

ART. II.—THE PRIMITIVE EXPECTATION OF THE MESSIAH.

I HAVE endeavoured in a former paper to establish a rendering of Gen. iv. 1, 26*b* differing from that ordinarily given. I have tried to prove that the one ordinarily given is compassed with an always-felt difficulty, partly in the first passage from the plain usage of the Hebrew language, which is violated, and in both places from the sense and context. I have shown how the rendering of Yahweh in its simple sense, and consequently its primitive senses, make the context harmonious and the meaning throughout clear.

Eve was not speaking of God, whom when she speaks of she calls Elohim. She exults that a man-child is born to her, "the very one who is to be," and who is, according to the Divine promise, to restore all things.

Disappointing experience made men cease to expect deliverance from mere weak and failing man (Enosh). They perceived that the promised seed must be more than man to redeem. And then they proceeded to give Divine honour to Him who was the coming One, "Yahweh." They began to anticipate the Incarnation. This hope was not, then, a national hope, but the hope of the race, and so was handed on. I proved that this interpretation fitted with the after-history of the Old Testament, and made it plainer and more forceful. If the view given of the interpretation of Gen. iv. is a true one, there was once a universal expectation of a Divine Redeemer, common to the race. If so, traces of it should still remain outside the history of the Hebrew nation, as well as traces of His name, "Yahweh." I proceed in the present article to show that such traces very manifestly exist, and are clearly to be found.

Turning, then, to the atmosphere of ancient thought and hope, made plain to us by many restored treasures of the distant past, but chiefly, it may be, by Assyriology, as nearest to the cradle of these hopes and thoughts, I find my argument is cumulative still. I have said the expectation of one Divine (Yahweh, He who will be) to do what humanity, forasmuch as it is weak by reason of its proved, experienced, inherent nature, is unable to do, was once part of the common heritage of the race. It were no wonder, consequently, if we find traces of the name Yahweh in other ancient nations. It were no wonder if we find in the legendary and mythologic lore of a race that was nearest to the cradle of this expectation a picture, bold, beautiful, and gracious, of such a Divine Redeemer mixed with baser elements. If these ancient

peoples have preserved the names of the ten first Fathers of the race before the Flood,¹ and the tradition of their long lives, which stand immediately after Gen. iv. 26b, "Then men began to worship Him who is to be," it ceases to cause any perplexity that they should preserve traces of this worship, profaned indeed, but still luminous. For this worship and this hope were far the bigger and more vital thing of the two.

There are traces of the worship of Yahweh in Balaam's country, in the names of Ammonitish, Phœnician, Philistine, and North Arabian kings, where borrowing from the Hebrews is impossible.² We find traces of it in the names of witnesses in the ancient Babylonian contract tablets³ and elsewhere. The probability is that in many different forms it fills the most ancient past the round world over. But it finds its finest and most attractive delineation in the picture of the Babylonish idea of the Messiah, with which some of those who have raised it from the past desire to mythologize the Christ that really came—so entirely different, and yet in some respects so like.

"Schelling," we are told, "taught that man inspired by God and endowed with reason lived in the earliest time. In no other way can we account for the beginning and spread of religion and culture. That culture may die and disappear in certain nations is a fact of which history makes us sure; that it may, as it were, *ab ovo et de novo*, develop itself out of the conditions of animal existence, this we do not know. The first estate of man was one of culture, founded on religion. That was the alpha of humanity, and a return of that golden age will be the omega. Schelling held that a tendency towards a true belief had more or less been present amid the errors of heathenism."⁴ If this be historically interpreted, and the word "culture" applied to extremely simple things, it seems an opinion strictly true to the facts.

"There," I quote again, "in the Gentile world a poetical mythology was to a large extent corrupt in its ethical import,

¹ In a relation of "good Hebrew to Babylonish which is still perplexing," Delitzsch, "Wo Lag das Paradies?" p. 149; Zimmern, in Schrader's "Keilinschriften," pp. 530 and 539 *et seq.* It may be some confirmation of the view proposed in this essay that this tradition of the ten Urväter is closely related with a curious mythological conception in several forms of a son of God, Adapa, "the wise one," of "a Divine proclaimer of revelation who before the Flood arose among them" (Zimmern, pp. 378, 520, and 538.

² Delitzsch, *ibid.*, p. 162.

³ Hommel, "Ancient Hebrew Tradition," pp. 100-102 *et seq.*

⁴ Gostwick's thoughtful "German Culture and Christianity," pp. 405 and 410.

the sense of man's sinfulness was mostly superficial, and the idea of union and reconciliation with God was therefore shallow. For want of depth, there was want of height. Ideas of mediation—mostly imaginative rather than religious—did, however, exist in heathenism, and indirectly foreshadowed the coming of Christ.¹ The bound Prometheus, a profound but unchastened picture of human nature, "was," as Schelling said, "not a thought that ever a man invented. It is much more one of those primitive, primeval thoughts which came into existence by their own intrinsic force."² All this is true in a special degree of the Babylonian picture of the Messiah, only, if what has been said of Gen. iv. 1 and 26b be true, it plainly distorts, as it embodies, an historical idea, which was one time a treasured tradition of the race, but only entirely true and fruitful in those who were faithful to it.

In Palmer's "Babylonian Influence on the Bible," which in its very title at once begs the question, we have a copy of a bas-relief in the British Museum delineating this ancient idea—Merodach, with strong, benevolent countenance, apparently winged and armed with the lightning, contending with the dragon. The idea may well have connection with the creative victory over chaos, for creation and re-creation have ever been seen to be nearly related ideas; but it certainly did not stay in this region of thought. Nor did it originate in it. "The Babylonians themselves," says Mr. Palmer, "seem to have considered their Merodach and the Hebrew Ya—Jah = Jehovah—to be one and the same, as we may infer from the names they gave their children, such as Bel-Yahu." "Bel is Yahweh," identical with Bealyah, the name of one of David's warriors, and Shamshi-Ya: "My sun is Yahweh."

It seems the extreme of historical perversity to trace the origin of a pure, simple idea to a representation of the same idea coloured with baser elements and become complex; and this in the name of evolution and against plain historic probability. But perhaps those who are not inclined to be historically perverse will grant that my argument is cumulative. It remains to trace the main features of this Babylonian idea of the Messiah.

There are certain features of deep distinction between the Babylonish phantasies and the Hebrew Messianic expectation. They are clear and numerous, and insistent to the understanding, which has an eye for large and patent things as well as for small and comparatively insignificant things.

1. Apparently the Babylonish expectation, as we have it,

¹ Gostwick, *ibid.*, p. 411.

² Martensen's "Christian Ethics," i. 63.

is a probably mixed copy of a copy. How far Sumerian influences have impressed themselves on the Semitic in Babylonian ideas is at present uncertain.¹ A comparison of the results derived by different Assyriologists, a reflection how relatively small an amount of the Babylonian libraries has been really investigated, and how much of the real Babylonish history must rest upon happy hypothesis in the absence of anything like a connected historical record—thought along these lines inclines to the belief that while much that is strictly trustworthy has been attained, much also that is strictly uncertain and tentative underlies what is sometimes stated without condition. Much still depends upon the point of view and the capacity for correct and extensive generalization possessed by the investigator. Intellectual arrogance is out of place, and humility and the fear of God is in place, in this matter.

2. It is clear that the Babylonish ideas have been complicated, lowered, and sterilized. They are ideas mixed sometimes with a good deal of earth. They stop at the point reached, and only, so to say, revolve round it. They admit of no progressive expansion, and contain no good news for the whole world. They rightly perished with the people that held them and strictly localized them. But they retain enough to throw light upon the conception, increased by years of reflection, of "Him who is to be," which it is the object of what is here written to suggest was once the only hope of the race. The conception does not touch the fact of sin, or but little.² "For want of depth, there is want of height."

¹ Zimmern (p. 349) says: "It is, however, up to the present little possible to decide in individual cases with certainty how far ancient, time-worn Sumerian conceptions have to do with the Babylonian religion, or how far properly Semitic religious ideas are in discussion, though, indeed, as has been said, the probability is in favour of by far the greater part of the Babylonian religious thoughts belonging already to the Sumerians."

Maspero ("Ancient History," p. 138) says: "The Semites adopted the old pantheon *en bloc*. Some of the principal deities were identified one with the other." It is, however, clear that something essentially uncertain still underlies both these statements. Delitzsch, in his "Assyrian Grammar" (pp. 61, 71), ends a discussion on the origin of wedge-writing, in which he declares himself on the side of Halévy and his school, with these remarkable words: "The Semitic Babylonians will be found entirely justified when they ascribed the invention of the art of writing to their god Nebo; and that, besides the Cossæans, they never anywhere mention a third, a Sumero-Accadian, people will in the long-run be explained by the fact that such a people was never in existence."

² Yet it does touch it. Marduk is called, as below, "the reconciling priest," "the restorer of their benefit" to the fallen. Of a good King—a

I will try, then, to point out very briefly some of the main features of the Babylonish picture of the Messiah. It is a picture rather than in any sense a prophecy. It leads to nothing. There are only points of interesting contact. But it has destroyed the idea of anticipation altogether, and has made the future which the Hebrews looked for essentially impossible.

Now, the Babylonish picture of the Messiah is scattered through many interesting and possibly correlated fancies; but it is in many ways gathered up into the portraiture of Marduk, the local god of Babylon. To this I ask attention.

(a) The first great cleft between the primitive Old Testament conception and Marduk appears in his origin. The difference seems of first importance. The idea of an Incarnation is pointed to by the human form of Marduk, as of many other gods, and is associated with the idea of "Babylonian-Assyrian kings, even in the oldest regal inscriptions, as children of goddess mothers,"¹ and specially of Assurbanipal, the child of Istar. But Marduk was not "a child to be born to us" in the future. The earliest thought of him, probably, was as the "son of the sun," the probable meaning of the name. He is the god of the early sun, as well the morning sun in the day dispersing the gloom as the spring sun in the year calling all nature from death to new life. These are Messianic analogies implanted in nature, which have struck all men. But as early as 3000 B.C. his genealogy was settled.² He was the first-born son of Ea, "the wise god," "lord of wisdom," and of his consort Damkina, "queen of heaven and earth." Now, Ea's ancient seat was Eridu, "the holy or salvation-bringing city," and here stood his sanctuary, with a holy tree. His chief epithet, surely derived from the situation of Eridu, was "king of the water-deep"—*i.e.*, king of the life-giving influences of the ever-flowing streams of the Euphrates and the Tigris, which play a great part in the earliest (Sumerian derived?) incantation ceremonies. Marduk was called "son of Eridu,"³ which Delitzsch makes his name mean. This Ea is identified with Sin, the god of Ur, the moon-god, by the manifest parallelism of the text in the Ishtar legend: "Then went forth Samas (*i.e.*, the sun-god), before Sin his father wept he, before Ea the king, came his

type of Yahweh—it is said, "Whom his sins had given up to death, him my lord the king has endowed with life" (Zimmern, pp. 373, 381; Palmer, p. 101).

¹ Zimmern, p. 379.

² So Zimmern, from whom the account is chiefly taken.

³ Delitzsch, "Wo Lag das Paradies," pp. 227, 228.

tears,"¹ and nearly as clearly is the identification of the sun-god with Marduk hinted at. The sun, as a god localized in Southern Larsa and Northern Sippar, is thought of as scattering by his light life and health, and as the judge who brings all to light, who helps the good to live in grace and chastises the bad. His wife is "the bride," and his children are "righteousness" and "equity." Marduk became identified with Bel of Nippur, and became viewed as father of Nebo of Borsippa. But Marduk was identified with Jupiter² as an astral god, and as this planet had the name Bel, Kaukebil, so Marduk was called Bel. Marduk is so set side by side with Zeus and Jove. He was regarded as the leader of the imaginary beings of the Zodiac. He is called by Nebuchadnezzar in his "standard inscription" "the sublime master of the gods."³ In another later inscription he is absolutely localized to Babylon.⁴ But again Marduk was identified with Yah, a shortened form of Yahweh. "Mr. Pinches has proved that the element *Äi* must be read as equivalent to the Hebraic *Yah*, originally a word in general use among the Western Semites, but especially among the Arabs. Thus we find *Abu-äi*, *Nindar-äi*, *Ashur-äi*, *Nirgal-äi*, *Samas-äi*, *Marduk-äi*, *Bel-äi*, as well as *Sharru-Ai* ('*Yah is king*')."⁵ And, further, Marduk, it may be esoterically, was identified with the other gods, not, apparently, the principal gods. The epithets belonging to them were simply transferred to him.⁶ Further, many Babylonian hymns show a monotheistic ground-tone. They are addressed to the "Father, who in heaven and upon earth alone is great, the Father Nannar" ("giver of light," Zimmern). The word "ilu," "i," "ili," *El* (God), is never localized, but "in the earliest as in the latest Babylonish texts 'ilu' stands at the head of the Babylonish-Semitic pantheon." "*Ilu* or *Yahu*, the oldest principal god of the Semitic Babylonians, was gradually displaced by other gods."⁷ "Certain schools, that of Eridu amongst others, proclaimed the absolute unity of the Deity, and addressed their prayers to one God," says Maspero. Sir Henry Rawlinson held the opinion that Eridu was once the seat of monotheism. "The

¹ Hommel, "Ancient Hebrew Tradition," p. 65.

² Lenormant, "Ancient History," i., p. 454.

³ *Ibid.*, i., p. 481.

⁴ Maspero, "History," p. 584.

⁵ Hommel, "Ancient Hebrew Tradition," p. 144.

⁶ Zimmern, p. 609.

⁷ Delitzsch, "Wo Lag das Paradies," p. 164. In the interesting and important discussion here referred to, Delitzsch, in the interest of proving the priority of the shortened forms of the tetragrammaton, raises difficulties as to its popular shortening, some of which he himself allows little weight to, and the rest of which disappear, if there is evidence of the fact.

doctrines of these schools did not prevail, and soon disappeared," says again Maspero.¹ Now, Eridu was the place whence came originally the idea of "the son"—Marduk, "son of Eridu," or "son of the sun."

Now, I submit, in the result, that under all these floating, inconsistent phantasies there lies one idea. It is the idea of the Father of the lights, whose creature the sun manifests His glory, bringing life and health and truth of vision into the world, and the idea of the Son sent by Him as the beams of light sent from the sun (an old Christian analogy of the Fathers for the eternal Son). Kings and deliverers were regarded as partial incarnations and representations of this idea, as in Ps. ii. That Yahweh, "He who is to be," was necessarily the Divine Son of God is the next inference upon His Divinity from Gen. iv. 26*b*. But the idea of Marduk gives up the thought of the actual birth of Yahweh as "the Son of man" also to come. It mythologizes His birth in heaven and in the past. It has no expectation more, for Marduk's mediatorial office is now and present. It is an ancient heresy of the once universal hope of Yahweh.

It is very interesting and more than conceivable that what remained of the better hope brought the magi from the East to Bethlehem. Osiris, who personifies the sun, presides over the last judgment, and is a type of the King, is the Egyptian counterpart of Marduk.

(*b*) It is clear, from what has been stated, that Marduk, and all the correlated fancies which he dominates and gathers to himself, reflect as in a distorting glass the primitive expectation of the incarnation of Yahweh, as it meets us in Gen. iv. We have, then, in the office and work of Marduk, light poured on the ancient anticipation of what Yahweh was to be, only complicated and lowered from its highest Hebrew plane. He was emphatically the healer of all sicknesses and the looser of all curses, the rescuer in trouble, "the reconciling priest among the gods," the supremely "compassionate one, who loves to give life to the dead," "the lord of life," "the king of heaven and of earth," "the king of gods and lord of lords," "the creator of the world." He was *sent* by his father on a journey of bringing help and loosing curses with these remarkable words; "My son, what thou knowest not, what can I say more to thee? What I know, that knowest also thou."² A series of tablets concern his wanderings to do his mission, in which he refers to his father in any difficulty.³ He contends in fierce

¹ Maspero, *ibid.*, p. 139.

² Zimmern, pp. 373 *et seq.*

³ Smith, "Chaldean Genesis," p. 112.

battle with the hostile powers of evil. This gives him the aspect of strenuous suffering. He is "he who maketh whole," "the only begotten one," "the creator of the law of the universe," "life," "restorer of their benefit" (to the fallen), "the shepherd-king." As good kings bring joy and prosperity to a nation, so he to the world¹ (Zimmern, p. 380). "The Son of Ea is the mediator between his divine father and suffering humanity. It is by him that Ea makes known his decrees, and reveals the great mysterious name that puts to flight the demons." "All the angel hosts of heaven and earth regard thee [Marduk], and give ear." "He is the great overseer of the spirits of heaven," "the king of angels," "the director of the spirits of heaven."² In fact, he stands in the same relation as Yahweh in human shape many times stands in the Book of Genesis to the hosts of God's messengers or angels, separate and supreme. But here again the same cleft comes in between the Old Testament and the Babylonish myth, that it is a pathetic, moving picture, only painted, as it were, on the sky and wandering in the earth, regularly dying down in the winter as much as reviving in the spring. The Babylonish Messiah never wrought any real deliverance, nor was he expected to work one. It is a heretical Messiah, the work of reason only, not of fact. And if, with Zimmern and many another, we conceive that Marduk created Yahweh, as he stands among the Hebrews in his actual mediatorial office, and not that the ancient thoughts and longings, once common to the race and centred in the promised Yahweh, created Marduk, we are bound back into the really hopeless paganism of "fallen" Babylon. The cleft that divides the Babylonish Marduk from our Jesus (the name means "Yahweh is salvation"), progressive in the Hebrew prophets and actual in the Gospel story, is exceedingly deep, for all the other analogies, some of them but slight and superficial, pointed out by Zimmern. They are all interesting, but do not lead to his conclusion. We Christians are not worshippers of Marduk redivivus, or followers of the authority of wisely-thought-out myths, when we have believed the power and the coming of Jesus Christ. There were chosen eye-witnesses of His majesty. There were chosen witnesses present even when He received honour and glory from God the Father, when there was brought to Him from the majestic glory such a

¹ Marduk is said to have searched out a good king, and proclaimed by his declaration "This is the shepherd, who gathers together the scattered" (Zimmern, p. 382). Cf. the remarkable allusion to Marduk's calling Cyrus by his name, p. 381.

² For these translations from Babylonian texts see Zimmern, and Palmer as above (pp. 101, 102), and Maspero (p. 136).

voice: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." There were those who heard the voice come from heaven, from the living God, when they were with Jesus in the Holy Mount.

We might ask, When were the prophetic historians and inspired speakers for God who built up the Hebrew Messianic idea in so friendly an attitude to the Babylonish pantheon of false and sometimes foul divinities that they culled out of them the flower and bloom of this sterile but beautiful speculation to engraft it on a really growing stock?

One thing more. In the Babylonish Messianic idea there is no mystery. Strictly, men and women and their children, naturally born, are projected on the heavens and on the wonders of the earth, so to say, and return Divine. There is nothing mysterious about it. But in the Old Testament, Yahweh, He who is to be, and to fill the future, and to gather together the nations, is the name of the one true God. Yahweh sends as much as Yahweh comes. There is the mystery throughout of the oneness of the Father, Son, and Spirit, suggested from one end of the Old Testament to the other. It is only possible to expurgate it by holding the opinion that what was always true in heaven *could* not be communicated to the men of the ancient world at that stage of their ideas. Such a preconception employs its learning to root out what is clearly there, hitherto always perceived, and historically developing. The New Testament only explains what the Old had sown. "God was *in* Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son (also the only begotten God; see the reading of the Sinaitic MS.), who *is* in the bosom of the Father, who was, when on earth, also in heaven: He hath explained Him." He was rejected because He came as a suffering man. It has been impossible in the scope of this essay to do more than suggest the outline of a theory which, I submit, accounts for the facts, which I hope are correctly stated. Mr. Leslie Stephen has said that a true theory is able to account for the prevalence of partial and even false systems by bringing to light and giving scope for the element of truth which each contains.

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