three, for which we have evidence in both literatures: "Land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord," exclaims Jeremiah (xxii. 29); "Hail, hail, hail to the king, my lord," more than one Assyrian scribe begins his letter. And as the seraphim before the throne of God call one to another: "Holy, holy, holy is Yahveh Zebaoth" (Isaiah vi. 3), so we read at the beginning of the Assyrian temple liturgy a threefold *asur*, that is, "salutary," or "holy."

"God created man out of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul,"—thus runs the so-called Yahvistic account of creation (Genesis ii. 7). The very same conceptions are found among the Babylonians: man is formed of earth (mud, clay), as for instance Eabani is created out of a pinched off and moistened piece of clay (compare Job xxxiii. 6: "I too am made of a pinch of clay"), and for that reason he returns again thither (so Genesis iii. 19); but he becomes a living being through the breath of God. In the opening of a letter to the Assyrian king the writers characterise themselves as "dead dogs" (compare 2 Samuel ix. 8), whom the king, their master, had caused to live by "putting the breath of life into their nostrils."

According to Babylonian notions the spittle of human beings possesses in a marked degree magic power. Spittle and spells are closely related conceptions, and spittle has death-dealing as well as life-giving power. "O Marduk,"—thus runs a prayer to the patron deity of Babel,—“O Marduk! thine is the spittle of life!” Who is not reminded by this of New Testament narratives such as that of Jesus taking the deaf and dumb man aside, putting his fingers in his ears, spitting and touching the man's tongue with the

spittle, saying "Hephata," "Be opened!" (Mark vii. 33 ff., and compare viii. 23, John ix. 6 ff.)

Yahveh conducts his people on the march through the desert by means of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (comp. also Isaiah iv. 5); but Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, before setting out upon a campaign, also receives the prophetic message: "I, Istar of Arbela, will cause to rise upon thy right hand smoke and upon thy left fire."

"Set thine house in order," says the prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah when he is sick unto death, "for thou art sick and wilt not live" (Isaiah xxxviii. 1), while the Assyrian general Kudurru, to whom the king has sent his own personal physician, thanks the king with the words: "I was dead, but the king, my lord, has made me to live." The soul of a man sick unto death is conceived as already straying in the underworld, has already gone down into the pit (Psalms xxx. 4). For this reason the goddess Gula, the patron genius of physicians, has the title "Awakener of the dead": an Oriental physician who did not raise people from the dead would be no physician at all.

How great the similarity between all things in Babel and Bible! Here as well as there the fondness for rendering speech and thought vivid by symbolical actions (I cite here merely the scapegoat which is chased away into the desert); here as well as there the same world of constant wonders and signs, of perpetual revelations of the divinity, particularly through dreams, the same naïve conceptions of the divinity! As in Babel the gods eat and drink and even retire to rest, so Yahveh goes walking in Paradise in the cool of the evening, or takes delight in the smell of Noah's sacrifice. And just as in the Old Testament Yahveh speaks to Moses and Aaron and to all the prophets, so also in Babel the gods speak to men, either directly or through the mouth of their priests and divinely inspired prophets and prophetesses.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]