

The Noachian Deluge and its Analogues.¹

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THE biblical account of the Noachian Deluge has given rise to many questions, and many speculations. Two questions especially suggest themselves. (1) Was the Deluge universal? (2) If not, was it destructive of the whole race of mankind? In attempting to answer these questions there are two kinds of evidence with which we have to deal, the scientific and the historical. At first sight these two sorts of evidence seem to lead us to contradictory conclusions. The evidence of geology and meteorology seems to compel us to answer the first question in the negative. The history of the rocks, as now understood by the greatest geologists, shows no signs of a universal flood. The animals, still popularly called antediluvian, which are found among many strata of geological formations, must have become extinct many thousands of years before the Deluge, or even the appearance of man upon the earth. There is nothing like the quantity of water in the world required to produce such a flood as to cover all the mountains, unless we were to suppose an enormous simultaneous depression of land in all parts of the world, of which, again, there is not the least evidence. It has now, therefore, been generally admitted that the Flood could not have been universal in extent. Indeed, though a universal flood seems intended by the narratives of Genesis, the language may be explained of a local flood. The word "earth" (אֶרֶץ), in such a phrase as "covered all the face of the earth," is frequently used of a limited area. It is, in fact, the word always employed in such phrases as "the land of Canaan," "the land of Egypt." Whereas there is another word (תְּהוֹמֹת) which, though not so common as אֶרֶץ even in this sense, cannot mean anything else but the whole world.

The second question is a more important one. But to it a negative answer is almost as certainly demanded by all that has been learnt of the primitive ages of mankind. The variations among

different families of man, the origin and history of early civilisation as proved by ancient monuments, probably also the dispersion of mankind, require an infinitely longer lapse of time for their development than the biblical narrative allows. The growth of the whole human race from Noah is hardly even conceivable, unless we could place the Flood many thousands of years earlier than the history of Noah's family permits.

At this point we must take into account the other side of the evidence, which I have called historical, in the wide sense in which history may be said to include all that has been said to have happened, without at this point considering whether it is true or not, as distinct from the more restricted sense which distinguishes the true record of events from what is fabulous, legendary, mythical, prehistoric, and the like. What, then, is the historical evidence in this wide sense of the term? It is briefly this, that among a very large number of nations in different parts of the world a belief in the destruction of the inhabitants of the world by a flood is found to exist. The most obvious explanation of this fact which first suggests itself is that these different stories are different accounts, varied by long tradition, of the event which is described in the Bible. The opposite view to this would be that which ascribes all such stories, including the Bible narratives themselves, not to a common original tradition of an early fact, but to similar causes working independently in different nations and producing similar myths or legends.

But on examination neither theory seems quite to satisfy all the conditions of the problem. These stories are some of them too like each other, and some of them too unlike, to be accounted for solely by either hypothesis. The best known story of those unlike the Bible narratives is the classical legend of Deucalion's Flood. According to this legend, when Jupiter sent a flood upon the world Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha alone escaped in a boat to Mount Parnassus, where they found a sanctuary of Themis the goddess of Fate. On propitiating the goddess they received an oracular message bidding them throw bones behind their

¹ This article was received some time ago, but with the writer's consent was postponed till the series of papers by Professor Ryle on "The Early Narratives of Genesis" was completed. It is, therefore, quite independent of Professor Ryle's article on the Deluge.—EDITOR.

backs. Not liking to violate the relics of their ancestors, they interpreted bones to mean stones (being the bones of the earth). On throwing them behind their backs, these became men and women, and so the earth was re-peopled. This is the form of the legend given in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, lib. 1. The account given in the treatise "Of the Syrian Goddess," ascribed, though probably incorrectly, to Lucian, reminds us more of the biblical narrative, but very probably was influenced by it. According to the Chinese story, "Fa-he, the reputed founder of Chinese civilisation, is represented as escaping from the waters of a deluge; and he reappears as the first man at the production of a renovated world, attended by his wife, three sons, and three daughters" (Hardwick, *Christ and other Masters*, quoted by Rawlinson, *Historical Illustrations of the Old Testament*, p. 18, and *Speaker's Commentary* on Gen. viii., note). But besides such legends, there is another group of legends bearing a much closer resemblance to the biblical account. These are notably the account of Berossus preserved by Josephus, the story on the Chaldean tablets in the British Museum, which were first deciphered by the late George Smith some twenty years ago, and the Deluge legend as it is found to have existed in Mexico.

The first two have a marvellously close resemblance to the account of the Noachian Deluge. According to the first, Xisuthrus was warned by the god Cronos of the coming Flood, and built a vessel in which he was preserved with his relations and friends, and all kinds of birds and quadrupeds. As the Flood abated he then sent out birds, which on the first occasion returned, but afterwards escaped. He was finally stranded on a mountain, left his ship, and offered sacrifice to the gods. The Mexican pictures represent a man and his wife on a boat or raft, with a dove and a vulture (see *Speaker's Commentary, in loco*). The Chaldean tablets still more closely resemble Gen. viii., ix. The account of the Deluge is found on the eleventh tablet of the so-called Izdubar legends, translated by George Smith, and published in *Records of the Past*, vol. vii. p. 133. The story is told by the translated Xisuthrus himself (here called Hasisadra) on the occasion of the visit of his descendant Izdubar (according to George Smith, the biblical Nimrod). The tablet is full of lacunæ, but the following facts can be clearly made out. Hasisadra is told by a certain god that he is going to destroy "the

sinner and life," and is consequently commanded to make a ship, of which the length, breadth, and height are given, but the numbers of cubits are now lost. To escape the coming Flood, he is then commanded to "enter, and the door of the ship turn. Into the midst of it thy grain, thy furniture, and thy goods, thy wealth, thy women-servants, thy female slaves, and thy young men, the beasts of the field, the animals of the field, all I will gather and I will send to thee, and they shall be enclosed in thy door." This is given in column i. In column ii. there is an elaborate description of the making of the ship, the collection of food, gold, silver, etc., the entrance into the ship with male and female servants, a festival to the god, the gathering and bursting of a great storm of wind and thunder till "the flood reached to heaven," and "the bright earth to a waste was turned." Two points in this column deserve special mention: (1) the covering of the ship within and without with pitch. "Three measures of pitch (bitumen) I poured over the outside, three measures of pitch I poured over the inside." (2) The shutting of the door by Hasisadra (not by God, as in the Bible), when he entered the ship.

The third and last column has been preserved almost perfectly. It contains a very remarkable description of the Flood, which was so terrible that even the gods fled away like droves of dogs, and sought refuge in heaven. Then the goddess Ishtar pathetically bewails the dead or dying, "I the mother have begotten my people, and like the young of the fishes they fill the sea." At this the gods wept with her and covered their lips. For six days and nights the storm lasted, and on the seventh the calm began. Then Hasisadra looked out and wept to see the corpses floating like reeds. In the distance he sees the mountain of Nizir. The ship's course is turned thither, until the mountain stops it. After six days he sent forth a dove, which found no resting-place, and returned. He then sent forth a swallow, which likewise found no resting-place, and returned. He then sent forth a raven, which feasted on the corpses, and did not return. He then (evidently after landing, though this is not actually stated) "sent forth animals to the four winds, and poured out a libation. I built an altar at the top of the mountain, by (*sic*) seven jugs of wine I took. At the bottom of them I placed reeds, pines, and

spices. The gods collected at its burning, the gods collected at its good burning."

The resemblances between this story and the Bible narrative are so striking, that it will hardly be necessary for us to particularise them. It will be far more interesting for the reader to work them out for himself. But to what conclusions do such resemblances point? It will be seen that we were quite justified in marking the distinction which was first, I think, pointed out by Lenormant, between the smaller class of legends, which so closely resemble the biblical account in its essential features, and those ancient legends of a flood which we find here and there in different parts of the world. These latter only agree in facts which are in themselves more or less likely to have happened in case of a great local flood. All nations agree in ascribing such natural calamities to the wrath of Heaven. Men would naturally seek to escape from such a flood in a raft or boat; they would naturally make their way to higher land out of reach of the water; and would certainly offer up sacrifice on landing to appease the anger of their gods. Thus stories which originated from different local floods, and such floods were common enough in such a land as China, might have come to bear a general resemblance, without having their origin in one common narrative or in a common event.

But it is otherwise with the smaller group of stories. They must have originated in one common event, if not indeed in one common narrative. Now it is very important to bear in mind that three of the smaller group of stories are all connected with Babylon. Berosus was a native of Babylon, and the story is connected with Babylonian history. The tablets described above were found in Babylon. The Bible narratives deal with a time when the cradle of the human race was, according to Scripture, in or about Babylonia. The only difficulty is about Mexico; and the fact that the aborigines of Mexico had a story so like the Babylonian records has been thought by some to show that they at least, like the Jews, originally migrated from that part of the world. The importance of this group of stories is this, that they make it probable that the biblical account of the Deluge is no nature-myth, certainly not a poetical or allegorical invention of some imaginative Jewish writer, but rather a time-honoured tradition of an event which once actually happened to their ancestors in Babylonia. We see, then, that the scientific evidence and the historic

are not necessarily at variance, but are both satisfied if we believe the Deluge to have been a local flood somewhere in the region of the Tigris and Euphrates, which destroyed all but one family of a particular race.

But we still naturally ask, "What, then, is the exact relation between the biblical narrative and that of the Izdubar legends?" First of all, we may be pretty sure that neither is directly derived from the other. Such a picturesque detail as the incident of the olive-branch is scarcely likely to have been omitted when once it formed part of the traditional story. On the other hand, the Izdubar tablets contain much which suggests a later version. We may notice especially the more exact symmetry attained by introducing the swallow as the bird sent out on the second occasion, and the far greater ornateness and fulness of detail, which look very much like poetical elaborations of the more simple story. We may thus fairly conclude that the tablet-legend, if not probably a direct descendant, is at least a much later version of the Bible Flood.

Had the story originally a polytheistic or a monotheistic basis? To this question it is almost impossible to give a satisfactory answer. It is quite certain that either nation would have altered the story to suit their religious ideas of God or their gods. All depends upon whether the religion of the ancient Chaldees or their ancestors was polytheistic or monotheistic. Of this we have no direct evidence. But the former is most probable, (1) from the analogy of other races of mankind, (2) from what we know of the Jews themselves. We still find among them, many centuries after they had established themselves in Canaan, traces of polytheistic ideas. Jahweh seems to have been long regarded as superior indeed to all other gods, but only as one God among many, in fact, the peculiar God of the Jews. The belief that He was the only true God, was the revelation of a comparatively late time in their history. When David fled from Saul he speaks of himself as driven out from the inheritance of Jahweh, and obliged to serve other gods. Even Jonah is described as trying to flee from the presence of Jahweh by taking a ship for Tartessus. Other Semitic tribes appear to have been generally more decidedly polytheistic. It does not, of course, follow from this that the particular form of polytheism which the story of the tablets exhibits was the original. This, no

doubt, was altered as the religion of the Babylonians changed or developed.

What, then, is the religious value of the biblical account of the Noachian Deluge? Surely it lies in the lessons about God and His dealings with man, which that story teaches us. God is there represented as a righteous God, who punishes sin, not merely as a personal offence against Himself, but as an offence against righteousness, and rewards those who courageously set their face against wrong. How far the details of the Bible story are literally true, and how far they are the unconscious creation of tradition, we shall perhaps never know; but we may be practically certain that it has a basis of fact in the early history of a primitive people, and quite certain that its religious lessons are true for all time, for they are confirmed by the continuous revelation of Holy Scripture, and by our own moral and religious sense. It is quite true, of course, that God's rewards and punishments do not

generally follow righteousness and sin in this life by an unerring law. Christ's teaching with reference to the tower of Siloam (Luke xiii. 4) as well as human experience forbids us to think that; but we believe that in the end this will be found to be the general principle of God's dealings with man. And so the story of the Deluge becomes an allegory—a type of God's judgment of the world, which we believe will be only completed in the Last Great Day.

It should be added that the Flood of the Izdubar legends is only one of several analogues of the early Bible stories found in Babylonian tablets. Their general importance is that they show that much of the Jewish beliefs concerning the origin of the world and the primitive history of man was brought with them out of ancient Chaldea, and was handed down, probably in an oral form, for many centuries before it was committed to writing.

Our Debt to German Theology.

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II.

It will be gathered from what has been said that we regard the influence of German theology as, on the whole, good and healthy. Not the least gain is the example given us of thoroughness. Mark, by way of example, the subdivision of labour, which is carried out to a wonderful extent. What with us forms a single subject is parcelled out into different departments, for some of which we can scarcely find names. We take slowly to Theological Encyclopædics, and Symbolics, and Apologetics. Biblical Introduction is gaining ground among us. It is only by such subdivision of labour that justice can be done to wide and complex subjects. Another illustration of thoroughness is found in the monographs on special topics in which German students delight. There is no famous name, and scarcely any obscure name in Church History, which has not been made the theme of special exposition. Round such names as Augustine, or Tertullian, or Origen quite a literature has grown up, and is still growing. In such studies a description of the man and his times, of all that goes to explain his character, is

only introductory to a minute analysis of his works and influence. These monographs are like the studies of a great artist for a serious work. As in spade-labour, every inch of ground is turned over. It is needless to say that many of them are delightful reading. They light up one corner after another of Church History as no general account could do. The first condition of excellence is thoroughness. One charm of a great work of art is finish in detail, the labour lavished on the seemingly insignificant. What Browning says of the grammarian applies to every student—

“Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace,
That before living he'd learn how to live.”

The chief advantage, however, of our intercourse with Germany is the impulse given to the higher theology. We have spoken already of the German predilection for philosophy. It may often be carried to excess, often lead astray, often result in failure. Still it is a fine trait and an excellent supplement to the practical genius of the English character. There are defeats that are better than some victories. It is needless to discuss the