

TABI-UTUL-BEL, THE PIOUS SUFFERER.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE Book of Job has always been of unusual interest to Bible readers. It is a philosophical poem which treats the problem of suffering. The introduction, apparently a later addition, depicts God as holding regular meetings of the angels through whom he governs the world. And here Satan the accuser also appears, railing at Job the pious man, and claiming that his faith would be found wanting if he ceased to enjoy prosperity. Satan is then permitted to bring misfortune upon Job. Goethe imitates this scene in his Prologue to Faust, and here also Mephistopheles receives permission to lead Faust astray.

In all his ordeals Job wavers but remains faithful to God, and at the end he is vindicated by having his health and former prosperity restored to him.

All critics, among them the most orthodox, agree that the poem is not a Hebrew composition. The Jews received it from Edom, and Job is described as an Edomite nobleman. The name Job (*Iyob*) is a foreign word of unknown meaning, and so are the names of his three friends who discuss his misfortunes. The general background of the poem is that of Edom, and the city of Uz is also presumably localized in the same country. We are safe then in assuming that whatever its original home may have been, the Jews received the poem from their neighbors on the southeast.

Since the spade has recovered so many historical treasures from the buried cities of Mesopotamia, a poem has been found in the library of Asurbanipal which bears a strong resemblance to the Biblical Book of Job. Part of it was first published in 1875¹ and was translated by Sayce in 1887. Pinches improved upon the work of Sayce and looked upon the hero as a prototype of the Messiah. In the meantime other Assyriologists worked at it successively and

¹ *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Vol. IV, 1875.

translated various other fragments. For a long time these were considered as independent penitential psalms or lamentations. Finally Zimmern and Winckler have translated the most important portions of it in their new edition of Schrader's *Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*, 1903, pages 385-387.

Of late Mr. H. L. F. Gillespie, of Chicago, has called our attention to the fact that Prof. Morris Jastrow has published an English version of the complete poem in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. XXV, pages 157-176, under the title "A Babylonian Parallel to the Story of Job." In this article Professor Jastrow discusses the several historical and textual problems both of the book of Job, and the Lamentation of Tabi-utul-Bel, a pious king and the victim of great suffering. We here insert the Babylonian poem, mainly after Professor Jastrow's translation, though in some variations Zimmern is followed instead. The references at the right are to passages in Job which are interesting for comparison. They have been selected by Mr. Gillespie, and in some cases the parallel is very close.

I will praise the lord of wisdom,
 protection
 [The staff of thy divinity?] I seize hold of.
 [Mine eyes he closed, bolting them as with] a lock,
 [Mine ears he stopped] like those of a deaf person;
 A king—I have been changed into a slave. (xxx. 26)
 A madman—my companions became estranged from me.
 In the midst (?) of the assembly, they spurned me.... (xix. 19)
 At the mention (?) of my piety.... terror.
 By day—deep sighs, at night—weeping;
 The month—cries, the year—distress.
 I experience, O my mistress, mournful days, distressful months,
 years of misery. (vii. 3)

* * *

I had reached and passed the allotted time of life;
 Whithersoever I turned—evil upon evil. (xxx. 27 ff)
 Misery had increased, happiness had disappeared,
 I cried to my god, but he granted me not his countenance;
 I prayed to my goddess, but she did not raise her head. (xxiii. 8, 9)
 The seer-priest could not determine the future by an inspection,
 The sacrificial-priest did not by an offering justify my suit,
 The oracle-priest I appealed to, but he revealed nothing,

The exorciser-priest did not by his rites release me from the ban.

(xiii. 4; xvi. 2)

The like of this had never been seen ;

Whithersoever I turned, trouble was in pursuit. (iii. 26)

As though I had not always set aside the portion for my god,

(xxix. 2-5)

And had not invoked my goddess at my meals,

Had not bowed down my face, and brought my tribute ;

As one in whose mouth supplication and prayer were not constant,

Who had passed over the day of his god, had forgotten the new-
moon festival,

Had spurned them, neglected their images,

Not taught his people fear and reverence, (iv. 3)

Not invoked his god, but eaten of his food,

Neglected his goddess, not offering her drink,

As though one who had always honored his lord could forget him!

Like unto one who has lightly uttered the sacred name of his god—
thus I appeared.

Whereas I was always steadfast in supplication and prayer ;

Prayer was my practice, sacrifice my law, (i. 5, last clause)

The day of worship of the gods was the joy of my heart,

The day of devotion to the goddess more to me than riches ;

The prayer of a king,—that was my joy ;

And hymns of praise—in them was my delight.

I taught my country to commemorate the name of God, (iv. 3)

To honor the name of the goddess I accustomed my people.

The fear of the king I made like unto that of God,

And in reverence for the palace I instructed the people.

For, indeed, I thought that such things were pleasing to God.

What, however, seems good in itself, to God is displeasing,

What in itself is held in contempt finds favor with God ;

Who is there that can grasp the will of the gods in heaven?

The mysterious plan of God—who can fathom it? (xviii. 20)

How can mere mortals learn the way of God?

He who is alive at evening is dead the next morning ; (iv. 20)

Suddenly he is cast into grief, in haste he is stricken down ;

In one moment he is singing and playing,

In a twinkling he wails like a mourner.

As day and night the spirit [of mankind] changes ;

Now they are hungry and are like a corpse,

Again they are filled, and feel equal to God ;

If things go well, they prate of mounting to heaven,

If they are in distress, they speak of descending into Irkalla.

An evil demon has taken hold of me (?); (i. 12)

From yellowish, the sickness became white, (xxx. 30)

It threw me to the ground and stretched me on my back,

It bent my high stature like a poplar;

Like a strong tree I was uprooted, like a lofty tree thrown down.

(xviii. 16)

As one whose food is putrid I grew old.

(xxx. 27)

The malady dragged on its course.

Though without food, hunger diminished (?);

.....my blood [became sluggish (?)]

With nourishment cut off (?).

Though my armor was burnished, the bow [strung], (xxix. 29)

Tied to the couch with the outlet closed, I was stretched out. (xii. 14b)

My dwelling had become a prison;

In the bonds of my flesh my members were powerless,

In fetters of my own, my feet were entangled,

My discomfiture was painful, the downfall severe.

A strap of many twists held me fast,

A sharply-pointed spear pierced me,

(vi. 4a)

My persecutor tracked me all the day,

Nor in the night time did my pursuer let me draw a breath, (vii. 4)

Through wrenching my joints were torn asunder (xvi. 9)

My limbs were shattered and rendered helpless;

In my stall I passed the night like an ox,

I was saturated like a sheep in my excrements;

My diseased joints the exorciser tore apart (?)

And my omens the seer-priest set aside,

The prophet-priest could not interpret the character of my disease,

And the limit of my malady the seer-priest could not determine.

(xiii. 4)

No god came to my aid, taking me by the hand,

No goddess had compassion for me, walking by my side.

The grave was open, my burial prepared; (xvii. 1)

Though I was not yet dead, the lamentation for me was over;

The people of my land had already said "alas" over me.

(vii. 6; ix. 25-26)

My adversary heard it and his face shone;

(xxx. 1-10)

As the joyful tidings were announced to him, his heart rejoiced,

Supposing that it was the day for my whole family,

When among the shades, their deity would be honored (?)

The weight of his hand I was no longer able to endure. . . .
 (Tabi-utul-Bel dwelling in Nippur,
 He spake, "How long yet!" deeply sighing,
 The strong ruler, decked with the turban.)
 My sins he caused the wind to carry away,
 [Mine eyes which had been bolted he opened;]
 Mine ears had been closed and bolted as a deaf person's—
 He took away their deafness, he restored my hearing;
 The net (?) which had shut (me) in, he released from round about me,
 He healed, and my breast resounded like a flute,
 The fetters which enclosed (me) like a lock he unlocked.
 The one weakened by hunger he made strong like a powerful, well-
 knitted sprout.

He brought me food, he provided drink.
 The neck that had been bent downwards and worn
 He raised erect like a cedar;
 He made my form like one perfect in strength.
 Like one rescued from an evil spirit, my lips (?) cry out,
 He poured out their wealth, he embellished their property.
 My knees that were caught like a mountain bird,
 My entire body he restored; (xlii. 10)
 He wiped out the anger, he freed from his wrath (?),
 The depressed form he cheered up.
 (To the shores of Naru, the place of the judgment of humanity
 they crossed over,
 The forehead brand was removed, the slave mark taken away.)

* * *

He who sins against E-sagila, through me let him see,
 In the jaw of the lion about to conquer me Marduk placed a bit;
 Marduk seized the one ready to overwhelm me, and completely en-
 circled me with his bulwark. (xi. 13-17)