The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: Dr. Paul Carus *Associates:* E. C. Hegeler. Mary Carus.

VOL. XIX. (No. 1) JANUARY, 1905. NO. 584

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THE TEMPTATION.

BY EDUARD BIEDERMANN.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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EXCAVATIONS AND THE BIBLE.

BY CHAUNCEY J. HAWKINS.

IN recent years great interest has been taken in the excavations in the Orient. The University of Pennsylvania has within the last ten years spent $100,000 in excavations at Nippur, and only this year the University of Chicago has sent out other parties with pick and shovel. Before America was interested, England, France and Germany had spent vast sums on the ruins of Nineveh, Babylon and Egypt. For centuries nothing has remained of the once glorious Babylon and Nineveh but "formless heaps and conical mounds. Peasants have drawn their plows through their ruins, the Bedouins have pastured their flocks upon their grass-covered slopes, and the wild Arab tribes have fought their unrecorded battles over long buried temples. But patient toil has uncovered these ruins and discovered galleries of art and volumes of history, song and legend which have opened to us anew the story of these once glorious civilisations.

These monuments have clearly revealed the fact that Israel was not an isolated nation as we have so long supposed. Her institutions, her laws, her literature, while all passing through the mould of the Hebrew mind, were directly or indirectly influenced by the nations which surrounded her. Because the libraries of Babylon were buried under the ruins of centuries and the Old Testament was our only record, it was natural for us to think of Israel as receiving all of her rich heritage direct from heaven, but since the finding of these old libraries it has become clear that the Old Testament is the product of an historical evolution. True that it is Hebrew, but the old civilisation of Babylon is its background, and many

things which we once thought of as coming to Israel in a moment are now seen to be the product of a long growth.

This fact becomes clear by a comparative study of Hebrew and Babylonian literatures. We cannot fail to see the influence of those old nations upon Israel in such comparisons as these. When we read in the Babylonian literature that before Esarhaddon set out on his journey he received this prophetic message: "I, Istar of Arbela, will cause to rise upon thy right hand smoke, and upon thy left fire," we must think of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night which followed the people of Israel through the desert. And when we read from the Babylonian legend that Eabani was created out of mud and became a living being only through the breath of God we are strongly reminded of Genesis, which tells us that "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."

Naram-Sin, the son of Sargon, is the oldest of known monarchs. We have preserved this legend, which is recorded above a tablet over his own name, which bears a striking resemblance to the early life of Moses. This is a portion of it: "My mother, of noble race, conceived me and bore me in secret. She put me in a basket of reeds and closed up the opening with pitch. She cast me upon the river. The river carried me along to Akki, the water-carrier. Akki, in the kindness of his heart, made me gardner. Thus Istar showed me favor and made me ruler over the black-haired race." I need not call attention to the strong resemblance to the story about the early life of Moses.

One of the best comparisons is found in the account of the flood which each nation gives. In 1872 George Smith translated the Chaldean account of the deluge. After a careful study of the deluge tablet, this scholar reached the conclusion that the date of its composition could not be placed later than the seventeenth century B. C. and it might belong to a time much earlier. This is at least a thousand years before the writing of the Hebrew account which has been handed down to us. The greatest difference between this and the Biblical narrative is in the religious sentiment. While in the Jewish account only one God is mentioned, in the cuneiform inscription all the gods of the Babylonian pantheon are engaged in bringing about the flood. One points toward monotheism; the other towards polytheism. (This is only an argument in favor of the modern view of the Bible, which holds that the Hexateuch reflects not the religious conception of the pre-Mosaic times, but of the time in which it was compiled—the tenth to the eighth century B. C. The Babylonian

account reflects the polytheism of early Babylon, while the Hebrew account reflects the purer religious ideas of a later period.)

Other minor differences occur which show that the myth has passed through the molds of distinct and independent nations. But the main events of the flood narrated in the Bible and the Inscriptions are the same. The flood, a divine punishment for the sins of men, the building of an ark, the coming of the waters which covered the earth, the taking into the ark representatives of all animals, the sending out of the dove, the falling of the water and the new beginning of life on earth, these are common to both. This seems to indicate that this Biblical story is but one of the legends found in the folk-lore and early literature of the Babylonians; that it has its origin in the plains of Chaldea.

The early date of this tablet makes it certain that the Hebrew derived the story from the Babylonians, and not vice versa. Smith placed the date of the tablet in the seventeenth century B. C., and many regard its earliest possible date to be 3000 B. C. This makes it certain that it was borrowed by the Hebrews from the Babylonians. This position is strengthened by another tablet which shows that the Babylonian language had been naturalised in Palestine before the Exodus, that it was the court language between the Babylonian and Canaanitish tribes. This being true, we can easily conceive how these traditions could be carried to Palestine and gradually become the property of the Jews.

Had we space to compare the traditions of the two nations about creation, the fall of man, and many others, it would only strengthen our belief that the roots of the Old Testament go far back into the thought and life of earlier people.

The question has been raised and must be answered: How much in these early stories is history and how much is legend? What is the historical value of these early portions of the Bible?

First, we must answer that they were not written with a historical or scientific, but a religious purpose. The lack of any clear information in regard to the progress of events, as seen, for instance, in the faulty chronology of the Book of Kings, shows clearly that these Old Testament writers had no great interest in history as such. They were not advocates of a system of science. They used what knowledge of history they possessed, they used the only scientific conceptions then known, for the purpose of teaching religion. They told the story of the creation of the world and mankind, not with a scientific but a religious purpose. In the words of Ryle, "the old-world myths and tales of Semitic folk-lore, were em-

ployed for setting forth in their true light the unchanging verities respecting the nature of God, of man, and of the created universe." They exercised no care in the mingling of history and legend, because it was not legend or history in which they were interested, but religion. For this reason in these earlier narratives it is impossible for us to tell where legend stops and history begins. Only this we know, that here is that intermingling of legend and history where legend is the golden link which connects the unknown time with the first events of actual history. The evidence at hand seems to justify the conclusion that the general outline of the narrative is historical, but we are not able with our present state of knowledge to separate the historical nucleus from the idealized picture.

The excavations do more than to throw light upon the origin of this legendary literature. They have thrown light upon the question of the origin of the so-called Mosaic legislation. It has been the contention of some scholars that there was nothing original about the laws of the Hexateuch but all of them were borrowed from the literature of older nations. That position is not held by many scholars and is not supported by the evidence of the monuments. But that the early laws of Babylon and Egypt and surrounding people exerted much influence over this legislation seems quite probable. For illustration, turn to that ancient funeral ritual of Egypt, the *Book of the Dead,* the earliest piece of Egyptian literature we possess, with possibly one exception. In it we find no account of the soul making its voyage in the spirit world. It came into the judgment hall of Osiris, in the presence of a council of forty-two gods and was compelled to make a declaration of its innocence. Among other things it said: "I have not told falsehoods. I have not made the laboring man do more than his daily task. I have not murdered. I have not slandered anyone." These are positive statements of a soul on trial, telling what it has not done. The declaration implies that there must have existed principles which should read: "Thou shalt not lie. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shalt not covet." In other words, these are some of the great laws of the Decalogue. They were so well known in Egypt when Moses was a youth, receiving his education in the school of the Pharoahs, as the Ten Commandments are today, and we can well suppose that Moses, when he started with the Children of Israel on that long journey, was well acquainted with them and they must have exerted a great influence over his legislation for Israel. If Moses was not the author of the Decalogue

it would not affect the force of the argument. The Hebrews were in Egypt and must have been acquainted with this funeral ritual.

One of the most important discoveries of recent times is the code of Hammurabi. It was found by the French expedition which during the years 1897-99 excavated the great ruin of ancient Susa. It is a code of 280 laws inscribed upon a large stone monument and is of great value not only because of the material which it contains, but also because it can be definitely dated at about 2250 B. C. A comparison of this code with the Old Testament laws will reveal the much higher standard reflected in the latter, its much higher moral development, but it also "makes highly probable and practically demonstrable the fact that the laws of Hammurabi," as Professor Kent of Yale says, "in some cases exerted a direct and in others a powerful indirect influence upon the laws and institutions of the Hebrews."

We can give only two or three illustrations. This is a law from the code of Hammurabi: "If any one brings an accusation of any crime before the elders and has not proved what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death." Comp. Deut. 19:16-21. Both codes makes kidnapping a capital offense, inflict capital punishment upon both parties to an act of adultery, and exact the same fine if an ox kill a man's slave. The code of Hammurabi said shepherds should "pay to the owner of a field of specified sum for the injury done to his crops by their flocks as a result of their careless or deliberate action." Comp. Ex. 22:5. These illustrations could be multiplied. Enough has been given to illustrate how this early code from the father of jurisprudence exerted a large influence over the Hebrew legislation. True that all of these legal and moral principles from Egypt and Babylonia were not adopted by the Hebrews in any out and out fashion. They were all assimilated by the Hebrew consciousness and adapted to the conditions of Hebrew life. But as we go back for many of our fundamental principles to England and the English back to Rome, so the Hebrew went back to Egypt and Babylon for many of their civil laws and moral principles.

To suppose that man never observed a Sabbath until the writing of the Ten Commandments would be as absurd as to suppose that the Declaration of Independence created the love of human liberty. The law to observe the Sabbath was only a formulation of a principle which had been long in practise among many people. We find among the Babylonians the custom of resting upon the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, days of each month. It was a law that upon these days

no work should be done, not even the king was permitted to change his clothes or mount his chariot. It matters not what motive prompted them to keep these days. Enough for us to know that in the early times a rest day was kept and the time and manner of keeping it reminds us strongly of the later Hebrew Sabbath.

True, this involves us in a difficulty. We have not been in the habit of thinking that any of the Hebrew legislation came in this way, especially the Decalogue. We have thought of the Hebrews as gathered at the feet of Sinai to receive a revelation. Amid thunder and lightnings and with the sound of a trumpet the Lord descended upon the smoking Mount and from there proclaimed the words of the law in the ears of a terrified people. The words uttered by the very voice of God were graven by the finger of God upon two tablets of stone.

Now it is significant that in the code of Hammurabi the divine origin of law is as definitely taught as in the chapters of Deuteronomy or Exodus. In the introductory words of these laws Hammurabi says: "The great gods have called me. I am the salvation-bearing ruler." And he closes by saying, "Hammurabi, the king of righteousness, to whom Shamash (that is the sun-god) has presented the law am I." Other traditions exist where the gods are represented as the author of law and civilisation. Are we not justified, as we read this poetic symbolism of the Bible, in believing that the writer of this record spoke of Moses as it was customary to speak of the great moral and political leaders of his time, as men sent from God, and of their law as having a divine origin? As Hammurabi believed that his laws were from God, so did Moses believe, and the writer clothed this faith in the terrible symbolism of Sinai. The proof of their divine origin was not in their symbolism, but in their moral purity and power for the history of mankind.

Space will not permit us to bring more evidence, but enough, I believe, has been used to prove beyond a doubt that Israel was not the isolated nation we have so long supposed her to have been, but the roots of her history extend far back into the history of the past. If every history of the civilised world could be distroyed except a brief account of the laws and institutions of the United States, people a century hence might well think that America was an isolated nations, that our laws and institutions were given directly from heaven. But we know better. Our common laws go back to England and our fundamental political ideas have their roots in soil even back of the mother country. Yet we believe none the less that God has guided us and has used this method of blessing the world. So

with nothing but the Bible we thought of Israel as isolated, but now with our wider literature we see that here has been a greater providence. Through a long process of education which extends back to periods of which we have no records, God has been preparing Israel for the leadership of the world and the final coming of Jesus Christ. So far as we can discover, God's method has always been that of evolution and not revolution, and Israel is no exception to the rule. As our national development has depended somewhat upon other people, so did Israel's. Absorbing much from that vast old-world civilisation and having the best advantages for a religious training, she has made all the world indebted to her.