

ISRAEL AND BABYLONIAN CIVILIZATION. ¹

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BEFORE dealing with the grave question suggested by the words Babylon and the Bible, it is necessary to refer to certain facts which have special reference to the discussion. Up to the present time, Biblical science has established that 2000 years before Christ the Israelites came out of Arabia, the land of the origin, the classic soil of the Semitic race. They established themselves in the south of Babylon at Ur-Kasdin. The southern part of the country at that time formed a division of the already flourishing empire called the First Babylonian Empire (about 4300 B. C.). There a civilization had sprung up and developed which without exaggeration may safely be described as marvelous. Its palmiest period dated from the time of Sargon I of Akkad (about 3800 B. C.) and extended through the reigns of his successors. This monarch, renowned in the antique annals of the Orient, had founded a library, that of Uruk "the city of books," a library composed of old and venerable writings engraved in cuneiform characters on slabs and clay cylinders. These works treated of astrology, magic, legislation, the grammar of the two languages (Semitic and non-Semitic) which were spoken in the Empire, and other matters. Thirty centuries later Assurbanipal, the celebrated Assyrian of the 7th century B. C., had copies of these works made, a part of which we now possess.

At the period of the decline of the First Empire, we meet with the *patesi* or priest-kings, the lieutenants of neighboring sovereigns, and contemporaneous (about 3000 B. C.) with the 4th Egyptian

¹ Professor Montet, Vice-Rector of the University of Geneva, Switzerland, and head of the Semitic department of its Faculty of Protestant Theology, was one of the most prominent figures at the International Congress of Liberal Thinkers at Boston last year. He has studied and written much on Oriental subjects and we are glad to present this article to our readers since it sums up in a short essay the commonly accepted results of higher criticism on the debt the Old Testament owes to Babylon. For further data we refer our readers to Delitzsch's *Babel and Bible* (Chicago: The Open Court Pub. Co.).

dynasty, during which the pyramids were built. Noticeable amongst these was one Gudéa whose headless statue in the Louvre at Paris holds in its hand a stone slab, on which is engraved the plan of a palace, such as we call to-day a scale-plan.

Babylonian civilization, then, as is evident from these details, was in a very advanced state considering the epoch, and the Israelites, quitting the deserts and oases of Arabia, must have been struck at the sight of so splendid a spectacle with bewilderment and admiration difficult for us to imagine. That this civilization exerted an increasing influence on Israel there can be no manner of doubt.

And indeed when we remember that all the ancient civilizations of the Orient were religious, it is not surprising that the religion of the Babylonians of the First Empire, with its traditions, its literature, and its rites, should have profoundly affected the Israelites and have left indelible traces in their sacred books.

The question, then, raised by the subject under discussion (viz., Israel and Babylonian Civilization) may be stated in these terms:

Is the Old Testament an original work, or is it only an echo, a copy, or an imitation of the religious traditions of the Babylonians? Will the value of the moral and religious truths contained in the Hebrew Scriptures be compromised or diminished by the discovery of the traces of Babylonian influence? Should we, men of the Bible, believers in the Book, be threatened by such a discovery with what has sometimes been called "the loss of our treasure?"

If there ever was an engrossing religious question, surely this is one. Let us examine it with all the impartiality and calmness of judgment of which we are capable.

It is of course impossible in one paper to deal adequately with so complex a question as the influence of Babylon on the Bible and on Israel. I shall therefore content myself with taking a few typical examples, and after having thrown them into full light, draw from them legitimate, well-founded conclusions which may contribute to the solution of the problem stated.

ORIGIN OF THE WORLD AND OF MAN.

At the outset, let us consider the traditions concerning the origin of the world and man contained in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

It is well known that these eleven chapters are essentially composed of two narratives of different ages, one dating from the 8th century B. C. (the Jahvist), the other from the 5th century B. C.

(the Priestly Code). The Assyrian-Babylonian documents which correspond to these accounts come from Assurbanipal's library and consequently date from the 7th century. These cuneiform texts of the time of the great Assyrian Monarch, however, are copies of documents of great antiquity, dating, according to Assyriologists, from more than 2000 before Christ.

The Creation.—We have two accounts of the creation in the Bible. In the first (Gen. i-ii, 4a), which is of the 5th century B. C., God is called *Elohim*; the creation takes place in seven days; God creates first, the light; then he separates the waters above (the heavens) from the waters below (the seas) and when the earth appears, the vegetable kingdom, the stars, the animals, fishes, birds, and beasts of the earth (divided into great and small beasts and beasts of the field) are successively created. After this comes the creation of man, male and female, and God having found his work good rests on the seventh day.

In the second account (Gen. ii. 4b-24) which dates from the 8th century B. C., God is called *Yahveh*. He begins by the creation of man, then he places him in the garden of Eden, in which all kinds of vegetation are made to grow and in the midst of which are the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. After this God creates the animals and the birds, and at last woman.

Now leaving aside the essential differences which characterize these two Biblical narratives, let us compare them with the two principal accounts of the cuneiform texts preserved on the Babylonian bricks which date from about 650 B. C. and which are exact copies of documents of such great antiquity as 2000 B. C.

Their close resemblance to the Biblical narratives cannot fail to strike any one who keeps in mind the first chapters of Genesis.

In the first Babylonian account called *Ennuma Elish* (these are the opening words of the Assyrian text) it is stated that at the beginning, when as yet neither the heavens above nor the earth below had been named, there was the aqueous chaos, the Abyss or primitive Ocean, from which all things proceeded. The word employed in the cuneiform text is *Tiâmat*, which is the same as the *Tchôm* of the Bible. The Hebrew word *Tchôm* is the abyss over which darkness hung and on which the spirit of God brooded, "moving on the face of the waters," that is to say on the primitive Ocean. This original state of aqueous chaos is again described by the author of the Babylonian account as "the union or fusion of the waters." The reference, of course, is to the waters above and below referred to in Genesis.

In the Babylonian account the first act of the Creator is the creation of the gods. But after this fragment, there are blanks and obscurity in the text which follows. Further on we read that the god Marduk made "the higher thrones of the great gods," the planets, the stars, and then fixed the year, established the twelve months, etc. Then should follow the account of the creation of the plants and the animals—but here the text is obscure and mutilated. At last the creation of man is described. It is said that Marduk resolved to create man, saying, "I will take blood, and from bones I will make man."

In the second Babylonian account called Eridu, it is stated that at the beginning there was neither temple of God, nor building of any kind, "a reed had not yet sprung up, a tree had not yet been created." The "whole of the lands," to employ the words of the text, consisted only of an aqueous chaos (Tâmtu—the Tiâmat of the first text).

Then Eridu and Esagila were created (the temple of Eridu, at once an earthly and heavenly paradise). Then Marduk made the earth and created man. The goddess Aruru, wife of Bel or Ea united with him in creating the human race, also the beasts of the fields and the animals living in the fields, after which the Tigris and Euphrates, etc., were made.

Now, in spite of the apparent differences between the Biblical and Babylonian accounts, the close resemblance between the traditions that have come down to us is evident, and the priority of the Babylonian traditions appears to be established by the great antiquity of the sources from which they are drawn.

In these traditions, common alike to Israelites and Babylonians, there are two points which must be insisted on, namely the Sabbath and Eden.

The Sabbath, or Day of Rest of the Israelites, was the same and bore the same name amongst the Babylonians. Indeed it is in ancient Babylon that we find the earliest traces of this institution,—at least such is my opinion after careful research as to the origin of the Sabbath.

As to Eden, the cradle of the human race according to the Bible narrative, it must be located in Babylon as Delitzsch was the first to point out and establish. And there is nothing astonishing in the fact that the Hebrews should have imagined that the earthly Paradise was in Babylon, when we remember that on leaving Arabia they had left behind very primitive conditions in which they had lived for long centuries and entered into the midst of a great and

dazzling civilization which must have appeared to them the miracle of miracles.

The Fall.—In the Biblical text (Gen. iii. 1-25) which dates from the 8th century B. C., the essential statements are as follows: At the beginning the first human couple were innocent. Seduced, however, by the Serpent, the woman and then the man ate of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and thus sin entered the world. God, fearing that man should profit by experience and lay hands on the tree of life, and eating thereof should become immortal, banished him and his companion from the garden of Eden.

In the Babylonian documents no such account as this has as yet been discovered. We have, however, precious points of comparison which I will briefly enumerate: In the Biblical narrative two trees are mentioned, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. But it is possible that in a more ancient gloss of the same text it was a question of only one tree. The forbidden tree, of the fruit of which Adam and Eve ate, is in reality simply called "the tree in the midst of the garden" (Gen. iii. 3), which seems to imply the uniqueness of the forbidden tree; the tree of life is only mentioned at the end of the narrative, in a kind of appendix. On the other hand, in the Jahvist account of the creation, the tree of life is indicated as also being in the midst of the garden (Gen. ii. 9) and reference, immediately following in the same text, to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil seems to confirm the identity of the two trees.

The philosophy of this passage expresses the great truth that there is no real life except where there is a knowledge both of good and evil.

Whatever may be our interpretation of this special point, one thing is certain, namely that the Babylonian and Assyrian documents mention only the tree or plant of life, jealously guarded by winged genii and surmounted in the painted or sculptural representations we possess by a winged symbol of Deity. This plant, an object of worship, is itself the symbol of eternal life.

Another point of comparison is to be found in the well-known Babylonian cylinder in the British Museum, on which two human beings are represented, a man with horns symbolic of strength, and a woman, both reaching out their hands towards a tree which may be a date palm. Behind the woman is a serpent, the tempter referred to in the book of Genesis. I am aware that the interpretation I have here given of these figures is called in question; that it has been

affirmed that they represent gods, and that as we are in possession of no explanatory text, it is simple madness to attempt any interpretation whatever. But this is not my opinion. From the day I first set eyes on the cylinder, the evidence of the representation on the Babylonian clay of the Biblical narrative of the Fall forced itself upon my mind. Indeed there is no reason for surprise at so striking a resemblance. The consciousness of sin which finds so profound an utterance from beginning to end in the Old Testament, is expressed with equal poignancy in the Babylonian documents, and the most remarkable proof is the celebrated psalm of repentance in the cuneiform texts. The following are some passages selected from Sayce's translations.*

"O my god who art violent [against me], receive [my supplication].
 O my goddess, thou who art fierce [towards me], accept [my prayer].
 Accept my prayer, (may thy liver be quieted).
 O my lord, long-suffering [and] merciful, (may thy heart be appeased).
 By day, directing unto death that which destroys me, O my god, interpret [the vision].
 O my goddess, look upon me and accept my prayer.
 May my sin be forgiven, may my transgression be cleansed.
 Let the yoke be unbound, the chain be loosed.

 Let me pass from my evil, and let me be kept with thee,
 Enlighten me and let me dream a favorable dream."—(Sayce, p. 355.)

[Accept] the prostration of the face of the leaving creature....
 [I] thy servant ask [thee] for rest.
 To the heart of him who has sinned thou utterest words of blessing.
 Thou lookest on the man, and the man lives,
 O potentate of the world, mistress of mankind!
 Compassionate one, whose forgiveness is ready, who accepts prayer.
 (*Priest*). O god and mother goddess that are angry with him, he calls
 upon thee!
 Turn [thy face] towards him and take his hand!"

The most striking of these penitential psalms is certainly the following, in which the consciousness of sin is uttered in a manner as religious as it is impressive. One feels the anguish which wrings the moral nature of the man who wrote these words:

"O lord, my sins are many, my transgressions are great.
 O my god, my sins are many, my transgressions are great.
 O my goddess, my sins are many, my transgressions are great.
 O god whom I know and whom I know not, my sins are many, my transgressions are great.

* *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians*. London, 1887.

O goddess whom I know and whom I know not, my sins are many, my transgressions are great.
 The sin that I sinned I knew not.
 The transgression I committed I knew not.
 The cursed thing that I ate I knew not.
 The cursed thing that I trampled on I knew not.
 The lord in the wrath of his heart has regarded me;
 God in the fierceness of his heart has revealed himself to me.
 The goddess has been violent against me and has put me to grief.
 The god whom I know and whom I know not has distressed me.
 The goddess whom I know and whom I know not has inflicted trouble.
 I sought for help and none took my hand;
 I wept and none stood at my side;
 I cried aloud and there was none that heard me.
 I am in trouble and hiding; I dare not look up.
 To my god, the merciful one, I turn myself, I utter my prayer;
 The feet of my goddess I kiss and water with tears.
 To the god whom I know and whom I know not I utter my prayer.
 O lord, look upon [me; receive my prayer!]
 O goddess look upon [me; accept my prayer!]
 O god whom I know [and whom I know not, accept my prayer!]
 O goddess whom I know [and whom I know not, accept my prayer!]
 How long, O god [shall I suffer?]
 How long, O goddess, [shall thy face be turned from me?]
 How long, O god whom I know and whom I know not, shall the fierceness [of thy heart continue?]
 How long, O goddess whom I know and know not, shall thy heart in its hostility be [not] appeased?
 O lord, destroy not thy servant!
 When cast into the water of the ocean take his hand.
 The sins I have sinned turn to a blessing.
 The transgressions I have committed may the wind carry away.
 Strip off my manifold wickedness as a garment.
 O my god, seven times seven are my transgressions; forgive my sins!
 O my goddess, seven times seven are my transgressions; forgive my sins!
 Forgive my sins; may thy ban be removed.
 May thy heart be appeased as the heart of a mother who has borne children.
 As a mother who has borne children, as a father who has begotten them, may it be appeased!"—(Sayce, p. 350.)

The Deluge.—The Biblical account of the deluge is formed by the combination of two documents, one of the 8th century and the other of the 5th. The principal contents of it are as follows: The human race being corrupt, God decides to destroy it by a deluge. Noah and his family alone escape the divine judgment. In the ark, in which they take refuge, a couple from every kind of animal on the face of the earth is housed.

The rain which is the cause of the deluge falls forty days. When the flood begins to subside the ark is stranded on Mount Ararat. In order to make sure that the waters have subsided and that dry land has appeared, Noah sends out four birds (ravens and doves). When at length Noah and those with him quit the ark, "they offer the Lord a sacrifice of thanksgiving." "Jehovah smells a sweet odor" (Gen. v. 21) and declares that He will never again utterly destroy mankind.

In the account of the deluge in Assurbanipal's library Xisuthros the Babylonian Noah, as Berosus calls him (the transcription of the Christian name from the cuneiform text varies so much, that I prefer to adopt the one employed by the historian Berosus) constructs a ship, in order to escape from the deluge which the gods, especially Bel, have decreed as a punishment for the wicked inhabitants of Shurippak. The family and slaves of Xisuthros are brought on board this vessel, also all his goods, as well as domestic and wild animals, and enormous provisions of food for man and beast. This ship of Xisuthros of which the cuneiform text gives us the exact measure, rivalled in size and proportions the largest modern steamships.

The gods open the flood-gates and let loose the deluge. Everything is destroyed and the water rises to the very skies. In the presence of this catastrophe the gods themselves are seized with fear and take refuge in the upper heaven, the heaven of Anu. "The gods lay motionless, huddled together like dogs," they weep. The storm lasts six days: on the seventh day there is a calm, and when Xisuthros opens the window of the vessel he perceives everywhere dead bodies floating on the surface of the water.

The vessel is stranded on Mount Nizir. In order to discover the condition of the inundated earth Xisuthros sends out first a dove, then a swallow, and at last a raven which does not return. Xisuthros then comes out of his ark, and offers a burnt-offering to the gods. "The gods smelt the sweet fragrance of the sacrifice and gathered like flies above the master of the sacrifice." They promise never again to bring about a deluge, but to content themselves with the employment of natural scourges (lions, for example) for the punishment of mankind. As to Xisuthros, he is carried up into the presence of the gods.

The resemblances between these two accounts—Biblical and Babylonian—are most striking and would appear even more so, when given *in extenso*. As I have already indicated the Babylonian

account is far more ancient than the Bible account which is a summary and monotheistic adaptation of the former.

The Tower of Babel.—As to the Biblical narrative of the tower of Babel or Babylon, which dates from the 8th century and which corresponds to the similar account given by Berosus, the Babylonian historian of the 4th century, we have nothing like it in the cuneiform texts. At the same time the Babylonian origin of the Biblical myth seems to be beyond doubt.

The colossal ruins of the "Temple of the Seven Lights of the Earth," the Tower of Borsippa which Nebuchadnezzar had restored in the 6th century (as an inscription of that monarch bears witness), certainly gave rise to the formation of the Biblical legend. While looking upon this crumbled edifice, the débris of which to-day forms a veritable hill of worn brick and dust, the foreigner passing through the valley of the Euphrates cannot fail to ask himself many a question as to the purpose for which so prodigious a monument was erected and the cause of its fall. The Bible legend is undoubtedly intended to serve as the answer to these questions.

And who knows if, some day, an inscription on a brick as yet undiscovered, containing the Babylonian version of the Tower of Babel may not be deciphered, throwing a flood of light upon the Bible text. The valley of the Euphrates has in reserve as many surprises as the extraordinary revelations it has already given us.

NAMES OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

Another interesting point of comparison between the Bible and the religious documents of Babylon is that which touches the names of God in the Old Testament.

We are all aware that in the Hebrew Scriptures God is sometimes designated by names which are related to El, Eloah, Elohim (the plural form is found by far the most frequently), and at others by Yahveh, a name also often employed.

El.—Now the divine name El, as well as its derivatives, is a term of the religious vocabulary of the Semites. We find the same word with difference of pronunciation or vocalization used by the Aramæans, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Phœnicians, the Arabs, etc., and everywhere it is the generic name for Divinity, bearing in germ the monotheistic idea, being even the very expression of monotheism amongst the Hebrews (El, Elohim) and much later among the Moslem Arabs (Allah).

Yahveh.—This name in the Old Testament is the appellation

of the primitive God of Sinai, or the holy mountain, which He inhabited and where He revealed Himself to Moses in the 14th century. Later on, in the time of King Ahab in the 9th century, it was there that the prophet Elijah went in search of God for inspiration.

Yahveh, become the God of Israel, crossed with his people the frontiers of their territory, followed them in their perigrinations and went before them in military expeditions to foreign countries. It is then no matter for surprise that we should find the name of Yahveh on Babylonian bricks. What is remarkable is that it is associated, as in the Old Testament, with the name *El*. On these cylinders which Delitzsch supposes to date from 2000 B. C., we read :

Ia-à-ve-Ilu	}	Yahveh is GOD.
Ia-ve-Ilu		
Ia-ü-um-Ilu		

This is the Yahveh-Elohim of a very great number of passages in the Old Testament.

THE CODE OF HAMMURABI.

The latest example of the coincidences between Babylon and the Bible, is the famous code of King Hammurabi; dating from about 2000 B. C., which was discovered in December 1901, and January 1902, by Mr. De Morgan amongst the ruins of Susa and which is now in the Louvre at Paris.

Between this code and the different codes mentioned in the Old Testament, such as the Covenant (9th century), Deuteronomy (7th century) and the priestly Code (5th century), there are, besides noticeable differences, resemblances so striking and characteristic that it must at least be admitted that the legislators of the two countries, Babylon and Israel, were inspired beforehand by the same common law. Here and there, however, the resemblances are so close that it is very difficult to escape from the conclusion that the Hebrew legislator had under his eyes the Code of the King of Babylon. Here are some cases in point :

The Old Testament lays down in principle the law of retaliation, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," etc. The Babylonian Code establishes the same principle (art. 196-200) : "If a man has put out the eye of a freeman, his eye shall be put out; if he has broken a member, one of his own members shall be broken; if he has knocked out a tooth, one of his own teeth shall be knocked out."

We all know with what severity the Old Testament punishes

want of respect for parents. Whosoever shall strike father or mother or curse them shall be put to death (Ex. xxi. 15, 17). The Code of Hammurabi, though not so cruel, is none the less severe. If a son says to his father, You are not my father, a mark shall be made on his body, and he shall be sold as a slave. If a son says to his mother, You are not my mother, a mark shall be made on his body, he shall be made to walk round the city, and shall be driven and under pain of death (art. 16).

In both legislations, the theft of man by man is punished with death (Ex. xxi. 16; Ham., art 14). As to slavery, there are analogies, but also essential differences between the two codes.

The Israelite is not obliged to give up to his owner a runaway slave who has taken refuge in his house (Deut. xxiii. 16). According to Hammurabi's Code the restitution in such cases is obligatory even under pain of death (art. 16).

Slavery for debt lasted six years with the Israelites, at the expiration of which time the Hebrew slave who had been sold or bought was free (Ex. xxi. 2-3). According to the Babylonian Code, slavery for the same reason, lasted only three years.

On many other questions, such as theft in general, theft of sacred objects in particular, false witness, corruption of judges, violation of property rights, dangerous animals, sexual crimes, etc., the codes of the Old Testament and of Hammurabi offer numerous resemblances and analogies, as well as divergences with which we need not deal here, but which are of the same character as those I have already indicated.

I should like, however, to call attention to a final analogy, and that of the highest interest between Biblical and Babylonian codes, I mean that which touches their origin.

According to the Biblical tradition, all the laws of Israel have one divine origin. It was on Sinai that Yahveh revealed the Decalogue to Moses, and this contained in germ all the laws of Israel for all ages. On the stele on which the Babylonian Code is engraved one sees the Sun-god giving to Hammurabi the laws which he codifies for his people. In both cases then we have the same conception of the divine origin of the law.

But it is time to draw the conclusions suggested by all these facts and considerations.

CONCLUSIONS.

The Scientific Conclusions.—I consider that in the present condition of Biblical science and of Assyriology, the Babylonian origin

of the traditions as to the beginning of the world and of humanity contained in the eleven first chapters of Genesis, is an established fact. It is more than probable also that the legislators of the Old Testament were conversant with the Code of Hammurabi. Finally, it would seem that the relations between Babylon and Palestine were close and ancient enough to permit of the possession by the two countries, not only of common religious sentiments, not only of the same religious and juridical vocabulary, but even the same names to designate the Divinity such as Yahveh-Elohim (Iave-Ilu).

Dogmatic Conclusions.—The scientific conclusions thus drawn have a dogmatic importance of the greatest value. If it can be established—and I think I have produced evidence enough for this—that certain passages of the Old Testament are the echo of Babylonian writings, then it is evident that the traditional notion of the inspiration of the Bible can no longer hold water. For centuries it has been believed and maintained in the Synagogue and in the Christian Church that the Old Testament was dictated to the sacred writers by God Himself and that they were but passive instruments or agents in the hands of the spirit of the Most High. This conception is now proved to be quite erroneous and with it disappears also the dogma of the infallibility of the Bible. No! the Old Testament is not a supernatural book; it is a human document, full of precious truths, but from which error is not excluded. At the same time it is an admirable book, recording centuries of experience of the most highly religious nation on the earth and constituting, with our Gospels, the most valuable religious treasure in the world.

Religious Conclusions.—Have we any cause for sorrow at the conclusions here drawn? Is there any reason for despair because we no longer have in hand a so-called infallible code of religious truth?

Shall we be tempted to imagine on account of these conclusions that the knell of the Bible and the religion founded upon it has been rung? No! a thousand times, No! On the contrary we are full of thankfulness to God that He did not desire to limit His revelation to one people, Israel, but to manifest to different nations and in divers manners the fundamental verities of religion and morality.

So far as I am concerned I feel an infinite joy, a sentiment of thankfulness that knows no bounds, towards God when I discover on the bricks covered with cuneiform characters religious affirmations and expressions of sorrow for sin, as profound as anything contained in the most beautiful pages of the Old Testament.

One often hears of the bankruptcy of science and oftener still of the bankruptcy of faith, but these noisy rumors and declarations are but empty sound to the religious man who studies the facts of science in a spirit of absolute impartiality, searching only for the truth in all realms despite those dogmas, creeds and ecclesiastical traditions which would impose on the mind a fixed conception of truth once for all. God has revealed Himself in all times and in all ages, and He will continue to reveal Himself always and without ceasing to those who seek after Him, whenever and wherever they may call upon His name.