

STONEHENGE FROM THE SOUTH-EAST
From a water-colour drawing dated August 21st, 1830.

THE ENCIRCLED SERPENT

A STUDY OF SERPENT SYMBOLISM
IN ALL COUNTRIES AND AGES

BY
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- The Serpent: (see also Dragon)
- see "The Qabalah" by J. F. C. Fuller, p. 95B-97B.
- "Symbolism in Christian Art" by F. E. Hulme, p. 111-120
- "The Lost Language of Symbolism" by H. Bayley; p. 199B-203M Vol. 1
- "Allegory & the Migration of Symbols" by Rudolf Wittkower, p. 16-44, Eagle & Serpent
- Serpent mounds (+ many names for serpents)
- "The Lost Language of Symbolism", Vol. II, p. 208-223
- "Secret Mysteries" & "Queen Moo", both by A. Le Plongeon, the Mayan origin of all serpent worship "land of the serpent with the inflated breasts = Yucatan (see book notes)
- "Awaken the World Within", Hotema, p. 227-229, Serpent & egg symbol
~~see also p. 143. Serpent 3 1/2 times around the cosmic egg (also see on this "The Ultimate Cosmos of the Universe" Kuhn, p. 100 M-B on 3 1/2~~
- "The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols" by B. G. Walker, p. 268, see Ouroboros, the serpent that swallows its tail
~~see also "The Secret Doctrine" Vol 4, p. 414B the serpent in the Garden + the Lord God are one, + see Vol 2, p. 215M + p. 354-355~~
- "The Secret Doctrine" Vol 4, p. 414B the serpent in the Garden + the Lord God are one, + see Vol 2, p. 215M + p. 354-355
- "Magic" by Bouisson Gnostic sect of the Naasees regarded the serpent as the Messiah
- "The Saturn Myth" by D. N. Talbot, p. 213M, Serpent myths + p. 163



"The Gods of Eden" by William Bromley
The Ancient Serpent Brotherhood, p. 56-61

"The Natural Genesis" by Gerald
Massey, Vol. #1, p. 242-370

"Ancient Britain", George H. Cooper,
p. 199-218

"Man, Myth + Magic", A Series,
Vol. 9, p. 2528-2532
"Index", p. 3168BC (serpent) excellent

"The Supernatural" Series, "Dream
Worlds", p. 75T (A snake with
its tail in its mouth seen in
a dream inspired the formula
for benzine)

"Bible Myths" by T. W. Doane, p. 355M-
357, Serpent a sym of Jesus, Vishnu,
Venus, Buddha, etc.
+ p. 379B; p. 482 + p. 489T-492M first
meaning of the serpent + Dragon in Myth
(excellent)

"The All-Seeing Eye", by M. P. Hall,
Vol. 3 #10, Jan., 1927, p. 1-2 + 7

"The Bestiary of Christ" by L. C. Lacey,
p. 153-164 (the snake); p. 427-440 (snake
swallowing his tail - Ouroboros)

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INTRODUCTION

THE serpent symbol is the most widespread, comprehensive, and marvellous, ever conceived by the human race. In its encircled form it is the fitting representation of the Divine Trinity in Unity. Siva, the Destroyer, is proved to be not only co-equal and co-eternal with Brahma, the Creator, and Vishnu, the Preserver, but *harmonious*. They are not three eternal, but One Eternal: not rival forces, but pulsating equilibrium: not conflicting mysteries, but One ineffable Love.

Nor is this wondrous symbol only expressive of the supremely Great. The sinuous serpent is the appropriate allegory of an almost endless series of objects of thought. I have endeavoured herein to follow some of its intricate windings, and my hope is to pass on to my readers the joy and interest its pursuit has brought to me.

I gratefully thank those authors whose researches have cleared the way. A list of the works consulted in each chapter will be found at its close. My thanks are also due to those kind friends who have lent books which otherwise might have been inaccessible to me.

M. O. H.

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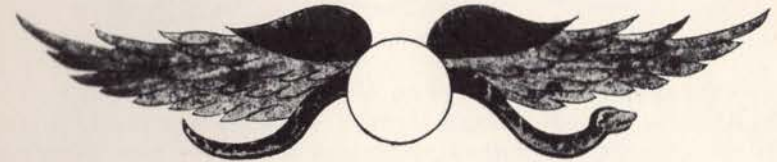


Edith Howey

CHAPTER I THE URÆON

AMONG the most interesting and prevalent symbols of Ophiolatry is the hierogram of the Circle, Wings and Serpent, known as the Uræon, or Uræus. It is a prominent feature in the hieroglyphics of Persia, Egypt and Mexico, and has been found, though more rarely, in China, Hindûstan, Asia Minor, Greece and Italy. It has even been discovered in Britain, embodied in the wonderful temple of Abury.

It is beyond doubt that this triple emblem is a symbol of the Deity. The circle is the solar disk, considered as the visible



From the ruins of Naki Rûstan, which is thought to have been the ancient Persepolis.

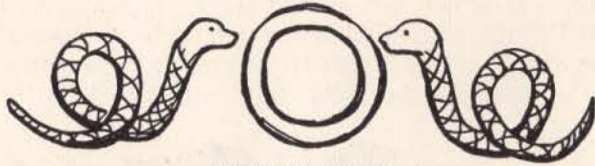
embodiment or outermost manifestation of the Divine ; or, as among the ancient Persians, representing the whole circle of the heavens, or the universe, regarded as the expression of the Creator, or simple essence of God, the Supreme Being and First Mind. The Serpent emerging from the sun is the Word, or vivifying quality of Divine Life which called all creation into existence. The wings represent the active, moving omnipresence of God's Love pervading and penetrating all. The entire emblem typifies the Deity as Creator and Preserver.

Among the sacred symbols and insignia of the Gods depicted in Egyptian sculpture, none is repeated so often as the Sphere. This Sphere, as Anna Kingsford says, is "the emblem of Creative Motion, because the Manifesting Force is rotatory ; being, in fact, the ' Wheel of the Spirit of Life ' described by Ezekiel as ' a wheel

within a wheel,' inasmuch as the whole system of the universe, from the planet to its ultimate particle, revolves in the same manner. And for this reason, and as an evidence of the knowledge which dictated the ancient symbology of the Catholic Church, the Eucharistic Wafer, figure of the *Word made Flesh*, is circular. The sacramental sphere, poised on the head of a Serpent or Seraph, is a common hieroglyph in Egyptian sacred tableaux, and sculptures bordered with processions of such emblematic figures are frequent in the ancient temples.

"The Apple, or round Fruit of the Tree of the Kalpa,—of which, by the advice of the 'Serpent' of heavenly Counsel, the Divine Archē partakes, and thereby brings about the 'Fall,' or manifestation of Spirit in Matter,—is no other than the Sacramental Host, type of the Bread of Life, or Body of God, figured in the Orb of the Sun, reflected in the disk of every star, planet, and molecule, and elevated for adoration on the Monstrance of the Universe."

The circle of the uræon is sometimes thought of as repre-



A CHINESE URÆON.

sentative of an egg, rather than of the sun or solar system, but the meaning is not changed thereby, for as here used, both are emblems of creative Life in its potential rather than its active form.

In some variations we find the circle presented as a ring, instead of as a disk or globe. Where this is the case it is probably intended to convey the meaning of time without end, or eternity.

A ring separating two serpents is the form the symbol most often takes in China, but, according to Deane, it there represents the two Principles claiming the universe.

The Mexican uræon is a somewhat grisly variation, for it shows two serpents intertwining to form the ring, and each grasps in its mouth a human head.

Still another design shows the serpent itself forming the ring by swallowing its own tail. This may be taken as expressive of the thought that God not only creates all, but is all, all substance and all time, and that the Infinite is forever reabsorbing its own output.

Dr. Fresne has some illuminating comments on the dragon

that figured in the ecclesiastical processions of the Roman Church. Speaking of rites in use at a certain monastery, he says: "On Palm Sunday there are two processions, in which the standard and the dragon precede. Holy water and a censer without fire; a cross and dragon on a pole are borne in procession. One of the boys, however, carries a lighted candle in a lantern, that fire may be at hand in case the light which is in the dragon's mouth should be extinguished. Here it is evident that the Church has preserved an ancient rite of the Ophiolaters. The sacred fire in the dragon's mouth, which so carefully was safeguarded from extinction, at once brings to mind the holy fire kept perpetually burning on the altars of the children of the sun, whilst the dragon on the pole was the standard of the serpent worshippers wherever they were to be found. The whole ceremony was probably a re-enactment of an ophite procession through the winding ways among the stones of Carnac."

It is not possible to literally convey the stupendous idea of the omnipresence of the Divine Spirit in a hierogram, but the wings of the uræon vividly suggest the swiftness of thought, which, unlimited as it is by space or time, affords the closest analogy to our conception of Omnipresence. The symbol in its entirety represents the Supreme as the Creator, Preserver, and, from an individualistic standpoint, the Destroyer.

The scarabæus, with wings expanded, was thought to present an image of the uræon, and therefore was itself looked upon as sacred by those who recognised the symbolism.

It is probable that the Caduceus of Mercury was but another form of the same hierogram, but we have given an account of this in a separate chapter, so will not enlarge on it here.

The uræon may also be recognised in the representations of the Egyptian Sun-god Re (Phre, the Sun), usually imaged as a man, with a hawk's head surmounted by a globe or disk of the sun from which the uræus asp issued.* This Sun-god was identical with the Syrian Baal and the Babylonian Belus, or Bel, which word is probably an abbreviation of Ob-el, signifying, as we have shown elsewhere, the Serpent-god.

A very interesting form of this vivid symbol has been found in Persia. Here a human figure occupies the place of honour, his waist encircled by a zone. On either side of him are the wings, whilst the serpent moves below them. The figure is said to represent the god Azon, whose name signifies "the Sun." The sacred zone that girds his waist is an emblem of the orbit described by Zon,—the sun. Hence the Greeks called girdles Zones.

* See page 23.

The name of the god may be compared with our word "azonic" (Gr. : *ἄζωνος*), "not confined to a zone." In this light it suggests the omnipresence of the deity, who as the sun, penetrates everywhere and shines alike on the evil and the good.

The uræon which forms our chapter head is the well-known



AZON, THE PERSIAN GOD.
After Kämpfer.

Egyptian hieroglyph everywhere sculptured on the porticoes of their temples and on the summits of their obelisks. We may read in "Bruce's Travels," how at the temple of Isis at Dendera in Upper Egypt, "the globes with wings, and the two serpents



AZON, THE PERSIAN GOD.

with a kind of shield or breastplate between them are frequently repeated, such as we see them on the Carthaginian medals." The temples at Luxor, Esnay, Konombu, Dendera, and Apollinopolis were profusely ornamented by this symbol. On the

Pamphylian obelisk, the serpent, either with or without wings, appears fifty-two times, whilst the whole hieroglyph was greatly used as a talisman over doorways.

The serpents which issue from this uræon are the fabulous reptiles known as basilisks (Latin: *basiliscus*, i.e. "a little king"). This creature was so named from a white spot on its head resembling a crown. It was believed in ancient times actually to exist, and was credited with extraordinary powers, its breath, and even its glance, being fatal to him on whom it fell. For further details of this royal serpent we refer our readers to the chapter specially dealing with it, and will content ourselves here with remarking that it is evidently intended as a symbol of the awful unapproachableness of the Deity. We may compare this implied meaning with the words of Exodus xxxiii. 20. "And he [i.e. Jehovah] said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live."

It has been suggested by Lord Prudhoe that the name of the Jewish Urim is derived from the two asps or basilisks *urei*, which formed the emblems of royalty in Egypt. *Ouro* is the Egyptian word implying a king. But authorities are not agreed as to the species of serpent represented in this hieroglyph, and others have supposed it to be the Egyptian asp or cobra, *Naja*

haje, which in archæology is generally known as the uræus. This is a very venomous reptile attaining a length of 3 to 4 feet,—related to, and resembling the Indian cobra *Naja tripudians*. It is of a mottled green and brown colour, and is frequently met with on the banks of the Nile. It is commonly represented in religious art as part of the head-dress of divinities and kings, and is often used symbolically to suggest royal power, although when forming a part of a ruler's head-dress the meaning suggested is that God is the over-ruler, and is above kingly sway.



ASP AS EGYPTIAN SYMBOL OF ROYALTY.

The Druids, being spiritually descended from the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Phœnicians, became the Celtic representatives of the oldest religion in the world; the worship of the sun as the source of life, and only visible manifestation of deity. They did not place the Uræon above their temple doors, but erected the whole building in the form of the serpent hierogram minus the wings. An interesting example of this construction was the serpent temple of Stanton Drew, near the village of Pensford about five miles west of Bristol, which represented the uræon with two serpents, but unfortunately barbarians have ruthlessly destroyed the stones of which it was composed, and applied them to such purposes as building and road making.

At Abury, or Avebury, in Wiltshire, about five miles west of Marlborough, on the Bath road, formerly stood what is said to have been the largest Druidical temple in Europe, this time figuring the hierogram with only one serpent.

All that we know about this wonderful monument is contained in the descriptions and printed accounts which Dr. Stukeley, who surveyed the spot, and made numerous drawings of it during the years 1720 to 1724, has bequeathed to us in his interesting work, entitled "Abury, a Temple of the British Druids," 1743, and in Sir Richard Colt Hoare's "History of Antient Wiltshire."

The temple consisted of a circle of a hundred stones of extraordinary size, placed upright at equal distances from each other, whilst from this circle two avenues of four hundred and sixty-two stones pursued a wavy line in opposite directions. These stones were of various dimensions, measuring from 5 to 20 feet in height above the ground, and from 3 to 12 feet in width and thickness.

The large circle enclosed an area of about 1400 feet in diameter, and within it were two smaller ones, not concentric. One was a double circle of upright stones with a single stone 21 feet in height and 8 feet 9 inches in breadth, which Stukeley calls the ambire or obelisk, raised in its centre. This small temple consisted of forty-three stones. The other inner temple contained forty-five stones, some of which are still standing and are of immense size. It was situated a little to the north of the first one, and consisted of two concentric circles which enclosed a group of three tall stones known as the cove.

We must now describe more particularly the two great serpentine avenues of this triple temple, which were such an important feature of this work and distinguished it from nearly all other Celtic temples. These avenues of approach consisted of double rows of upright stones, which branched off from the central work to the extent of more than a mile each. One of them turned off

from the outer circle to the south, veering near its extremity to the south-east, where it terminated in two circular, or rather elliptical ranges of upright stones. In width this avenue varied from 56 to 35 feet between the stones, which were on an average 86 feet apart from each other in a lineal direction.

The head of this gigantic serpent was formed by a terminating temple of two concentric ovals, of which the outer measured about 146 feet in diameter, and the inner was 45 feet across. This was placed upon a height known as Overton Hill, which forms the southern promontory of the Hakpen hills. As "Hakpen" means "Serpent-head" there seems little doubt that the range received its name from the temple.

The Western avenue extended about one mile and a half, and consisted of two hundred and three stones; its extremity ending



TYNWALD HILL IN THE ISLE OF MAN.
From "The Fireside," 1877.

in a point, or with a single stone, to represent the tail of the serpent.

The distance from the serpent-head promontory to the end of the serpent's tail is about two miles, whilst the area occupied is upwards of twenty-eight acres. The whole of the large circle is surrounded by a deep and wide ditch and rampart, measuring 70 or 80 feet in height from top to bottom, except where two openings corresponding to the two great avenues, were left as entrances to the temple.

The bank is now broken in four places, but these two were probably the only original ones. About half-way up this inner slope was a sort of terrace walk apparently adapted for spectators of the sacred ceremonies.

It would be interesting to discover the name bestowed on the Great Serpent by its builders. Abury, or Avebury, was written as Aubury in the ancient books of Malmesbury Abbey. This

was probably a corruption of Aubur, i.e. the "Serpent-sun," *aub* being the Eastern name of the serpent, and *aur* or *ur*, signifying light, and being a title of the sun-god. There is a remarkable artificial mound of great height, midway between the terminations of the serpentine avenues, known as Silbury Hill, i.e. the "Hill of the Sun." Its name is a further confirmation that the temple was sacred to the sun-god, and to the serpent as his symbol.

Sir Richard Hoare has given us the measurements of this hill as calculated by Edward Crocker, a scientific practical surveyor. According to these "The circumference of the hill as near the base as possible, measures 2027 feet, the diameter at top, 120 feet, the sloping height 316 feet, and the perpendicular height 170 feet; but that part of our measurement which will excite the most surprise, is, that this artificial hill covers the space of five acres and thirty-four perches of land."

Sir Richard Hoare considers that "there can be no doubt it was one of the component parts of the grand temple at Abury, not a sepulchral mound raised over the bones and ashes of a king or arch-druid. Its situation opposite to the temple, and nearly in the centre between the two avenues, seems in some degree to warrant this supposition."

Further, as Dr. Stukeley observes, "the meridian line of the whole work passes from Silbury Hill to the centre of the temple of Abury." A proof that Silbury Hill and other barrows near it, were raised before the Roman colonisation of Britain is afforded by the fact that the line of the great Roman road from *Aquæ-Solis* or Bath, to *Londinum* or London, is straight for some miles till it comes to the hill, when it diverges to the south, and again continues in a direct line for Marlborough. In one place the road-makers, with their traditional disregard of obstacles, cut through a large barrow when forming the road, but Silbury Hill seems to have baffled them.

The affinity between these serpent temples, and Sun-circles, such as those at Stonehenge and near Keswick, is so close that they must be looked upon as little more than varieties of the same kind of structure, and dedicated to essentially the same kind of worship. There is no room for doubt all were temples of the serpent-sun, and probably the ritual was identical in both varieties of structure, so we will just glance at some of the simpler forms before closing this chapter.

Stonehenge, which is also in Wiltshire, is much smaller than Abury, and figures only the circle, not the uræon. It has been suggested that Abury, being of the ruder and apparently more ancient construction, was the grand temple of the original Celts,

and that Stonehenge was erected by the Belgians, when they obtained possession of the southern parts of the island, and was intended as a rival to the other; the deep ditch called Wansdike acting as a line of demarcation between the two people, and passing between their temples.

But it has been conjectured with more probability, that Stonehenge was erected at different periods, the outer circle and inner oval of trilithons being one erection, and the smaller circle and oval of inferior stones being another. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that the latter are granite, while the others are not; but antiquaries have come to opposite conclusions respecting the priority of erection, some believing that the outer circle was the original work, and others that the inner and more simple design must have been first formed. It is against the hypothesis of Stonehenge having been erected by a nation in hostility with the Celts, that the outer stones must have been brought from the northern part of the country, beyond the frontier line of the Belgian territory.

At Merivale Bridge on Dartmoor, four miles from Tavistock, the remains of four temples have been found. Two of these are serpentine, two circular.

According to tradition the largest temple in Britain, measured by extent, was that of Shap in Westmorland, which reached from one mile south of Shap to Moor Dovey, a distance of eight miles, but the stones which formed it were smaller than those at Abury, the largest remaining being but 8 feet high.

Although it is not in the form of the uræon, yet we must also mention the remarkable temple at Classerness in the Isle of Lewis. The magnitude and singularity of this work has induced some antiquaries to believe it to be the very Hyperborean temple spoken of by the ancients. Conjecture wavers between Abury, Stonehenge and Classerness. This singular monument is placed north and south, and consists of an avenue 558 feet long, 8 feet wide, and composed of thirty-nine stones, most of which are 6 or 7 feet high, with one at the entrance 13 feet. At the southern end of this avenue is a circle of 63 feet in diameter that appears to have been originally composed of either thirteen or fifteen stones 6 to 8 feet in height, the centre being occupied by an obelisk 13 feet high, and shaped somewhat like a chair.

Beyond the circle several stones are carried in right lines, producing a cruciform appearance. The length of this cross part is 204 feet, and the total number of stones appears to have been formerly sixty-eight or seventy. Borlase made them fifty-two and Mac Culloch forty-seven.

Six miles from Oban, N.B., between Loch Feochan and Loch Nell lies a wonderful remnant of a civilisation that passed away two thousand years ago. The Serpent of Loch Nell is a mound of earth about 10 feet high and 300 long, with a head formed of a cairn of stones. The head was opened by its discoverer, Phené, in October, 1871, in the presence of the owner of the Glen Feochan estate, and other witnesses. Within was found a vault of huge stones, probably built as a tomb. Some burnt bones, a few charred nutshells, some charcoal and a flint instrument with a beautifully serrated edge, were the only contents. The tail of this serpentine mound points directly to the triple-headed peak of Ben Cruachan. Around the serpent's form are wonderful Druidical remains, though these have been partially destroyed by the ignorant inhabitants of the surrounding country-side. For instance, in 1873 a writer in "All the Year Round" records that when visiting the cromlech—a megalithic chamber—said to be the grave of the great Cuchullin, the Ossianic hero; he found that the dolmen, or transverse stone, had very recently been blown asunder with gunpowder "to form the raw-material of a grind-stone for some barbarian of the neighbourhood."

There is also a smaller cromlech, said locally to be the grave of Cuchullin's child.

The age of the Serpent is believed to be anything between two and four thousand years, and it is thought to have been formed by the Celtic Druids and their people. This mound was no doubt originally in the form of the uræon.

Cæsar has told us that the Gauls paid their highest veneration to Mercury. The god whom Cæsar called Mercury was Teut or Theuth, Dhu taith, or Teutates, i.e. the god Taute, who was no other than the Taatus of the Phœnicians. We have already remarked that the Uræon was but a variation of the caduceus borne by Mercury.

Dr. Kitto refers to these serpent temples in the following paragraph: "It is from those giant serpents which at a remote period were evidently still more colossal than that which is reported to have opposed a Roman army, or the skeleton of another, above 100 feet in length, found more recently in India, that the vague but universally spread notions must have arisen in the earliest antiquity, and been perpetuated to our own time, which typified the deluge and all great destructive agents under the form of a dragon or monster serpent. We find them embodied by the ancients in the form of dragon temples, consisting of huge stones set upright in rows, such as that of Colchis no doubt was. Such temples once existed in Asia Minor, Northern Africa, Gaul and

Britain (that at Abury in Wiltshire being several miles in length); and where their design can be traced out sufficiently in existing remains the serpentine figure is ever observed to glide through or sustain a diagram of similar materials—a circumstance which appears best explained by considering them more or less astronomical, but fundamentally reposing upon traditions concerning the ark, the preserver of human life in the act of struggling with the overwhelming element."

Although Britain was the principal seat of the Druidical serpent and sun-worship, yet vast serpent-temples built to the same design of the uræon without wings have existed elsewhere. Thus in Brittany, in the department of Morbihan, at Carnac, is the great serpent-temple of huge stones set up in winding rows that portray the figure of an enormous snake moving along the ground. There were originally eleven rows of these stones, and they numbered about ten thousand, more than three hundred measuring from 15 to 17 feet in height, and from 16 to 30 feet in circumference, one being 42 feet in girth. The whole length of this enormous temple, following its windings, is eight miles. The peasants of Erdeven, where the temple begins, used to hold an annual dance at the Carnival, describing the symbol of the circle and the serpent, but I do not know if they still follow this custom.

The name of Carnac is really Cairn-hac, i.e. the Serpent's Hill, cairn meaning a mound or heap of stones, and *hac* being an old Celtic word for serpent. There is a high mound near that portion of the temple which approaches Carnac. The top of it appears to be artificial, and it no doubt was the spot on which the altar was erected where the perpetual fire kindled by the sun was kept burning, as prescribed in the rites of the fire- or sun-worshippers of Persia and elsewhere.

The following account of Carnac was written by a lady traveller, Mrs. Stothard, more than one hundred years ago, and I include it because it gives a good general impression of the place as to surroundings and extent, though she seems to have had no suspicion of its true form or meaning and to have underestimated the size of the stones. She says:

"We hired a cabriolet, and left Auray early this morning; beside the driver, a man accompanied us, who walked by the side of the voiture, in order to render his assistance in preventing it from being upset by the large, loose and broken rocks that strewed the way, and lie in confused heaps about the road. After travelling three leagues through a desolate and wild country, we arrived at a spot about a mile from the seashore, where this curious Celtic antiquity remains. . . . Carnac is infinitely more

extensive than Stonehenge, but of ruder formation; the stones are much broken, fallen down, and displaced; they consist of eleven rows of unwrought pieces of rock or stone, merely set up on end in the earth, without any pieces crossing them at top. These stones are of great thickness, but not exceeding 9 or 12 feet in height; there may be some few 15 feet. The rows are placed from fifteen to eighteen paces from each other, extending in length (taking rather a semicircular direction) above half a mile, on unequal ground, and towards one end upon a hilly site. The semicircular direction was probably accidental, as from their situation it was not possible to see all the ground at once, in order to range them in a straight line. When the length of these rows is considered, there must have been nearly three hundred stones in each, and there are eleven rows; this will give you some idea of the immensity of the work, and the labour such a construction required. It is said that there are above four thousand stones now remaining. We remarked three tumuli, probably the graves of chiefs; they are formed of large stones placed upon each other, on a raised bed of earth. In some places the irregular line of the work is broken by the ground having been cleared for fields; in others the stones that have fallen were broken up and carried away for building. More injury has perhaps been done to this stupendous Celtic work by the hand of man than by that of time. The place was peculiarly well chosen for obtaining materials to construct such a monument, as the ground for miles round is full of rock. We could gain no information from the people relative to anything that might have been found; for in answer to whatever we said to the peasantry, we received replies in the Breton tongue, of which we could only articulately distinguish the word *Gaelic*, and this was repeated whenever we accosted them. I have been informed by a priest, but I know not how far it may be correct, that *Carnac* signifies literally, in the Breton language, *a field of flesh*. . . . The people have a singular custom, whenever any of their cattle are diseased, of coming among these stones to pray to St. Cornelius for their recovery. Such a practice may be a remnant of Pagan superstition continued in Christian times; but I must remark that St. Cornelius is the patron saint of the neighbouring church. I cannot learn that the peasantry of this country have any traditions about Carnac; and I must here observe that no relations or accounts given either by the poor or more enlightened people of Brittany can be depended upon."

Deane's account of the Carnac Dracontium casts more light on its meaning. "The course of the avenues is *sinuous*," he says, "describing the figure of an enormous serpent moving over

the ground. But this resemblance is more striking upon an actual inspection of the original. Then the *alterations* of the *high* and *low* stones regularly disposed, mark with sufficient accuracy *the swelling of the serpent's muscles as he moves along*: and a spectator standing upon one of the Cromlech hills, round which the serpent sweeps, cannot but be struck by the evidence of design which appears in the construction of the avenues. In the course of the Dracontium there are two regularly defined areas, one near the village of Carnac, which is of the shape of a *horse-shoe*, or a bell; the other toward the eastern extremity, which approaches the figure of a rude circle, being a parallelogram with rounded corners. . . . The *circle* and the *horse-shoe* were both sacred figures in the Druidical religion, as may be seen in Stonehenge where they are united; the outer circles enclosing inner horse-shoes. I cannot find any connection between the latter symbol and the tenets of the Celtic religion, unless it be intended as a representation of the moon."

As I have dealt somewhat fully with the symbolism of the horse-shoe in my book on "The Horse in Magic and Myth," I will not attempt to explain its connection with Druidism here, but only remark it is a most fascinating subject for study, and recommend my reader to follow it up.

In the *Ile aux Moines*, in the Morbihan, may be found some scanty relics of what seems to have once been another serpent-temple of less imposing proportions. The stone avenues of this terminated in an oblong mound which still retains the name of Penab, i.e. *Pen-ab*, the "head of Ab," the sacred serpent of the East. At the head of this mound was an obelisk, the well-known emblem of the sun's rays, signifying that the solar deity was adored there. According to Bryant the word obelisk is derived from Obel, i.e. Ob-el, "The serpent-god," and the Apollo of Syria, to whom these monuments were dedicated. The Greek form of the name Apollo is *Apollon*, and this word is said to be a compound of *Ap* or *Ab*, a serpent, *El*, a god, and *On*, the sun, the whole being therefore "The Serpent-Sun-God."

According to Pausanias "in the road between Thebes and Glisus you may see a place encircled by select stones, which the Thebans call the Serpent's head." Near to this Theban temple is a lofty hill upon which once stood a temple of Jupiter.

Ovid has described one of these serpent-temples as being passed by Medea in her flight from Attica to Colchis—

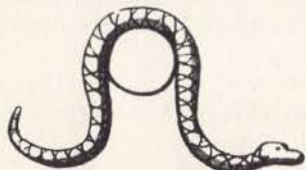
"A long-drawn serpent's image made in stone."

A very interesting description of the Druidical rites practised in these gigantic serpent-temples which seems to identify them

with the rites used in the worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis, is given in an ancient bardic poem known as "The Elegy of Uther Pendragon," i.e. Uther of the Serpent's or Dragon's Head, a title given to an elective sovereign paramount over the many kings of Britain, equivalent to "King of Kings." King Arthur's father was Uther Pendragon. The descriptive passage runs :

" With solemn festivity round the two lakes,
With the lake next to my side :
With my side moving round the sanctuary,
While the sanctuary is earnestly invoking
The gliding king, before whom the fair one
Retreats, upon the veil that covers the huge stones :
While the dragon moves round over
The places which contain vessels
Of drink-offering :
While the drink-offering is in the golden horns :
While the golden horns are in the hand ;
While the knife is upon the chief victim :
Sincerely I implore thee, O victorious Beli," etc.

The last line seems to show that these Druidical rites were not only identical with those of Egypt, but also that the Druids worshipped the Serpent-god Bel, Belus or Baal, of Assyria and Canaan.



From the Isiac Table.

Moreover from the words describing the dragon (i.e. serpent) moving among the drink-offerings upon the altar-stone, it is clear that here we have

the origin of the Ophite rites described in another chapter.

Ovid has referred to this ceremony as performed in Egypt, in the following words addressed to Isis :

" So may the serpent ever glide around the offerings."
(*" Amor.,"* lib. 2, Eleg. 13.)

From which quotation we may infer that in the temples of this goddess also, live serpents were kept that they might glide about the offerings to consecrate them.

A remarkable golden horn which was found by a peasant woman near Tundera in Denmark in the year 1639 appears to be one of the very horns mentioned in "The Elegy of Uther Pendragon." It is embossed in seven parallel circles, with pictorial designs of rude workmanship. In the first compartment of the first circle a nude female figure is seen, kneeling, with arms upstretched to heaven, whilst upon either side is a large serpent in threatening attitude. In the second compartment the same female is fleeing from a pursuing serpent, whilst the third shows

the serpent with its head averted from the figure who holds up both hands as if thanking for safety. In the second circle we find the woman seated on the ground with her hands brought together as if in supplication to the serpent. Another serpent with head and neck erect is coiled behind. The third circle pictures the woman conversing with the serpent, and in three of the remaining four circles the serpent again figures. In the pictures described above we see depicted the "gliding king before whom the fair one retreats" of the poem, and the golden horn itself seems to be just one of those named in that elegy, used for the same sacrificial drink-offerings in Denmark as in Egypt and Britain.

Southey has vividly brought a scene of Druidical serpent worship before our eyes in the following word-picture of the priest and his snake-god.

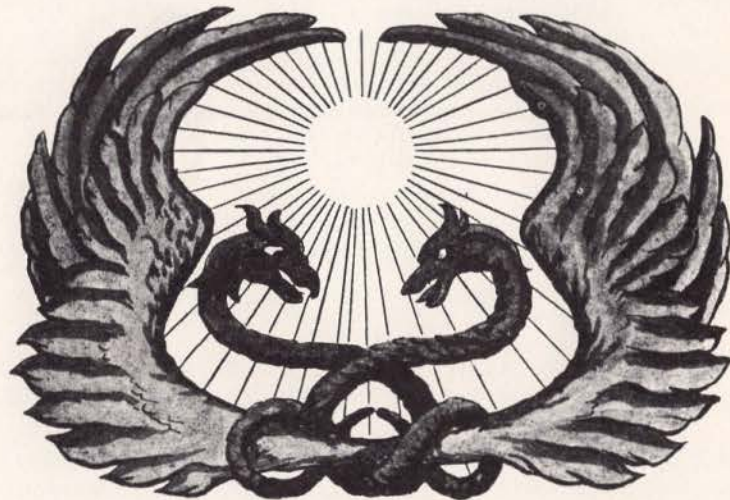
. . . " On came the mighty snake,
And twined, in many a wreath, round Neolin,
Darting aright, aleft, his sinuous neck,
With searching eye, and lifted jaw and tongue
Quivering, and hiss as of a heavy shower
Upon the summer woods. The Britons stood
Astounded at the powerful reptile's bulk,
And that strange sight. His girth was as of man,
But easily could he have overtopped
Goliath's helméd head, or that huge king
Of Basan, hugest of the Anakim :
What then was human strength if once involved
Within those dreadful coils ? . . . The multitude
Fell prone, and worshipped."

(*" Madoc,"* Bk. VII.)

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Oldfield Howey

CHAPTER II

THE SERPENT-GODS OF EGYPT

THE religion of ancient Egypt is from the earliest times closely interwoven with the symbolic worship of sun and serpent. Not only was the serpent looked upon as an emblem of Divinity in the abstract, but it was connected with the worship of all the Egyptian gods, and Plutarch was no doubt voicing the thought of his time when he explained this by saying that "it was revered on account of a certain resemblance between it and the operations of the Divine Power."

Horapollo, or Horus Apollo, the author of a treatise on Egyptian hieroglyphics, endeavours to make clear to his readers the appropriateness of the symbolism of the encircled serpent. He tells them that "when the Egyptians would represent the Universe they delineate a serpent bespeckled with variegated scales, devouring its own tail, the scales intimating the stars in the Universe. The animal is extremely heavy, as is the earth, and extremely slippery, like the water, moreover, it every year puts off its old age with its skin, as in the Universe the annual period effects a corresponding change and becomes renovated, and the making use of its own body for food implies that all things whatever, which are generated by Divine providence in the world, undergo a corruption into them again."

The origin of Egyptian Ophiolatry is lost in the mists of antiquity, but it is said to have been derived from Chaldea, which country is thought to have given it birth, and certainly produced enthusiastic adherents of its tenets. But the serpent is everywhere in the mythologies and cosmogonies of Eastern lands, so that to trace out the ultimate source of its appearance in so ancient a civilisation with any certainty is probably impossible.

According to the legendary account of the introduction of serpent worship into Egypt, Thoth, also known as Athoth, Thaut or Teuth, founded the first colonies in this country after the flood, and taught the Egyptians to worship Kneph,— "the original, eternal Spirit, pervading all creation,"—under the symbol of a serpent. Thoth, who is known as "the Reformer of

the Religions of Egypt," and was himself symbolised by a serpent, after his death was deified by the Egyptians as the god of the moon, the Divine Intelligence and source of Wisdom who uttered the words which created Heaven and Earth. In the "Book of the Dead" he is hailed as the "Everlasting King," the "Lord of Justice who giveth victory to him who is injured, and the weigher of men's souls." He was also the god of speech and hieroglyphics or letters. Because of these attributes it has been suggested that our word thought may be derived from his name.

He it was whose sword effected the triumph of Osiris over his enemies, and he, also, who assisted Isis in her distress. Besides all this, he was the god of health, and became the prototype of Æsculapius.

The Alexandrian Neoplatonists identified him with the Grecian Hermes Trismegistus, and therefore with his Roman counterpart, Mercury. But whatever name he is known under in different periods or countries the serpent is still his companion. He is often represented as leaning on a knotted stick around which a serpent is entwined. But Egyptian paintings portray him with the head of an ibis, and carrying a palette and writing reed in his capacity as scribe of the gods.

They show him wearing upon his head the feather which symbolises right and truth, and the crescent moon which is the computer of time.

The "Divine Pymander" is an abridgment of one of the Books of Thoth, by a Platonist of Alexandria.

The first Phœnician colonies after the flood are said to have been founded by Thoth, and Taut or Taaustus, supposed to be identical with Thoth, is said by Sanchoniathon to have taught the Phœnicians to worship the serpent. This writer tells us that "Taut first attributed something of the Divine nature to the Serpent, in which he was followed by the Phœnicians and Egyptians. For this animal was esteemed by him to be the most inspirited of all reptiles, and of a fiery nature, inasmuch as it exhibits an incredible celerity, moving by its spirit, without hands or feet, or any of the external members by which the other animals effect their motion; and in its progress, it assumes a variety of forms, moving in a spiral course, and darting forward with whatever degree of swiftness it pleases."

Moreover, he would have us consider that it is long-lived, and not only has the faculty of putting off its age and regaining its youth, but at the same time is increased in size and strength, and "when its measure of life is fulfilled, it consumes itself, as

Taut has written in the Sacred Books, wherefore this animal is received into the sacred rites and mysteries."

We also learn from Sanchoniathon that the Egyptians represented the world under the figure of a fiery circle, in the midst of which Kneph was pictured as a serpent. This deity, variously known as Canoph, Caneph, Cnneph, Chuphis and Kneph, was described by his votaries in the ancient Hermetic books as the "First God, immovable in the solitude of his Unity, the Fountain of all things, the root of all primary, intelligent, existing forms, the God of Gods, before the ethereal and the empyrean Gods and the celestial."

He was regarded as the first emanation of the Supreme Being, the good genius of the world, the demiurgus, the efficient Reason of all things, and the Architect of the Universe. It is in this last aspect that Kneph is represented in the Gnostic figure portraying a serpent thrusting from its mouth an egg. The hieroglyph, by the serpent, symbolises the vitalising, active, creative Force, as it is about to awaken life in the original, formless, passive Mundane Egg.

On the physical plane, Kneph is here identified with the sun, hence the rays of glory around his head. Both serpent and sun were emblems of the Celestial Father and participated in the honours that through them were paid to the Supreme.

As the solar deity, Kneph became the Christos of the Gnostics. He is intimately connected with the seven sons of Aditi (Universal Wisdom), her eighth son being Mârttânda, the Sun, whilst the seven are the seven genii or rulers of the planets. Kneph was regarded as the spiritual sun of enlightenment, or wisdom, and was therefore the patron of all the initiates of Egypt, as Bel-Merodach at a later period was with the Chaldeans.

The Grecian counterpart of Kneph was known as Agathodæmon, or "The Good God," and this title Pausanius conjectures with great probability to have been merely an epithet of Zeus. It can hardly have been a coincidence that this name was also applied to Kneph by the Phœnicians, but points to the unity of origin of the Grecian and Egyptian deities. This is further confirmed by Strabo and Eusebius, who both represent Zeus as having been adored under the form of a serpent.

Sanchoniathon speaks of himself as having written a history of serpent worship, but unfortunately it is not extant. According to Eusebius the title of this work was Ethothian, or Ethothia, so embodying the name of Thoth. Another treatise on the same subject was written by Pherecydes Tyrus. This may have been



THE CHNUPHIS
SERPENT.

a copy of the former, since he is said to have composed it from some previous accounts of the Phœnicians. It was entitled the Theology of Ophion. Although it seems quite likely that Sanchoniathon's book was named Ethothion or Athothion, as Eusebius has told us, yet perhaps it is still more probable from its subject that the latter word was a scribal error for Ath-Ophion, which would have been a name more immediately relative to the subject. Ath was a sacred title, and probably this work not only bore upon the serpent-god, but contained accounts of his worshippers, the Ophitæ, chief among whom were the sons of Chus, the Cushites, or Ethiopians, called by the Greeks Aithiopes. This people inhabited an indefinite region south of Egypt including modern Abyssinia. They were Semitic and are represented by the modern Abyssinians, who, however, are a much more mixed race. Popular modern etymology has interpreted their name as meaning "burnt faces," and supposed that they received it on account of their swarthy complexions; but the formation of the word does not bear this interpretation. It is far more likely that they were so called from Ath-Ope, or Ath-Opis, the god whom they worshipped.

Pliny confirms this view. He says that Ethiopia derived the name of Æthiop from a personage who was a deity—*ab Æthiopo Vulcani filio*.

Bryant says of the etymology of the word Æthiopian, that it would appear to mean "the race of Ophe," or "race of the Serpent," from "ethnos" or "ethos," "a collection of persons associating together from habit," and "ophis," "a serpent."

That some such etymology is correct is confirmed by the fact that the Arabians call the Æthiopians *Nagashi*, i.e. serpents, from *Nahash* or the Indian *Nāga*, a serpent. It was probably in honour of the serpent-god Kneph, that the name Onuphis was bestowed upon one of the cities and prefectures of Egypt. Kircher remarks of this name: "In the Coptic language this city was called Pihof or Nouphion, which signifies a serpent. This prefecture is called Onuphis, because here they worship the asp, as Pausanias, when speaking of the worship of animals in Bœotia, says, 'As in the city of Onuphis, in Egypt, they worship the asp.'"

One of the titles of Kneph was *Onuphis* which Garnier says: "is plainly made up of 'On,' the name of the sun at Heliopolis, and 'Ophis,' the serpent. In short *Onuphis*, which in modern Coptic is *Nouphion*, signifies a serpent in that language. 'Chnouphis' which is the same as 'Nouphis' with the K or Ch prefixed, as in the case of Kham for Ham, is merely a form of Onuphis, the Sun- and Serpent-god. In Herwart's table of Egyptian

hieroglyphics, and also in the Isiac table, an Egyptian priest is shown offering adoration to a serpent, who was doubtless the Serpent-god 'Onuphis.'"

The second Gnostic gem here pictured, shows the Chnouphis serpent rearing himself aloft, as in the act of making the mythic dart. He is crowned by the seven vowels signifying speech, the gift to Man in his "Fall." The reverse of this gem portrays his sacred creative power by the symbol of the triple "S.S.S." coiled around a phallus.



CHNUPHIS.
From a
Gnostic Talisman.

In these amulets of a later age Kneph is sometimes portrayed as winged, whilst on certain monuments he is represented as a serpent with the legs of a man, or with the head of a lion. This last mentioned mixed emblem was used by the Greeks to picture Hercules or Cronus, as the Supreme, in the Orphic symbolic theology.

The symbol of Chnouphis, or the Soul of the World, Champollion says, "is among others that of an enormous serpent standing on human legs; this reptile, the emblem of the good genius, is a veritable Agathodæmon. It is often represented bearded. . . . The serpent has various heads, but is constantly inscribed with the letters XNOYBIΣ."

Kneph was also represented by a serpent forming a circle and passing diametrically from circumference to circumference as in the illustration. This emblem was the origin of the Greek Θ (Theta). We may recognise in it the circle and diameter Θ which Madame Blavatsky tells us is the symbol of Venus or *Sukra* in exoteric Brahmanism. "The diameter, when found isolated in a circle," she says, "stands for female nature, for the first ideal World, self-generated and self-impregnated by the Universally diffused Spirit of Life."

The species of serpent which represented Kneph was named Thermuthis and was identical with the Basilicus or Royal Serpent. This was regarded in Egypt as being of a specially sacred character and decorated the statues of Isis and other deities. Indeed, all the gods were more or less symbolised or crowned by serpents, and all the goddesses were hieroglyphically represented by serpents. The priests also had serpents figured upon their bonnets.

According to Diodorus Siculus the Egyptian kings wore high bonnets which terminated in a round ball, the whole being surrounded by figures of asps. Maspero says that the representation



A SYMBOL OF
CHNUPHIS.

of the hooded serpent attached to the front of the king's head-dress was not only regarded as the badge of royalty, but was also a protector, and credited with power to destroy any who might lay sacrilegious hands on the Pharaoh. The Pharaohs claimed descent from the sun, and the reigning king was thought to be the incarnation of the solar deity, and as such received divine honours whilst living. His statue sat enthroned in a temple, received worship, delivered oracles, and was regarded as a god. The official form of address used by the Egyptian governors of provinces when sending reports to the king, was "The King, My Lord, My Sun-god," and after death each Pharaoh was worshipped as a deity.

The name of the princess who is said to have adopted Moses is given by Josephus as Thermuthis, thus identifying her with the god.

The very title of the Egyptian kings, *Pharaoh*, *Phra*, or *Aphra*, is said by Garnier to be "compounded of *Aphe* 'serpent' and *Ra*, 'the Sun,' by which they claimed descent from the Sun- and Serpent-god, while the serpent which they wore on their foreheads was the type of the power and dominion which they equally claimed in virtue of that descent." Wilkinson points out that "the connection between the goddess Ranno, or the asp, and royalty, is very remarkable; and the name *uræus*, which was applied to that snake, has with good reason, been derived by the ingenious Champollion from *ouro*, the Coptic word signifying 'king,' as its appellation of basilisk originated in the *basiliscos* of the Greeks." The Goddess Ranno also presided over gardens, and was frequently represented with a human body and the head of an asp, or altogether in the form of an asp. Because of this "we find," says Wilkinson, "the emblematic figure of an asp attached to the sculptured representations of a wine-press, a vineyard, or other parts of a villa; and the same deity appears in the capacity of protecting genius to a king, or the nurse of a young prince." Wilkinson adds that he at first supposed the image of the protecting genius Ranno to represent the god Hat, who has the same emblematic serpent.

Pharaoh is identified with the serpent whose effigy he bore, by the prophet Ezekiel, who writing 589 B.C. says, "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales. And I will leave thee thrown into the wilderness, thee and all the fish of thy rivers: thou shalt fall

upon the open fields; thou shalt not be brought together, nor gathered" (xxix. 3-5).

The sovereign god of the Memphite system was known as Phre or Ra, and his worship was of very ancient date. He is represented with the head of a hawk crowned by the serpent encircled sun, and in his right hand he holds the symbol of life.

Ra was afterwards identified with, and merged into Amen, or "The Hidden One." Amen was the chief member of the great Theban Triad, Amen, Mut, and Khonsu or Chons, and after the expulsion of the Hyksos, or shepherd kings, about 1700 B.C. by his worshippers the kings of Thebes, became the chief god of Egypt, and had all the attributes of Ra bestowed upon him. He was described as having neither equal, nor second, nor like, as his title was "One," or "One of Oneness."

During the period of the eighteenth dynasty his priests ruled with almost absolute power, and it was doubtless in his honour that the Egyptians symbolised the universe by a large fiery circle representing a serpent with the hawk's head of Ra lying across its diameter (Eusebius).

The name *Amenoph*, by which some of these Theban kings were known, is compounded of *Amon*, *Ammon*, or Amen, the Sun-god, and *Ophe*, serpent.

Dr. Budge gives the following translation of an Egyptian hymn in which Ra, the Sun, the "Egg within the Serpent's coil," addresses "Nu, the one Hu, the celestial ocean, the unfathomable Mind or Oversoul."

"Ascribe ye praise to the god, the Aged One, from whom I have come into being. I am he who made the heavens, and I set in order (the earth, and created the gods, and) I was with them for an exceedingly long period; then was born the year . . . but my soul is older than it (i.e. time). It is the Soul of Shu; it is the Soul of Khnemu (?); it is the Soul of Heh; it is the Soul of Kek and Kerh (i.e. Night and Darkness); it is the Soul of Nu and of Ra; it is the Soul of Osiris, the lord of Tettu; it is the Soul of the *Sebak* Crocodile-gods and of the Crocodiles; it is the Soul of every god (who dwelleth) in the divine Snakes; it is the Soul of Apep in Mount Bakhau (i.e. the Mount of Sunrise); and it is the Soul of Ra which pervadeth the whole world."



RA, THE SUN-GOD.

In a Theban papyrus dedicated to Harmakhis, the Sun is described as standing in his divine bark, with the coils of the serpent (Ureus) around him.

All the attributes of Amenra, or Amen Ra Harmakhis, or "the sun in the horizon," as he was variously called, including the serpent as symbol of divine power, were given to Osiris in the later Egyptian mythology, and he became the Sun-god. In him the circle of the serpent was completed, and he was also lord of the underworld and judge of the dead, thus corresponding with Pluto. He is said in this later mythology to have suffered a cruel death on earth at the hands of his brother Set, the god of darkness, but by his divine power rose again in a glorified body, and so gave to the Egyptians the belief in a resurrection. The serpent's periodical casting of its old skin furnished an illustration of this allegory. As we shall see, Osiris may be identified with Serapis, whose image, encircled by serpents, is so often found upon Egyptian tombs.

Osiris in one of his forms was the River Nile, and not only was he the river itself but, as Mackenzie says, "he was the serpent and soul of the Nile, and he was the ocean into which the Nile flowed, and the leviathan of the deep. In the Pyramid texts Osiris is addressed: 'Thou art great in thy name of Great-green (sea); lo, thou art round as the circle that encircles the Hauneba' (Ægeans?). Osiris was thus the serpent (dragon) that, lying in the ocean, encircled the world." According to the older form of the myth of Osiris' death, Osiris, or his serpent-mother enclosed the river-water in its cavern during the period of "the low Nile" before the inundation took place. A bas-relief in the small temple of Philæ illustrates this. It shows a serpent enclosing the waters in the shrine of the Nile. Mackenzie says: "After Osiris, as the water-confining serpent* was slain, the river ran red with his blood and rose in flood. Osiris, originally a 'dangerous' god, was the 'new' or 'fresh' water of the inundation. 'The tradition of his unfavourable character,' Breasted comments, 'survived in vague reminiscences long centuries after he had gained wide popularity.' Osiris ultimately became 'the kindly dispenser of plenty,' and his slayer Set, originally a beneficent deity, was made the villain of the story and fused with the dragon Apep (or Aphôphis), here the symbol of darkness and evil. This change appears to have been effected after the introduction of the agricultural mode of life. The Nile, formerly the destroyer, then became the preserver, sustainer, and generous giver of soul substance and daily bread."

* Compare with the water-confining serpents of India and Mexico.

Though thus identified with the Nile, it would seem that Osiris, who was originally but the local deity at Abydos, owed his elevation to the supreme position in the Egyptian pantheon to the fact that he was also identified with Ra, the Sun, or Sun-god. This identification is expressed in unmistakable language in "The Book of the Dead": "Ra, the soul of Osiris, and Osiris, the soul of Ra." Now the deities of ancient Egypt might be either male or female, but in neither case could the Egyptian worshipper conceive of one existing without the other. The predominant partner must have a counterpart and complement of the opposite sex. To this notion the goddess Isis owed her origin. She was the feminine counterpart of Osiris as Mut had been of Amen, and this idea was expressed in the statement that she was at once his wife and his sister. As childless parents cannot exist, we find the ancient Egyptians grouping their deities in triads or trinities of father, mother and child, none of which can be thought of without the complementary two, and which though thus inseparable, are yet each distinct. The deity who completed the triad in the case of Osiris and Isis was their son Horus, who was the counterpart of his father and therefore also symbolised by the sun and serpent.

Osiris himself was said to have been the son of Kneph and Nut (the Sky-goddess, who was an earlier form of Isis), and he was essentially identical with Kneph, whilst Isis was similarly the daughter and counterpart of her Great Mother Mut, the wife of Amen, or Ra.

We have referred above to the conception of the serpent as embodying the spirit of evil and darkness, the dragon Apep (or Aphôphis), identified with Seth, the gigantic serpent of the celestial ocean of Egyptian mythology. According to M. Le Page Renouf, we have in the story of the contest between Horus and Apep a form of the Indra and Vritra myth. Horus, usually



HARPOCRATES.

Thought to be identical with Horus.

From old woodcut.

represented as a hawk-headed deity, assumed the form of the uræon in his great battle against the snakes, crocodiles and other enemies of Ra, which culminated in this combat. Above the hole in the ground where Apep (or Set), in his "hissing serpent" form concealed himself was placed a pole which was crowned by the head of the Horus hawk.

But though thus represented in combat with serpents, Horus was only their enemy when they were considered as symbolising the evil principle. He wore the Uræus asp surrounding the sun upon his head, and when he assumed the form of the Uræon was guarded by the two snake-goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt. As a child he was nourished and concealed by the serpent goddess Uazit on a green floating island of the Nile.

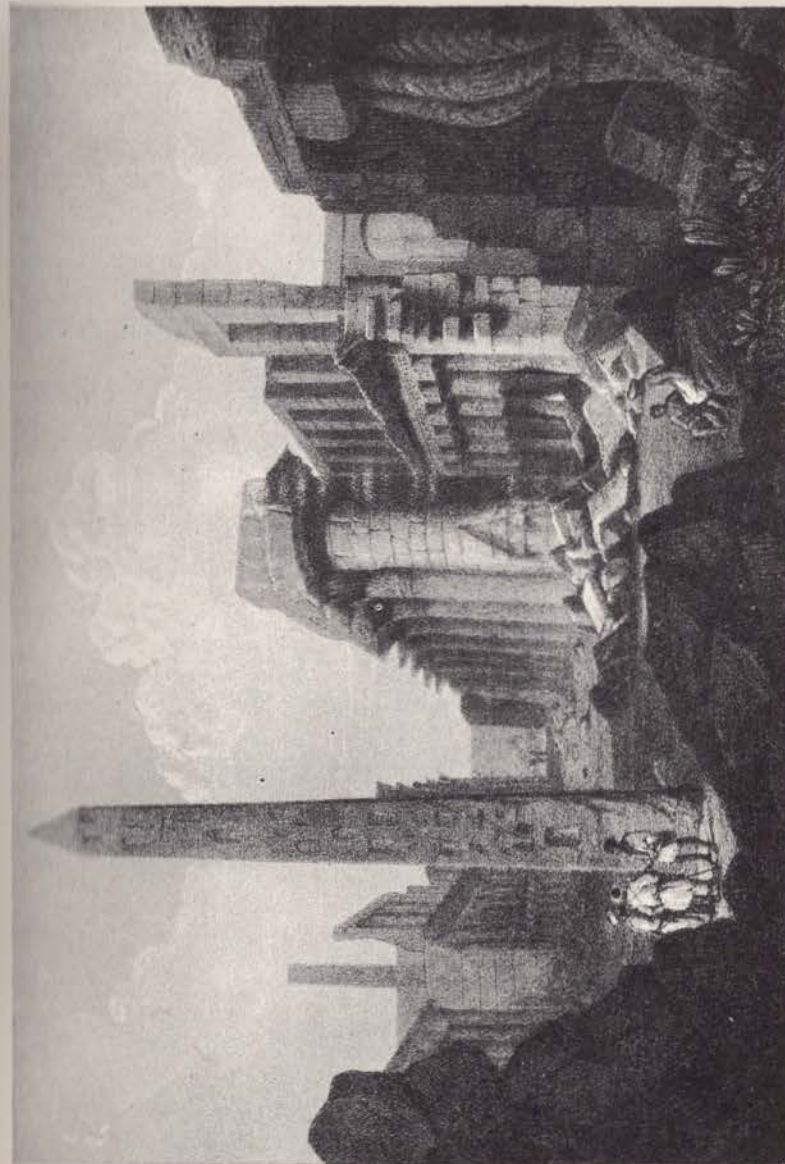
In the Egyptian "Book of the Dead," Horus, the son of Osiris, is declared to be at the same time Set "by the distinction made between them by Thoth." The encirclement of the serpent is complete.

Further light is thrown upon this by Wake who says, "In a passage of the 'Book of the Dead,' Set, according to Bunsen, is called *Tet*, a fact which intimates that Thoth inherited many of the attributes of Set. They were however, in some sense the same deities, it being through Thoth that Set was identified with Horus. We have here an explanation of the statement that *Tet*, the Phœnician *Taaut*, was the snake-god, Esmun-Esculapius, the serpent being the symbol of *Tet*, as we have seen it to have been that of Seth also. In this we have a means of identifying the Semitic deity Seth with the Saturn of related deities of other peoples."

Although all trace of the worship of Seth was obliterated from the Egyptian monuments, yet one representation has been preserved in which Seth and Horus are portrayed "united as one divinity, between the triple serpent of good." Here is a proof that Seth was originally a good and not an evil god. Seth was the national deity and legendary ancestor of the Semitic inhabitants of Lower Egypt, and the hatred with which he and the serpent Aphôphis identified with him, were later regarded was probably the result of national enmity.

Bunsen says that "the myth of Osiris and Typhon, heretofore considered as primeval, can now be authoritatively proved to be of modern date in Egypt—that is to say about the thirteenth or fourteenth century B.C."

Mr. Wake comments on this: "The fact of Typhon (Seth) having been venerated in Egypt to so late a date as the thirteenth century B.C. is a proof that the myth, according to which he was the cruel persecutor of his brother Osiris, must have been of a



RUINS OF THE TEMPLE OF EL KARNAC AT THEBES.
From old lithograph.

later origin. The primitive form of the myth is easily recognised when it is known that both Osiris and Typhon (Seth) were Sun-gods. Thus according to Bunsen, 'the myth of Osiris typifies the solar year, the power of Osiris is the sun of the lower hemisphere, the winter solstice. The birth of Horus typifies the vernal equinox—the victory of Horus. The summer equinox—the inundation of the Nile. Typhon is the autumnal equinox—Osiris is slain on the 17th day of Athyr (November). . . . The rule of Typhon lasts from the autumnal equinox to the middle of December. He reigns twenty-eight years, or lives as long.' (Bunsen's 'Egypt,' Vol. III, p. 437.) Thus the history of Osiris is the history of the circle of the year."

Mr. Cooper has pointed out that the good serpent of Egyptian mythology is always represented as upright, whilst the evil serpent is shown crawling, and this is usually the only distinction made.

The moon-goddess Isis being the feminine counterpart of Osiris, we must expect to find the mysteries of her worship equally entwined with Ophiolatry. According to Montfaucon, the Isaic table, which described these mysteries, was pictured with serpents in every part as emblems of the goddess. The particular serpent most pictured was the asp, so famous as the instrument of Cleopatra's suicide. This reptile is said to be identified with the horned viper of the genus *Cerastes*, a snake about fifteen inches long, said by Herodotus to have been common near Thebes. In the British Museum there is a head of Isis wearing a coronet of them. It is painted or carved upon the tiaras of kings, the priestly robes, and the image of the goddess, and it was the chief symbol displayed upon the sphinxes. In olden days the living reptiles were housed in Isis' temple, and sanctified the offerings of her worshippers by crawling over and around them.

Montfaucon also describes an engraved plate of gold which was found in an old wall at Malta in 1694. "This plate was rolled up in a golden casket; it consists of two long rows which contain a very great number of Egyptian deities, most of which have the head of some beast or bird. Many serpents are also seen intermixed, the arms and legs of the gods terminating in serpents' tails. The first figure has upon its back a long shell with a serpent upon it; in each row there is a serpent extended upon an altar. Among the figures of the second row there is seen an Isis of tolerably good form. This same plate no doubt contains the most profound mysteries of the Egyptian superstition."

Deane says that sculptured serpents are sometimes found attached to the breasts of mummies, but it seems doubtful

whether they were there as talismans, or to indicate that their wearers had belonged to the priesthood of Isis. A female mummy opened by M. Passalacqua at Paris wore a necklace of serpents carved in stone. The same writer tells us of a painting discovered in a tomb at Biban in Malook which pictures a sacrificial rite. "The officiating priest is represented with a sword in his hand, and three headless victims are kneeling before an immense serpent. Isis is seen sitting under the arch made by the serpent's body, and the sacred asp with a human face, is behind her seated on the serpent's tail. This picture proves that the serpent was propitiated by human victims."

Deane further says that "Ophiolatrea had taken such deep root in Egypt that the serpent was not merely regarded as an emblem of divinity, but even held in estimation as the instrument of an oracle. The priests of the temple of Isis had a silver image of a serpent so constructed as to enable a person in attendance to move its head without being observed by the supplicating votary. But Egyptian superstition was not contented with worshipping divinity through its emblem the serpent. The senseless idolater soon bowed down before the symbol itself, and worshipped this reptile, the representative of man's energy as a god."

Apis was here identified with Osiris, for Professor Petrie tells us that the Egyptians usually represented two serpents together—one often with the head of Isis, the other with that of Ser Apis (Osiris), so, therefore, male and female. Le Plongeon says that those who were initiated into the mysteries of Osiris were told that Apis ought to be regarded as a fair and beautiful image of their own soul.

The Egyptians often represented their deities with their own heads attached to serpents' bodies, and in Montfaucon's work (Vol. II, plate 207) there is an engraving of Serapis with a human head and serpentine tail, whilst another supposed image of this god takes the form of a serpent with a bull's head. This is bored through the centre and was probably intended to be hung around the neck and worn as an amulet or charm. Bayley, who gives a watermark portraying a bull-headed serpent (Vol. I, p. 201), says the symbolism implies "a combination of Wisdom the Mother, and Apis the Creator and First Cause. . . . The *cerastes* or horned serpent was as sacred among the Mayas as among the Egyptians, and this reptile probably derived its sanctity on account of its combining some of the attributes of both Bull and Serpent. *Cerastes* was a name applied by the Greeks to Zeus—the horned Zeus."

About the commencement of the Christian era the cult of Osiris was extended over Asia Minor, Greece and Rome.

We learn from Cicero that this god was also known as Opas,

and hence was often called Ob-El, or Pytho Sol, and certain pillars, with curious hieroglyphical inscriptions, which were sacred to him, were called by this name. These were very tall, and were slender in proportion to their height; hence among the Greeks, who copied from the Egyptians, everything that gradually tapered to a point, was styled Obelos, and Obeliscus. Ophel (Oph-El) was a name of the same import, and many sacred mounds, or Tapha, were thus named from the serpent-deity to whom they were consecrated.

Apthah, or Pthah the name of the Egyptian Vulcan,—the "Lord of Truth," has for its root *Aphe*, serpent. He was worshipped at Memphis from the earliest times and was the chief member of the triad of that city, whose other members were Sekhet and Nefer-Tmu. He is said to have emerged from the egg that came out of the mouth of Amun-Kneph, the True and Perfect Serpent. Sekhet symbolised the fierce heat of the sun and was represented with the head of a lioness, her solar character being indicated by the sun-disk, encircled by a serpent that crowned her head. She carried the symbol of life, and is said to have been really the goddess Isis under a local name. This is very probable, for Isis is called the "many-named" and the "thousand-named" in the hieroglyphics, and in Grecian inscriptions is described as the "myriad-named."

Sekhet is sometimes regarded as identical with the goddess Hathor sometimes as her mother, and according to Mr. Weigall, Hathor, "appears sometimes as a serpent."

It will be remembered that when Saturn devoured his male children, his wife Ops (or Rhea) saved their son Jupiter by giving her husband a large stone wrapped in swaddling clothes, in his stead, saying that it was Jupiter. The Romans therefore gave this god the title of Jupiter Lapis or Lapidus, and believed that an oath made in this name was the most solemn of all oaths. Identifying the god with the substituted stone, Eusebius says that Lapis reigned in Crete.

Now as we have already noted, Opas or Ops, was the serpent-god of antiquity, usually regarded as masculine, but here introduced in feminine form. The stone which she substituted for her son was called Abadir, which appears to be a variation of Ob-Adur (Egyptian *Ob*, or *Oub*, serpent), and signifies the serpent-god, Orus (Horus).



THE GODDESS SEKHEH,
THE SUN-FLAME.

Deane thinks Abadir may mean "Serpens-Dominas-Sol." He says "it was regarded as the symbol of the solar deity, whose most favourite emblem was the serpent; and as such assumed a conical figure to represent a sun's ray."

According to Pausanias, one of these stones, which Saturn swallowed instead of a child, stood at Delphi. It was held to be very sacred, and had libations of wine poured upon it daily, and special honours were paid to it on feast days. This stone was probably a substitute for the original altar of Saturn, where in older days children had been sacrificed to the god, and the myth we have just considered may have been composed to sanction the introduction of a bloodless offering. Some writers consider Abadon, or Abaddon, i.e. destruction, described in Rev. ix. 11 as "the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon" (i.e. "A Destroyer"), to be identical with the serpent-god of these Ophites. In Chapter XX this god is further described by the Christian mystic as "the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan." Hence it is probable that the Dutch scholar—Heinsius—is right in the opinion which he has given upon this passage, when he makes Abaddon the same as the serpent Pytho.

Abadon is identical with the Asmodeus (Heb.: *Aschmedai*, "the Destroyer") who figures in the Book of Tobit. In the Talmud Asmodeus is described as the prince of demons, and is said to have driven Solomon from his kingdom.

Since therefore Jupiter owed both his birth and his continued existence to his serpent-mother it is not surprising to find that in the renowned temple of Jupiter at Thebes Ophiolatry was practised. Herodotus writes of this: "At Thebes there are two serpents, by no means injurious to men; small in size, having two horns springing up from the top of the head. They bury these when dead in the temple of Jupiter: for they say that they are sacred to that god."

The story of the birth of Alexander the Great as related by Plutarch was doubtlessly invented to give the prestige of a divinely begotten son to this hero. His mother, Olympias, kept tame serpents in her house, and one of these was said to have been found in her bed, and was thought to be the real father of Alexander. Lucian adopted this view of his parentage.

It is also told of Alexander, that being desirous to visit the oracle of Jupiter Ammon, which was established in an oasis in the midst of the Libyan desert, he set forth upon the long and difficult journey that lay between him and his object at the risk of his life, accompanied by an escort that was in effect a small

army. As they journeyed along the desert track, a strong southerly wind so raised the sand and obliterated all signs of the way, that his guides were utterly at a loss in which direction to proceed.

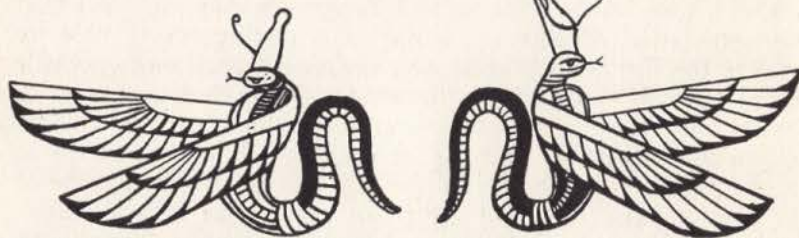
According to both the great generals of Alexander's army who wrote his history, a prodigy relieved him and his followers from the threatened destruction. Ptolemy relates that two dragons (i.e. large serpents) appeared at the head of the army, uttering sounds that seemed like speech. Alexander commanded to follow them, and they led directly to the seat of the oracle.

Aristobulus differed in his account by calling the conducting creatures ravens. Mitford remarks that these stories "have come to us only in a very succinct abstract, from their unfortunately lost works, by Arrian; which high as that writer's authority is, will hardly warrant decisive judgment on the subject. The very learned Bryant, looking to the familiarity of figurative speech among the Eastern people generally, and the particularities which we learn of the ancient Egyptians, has supposed that the appellation of Ravens, borne as a distinguishing title by some of the Egyptian priests, gave occasion for the more popular story, that of Aristobulus, to which alone he has adverted. Priests and attendants of the temples, would, in all probability, be among the guides. But the serpent, as well as the raven was among the sacred symbols of the Egyptians. If then some of the priests were, either in Egyptian or Grecian speech distinguished by the title of dragons, while others were called ravens, the difference between the two eminent writers would be utterly unimportant, and both accounts would be divested of all improbability. Whether then it were so, or whether it may have been the deliberate purpose of those eminent writers to take a simple fact as ground for fable, suited to excite public respect for their prince, among a credulous and wonder-loving people, must be left to the reader's judgment. . . . In favour of Bryant's interpretation, what Herodotus relates of the founders of the oracle of Dodona may deserve to be remembered from some peculiarities of their speech, he says, on their first arrival from beyond the sea, the people of the country called them pigeons; whence tradition passed to posterity that birds, with power of human speech established the oracle."

It should be noted that Ophiolatry was not at once destroyed in Egypt and other places where it flourished by the introduction of Christianity, but that on the other hand certain sects of the new religion embraced and united it with their own creed (see chapter on The Ophites). Bishop Pococke has given us the following interesting account of how, during his travels in Egypt,

he came across what he considered to be a remnant of ancient serpent worship.

"We came to Raigny, where the religious sheikh of the famous Heredy was at the side of the river to meet us. He went with us to the grotto of the serpent that has been so much talked of under the name of the Sheikh Heredy, of which I shall give you a particular account, in order to show the folly, credulity, and superstition of these people; for the Christians have faith in it as well as the Turks. We went ascending between the rocky mountain for half a mile, and came to a part where the valley opens wider. On the right is a mosque, built with a dome over it, against the side of the rock, like a sheikh's burial place. In it there is a large cleft in the rock out of which they say the serpent comes. There is a tomb in the mosque, in the Turkish manner, that they say is the tomb of Heredy, which would make one imagine that one of their saints is buried there, and that they



SYMBOLIC WINGED SERPENT OF THE
GODDESS MERSOKAR.

SYMBOLIC WINGED SERPENT OF THE
GODDESS EILETHYA.

suppose his soul may be in the serpent, for I observed that they went and kissed the tomb with much devotion, and said their prayers at it. Opposite to this cleft there is another, which they say is the tomb of Ogli Hassan, that is of Hassan, the son of Heredy; there are two other clefts which they say are inhabited by saints or angels. The sheikh told me there were two of these serpents, but the common notion is that there is only one. He said it had been there ever since the time of Mahomet. The shape of it is like that of other serpents of the harmless breed. He comes out only during the four summer months, and it is said that they sacrifice to it. This the sheikh denied, and affirmed they only brought lambs, sheep, and money to buy oil for the lamps—but I saw much blood and entrails of beasts lately killed before the door.

"The stories are so ridiculous that they ought not to be repeated if it were not to give an instance of their idolatry in those parts in this respect, though the Mahomedan religion seems to be very

far from it in other things. They say the virtue of this serpent is to cure all diseases of those who go to it. They are also full of a story, that when a number of women go there once a year, he passes by and looks on them, and goes and twines about the neck of the most beautiful. I was surprised to hear a grave and sensible Christian say that he always cured any distempers, but that worse followed. And some really believe that he works miracles, and say it is the devil mentioned in Tobit, whom the angel Gabriel drove into the utmost parts of Egypt."

Mr. Weigall relates the following story of a tragic coincidence which occurred during the recent excavation of Tut-ankh Amen's Tomb. One of the discoverers, Mr. Howard Carter, had a pet canary which every day regaled him with its happy song. But on the day when the entrance to the tomb was laid bare a cobra got into the house, and seized on and swallowed the bird. "Now cobras are rare in Egypt, and are seldom seen in winter; but in ancient times they were regarded as the symbol of royalty, and each Pharaoh wore this symbol on his forehead, as though to signify his power to strike and sting his enemies. Those who believed in omens therefore, interpreted this incident as meaning that the spirit of the newly found Pharaoh, in its correct form of a royal cobra, had killed the excavator's happiness symbolised by this song-bird."

The death of Lord Carnarvon, which so tragically fulfilled the omen, will long be remembered.

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CHAPTER III

THE RUINED TEMPLES OF CAMBODIA

AN article in "Illustrated Travels" describes how in the summer of 1866 the French Government dispatched an expedition from their colony of Cochin-China to explore the unknown regions watered by the great Mekong River, which flowing from the northern part of Siam, enters the sea near Saigon.

Whilst awaiting the arrival of money and passports at Compong Luong the explorers visited the famous ruins of the temple of Angkor, a former centre of Ophiolatry. "The monumental entrance, the long causeway ornamented with fantastic dragons, . . . the two vast sheets of water extending like lakes on each side, the colossal appearance of the temple itself, all showed them that they were in the presence of a work of the highest order, and of more than ordinary proportions. There they saw (as the traveller Mouhot says) not a rival temple to that of Solomon, which was doubtless unworthy of such a comparison, but the masterpiece of some unknown Michael Angelo. It required some time to comprehend the exact arrangement of a building which measures outside the moats about six thousand English yards, or nearly three miles and a half! The endless staircases and galleries, the inner courts with their uniform colonnades, seemed in spite of their symmetry, or rather on account of their symmetry, to form an inextricable labyrinth; and the enormous dimensions of each of the parts rendered it additionally difficult to grasp the magnificent whole.

"After several excursions—for thus we may call visits to a monument whose dimensions are reckoned by miles—the main plan of the edifice came out more clearly. Its form is rectangular, longest in the direction of east and west; and the four sides together measure 3845 English yards, or nearly two miles and a quarter. The principal entrance is on the west side by which the party had approached it. This entrance is composed of a gallery 254 yards in length, resting on a basement of seven yards and a half in width. The gallery is formed externally by a double row of columns, internally by a wall in which false

windows have been made with bars of carved stone looking towards the pagoda. In the centre of the gallery rises the triumphant arch, with the triple entrance described above; and at its extremities are two other openings on a level with the soil, which were used for the passage of chariots. On the three remaining sides of the enclosure are three gates of much less importance. . . .

"The pilasters at the sides of the gates . . . are covered from top to bottom with architectural roses, with figures of animals, and of legendary personages, worked out with marvellous art. Though time has covered with moss the vivid outlines of these sculptures, they are still admirable, and can bear comparison with the most perfect work of a Greek chisel. . . . Some of the blocks of stone composing the columns, roofs, and walls, are nearly four yards in length, by about one yard in breadth and thickness. No cement has been employed in bringing these stones together—but their junction is absolutely perfect."

Tempting though it is we must not spend longer in describing the wondrous architecture of these magnificent ruins. A Chinese traveller who visited Angkor in the year 1295 described the city in all its splendour, and also affirmed that snake-worship was anciently practised by the Cambodians. In 1601, Ribadeneyra wrote, "There are in Cambodia the ruins of an ancient city which some declare to have been built by the Romans or Alexander the Great."

Mr. Fergusson says that "in old Cambodian traditions collected by Dr. Bastian, and in those extracted from Siamese books by Colonel Low, nothing is more asserted and insisted upon than the presence of a Prince of Rome, or Romans, and a race of white men."

However, he believes this work to be that of a race which migrated from the Indus; and he considers Angkor Wat to be the best and greatest of the temples dedicated to the Nāga or Snake-worship.

There are snakes all over it. Cornices and balustrades are snakes; every angle of the roofs is adorned with the seven-headed snake, and there are hundreds of them; the courts are the tanks of the Nāga; and the whole water arrangements of the temple were connected with "the worship of the Snake and that only" ("History of Architecture"). The chief temples may be assumed to have occupied two centuries—between 1150 and 1350—the Angkor Wat, or Nakon Wat, as it is alternatively called,—being about the middle of this period. The mystery shrouding its origin is hardly greater than why in so short a time it should have become a desolate ruin.

Another writer, Mr. Thomson, F.R.G.S., considers however that it was "the followers of Gotama who reared this temple."

He says that "they found the snake to be the object of worship in the country, and gave it a subordinate place, making it an ornament to, and the guardian of this greatest of Buddhist buildings." It holds "a similar place to that assigned by Buddhists to the deities of Hindoo mythology, who are used as the guardians of the temple gates, and keepers of the sacred shrine of Buddha."

It is recorded in the history of the Sung dynasty, that the king of Sambotsi (Cambodia) sent an embassy to China in the year A.D. 1003, to state to the Chinese emperor that he was building a Buddhist monastery to be the means of increasing the age of the reigning sovereign, and with the request that the emperor would grant a name to be inscribed above the gateway. Mr. Thomson thinks that this Buddhist temple is most probably Nakon Wat.

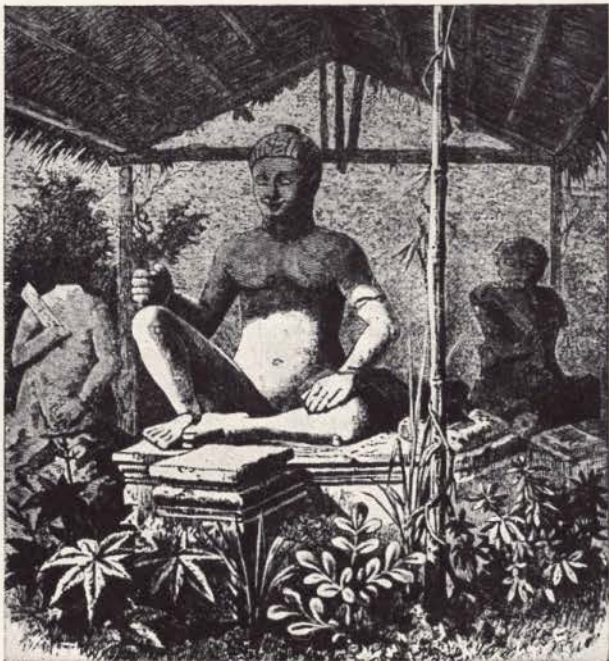
Nor is this temple the only one of the city of Angkor the Great, as it once was, in the days of its glory. Wandering through the jungle the explorers found "the ruins of monument after monument, each, if possible, more astonishing than the preceding. A few minutes' walking towards the city itself from the Bakheng, which is a kind of Acropolis to it, brought the party before a gate which belongs to the southern face of the enclosure. This enclosure is rectangular with a perimeter of about nine English miles. It is entirely surrounded by a moat of about 400 feet in width, and from 12 to 15 feet in depth. The walls are about 30 feet high. . . . The gate in front is approached by a stone bridge thrown across the moat, but wars and destructions of every kind have so ruined everything here, that in the accumulated mass of fragments it is difficult to comprehend the general arrangements of this bridge. Fortunately there are four other similar gates; and especially from those on the west and the south-east—which is traditionally called the Gate of the Dead,—we are enabled to judge what those monumental avenues must formerly have been. They are made of huge blocks of sandstone, resting on narrow arches which are scarcely large enough for the free circulation of the water in the moats. A gigantic stone dragon forms a balustrade on either side, and at the beginning of the bridge raises its nine heads like a fan; it is supported on both sides by fifty-four giants, seated, and facing outwards from the city. . . . The long causeway peopled by these strange beings of stone, the towers and gigantic sculptures with which they are covered, make one dream of the wonders of the Arabian Nights."

The explorers ere going on their way also saw "the famous

statue described by Mouhot as 'the Leper King.' Tradition says that about the middle of the thirteenth century the reigning king was afflicted with leprosy for deserting the snake-worship of his forefathers, and adopting the Brahminical or Buddhist heresy."

Another writer, M. Moura, says that the ancient Khmers of Cambodia recognised both good and evil serpents, the former of which inhabited the water, whilst the latter lived upon land.

The Buddhists of India and Indo-China also had this idea,



THE LEPER KING AT TÔM.

and M. Moura supposes that the good serpents represented the human Nāgas who became Buddhists, and the bad serpents those who refused to abandon their native serpent-worship. But perhaps it is in Egypt that we shall find the most satisfactory explanation of these ideas. As Mr. Cooper has pointed out in his "Observations on the Serpent Myths of Ancient Egypt," "the reverence paid to the snake was not merely local, or even limited to one period of history, but prevailed alike in every district of the Pharian Empire, and has left its indelible impress upon the architecture and archæology of both Upper and Lower

Egypt." It is clear that the hooded cobra of the Hindus and Cambodians was identical with the sacred uræus of the Egyptians.

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CHAPTER IV

KRISHNA AND THE NĀGAS

IT will be remembered that one of the *Avatāas* or incarnations of Vishnu was as Krishna who was at once warrior, counsellor, teacher and sun-god. The story of this deity in some parts reminds us of that of the Grecian hero Hercules, and the serpent forms a prominent feature in both. In his youth Krishna was brought up by a cowherd of the name of Nanda, and as a boy used to roam the forests of Vrīndāvana with his companion cowherds, and at eventide would join in their games. One day he wandered to the River Yamunā, which was flowing sportively, and sparkling with foam as if with smiles, as its waves broke against its banks.

But in its bed was the pool where the terrible serpent Kāliya, or Kalli Nāga (the evil spirit with a thousand heads) made its home, and so poisoned the stream that all the companions of Krishna and his cattle, who tasted of it died. Krishna not deceived by its fair exterior, jumped boldly into the lake of the snake-king, and a fearful combat ensued. The serpent entwined himself about the body of Krishna, but the divine child became so huge that Kāliya had to release him and tore off the hydra's heads one after the other, then assuming the weight of the entire universe, trampled them beneath his feet.

Still Kāliya lived, and now the serpent-wife and children of the monster came, and, worshipping the victor, begged mercy for their relative. Krishna took pity on them, and releasing the snake-king, commanded him "Begone quickly into the abyss: this place is not proper for thee since I have engaged with thee, thy name shall remain through all the period of time without dismay." So Kāliya prayed forgiveness, pleading that he had not recognised the Lord. He then departed into the abyss, and the Yamunā River became pure and wholesome.

The triumph of the young god is a favourite theme of Indian poet and painter, and Mr. Leupolt tells us of a picture he saw in India in which Krishna's life is divided into two periods: (1) Krishna suffering.—A large serpent having entwined itself round him, is biting him in the heel. (2) Krishna triumphant.



THE TRIUMPH OF KRISHNA.
From an Indian drawing.

—Krishna has disentangled himself from the serpent, and is bruising its head with his heel.”

None of the Indian sculptures contain a more beautiful figure than the representation of Krishna's triumph. The young god, leaping and smiling, rests one foot upon the malignant Kāliya's head, whilst he grasps in both his outstretched arms the body of the foe. For centuries the stone has immortalised his glad smile of victory. And this, although the serpent mortally bit his heel.

“They who trust in me,” said Krishna, “know Brahm: I am the Victim, I am the Sacrifice, I am the Worship, I am the Road of the Good, the Creator, the Witness, the Asylum and the Friend.”

The doctrine of the Encircled Serpent was well understood by Krishna, and we find him when instructing Arjuna to recognise God in all things, saying: “Of serpents Vāsuki am I. And I am Ananta of Nāgas.” And Arjuna, in the same spirit replies:

“Within Thy Form, O God, the Gods I see,
All grades of beings with distinctive marks;
Brahmā, the Lord, upon His lotus-throne
The Rishis all, and Serpents, the Divine.”

Here then is the recognition in Indian thought of the eternal oneness of apparently opposing principles. This it is that causes the Hindūs to include Krishna's foe, Kāliya, in their worship, on the day which they annually keep sacred to serpents,—or rather to the Nāgas or demigods in the form of serpents, who are mentioned in detail in the Padma, and Garuda Puranas. On this day they smear the doors of their houses with the sacred cow-dung and Nim leaves, as a sign to poisonous reptiles that they must do no harm, since the place is holy. At Muttra the men search out the snake-holes beforehand, and the women pour offerings of milk into them. They also make charcoal drawings of a serpent on the walls of their houses, and do reverence to it.

A less spiritual interpretation of the allegory of Krishna's conquest of Kāliya has been suggested by some commentators, to the effect that the Dasyus, or aborigines of India, were symbolised by a serpent, and that Krishna, the Aryan prince, vanquished and routed them. A similar meaning is no doubt implied by the statements that Krishna destroyed the serpent-king of Egypt and his army of snakes, and that he conquered the dragon into which the Assoor Aghe had transformed himself for the purpose of swallowing him up.

The serpent-bite in Krishna's heel by which he met his death is also said to be allegorical, and to imply that he was mortally wounded by an arrow which struck his foot. One version thus relates the story.. The serpent was a much used and

appropriate symbol for an arrow, the swift and silent inflicter of a poisonous and deadly wound.

A figure closely associated with Krishna in his warfare against serpents is the human-headed eagle Garuda, a *vāhana* or vehicle of Krishna. A pillar surmounted by a carving of this bird is often erected in front of the temples that are dedicated to Krishna as Vishnu.

Just as the serpent is thought by some commentators to have been the symbol by which certain tribes were named, so Garuda is considered by them to be more than an allegorical being. According to this theory Garuda, or the eagle, was the totem of one of the Solar tribes of Patala which claimed to be specially favoured by the Sun they all worshipped. In the Mahābhārata a list of forty-eight Garuda chiefs is given, said to have been all specially distinguished by their achievements.

The Garudas were fierce and warlike, and perpetually combating their neighbours. The story of the eagle devouring the serpents, and destroying the elephant and the tortoise, is in this light seen to be but a figurative description of intertribal warfare.

Krishna was the leader of the Garudas and adopted their totem as his ensign. Hence the poets have spoken of his being borne by the eagle on his warlike forays against the Asuras or Serpas,—tribes, which like his own claimed to be of Solar race, though in later mythology destined to become the Nāgas of Patala, which was first described as a subterranean region, and eventually became the Brahmanical Hell. The term Nāga was then applied to those descendants of the Solar tribes who had retained the religion and customs of their forefathers. These are now all more or less orthodox Hindus, but the old legends are not forgotten and the ancient festivals are yet celebrated in honour of the Nāga demigods, though the Nāga people disappeared from history about the time of the downfall of the Buddhist religion (Oldham).

The Brahmanic revival seems to have been fatal to both, and the Nāgas, like the Buddhists, were probably induced or compelled to accept orthodox Hinduism, whilst their gods were relegated to the rôle of demons.

A reflection of the persecution endured by the Nāgas at the hands of the Brahmins is visible in the legend of the serpent sacrifice, an instance of which is recorded in the Mahābhārata, and in the Panjāb is the motif of one of the most popular folk tales. According to tradition the raja Parikshit abducted the daughter of Basak Nāg, who in return invaded his territory with a Nāga army. In the fight that followed Parikshit was killed, and his son, in revenge, carried on an exterminating war with the Nāgas

which ended with the "serpent sacrifice" held at the instigation of the Brahman Utanka. The victims so designated were the Nāga prisoners taken in the raid, who were buried alive with Brahmanical rites.

Originally, the Asuras or Nāgas were not only a civilised people, but a maritime power, and in the Mahābhārata, where the ocean is described as their habitation, an ancient legend is preserved of how Kadru, the mother of serpents, compelled Garuda to serve her sons by transporting them across the sea to a beautiful country in a distant land, which was inhabited by Nāgas.

Apparently Garuda here symbolises the captain of a ship, or perhaps the ship itself. After various adventures Kadru's serpent sons arrived in the country of Ramāniaka on the coast of Malabar.

The Asuras (Nāgas) were expert navigators, possessed of very considerable naval resources, and had founded colonies upon distant coasts. "The trident of Neptune was borrowed from the Nāga demigods, and the conch-shell of the Tritons was used by the Asuras before them" (Oldham.)

Because of this maritime power Nāga chiefs are often spoken of as reigning in countries in or beneath the sea, and thus they came to be regarded as semi-divine or fairy beings by those who never left their own land. De Visser is evidently adopting this point of view when he says that "The Nāgas are semi-divine serpents which very often assume human shapes, and whose kings live with their retinues in the utmost luxury in their magnificent abodes at the bottom of the sea, or in rivers and lakes. When leaving the Nāga world they are in constant danger of being grasped and killed by the gigantic semi-divine birds, the Garudas, which also change themselves into men" (p. 7).

The sacred bird of Vishnu, Garuda, worshipped by the Vaishnavas in the golden age of Hindu idolatry, like its master, Krishna, seems to have occupied a somewhat anomalous and uncertain position in relation to serpents, being occasionally represented as their friend, but more often as their deadly foe;—though as we have seen, it was descended from, and is of one stock with the Nāgas.

According to Moor, Garuda was a compound creature, half bird, half man, and Fergusson says, this being "is almost certainly the hawk-headed deity of Assyria."

An Assyrian origin of Garuda is quite possible, for, as Mrs. Speir points out, there are "The Buildings, Columns, Excavations, and Coins, showing that art—glorious art from Assyria and

Greece!—gave to hidden Buddhism the torch which has made her conspicuous to the Universe.”

Garuda is said to have wedded a lovely woman, and thereby to have alarmed and roused to war against him the serpent tribes. For having already experienced his tender mercies, they dreaded lest his progeny should exterminate their race. In the fight that their fear had instigated, Garuda himself slew all but one, which he placed as an ornament around his neck.

According to some legends, Garuda was born from an egg, and flying to Indra's dwelling, extinguished the flames that surrounded it, overcame the guardian *devatas*, and carried off the ambrosia which was the object of his raid. A few drops of this wondrous liquid fell upon some "Kusa" grass which thereby became eternally consecrated. The serpents discovering the immortal nectar, greedily licked it up, though by doing this, they cut their tongues upon the sharp edges of the grass, so severely that they have ever since remained forked; but their zeal was amply rewarded in spite of the suffering it entailed, for they gained immortality by partaking of the life-bestowing ambrosia.

Garuda was thus unintentionally the benefactor of his foes. None the less, Naganteka, or Destroyer of Serpents, is one of his titles, and he is said to have greatly aided Krishna in clearing the country around Dwarka from ferocious beasts and reptiles. He also assisted Rama in his last battle with Ravana by destroying the serpent arrows of the latter.

Some ancient coins depict Garuda with snakes or elephants in his talons and beak, and on a temple frieze at Sanchi he is represented as holding in his beak, presumably for the purpose of destroying it, a five-headed Nāga, although in this very temple the Nāga was accorded divine honours.

Garuda is sometimes represented as the guardian of the passes that lead to the Hindu Garden of Eden, resisting and destroying approaching serpents (or sin) of which as the vahan or vehicle of Vishnu, he is the deadly enemy. But in the Epic of Rama, Garuda and the Nāgas are represented as enshrined together and equally honoured. The description says:

“Where the shrines of great Immortals stood in order thick and close,
And by bright and blazing altars chanted songs and hymns arose.

Holy spirit of Gayatri, goddess of the morning prayer,
Vasus and the hooded Nāgas, golden-winged Garuda fair.

Shrines of all these bright Immortals ruling in the skies above,
Filled the pure and peaceful forest with a calm and holy love!”

(Ramesh Dutt's Trans.)

Garuda may be compared with the magic Roc of Oriental mythology, which was also the mortal enemy of serpents; with the great bird Voc of Central American mythology, which Spence tells us is connected with a serpent-swallowing episode, and with the Egyptian hawk-headed Horus who waged war on serpents.

Indian religious thought has undergone many modifications and changes since Krishna walked on earth, and the orthodox Hinduism of to-day is not that described in the Mahābhārata and other epic poems. It is said that Buddhism is now almost extinct in India; large numbers of the people have become Mohammedans. Western civilisation has had an iconoclastic influence and modern scepticism has invaded the ancient faiths. But even yet the old gods are not dead. The Nāga rajas are revered as demigods, the serpent is sacred, and Indra and his Devas have their shrines and their worshippers as in the days whose memories are preserved so vividly in the ancient literature.

A remnant of the Nāgas of the Mahābhārata still survive in the mountainous country that borders Kashmir. This country claimed to be under the special protection of the Nīla Nāga and other serpent-gods from remote times, and the serpent-gods Sesha, Vāsuki, Bāsdeo, Takshaka, and others are even now worshipped by them with the ancient rites, probably almost without variation in form from that which prevailed of old.

These serpent-gods are not regarded as the controlling powers of dangerous reptiles who must be propitiated, or even as merely symbols of holy things. They are looked on as the deified rulers of this ancient people whose racial symbol was the Nāga, or hooded serpent, and whose god was the sun. These people do not call themselves Nāgas, for this was not a tribal name, but was originally a descriptive term applied to those who revered the Nāga or hooded serpent. They are known as the Takas or Kathas.

The city of Taxila is the ancient Nāga capital, Takshasita; Taxiles or Omphis. The ally of Alexander the Great was a Takha raja, and during his reign two serpents were kept at Taxila for purposes of worship, probably as ancestral symbols, for the Nāga temples are not dedicated to the serpent, but to the Nāga rajas, the ancient rulers of the race. As we might expect, these are usually worshipped in human form, but each is represented with the hoods of three, five, seven, or more serpents forming a canopy over his head to denote his divinity. In some places Nāgas of lesser fame are represented as men attended by snakes but without the serpent canopy.

Temples are also to be found dedicated to Nagini Devis, the wives of Nāga chiefs. Within the temples, besides the image of

the Nāga raja with the serpent canopy above his head, are a lamp, an incense burner, and a sūngal, or iron scourge exactly resembling that held by the Egyptian Osiris. There are also votive offerings from the worshippers which usually take the form of iron tridents or models of serpents in iron and stone, whilst in most of the temples to Vāsuki or Bāsdeo in the Chenab valley beside the figure of the Nāga raja is an image of his Wuzir.

We learn from Mr. Frazer that a "form of communion with the sacred snake is observed by a Snake Tribe in the Punjab. Once a year, in the month of September, the snake is worshipped by all castes and religions for nine days only. At the end of August the Mirasans, especially those of the Snake Tribe, make a snake of dough which they paint black and red, and place on a winnowing basket. This basket they carry round the village, and on entering any house they say :

" ' God be with you all !
May every ill be far !
May our patron's (Gugga's) word thrive ! ' "

" Then they present the basket with the snake, saying :

" ' A small cake of flour :
A little bit of butter ;
If you obey the snake,
You and yours shall thrive ! ' "

" Strictly speaking, a cake and butter should be given, but it is seldom done. Everyone, however, gives something, generally a handful of dough or some corn. In houses where there is a new bride or whence a bride has gone, or where a son has been born, it is usual to give a rupee and a quarter, or some cloth. Sometimes the bearers of the snake also sing :

" ' Give the snake a piece of cloth,
And he will send a lively bride ! ' "

" When every house has been thus visited, the dough snake is buried and a small grave is erected over it. Thither during the nine days of September the women come to worship. They bring a basin of curds, a small portion of which they offer at the snake's grave, kneeling on the ground and touching the earth with their foreheads. Then they go home and divide the rest of the curds among the children. Here the dough snake is clearly a substitute for a real snake. Indeed, in districts where snakes abound the worship is offered, not at the grave of the dough snake, but in the jungles where snakes are known to be. Besides this yearly worship, performed by all the people, the members of the Snake Tribe worship in the same way every morning after a new moon.

" The Snake Tribe is not uncommon in the Punjab. Members of it will not kill a snake, and they say that its bite does not hurt them. If they find a dead snake they put clothes on it and give it a regular funeral."

They say that it was once a great king. But every hundred years the snake changes its form and becomes either a man or a bull.

Snake-charmers can recognise the serpent through its transformation, and ask it to reveal hidden treasure. It will do this in return for a drop of blood from the finger of a first-born son.

Frazer tells us further that "in Behar during the month of *Sawan* (August) crowds of women, calling themselves Nagin or 'wives of the snake,' go about for two and a half days begging ; during this time they may neither sleep under a roof nor eat salt.

"Half the proceeds of their begging is given to Brahmans, and the other half spent in salt and sweetmeats, which are eaten by all the villagers."

The day known as the Nag Punchami, specially sacred to serpents, occurs in this month, and, according to Shepherd, is marked in their calendar with the following words :

" On the fifth of the light half of (the month) *Srawan* (or *Sawan*) is the birthday of the Snake-king. On that day they worship snakes. In Benares is a well called the Snake-well ; there on this day the people bathe. By worshipping snakes, there is no fear of snakes." To the average European such customs convey no message, but this is not always because they have none.

Love, and reverent recognition of the essential Divinity of all that lives, effectually cast out fear.

The temples are supplemented by numerous small shrines which hold rudely sculptured images of the sacred reptiles, and images of the Nāga placed under trees ; to all these symbols offerings are made. Mr. Oldham says :

" In these primitive shrines I could discover no trace of any connection between the Nāga and the Phallus. The worship is simply that of the Nāga demigods, as descendants of the Sun, and ancestors of the Solar race. The Devas, too, whose temples are found throughout the Himālaya, are deified Kshatriyas, and ancestors of the people. The rites and ceremonials at the Nāga temples are essentially the same as those at the temples of the Devas. And it is very unlikely that any important change has occurred in this respect since the ancient times when Swārga was occupied by the Nāgas and the Devas. In each case, goats and sheep are sacrificed, votive offerings are made, lights and incense are burned, the smoke of cedar is used for purification and protection against evil spirits, circumambulation of the temple takes place, and the deity is consulted through his inspired

prophet," who "sometimes passes through the fire, or inhales the smoke of burning cedar, and almost always does penance with the sūngal or iron scourge. Music and dancing form an important part of the ceremonial. . . . I have seen worshippers dancing before the litter, in which the representation of the deity was travelling, as David danced before the Ark."

As may be inferred from the above the Nāgas do not always remain in their shrines. With proper rites, and attended by their priests and office bearers they visit one another's festivals. These are held regularly in all the chief temples, but are not the only occasions of the gatherings of the great ones, which take place whenever an emergency of sufficient importance arises, thus enabling the people to obtain their guidance through the medium of their inspired prophets. One of these parliaments seems to be referred to in the Mahābhārata where we read how the gods (Devas), having met together upon the banks of the Sāraswati, enthroned the Nāga Vāsuki as monarch over all serpents (Salya, "Gudāyudhya," p. xxvii, 149). Oldham thinks "it is probable that when in the epic poems we read of the commands of Indra, or other divinities, the utterances of the inspired prophet are referred to."

He tells us of a Nāga Kavū, near Travancore, which belongs to "a family whose ancestors, according to ancient tradition, were amongst the Nāgas spared when the Khāndava forest, in the Panjāb, was burned by the confederate tribes led by Krishna and Arjuna.

"Every male member of this family bears the name of Vāsuki, the raja of Pātalla and the deified hero of the Nāga people of Northern India. The members of this household are priests of the temple, and in the solemn procession, which circumambulates the shrine at the festivals held in honour of the Nāga raja, the image of the serpent-god is carried by the eldest female member of the family, who is required to remain celibate."

To the north and east of the country of Takshasita lay the ophiolatrous countries of Uraga and Abissara, and beyond these was Kashmir. One of the chief dynasties in Kashmir claimed descent from Karkotaka, a Nāga demigod. According to Abdul Fuzl, in no fewer than seven hundred places representations of the Nāga deities were set up for worship though only forty-five shrines were sacred to Siva, sixty-four to Vishnu and three to Brahma. The Nāgas were no doubt considered as intermediary and intercessory deities providing an avenue of approach to the great Trinity, even as do the saints and angels of Catholic Christianity. It will be seen that they occupied an almost exactly similar position.

Purchas has informed us that a king of Calicut built cottages for live serpents, and that he tended them with extraordinary care, and made it a capital offence to kill a snake in his dominions. Purchas adds in explanation that "the natives looked upon serpents as endued with divine spirits."

Forbes says that certain gardeners in Guzerat would never allow snakes to be molested, but called them "father" and "brother," whilst the head gardener "paid them religious honours," and Frazer mentions that natives of Travancore never talk disrespectfully of serpents, but speak of the cobra as "the good lord" (*nalla tambiran*) or "the good snake" (*nalla pambu*).

Mr. Oldham, writing in 1905, tells us that "at many towns, during the festival of the Nāgapanchami, which is held in honour of the serpent demigods, living Cobras were, and probably still are, brought in from the country for sale. These were bought up by the townsfolk, who turned them loose to free them from captivity, as an act of religious merit." He adds: "It must not be supposed that all snakes are worshipped. The Nāg alone is sacred."

The serpent thus associated with the mysteries is the cobra-di-capella, and it naturally follows that the natives look upon it as a crime to kill one of these. The slayer must consider himself polluted for three days. On the second day of his penance milk is poured upon the cobra's body, and on the third day the killer is free from his uncleanness. He probably owes it to British rule that he escapes so lightly, as Purchas has told us tradition says that in olden times the slayer was subject to the heaviest penalties.

Among the Dravidian people of the south, if a cobra is slain, it is burned as if it were a human body; and it is even provided with a winding-sheet. Other snakes, generally speaking, may be slain without compunction. The spectacle snake is however an exception to this, for Colonel Briggs is quoted in the "Penny Cyclopædia" as saying that this serpent "is sometimes worshipped in temples in India, where it is pampered with milk and sugar by the priests," and he notices it as a surprising instance of the effect of kind treatment in subduing the most irritable spirits. "The Hindus," says the Colonel in continuation, "have a notion that the sagacity and the long-cherished malice of this worm are equal to that of man. I have seen them come out from their holes in the temples, when a pipe has been played to them, and feed out of the hand as tamely as any domestic animal; and it is when in this state of docility, so opposite to their shy but impetuous nature, the common people believe that the Deity has condescended to adopt that form."

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CHAPTER V

BUDDHA AND THE NAGAS

WHEN, as the result of the Great Renunciation of Gautama Buddha, the doctrines he preached became established in Eastern Asia, the Nāgas, those strange serpent demigods of ancient India, being too firmly established in the affections of the people to be easily uprooted, were adopted by the new creed. They evidently have a great deal in common with the dragon demigods of China if they are not really identical, at least in origin. Like those beings they are the guardians of the four quarters of the universe, and although primarily water deities are described as being "Lords of the Earth," even as the Babylonian sea-god Hea was known also as Enki, "The Lord of the Earth."

As sea-deities they control the winds and tides, and one of the Nāga kings is Sagara, who may be identified with the Japanese Neptune.

According to the doctrines of Buddhism, Sesh Nāg is the ruler of the demigods or Nāgas who have their headquarters beneath the sacred mountain Méru, though they also dwell below the waters of the human world. There they live in great luxury and wealth, being especially rich in gems.

These beings generally wear the form of the spectacle snake (*Naia tripudians*) with the extended hood, but many of the deeds they are said to accomplish could only be done with the aid of the human body, and they can assume this shape at will. When in it, they may be recognised by a serpent's form poised over or on their heads, as the Egyptian monarchs wore the Uraeus asp upon their foreheads. Human-shaped Nāgas are represented in Indian drawings as worshipping Buddha whilst they stand in the water, thus emphasising their connection with the element.

A very interesting account of these serpent demigods is given by Dr. Davy, who is quoted in the "Penny Cyclopædia" as saying:

"The Nāga-bhawené, that lies under Asoora-bhawené, is ten thousand leagues in circumference. It is a hollow sphere, without mountains or hills, lakes or rivers, and entirely destitute of

vegetation, with the exception of a single tree, called Parasattoo, that answers for all others, bearing not only an immense variety of flowers and fruits, but everything else that is desirable.

"The Nāga-bhawené is the abode of a numerous race of snakes, similar in kind to the hooded snake (Cobra Capello), and of great size, beauty and power, capable of passing from one part of the world to another, and shining like gods; so that though they have no light but that which emanates from their own bodies, they enjoy perpetual day infinitely brighter than ours. In their former lives on earth they were persons of remarkable purity and goodness, almost deserving of becoming gods; but their high virtues were sullied by some vice, particularly that of malice, to which they owe their present forms. Though snakes, they are Bhoodists, and are in possession of a relic and worship in temples. They reside in well-furnished houses, and eat and drink, and enjoy society. By merely wishing, they immediately have any article of food they want; and whatever it may be, it always appears in the form of a frog. They are under a regal government, and are distributed into castes like the Singalese. Their king, Mahakilla-nāga-rajaya, is in every respect superior to the rest; it was with his assistance that the gods and Asooras churned the milky sea; he wound himself round a rock, and they pulling at his two extremities, set the mass in motion and accomplished their work.

"Were these snakes disposed, they could destroy the whole of the inhabitants of the earth by a single blast of their poisonous breath; but they are naturally mild and benevolent and do harm only when provoked. In consequence they are rather venerated than dreaded, and it is on this account that the common hooded snake is so much respected."

The Nāgas (*nāga* is Sanskrit for serpent) described by Dr. Davy have given their name to a race of serpent worshippers who claim descent from an ancestral serpent. They partly occupy the former territory of Nagpur or Nagpore in the south of British India, and were, until recent years, addicted to human sacrifices, whilst their incessant raids into more orderly provinces gave much trouble to the authorities, until in 1881 their country was made into an administrative district and garrisoned by a native regiment.

We may also find their name in Nagpur (*Nagapura*, "the town of serpents") a walled city of British India. Here, in the old temple near the palace, is a five-headed snake elaborately coiled, whilst a similar image may be found in the temple near the Itwarah gate.

Sometimes the tree-spirits (dryads) are called Nāgas, but

usually the latter are especially water-spirits, and according to Kerns are generally represented "in human shapes, with a crown of serpents on their heads," though also as snake-like beings resembling clouds.

It is typical of this absorption of the Vedic faith that the serpent, rather than the tree, is now the special symbol of Buddha, and a large snake-crowned head of Buddha may be seen in the fourth volume of the "Bengal Journal."

Let us see if we can follow the train of thought and circumstance whereby Buddhism was so successfully engrafted on to the older faith. Tree and serpent worship are intimately associated with religious notions of many Buddhist peoples, and, as Mr. Wake has pointed out, "This is shown curiously in the early legends of Kambodia. These are said by General Forlong to present two striking features. First a holy tree, which the kingly race, who came to this serpent country, reposed under, or descended from heaven by; secondly that this tree-loving race are captivated by the dragon princess of the land. It is the serpent-king, however, who builds the city of *Nakon Thom* for his daughter and her stranger husband. It is not improbable that Buddhism originated among a people who were both tree and serpent worshippers, although the former became more intimately and at an earlier period associated with its founder."

If Mr. Wake is right in his conjecture,—and probability is certainly on his side,—the Buddhist missionaries would naturally recall their own past-ophiolatrous convictions as common ground whereby they might easily approach the people they sought to proselytise, but, according to Mr. Fergusson, although Indian Ophiolatry owed its establishment to Nāga tribes who were Buddhists, yet its supporters suppressed the worship of the serpent, elevating tree worship in its place. Certainly Buddha is said to have personally inaugurated the worship of the Bo-tree beneath the shade of which he attained to Buddhahood, and to have told his followers that he who worshipped it, would receive the same reward as if he worshipped Buddha in person.

But notwithstanding a certain tendency to replace the serpent by the tree, as the holy symbol, snake-worship appears to have been closely entwined with Buddhism and to have more than held its own, as may be confirmed by a visit to the Amrāvati sculptures in the British Museum.

In these, and other works, the Nāga people are represented as worshipping Buddha or Buddhist emblems, and in some cases the emblems are depicted as being adored in the same temple as the Nāga (see "Tree and Serpent Worship," plate LXX). In some of the Amrāvati designs the serpent actually occupies the place

of honour in the dagoba usually assigned to Buddha himself (B. Museum, Nos. 45, 74, 81, 89). And in others Buddha is represented as having over his head the expanded hoods of a seven-headed Nāga, which we have already seen was the special distinction of a Nāga raja.

Sakya Buddha himself claimed descent from Maha Sammata, said to have been the first monarch of the world, and of the race of the sun. His connection with the serpent is easy to trace, and seems to have been instantly recognised, for, at his very birth, two dragons are fabled to have descended from the clouds to bathe the divine babe, one spouting warm water and the other cold. He was addressed by his disciples as Mahānāgo, or great Nāga (*Paryanavagga* 195) and all through his life he was on terms of friendship with the Nāga people, whilst at his death they claimed to share his relics, and built stupas over them. Even in the time of the Chinese pilgrims, Buddhist sramanas were worshipping the Nāga, and celebrating the ritual at Nāga temples.

Mr. Oldham says the evidence "that Buddha and the Sakyas were of Nāga, or Solar, race, was confirmed in a remarkable manner lately.

"In 1898 the stupas erected over the relics of the Sakyas, who were killed when Kapilavastu* was destroyed by the king of Magadha, were opened; and in nearly every relic casket was found the representation of a Nāga. One of these caskets which contained a golden Nāga, bore the name of Mahānāman, one of Buddha's own family, who succeeded to the throne, which would have been inherited by Gautama himself had he not renounced the world."

By about A.D. 300, the serpent, if not actually identified with Buddha, occupied a similar position, and was equally venerated and intimately connected with him, and to-day it is the serpent, rather than the Bo-tree, that is his special symbol.

Mr. Fergusson has pointed out that a king of the Nāga race was on the throne in Magadha when Buddha was born in 623 B.C., and he considers that the spread of Buddhism "is wholly due to the accident of its having been adopted by the low caste kings of Magadha, and to its having been elevated by one of them to the rank of the religion of the state."

The following stories make it clear that at first the new faith was received with dislike and suspicion by the Nāga monarchs who derived their authority to rule from their claim to be of supernatural origin, and apparently feared to see this claim undermined.

As we have seen, Buddhist authors often refer to the control

* The birthplace of Buddha.

over the elements exercised by these kings, and this supposed power is said to have been exerted against Buddhist missionaries.

For example, we read in the Mahāwanso, that when, in the time of Asoka, Majjhantiko, the thero was sent as a missionary to Kashmir and Gandhāra, the Nāga raja Aravalo, to terrify, and so deter him from his purpose, caused a violent storm of thunder and lightning, thunderbolts and rain. But the thero persisted in his mission, and the raja was won to Buddhism.

Sung-Yun relates a similar story of how when Buddha travelled to Udyāna to convert a Nāga king, this monarch was angry and produced a violent rain-storm. Finally, a happy union or compromise was effected between the old creed and the new. The Nāgas embraced Buddhism, and retained their claim to divine extraction.

So close became the union of creeds that one of the sacred books of the Tibetan Buddhists is actually said to have been received from the Nāgas.

Clearly Schlagentweit is mistaken in his view that the Nāgas are *only* "fabulous creatures of the nature of serpents who occupy a place among the beings superior to men, and are protectors of the law of the Buddha," though as we have seen these beings share the title with the people who enjoy their friendship. More correctly, Madame Blavatsky, whilst regarding the term "Nāgas" as applying to "real living men," hold these to be in some cases "superior to men by virtue of their Occult knowledge, and the protectors of Buddha's law, inasmuch as they interpret his metaphysical tenets correctly, others inferior morally as being black magicians. Therefore it is truly declared that Gautama Buddha 'is said to have taught them a more philosophical religious system than to men, who were not sufficiently advanced to understand it at the time of his appearance'" (Schlagentweit's "Tibetan Buddhism").

Probably these monarchs were men of superior culture and education to their subjects, and made more critical demands of the new creed's claims to acceptance. Farther on Madame Blavatsky says that "while astronomically, the Nāgas, along with the Rishis, the Gandharvas, Apsarasas, Grāmanis, Yatudhanas and Devas, are the Sun's attendants throughout the twelve solar months; in theogony, and also in anthropological evolution, they are gods and men—when incarnated in the *nether* world. Let the reader be reminded in this connection, of the fact that Apollonius met in Kashmir Buddhist Nāgas—which are neither serpents zoologically, nor yet the Nāgas ethnologically, but wise men."

This interpretation is supported by the evidence of Mrs.

Speir, who tells us how the Nāgas of Kashmir and Candahar were turned from their evil ways and converted to Buddhism. These places and the neighbouring country are described in the "Mahāwanso" as having been greatly troubled by thunderstorms which were brought about by the Nāgas (whom the people worshipped) and destroyed the crops. But Mogalaputra, "reflecting on futurity, perceived that the time had arrived for the establishing of the religion of Buddha in foreign countries, and dispatched *Sthaviras* (priests) into foreign parts" ("Mahāwanso," Chap. XII).

The Nāgas most gladly became converts to Buddhism, and the preachers exhorted them "Do not, as formerly, give way . . . to anger; . . . but, evincing your solicitude for the happiness of living creatures, abstain from the destruction of crops. . . . live, protecting mankind." And the Nāga king, being convinced by this discourse, "placing the Sthavira on a gem-set throne, respectfully stood by fanning him. . . . From that period to the present day the people of Kasmira and Gandhara have been fervently devoted to the three branches of faith, and the land has glittered with yellow robes."

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CHAPTER VI

THE SERPENTS OF SIVA

THE Indian deity Siva or Shiva, so intimately connected with serpent worship, though now recognised as the Third Person of the Hindu Trinity, is by far the oldest member of the triad, and appears to have been pre-Aryan in origin, and not a Vedic god, but adopted by the Brahmans; who, finding his worship too firmly established to be uprooted, sought thus to gain influence with the older race.

There is much evidence available to prove that it was a nation of high civilisation that preceded the Sanskrit race in India, and it seems certain that the Cyclopean monuments of the Dekkan were standing before the Hindus arrived in that country. The famous rock temples at Salsette, Ellora, and Elephanta, are such monuments, and whilst none of these were consecrated to Brahma or Vishnu, the temple of Salsette is a temple of Siva, and Siva is also the only god worshipped at Ellora.

It is clear that neither Siva nor the Phallic worship so intimately connected with this god were Aryan in origin, and we find that the Phallic worshippers bore a bitter hatred to the Brahmans who responded in kind by designating them "Pakhundi" or heretics. Even now a close inspection reveals that the amalgamation of the two religions is not perfect, and it is not surprising therefore if we occasionally see anomalies in the teaching and tradition of Brahmanism. Siva-worship has its chief strongholds in the south and south-east, and there the votaries of this god greatly outnumber those of Vishnu. Indeed, the other members of the Trinity seem wellnigh superfluous, for Siva is at once Creator, Preserver, Destroyer. This is probably the position he occupied in the older faith, until the Aryan invaders limited and degraded, even whilst they included him in their Trinity, because, their creed being non-dualistic, they had no place for a devil.

Mrs. Speir, referring to the surviving monuments of pre-Aryan Phallic worship, has observed that "Buddhism was an attempt to make general doctrines hitherto restricted to learned and

privileged classes. But the public cannot accept abstractions, and the more vague and negative the doctrine, the more absolute its demand for visible types and images, and consequently in every country the footprints of Buddhism are gigantic monuments, pillars, towers, caves and temples." But, "although we know that Buddhists made memorial mounds we are far from knowing that all memorial mounds and monuments were made by Buddhists. The fact is that our earliest evidence of such monuments in India dates about 200 years B.C., whereas Tumuli are found all over the world, giving traces of the first wanderers on the face of the earth, or recording names the earliest known to history."

In other chapters we have described some of these, which are



ENTRANCE TO THE ELEPHANTA CAVES.

found in the high plateaus of Asia, in ancient Lydia and Greece, in Mexico, in Scandinavia, Great Britain, Etruria and Sardinia, as well as in the peninsula of India. Captain Newbold described such tombs as being scattered throughout Southern India,—left in secluded spots by races of whom tradition is silent.

"It is certain," he says, "that they are not the sepulchres of any of the sects of Buddha, Jineswara, or Brahma, or of the snake-worshippers who preceded them. Whose bones then do these huge blocks of granite cover? Throw down one of the side slabs, with its circular aperture, and we have the cromlech or dolmen. Clear away the Cyclopean superstructure, and we behold the Druidical circles and the cairn. If we turn our eyes northerly to the mountains of Circassia, we there start with

surprise on seeing an absolute facsimile of the mysterious tombs of Southern India."

And Mrs. Speir remarks that "almost universally the ancient cairns, cromlechs, tumuli and tombs are traced to people who were not of the Sanskrit-speaking races, from whom we derive our origin, but of the mysterious people which preceded Hindus in India, Greeks in Greece, Romans in Italy, and Celts in Scandinavia and Great Britain. . . . It seems evident that cromlechs, cairns and effigies of serpents travelled westward with Turanian tribes who were often metal-workers; and that people of allied race in India (often called Nāgas) made similar tombs independent of Buddhism, and previous to the rise of that religion Mr. Walters speaks of 'two or three thousand monuments, great and small' ('Asiatic Researches,' XVII, 500). And, further to the north-east, Dr. Hooker sees at Nurtiung 'several acres covered with gigantic, generally circular, slabs of stone, from ten to twenty-five feet broad, supported five feet above the ground upon other blocks.'"

With the conquest of the Aryans came an entire change in the religion of the vanquished. Next the Nature-worship of the Vedas introduced by the conquerors, was succeeded by the more spiritual conception of Brahmanism, which in its turn was overshadowed for a thousand years by its daughter Buddhism; yet through all these changes, the worship of the serpent persisted, recognised or unrecognised by the prevailing creed.

As illustrating this remarkable persistence of Ophiolatry into modern days, we may quote Mr. Rivett-Carnac who writes:

"The worship of the snake is very common in the old Nāgpūr province where, especially among the lower class, the votaries of Siva or Nāg Bhushan, 'he who wears snakes as his ornament,' are numerous. It is likely enough that the city took its name from the Nāg temple, still to be seen there, and that the River Nāg, perhaps, took its name from the city or temple, not the city from the river, as some think. Certain it is that many of the Kunbi, or cultivating class, worship the snake and the snake only, and that this worship is something more than the ordinary superstitious awe with which all Hindus regard the snake. I find from my notes that one Kunbi whom I questioned in the old days when I was a Settlement Officer in camp in the Nāgpūr Division stated that he worshipped the Nāg and nothing else; that he worshipped clay images of the snake, and when he could afford to pay snake-catchers for a look at a live one, he worshipped the living snake; that if he saw a Nāg on the road he would worship it, and that he believed no Hindu would kill a Nāg or cobra if he knew it were a Nāg. He then gave me the following

list of articles he would use in worshipping the snake, when he could afford it; and I take it, the list is similar to what would be used in ordinary Siva worship. (1) Water. (2) Gandh, pigment of sandal-wood for the forehead or body. (3) Cleaned rice. (4) Flowers. (5) Leaves of the Bail tree. (6) Milk. (7) Curds. (8) A thread or piece of cloth. (9) Red powder. (10) Saffron. (11) Abir, a powder composed of fragrant substances. (12) Garlands of flowers. (13) Buttemah or grain soaked and parched. (14) Jowarri. (15) Five lights. (16) Sweetmeats. (17) Betel leaves. (18) Coco-nut. (19) A sum of money (according to means). (20) Flowers offered by the suppliant, the palms of the hands being joined.

"All these articles, my informant assured me, were offered to the snake in regular succession, one after the other, the worshipper repeating the while certain *mantras* or incantations. Having offered all these gifts, the worshipper prostrates himself before the snake, and, begging for pardon if he has ever offended against him, craves that the snake will continue his favour upon him and protect him from every danger."

The symbolic image in all the great temples of Siva, during the religious ceremonies, is surrounded by the folds of a Nāga, or cobra de capello, whose head spreads out above that of the god's. These nāgas are constructed of precious metals and ornamented with diamonds, pearls and precious stones of all sorts.

In the Mahābhārata, Mahadeva (Siva) is described as having "a girdle of serpents, ear-rings of serpents, a sacrificial cord of serpents, and an outer garment of serpents' skins. He has the title of King of Serpents." The sceptre, or rod of office which he holds, takes the form of a trident, and as Mr. Wake has pointed out, "in the 'crescent surmounted by a pinnacle similar to the pointed end of a spear,' which decorates the roofs of the Tibetan monasteries, we undoubtedly have a reproduction of the so-called trident of Siva. This instrument is given also to *Sani*, the Hindu Saturn, who is represented as encompassed by two serpents, and hence the pillar symbol of this primeval deity we may well suppose to be reproduced in the linga of the Indian Phallic god."

One of the Semitic names of Saturn was Set or Seth, and Mr. Wake says that "it was the serpent symbol of this god which was said to have been elevated in the wilderness for the healing of the people bitten by serpents, and curiously enough Rudra [Siva] was called not only the *bountiful*, the *strong*, but the *healer*. The later Egyptian title of the god Set was Typhon [see chapter on "Apollo and the Python"]. . . . An ancient writer states that one of the names of El or Chronos was Typhon, and the

serpent and pillar symbols of the Phœnician deity confirm the identification between Set or Saturn, and the Siva of the Hindu Pantheon."

Mr. Fergusson has justly said that although a Phallic symbolism is attached to the worship of Siva, yet his religion "is too severe, too stern for the softer emotions of love, and all his temples are quite free from any allusion to it." We may see in Siva especially the god of Intellect, and this is emphasised by his third eye. Although he must be dreaded as the resistless Destroyer, yet by his perfect Wisdom doth he recreate and preserve all things. He is therefore the patron deity of the Brahman order, and the most intellectual Hindus of to-day are numbered among his disciples. The serpents surrounding him are the symbols of wisdom, and the bull on which he rides denotes strength rather than fecundity.

But although we may see the Creator embodied in Siva's dread form, yet his symbol the serpent hath encircled itself, and he also represents the Destroyer. In his character of destroyer Siva is robed in tiger skins. Around him is entwined a hooded snake, with head upreared above his shoulder, and twisted serpents form his head covering. Or he is represented carrying a spear, a sword, a serpent and a skull, and wearing a girdle of skulls around his waist. He is described in the *Puranas* as "wandering about, surrounded by ghosts and goblins, inebriated, naked, and with dishevelled hair, covered with the ashes of a funeral pile, ornamented with human skulls and bones, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying." The bloodiest sacrifices of India were dedicated to him, and his votaries subject themselves to excruciating tortures. The festival of the Charak Puja is held in honour of this divinity. Hook-swinging is its chief feature, and the Sanyasis, or devotees, compete with each other in self-immolation. Some will leap from a distance of several feet on to a platform composed of knives and bamboos, others will pass iron rods through the fleshy parts of their bodies or thrust live serpents through a hole made in their tongue.

We have already seen that we must not judge Siva from one aspect only, since being divine he represents All. Another and very different interpretation of the imagery from that of death and destruction which springs so spontaneously to our Western minds, is not only possible, but appears to be the dominating impression conveyed by it to those who have drawn the nearest to this Terrible One. The serpents that enfold him are not seen only as portents of death or disaster or even as mere symbols of life and wisdom by his votaries, but as proofs of the god's great and all-embracing love. Siva is known among his many titles as

"The Refuge of Animals," and we are told to note how around his neck have wound the serpents whom no one else would receive. Never did he turn any away. He was the friend of the friendless. What all others have rejected, that Siva accepts. He took all the pain and evil of the Universe as his share, when he drank the poison of things and made his throat blue for ever.

According to an Indian legend immortalised by the poet Kalidasa in his descriptive poem *Kumara-Sambhava*, Siva was wedded to a mortal maiden, who after her death was reincarnated, and sought her divine lover again, with severe penances. To try her love he disguised himself as a hermit and strove to dissuade her from her purpose.

"Scarce I fathom, lovely Uma,
How these gentle hands of thine
Shall with wedding wreath encircled,
Clasp his hands which snakes entwine;
And a young wife's bridal garment,
Traced with birds of plumage fair,
Scarce will match his blood-stained mantie,
Skins and barks he loves to wear!
In thy father's stately mansions
Flowery paths thy feet have trod,—
Wilt thou now on sites unholy
Wander with a homeless God?"

(Romesh Dutt's Trans.)

Skanda Purana puts into Siva's mouth the following description of himself which will help us still further to visualise the allegory: "Parvati (i.e. Uma) must be foolish to practise so severe a penance in order to obtain me, Rudra (one of his thousand names), a wandering mendicant, a bearer of a human skull, a delighter in cemeteries, one ornamented with bones and serpents, covered with ashes, and with no garments but an elephant's skin, riding on a bull" (in his character as god of Justice of which the white bull is the symbol, "Manu." VIII, 16), "and accompanied by ghosts and goblins."

But Uma was not to be daunted by externalities, and she indignantly answered the supposed Brahman, and showed how differently she viewed her loved one:

"Refuge of the wide creation,
Ruler of Immortals' fate,
Doth he brook our mortal customs
Pomp and pageantry and state?
Void of wealth,—but source of riches,
Homeless,—ranging earth and sky,
Wild of mein,—his grace pervadeth
Who can comprehend the High?"

Wearing gems or coiling serpents,
Broidered lace or skin and skull,
Who can guess his real image,
Classed in worlds, pervading all?
And if ashes smear his bosom,
They can bless and sanctify
Men below and bright Immortals,
Dwellers of the azure sky!
And if sacred bull his emblem,
Indra with obeisance meet
From his crown of heavenly blossoms
Drops the flower-dust on its feet!
Didst thou say,—obscure his lineage
And unknown his race on earth?—
Bright Gods own him as Creator,
First Creator hath no birth!"

Turned away the damsel
From the stranger guest,—
Through the bursting wild bark
Heaved her angry breast!
Smiling he embraced her,
All disguise removed,—
Uma gazed in wonder,
'Twas her lost and loved!

'Maiden,' so spake Siva,
'Take this hand of mine,
Won by love and penance
Henceforth I am thine!
With a holier beauty
Heavenly Uma shone,
For by toil and duty
Destiny is won!"

(Romesh Dutt's Trans.)

The parable we have just been considering evidently represents by Uma the human soul in its search and longing for union with the Divine. How many have been turned aside by the necklace of skulls, by the outer garment of "Nature, red in tooth and claw," by the threatening serpents that keep the portals of the mysteries? But the truly earnest seeker will not be thus frustrated. The eyes of love can penetrate the illusions of matter and recognise within its veil the One beloved. Siva has been described by one of his modern disciples, the Sister Nivedita, as "the All-Merciful, the Destroyer of Ignorance, the Great God, the Sweetest of the Sweet, the Most Terrible of the Terrible, the Lord of Heroes, and the Wondrous Eyed."

We cannot study Siva apart from his consort, the goddess Kali, who is really his personified energy. It is difficult for Western

minds to comprehend the dual nature of these deities, which because of their adoption by a people of a totally different cast of thought from the race which gave them birth, is extremely complex. We may help ourselves, however, by considering them as embodiments of time, which is at once the womb that brings forth and the grave that swallows all things. But the analogy is an imperfect one and only presents one aspect of these many-sided gods.

Kali, the divine consort of Siva is, like her spouse, a paradox. To the careless observer she is above all a war-goddess. Her images are hideous with emblems of death and destruction. Like Siva, she is entwined with serpents; her necklace is of human



PRESENTING OFFERINGS TO KALI.

skulls, and a girdle of severed hands encircles her waist. Tigers crouch at her feet. She is said to delight in human sacrifices, and the ritual of these demands that before the victim dies the goddess should be invoked as follows: "Let the sacrificer first repeat the name of Kali thrice, Hail, Kali! Kali! Hail, Devi! Hail, Goddess of Thunder! iron-sceptred, Hail, fierce Kali! Cut, slay, destroy! bind, secure! Cut with the axe, drink blood, slay, destroy!" And this dreadful invocation was no mere figure of speech, for Coleman tells us that "on her festivals her temples literally stream with blood." And yet this awful goddess, like her consort Siva, hath her devoted worshippers, who see in her horrid form, beauty, and love and motherhood. How shall we reconcile such antagonism? Let us turn to one who loves

her for an explanation, the Sister Nivedita, from whom we have already learned that Siva hath his beauty. Our teacher would have us gaze upon Kali together with her spouse:

"Siva—ideal of Manhood, embodiment of Godhead. As the Purush, or Soul, He is Consort and Spouse of Maya, Nature, the fleeting diversity of sense. It is in this relation that we find Him beneath the feet of Kali. His recumbent posture signifies inertness,* the Soul untouched and indifferent to the external. Kali has been executing a wild dance of carnage. On all sides She has left evidences of Her reign of terror. The garland of skulls is round Her neck; still in Her hands She holds the bloody weapon and a freshly severed head. Suddenly she has stepped unwittingly on the body of Her Husband. Her foot is on His breast. He has looked up, awakened by that touch, and they are gazing into each other's eyes. Her right hands† are raised in involuntary blessing, and Her tongue makes an exaggerated gesture of shyness and surprise, once common to Indian women of the village.

"And He, what does He see? To Him, She is all beauty—this woman nude and terrible and black, who tells the name of God on the skulls of the dead, who creates the bloodshed on which demons fatten, who slays rejoicing and repents not, and blesses Him only that lies crushed beneath Her feet.

"Her mass of black hair flows behind her like the wind, or like time, 'the drift and passage of things.' But to the great third eye even time is one, and that one, God. She is blue almost to blackness, like a mighty shadow, and bare like the dread realities of life and death. But for Him there is no shadow. Deep into the heart of that Most Terrible, He looks unshrinking, and in the ecstasy of recognition He calls her *Mother*. So shall ever be the union of the soul with God.

". . . Bend low, and you shall hear the answer that India makes to the Eternal Motherhood, through all her ages of torture and despair. Listen well, for the voice is low that speaks, and the crash of ruin mighty: 'Though Thou slay me; yet will I trust in Thee!' After all has anyone of us found God in any other form than in this—the Vision of Siva? Have not the great intuitions of our life all come to us in moments when the cup was bitterest? Has it not always been with sobs of desolation that we have seen the Absolute triumphant in Love? Behold we also, O Mother, are Thy children! Though Thou Slay us, yet will we trust in Thee!"

* The usual position in allegory of the male and female characteristics is here reversed. She is the active. He the passive,

† Kali is four-handed,

Thank you, gentle Sister. Perhaps East and West are not so far apart as once we thought them. We have worshipped in the same shrines, although we have called the gods by other names.

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CHAPTER VII

THE CADUCEUS

HERMES or Mercury, the messenger of the gods of Olympus, next claims our attention. A son of Zeus, he was characterised by swiftness of motion, eloquence of speech and quickness of intellect. He was famed as a master of music and inventor of the lyre (hence identical with the Hebrew Jubal); and also as first of astronomers and mathematicians and the lord of commerce. He was further known as the God of Twilight, and according to Max Müller is the deity corresponding to Sarameya, Son of the Twilight, mentioned in the Vedas. Moreover he was related to the Egyptian deity Thoth or Taaut, to whom the oldest papyri on medicine are dedicated, and who was physician, author, and scribe of the gods.

Mercury's famous rod of office, the caduceus or caduceum which gave the god power to fly, certainly forms one of the most striking examples of the talismanic serpent. But, as such authorities as Kirchen and Montfaucon have pointed out, it is an error to suppose that this rod belonged exclusively to Hermes or Mercury, for it may be found in the hand of the Egyptian Anubis, the Assyrian Cybele, the Celtic Hercules Ogmios, the Grecian Aphrodite, Demeter, Dionysus, Mars, Minerva, Pitho (or Suada), and the personified constellation Virgo, whom Lucian said had her symbol in the Pythian priestess.

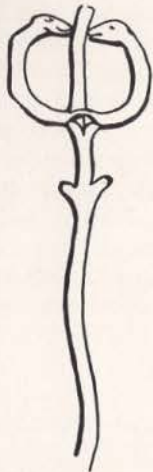
The variations in the form of the caduceus are many and interesting, and some of these may be seen in the figures here given. The wand is sometimes found without the wings, but never without the serpents. The differences consist chiefly in the relative positions of the wings and the serpents, and the number of folds made by the serpents' bodies around the rod.

According to Madame Blavatsky (S.D., I, 360) the original symbol figured a triple-headed serpent, but the centre head became

the knob of the rod, and the two lower heads were separated, disfiguring somewhat the original meaning.

Kirchen says that the caduceus was originally in the form of a cross, and was invented by Thoth, the Egyptian Mercury, to symbolise the four elements proceeding from a common centre. In Greece, however, its origin can be traced to the herald's staff, and it was at first a simple laurel or olive stick like the Greek hiketerion and the Roman supplicia, decorated with garlands or entwined with fillets of white wool.

Later the name was more specially employed to denote the wand assigned by artists and poets to Mercury or Hermes, as the



CADUCEUS.

From a sepulchral urn.

The olive stick and serpents for garland are noticeable.



CADUCEUS WITHOUT WINGS.

From a vignette found at Pompeii.

ensign of his authority in his office as messenger or herald of the gods. It is said that in return for Mercury's present to Apollo of the sweet-toned lyre, the god of Music gave to Hermes the magical "three-leaved rod of wealth and happiness." The place of the woollen garlands that had formerly adorned it, was shortly afterwards occupied by the twisting serpents, and there is no difficulty in recognising in it the well-known trident of Siva, which is also sometimes entwined by serpents. The presence of the reptiles on the rod is accounted for by a legend which says that they were the means of first discovering to Mercury the virtue of his wand as a peace-maker. According to this, whilst

on his travels, the god saw two snakes engaged in deadly combat, and placed his staff between them to end the fight. The magic wand so pacified their anger that they embraced one another and clung around it. Hence the caduceus became the symbol of peace, and caduceator the synonym for an ambassador, or any person sent forth from one belligerent to another. Instead of the flag of truce he bore in his hand the caduceus, or wand of peace, and his person whilst he held it, was considered sacred and inviolable.

As an instance of its use by the ancients, we may note how the Romans sent to the Carthaginians a messenger bearing a caduceus and a javelin, thereby offering them the choice of peace or war; and pursuant of the same idea, old Roman coins often represented Mars with the caduceus in one hand, and a javelin in the other. Similarly Suada (or Pytho), the goddess of persuasion among the Romans and Greeks, who was said to be the daughter of Mercury, is figured with a caduceus at her feet to denote her powers of persuasion.

To symbolise his gifts as a peacemaker derived from the magic wand, Mercury was sometimes painted with chains of gold flowing from his mouth, with which he linked together the minds of those that heard him. Not only did he pacify mortal men by this means, but also the immortal gods of heaven and hell; for, whenever they had a difference among themselves, he composed it.

"Thee, Wing-foot, all the gods, both high and low,
The arbiter of peace and war allow."

(Ovid, "Fast.," 5.)

And again :

"Fair Maia's son, whose power alone doth reach
High heaven's bright towers, and hell's dusky beach,
A common god to both, does both the worlds appease."

(Claud., "de Rap. Pros.")

Spenser speaks of

"Caduceus, the rod of Mercury,
With which he wons the Stygian realms invade,
Through ghastly horror and eternal shade :
The infernal fiends with it he can assuage,
And Orcus tame, whom nothing can persuade
And rule the Furies, when they most do rage !"

("Faerie Queene," B. II, c. 12, st. 40.)

And in another poem he says :

"In his hand
He took Caduceus, his snakie wand,
With which the damned ghosts he governeth
And furies rules, and Tartare tempereth."

("Mother Hub.," Tale I, 1292.)

The caduceus was believed to have the power of paralysing the mind, and also of raising the dead. This, being interpreted, probably meant that it was used in mesmerism to induce a state of trance, and in calling up the spirits of the dead or daimonia.

Mercury is said by Bayley to mean the "Fire of merak," the Great Mare (Vol. II, p. 111), and in an old print, which is reproduced in the Lost Language of Symbolism, the caduceus is shown spanned by a winged mare. The horse or mare, like the serpent, is the symbol of intellect,* and of the Sun, and therefore a fitting emblem of Mercury, the Great Mind, and the Sun-god.

Vossius has told us that "All the theologians agree to say that Mercury and the Sun are one." He adds that Mercury "was the most eloquent and the most wise of all the gods, which is not to be wondered at, since Mercury is in such close proximity to the Wisdom and the Word of God (the Sun) that he was confused with both."

Like Michael, with whom, according to some writers, he is to be identified, he may be described as the one "who is like God."

Realising the unity of Mercury with the Sun, we shall not be surprised to find that the serpent is their common symbol.

We have elsewhere noted that Jehovah was a Sun-god. The brazen serpent which his deputy, Moses, set up in the wilderness upon the rod, was in fact identical with the serpent-entwined rod of Mercury, the messenger of Apollo. The same thought is apparent in the rod of office carried by Moses, which in his hand became a serpent, and the caduceus borne by Mercury as evidence of his divinely appointed mission.

As we have devoted a special chapter to the brazen serpent and serpent-rod of Moses we here continue our investigation of the caduceus, and ask our readers to make their own comparisons.

The serpent in each case represented the delegated power of the Sun-god, and could be used either constructively or the reverse.

Virgil has described for us some of the manifold uses of this instrument in the hand of Apollo's deputy.

"Hermes obeys; with golden pinions binds
His flying feet, and mounts the western winds;
And whether o'er the seas or earth he flies,
With rapid force they bear him down the skies.
But first he grasps, within his awful hand,
The mark of sov'reign power, his magic wand:
With this he draws the souls from hollow graves;
With this he drives them down the Stygian waves;
With this he seals in sleep the wakeful sight,
And eyes, though clos'd in death, restores to light."

("Æn.," 4, Tooke's Trans.)

* See "The Horse in Magic and Myth."

Homer has a similar thought to that voiced in the last two lines:

"He [i.e. Mercury] grasps the wand that causes sleep to fly,
Or in soft slumbers seals the wakeful eye."—"Odyssey."

Madame Blavatsky quotes "a Commentary in the Esoteric Doctrine" which illumines another aspect of the caduceus. Here is the paragraph:

"The trunk of the *Asvattha* (the tree of Life and Being, the ROD of the caduceus) grows from and descends at every Beginning (every new Manvantara) from the two dark wings of the swan (HANSA) of Life. The two serpents, the ever-living and its illusion (Spirit and matter) whose two heads grow from the one head between the wings, descend along the trunks in close embrace. The two tails join on earth (the manifested Universe) into one, and this is the great illusion, O Lanoo!"

The following lines from Chaucer's "The Chanounes Yemannes Tale" evidently refer to the twin serpents of the caduceus.

"Lo, thus saith Arnold of the Newe-toun,
As his Rosarie maketh menciuon,
He saith right thus, withouten eny lye:
Ther may no man Mercury mortifye,
But be it with his brother* knowleching.
Lo, how that he, which that first say'd this thing,
Of philosophres fader was, Hermes;
He saith, how that the dragoun douteles
He dyeth nought, but if that he be slayn
With his brother. And that is for to sayn,
He understood, and brimston be his brother,
That out of Sol and Luna were i-drawe.
'And therefore,' sayde he, 'take heed to my sawe.'
Let no man besy him this art to seche,
But if that he thentencioun and speche
Of philosophres understonde can;
And if he do, he is a lewed† man.
For this sciens, and this connyng, quod he,
Is of the Secré of secretz, pardé.'" (Lines 13356-75.)

The student should note the reference to Sol and Luna. The caduceus had now become a winged wand which combined the symbols of the crescent, the circle and the cross, as in the symbol of Mercury ♀.

Mercury besides possessing the qualities we have already noted, was the Phallic god, and the caduceus plainly denotes this,

* i.e. his brother's knowledge. † i.e. unlearned.



WINGS BELOW
SERPENTS.
From design on
old coin.

for the male and female serpents, the sun-god and moon-goddess, are symbols of generation, whilst the supporting rod or tree represents the phallus, and occupies the same position as the centre line in the letter Φ , which had a similar significance. With this symbol we may compare the *Tri-Ratna* here figured, the sacred emblem of Buddhism, which has been described as "the three precious symbols of the faith." It is almost identical with the Caduceus of Mercury, as will be seen on comparing the drawings, and it bore the same significance, being also a combination of the symbols of the sun, the moon and the phallus.



THE TRI-RATNA.

Colonel Garnier believes Buddha to be identical with Mercury, and calls attention to some curious points of resemblance. "The mother of Mercury was Maya, or Maia, and this was also the name of the mother of Buddha. The fourth day of the week was called 'Mercury's day' by the Celtic nations, as it is now by the French, 'Mercredi.' . . . In Buddhist nations the same day is called 'Boodwar,' or 'Buddha's day.' The star Mercury is also called Buddha by the Hindus. Mercury was represented by conical black stones. Buddha is likewise represented by similar black stones. Mercury was the conductor of the dead. So also Buddha, in his character as Naravahana, is represented as conveying the souls of the dead over the river of Hell, and Menu Satyavratta, who is identified with him is also the god of funeral obsequies. . . . Buddha was also called '*Mahi Man,*' the great man or Mind, and this was exactly the character of Hermes, celebrated for his wisdom."

To this we may add that both Buddha and Mercury were symbolised by the serpent. Mercury is said to have been the inventor of contracts, weights and measures and to have taught mankind the arts of buying and selling.



WINGS ABOVE SERPENTS.

Roman statuettes of bronze, in which Mercury is represented like the Grecian Hermes, standing, holding the caduceus in one hand and a purse in the other, are very common. The caduceus is found on Italian coins as early as the fourth century B.C., and several of these were preserved as sacred objects in the *adytum* of the sanctuary at Lavinium. But that the conception was foreign to Rome is proved by the fact that although it was a symbol of peace, it was never borne by the *fetiales*, the old Italian heralds. The very name is derived from the Greek *κηρύκειον*.

In modern times the caduceus figures as a symbol of commerce, since Mercury is the god of commerce. The rod (or sceptre) symbolises the power bestowed by wealth, the serpents typify wisdom, and the wings diligence and activity.

According to Bayley our words "market, merchandise, merchant, commerce (cp. Mercia or Meorcland), are all traceable to the *merciful* (cp. River Mersey) Mercury who was the God of Merchants" (Vol. II, 113-14).

The caduceus is a rare bearing in heraldry, and when it occurs is blazoned as a staff, having two serpents annodated about it, mutually respectant, and joined at the tails.

Our figure of the head of Medusa shows the serpents of her hair forming a caduceus. Pausanias revealed to us that the terror of the Gorgon's head dwelt in its surrounding serpents, since the face of Medusa was "mild and beautiful." Dean remarks that the general impression of a powerful charm inherent in the Gorgon, must be attributed to some forgotten tradition respecting the *serpents* in the hair; for all agree that the face of Medusa was far from being terrific. Some engravings of this head preserved in Montfaucon explain the mystery. From these we may infer that this celebrated talisman was no other than the still more celebrated emblem of consecration, the circle, wings and serpent. . . . In the plate in Montfaucon referred to (I, 88) are representations of Medusa's head from either side of whose forehead proceeds a wing; and two serpents intersecting one another below the chin in a *nodus Herculis*, appear over the forehead, looking at each other. Take away the human face in the centre, with its remaining snaky locks, and you have the Egyptian emblem of consecration, *the serpents and winged*



CADUCEUS ON HEAD OF MEDUSA.

circle; the circle being framed by the bodies of the snakes. The Gorgon is therefore nothing more than the caduceus without its staff." It is in fact the Encircled Serpent.

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CHAPTER VIII

NEHUSHTAN, OR THE BRAZEN SERPENT

IN our last chapter we identified the caduceus with the Brazen Serpent of Biblical allegory. Let us take the account of the latter's origin as given by the poetical author of the Book of Numbers.

"The soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived" (Num. xxi. 4-9).

The Biblical account of the plague of fiery serpents is confirmed by one of the Sinaitic inscriptions. This, deciphered by Mr. Forster's alphabet, and translated by the Arabic Lexicon, is said to give the following meaning:

"Destroy, springing on the People, the fiery serpents;
Hissing, injecting venom, heralds of death, they kill;
The people, prostrating on th. ir back, curling in folds,
They wind round, descending on, bearing destruction."

Beside this inscription, running down the whole depth of it "is the figure of a serpent, springing, in undulating curls, downwards upon its victim."

It is, of course, open to question whether the Israelites were the authors of these inscriptions on the rocks of Sinai, which were discovered by an Egyptian merchant named Cosmas, about

fourteen centuries ago; but at least a fair case seems to have been made out for this view, by the many who have written in support of it. So far as I can discover there is no record of the healing brazen serpent in these inscriptions, and it is upon its figure that our attention and interest are most concentrated. And this not only because of the miracle it is said to have accomplished, and the allegory embodied by it, but also because the law against the making of images, elsewhere so strongly emphasised, was here abrogated by command of Jehovah. Mr. Hargrave Jennings comments on this anomaly:

"It is to little purpose that we are reminded that the Jews



THE BRAZEN SERPENT.
From engraving after A. Strähuber.

were forbidden by their law to 'make unto themselves any graven image'; for, as Lewis shows in the following passage, there may be exceptions to this as to every other general rule. 'Notwithstanding,' he says, 'the severity of the law against the making of Images, yet, as Justin Martyr observes in his Book against Trypho, it must be somewhat mysterious, that God in the case of the "Brazen Serpent" should command an image to be made, for which one of the Jews confessed he never could hear a reason from any of their doctors.'

Let us see if we can find any light on this apparent inconsistency on the part of the iconoclastic Jehovah.

In considering the source and meaning of the Brazen Serpent,

we must not overlook the fact that the Hebrews were Semites, and therefore of the same race as the serpent-revering Phœnicians, Assyrians and Babylonians. Even the languages of these peoples were almost identical in their grammatical structure, and closely allied in their vocabularies. It is therefore not surprising to find considerable similarity in their religious symbolism. This accounts for the importance assumed by the serpent in the Bible, and more especially for this story of the healing serpent. But not alone from their Semitic relatives did the Hebrews learn to venerate the serpent. During their long sojourn in Egypt its sacred nature and meaning as the representative of the Sun-god, must have been still further impressed upon them, and especially upon their leader Moses, since he was brought up by Pharaoh's daughter as her own son, and "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts vii. 22).

So far as we can reconstruct Jewish history from Bible records, it would seem that the southern kingdom of Judah was partly settled before the northern kingdom of Israel, and also that a certain rivalry between the two was prevalent. In Judah the image of Jehovah took the form of a golden serpent, as in Solomon's temple. But in Israel, Jehovah was represented as a golden bull, or sometimes as a sucking calf.

There can be no doubt that in either form, the worship was exactly what the peoples had become accustomed to during their sojourn in Egypt, and was in fact the worship of the Sun-god, Osiris, under the name of Jehovah. The Egyptian sacred bull was not only consecrated to Osiris, but appears to have been regarded as the vehicle of manifestation used by this deity, and as being of miraculous birth. Thus Herodotus describing Apis says:

"He is a young bull, whose mother can have no other offspring, and who is reported by the Egyptians to conceive from lightning sent from heaven, and thus to produce the god Apis" (iii. 28), whilst Plutarch says that "they call the Apis the living image of Osiris, and suppose him begotten by a ray of generative light from the moon" (de Is. s. 43).

The identification of the Apis with the serpent, as representative of the Sun-god, may be seen from the annexed drawing of a bronze figure of the Apis, showing the indispensable mark of the circle and wings upon his back, whilst curled within his horns is a serpent, rising between their points, which are supporting the solar disc.

When the young Apis was discovered, it was fed by the priests in a house that faced the rising sun, and many other rites connected it with the sun. It is evident, therefore, that the golden

calf of the Israelites represented Apis, and that both it, and the golden serpent, symbolised the sun in Egyptian religious typology. But both these images were not only Egyptian, but also old Babylonian and Phœnician symbols, and as we have noted these nations also had influenced the religious thought of the Jews. Such mixed sources of derivation involved mixed meanings of



From a bronze figure of Apis, showing the sacred marks.

the emblems, and thus led to a certain confusion of thought, and inevitably brought about dissension in the ranks of the ignorant worshippers, as now one meaning, and now its exact opposite, was put before them, by rival would-be leaders, as the true interpretation of the images.

Thus in Egypt, the serpent, as we have seen, represented the Sun-god, but among the Phœnicians the serpent was known as Tiamat, the bitter enemy of

the Sun-god, who, in one of their best-known myths personified the dark ocean flood.

The Babylonian myth of the slaughter of the dragon tells how in the beginning the mighty god Marduk (or Merodach) fought and slew the monstrous dragon Tiamat, representing the watery chaos. After the god had thus conquered his foe, he split its huge body into halves, and formed the sky from one portion whilst from the other he made the earth. Thus cosmos came forth from chaos. This myth is clearly referred to in more than one place in the Hebrew scriptures where the dragon of the sea is spoken of as Rahab, or Leviathan. Thus Isaiah says: "Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon?" (li. 9), and again he says, "In that day the Lord with his sore and great sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea" (xxxvii. 1). In Psalm lxxxix. 10, it is said, "Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces," whilst from Psalm lxxiv. 14, we learn the monster was hydra-headed. "Thou breakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness."

A writer in the "Temple Dictionary" comments: "The details of this myth had been forgotten when the historical books were composed, or were considered irreverent. The rescue of Israel from Egypt was substituted for it." The myth

may indicate the conquest of the worshippers of Anu and Ea by the worshippers of Marduk. But it seems probable that the combat of Marduk and Tiamat was first of all a mythical description of the Babylonian spring, and its larger meaning of Cosmos and Chaos but an afterthought. In the tropical changes of season to which Babylon is subject, it is easy enough to see an analogy of conflict between two hostile powers of life and death, with victory hovering in the balance and inclining now to one side, now to the other, as winter yields to spring, or summer to autumn, and those on whom the myth had most deeply impressed itself would see in the serpent the enemy of Jehovah, whom, like so many of their contemporaries they identified with the sun.

That Jehovah was a Sun-god is evident from the fact that such a number of the phenomena primarily connected with him were meteorological; the rainbow which he set up in the clouds when his anger had passed, and he no longer needed it as a weapon wherewith to shoot his arrows against his foes; the thunder so frequently spoken of as the voice of the Lord, as in 1 Samuel vii. 10, "The Lord thundered with a great thunder" (voice, Heb. *gol.*); the lightning, described as his "glittering sword" (Deut. xxxii. 41 and Job xx. 25), or his arrows of destruction (Psa. cxliv. 6) etcetera, etcetera, and according to Professor Cheyne, both the brazen serpent, and the brazen sea in the temple at Jerusalem were borrowed from Babylon, and represented the great dragon, which personified the primæval watery chaos. We see it here as conquered and pressed into the service of Jehovah, or by connection with the Egyptian myth, regarded as his very symbol.

Yet another possible interpretation has been suggested, which may still further have confused this unhappy people, and this is that King David belonged to a family owning the serpent as its totem, and the brazen serpent therefore represented the old sacred animal of his house. It might at the same time be recognised as possessing the cosmological meanings we have just noted; so the symbolism was certainly sufficiently complicated to account for the violent revulsions of feeling the Israelites experienced in connection with it.

The serpent set up by Moses was originally the Egyptian seraph, symbolising the Sun-god, who was now known to this people as Jehovah. Everywhere the sun has been recognised as the great life-giver and healer. Apollo-Python, his Grecian personation, used to be invoked by the sick, crying, "Heal us, Pæan!" But the sun could slay by his darts, as well as heal, and possibly the fiery serpents who bit so fatally were but a poetical symbol of the sun's burning death-dealing rays in the

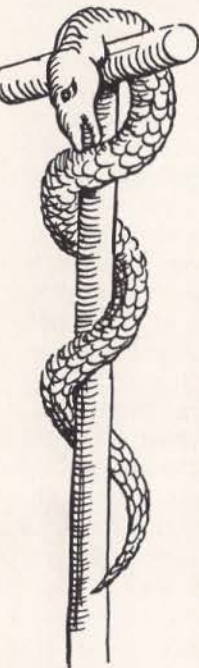
scorched and dreary desert. The name Seraph, or Se Ra Ph, is the singular of seraphim, and is derived from *Sāraph*, burn, which may be interpreted as splendour, light, and fire, so confirming our conjecture.

Some writers have identified the *serāphīm*, or burning serpents, described in Numbers, with the *serāphīm* spoken of by Isaiah (vi. 1-6) as celestial beings that surround the throne of Jehovah, but it is difficult to accept this view, as Isaiah's account of the beings seen by him leads us rather to suppose that their form was based upon the human. He says:

"Above it" (the throne of the Lord) "stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."

The office of these seraphim was said to be twofold. Firstly, to praise Jehovah's holiness and power, which was the task Isaiah found them engaged upon; for he tells us how "one cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." Secondly, their mission was to serve as messengers between heaven and earth; and we must suppose they were acting in this latter capacity, if we assume their identity with the serpents of Numbers, who, at Jehovah's command, bit the Israelites so fatally.

Anna Kingsford calls our attention to another aspect of the parable of Nehushtan. She says that in the symbolism of Egypt, the Divine seraph or serpent is constantly represented as sur-



THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

From old woodcut published 1699.

mounting a cross, and wearing the crown of Maut the Mother, who is the original and celestial Reason, and when the Israelites looked to the serpent on the cross, the poisonous bites of the serpent of the dust were healed.

Anna Kingsford perhaps derived this interpretation from the Targum (or Chaldee Paraphrases) where the Brazen Serpent is termed a "Saviour." It was a palladium or talisman in the form of a serpent coiled around the mystic Tau, or T, and was probably a serpentine crucifix, as it is called a cross by Justin Martyr. The Chaldee Paraphrast also refers to it as *Λογος*, or the "Word" (Basnage, lib. IV, chap. 25).

It is certain that the Israelites must have found something extraordinarily attractive in the mystic serpent, for, when we

turn to the Second Book of Kings (xviii. 4) we learn that eight hundred years after the days of Moses, the brazen serpent was still worshipped in Palestine. That iconoclastic king, Hezekiah, now reigned in Jerusalem, and he determined to end the practice. "He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan." Several interpretations of this name seem possible. One writer gives it as Serpent Dragon, but the marginal explanation is "a piece of brass." Bishop Patrick says the name means the "foul fiend, the old Dragon or Satan," but, when applying such epitaphs, he has surely overlooked what he would certainly claim had been the divinely inspired origin of the symbol.

Probably a play on the resemblance of the sounds of the two words, *nēhōsheth*, "brass," and *nāhāsh*, "a serpent," was intended by Hezekiah. The transliteration adopted by the LXX, *neesthan*, would indicate that the Egyptian translators connected *nehushtan* rather with *nāhāsh* than with *nēhōsheth*.

The Talmudists add to the above account of the destruction of the brazen serpent, that Hezekiah, not contented with breaking it into pieces, ground it to powder, and scattered it in the air, so that no relic of it might remain for future worship.

But it would seem that the Roman Catholics attach very little weight to these records, for they show at Milan a brazen serpent which they claim is the identical one made by Moses.

Canaan was probably another source of Israelitish Ophiolatry. In Canaan the Hivites were serpent worshippers and actually derived their name from the practice. According to Bochart the word is derived from *Hhivia*, a serpent, the root of which is *Eph* or *Ev*—one of the variations of the original *Aub*. This word was variously pronounced in different dialects, *Aub*, *Ab*—*Oub*, *Ob*—*Oph*, *Op*—*Eph*, or *Ev*—the Greek *ophis*, a serpent, being formed from the same root. *Ephites* or *Evites*, being aspirated, would become *Hevites* or *Hivites*—which is equivalent to the term *Ophites*, by which name the worshippers of the serpent were called by Greek historians.

The Israelites intermarried with this people, and "served their gods," which still further accounts for their worship of the brazen serpent after they had settled in the Land of Promise.

The Canaanites were evidently workers in brass at this period, for Moses when speaking to his people of their land says, "out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass" (Deut. viii. 9). Copper is found there in abundance, and possibly the prophet saw it as

already formed into brass, or took a poet's licence in speaking of it thus.

Brazen serpents have been found far away from Canaan among the Benin city people of the Niger coast, and have given rise to some interesting speculations. According to Captain Clapperton, the Benin people are descendants of their neighbours, the Yoruba tribes, and Sultan Bello, who was the Foulah chief of Sokoto at the time of Clapperton's visit to that city (1825) claimed that the Yoruba tribes were descended from the children of Canaan, who were of the *Tribe of Nimrod*. From the very earliest times the Benin people appear to have been, like their supposed ancestors, great workers in brass, and the first accounts given by European travellers (*circa* 1485) of the city of Benin invariably contain descriptions of towers, from the summits of which enormous brass serpents were suspended. These accounts were confirmed, when in February, 1897, a punitive expedition entered into Benin city and discovered one of these brazen serpents still existent, not hanging from a tower, but laid upon the roof of one of the king's houses.



Ancient Serpent of Copper, found in Palestine.

M. le Comte C. N. de Cardi suggests that they may be "a remnant of some tradition handed down from the time of Moses," and states that other customs connected with the king of Benin, as the religious head of his country, "seem to have some trace of a

Biblical origin," and that these people are superior to the tribes by which they are surrounded.

Before closing this chapter we will glance at our subject in one or two side-lights that research has cast upon it. The belief that "like cures like" which is manifested in the above narrative of the employment of a brazen image of a serpent to check the onslaught of the living serpents, may be paralleled by similar accounts from Arabian sources. Thus Kazwīnī (II, 373) writes of a golden locust which guarded a certain town from a plague of locusts, and of two brazen oxen which stayed a murrain that had attacked cattle. Some writers consider it more likely that such a concrete idea was the motive of this primitive people in setting up the image, rather than that it was inspired by an abstract conception of the serpent as the symbol of divine healing, and sacred therefore to Asklepios.

The student should turn to the chapter on "The Serpent in

Charm and Incantation" for further examples of this homeopathic use of images, and also compare it with the facts given in the chapter on "The Serpent and Doctrine of Signatures."

A story related in the Acts of the Apostles (xxviii. 3) illustrates what was apparently the belief of the children of Israel that he who was killed by a serpent bite was necessarily wicked, and is there ascribed to the barbarous people of Melita.

The writer after describing the hospitable reception given by the savages to his shipwrecked company, says that "when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly; but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god."

The healing serpent of Moses afterwards became the symbol of the uplifted Christ. It is written in the gospel of John: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (iii. 14).

And now Nehushtan is no more a mere piece of brass; it has become the divine Serpent of the Tree, some of whose manifold forms we have endeavoured to describe in another chapter.

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CHAPTER IX

ÆSCULAPIUS, THE HEALING SERPENT

SERPENTS in ancient mythical stories are often said to have knowledge of healing or life-restoring plants. Thus, we learn from Apollodorus (III, 3. 1.) that Glaucus, son of Minos, was raised from the dead by the seer Polydius who had learned the secret from a serpent, and we know from Pliny that a similar story was told by Xanthus, an early historian of Lydia, of the Lydian hero, Tylon or Tylus. According to the tale Tylon was walking one day along the banks of the Hermus when a serpent stung and killed him. His sister, Moire, in great distress at his cruel fate persuaded a giant named Damasene, to slay the serpent. This he did, but the serpent's mate gathered a herb called "the flower of Zeus" which grew in the woods, and brought it in her mouth to the lips of the dead serpent who immediately revived. Moire, who had been watching the serpent's actions, took the same herb to her dead brother, Tylon, and renewed his life by touching him with it.

Bearing these instances in mind, we shall have no difficulty in realising why Æsculapius, or more properly Asclepius, the reputed son of Apollo, the Sun-god, was worshipped all over Greece as the god of medicine, and like his sire was symbolised by the serpent.

The worship of Æsculapius under this image originated in Greece at Epidaurus where he was born, but probably it was ultimately derived from Egypt, and Æsculapius was but another and newer personification of the healing power represented by the sun-serpent, Cneph, Cneph, or Kneph, which was worshipped by the Egyptians. Garnier says that Æsculapius "may more or less be identified" with the Babylonian god Hea, who was also symbolised by a serpent, and in support of this, he points out that "Hea," or "Heya," is the Arabic word for both "life" and "serpent," and, he continues, "the etymology of the name Æsculapius tends further to identify him with 'Hea,' for 'Aish shkul ape' (which would be written 'Aishkulape' and 'Æsculapius' in Greek), means 'the man-instructing serpent,' from *aish*, 'man,' *shkul*, 'to instruct,' and *ape* or *aphe*, 'serpent.'

Similarly 'Hea,' the serpent-god, is called 'The teacher of Mankind, the Lord of Understanding,' etc., and like Æsculapius, he is 'The Life-Giver.'"

It is supposed that Cadmus, who was one of the earliest colonists of Greece mentioned in history, and is said to have introduced the alphabet there, also brought with him the worship of the serpent either from Egypt or Phœnicia. As Cadmus and his wife Harmonia are said to have been finally transformed into serpents, and after this Cadmus was worshipped as the serpent god, it is possible that they are the originals of Æsculapius and his wife or sister Hygia.

A splendid temple was erected to the honour of Æsculapius at Epidaurus. It contained a gold and ivory statue of the god by Thrasymedes, half the size of the statue of Olympian Jupiter at Athens. He was represented sitting; one hand holding a staff, the other resting on a serpent's head,—whilst a dog, as an emblem of watchfulness, crouched at his feet. On the coinage of ancient Greece he is usually pictured with a long beard, holding in his hand a staff around which a serpent is twined. Often he is accompanied by a cock, and sometimes by an owl. At Epidaurus there was a peculiar breed of yellowish-brown snakes, large in size, harmless, and easily tamed, which lived in the temple, and were fed by servants, who, because of religious awe, were fearful of approaching the sacred reptiles, since they were believed to be the form in which the god manifested himself. The following story is illustrative of this, and it also accounts for the introduction of the worship of Æsculapius to Rome (about 291 B.C.) where a temple was built to him in which he was honoured under the form of an enormous serpent.

A pestilence having broken out in this city, the oracle at Delphi was consulted as to the best means of combating it. The advice given was that the Romans should send an embassy to Epidaurus to fetch Æsculapius from his temple. Ambassadors were duly sent, and having arrived in the temple, were gazing with awe on the magnificent statue of the god, when a venerable serpent glided forth from his lurking-place beneath, and proceeding to the ship which had brought the Romans, he went on board and there coiled himself up in the berth of Ogulnius, the principal ambassador. The ambassadors instantly recognised that it was the deity who had assumed this form, and conveyed it homewards. On reaching an island in the Tiber, the serpent leaped ashore and disappeared. The Romans erected a temple on this spot and the plague was stayed "with wonderful celerity." A few inscriptions relating cures and the means employed, have been found in this island. An unsympathetic commentator writing about

these in "The Penny Cyclopædia" says, "The means are of such a nature that the cures must have been impostures, or have been wrought by the power of imagination; most likely the former."

It was the custom to place similar inscriptions in the temples of Æsculapius. At Epidaurus, there were stones in the sacred precinct, erected in commemoration of cures performed by the god, and recording in the Doric dialect the names and diseases of the patients, and detailing the means employed. Six of these remained when Pausanias visited the place; and besides, an ancient pillar, which commemorated the gift of twenty horses by Hippolytus, in gratitude for his restoration to life.

The usual offering to the god from grateful patients was a cock or a goat. The first-named of these typified the watchfulness that is so essential in a physician. The latter probably, by its immunity from disease, and ability to eat almost any poisonous herb unharmed, was considered to be specially under the god's protection and favour, and therefore at once an acceptable offering, and an unspoken prayer that the giver might be equally favoured.

We know very little as to the extent of Æsculapius' knowledge and his methods of practice. Pindar speaks of him as healing those afflicted with self-produced ulcers, wounds from brass or stone, or injuries from summer heat, or cold. On the same authority his remedies consisted of incantations, soothing drinks, external applications, and the knife.

Plato, in a remarkable passage inveighing against the effeminacy of his own times, contrasts the attention of contemporary physicians to diet, exercise, etc., with the negligence of the sons of Æsculapius in such respects; and quotes a passage from Homer, in which Machaon, returning from battle severely wounded, at once partakes of a mess of meal and cheese blended



ÆSCULAPIUS.
From old woodcut.

with strong Pramnian wine. He adds that it is not to be supposed that the god failed through ignorance to teach his sons *gymnastic medicine*,—by which he means diet, exercise, and the care that can strengthen a weak constitution,—but rather that the god only intended medicine to help those who had some accidental ailment, but a naturally sound constitution. This passage is at least good evidence as to what the teaching of Æsculapius was supposed to be in Plato's age.

The sons of Æsculapius, Machaon and Podálirius, fought in the Trojan war, and also exercised their medical skill. They are often mentioned by Homer, but they seem to have troubled only about external injuries.

For several centuries after the fall of Troy, medical skill seems to have been confined to the temples of the god, and only his descendants, the Asclépiadæ, who formed the priesthood, were allowed to practise; until in later days pupils were admitted into the brotherhood, after being solemnly initiated and bound by oath to conform to its rules.

The most famous temples, besides that at Epidaurus, were those of Rhodes, Cnidos, and Cos, where Hippocrates, who was a native of the island, is said to have profited from the records preserved in the temple. Croton and Cyrene also possessed schools of medicine. It is said that the god often personally prescribed for patients by means of dreams and visions, and the patients were prepared for this divine intercourse by means of religious rites. Bathing, abstinence, and hopeful tranquillity probably aided these cures.

But Æsculapius did not only prescribe for those who were sick. He had other missions to perform. In ancient times there was a widespread belief in the physical fatherhood of God, and many of the heroes of those days were reputed to be sons of God in a literal sense. The Serpent-god was greatly sought after by women who wished to have children. His sanctuary stood in a beautiful upland valley, and hither the women came. They slept in the holy place and in their dreams were visited by a serpent supposed to be the god himself. The children who were afterwards born to these women were in many cases, thought of as his offspring. The famous Aratus of Sicyon was believed by his countrymen to be a son of Æsculapius and begotten by him when in serpent form (Pausanias, II, 10, 3; IV, 14, 7 *et seq.*).

Frazer says of this hero's mother, "Probably she slept either in the shrine of Æsculapius at Sicyon where a figurine of her was shown seated on a serpent, or perhaps in the more secluded sanctuary of the god at Titane, not many miles off, where the sacred serpents crawled among ancient cypresses on the hill-top which

overlooks the narrow green valley of the Asopus, with the white turbid river rushing in its depths. There, under the shadow of the cypresses, with the murmur of the Asopus in her ears, the mother of Aratus may have conceived, or fancied she conceived, the future deliverer of his country."

The ancients would see nothing improbable in such an idea. The Emperor Augustus was said to have been begotten by a snake in the temple of Apollo, and hence was said to be a son of that god, and many other instances might be given of celebrated men who claimed sacred serpents as their fathers.

The reasons which caused the god of healing to adopt the serpent form are explained in the preface to an old translation of Ovid's "Metamorphoses": "The Legend of Æsculapius's voyage to Rome in form of a Snake, seems to express the necessary Sagacity required in Professors of that Art for the readier Insight into Distempers. This Reptile being celebrated by the ancient Naturalists for a quick Sight.

"The Venerable *Epidaurean* assumed the Figure of an Animal without Hands to take Fees; and therefore, grateful Posterity honoured him with a Temple. In this Manner should wealthy Physicians, upon proper Occasions, practise; and thus their surviving Patients reward." It would be interesting to know what proportion of patients survived the attentions of these disinterested physicians. From the glimpses we have taken of their methods we cannot believe it was very large.

Perhaps it is not generally realised that our Christmas-tree and Yule-log are connected with the healing serpent Æsculapius. It will be curious to trace this out. The Christmas festival of the Sun-god on the 25th of December was celebrated by many ancient peoples as the *natalis invicti Solis*—the birthday of the unconquered Sun; for the time of the winter solstice, when the days begin to lengthen, was regarded as a fitting symbol of the god's reincarnation, or birth for the purpose of subduing his enemies. The incarnated god was known by different names in different countries and periods. We may find him as Nimrod, as Tammuz or Adonis, and as Bacchus, and everywhere his birth was celebrated with feasting and revelry. The word Yule is the Chaldee term for an infant or little child, and Christmas Day was known among these people as Yule-day, or the "Child's Day," whilst Christmas Eve was called by them "Mother-night."

"This," says Mr. Hislop, "entirely accounts for the putting of the Yule-log into the fire on Christmas Eve, and the appearance of the Christmas-tree the next morning. As Zero-ashta, the Seed of the Woman, which name also signified Ignigena, or

'born of the fire,' he has to enter the fire on Mother-night, that he may be born the next day out of it as the 'Branch of God,' or the Tree that brings all divine gifts to men. . . . But why, it may be asked, does he enter the fire under the symbol of a log? To understand this it must be remembered that the divine Child born at the winter solstice was born as a new incarnation of the great god (after that god had been cut in pieces) on purpose to revenge his death upon his murderers. Now the great god, cut off in the midst of his power and glory, was symbolised as a huge tree, stripped of all its branches, and cut almost to the ground."

Mr. Hislop illustrates this symbolism by an engraving of a Tyrian medal. On it is shown the trunk of a large tree cut off short, with a serpent entwined around it, whilst sprouting from its roots is a young palm tree. "The great serpent," continues our author, "the symbol of the life-restoring Æsculapius, twists itself around the dead stock, and lo, at its side sprouts up a young tree—a tree of an entirely different kind, that is destined never to be cut down by hostile power—even the palm tree, the well-known symbol of victory. . . . The Yule Log is the dead stock of Nimrod, deified as the Sun-god, but cut down by his enemies; the Christmas-tree is Nimrod *redivivus*—the slain god come to life again" (p. 140).

As Madame Blavatsky has noted, "Esculapius, Serapis, Pluto, Knoum and Kneph, are all deities with the attributes of the serpent. Says Dupuis, 'They are all *healers*, givers of health, spiritual and physical, and of enlightenment.' The crown formed of an asp, the *Thermuthis*, belongs to Isis, goddess of Life and Healing."

Mercury is also one with Æsculapius. Like him he is the son of Apollo and bears the serpent, and delegates to it his powers. Like him he is so closely connected with his sire, the Sun, as actually to be often confused with him. The magic wand which Apollo presented to Mercury could have been entwined by nothing more essential to its wholeness than the health and life-giving serpents, without which it could have had no power to bestow wealth and happiness.

Macrobius says: "Æsculapius was the beneficent influence of the Sun which pervaded the souls of man," and as the Sun was considered to be the visible representative of the Creator, so Æsculapius, the Serpent-god, was the life-giver and restorer. The Greeks, failing to realise the true esoteric doctrine made Æsculapius only the god of healing.

The Egyptian god of Silence, Harpocrates, has also been identified with Æsculapius and the serpent is represented as

encircling his figure. Silence may be a *potent healer* if it be inspired by rest and peace.

The ancient Grecian goddess of health, Hygeia, was, as we have seen, appropriately enough, the sister or daughter of Æsculapius, and was constantly associated with him in ritual and in art. She was worshipped along with him in various cities of Greece. She is represented as a maiden, fully draped, and usually holding a patera.

Very often, too, we find her with the long staff or sceptre, which was an attribute of her father, and she is generally accompanied by the Æsculapian serpent, which may be regarded as an embodiment of the delegated healing power of Apollo. The image of a goddess entwined by serpents which was discovered in a prehistoric shrine at Gournia in Crete, may have represented a predecessor of the serpent-feeding Hygeia. A favourite subject of Greek art is a woman feeding a serpent from a saucer, and the human figure in these groups is commonly taken to be the Goddess of Health.

The Roman goddess of health, Salus, was imaged as

a woman seated on a throne, holding a bowl in her right hand. Close beside her was an altar, a snake twining around it and lifting up its head towards the bowl. Our illustration depicts her with the sacred serpent resting on her shoulder, and the saucer in her hand is presumably filled with milk for its enjoyment. The subject was a favourite one with the Roman artists and sculptors. Salus personified health, prosperity and the public weal. She was worshipped publicly on the 30th of April, along with Pax, Concordia and Janus, and had a temple on the Quirinal hill. Hygeia, who also had a statue at Rome, in the temple of Concordia seems to have been the Grecian conception of the same goddess.

There is a curious analogy between Æsculapius and the Malagasy god of wisdom and healing,—Ramahavaly. One of the



SALUS, OR HYGIA, GODDESS OF HEALTH.

names by which the latter is known is *Rabiby*, i.e. "animal," signifying that he is the "god of beasts." Serpents are looked upon with awe in Madagascar as being his emissaries. He is known as the Physician of Imerina, and believed to preserve from, and banish, epidemic diseases. Mr. Ellis tells us that he is sometimes described "as god, sacred, powerful and almighty; who kills and makes alive; who heals the sick and prevents diseases and pestilence; who can cause thunder and lightning to strike their victims or prevent their fatality; can cause rain in abundance when wanted, or can withhold it so as to ruin the crops of rice. He is also celebrated for his knowledge of the past and future, and for his capacity of discovering whatever is hidden or concealed."

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CHAPTER X

THE HERALDIC SERPENT

HERALDRY has been universally in use in modified forms from the earliest ages, and has everywhere and always been regarded as of the highest importance, and a link between the mysticism of religion, and the battles of everyday life.

Many of the ancient devices claimed direct divine inspiration as their source, and were said to have fallen from Heaven, or to have appeared in the sky; but we have no space to give instances that are not strictly relevant to our subject. However, we shall feel no surprise to find the sacred serpent or dragon figuring often on banners, shields and arms, and we propose to glance at some of these in this chapter.

Tasso calls our attention to a curious example (here illustrated) when, in Canto 1, he makes Godfrey of Bouillon, whilst reviewing the Christian leaders and their troops, say:

"Nor to strong Otho be the
verse denied,
Otho, who conque ed from
the Paynim vilde
The shield wheron the snake
devours a naked child."

This is a direct allusion to Otho Visconti, the founder of that famous Italian family which for centuries possessed sovereign power in Italy as Lords of Milan and Dukes of Lombardy. The tradition preserved in that family is that in the first Crusade, Otho conquered a huge Saracen, and took from him his shield, on which was



THE ARMS OF VISCONTI, MILAN, AND LOMBARDY.

portrayed this device of a crowned serpent swallowing a naked infant. He adopted it as his own coat of arms, and it became not only the arms of his family, but has remained ever since the acknowledged ensign of the city of Milan, and of the Province of Lombardy.

Another example is afforded by the usual bearing of the name of Vaughan in South Wales which displays three boys' heads couped at the bust argent, wreathed about the neck with a snake proper.

Whilst the serpent is a somewhat rare bearing, the dragon on the other hand, is a favourite heraldic emblem, and has formed the ensign of many nations. Its name is thought to be derived from *drakesythai* (drakein, to look), and it is said to be thus called from its terrible eyes. Its figure varies considerably according to the fancy of the delineator. But although the name is freely used to designate any large serpent, it is properly applied to the fabulous winged serpent or lizard of heraldry. The chief characteristics of this monster are the head of a wolf, the body of a serpent, four eagles' feet, bat-like wings, and barbed tongue and tail.

A dragon without wings is known as a lindworm, or lintworm which, according to Grimm ("Deutsche Mythol.," II, 652), means a beautiful or shining worm.

The following old verse is descriptive :

" There was a dragon great and grymme,
Full of fire and also of venym ;
And as a lion then was his fete,
His tayle was long and full unmete ;
Between his head and his tayle
Was twenty-two foote withouten fayle ;
His body was like a wine ton,
He shone full bright against the sun ;
His eyes were bright as any glass,
His scales were hard as any brass."

In some of the older treatises on natural history full descriptions of the dragon may be found, no doubt as to its actual existence being entertained by the writers. Conrad Gesner, Professor of Natural History at Zurich, and Aldrovandi, the Pisan professor (who were two of the ablest scientific writers of the sixteenth century), have bequeathed to us elaborate descriptions of the dragon. Because of its watchfulness the ancient mythologists represented the chariot of Night as drawn by dragons, and Shakespeare, alluding to the horror with which these gloomy shades were regarded by many, makes "scale of dragon," one of the loathly ingredients of the witches' mess

("Macbeth," IV, 1), indicating that Night is the period of occult terrors.

But the symbol was not often degraded in meaning thus. Its quality of watchfulness suggested the Divine guardianship, and thus its representation on a banner came to be held in special reverence as an indication of the Presence of Deity. Because of this it was the chosen standard of the Phœnicians, the Assyrians and the Babylonians, as of many other ancient peoples, and in later times was adopted by the Emperor Constantine Dracos of Constantinople, who is said to have taken the conception of the dragon standard which he used in battle from the Assyrians.

The Persians, the Scythians, and the Parthians also bore on their standards the figure of a dragon or serpent, and the Romans adopted this custom from the Parthians, the Dacæ, or the Assyrians about the time of Trajan, and called their military ensign the draco. This was made to resemble a large serpent or dragon and fixed upon a spear. Its head had gaping jaws of silver, whilst its body was formed of coloured cloth or skins, which, as they were hollow and flexible waved about with a serpentine motion, as the wind entered through the open mouth. At first, as appears from Ammianus Marcellinus, the Roman dracos were merely figures of dragons painted in red (to symbolise fire) on their flags, but among the Persians and Parthians they were figures in full relievo, so that the Romans were often deceived and took them to be the objects they represented.

The standard-bearer of the cohort who bore the draco was known as draconarius, and the emperors carried the custom with them to the Eastern world. Under the emperors of Byzantium, as well as under the emperors of Rome, every cohort or centurion bore a dragon as ensign.

Marcellinus, describing the triumphal entry of Constantine into Rome after his victory over Magnentius, says that numbers of the chief officers who preceded him were surrounded by dragons embroidered on various points of tissue, fastened to the golden or jewelled points of spears ; the mouths of the dragons being open so as to catch the wind, which made them hiss as though they were inflamed with anger, while the coils of their tails were



THE DRACO.

Roman ensign adopted from The Parthians, depicted on the Column of Trajan.

also contrived to be agitated by the breeze (Bk. XVI, 10). He tells too of Silvanus tearing the purple silk from the insignia of the dragons and standards, and by this means assuming the title of Emperor.

In Northern Europe the ancient Vandals emblazoned the figure of a flying dragon upon their royal banners, and the Danes were conspicuous by the sacred dragon on the royal standard even among the many serpent worshippers of those times.



A HERALDIC DRAGON.

certainly existed as an armorial ensign among the Cymrians, before they could have had any obligation to the songs and legends of that people. Like the Roman dragon, it was red in colour, so differing from the Saxon dragon which was white.

The Saxons of Wessex adopted the dragon as their ensign from a very early period. Probably it was as a compliment to them that Edward Ironsides, who was the hero of the Saxons, assumed this bearing. The principality of Wessex formed the most important portion of the pure Saxon race, and its founder was the ancestor of the Imperial house of the Basileus of Britain.

Their dragon standard was carried by the piratical Normans into France, where it was adopted as an ensign by the Dukes of Normandy, and a charter was also granted to one of the family of Bertran to bear the dragon standard.

Among the Celts the dragon was the emblem of sovereignty, and as such it was depicted on the helmet of the monarch, just as in Egypt the basilisk surmounted the head-dress of Egyptian kings; and with the same meaning, in both cases, that God alone, and always, was above the earthly ruler.

Although some writers have supposed that the dragon was introduced to Britain from the East, through the Saracens, it

The origin of the dragon standard of the Anglo-Saxons is given as follows by Matthew of Westminster :

"The brother of the British king Aurelius beheld a vision—a fiery meteor in the form of a great dragon, illumined the heavens with a portentous glare. The astrologers unanimously expounded the omen to signify that the seer would one day sit upon the throne of Britain. Aurelius died, and his brother became king. His first royal act was to cause the fabrication of two dragons in gold, like the figure which the meteor assumed. One of these he placed in Winchester Cathedral; the other he reserved to be carried before him in his military expeditions. And hence the custom which the kings of England have ever since observed—that of having the dragon standard borne before them in battle."

In the year 742 a great battle was fought at Burford, in Oxfordshire, and the Golden Dragon, which, like the White Dragon, was the standard of Wessex, was victorious over Ethelbald, the king of Mercia.

The warfare between the Saxon and Gaelic or Celtic race which, as we have seen, both used the dragon as their emblem, is mirrored in an old Welsh romance,—*"The Story of Lludd and Llevelys,"* which has been translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in her *"Mabinogion."*

It tells of a terrible trouble that oppressed Britain in the days of Lludd, originally the Zeus of the Britons and the Gaels, who in later mythology was changed from god to king. This was a shriek "that came on every May eve, over every hearth in the Island of Britain, and went through people's hearts and so scared them that the men lost their hue and their strength, and the women their children, and the young men and maidens their senses, and all the animals and trees and the earth and the waters were left barren."

Lludd was puzzled, as well he might be, to know how to deal with this mysterious terror, but, by the advice of his nobles, he went to France to consult his brother Llevelys, who ruled as king there, and had the reputation of being "a man great of counsel and wisdom."

Llevelys explained the shriek to him, saying, it was raised by a monster known as the Red Dragon of Britain which was being attacked by the White Dragon of Saxony in mortal combat. He then proceeded to give his brother practical advice as to how to cope with the trouble. Lludd was to measure the length and breadth of Britain, and when he had thereby found the exact centre of the island, he was to have a pit dug upon the spot. In this pit was to be placed a vessel filled with mead of the

best make, and covered over with satin to conceal it from view. Llevelys said that the dragons would come, and fight in the air above this spot until they were so exhausted that they would fall together on the top of the satin cloth, and so draw it down with them into the mead. When they found with what a delightful beverage they were surrounded they would naturally drink it, and this would cause them to sleep. As soon as Lludd was sure they were helpless, he was to go to the pit and wrap both in the satin cloth and bury them together in a stone coffin in the strongest place in Britain. If he successfully carried out these instructions, the shriek would trouble his kingdom no more.

Lludd returned to Britain and did as the French king had advised. He carefully measured his island kingdom, and proved its exact centre to be at Oxford, and there he had the pit dug, and in it placed the vessel of mead concealed by a satin covering. Then, everything being ready, he watched for the promised appearance of his victims. They soon came, and all happened as Llevelys had foretold. After fighting desperately in the air, they fell together upon the satin cloth, and with it sank into the bath of mead. Lludd waited till they were perfectly silent and still, and then, dragging them forth, he carefully enfolded them in the satin, and carried them to the district of Snowden where he buried them in the strong fortress near Beddgelert, the remains of which are still called "Dinas Emrys."



A HERALDIC WYVERN.

No more was heard of the fatal shriek until five hundred years later, when Merlin had the dragons dug up, and they began their battle again. This time the Red Dragon was victorious, and drove the White Dragon out of Britain, so the warfare ceased.

Not only was the device of the dragon borne upon the banners and standards of ancient warriors. Their very ships were built to conform to its sacred outlines.

Mackenzie thus describes the ships of the Vikings "who were for ages the scourge of our Scottish shores. . . . The galleys in which the North-men came were long, black, and low. The bow

was formed like a gigantic dragon which seemed to cleave the waves with its gaudily painted breast, while its tail curled aft over the head of the helmsman. The shining shields of the warriors hung in a row outside the bulwarks. Twenty or thirty long oars, projecting from each side, smote the ocean with even beat. A single mast bore a large square sail made in broad stripes of red, white, and blue. Well were these dragon-galleys known on the Scottish shores."

But occasionally such vessels came to Britain on other missions than conquest and destruction.

" . . . A ship, the shape thereof
A dragon wing'd," ("Coming of Arthur")

was said to have brought the good King Arthur as a babe to British shores and then to have mysteriously vanished, leaving the child to be washed by the waves to Merlin's feet.

And the form of this fairy ship, as we all know from Tennyson's "Idylls" was adopted by King Arthur as his ensign; the golden dragon of Britain:

"The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,
That crown'd the state pavilion of the king,"

and shed its glorious rays upon Arthur's helmet as he rode to his last battle,

"making all the night a stream of fire."

"The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of Kings," was easily found by those who sought him among the throng at Camelot.

"Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherin they lost themselves."

("Lancelot and Elaine.")

To Arthur was assigned a celestial and miraculous parentage from Uthyr Pendragon (Head of the Dragon). Uthyr himself was the Celtic Jupiter, who, under the form of a cloud became the father of Arthur—the Celtic Hercules. Arthur's own name was bestowed on two constellations—Arthur's Chariot, now known as the Great Bear, and Arthur's Lyre.

Gradually in the Celtic people, as in the Grecian, an unfortunate

tendency arose to explain the earlier myths, the meanings of which had become obscure, by supposing they were accounts of adultery and incest. So the Uthyr Pendragon of the Round Table is a real Jupiter. The cloud became a human man, and the whole legend suffered degradation. Historically, Arthur is said to have succeeded Uther as pendragon or dictator of the Britons in 516, and his adventures are related by the old Welsh bards and in the chronicles of Geoffery of Monmouth.

The real Arthur was probably a leader of the Celtic tribes against the Saxons in the fifth century. In Celtic chivalry, the word dragon came to be used as a synonym for chief; and as the knights who slew a chief in battle were said to slay a dragon, this necessarily helped to keep alive the popular traditions of serpent or dragon-slayers that these people had brought with them in their westward migration from their Aryan home.

The red Dragon was the device of Cadwallader, which all his descendants bore on their banners, and Gray identifies the warrior king with his totem in the following lines:

“Dauntless on his native sands
The Dragon son of Mona stands;
In glitt'ring arms and glory drest,
High he rears his ruby crest.”

Cadwallader succeeded to the nominal sovereignty of Britain in 660, but, disheartened with the progress of the Saxons, he went to Rome in 686, and there died in 703. With him ceased the title of King of the Britons.

King Henry VII was proud of tracing his descent from Cadwallader and took the red dragon as one of his supporters. He also created the office of the Pursuivant of Arms known as Rouge Dragon, and so named from the red dragon of Cadwallader. The badge is here given.

The arms of Berkshire are the dragon, and just below its famous White Horse is a mound known as the Dragon Hill. Whether this is of natural or artificial origin is a matter of doubt.

The ancient British word *Draig* emphasises the fact that our ancestors were ophiolaters. For it embraces the double meaning of a fiery serpent (or dragon), and the Supreme Being.

This sacred symbolism was embodied in the Anglo-Saxon standard at Hastings,—as may be seen from the representation, of it in the Bayeux tapestry, for it consisted of a dragon carried upon a staff. Harold, the last of the Saxon kings, fell on that fatal field, fighting in defence of his loved country, between dragon standards.

As Matthew of Westminster says: “The King's place was

between the Dragon and the Standard.” The Dragon as symbol of the Divine Presence was of course held to be a most potent charm to ensure victory, and the king, as the earthly representative of Deity, was fitly placed beside it.

But since the Dragon was not only the ensign of Britain, but also the royal standard of the Danes and Normans, it continued in use after the Conquest down to the reign of Henry VIII. The lions or leopards which have been assigned to William the Conqueror are certainly a later invention. There is no appearance



ROUGE DRAGON OF CADWALLADER.

of them on the banners and shields of the Norman army as represented in the Bayeux tapestry. The contending forces in this fateful battle had alike invoked the sacred Presence. If the faith of the vanquished party was shaken, at least the conqueror's confidence would not be diminished by the result, and the emblem continued long after to be used in British warfare. It was the standard carried by the crusading army of Richard Cœur de Lion (in 1190) as a sign that their mission was a sacred one.

On one occasion, Hoveden tells us, a dispute arose between two of Richard's knights as to which of them belonged the honour of bearing it, and “when the king had planted his standard in the middle, he gave his dragon to be borne by Peter

de Pratellis, contrary to the claim of Robert de Trussebut, who demanded that honour as his hereditary right."

Peter Langtoffe says that at the battle of Lewes, fought in 1264 in the reign of Henry III, "The king schewed forth his schild, his dragon full austere."

It was during the reign of this monarch that the dragon standard became the recognised signal for destruction. Knighton tells us how, during the Welsh campaign, "so great was the indignation of Henry, that having raised the dragon standard, he ordered his troops to advance and give no quarter," whilst Matthew of Paris records, how, "animating his troops, he marched daily clad in armour, and unfolding his royal ensign, the dragon which knows not how to spare, he threatened extermination to the Welsh." Deane notes that "with similar ferocity, and with the same terrific standard, he marched against his rebellious barons. The dragon was always the herald of 'no quarter.'"

Like the Encircled Serpent, the dragon symbolised God as All-Preserver, but likewise dread Destroyer.

Not only in England, but also in Scotland, the sacred ensign was originally the dragon, but for some reason this seems to have fallen into disrepute even earlier in the northern country.

William the Lion, of Scotland, obtained his surname because before his time (1165) the royal standard of Scotland bore the figure of a dragon, but William substituted for this the lion, which the royal arms of Scotland still bear.

It is from the sacred *Draig*, or Dragon, borne on these ancient standards that the modern name of dragoon is derived. The original meaning of this word was a cavalry soldier who followed the ensign of a dragon. The *Draconarii* were horse soldiers who bore dragons for ensigns. The original dragoons were raised by Marshal Brisac in 1554, and carried a kind of short carbine, known as a dragon, "on the muzzle of which, from the old fable that the dragon spouts fire, the head of a dragon was worked." These troops were specially raised in order to be superior to the German reiters (who used the pistol to so much advantage), and on this account were provided with a more formidable weapon that was like a small blunderbuss.

It is said by some writers that in Britain the first regiment of dragoons was raised in 1681, but other authorities say that the Scots Greys, established 1683, is the oldest dragoon regiment.

From the ancient custom of assigning to the monarch the place of honour between the Dragon and the Standard, originated the ensign's "pair of colours" in a battalion.

The first colour, which is the "King's Colour" is properly the

standard, and has its place to the right, whilst the second colour, known as the "Regimental Colour," is the "Dragon," and to it is assigned the left-hand, or sinister, position. The standards and guidons of the cavalry also follow the rule.

The same curious device occurs among the Chinese, and a Jesuit, who accompanied the Emperor of China on a journey into Western Tartary in 1863, said, "This was the reason of his coming into their country with so great an army and such vast military preparations; he having commanded several pieces of cannon to be brought, in order for them to be discharged from time to time in the valleys; purposely that the noise and fire, issuing from the mouths of the dragons, with which they were adorned, might spread terror around."

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CHAPTER XI

THE SERPENT AND THE TREE

THE connection between the constantly united symbols of the serpent and the tree is a beautiful and appropriate one, and seems to have appealed to peoples in every part of the world. With so many and such varied interpreters we must expect to find a number of differing interpretations, and now one aspect and now another forced into prominence or shaded in obscurity.

As Mr. Fergusson has pointed out, serpent worship was the especial characteristic of the old Turanian (or Akkadian) empire of Chaldea, whilst tree-worship was the more prominent feature of the later Assyrian Empire. This would seem to imply that the older race were phallic worshippers,—since the serpent is almost always connected indirectly with the adoration of the male principle of generation,—whilst the later race exalted the feminine or "mother" aspect of life, and found its fitting emblem in the sacred tree.

But the dual symbols have been interwoven and combined by peoples separated from each other by wide gulfs of time and space; so that even if we claim for all races a common origin, we must admit something peculiarly appropriate in symbolism that has survived so many vicissitudes. We may find it pictured on the sepulchral monuments of the Greeks and Romans, on the coinage of Tyre, and among the fetishes of Whidah. It prevailed among the Scandinavians, and the Druids employed its complex figure. The Jewish scriptures commence with the parable, and it is incorporated into Christianity.

There are necessarily numerous variations of so far-flung a legend, but for purposes of comparison we may roughly classify these under four headings. Firstly, there are those versions which under the figures of Serpent and Tree, allegorise the Active and Passive aspects of the Supreme. Secondly, we find the serpent, still divine, but now an individualised or personal deity, guarding the tree that represents knowledge, or life, or both, from those who might profane it. Thirdly, the serpent is degraded, and become symbolic of an evil power whose aim is the

destruction of the tree of life; and fourthly, serpent and tree alike represent evil and death.

Still another complication is found in some versions, for two trees are introduced, one of good and one of evil, and the Creator's message sent by the serpent to his creatures that they were to eat only of the fruit of the good tree, is perverted by the ill-chosen messenger.

I. *The Divine Serpent and Tree of Life*

It is perhaps at a first glance difficult to understand why these symbols should have been so arbitrarily chosen as representative of Divinity, and many writers on the subject whose works I have consulted seem baffled by the problem, or attempt to answer it by forced and unconvincing explanations. But if we realise that both serpent and tree were symbols of the sun in twofold aspect, and the sun of the Supreme Creator, we shall no longer be perplexed. The meaning is the same as that which is conveyed by the dual symbology of the Serpent and Egg. It sets forth the twofold nature of God, as Active and Passive, Spirit and Matter, Male and Female. The Serpent entwined around the tree is the energising, fructifying, masculine force. The tree is the passive, yet potent producer of the sacred fruit. Enwrapped by the Divine Serpent of Life, warmed and impregnated by his rays, she bears on her branches the apples of knowledge, and the leaves that are for the healing of the nations.

The Tree may also be considered as representative of the visible universe. The Serpent, as the Spirit of Life, whose embrace has caused her to bring forth the myriad conscious forms that teem upon her vast body, and find their home and food and shelter there, as birds and insects do upon a tree.

The Cross represents the tree before the vivifying Serpent has caused her to bud and bloom, and is the symbol of matter, inert and formless, even as the tree is of the feminine aspect of the Sun. Upon the Cross of matter the divine Serpent of Life has been lifted up and crucified. The agony is not yet over. The nails still pierce the sacred palms and hold them to the tree, and God still hides his face and appears to have forsaken the suffering Life which is His own emanation. But, gazing



CHRIST CARRYING THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF LIFE, AND ENCIRCLED BY THE SERPENT.

From the Roman Catacombs of St. Agnese.

sadly and earnestly upon the Mystery, we perceive that matter is but a veil of God, illusory and impermanent, and even as we watch is changing form and fading away, whilst Life is Eternal and Imperishable.

The crucified Serpent will cast off the worn-out skin and arise in renewed vigour and beauty, and the instrument of pain having fulfilled its purpose, will moulder away and cease to be.

Whilst many of the Christian Churches venerated the serpent as a holy symbol, few seem to have recognised the double emblem of the serpent and the tree, although it had occupied so prominent a position in the faith of their Jewish parent, and as we have noted was transformed into the serpent and cross of later symbology.

But the Lombards were an exception to this rule, and, according to Milner, were worshippers of a golden viper, and a tree, from which was suspended the skin of a wild beast. Barbatius, bishop of Benevento, found this emblem in use among them as late as A.D. 663. But with iconoclastic zeal he persuaded them to cut down the tree, and melt the golden viper into a sacramental chalice.

According to Jacob Ouzel, the serpent and tree were among the earliest objects of worship in Sarmatia, and he cites Erasmus Stella as saying, "For some time they had no sacred rites; at length they arrived at such a pitch of wickedness that they worshipped serpents and trees."

From these examples it is clear that the orthodoxy of the day had discarded the symbols and forgotten their meaning. But outside the Christian Church it has not been so, and the symbolism is recognised all over the world even now.

The Chinese people have many myths and legends entwined around the twin symbols of the serpent and tree. Like the Hebrews they tell of a mysterious garden in which a tree that bears apples of knowledge and immortality is guarded by a sacred dragon or winged serpent. They see in the serpent the symbol of Divine Wisdom keeping ward over the Tree of Life, and it is this serpent or dragon which forms the national emblem of the Celestial Empire.

The conception of a Mother-Goddess strongly influenced the religion of China. The Tree of Life is closely connected with her. She has many forms and is sometimes represented as a beautiful woman riding on a dragon, sometimes as a dragon, or sometimes as half-woman, half-serpent. Mackenzie says: "It is from the goddess that the tree receives its 'soul substance'; in a sense she is the tree. . . . The fruits of the tree are symbols of her as the mother, and the sap of the tree is her blood."

It is in this sense that Elliot Smith would interpret the story of Genesis. He says that "When Eve ate the apple from the tree of Paradise she was committing an act of cannibalism, for the plant was only another form of herself."

II. *The Serpent Guardian of the Tree of Life*

We have next to consider those myths in which Serpent and Tree instead of being merely two aspects of the one Supreme Being are regarded more personally and individually as guardian dragon or serpent, and sacred object guarded.

In this order we must place the Grecian myth of the apple-bearing tree of the Garden of the Hesperides. For a fuller account of this legend and its special meaning, the reader is referred to the chapter on the Ophites.

Another Grecian version of the Guardian Serpent and Tree of Life may be found in the myth of the Attic hero Erechtheus, said to have been the son of Hephæstus (Vulcan) and Atthis, daughter of Cranaus, the son-in-law and successor of Cecrops. Erechtheus was brought up by the goddess Athena, and was the chief means of establishing her worship in Attica. He instituted the Panathenæa, and a temple, the Erechtheum, was erected to his honour. He is represented as having been half-serpent, half-man in form, his lower extremities being serpentine. When his guardian and adopted mother, Athena, competed with Neptune for the honour of naming the city of Athens, she won the prize by creating the olive tree, which was therefore considered as sacred to her. Having planted the new-made tree as her special gift to mankind upon the Acropolis, she placed it in the guardianship of Erechtheus.

A Highland version of this aspect of the legend exists, in which the rowan tree represents the Tree of Life; it bears fruit every month, and its red berries, though but tasted, will stave off hunger for long, but it has its guardian serpent:

"It's berries' juice and fruit when red
For a year would life prolong.
From dread disease it gave relief
If what is told be our belief.
Yet though it proved a means of life
Peril lay closely nigh;
Coiled by its root a dragon lay
Forbidding passage by."

A Chaldean (?) carving of the tree and its guardian serpent may be seen in the British Museum. Madame Blavatsky comments on this characteristically: "Representing the events of The Fall according to G. Smith, there are two figures sitting

on each side of a tree, and holding out their hands to the 'apple,' while at the back of the 'Tree' is the Dragon-Serpent. Esoterically, the two figures are two 'Chaldees' ready for initiation, the Serpent symbolising the 'Initiator'; while the jealous gods, who curse the three, are the exoteric profane clergy."

Here, then, we have another aspect of the guardian serpent and the Tree of Divine Knowledge. This view is supported and further enlarged upon by a modern exponent of mystical Catholicism, Mr. Holden Sampson, who says that the Serpent of Eden was "the symbolic figure of the 'temptations,' or testing of man in his reincarnate course, and of his growth in the wisdom and knowledge of the Holy Mysteries. It is the symbol of the Upward Path of the human organism, which, in its several stages, opens up the vistas of Wisdom, Knowledge and Experience, to the growing intelligence and consciousness, by Steps and Degrees of Initiation in the Holy and Eternal 'Mysteries.'"

In the Buddhistic writings of the Chinese may be found mentioned a Garden of Wisdom situated in Central Asia, and inhabited by dragons, whilst in its midst stand the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. This is said to embody "the fact that, after the destruction of Atlantis, certain districts in Central Asia became the gathering place of the Initiates of the Good Law—the expression dragons, they who see and watch, being a term constantly used for Initiates" (Williamson).

The tree of life is often represented on Assyro-Babylonian monuments guarded by two winged figures, whilst the tree of knowledge is represented by the oracle tree of Ea, or Hea, which latter symbol was highly revered by several of the early Babylonian kings. This oracle tree was planted at Eridu, "the good city" under the protection of Ea, the god of wisdom and culture, and it is described in an old poem as growing in its sanctuary "between the mouths of the rivers on either side." Ea, as we have noted elsewhere, was closely associated with the serpent which is coupled with the tree, on a North Syrian monument now in the Louvre, as well as on a Babylonian seal. The cherubim are the Babylonian *Kirubi*, guardian spirits who keep ward at the entrance to a building or enclosure to drive away trespassers, both material and spiritual.

III. *The Serpent Destroyer of the Tree of Life*

We now come to the third aspect of our subject in which the serpent is viewed as the destroyer of the Tree of Life.

The Scandinavian creation myth is the almost unique example of this conception. It relates how Odin created an enormous

ash-tree which he named Yggdrasil, the Tree of the Universe, or of Life. This filled all the world, and took root not only in the deepest depths of Nilf-heim, the home of mist and darkness, whence arose the spring Hvergelmir, but also in Midgard, near Mimir's well (the ocean), and in Asgard, near the Urdar fountain.

A horrible dragon or serpent named Nidhug had his dwelling in Hvergelmir, and he continually gnawed at the roots of Yggdrasil, and was aided in his work of destruction by numerous worms. Their aim was to kill the tree, and their success, if accomplished, meant the downfall of the gods.

Running up and down the branches and stems of Yggdrasil was a squirrel named Ratatosk, or the Branch-borer, employed in repeating to the dragon below what had been said by the eagle who lived in the topmost boughs.

According to Bayley this very unusual emblem of the squirrel may be explained by its French name *écureuil*, which phonetically is *ek ur œil*, the Great Fire's Eye. This would make it symbolise the All-Seeing Eye of the Supreme. At the foot of the Tree the gods met in daily council beside the Urdar Well.

"The gods arose
And took their horses, and set forth to ride
O'er the bridge Bifrost, where is Heimdall's watch,
To the ash Igdrasil, and Ida's plain."

("Balder Dead," Matthew Arnold.)

The myth goes on to relate how the spirits of those who had led evil lives upon earth were first banished to Naströnd, the strand of corpses, where they waded in icy streams of venom through a cave made of intertwined serpents whose threatening heads were ever turned towards them. After untold sufferings in this horrid place they were washed down into the bubbling cauldron Hvergelmir, and Nidhug would pause for a moment from gnawing the roots of Yggdrasil, that he might devour their bones.

"A hall standing
Far from the sun
In Naströnd;
Its doors are northward turned,
Venom-drops fall
In through its apertures;
Entwined is that hall
With serpents' backs.

There Nidhog sucks
The corpses of the dead."

(Sæmund's "Edda," Thorpe's Trans.)

Though here the serpent is wholly evil, a symbolic sanctity is ascribed to the ash in Scandinavia that accounts for the following information from Bartholomew Angelicus, who, writing about 1260, says:

"Ash hath so great virtues that serpents come not in shadow thereof in the morning nor at even. And if a serpent be set within a fire and ash leaves, he will flee into the fire sooner than into the leaves." But here the position of destroyer and victim seems to be reversed. It is the tree that is dreaded by the serpent,—the passive by the active. Perhaps some legend exists to explain the anomaly, but I have not found it.

The Persian version of the legend of the fall is the second example of the hostility of the serpent to the tree. These people were indebted to the Chaldeans for many of their religious ideas and probably derived the allegory from that source. The scene of the story was laid in a garden known as Eren, or Heden, situated in Iran, and, according to the "Boundehesch" (one of the sacred books of the Parsees) a tree there gave birth to the first man, Meschia. His body divided into two beings, male and female, named Meschia and Meschiana. These were good and pure at first, but seduced by Ahriman, in the form of a serpent, they rendered to the Prince of Darkness the worship due from them to Ormuzd, the God of Light.

Thus they lost their first innocence, and quickly found it to be irrecoverable, either by themselves or their descendants, except by the intervention of Mithra;—the god who presided at the mysteries and initiations that were looked upon as the way of rehabilitation for those who truly sought the Divine.

The Persian story agrees so closely with the Hebrew account of the Fall, when both are stripped of their figurative language, that it is clear they are mere versions of one legend, the Persian version probably being the older of the two, and the symbolism employed in it being more transparent. Ahriman, known as "the old serpent with two feet," is evidently the origin of the speaking serpent of Eden, but the tree in the Persian version is single and is regarded as good, for the innumerable attendants of the Holy One are represented as guarding it from the efforts of Ahriman to destroy it.

Perhaps a reflection of this idea is seen in the Hebrew myth, where we read that the Lord God "placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. iii. 24).

But the idea implied by the context is that the sole object was to deprive man of its fruits, and no express mention of the serpent is made in this connection.

Mr. Wake has some interesting comments on the story we are considering. He says, "The legend is divisible into two parts, the first of which is a mere statement of the imparting of wisdom by the serpent and by the eating of the fruit of a certain tree, these ideas being synonymous, or at least consistent, as appears by the attributes of the Chaldean *Héa*. . . ."

"The second part of the legend, which is probably of much later date, is the condemnation of the act referred to, as being in itself evil, and as leading to misery and even to death itself. . . . The object of the myth evidently was to explain the origin of death, from which man was to be delivered by a coming Saviour, and the whole idea is strictly Mithraic, the Persian deity himself being a Saviour God."

The follower of Zarathustra would see in the promised "seed of the woman who shall bruise the serpent's head," a reference to Mithra, just as the Christian finds in it a promise of Christ.

The religious ideas embodied in the legend of the Fall were without doubt a late phase of thought, and Mr. Wake says, "It is well known to Biblical writers that this legend formed no part of the earlier Mosaic narrative."

IV. *The Serpent Tempter and Tree of Death*

The Scandinavian and Persian myths related above form an interesting link between those legends which show us serpent and tree alike as symbols of good, and those which set forth both as emblems of evil. As I have endeavoured to show, esoteric Christianity embraced the idealistic view, but its exoteric doctrine taught precisely the opposite, and formulated a benevolent, but limited and anthropomorphic god, perpetually opposed and thwarted in his good intentions by a wicked antagonist, whose superior wit amply compensated for his possibly inferior strength.

In a country where the serpent was hated and feared, it was the natural and appropriate emblem of this evil one; and the tree supporting it, in most cases suffered a like degradation, and, from being the Tree of Life, or of Knowledge, and the Great Mother, descended to become the bearer of deceptive and deadly fruit.

This view, derived from Judaism, was adopted by the larger portion of the Christian Churches, and to them was no mere symbol, but a literal record of actual history, whereof it were sin to doubt one word. The Churches burnt men alive for such "sins" when they were strong enough to do so. The Christian poet, Milton, has handed on the story of the Serpent of Eden

to us in pictorial verse that vividly illustrates the exoteric conception.

"The infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile,
Stirr'd up with envy and revenge, deceived
The mother of mankind, what time his pride
Had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host
Of rebel Angels. . . .
. . . Him the Almighty Power
Hurl'd headlong flaming from the ethereal sky,
With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition; there to dwell
In adamant chains and penal fire."

(*"Paradise Lost," I. 34 et seq.*)

But in spite of all, the Serpent contrived to get even with his Almighty but unwary foe. Jehovah had placed his new



THE TEMPTATION.
From old woodcut.

creation defenceless and unguarded in a garden where he himself was wont to come and walk in the cool of the day. Perhaps he thought his foe securely bound by those adamant chains, and

sufficiently occupied by the pangs of the penal fires inflicted on him.

Milton tells us that Satan had not yet assumed the serpent shape with which he afterwards became so closely associated, but having decided to make Jehovah's new creation serve his revenge, he sought an earthly form in which he might disguise himself the better to effect his purpose.

"The orb he roam'd
With narrow search; and with inspection deep
Consider'd every creature, which of all
Most opportune might serve his wiles; and found
The Serpent subtlest beast of all the field.
Him after long debate, irresolute
Of thoughts revolved, his final sentence chose
Fit vessel, fittest imp of fraud, in whom
To enter, and his dark suggestions hide
From sharpest sight: for in the wily snake
Whatever sleights, none would suspicious mark,
As from his wit and native subtlety
Proceeding; which, in other beasts observed,
Doubt might beget of diabolic power
Active within, beyond the sense of brute.

Like a black mist low-creeping, he held on
His midnight search, where soonest he might find
The serpent; him fast-sleeping soon he found
In labyrinth of many a round self-roll'd,
His head the midst, well stored with subtle wiles
Not yet in horrid shade or dismal den
Nor nocent yet; but, on the grassy herb,
Fearless, unfear'd, he slept: in at his mouth
The Devil enter'd; and his brutal sense,
In heart or head, possessing, soon inspired
With act intelligential; but his sleep
Disturb'd not, waiting close the approach of morn."

Having so far succeeded in accomplishing his fell purpose,

"(He) toward Eve
Address'd his way: not with indented wave,
Prone on the ground as since; but on his rear,
Circular base of rising folds, that tower'd
Fold above fold, a surging maze! his head
Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes;
With burnish'd neck of verdant gold, erect
Amidst his circling spires, that on the grass
Floated redundant: pleasing was his shape
And lovely."

That morning Eve had proposed to Adam that instead of sharing their labours in the garden together, as was their usual custom, they should divide their work the better to expedite it, and Adam, after some demur, had consented to the plan; so the

Serpent, favoured of Fate, found his intended victim unprotected even by her mate. Having first attracted her attention by his movements, he gazed on her as if lost in admiration, and then began to speak her praises.

It naturally aroused amazement in her, that a serpent should use the voice of man, and she asked him to explain by what miracle he had attained such power, whom God had "created mute to all articulate sound." This question gave the wily inspirer of the serpent the opportunity he had been working for, and he quickly seized it, telling Eve that originally he had been

" as other beasts that graze
The trodden herb, of abject thoughts and low."

But that he had discovered in the garden a marvellous and beautiful tree, laden with fruit fairest in form and scent and colouring. He had climbed its trunk and partaken of its luscious apples, and after found himself possessed of reason and speech.

He now offered to conduct Eve thither, and she, guilelessly accepting, he brought her to the mystic tree of knowledge forbidden by Jehovah to mankind. When she realised its identity she at first refused to eat of its fruit, but the Serpent soon put the matter in a light that caused her to revoke her decision.

" Do not believe
Those rigid threats of death ; ye shall not die.

. . . Will God incense his ire
For such a petty trespass ? and not praise
Rather your dauntless virtue, whom the pain
Of death denounced, whatever thing death be,
Deterr'd not from achieving what might lead
To happier life, knowledge of good and evil.
Of good, how just ? Of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known since easier shunn'd ?
God therefore cannot hurt ye and be just ;
Not just, not God ; not fear'd then nor obey'd :
Your fear itself of death removes the fear.
Why then was this forbid ? Why but to awe ;
Why, but to keep ye low and ignorant,
His worshippers ? He knows that in the day
Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear,
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then
Open'd and clear'd, and ye shall be as Gods."

The picture drawn by Milton of the Serpent's cool and persuasive logic forms a dramatic contrast to the scene that followed, when Jehovah, arriving in the garden for his usual evening walk in its pleasant shades, discovered that his will had been thwarted.

Apparently he was too angry to recognise the real offender, or

perhaps he was impotent to inflict further punishment on his arch-enemy. The Devil must have smiled as Jehovah rained his awful curses upon his own so recent creation. Not only did he curse the actual transgressors of his command, and all serpents, because Satan had assumed that form, but even the passive earth was cursed, and the unborn children and animals that were to come upon it ages thence were predestined to suffering and death by the wrath of the foiled and outwitted deity.

Byron says :

" The snake spoke truth : it *was* the tree of knowledge ;
It was the tree of life." (" Cain, I. 1.")

Genesis confirms this : " And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil : and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever . . . So he drove out the man : and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

According to Smith, these Cherubims were not a species of angel but, like the Cherub of Assyria and of Babylon, and indeed of the entire Orient, were fabulous winged griffin-like monsters. So at last the Tree had its protecting dragon.

If only Jehovah had thought thus to guard the gate before, instead of after the catastrophe !

Josephus' naive narrative of the events recorded in Genesis shed further light on the story and will repay perusal. He tells us, on the authority of Moses, that " God planted a paradise in the east, flourishing with all sorts of trees, and that among them was the tree of life, and another of knowledge, whereby was to be known what was good and evil." God " commanded that Adam and his wife should eat of all the rest of the plants, but to abstain from the tree of knowledge ; and foretold to them, that, if they touched it, it would prove their destruction. But while all the living creatures had one language, at that time the serpent which then lived together with Adam and his wife, showed an envious disposition, at his supposal of their living happily, and in obedience to the commands of God ; and imagining that, when they disobeyed them they would fall into calamities, he persuaded the woman, out of a malicious intention, to taste of the tree of knowledge of good and evil ; which knowledge when they should obtain, they would lead a happy life, nay, a life not inferior to that of a god : by which means he overcame the woman, and persuaded her to despise the command of God. Now when she had tasted of that tree, and was pleased with its fruit, she persuaded Adam to make use of it also. Upon this they perceived

that they were become naked to one another ; and being ashamed thus to appear abroad, they invented somewhat to cover them ; for the tree sharpened their understanding ; and they covered themselves with fig leaves ; and tying these before them, out of modesty, they thought they were happier than they were before, as they had discovered what they were in want of. But when God came into the garden, Adam, who was wont before to come and converse with him, being conscious of his wicked behaviour, went out of the way. This behaviour surprised God ; and he asked what was the cause of this his procedure ; and why he, that before delighted in that conversation, did now fly from it, and avoid it. When he made no reply, as conscious to himself that he had transgressed the command of God, God said, ' I had before determined about you both how you might lead a happy life, without any affliction and care, and vexation of soul ; . . . but now thou hast abused this my good-will, and hast disobeyed my commands, for thy silence is not the sign of thy virtue, but of thy evil conscience.'

" However, Adam excused his sin, and entreated God not to be angry at him, and laid the blame of what was done upon his wife ; and said that he was deceived by her, and thence became an offender, while she again accused the serpent. But God allotted him punishment, because he weakly submitted to the counsel of his wife ; . . . He also made Eve liable to the inconveniency of breeding, and the sharp pains of bringing forth children, and this because she persuaded Adam with the same arguments wherewith the serpent had persuaded her, and had thereby brought him into a calamitous condition. He also deprived the serpent of speech, out of indignation at his malicious disposition towards Adam. Besides this he inserted poison under his tongue, and made him an enemy to men ; and suggested to them that they should direct their strokes against his head, that being the place wherein lay his mischievous designs towards men, and it being easiest to take vengeance on him that way : and when he had deprived him of the use of his feet, he made him to go rolling all along, and dragging himself upon the ground. And when God had appointed these penalties for them, He removed Adam and Eve out of the garden into another place."

The central tablet of a large sculpture in the temple of Osiris at Phylæ appears to represent an Egyptian version of Adam and Eve, the serpent and the tree. The serpent is here a basilisk, standing erect, and the fruit, a pomegranate, is already plucked.

This tablet stands between two others and with them forms one composite picture with accompanying explanatory hieroglyphics. The design in the first compartment apparently

represents a basilisk, and the inscription above it has been deciphered and described as follows by Forster, who sees in it a confirmation of Genesis :

" I first noticed three hieroglyphics of men's heads, two of them set upon poles, with the figure of a serpent across each pole. The word beside these emblems of death was *wahar*, and its primary definition, ' Casting a man into something from which he cannot get out.' The second word was *wated*, ' a pile or stake driven into the ground '—a term standing beside the two upright poles, supporters of the human heads. The third was *fani*, ' perishing.' The fourth *Hak*, ' smiting with the sword.' Then follows (5) *rajaz* (Satanas?), or *rahh*, ' curling serpent.' (6) *Rai*, ' dissembling, acting hypocritically,' and (7) *Namas*, ' one guilty of imposture, a deceiver, an accuser.' "

Upon the central tablet the subject of which we have already described, there follows " (8) *Raman*, ' the Pomegranate tree.' (9) *Hatt*, ' lost and ruined men.' (10) *Badu*, ' transgressing the bounds of moderation.' (11) *Haja*, ' eating, giving to another to eat.'

" These words, be it observed, from 8 to 11 inclusive, stand over the picture of the Fall. Then follow (12) *rahak*, ' wandering from the right way, perishing.' And (13) the figure of a crouching lion, with a word under it of a double sense, and awfully self-interpretative, (1 and 2) *naham*—(1) ' Satan,' and (2) ' a lion.' This all-important word is determined by the hieroglyphic lion : if connected words have connected senses, in this place it is Satan as a ' roaring lion.' The next words (14) *ârm*, ' stripping the bone bare of flesh,' and (15) *natan*, ' fetid, ill-odoured,' with the significant figure of a vulture, seem to tell but too significantly, so far as words can tell—

' Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste,
Brought death into the world and all our woe.'

" The concluding words, (16) *añah*, ' manifesting great sadness ; peculiarly, through grief on account of sins and imploring the mercy of God,' and (17) *dari*, ' conscious,' illustrated by a human figure crouching on the heels, a well-known Egyptian attitude of devotion and homage—at least are well in unison with the repentance of our first Parents. Below the last four words, beginning with *ârm*, ' denuding a bone of the flesh,' is the figure of a jackal crouching on a tomb, with an unknown hieroglyphic between the forepaws, which I mistook for a torch. A glance into the lexicon undeceived and enlightened me. The words over the jackal's head, in the plainest characters, were

namar har, 'howls the angry dog,' and *machar*, 'sucking the marrow out of a bone.'

"The rest of this short inscription, being only the repetition of the vulture, with the words, 'ill-odoured, gnawed by famine,' the burden of this part would most plainly seem to be, the fatal consequences of the Fall (the scene of which stands depicted at hand), indicated by the tomb, the human bone, and the bird and beast of death."

In the same temple is another sculpture of this subject with two short descriptive inscriptions. Here the figures are represented as watering the tree, one of them is holding a fruit, and the serpent seems to be offering them a second by holding it on his head. The inscriptions as deciphered and translated by Forster, give the following sense: "Diligently watering" (the tree). "Promising a future good, he plunges (them) into evil."

V. *The Serpent as the Unfaithful Messenger*

Frazer has called our attention to another important and interesting point generally overlooked when considering the Bible story. This is the fact that the Tree of Life was *not* forbidden to our first parents, but rather seems as if it had been especially intended for their use in the first instance, and certainly included in the permission given to eat the fruits of all the garden produced, save that only of the Tree of Knowledge, or more probably, the Tree of Death.

But the Creator's originally benevolent intention was frustrated by the serpent. It seems hard to account for the reptile's malice (unless we accept Milton's view that he was merely the tool of the devil), since Jehovah had not then made enmity between his race and mankind, and he apparently gained nothing by his fraud,—but perhaps, as Frazer suggests, in the original version of the story the serpent himself partook of the Tree of Life, and so became immortal, whilst he persuaded Adam and Eve to take of the Tree of Death in his place.

Many savages held this strange idea that god and man were outwitted by serpents who secured for themselves the immortality intended for men, and the belief appears to have been shared by the Semites.

The Phœnician writer, Sanchuniathon, said that serpents were the longest lived of any animals, because they renewed their youth by casting away their worn-out skins. The Hebrews had an idea that the eagle achieved the same result by moulting its feathers: "Thy youth is renewed like the eagle's," says the Psalmist (Psalm ciii. 5), so they would see no difficulty

in such a theory. The idea that the serpent cheated mankind of immortality by securing for itself the life-giving plant the gods had intended for man, is found in the Gilgamesh epic, which is one of the oldest literary monuments of the Semitic race—and long anterior to Genesis.

The ancient Chaldean poem of which Gilgamesh is the hero is said to date back beyond 2500 B.C. Gilgamesh, who was king of Uruk, or Erech, having offended the goddess Ishtar, was afflicted with a skin disease as the result of her curse. To obtain relief he made a pilgrimage to the shrine of his deified ancestor, Pir-napistem (or Ut-napishtim), king of Shurippak, who was the Babylonian Noah. After bathing in sacred water, as advised by Pir-napistem, he was healed, and was then presented by his ancestor with a branch of a sacred tree which bore the suggestive name "In-old-age-the-man-becomes-young." But on his homeward journey Gilgamesh landed on an unknown shore, and drank from a spring. Whilst he did so, a serpent, evidently the genius of the spring, seized and carried off the precious branch from the tree of life.

Gilgamesh, being unable to recover it, weeping sadly, resumed his homeward way.

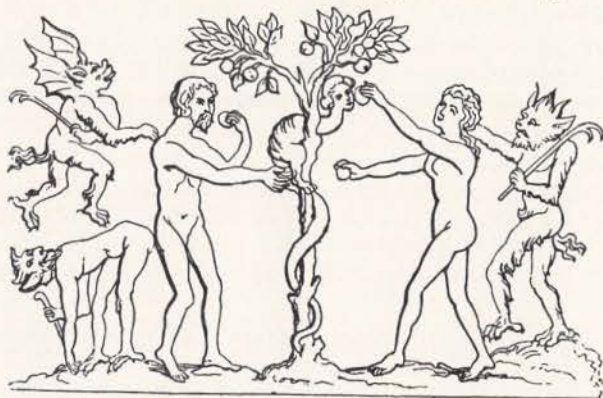
The serpent of this legend seems to typify the jealous-minded gods who wished to rob man of his immortality. It is true this story corresponds with that of Genesis in that nothing is said about the serpent eating the plant, and so gaining immortality for himself, but possibly the omission is due to the state of the text, which is obscure and defective. But, even if the poet were silent on this point, Mr. Frazer points out that the parallels further suggest, though they do not prove, that in the original of the story, which the Jehovistic writer has mangled and distorted, the serpent was the messenger sent by God to bear the glad tidings of immortality to man, but perverted the message to the advantage of his species, and the ruin of ours. The gift of speech would seem to have been lent to the serpent, in his capacity as ambassador from God to man.

Frazer, who relates many of these stories, sums them up as follows:

"If we may judge from a comparison of the versions dispersed among many peoples, the true, original story of the Fall of Man ran somewhat as follows. The benevolent Creator, after modelling the first man and woman out of mud, and animating them by the simple process of blowing into their mouths and noses, placed the happy pair in an earthly paradise, where, free from care and toil, they could live on the sweet fruits of a delightful garden, and where birds and beasts frisked about them in fearless

security. As a crowning mercy, he planned for our first parents the great gift of immortality, but resolved to make them the arbiters of their own fate, by leaving them free to accept or reject the proffered boon. For that purpose he planted in the midst of the garden two wondrous trees that bore fruits of very different sorts, the fruit of the one being fraught with death to the eater, and the other with life eternal. Having done so he sent the serpent to the man and woman and charged him to deliver this message: 'Eat not of the Tree of Death, for in the day ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die, but eat of the Tree of Life, and live forever.' Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field, and on his way he bethought him of changing the message; so when he came to the happy garden and found the woman alone in it, he said to her, 'Thus saith God: Eat not of the Tree of Life, for in the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die; but eat of the Tree of Death, and live forever.' The foolish woman believed him, and ate of the fatal fruit, and gave of it to her husband and he ate also. But the sly serpent himself ate of the Tree of Life. That is why men have been mortal, and serpents immortal ever since, for serpents cast their skins every year, and so renew their youth. If only the serpent had not perverted God's good message and deceived our first mother, we should have been immortal instead of the serpents; for like the serpents, we should have cast our skins every year, and so renewed our youth perpetually."

The beautifully illuminated manuscript known as Queen Mary's



THE FALL OF MAN.

From the illuminated manuscript of Queen Mary's Psalter.

Psalter contains a quaint illustration showing Eve yielding to the influence of a strangely formed Echidna-like monster with the head of a woman and the body of a dragon, whilst three

demons act as devil's advocates. One is patting Eve on her shoulder, with an air of approval and encouragement, while a second, with wings, is urging on Adam, and apparently laughing at his apprehensions; and a third is preventing him drawing back from the trial.

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CHAPTER XII

THE SERPENT AS PHALLIC EMBLEM

ALTHOUGH many writers unhesitatingly attribute a Phallic origin to the serpent as a religious emblem, this theory is not supported by all. Mr. C. S. Wake says, "So far as I can make out the serpent-symbol has not a direct phallic reference, nor is its attribute of wisdom the most essential. The idea most intimately associated with this animal, was that of life, not present merely, but continued, and probably everlasting. Thus the snake *Bai* was figured as Guardian of the doorways of the Egyptian Tombs which represented the mansions of heaven. A sacred serpent would seem to have been kept in all the Egyptian temples, and we are told that many of the subjects, in the tombs of the kings at Thebes in particular, show the importance it was thought to enjoy in a future state. Crowns, formed of the Asp or sacred *Thermuthis*, were given to sovereigns and divinities, particularly to Isis, and these no doubt were intended to symbolise eternal life. Isis was goddess of life and healing and the serpent evidently belonged to her in that character, seeing that it was the symbol also of other deities with the like attributes. Thus, on papyri, it encircles the figure of Harpocrates, who was identified with Æsculapius, while not only was a great serpent kept alive in the great temple of Serapis, but on later monuments this god is represented by a great serpent with or without a human head.

"Mr. Fergusson, in accordance with his peculiar theory as to the origin of serpent worship, thinks this superstition characterised the old Turanian (or rather let us say Akkadian) empire of Chaldea, while tree-worship was more a characteristic of the later Assyrian Empire.

"This opinion is no doubt correct, and it means really that the older race had that form of faith with which the serpent was always indirectly connected—adoration of the male principle of generation, the principle phase of which was probably ancestor worship, while the latter race adored the female principle, symbolised by the sacred tree, the Assyrian 'grove.' The 'tree of life,' however, undoubtedly had reference to the male element,

and we may well imagine that originally the fruit alone was treated as symbolical of the opposite element."

According to Layard, during the researches of M. Botta in the ruins of Kouyunjik, a curious representation of an Assyrian ceremony was discovered. It seems fairly evident that this had a Phallic significance. It shows two eunuchs standing before an altar, on which burns the sacred fire, and two serpents attached to poles, suggesting by their attitude the popular representation of the brazen serpent set up by Moses in the wilderness. A bearded figure leads a goat (symbol of sexual uncleanness), but the form and size of the altar do not suggest that a sacrifice is intended. The eunuchs and the uplifted serpents seem to suggest that it has already been made.

Dr. Donaldson considers that the serpent has always had a Phallic significance, and General Forlong from close and independent "observation in Eastern lands unaided by books or teachers, from thousands of stories and conversations with Eastern priests and people" arrived at the same deduction. He even asserts his opinion that phallic worship enters so closely into union with all faiths to the present hour, that it is impossible to exclude it from view. He says, "So imperceptibly arose the serpent on pure Phallic faiths, fire on these, and sun on all, and so intimately did all blend with one another, that even in the ages of true history it was often impossible to descry the exact God alluded to."

The intimate blending of the several symbols of ancient worship alluded to above is strongly marked in the Semitic languages, where, as Mr. Gliddon has pointed out, the same root signifies serpent and phallus. Both, in different senses, are of course solar emblems.

A further contribution to this subject is made by Brown, in his "Great Dionysiak Myth." He says, "The Serpent has six principal points of connection with Dionysos: (1) As a symbol of, and connected with, wisdom. (2) As a solar emblem. (3) As a symbol of time and eternity. (4) As an emblem of the earth, life. (5) As connected with fertilising moisture. (6) As a phallic emblem." Enlarging on the last of these points our author continues: "The serpent being connected with the sun, the earth life and fertility must needs be also a phallic emblem, and so appropriate to the cult of Dionysus Priapos. Mr. Cox, after a review of the subject, observes, 'Finally, the symbol of the Phallos suggested the form of the serpent, which thus became the emblem of life and healing. There then we have the key to that tree and serpent worship which has given rise to much ingenious speculation.' The myth of the serpent and the tree is not, I apprehend, exhausted by any merely phallic explanation,

but the phallic element is certainly one of the most prominent features in it, as it might be thought any inspection of the carvings connected with the Topes of Sanchi and Amravati would show. It is hard to believe, with Mr. Fergusson, that the usefulness and beauty of trees gained them the payment of divine honours. Again the Asherah or Grove-cult (Exod. xxxiv. 13, 1 Kings xvii. 16; Jer. xvii. 2; Micah v. 14) was essentially Phallic, Asherah being the Upright. It seems also to have been in some degree connected with that famous relic, the brazen serpent of Nehushtan (2 Kings xviii. 4). Donaldson considers that the Serpent is the emblem of desire. It has also been suggested that the creature symbolised sensation generally."

The Rev. G. W. Cox (whom Brown refers to in the paragraph quoted above), in his "Mythology of Aryan Nations," says, "If there is one point more certain than another it is that wherever tree and serpent worship has been found, the cultus of the Phallos and the Ship, of the Linga and Yoni, in connection with the worship of the sun, has been found also. It is impossible to dispute the fact, and no explanation can be accepted for one part of the cultus which fails to explain the other. It is unnecessary, therefore, to analyse theories which profess to see in it the worship of the creeping brute or the wide-spreading tree. A religion based on the worship of the venomous reptile must have been a religion of terror; in the earliest glimpses which we have



SERPENT EMBRACING
EGG.

of it, the serpent is a symbol of life and of love.

"Nor is the Phallic cultus in any respect a cultus of the full-grown and branching tree. In its earliest form the symbol is everywhere a mere stauros or pole; and although this stock or rod budded in the shape of the thyrsus and the shepherd's staff, yet, even in its latest developments, the worship is confined to small bushes and shrubs and diminutive plants of a particular kind. Nor is it possible again to dispute the fact that every nation at some stage or other of its history has attached to this cultus precisely that meaning which the Brahman now attaches to the Linga and the Yoni.

"That the Jews clung to it in this special sense with vehement tenacity is the bitter complaint of the prophets; and the crucified serpent adored for its healing powers stood untouched in the Temple until it was removed and destroyed by Hezekiah. This worship of serpents, 'void of reason,' condemned in the Wisdom of Solomon, probably survived even the Babylonish captivity.

Certainly it was adopted by the Christians who were known as Ophites, Gnostics and Nicolaitans. In Athenian mythology the serpent and the tree are singularly prominent. Kekrops, Erechtheus, and Erichthonios, are each and all serpentine in the lower portion of their bodies. The sacred snake of Athene had its abode in the Akropolis, and her olive trees secured for her the victory in her rivalry with Poseidôn. The health-giving serpent lay at the feet of Asklêpios and snakes were fed in his temple at Epidauros and elsewhere. That the ideas of mere terror and death suggested by the venomous or the crushing reptile could never have given way thus completely before those of life, healing, and safety, is obvious enough; and the latter ideas alone are associated with the serpent as the object of adoration. The deadly beast always was, and has always remained, the object of the horror and loathing which is expressed for Ahi, the choking and throttling snake, the Vritra whom Indra smites with his unerring lance, the dreadful Azidahaka of the Avesta, the Zohak or Biter of modern Persian mythology, the serpents whom Heraktes strangles in his cradle, the Python, or Fafnir, or Grendel, or Sphinx whom Phoibos, or Sigurd, or Beowulf, or Oidipous smite and slay. That the worship of the serpent has nothing to do with these evil beasts is abundantly clear from all the Phallic monuments of the East or West. In the topes of Sanchi, and Amravati the discs which represent the Yoni predominate in every part of the design; the emblem is worn with unmistakable distinctness by every female figure, carved within these discs, while above the multitude are seen, on many of the discs, a group of women with their hands resting on the linga which they uphold. It may indeed be possible to trace out the association which connects the Linga with the bull in Sivaïson, as denoting more particularly the male power, while the serpent in Jainaision and Vishnavism is found with the female emblem, the Yoni. So again in Egypt, some may discern in the bull Apis or Mnevis the predominance of the male idea in that country, while in Assyria or Palestine the Serpent or Agathos Daimon is connected with the altar of Baal."

Mr. J. H. Rivett-Carnac, in his paper printed in the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, entitled "The Snake Symbol in India," also upholds the opinion that the serpent is a symbol of the phallus. He says: "The serpent appears on the prehistoric cromlechs and menhirs of Europe, on which I believe the remains of phallic worship may be traced. What little attention I have been able to give to the serpent-symbol has been chiefly in its connection with the worship of Mahádeo or Siva, with a view to ascertain whether the worship of the snake and that of Mahádeo

or the phallus may be considered identical, and whether the presence of the serpent on the prehistoric remains of Europe can be shown to support my theory, that the markings on the cromlechs and menhirs are indeed the traces of this form of worship, carried to Europe from the East by the tribes whose remains are buried beneath the tumuli.

"During my visits to Benares, the chief centre of Siva-worship in India, I have always carefully searched for the snake-symbol. On the most ordinary class of 'Mahádeo,' a rough stone placed on end supposed to represent the phallus, the serpent is not generally seen. But in the temples, and in the better class of shrines which abound in the city and neighbourhood the snake is generally found encircling the phallus. . . . In the Benares bazaar I once came across a splendid metal cobra, the head erect and hood expanded, so made as to be placed around or above a stone or metal 'Mahádeo.' It is now in England. The attitude of the cobra when excited and the expansion of the head will suggest the reason for this snake representing 'Mahádeo' and the phallus.

"Although the presence of this snake in these models cannot be said to prove much, and although from the easy adaptability of its form the snake must always have been a favourite subject in ornament, still it will be seen that the serpent is prominent in connection with the conventional shape under which Mahádeo is worshipped at Benares and elsewhere, that it sometimes takes the place of the Linga, and that it is to be found entwined with almost every article connected with this worship."

As the author of "Ophiolatrea" points out, these symbols were "conceived in no obscene sense, but as representing regeneration, the new life, 'life out of death, life everlasting, which those buried in the tumuli, facing towards the sun in its meridian, were expected to enjoy in the hereafter. . . . 'a fitting ornament for the graves of the departed.' . . . The same idea in fact which . . . causes the rude Mahádeo and Yoni to be worshipped daily by hundreds of thousands of Hindus."

Frazer informs us that Sayids and Mussulmans of high rank in Northern India say that a snake should never be called by its real name, but should be described either as a tiger (*sher*), or as a string (*rassi*). Crooke says of the same district, that if you are bitten by a serpent, you must not mention its name, but may say, "A rope has touched me."

A curious sidelight is thrown on the reason of this mysterious paraphrasing by a remark of Jennings. "There is something strange about these cords, cordons, ropes, belts, bands, baldrics (also in the term 'belted earl'). These are always male accessories.

. . . Many early Norman mouldings exhibit various examples of the cable. Thongs, ties and network are seen to bind all the significant figures in the early English and Irish churches. Is there any connection between these bonds, or ties, or lacings with the 'cable-tow' of the initiates among the Masons? Perhaps the 'tow' in this 'cable-tow' means the 'Tau,' or stood for it originally. Reference may here be made to the snake which forms the girdle of the Gnostic 'Good Shepherd' in the illustration later in our book. . . . The Good Shepherd bearing upon his shoulder the Lost Lamb, as he seems to the uninitiated eye: but on close inspection he becomes the double-headed Anubis; having one head human, the other a jackal's, whilst his girdle assumes the form of a serpent, rearing aloft its crested head."

Anubis bore the title of Ap-hera, "opener of the roads" or "paths," which lead to heaven, and in this character he was often represented as a jackal seated on a pylon or gateway.

Samuel Birch says: "This may be considered as the type of the celestial Anubis, and as such he was styled lord of the heaven, and opener of the solar disc."

Anubis is identified with Mercury, whose serpent-entwined rod we have described in the chapter on the caduceus. He is "the mystic Mercurius Trismegistus,—Thrice-Master, Thrice-Mistress,—for this personage is double-sexed: Phœbe above, Diana on earth, Hecate below."

This description of Mercury at once recalls the fable of Tiresias, the celebrated prophet of Thebes, and suggests that the double sex ascribed to the god was not unconnected with the serpents that clung to his rod. Our readers shall judge for themselves. The story of Tiresias is said by Ovid to be as follows:

"When Jove disposed to lay aside the Weight
Of public Empire and the Cares of State,
As to his Queen in Nectar Bowls he quaff'd,
'In troth,' says he, and as he spoke he laugh'd,
'The Sense of Pleasure in the Male is far
More dull and dead, than what you Females share.'
Juno the Truth of what was said deny'd;
Tiresias therefore must the Cause decide,
For he the pleasure of each sex had try'd.
It happen'd once within a shady Wood,
Two twisted Snakes he in Conjunction view'd,



A design from Sylvanus Morgan, an old herald, showing the serpent uniting the spade and distaff.

When with his staff their slimy Folds he broke,
 And lost his Manhood at the fatal Stroke.
 But after seven revolving Years, he view'd
 The self-same Serpents in the self-same Wood :
 ' And if,' says he, ' such Virtue in you lie,
 That he who dares your slimy Folds untie
 Must change his Kind, a second stroke I'll try.'
 Again he struck the Snakes, and stood again
 New sex'd, and straight recover'd into Man ;
 Him therefore both the Deities create
 The sov'reign Umpire in their grand Debate ;
 And he declar'd for Jove ; when Juno fir'd
 More than so trivial an Affair requir'd,
 Depriv'd him in her Fury, of his Sight,
 And left him groping round in sudden Night.
 But Jove (for so it is in Heav'n decreed,
 That no one God repeal another's Deed)
 Irradiates all his Soul with inward Light,
 And with the Prophet's Art relieves the Want of Sight."

(Addison's Translation.)

Related to the serpents of the caduceus is the phallic serpent of the mystic Nehushtan, set up in the wilderness by the Hebrew lawgiver Moses. This consisted of a serpent coiled around the emblem of the phallus, the Tau or T. (See p. 84).

Freemasons have perpetuated this ancient symbolism. Wynn Westcott writes : " The Tau is well known to all Freemasons as the design on the Master's apron ; the Triple Tau is known in a higher grade, and in the 25th degree of the Ancient and Accepted Rite—the Knight of the Brazen Serpent—the jewel was a serpent creeping upon a Tau, with the words *nachustan*, ' serpent,' and *chethanu*, ' I have sinned.' This grade is said to be a revival of a military and monastic benevolent society founded by the Crusaders in the Holy Land."

The connection of the idea of sin with the creative act is reproved by Madame Blavatsky, who writes : " The first Christians never perceived that not only was there no sin in this disobedience [of Adam and Eve], but that actually the Serpent was the Lord God Himself, who, as the Ophis, the Logos, or the bearer of divine creative wisdom, taught mankind to be creators in their turn. They never realised that the cross was an evolution from the tree and the Serpent, and thus became the salvation of mankind. By this it would become the very first symbol of creative cause, applying to geometry, to numbers, to astronomy, to measure and to animal reproduction."

But the cross of Christ was an advancement on the Tau or male cross of the serpent of Moses. The former is the symbol of negation ; man's aspirations and desires represented by the ascending pole, abruptly terminated by the crushing horizontal.

" Thou shalt not," thunders the law, in answer to all man's efforts of self-expression.

A new element is visible in the Christian cross. The upright pole has pierced and transcended the horizontal. The cross no longer represents negation. The divine uplifted " Serpent " has redeemed it, and man's aspirations may soar into infinity.

The union of the masculine Tau with the feminine circle produces the ankh or crux-ansata, the symbol of that physical life which is brought into being by the conjunction of male and female principles. But such life, though it be the gift of the gods, is brief, and unsatisfying to its possessor, and serves but to arouse in him the longing for fuller expression. Our diagram suggests the way of attainment.

The nails of the crucifixion must replace the Tau, and the divine ideal of the Encircled Serpent, supersede the circle of desire and selfish gratification.



THE APOTHEOSIS OF
THE ANKH.

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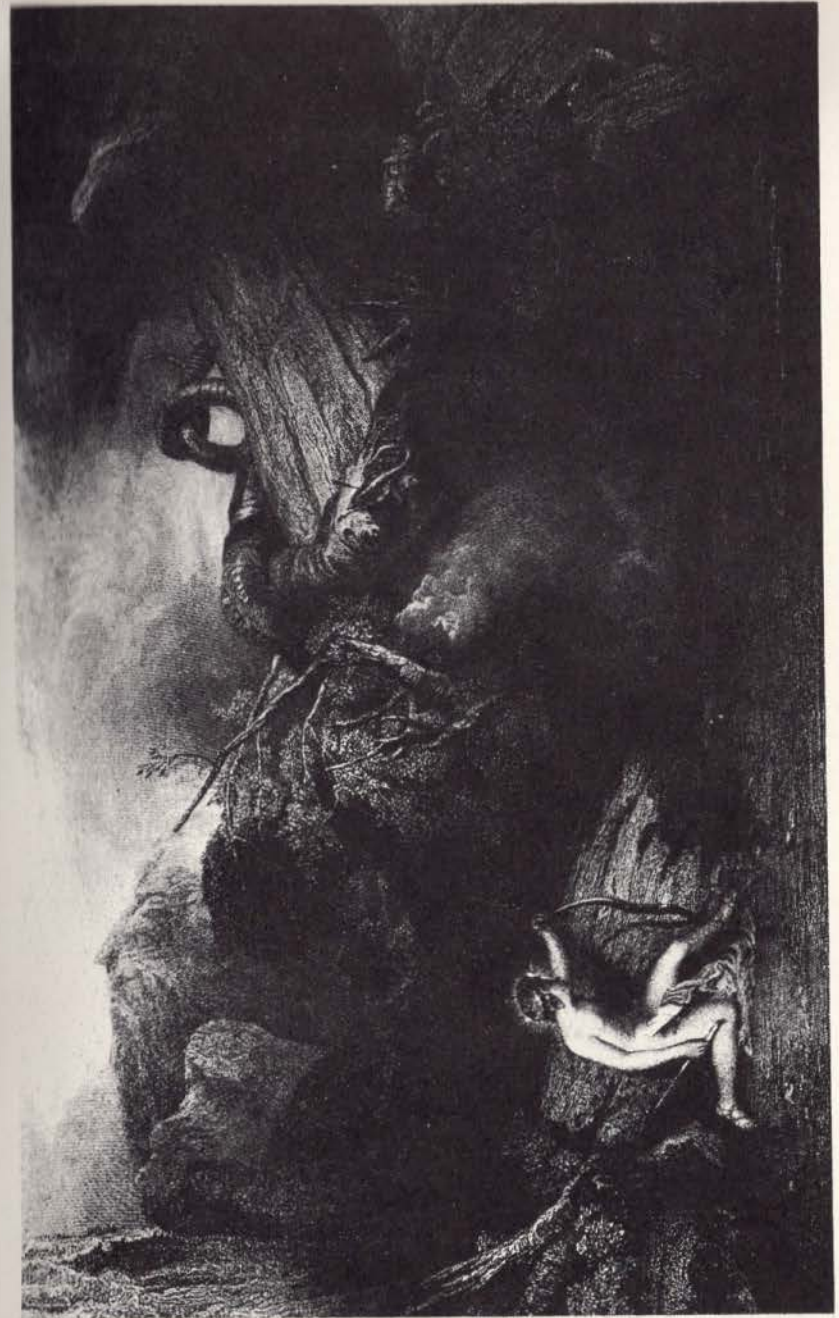


CHAPTER XIII

APOLLO AND THE PYTHON

THE Grecian god most closely associated with Ophiolatry was Apollo, the bright Sun-god, and the most celebrated centre of this worship, together with the far-famed temple and oracle of Apollo, was at Pytho, or Python, which later became known as Delphi. But it is evident from the myth, that long before the Sun-god was conceived of, serpent worship flourished there; and Strabo has told us that the older name of the place was derived from the serpent Python, which was later slain there by Apollo, who adopted the name of Pitheus to commemorate his exploit. Hyginus and Ælian tell us that before the oracle was established at Python, or Apollo came there, this serpent used to deliver oracles at Mount Parnassus. Because of this Hyginus called Python "the divine dragon," and believed it to be the mouthpiece of Divinity. He seems to have thought that the serpent directly delivered the oracles, though later we find it doing so by means of the pythia, or pythoness.

The story of Python is involved with that of Apollo and Diana, the twin offspring of Jupiter and his paramour Latona. When the latter was about to become a mother, the angry Juno drove her from Heaven, and made Terra swear to allow her no resting-place upon earth. Not yet satisfied in her revenge, she commanded the serpent Python to persecute and pursue her. Python, knowing it was decreed that he should be destroyed by Latona's offspring, eagerly carried out Juno's wish, and sought Latona's death. But Neptune, seeing her distress, took compassion, and carried her to Delos in the Ægean Sea, which, as it was a floating island, was not included in the oath of Terra. Here the twins were safely born, and from the name of the island, Apollo was called Delius.



APOLLO AND THE PYTHON
After Turner.

Afterwards, when the god was engaged in deadly combat with the Python, Latona, who had suffered so cruelly from its persecution, encouraged and cheered on her son in the fray, shouting continually, "Strike him, Pæan, with thy darts." Pæan was one of the names by which Apollo was known to his votaries, probably because of his unerring skill in striking with his sun-rays. After his victory, in memory of his mother's invocation, not only all hymns sung to his praise were henceforth called *pæans*, but in all songs that celebrated victory, the words "Io Pæan" were introduced. And from this invocation Apollo gained the name of *Ieios*.

But although Apollo was thus exoterically identified with the promised "seed of the woman," as the slayer of the serpent, the initiated understood something quite different from this account of him. Faber has pointed out that the word which in its exoteric sense is "slayer" in its esoteric meaning is "priest," so that to the initiated, Apollo was revealed as the priest of the serpent, and therefore as himself the serpent; since the priest represented, and was identified with the god he served. So, when at Delphi, a hymn of praise was sung to the python on every seventh day, it was Apollo, the sun-god, who was worshipped in reality.

It is clear that Apollo was identified with Python, because although Apollo is represented as its slayer, the spirit of the god which inspired the pythoness was still said to be the spirit of Python. But in reading the following account, compiled from writings of all ages, it must be remembered that this was a secret known only to the initiated, and even now not generally realised.

According to Ovid, for example, Python was not part of the original creation, but was a horrible monster born of devastation and destruction during the period when the flood covered the earth, and left behind when it subsided. He is thus fittingly represented as slain by the sun-god who restored life and beauty to the drowned world, and the poet relates how

"Of new Monsters, Earth created more.
Unwillingly, but yet she brought to light
Thee, Python too, the wond'ring World to fright,
And the new Nations with so dire a Sight:
So monstrous was his Bulk, so large a Space
Did his vast Body and long Train embrace.
Whom Phœbus basking on a Bank espi'd;
E're now the God his Arrows had not try'd
But on the trembling Deer, or Mountain Goat;
At this new Quarry he prepares to shoot."

The arrows here mentioned were presented to Apollo shortly after his birth by Vulcan. Ovid continues :

“ Though every Shaft took place, he spent the Store
Of his full Quiver ; and 'twas long before
Th' expiring Serpent wallow'd in his Gore.
Then to preserve the Fame of such a Deed,
For Python slain, he Pythian Games decreed.
Where noble Youths for Mastership should strive,
To quoit, to run, and Steeds and Chariots drive.”

These Pythian Games were at first celebrated every eight years, but later every four years, and as the poet has told us, were held (at Delphi) in honour of Apollo and his victory over the python. They are said to have been originally instituted by Diomedes on his return from the Trojan War. Be this as it may, they became one of the four great national festivals of Greece, and appear to have been regularly observed until the end of the fourth century ; lesser Pythian games being celebrated in many other places where the worship of Apollo had been introduced. Ovid continues :

“ The Prize was Fame : In Witness of Renown
An oaken Garland did the Victor crown,
The Laurel was not yet for Triumphs born ;
But every Green alike by Phœbus worn,
Did, with promiscuous Grace his flowing Locks adorn.”

(“ Met.,” I, Dryden's Trans.)

Here it should be noticed that the oldest sacred tree at Delphi seems to have been the ilex, or evergreen oak, but for some obscure reason this was later replaced by the laurel. Though the leaves of the latter were larger than those of the oak, yet they were not unlike in form and colouring so that the substitution would hardly be noticed by the ordinary observer.

In another chapter we have enlarged upon the curious connection that appears to exist in mythology between the serpent and the tree. The python was probably the guardian of the sacred oak or laurel, the foliage of which was used to bind the victor's brow in the Pythian Games, and it may have been from this tree that the leaves used by the pythia when delivering the oracles were gathered. The celebrated Grove of Daphne near Antioch was consecrated to Apollo, who united in his rites the worship of Tree and Serpent.

Euripides describes the Delphic dragon as covered by a leafy laurel ; but it was also the guardian of the spring of sacred water, so it would seem that all the instruments of discovering the god's will were originally entrusted to its care. The priestess always

drank of the sacred spring, as well as chewing a leaf of the sacred wreath of laurel, before she prophesied, for the waters, like the tree and the chasm, were believed to bestow prophetic power. The spring may have been either Cassotis or Castaly, as both were deemed oracular. The last named comes forth from a narrow gorge with tremendously high rocky walls a little to the east of Apollo's temple. According to the legend, after he had slain the serpent Apollo purged himself from the stain of blood in the Vale of Tempe where the River Peneus flows between the tree-clad heights of Olympus and Ossa. Here it was that the god crowned himself with a garland which was probably of ilex, and to this place therefore his human representative went to gather garlands for his brow on the occasion of the Festival of Crowning.

This Festival was therefore identical in origin with the Pythian Games. At first it was also celebrated every eighth year at almost the same time as the Games, and probably the distinction between the two first arose when the Delphians arranged to hold the latter every fourth, instead of every eighth, year. It dramatically represented the slaying of a great water dragon by a god or hero. The actor who took this part had his brows crowned by a wreath from the sacred laurel, but had to undergo a penance and purification for slaying the reptile, which was evidently a recognition of its sacred character. The penance was a severe one. Cleombrotus informs us that “ It was ordained that he who would slay the Python, must be, not merely banished from the temple for ten years, but even depart from the world ; whence he should return after nine revolutions of the great year, expiated and purified : wherefore he should obtain the name of Phœbus—i.e. pure ; and obtain possession of the oracle at Delphi.”

It seems fairly clear that the original shrine at Delphi was dedicated to Ge, or Gæa, the goddess of earth, and Apollo probably superseded Gæa when the Grecian race took possession of the country and conquered the earlier inhabitants. Perhaps it is this event that is symbolised by the story of the slaying of the Python by Apollo,—the subjugation of the older religion,—henceforward to be regarded as the Evil One,—by the new. Pausanias has told us that “ in the most ancient times the Oracle was an Oracle of Earth.” Plutarch has further informed us that the temple of Ge stood to the south of that of Apollo near the waters of Castalia, and his evidence has been confirmed in recent years by an inscription discovered in the locality. The original Python, then, was apparently the guardian serpent of the shrine of Ge. The pythia, priestess of the earth goddess, obtained her inspiration from subterranean sources, and received through a cleft of the earth the gassy vapour which threw her into a trance. The place

whence this vapour was exhaled, was a deep cavern with a narrow orifice, on the southern side of Mount Parnassus, at no great distance from the seaports of Crissa and Cirrha. We are told that it was first introduced to public notice by a goatherd, whose goats, browsing on its brink, were thrown into violent convulsions as they came within its influence. Their guardian thereupon went to the same spot and endeavoured to look into the chasm, but himself was frantically agitated. When these happenings became known, they were at once attributed to a deity residing in the place, and it was said to be the oracle of the goddess Ge. From all around the people flocked to it to obtain information of the future by inhaling the mysterious vapour. Whatever they uttered in the ensuing intoxication was regarded as inspired by the goddess. But prophecy under such conditions was attended by considerable risk, and many of the prophets, made giddy by the gas, fell into the chasm and were lost. A consultation of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood was called, and they decided that only one person, appointed by public authority, should be allowed to receive the inspiration and render the responses of the goddess, and that the security of this prophet should be provided for by a frame placed over the chasm through which the maddening vapour might be inhaled with safety. The importance of the oracle was of course greatly increased by this public recognition, and further measures became necessary. A rude temple was erected over the cavern, priests were appointed, ceremonies prescribed, and sacrifices offered. A revenue became a necessity. Therefore all who would consult the goddess must bring an offering to her shrine, and sometimes this was of great value. The reputation of the oracle now no longer rested merely on the superstition of the people. With the priesthood, a vested interest had been created for its guardianship, and Delphi, prospering through its oracle, became an important town.

The reason for the change of divinities at this shrine is lost in the mists of obscurity. It may have been the result of conquest, but Mitford thinks that "according to probable conjecture" it was due to such mercenary reasons as those indicated above, and that the profits produced by the prophetic powers of Ge having begun to fail, it was first asserted that Neptune was associated with her in the oracle, and then her daughter Themis was said to have taken her place.

The god Apollo had a great reputation in the surrounding islands of Greece, and also in Asia Minor, but until this time had little fame on the mainland of Greece. His introduction to the shrine, according to Mitford, was as follows: A vessel from Gnosus in Crete came to the port of Crissa; and the crew landing

at once climbed the neighbouring mountain of Parnassus to Pytho. Apparently their object was to oust the older deity and instal Apollo in her room. To accomplish their purpose more effectively, they circulated a wonderful story that their vessel had been bound to Pylus on the coast of Messina, but had been forced by supernatural power beyond that port, and while the amazed crew were perfectly passive, had been conducted with extraordinary exactness and precision to Crissa. Further, that an enormous dolphin had accompanied their ship, and when they arrived at Crissa had discovered himself to the crew as the great and beneficent god, Apollo; at the same time commanding them to follow him to Pytho, and promising that there they should become his ministers.

This scheme succeeded beyond expectation. For some time the profits produced by the responses of the earth goddess had been failing, and a new incentive to public curiosity had become necessary to keep up the revenue. Neptune and Themis had been introduced by the priests without much result. Apollo was now installed as the presiding deity of the shrine, and under this god, through the skill of his new ministers (for Crete had an earlier civilisation, and probably more intercourse with Egypt than the rest of Greece) the oracle not only recovered but increased its reputation.

Pytho, or Delphi, which was really the centre of Greece, was now described as the centre of the earth; miracles were said to have occurred to prove this important theory, and "Navel of the Earth" was among the titles bestowed on the shrine. Probably it was at this juncture that the Pythian Games were instituted, celebrating the installation of Apollo and bringing fresh popularity to his temple. Pausanias informs us that the first victor in the competitions was a Cretan.

If we may credit the hymn to Apollo, before Homer's time, the temple of this deity was built with some magnificence in stone. But the Dorian conquest seems to have been the means that chiefly spread its fame and enlarged its influence, which so rapidly extended that nothing of moment within Greece was undertaken by states, or even by private persons who could afford the expense, without first consulting the oracle of Delphi.

Obviously the method of divination through the gassy vapours of earth belonged to the older religion. It was the mother-goddess Ge, who had been wont thus to breathe forth her secret promptings to those who sought her counsel. And her rites had nothing in common with those of Apollo, the bright sun-god, now enshrined at Delphi in her room. But although to outward seeming the goddess was conquered, and her religion, like its

guardian, the Python, slain, yet their influence was far from dead, but continued to make itself felt as long as did that of the superseding creed. The skin of the slaughtered Python was used to cover the tripod on which the pythia, who had now nominally become the priestess of Apollo, still sat to continue her functions and reveal the will of the reigning god.

With the triumph of the worship of Apollo, Greek religion may be said to have reached the climax of its development. His oracle at Delphi inculcated a really high standard of religious life for three hundred years, and it was not till about the end of the sixth century B.C. that it began to decline. It is significant that it was this worship that won the unstinted homage of Socrates.

Apollo's oracle at Python was so greatly sought after and consulted that it has even been suggested that his name of Pythius may have been derived from asking or consulting, though the explanation that he derived it from his exploit in slaying Python would appear such an obvious one. It exercised a political influence on the Greeks, and through them, on the civilised world of those days that is only comparable with the power wielded by the Pope of Rome on mediæval Europe.

During the Roman period we find the name Python constantly used as a synonym for soothsayer. The spirit was supposed to speak from the belly of the prophet, who was therefore called a ventriloquist, a word used in the Septuagint to represent the Hebrew *ōbh*, i.e. a sorcerer, or necromancer, often translated Python in the Vulgate.

As an example we may take the account found in Acts xvi. 16, of the damsel of Philippi "possessed with a spirit of divination." The marginal reading, and the usual one, is "a spirit of Python," though some manuscripts read "a spirit, a Python." This damsel "brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this she did many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." For this offence against the serpent-worshipping Philippians, Paul and Silas were stript and scourged in the public thoroughfare, and afterwards thrown into the inner prison, and their feet made fast in the stocks.

It may be noted that the missionaries did not question the genuineness of her inspiration by the spirit of Python, and also that it spoke the truth, and was able to recognise the servants of God, though they preached a new and rival religion.

To turn to an instance in which the oracle is said to have spoken with the direct voice, Lucian tells us that "the dragon (or serpent) under the tripod spoke," and this quotation proves that the original belief that the Python directly delivered the oracles still survived in his day. Live snakes were kept in the temple at Python, and probably one of these was supposed to have acted on this occasion as the mouthpiece of the god.

The tripod on which the pythoness sat was another relic of the religion which it had superseded, for it was formed of a serpent of bronze, coiled spirally upwards in the form of a cone, and terminating in three heads. As the cone or pyramid was a symbol of the sun's rays, this typified the union of the worship of Apollo, the Sun-god, with that of the Serpent, the Python, or earth deity.

This combination of ideas, though here, as we have seen, the result of conquest, and not a spontaneous union, has been found in almost all parts of the world. The student should refer to the chapter on the Uræon for other examples.

The guardianship and superintendence of the Delphic oracle and the treasures deposited at Apollo's shrine by its consultants were vested in the Council of the Amphictyons, or deputies from the confederated states of Greece, but citizens of Delphos were the original proprietors of the temple, and continued to direct the religious ceremonies, and to conduct the important business of this prophecy. To them alone it belonged to determine at what time and on what occasions the pythia should ascend the tripod. When, infused by the divine inspiration, she uttered frantic sounds and confused words, these were collected and reduced to order by the Delphians, who usually delivered them in the form of hexameter verse. The Pythia was of course but an instrument in the hands of these ministers, who appointed or dismissed her at their pleasure. In course of time they became invested with so much sacredness from their occupation, that they were regarded not merely as attendants and worshippers, but as the peculiar family of the god. They were very numerous, but their number has never been exactly ascertained. All the principal inhabitants of Delphos claimed an immediate relation to Apollo, and were entitled to officiate in the rites of his sanctuary, whilst the inferior citizens employed their time in dances, festivals, processions, and symbolic pageantry.

The pythoness was chosen from among mountain cottagers, the most unacquainted with mankind that could be discovered, and it was always required that she should be a virgin, and originally, that she should be young. Once appointed she was never to leave the temple. But one of these maidens made her

escape. A young Thessalian, who fell in love with her extraordinary beauty, succeeded in an attempt to carry her off. After this it was decreed that no pythoness should be appointed under fifty years of age, though she was still to be as simple and child-like as possible and to wear the dress of a girl.

At first there was only one pythoness, but later the oracle was so sought after that three were appointed, who alternately took their seats on the tripod. The office of pythoness appears to have been anything but desirable. The vapours from the chasm threw her into real convulsions. The priests often employed force to lead her to the sacred tripod, and held her upon it till her frenzy rose to what they considered was the desirable pitch. It was easy for them to protect themselves, because the noxious vapours were so much heavier than air that they did not rise above a certain height. But some of the pythonesses died almost immediately after leaving the tripod, and others whilst actually upon it.

Anacharsis has thrillingly described his impressions of the ceremony in his "Travels." He says :

"A number of strangers were assembled to consult the oracle. We waited our turn of approaching the Pythia, which was to be decided by lot. No sooner had we received the proper notice than we saw her pass through the temple, accompanied by some prophets, bards and sacred persons, who entered with her into the sanctuary. She appeared melancholy and dejected, and seemed to go with reluctance, like an unwilling victim to the altar. She chewed laurel, and as she passed threw into the fire some leaves of it, mixed with barley-meal. She wore a crown of laurel on her head, and her brow was bound with a fillet. One of the priests then undertook to prepare us. After being purified with the consecrated water, we offered a bull and a she-goat ; our heads crowned with laurel, and bearing in our hands a branch, round which was a narrow circle of white wool ; we then approached the altar ; soon after, the priest came and led us into the sanctuary, a sort of deep cavern, the walls of which are ornamented with a variety of offerings. At first we could scarcely discern the objects around us ; for the incense and other perfumes continually burning there, filled the place with a thick smoke. Toward the middle is an aperture, from whence issues the prophetic exhalation. The approach to this opening is by a gentle descent ; but it is impossible to see it, and it is covered with a tripod so surrounded with chaplets and branches of laurel, that the vapour is prevented from dispersing itself in the cavern. The Pythia, worn-out with fatigue, refusing to answer our questions, the priests who surrounded her had

recourse to menaces and violence. Yielding at length, she seated herself on the tripod, after drinking some water which flows in the sanctuary, and which possesses, it is said, the virtue of disclosing futurity. The boldest colours would scarcely suffice to paint the convulsions with which she was soon after seized. We saw her bosom heave, her countenance change, and all her limbs agitated by involuntary motions ; but she uttered only plaintive cries and deep groans. At length, with eyes sparkling, foaming mouth, and hair erect, unable either to support the vapour that overpowered her, or escape from the tripod, on which she was held down by the priests, she tore the fillet from her head, and amid the most dreadful howlings pronounced a few words, which were eagerly collected by the priests. They arranged them in a proper order, and delivered them to us in writing. I had asked whether I should be so unfortunate as to survive my friend ; and Philotras, unknown to me, had made the same question. The answers were obscure and equivocal, and we tore them in pieces the moment we left the temple. Our hearts were now filled with pity and indignation, and we reproached ourselves with the lamentable condition to which we had reduced the unhappy priestess. The functions she exercises are cruel, and have already cost many of these women their lives. This is known to the priests, yet do they multiply and calmly contemplate the torments under which she is sinking. It is still more painful to reflect, that they are rendered thus callous to the feelings of humanity by sordid interest. But for this delirium and ravings of the Pythia, she would be less consulted, and consequently the liberalities of the people would be less abundant. This tribute imposed on the credulity of mankind, is perhaps still less to be regretted than the influence which their answers have over the public affairs of Greece and of the whole world. Who but must deplore the miseries of humanity, when he reflects, that beside the pretended prodigies of which the inhabitants of Delphi make a constant traffic, a single word dictated by corrupt priests, and uttered by a senseless girl, is sufficient to excite bloody wars, and spread desolation through whole kingdoms."

It is needless to comment on this most interesting contemporary account of the proceedings at Delphi as seen by an impartial witness. We cannot regret that they belong to the past.

Not only the Greeks, but the peoples of neighbouring nations, consulted the Pythia in difficult emergencies, and consequently the temple became a storehouse of valuables that had been presented to the god. Its riches were famous even in the time of Homer ("Iliad," 1-404) and Xerxes sent four thousand men

to plunder it, part of whom are said to have been destroyed by thunderbolts and an earthquake, and the rest almost all cut off by the people of Delphi, who had fled to the tops of Parnassus upon the approach of the Persians ("Herodotus," VIII, 36 *et seq.*). Several centuries after, an army of Gauls under Brennus, shared a similar fate. Then the Phocenses, urged by the exactions of the Thebans, seized the temple and employed the riches they discovered there, which amounted to ten thousand talents, or over two and a quarter million pounds, to hire troops to defend themselves against their oppressors ("Diodor.," XVI, 76). The Thebans, being defeated, called in the aid of Phillip, King of Macedon, who availed himself of this war, which was designated "the sacred war," as a pretext for interfering in the affairs of Greece, and eventually brought the whole country under his subjection ("Justin," VIII, 1). In this exploit he received considerable aid from the Pythia's responses which his bribery ensured should be always favourable to his schemes, so that Demosthenes used to say of her that she "phillipised."

In the time of Cicero the oracle had fallen into contempt, because the prophetic vapour was supposed to have lost its force (Cic., *div. II*, 57). At length it entirely ceased (Juvenal, VI, 554), which some ascribed to the growing influence of Christianity. However, the priestess still occasionally returned answers, as e.g. to Nero (Suet., "Ner.," 40), although that Emperor is said to have destroyed the oracle (Dio., LXIII, 14), after having first pillaged it of five hundred brazen statues. Yet it seems to have existed in the time of Julian, and even after him.

The Delphic column served to commemorate the repulse of the Persians by the thirty-one confederate cities of Greece at the Battle of Plataea—a battle which secured Greece from further Eastern aggression. It is still possible to partially decipher the names of the cities on the coils of the three-headed serpent. All that now remains of this monument is preserved in the Hippodrome at Constantinople. Here, according to Gibbon, it was brought by Constantine, though Montfaucon thinks that Constantine left the original in its place, and caused a copy of it to be made. It consists of the intertwined bodies of three brazen serpents. Their heads, which once supported the golden tripod, have all disappeared. Two of them were broken off in misguided zeal by a patriarch of the tenth century, and the third is said to have been smashed off by the battle-axe of the Sultan Mahomet as he rode past on his way to St. Sophia on the day his troops entered the city. The "Annales Turcici" thus describe this incident. "When Mahomet came to Atmeidan he saw there a stone column, on which was placed a three-headed brazen serpent.

Looking at it, he asked, 'What idol is that?' and at the same time hurling his iron mace with great force knocked off the lower jaw of one of the serpent's heads. Upon which, immediately, great number of serpents began to be seen in the city. Wherefore that column remains to this day. And although, in consequence of the lower jaw of the brazen serpent being struck off, some serpents do come into the city, yet they do harm to no one."

Here the image of the serpents is directly credited with being a charm against living serpents, even as was the brazen serpent of Moses. It is interesting to compare the two stories.

There was also a celebrated oracle of Apollo at Delos, his birthplace, and an image in the form of a serpent or dragon erected in his honour. There was, in addition, an oracular fountain, named *Inopus*—i.e. Ain-opus, the fountain of Oph, the Serpent-god. Besides this there was a celebrated stream at Colophon, in Ionia, which was the source of prophetic inspiration to the priest of its guardian deity Apollo. Its name Colophon being really Col-oph-on, i.e. "collos serpentis solis"—the "Hill of the Serpent of the Sun." This oracle was consulted by Germanicus and foretold his approaching fate.

There was another famous oracle in the cave of Trophonius, in Phocis. This name is said to be derived from Tor-oph-on, the "Temple of the Serpent of the Sun," and here were two figures of a man and a woman, with sceptres encircled by serpents in their hands. Live snakes were kept in this cave and offerings of cakes were made to propitiate them. They were said to have the power of striking all who entered the cave with a seizure of mind, or stupor.

According to Ælian, in Epirus also there was a grove of Apollo where sacred serpents were kept inside a walled enclosure, and here an annual festival was held by the farmers, the object of which was to supplicate the god for a good harvest. In this ceremony the serpents were approached by nude priestesses with offerings of food. If the reptiles accepted these the omen was good, and vice versa.

Similar ceremonies were practised in other districts. The Egyptian myth of Typhon from which the Greeks derived that of Python seems to have originated in Nature-worship. We are told by Plutarch (*Isis et Osiris*), that among those who saw personifications of natural objects in the deities of that land, there were some who considered Osiris to represent the moon, and his enemy, Typhon, the sun, "because the moon with her humid and generative light, is favourable to the propagation of animals and the growth of plants; while the sun with his fierce fire scorches and burns up all growing things, renders

the greater part of the earth uninhabitable by reason of his blaze, and often overpowers the moon herself."

Although this view of the sun certainly does not appeal greatly to people dwelling in these northern climes, it is easy to see that the inhabitants of sandy Egypt with the waterless desert pressing upon them, might come to view the sun as an enemy of life, instead of as its very source. We have here a striking example of how it is possible for the god, and the enemy of the god, to become identified by the confusion arising from two different points of view of the same symbol, but, as we shall see, there are deeper reasons for this identification.

The Egyptian form of the myth, being the earlier, is the simpler, and in some aspects, the more interesting. Typhon being envious of Osiris, killed him, and persecuted the terrified Isis; but he was, in his turn, vanquished by Horus her son, who put his foot on the serpent's head and chained him.

The repetition of this legend in that of Apollo, the Python-slayer, is striking. Latona, terrified by the great serpent, flies to Delos, and there brings forth the son of Jove, the glorious Apollo, Sun and Archer, who delivers men from the ravages and powers of the Python, and, in the groves of Delphi, opens to them treasures of wisdom and knowledge. This Apollo is the same as Phœbus (pure), the author of genius and poetry, the suggestor and deviser of counsels. He conquers night, and floods the earth with glory. The myths of Horus and Apollo appear to be identical in their details, whether we consider the envious hatred of the enemy, the danger of the woman, or the conquest and honour obtained by her son.

The ode to the Sun of Martianus Capellus shows that Typhon was identified with Apollo, even as was Python. It says: "They esteem thee Phœbus (Apollo), the discoverer of the secrets of the future . . . Egypt worships thee as Isœan Serapis, and Memphis as Osiris. Thou art worshipped by different rites as Mithra, Dis, and the cruel Typhon."

The figure which represented Typhon in Egypt was the hundred-headed serpent, and Æschylus puts into the mouth of Prometheus an account of "the earth-born Typhon, dweller in Cilician caves, dread monster, hundred headed"; we may read how in his pride, this hydra rose up against the gods, his dreadful hissing jaws threatening destruction, whilst lightning flashed forth from his Gorgon eyes. But there fell on him, from the heavens he defied, a flaming levin bolt, which smote him to the heart, so that now he lies, scorched and withered, beneath the island of Etna beside the sea. But some day he will be revenged, for he will belch forth fiery hail and rivers of flame to devastate the rich

Sicilian fields. This, and a somewhat similar passage in Pindar, where Typhon is spoken of as "bred in the many-named Cilician cave," suggest that Typhon was a personification of those active volcanoes which spout fire and stones to heaven as if defying the gods. More probably, as the principle of evil, he was conceived of as working through these means to bring destruction and death on the world.

Adam says, "The most dreadful of all the giants is said to have been Typhon, produced by Terra and Tartarus after the destruction of the other giants. He had a hundred heads of dragons. The gods are said to have been so affrighted at his enormous bulk and strength, that they fled into Egypt, and several of them for the sake of concealment, converted themselves into beasts of various forms. But Jupiter vanquished Typhon with his thunderbolts, and laid him below Mount Ætna." The following is Ovid's description of Typhon in the song of the Pierides ("Met.," V):

"She sings, from Earth's dark Womb how Typhon rose
And struck with mortal Fear his Heavn'ly Foes.
How the Gods fled to Egypt's slimy Soil,
And hid their Heads beneath the Banks of Nile:
How Typhon, from the Conquer'd Skies, pursued
Their routed Godheads to the sev'n-mouth'd Flood;
Forc'ed every God his fury to escape,
Some beastly Form to take, or earthly Shape."

(Maynwarding's Translation.)

Tooke thus describes Typhon: "Typhœus, or Typhon the son of Juno, had no father. So vast was his magnitude that he touched the east with one hand and the west with the other, and the heavens with the crown of his head. A hundred dragons' heads grew from his shoulders; his body was covered with feathers, scales, rugged hair and adders; from the ends of his fingers snakes issued, and his two feet had the shape and fold of a serpent's body; his eyes sparkled with fire, and his mouth belched out flames."

This fearsome monster was, as we have seen, finally conquered and slain by Horus, or Apollo,—for the Egyptian and Grecian deity were identified as early as the time of Herodotus;—and lest he should again return to life the island of Sicily was placed upon the top of him that he might no more ascend to trouble the heaven from which he had been cast forth.

Yet one more description of Typhon, as it differs considerably from those just given. According to the myth related by Apollodorus, Typhon was begotten in Cilicia by Tartarus upon the goddess Earth, and was human in form in his upper half, but from

the loins downwards was an enormous serpent. During the battle between the gods and the giants, which was waged in Egypt, Typhon hugged Zeus in his snaky folds and wrenched from him his crooked sword. With the weapon thus gained, he cut out the sinews from the god's hands and feet. Then, hoisting the now helpless deity on to his back, he conveyed him over the sea to Cilicia, and placed him in the Corycian cave. But his triumph had made him over-confident, and he incautiously hid the severed sinews in a bearskin in the same cave. Hermes and Ægipan contrived to get hold of these and restored them to their divine owner. Zeus, now himself once more, soon conquered Typhon, and pursued him from place to place, pelting him with thunderbolts, and finally placing Mt. Etna on the top of his fallen foe. The places where the deity's thunderbolts fell are still marked by hissing flames.

But although Zeus, or Horus, or Apollo, thus rid the world of Typhon or Python, the deity was afterwards responsible for the appearance on earth of a monster scarcely less terrible. The story told in Thebais of Statius runs that after this glorious exploit the god went to the court of Crotopus in Argos, and there wooed and won the favours of the king's daughter Psamathe. Finding herself a mother, and fearing her father's anger, Psamathe fled to the woods, and entrusted the care of her offspring to a shepherd. But whilst the hapless infant lay among the bleating lambs, mingling his cries with theirs, fierce dogs devoured him. When the tidings of this tragedy reached the babe's mother she no longer remembered her fame, but beat her breast and rent the air with her cries. Then, wild with anguish, fled to her father and demanded sentence from him. Thus she perished.

Apollo, hearing of this and touched too late by remorse, prepared to avenge his mistress' fate.

" He sends a monster, horrible and fell,
Begot by furies in the depths of hell.
The pest a virgin's face and bosom bears ;
High on a crown a rising snake appears,
Guards her black front, and hisses in her hairs :
About the realm she walks her dreadful round
When night with sable wings o'erspreads the ground,
Devours young babes before their parents' eyes,
And feeds and thrives on public miseries."

The terrible pass at which things had arrived aroused the generous rage of a warrior named Chorœbus, who was famed both for virtue and valour ; and certain ambitious and martial youths, who thought a short mortal life a small sacrifice when exchanged for immortal fame, joined themselves to him ; their

common purpose being to slay the monster. Accordingly they set out together in quest of it.

" The direful monster from afar descri'd ;
Two bleeding babes depending at her side ;
Whose panting vitals, warm with life, she draws,
And in their hearts embrues her cruel claws."

The youths quickly formed a circle around the dragon pointing their gleaming spears towards her, but Chorœbus rushed into the fray and plunged his sword in her breast, slaying her outright.

" Th' Inachians view the slain with vast surprise,
Her twisting volumes and her rolling eyes,
Her spotted breast, and gaping womb embru'd
With livid poison, and our children's blood.
The croud in stupid wonder fix'd appear,
Pale ev'n in joy, nor yet forget to fear.
Some with vast beams the squalid corpse engage,
And weary all the wild efforts of rage.
The birds obscene, that nightly flocked to taste,
With hollow screeches fled the dire repast ;
And rav'nous dogs, allured by scented blood,
And starving wolves, ran howling to the wood."

But, great as was the boon Chorœbus had conferred on his countrymen by the destruction of the monster, it was the instrument of Apollo that he had slain, and now he had to face the wrathful god.

" Fir'd with rage from cleft Parnassus' brow
Avenging Phœbus bent his deadly bow,
And hissing flew the feather'd fates below ;
A night of sultry clouds involv'd around
The tow'rs, the fields, and the devoted ground :
And now a thousand lives together fled,
Death with his scythe cut off the fatal thread,
And a whole province in his triumph led."

But the noble Chorœbus was undaunted even in this emergency, for his motive had been pure, and his conscience told him that his action was justified. Therefore he felt no fear and did not ask clemency from the angry god, but begged that the punishment of the innocent should cease, and the deity's wrath be visited on him alone, and his fate be accepted as atonement for his country. His generous soul was rewarded. Apollo, amazed to find such virtue in mortal man, relented, and gave him his life and that of his countrymen. The clouds that the angry deity had gathered around him, were dispersed, and the hero retired, unharmed, from the presence of the god.

To commemorate this great deliverance, an annual feast was instituted to the honour of Apollo.

We may conclude this chapter by some lines from Rogers' description of the pythoness' rapture :

“ But say, what sounds my ear invade
From Delphi's venerable shade ?
The temple rocks, the laurel waves !
‘ The God ! The God ! ’ the Sybil cries.
Her figure swells ! she foams, she raves !
Her figure swells to more than mortal size !
Streams of rapture roll along,
Silver notes ascend the skies :
Wake, Echo, wake, and catch the song,
Oh, catch it ere it dies !
The Sybil speaks, the dream is o'er,
The holy harpings charm no more.
In vain she checks the god's control ;
His madding spirit fills her frame,
And moulds the features of her soul,
Breathing a prophetic flame.
The cavern frowns ; its hundred mouths unclose !
And, in the Thunder's voice, the fate of empire flows.”

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CHAPTER XIV

PERSEUS AND THE GORGONS

THE Gorgons of Greek mythology were three sisters, the daughters of Phorcus and Cete. Their names were Medusa, Stheno, and Euryale, but only Medusa was mortal, and she alone is meant when the Gorgon is spoken of singly.

According to the generally received account, these sisters were so frightful that they turned to stone all those on whom they fixed their eyes. Their heads were covered with threatening vipers, their hands were brass, all over their bodies were impenetrable scales, and their teeth were as long as the tusks of a wild boar.

Mythologists differ as to where the Gorgons lived. Hesiod says vaguely that it was in the west, Æschylus fixes their abode in Scythia, and Ovid in Libya, near the lake Triton. Writers differ also on a still more important point, and some have given a precisely opposite interpretation of the Gorgons' property of turning their beholder into stone; which is, that far from being frightful and repulsive as we have described them, these sisters possessed an extraordinary beauty, which so amazed and delighted their seer, that he remained entranced and motionless.

Be this as it may, it is related that the dread Medusa was once a beautiful and charming maiden with many eager lovers who sought to win her hand. But lovely as her features were, her crowning attraction was her glorious, golden hair, which waved and shone in rippling ringlets. Neptune was counted among her admirers, and coming upon her one day in the temple of Minerva, he forgot the sacred character of the place in the raptures of love. Minerva, to whom such an act was particularly abhorrent, apparently not realising there were two offenders in the case, or perhaps being unable to punish her peer, wreaked her anger upon Medusa, whom Neptune had left undefended. She turned Medusa's shining hair to scaly serpents that its beauty might never tempt again, and decreed that all who looked upon Medusa's



HEAD OF MEDUSA.
From the Tazza Farnese
(By courtesy of the "Daily Mail.")

head in future, should be transformed into statues of stone. Far-reaching were the results of this fiat : Ovid tells us that :

"The hissing snakes her foes more sure ensnare,
Than did they lovers once when shining hair."

(Eusden's Trans., Bk. IV.)

But Medusa even now retained a charm and beauty, for Waller describes her lying at rest.

" . . . Bright as the rainbow's hues
Her halcyon plumage gleamed with green and gold,
And tender roseate hues of sunset, mixed
With creamy white, and delicate sapphire tints
Lovely exceedingly. Her folded wings
Were eyed like peacock's feathers, and her hair
Of wavy gold, unbraided, on the ground
Floated in silken cataracts : yet each tress
Was twined with hissing snakes : her long white arms
Were fair as Aphrodite's, yet her hands
Were brazen claws, and brass the glittering scales
That clothed the sensuous outlines of her flanks
In armour horrid as a panoply
Of Python, hugest of the serpent race,
That from the slime in old Deucalion's days
Sprang like a pestilence."

The Gorgons finally met their doom at the hands of Perseus, who rendered himself immortal by slaying Medusa. He was specially aided and inspired by Minerva for the feat, and was armed with her ægis, upon which he afterwards fixed the head of his conquered foe. Other deities also lent him deadly weapons that his victory might be quite secure, so no room was left for any personal glory in his conquest. Yet he is usually represented as a hero, though his methods of warfare were certainly not heroic, but incline us to sympathise with his victims, unlovely though they were.

Pluto lent Perseus his helmet which had the property of making its wearer invisible. Mercury lent him wings and the talaria, and a short dagger made of diamonds called *herpe*.* Thus armed by the gods and conducted by Minerva, Perseus flew through the air on his borrowed wings to the Graiæ (sisters of the Gorgons, and like them three in number) that he might gain from them still another weapon to add to his outfit. The Graiæ were Gorgons, too, and were also known by the names of Lamiaë or Empusæ ; they had the necks and breasts of women, but lower down were clothed with scales, and their extremities terminated

* (Some writers say Perseus received the *herpe* from Vulcan, not from Mercury, and that it was formed like a scythe.)

in a serpent's tail. They would tempt men to come near and converse with them, and then would fly in their faces, strangle and tear them into pieces.

Although Perseus was undoubtedly justified in combating these pests, yet we wish for his honour's sake that he had seen a way to use more manly methods, and fought his foes upon more equal terms than those we are about to relate. At least he might have fairly challenged them to try their hellish arts against his heaven-bestowed powers, and then have left the result in the hands of the gods. But his faith and courage appear to have been unable to rise so high, and he meanly took advantage of the unsuspecting helplessness of his adversaries, thereby forever tarnishing his fame. Moreover, as we shall see by following him further in his adventures, this meanness was no mere slip on his part, but an expression of his real character.

The Graiæ possessed but one eye and one tooth between them all, and these they kept for safety in a small receptacle, and whoever went abroad had the use of them. It was Perseus' aim to secure their eye for his adventure, and in their infirmity he saw his opportunity. We will let Ovid tell the story.

" . . . A Vale beneath cold Atlas lies,
Where, with aspiring Mountains fenc'd around,
He the two Daughters of old Phorcus found.
Fate had one common Eye to both assign'd
Each saw by Turns, and each by Turns was blind.
But while one strove to lend her Sister Sight,
He stretch'd his Hand, and stole their mutual Light,
And left both Eyeless, both involv'd in Night."

("Met.," IV, Eusden's Trans.)

This unheroic deed* accomplished with safety to himself, Perseus continued on his way, his real aim being to take the head of Medusa. Our poet shall continue the narrative:

"Thro' devious Wilds and trackless Woods he past,
And at the Gorgon Seats arriv'd at last:
But, as he journey'd, pensive he survey'd,
What wasteful Havoc dire Medusa made.
Here, stood still breathing Statues, Men before;
There, rampant Lions seem'd in Stone to roar."

But Perseus, having the assistance of Minerva, passed safely on, and when he drew near to Medusa, instead of looking directly upon her terrible head, and so sharing the fate of those who had

* According to some writers Perseus stole both the eye and the tooth, shared in common by the Graiæ, but restored them when the sisters had guided him to the nymphs, from whom he received the winged sandals, the wallet and the cap of invisibility.

previously attempted to take it, he walked backwards to his goal, using Minerva's shining shield as a mirror to guide his feet. In it he saw, that by what he regarded as good chance, his victim lay asleep, and all her serpents slumbered also. This was the kind of warfare that suited Perseus, and he did not hesitate to take his foe at a disadvantage.

"Then backward an unerring Blow he sped,
And from her Body lopp'd at once her Head.
The Gore prolific prov'd; with sudden Force
Sprang Pegasus, and wing'd his airy Course."

Thus Medusa by her death became known as "The Snake-hair'd Mother of the winged Horse." This beautiful and heavenly being had been within her deformed exterior, hidden and unsuspected. But it was not the only offspring of her gore; evil qualities also had been hers.

"The Victor Perseus with the Gorgon-Head,
O'er Libyan Sands his airy Journey sped.
The gory Drops distill'd as swift he flew,
And from each Drop envenom'd Serpents grew.
The Mischief brood'd on the barren Plains,
And still th' unhappy Fruitfulness remains."

The poet's last lines refer to the fact that he who travels in the Libyan Desert may see innumerable serpents said to have sprung from Medusa's gore. Probably these typify the thoughts of hatred and revenge that her unspeakable wrongs aroused within her. They had fallen from her at death, for they had never really belonged to her. Her true self was embodied in the wondrous winged horse, and had at last escaped from the imprisoning matter, through the infliction of a final wrong.

But Perseus' adventures were not terminated by his gaining Medusa's head. Its possession led him into many more.

The myth of Perseus and Andromeda is one of the most ancient in the world, and has been immortalised by bestowing the names of its hero and heroine upon certain constellations. It is probably the origin of most of the legends and fairy tales relating a deadly combat between a divine, or saintly hero, and Evil, personified as a dragon.

Our national legend of St. George is a later form of this widespread allegory. According to the most pleasing version of it, the hero Perseus was winging his way in happy flight over land and sea, when, as he reached the rugged shore of Ethiopia, he saw the beauteous maiden, Andromeda, chained to a rock at the foot of a cliff, close to the water's edge. Perseus stayed his rapid flight, and alighting at her side, heard from her the story of

the doom awaiting her. She told him that she was the daughter of a king and queen, and was condemned by an oracle to be sacrificed to a sea monster which had ravaged the country, and could only be appeased by such an offering. Ever whilst she spoke the sea foamed and raged, and a monstrous dragon-like head appeared above the waves, followed by an unwieldy form. Perseus sprang again into the air, and swooping downward swiftly as an eagle, drove his sabre deep into the dragon's back. In vain it furiously turned upon him. Perseus eluded its onslaught by bounding once more above it, and wheeling around, gored its scaly side. Finally, drawing the head of Medusa from his wallet he held it before his dire foe. In an instant the monster was turned to stone, and became a rocky islet. Perseus then released Andromeda from her chains and accompanied her to her father's palace, where, amid tremendous rejoicings, they were married, and appropriate offerings and oblations were made to the gods.

"The great Immortals, grateful Perseus prais'd,
And to three Pow'rs, three turfy Altars rais'd.
He hastes for Pallas a white Cow to cull,
A Calf for Hermes, but for Jove a Bull."

After the combat, Perseus buried the head of Medusa in a sandy creek, lining it with leaves and young shoots, but as soon as the fatal head touched them, these hardened into stone. The watching Nereids brought more fresh juicy twigs, to cover the fatal head, but these turned to sprays of coral, and the nymphs kept their petrifying seeds so that they might propagate this new wonder in the ocean deeps. Ultimately, by the command of Zeus, both Perseus and Andromeda were immortalised, and given an everlasting dwelling among the stars.

The beautiful painting of the rescue of Andromeda, by Lord Leighton, represents Perseus as mounted on Pegasus for the combat, but from the account given by Ovid in his "Metamorphoses" it would appear that Perseus was unmounted, and that he made no use of Medusa's head; whilst the manner in which he is there represented as bargaining with her parents that Andromeda should be his, if he consented to rescue her, completely mars the beauty of the concept. It was Hobson's choice for the luckless lady and her parents, according to this version. The poet seems to have been conscious of this himself, for Eusden translates him as saying:

"The Parents eagerly the Terms embrace,
For who would slight such Terms in such a Case?"

Andromeda's own consent appears to have been taken for granted, though she was already wedded to Phineus, who after

her marriage with Perseus, arrived, angry and indignant, to demand redress for the wrong. As this was refused, an armed fight ensued between the principals and their followers, in which neither side seemed to gain a decided advantage, till Perseus produced Medusa's head and turned his foe to stone. Alas, this hero is best viewed from a distance. Let us leave him in his star and return to our contemplation of the head of Medusa, that after proving so powerful as a weapon of offence and defence, was fixed by Perseus upon the shield of Minerva, and presented with it to the goddess, still able to petrify all who looked upon it.

"That snaky-headed Gorgon shield,
That wise Minerva wore."

(Milton's "Comus," 1, 447).

We have seen Minerva represented as the enemy of Medusa, we are now to see her at one with her former foe. Medusa's head typified Divine Wisdom, therefore it was appropriate that it should be housed upon Minerva's shield. In the temple of this goddess at Tegea was a sculpture of Medusa's head, the hair entwined by serpents,—which was said to have been the gift of Minerva herself, that it might act as a talisman and preserve the city from all harm.

Small sculptured amulets in the form of Medusa's head have been found in Egyptian sepulchres, their object being to protect their wearer by repelling onlookers. These are said by Professor Flinders Petrie to belong to the Roman period. The story of Medusa's head being brought to Minerva by Perseus, when interpreted, means that the worship of the serpent-deity was introduced into Greece by the Persians. Its influence may be traced in the frequent representations of Minerva as accompanied by a serpent or dragon. The city of Athens was specially consecrated to this goddess, and the Athenians were said to be Serpentinae. They preserved a live serpent in the Acropolis which they regarded as the guardian of the place, and the statues of Minerva by Phidias, represent her as decorated by serpents. In ancient medals she is sometimes holding a caduceus in her right hand, and sometimes a staff around which a serpent is coiled. Some represent her as preceded by a large serpent as she walks, and others show her crest as composed of a serpent.

A story has reached our times that a priestess who went into the sanctuary of the goddess late at night, saw a vision of Minerva, who held up her ægis bearing the awful Gorgon head, with the result that the rash intruder was instantly turned to a statue of stone.

In archaic art it was customary to represent the ægis as a

kind of mantle fringed with serpents which was generally worn so as to cover the breast, but sometimes extended over the left arm, or was thrown over the arm that it might serve as a shield. Except in the very earliest representations, the ægis of Athena bears the head of the Gorgon Medusa in its centre, and is generally also covered with scales in imitation of a serpent, thus figuratively it has come to mean anything which protects.

According to Pliny ("Nat. Hist.," I, 34, C. 8) the serpents surrounding the Gorgon's head on Minerva's shield rang and resounded with the notes of a harp or cittern, and it is from them that she derives her surname of Musica. Her surname of Gorgophora, was likewise derived from the Gorgon's head on her ægis.

Homer, in the following lines, speaks of Medusa's head as being on the shield of Jove, and it would appear that the god's shield was originally borrowed by Minerva, but that later he bestowed it upon her.

" . . . With them the grey-eyed Maid [Minerva]
Great Ægis (Jove's bright shield) sustained, that never can be old,
Never corrupted, fringed about with serpents forged of gold.
As many as sufficed to make an hundred fringes, worth
A hundred oxen, every snake all sprawling, all set forth
With wondrous spirit. Through the host with this the goddess ran,
In fury, casting round her eyes and furnish'd every man
With strength, exciting all to arms and fight incessant."

("Iliad," Bk. II, Chapman.)

Turning to Book V we find Minerva again donning the armour of Jove, and especially his ægis.

"About her broad-spread shoulders hung his huge and horrid shield,
Fringed round with ever-fighting snakes; through it was drawn to life
The miseries and deaths of fight; in it frown'd bloody strife.
In it shined sacred Fortitude, in it fell Pursuit flew,
In it the monster Gorgon's head, in which held out to view,
Were all the dire ostents of Jove."

(Chapman.)

In this fable of the Gorgon's head we again see the encircled serpent. Apparent evil is but an aspect of the Divine, which containeth All.

We have already seen how the true soul of Medusa ascended Heavenward in the form of Pegasus. We have noted, too, how her still terrible head became the central ornament of Minerva's shield and was recognised as symbol of the Divine Wisdom.

But feelings and thoughts of hate and wrong so strong and deep as those engendered by her terrible sufferings in the mind of Medusa,—though they fall from the true self as did the serpents from her head, and are scattered and lost in the tractless desert,—

yet have left behind them somewhere what we may symbolically describe as a film record of every smallest detail of that which brought them into being.

This will explain how it came about that Ulysses, exploring the shades of Hell, saw there the appearance of Medusa as she had been on earth, and with all her dread powers intact. But though it may be apparent to us that what he saw was but a ghostly counterpart of what had been, it was not so to Ulysses, and he decided to abandon further exploration of Hell after a short sojourn there.

"Lest Gorgon, rising from th' infernal lakes,
With horrors arm'd, and curls of hissing snakes,
Should fix me, stiffen'd at the monstrous sight,
A stony image, in eternal night!"

(Pope's "Odyssey," Bk. XI, 785.)

We all know the horrible fear that may be inspired by a dream, and how entirely incapable we are whilst it lasts, of perceiving its visionary nature, so we are not surprised at Ulysses' decision.

Milton was probably thinking of the "Odyssey" when he wrote telling how to prevent lost souls finding relief by drinking the waters of oblivion:

"Medusa with Gorgonian terrour guards
The ford, and of itself the water flies
All taste of living wight." ("Paradise Lost," II, 611.)

Echidna (Gk.: viper or adder) was a sister of the Gorgons and of the dragon Ladon which guarded the mystic garden of the Hesperides,—a daughter of Keto and Phorcus. Half-serpent, half-woman in form, she was the mother of many monsters. These included Cerberus, the dog of Hades, who has been described as "having his body covered in a terrible manner with snakes instead of hair" (Tooke), the Lernean Hydra, and the Chimæra, from which last-named monster sprang the Nemean Lion and the Sphinx.

Echidna was finally slain by Argus who caught her sleeping, and like Perseus had no scruple in taking his foe at a disadvantage.

Many reflections of the Grecian myth may be found in ancient history and fable. For instance it is said that Attila, the "Scourge of God," wore upon his breast a "Teraphim,"*—a snaky-haired head which was postulated to be that of Nimrod,

* *Teraphim*. According to certain Jewish writers, Teraphim were human heads, placed in alcoves and consulted as oracles. The gods which Rachel stole are called Teraphim.

whom he claimed as his great progenitor. This same Medusa-like head was an object of worship to the heretical followers of the Gnostic, Marcion, and was the Palladium set up by Antiochus Epiphanes at Antioch, though it was there called the visage of Charon.

Mr. Hargrave Jennings tells us that the Templars were also charged with having worshipped a mysterious Head in their secret rites, and the character of this teraphim has been the subject of much discussion. According to some, it represented the head of Proserpine, or of Isis under strange aspects, whilst others consider it to be masculine, and assert it to be that of Pluto or of Charon. Still others say it is the head of Medusa, dripping blood which turns to snakes and transforms the beholder to stone.

This mysterious head was regarded as a talisman and was supposed to be the mark of recognition of the secret society which was headed by Pichegru and others, and suppressed by Napoleon on the ground that its aims were revolutionary in character.

Napoleon is said to have afterwards adopted this magical sigma, and to have placed his own head in the centre before occupied by the awe-inspiring one we have been examining, making the whole the star of his newly founded "Legion of Honour."

Mr. Jennings adds that there is a tradition in the East of "this insupportable magic countenance, which the Orientals assign to a 'Veiled prophet,' similar to the mysterious personage in 'Lalla Rookh.'"

We have given a separate account of the Furies or Erinys in another chapter, but these beings are really only tribal or local variations of the same conception. The Gorgons are specially Attic, the Furies Minyan.

The Gorgons may be considered as the impersonation of atmospheric terrors, and therefore connected with Zeus and Athene,—those deities who are armed with thunder and lightning.

Especially in the case of Athene the connection is very close, and certain features of ritual and nomenclature seem to suggest an original identity of the two. According to Palæphatus, Athene was worshipped under the name of Gorgo in the island of Cerne, and Plutarch says that her wooden statue at Pallene, if brought forth from the temple destroyed human life.

The Attic tradition was that the Gorgon was a monster, produced by Earth to aid her distressed sons the giants, and was slain by Pallas.

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CHAPTER XV

BEL MERODACH AND TIĀMAT

THE Babylonian and Assyrian sun-god, Bel Merodach, though worshipped in later times as the supreme god, was originally, according to the creation myth, one of the younger deities. He gained his supremacy by the slaughter of the dragon Tiāmat, which possibly means that the worshippers of the serpent-deity Hea were conquered by Bel's followers.

The serpent-worshipping Accadians were the dominant people of Babylonia at the time of the earliest records we possess, and these date back to 4500 B.C., so that they are one of the oldest people of whom we have any written history.

The primeval inhabitants of the country were a Semitic race, but, according to the account found in Genesis (x. 10), the mighty hunter, Nimrod, said to be identical with Bel Merodach, led an invasion into their land. "And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar."

Babylonia was always a land of mixed races and tongues, and in the Old Testament is variously referred to as Shinar, Babel, and "the land of the Chaldees." The Chaldeans of Babylonia are said by Sir Henry Rawlinson to have been "a branch of the great Hamitic race of Akkad which inhabited Babylonia from the earliest times," and with whom the arts of civilisation originated.

For much of our information about Babylonian customs we are indebted to Berosus, a Babylonian priest who lived in the reign of Alexander the Great, and wrote a history of his native country which commenced with the creation of the universe and was carried down to his own time. Only fragments of this work, quoted by later writers, have reached us, but as the order to which he belonged was distinguished for its learning, and as he may be supposed to have possessed an intimate knowledge of the temple ritual and records, his words carry considerable weight.

From Berosus we learn that about 2400 B.C. Babylonia was invaded by a conquering tribe named by him "Medes." Nothing is known as to the race so called, but it is conjectured they were

Elamites, who inhabited the mountainous district east of Babylon, and they appear to have been ophiolaters. Possibly they were the original serpent-worshipping inhabitants of Babylonia whom the "mighty hunter" had dispossessed, and caused to take refuge in the mountains.

This idea is confirmed by Mr. Wake who says that "the predecessors of the *Akkad* in Chaldea, were the Medes, or Mad, of Berosus." He adds that "the distinctive title of at least the later Medes was *Már*, which in Persian means 'a snake.' This Sir Henry Rawlinson supposes to have given rise 'not only to the Persian traditions of Zohák and his snakes, but to the Armenian traditions, also, of the dragon dynasty of Media.' The Medes of Berosus belonged almost certainly to the old Scythic stock of Central Asia, to whom the Chaldeans, the Hebrews, and the Aryans have alike been affiliated by different writers. When, therefore, Mr. Fergusson says that serpent worship characterised the old Turanian Chaldean Empire, he would seem to trace it to the old Asiatic centre. Probably to the same source must be traced the serpent tradition of the Abyssinian kings. Bryant long since asserted that that superstition originated with the Amonians, or Hamites, who would also seem to have been derived from the Scythic stock."

Even now, the Yezidis of the Zagros Mountains, who are regarded by Layard as probably being a remnant of the ancient Medic or Proto-Medic inhabitants, still adore the solar deity and pray towards the East, and still have the serpent carved on their sacred shrines.

Such briefly was the historical setting of the myth of Bel Merodach and Tiāmat; we will now pass to the religious interpretation and study the story in more detail.

It is interesting to find that in the Babylonian Theogony, Chaos, personified as the female Dragon Tiāmat, is represented as existing before the gods. Apsu became her consort and the birth of the gods followed.

But there are traces of a still earlier cosmogony, according to which at the head of all things was a Triad or Trinity, consisting of Anu, god of Heaven and Universal Father, Bel or Belus, the ruler of Earth, and Hea, or Ea, symbolised as a serpent, Lord of the Sea, and also of Wisdom, later identified with Tiāmat.

Beneath these is a lower triad of heavenly bodies, Shamash, the sun-god, Sin, the moon-god, and Ramman the god of the Atmosphere. Among the minor deities is Merodach or Marduk, the son of Hea, later identified with Bel, and regarded by Nebuchadnezzar as the supreme deity. With Merodach is his son Nabu (Nebo) who is thought to have represented the planet

Mercury, and afterwards became the god of wisdom in place of Hea.

Among the Chaldeans Hea, and his son Bel Merodach, were the gods to whom the people appealed for protection against sorcery, and infernal powers of every kind.

According to the Chaldean account of the deluge it was Hea who as the Sea-god gave warning of the coming flood and commanded the preparation of the ark, his directions being carried out by Adrakhasis, the king of Shurippak, who was the Chaldean Noah (also known as Pir-napistem, Samash-napishtim, etc.).

The Babylonians early connected Hea with the Euphrates, which was known to them as "the river of the snake." Probably the merchant shipping on its waters still further emphasised to these people the bounty of their god in bearing to them culture and wealth from other lands upon his own body.

According to Sir Henry Rawlinson, the most prominent titles of Hea refer to "his functions as the source of all knowledge and science." He is not only "the intelligent fish," but his name may be interpreted as signifying both "life," and a serpent (an initiated adept). He may be considered as "figured by the great serpent which occupies so conspicuous a place among the symbols of the gods on the black stones recording Babylonian benefactions."

And here we may note that the name of Hea related to the Arabic *Hiya*, which has the double meaning of serpent and life. Sir Henry Rawlinson says that "there are very strong grounds indeed for connecting him with the serpent of Scripture, and with the Paradaisical traditions of the tree of knowledge and the tree of life." Hea, like the snake of Genesis, was the revealer of knowledge, but in Babylonian myth is clearly identified with the creator of mankind, and represented as taking an affectionate and fatherly interest in their progress and welfare.

In the original cosmogony of the Accadians, there was no Dragon of Evil to be conquered by a sun-god. The Watery Deep, or Space, was the birthplace and dwelling of the serpent-god of Wisdom, Hea, the Incognisable and Infinite. The serpent was seen to be encircled. But dualism crept in, as may be seen in an Accadian dithyrambus spoken by a god,—and probably referring to Hea himself:

"Like the enormous serpent with seven heads,
the weapon with seven heads I hold it.
Like the serpent which beats the waves of the
sea attacking the enemy in front,
Devastator in the shock of battle, extending his
power over heaven and earth, the weapon with
(seven) heads (I hold it)."

(Lenormant.)

With the introduction of Semitic dualism the symbols changed in significance. The Infinite Ocean or Abyss no longer represented Divine Wisdom, but gross and sinful matter, whilst Hea became identified with the Dragon Tiāmat, or Chaos, and was considered to be the source of all evil and misfortune. He was now to be slain by the sun-god, Bel Merodach, who was formerly honoured as being Hea's son.

Hea is said to have been the father of Bel Merodach, the sun-god, but probably he was originally the sun-god himself. It is stated in Babylonian script that Hea conferred his name on



THE GREAT RED DRAGON.
From woodcut dated 1699.

Bel Merodach. This may be read as meaning that Bel Merodach supplanted Hea, who was henceforth to be merged in Tiāmat, and took over his principal attributes and portions of his history. And since he was the god of Babylon, which supplanted other cities that had formerly been capitals, he supplanted also the gods who had been the rulers of those cities.

Madame Blavatsky says that the description in St. John's Revelation (xii.) of the persecution of the Woman clothed with the Sun by the great red Dragon with seven heads and ten horns, "comes from the Babylonian legends without the smallest doubt, though the Babylonian story had its origin in the allegories of the Aryans. The fragment read by the late George Smith is sufficient to disclose the source of the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse. Here it is as given by the eminent Assyriologist:

' Our . . . fragment refers to the creation of *mankind*, called Adam, as (the man) in the Bible, he is made perfect . . . but afterwards joins with the dragon of the Deep, the animal of Tiāmat, the Spirit of Chaos, and offends against his god, who *curses him*, and calls down on his head all the evils and troubles of Humanity. This is followed by a war between the dragon and the powers of evil, or chaos, on one side, and the gods on the other.' ' The gods have weapons forged for them, and Merodach (the archangel Michael in Revelation) undertakes to lead the heavenly host against the dragons. The war, which is described with spirit, ends, of course, in the triumph of the principles of Good. . . .'

But this dualistic conception represents a comparatively late phase of thought. The story of the combat as told in one of the clay tablets from the library of Assur-bani-pal (who reigned in Assyria about 668-626 B.C.) represents a transition stage between Monotheism, and the Dualism which later took its place. The dragon is not yet actually charged with evil, but the idea of a combat is introduced, as being an essential part of the process of creation. It will readily be recognised by those who read between the lines that this "combat" was one of love, and not of hatred, for its result was the fruitfulness of the hitherto barren Tiāmat.

In the Assyrian tablet we may read how Bel Merodach, the "Lord of Life" and "Quickener of the Dead," armed himself and went forth to combat the dragon Tiāmat. For his weapons he created a lightning flash and charged it with blazing fire, and he carried the winds of the four quarters of Heaven in a net. He also made a hurricane, a whirlwind, a storm and winds. When he encountered the dragon he cast his net over her, let loose the hurricane, and drove the wind down her throat to burst her body. He then ripped her open with his sickle-shaped sword, and cut her skin into two portions, from one of which he made the vault of heaven, from the other, the earth.

The ancient historian, Alexander Polyhistor, who lived in the seventh century of Rome, said: "Belus came and cut the woman asunder, and of one half of her he formed the Earth, and of the other half the heavens, and at the same time he destroyed the animals within her."

Herein it is made clear that Tiāmat personified the watery, abstract, formless, or feminine element, which was finally conquered by Bel Merodach, the sun-god, and the concrete, formative, or male principle. The Accadian allegory can be traced in the mythology of many lands.

The seven-headed serpent of Hindu legend is derived from the seven-headed serpent of the Accadians "which beats the waves

of the sea," whilst the story of Andromeda came through Phœnician hands from a Chaldean myth which forms the subject of one of the lays of the great epic. Niebuhr well said: "There is a want in Grecian art which no man living can supply. There is not enough in Egypt to account for the peculiar art and mythology of Greece. But those who live after me will see on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates the origin of Grecian mythology and art."

The worship of Hea seems to have been far-flung. In a letter written by Dusratta, king of Mittani, to Amenophis III, king of Egypt, several deities are invoked, but the god Hea is spoken of as "Lord of All."

Traces of Chaldean serpent worship have been discovered in Britain. Bayley says, "The Chaldean for serpent was *acan*, and at Glen Feechan (feu akan, 'Fire Serpent') in Argyllshire there is a serpent-mound three hundred feet in extent. The back or spine of this serpent was found beneath the peat-moss to have been formed by a scrupulous adjustment of stones, and the sinuous winding and articulations of the vertebral spinal arrangement are anatomically perfect."

Another curious relic of the worship of Bel has been preserved in a sculpture on the front of a temple at Montmouillon in Poitou. It represents, among other sacerdotal figures, a nude female with two serpents twining round her legs. This figure is evidently a priestess of the serpent-deity. An engraving of the subject may be seen in Montfaucon's "Antiquite."

Shepherd says that "In Brittany where the ancient Celtic idolatry found refuge when banished from other parts of Gaul by the Romans, there is still to be seen an oracle of Bel, the serpent-god of Assyria and the East. It is situated in the island of St. Cado, and consists of a small rectangular enclosure three feet long by two feet wide, contained by four stone slabs. The parish in which it stands is still called Belz or Bels—that is, Belus. The peasants devoutly believed in the miraculous powers of this hole—a relic probably of its ancient reputation for oracular responses."

In the north of Europe also the Babylonian serpent-deity can be traced, there he reigns as Wainamoïnen, one of the three principal gods of the Finns. This god, like Hea, was not only king of the waters and the atmosphere, but was also "the spirit whence all life proceeded, the master of favourable spells, the adversary and conqueror of all personifications of evil, and the sovereign possessor of all science" (Lenormant).

Deane has pointed out that although the name of Bel is supposed to signify nothing more than "Lord," and was also

sometimes appropriated to deified heroes, it is more probably an abbreviation of Ob-el—"The Serpent-God."

Bryant says that the Greeks knew this deity as Beliar, and this name is interpreted by Hesychius to mean a dragon or great serpent. So at least it would appear that the serpent was an emblem of Bel, if not the form in which he manifested.

The name Babylon is suggestive of the deep religious feeling of the people, for it is the Greek form of Babel or Bab-ili, "the Gate of God," or, as it is sometimes written, "of the gods," and the most remarkable building in Babylon was the temple of Bel Merodach now marked by the *Babil*, on the north-east. This was a pyramid of eight square stages, of which the lowest measured over 200 yards each way. The summit was reached by a winding ascent, and upon it was the shrine in which stood a golden image of the god 40 feet high, two other golden statues, and a golden table 40 feet long and 15 feet broad, besides many more colossal objects of the same metal. At its base was a second shrine with a table and two images of gold. A similar temple stood at Borsippa, the suburb of Babylon. This consisted of seven stages, the lowest of which was a square 272 feet each way, its four corners exactly corresponding to the four cardinal points, as in all Chaldean temples, and each of its stages being placed nearer the south-western than the north-eastern edge of the one below it. Like the Biblical tower of Babel, this erection lay unfinished for many years, but it was finally completed by Nebuchadnezzar, the same monarch who erected images of serpents at the gates of the great temple in Babylon to honour the sun-god.

Ophiolatry as a recognised religion was nearly extinct when Diodorus Siculus visited Babylon; the city was almost deserted by its inhabitants, and the public buildings were falling into decay. Possibly this is why this writer, who has left us such minute descriptions of the walls and gardens, passes over the temple of Merodach with a few sentences. In these he tells us that within the temple was "an image of the goddess Rhea, sitting on a golden throne; at her knees stood two lions, and near her very large serpents of silver, thirty talents each in weight." There was also "an image of Juno, holding in her right hand the head of a serpent" (Lib. II, s. 70).

According to the Hebrew scriptures, some seventy years before the visit of Diodorus to Babylon, serpent worship in that city had received a severe blow; this perhaps accounts for his silence on the subject, though the story must be accepted with reserve.

The "History of the Destruction of Bel and the Dragon" relates how in the reign of Cyrus of Persia "There was a great

dragon which they of Babylon worshipped. And the king said unto Daniel, Wilt thou also say that this is of brass? Lo, he liveth, he eateth and drinketh; thou canst not say that he is no living god: Therefore worship him. Then said Daniel unto the king, I will worship the Lord my God; for he is the living God. But give me leave, O king, and I shall slay this dragon without sword or staff. The king said, I give thee leave. Then Daniel took pitch, and fat, and hair, and did seethe them together, and made lumps thereof; this he put in the dragon's mouth, and so the dragon burst in sunder: and Daniel said, Lo, these are the gods you worship. When they of Babylon heard that, they took great indignation, and conspired against the king, saying, the king is become a Jew, and he hath destroyed Bel, he hath slain the dragon, and put the priests to death."

Daniel's method of dragon-slaying seems to have had the merit of originality, though it could not be called heroic. According to the writer of the above account it was the occasion of his being cast into the lion's den, but a totally different reason for this is given in the book which bears his name.

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CHAPTER XVI

ST. MICHAEL AND THE DRAGON

FOREMOST among Christian Serpent-slayers stands St. Michael (Who is like God) whose mystic conflict with the serpent is alluded to in the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse, and has inspired so many painters and poets. "Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels."

In the Book of Daniel this hero appears as the guardian angel or "prince" of Israel (Dan. x. 13, 21; xii. 1), and as such, he is naturally represented in Jewish theosophy as the greatest of all angels, the first of the four who surround the throne of God.

Michael is said to have appeared upon the earth during a pestilence in the days of Gregory the Great. According to the chronicler: "Car quand celuy Pape eut étably les grandes litanies pour la pestilence qu'y était, il vit sur le chasteau qui jadis est dict de la mémoire de Hadrien, l'Ange de Nostre Seigneur qui touchait sa glaive ensanglantée de sang, et la remit dans sa gaine: et a donc fit là une église en l'honneur de St. Michel-Ange, et ce chasteau a nom le chasteau de Saint-Ange." Even now the bronze image of the archangel crowns the mole of Hadrian, and watches over the yellow waters of the Tiber and the domes and spires of the City on the Seven Hills.

The conical mound near Carnac which may be seen for many miles, and from every part of the Dracontium, was probably originally raised that it might serve as an altar, upon which the perpetual fire kindled by the sun was kept burning. It was consecrated by the Christian Church to the Archangel Michael; and to him almost every natural or artificial cone in Brittany is sacred. The connection of thought is easy to follow. St. Michael is the destroyer of the dragon of the Apocalypse; identified by the Christians with the serpent, whose mutilated remains still mark the site of his former temple. His worshippers, converted to the newer faith, marked the victory of triumphant Christianity, by erecting upon the high places of the solar serpent, chapels to the archangel.

Satan, described in Job i. 6 as one of the Sons of God,

becomes in exoteric interpretation the Devil and the Dragon in its evil sense; but Madame Blavatsky tells us that "in the Kabala (Book of Numbers) Samael, who is Satan, is shown to be identical with St. Michael, the *Slayer of the Dragon*. How is this? For it is said that Tselem (the image) reflects alike Michael and Samael *who are one*. Both proceed, it is taught, from *Ruach* (Spirit), *Neschamah* (Soul) and *Nepesch* (Life). In the 'Chaldean Book of Numbers' Samael is the concealed (occult) Wisdom, and Michael the higher *terrestrial* Wisdom, both emanating from the same source but diverging after their issue from the *mundane soul*, which on Earth is *Mahat* (intellectual understanding), or *Manas* (the seat of Intellect): They diverge because one (Michael) is *influenced* by *Neschamah*, while the other (Samael) remains *uninfluenced*. This tenet was perverted by the dogmatic spirit of the Church; which, loathing independent Spirit, uninfluenced by the external form (hence by dogma), forthwith made of Samael-Satan (the most wise and spiritual spirit of all)—the adversary of its anthropomorphic God and sensual physical man, the devil."

An Arab story of St. Michael connecting the serpent with the devil in the temptation of Eve is given in Masudi's history, which was written A.D. 956, as follows: the Devil, wishing to get into the Garden of Eden to tempt Eve, asked all the animals in turn to carry him in, but they all refused; until at last the serpent, which had then an erect form and was gorgeous in beauty, agreed to do so, and carried the Devil into the Garden, and so accomplished the fall of Eve. The Archangel Michael punished the serpent for this act by cutting off his limbs so that ever since it has had to crawl upon the ground and feed on refuse.

The old English coin known as the angel was so called from



ST. MICHAEL CONQUERING THE DRAGON.
From the head of a twelfth century crozier.

having upon its obverse the figure of the archangel Michael piercing the dragon. It was first coined in 1465 by Edward IV, and its value was then 6s. 8d., from which it varied to 10s. under Edward VI. It was last coined by Charles I. It was the coin that was always presented to anyone touched for the king's evil,



ST. MICHAEL'S VICTORY.
From old woodcut.

and when it passed away, medals of the same device were substituted for it and were called touch-pieces.

In the crozier here pictured it is interesting to note that a Great Serpent is supporting both slayer and slain, and the latter seems passively acquiescent in its own death.

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CHAPTER XVII

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

THE serpent-slayer who takes precedence next to St. Michael in Christian myth is St. George of Cappadocia, the patron saint of England. The legend, as told in the "Legenda Aurea" of Jacques de Voragine is as follows:

George, a tribune, was born in Cappadocia, but travelled to the town of Silene in Libya. Near this place was a pond in which resided a monstrous dragon which had many times driven back an armed host sent to destroy it. It was a terrible menace to the city, for it would from time to time approach the walls, and with its poisonous exhalations kill all the inhabitants who happened to be near. To pacify the monster, and avoid such disastrous visitations it was decided to supply him each day with two sheep to satisfy his voracity, and accordingly he was given sheep until none were left in the neighbourhood, and it was impossible to procure them. The hungry dragon then attacked the town, and so infected the air with his envenomed breath that many of the citizens died. Those remaining held a council at which they decided that each day a man and a beast should be offered, so that they actually sacrificed their sons and daughters, and none, when his turn came, was spared.

At last the lot fell upon the princess Saba, and the king, struck with horror, offered in exchange for his daughter's life, his gold, his silver, and half his realm. But the people demanded that no favour should be shown, and all the unhappy father could obtain was a delay of eight days, in which to bewail her fate.

As soon as this time had expired, the people returned to the palace, telling the king that the breath of the monster was slaying them all, and accusing him of sacrificing his subjects for his daughter. The king saw that he could withhold his child no longer. He dressed her in royal robes, embraced her, and said, "Alas! dear daughter! I had thought to see myself reborn in your children, and to have invited princes to your wedding, and accompanied you to the ceremony with music and rejoicings; but this monster is about to devour you! Why did I not die before you?"

The dutiful damsel fell at her father's feet and besought his blessing, which he weepingly bestowed upon her. Then after a last embrace they parted, and she walked down to the lake.

Now it so fell out that George was passing that way, and seeing the weeping maiden, asked the cause of her tears. "Good youth!" she replied, "quickly mount your horse and fly, lest you perish with me." But George answered, "Do not fear! tell me what it is you await, and why this multitude are watching—I shall not go until I know the cause," he added. Then she told him all; but on hearing her story he exclaimed, "Fear nothing! In the name of Jesus Christ I will assist you."

Whilst the brave maiden was still endeavouring to dissuade the chivalrous youth from his self-imposed task, the dragon appeared above the surface of the water. But St. George made the sign of the cross and advanced to meet it, recommending himself to God. Then with his lance he transfixes and cast the monster to the ground, and turning to Saba, he bade her pass her girdle round it, and fear nothing. When she had done so the dragon became docile as a dog, and followed its conquerors to the town.

The citizens commenced to flee before it, but George called them back, and bade them put aside their fears, as he had been sent by the Lord to deliver them. Then the king, and all his people, twenty thousand men, without counting women and children, were baptised, and St. George smote off the head of the monster. They offered St. George a large sum of money as reward, but he gave this in alms to the poor, and after instructing the king in the duties of his new religion, went on his way rejoicing.

According to another version of the story, the doomed princess was shut up with her retainers in a castle, and all of them were perishing for lack of water which could only be obtained from a fountain at the base of a hill, and this was guarded by the "laidly worm" from which St. George rescued them.

"The hero won his well-earn'd place
Amid the saints in death's dread hour;
And still the peasant seeks his grace,
And next to God, reveres his power,
In many a church his form is seen
With sword, and shield, and helmet sheen;
Ye know him by his steed of pride
And by the dragon at his side." (C. Schmid.)



ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON.

After Wyon.

It will be evident that the legend of St. George and the dragon forms part of one of the sacred myths of the Aryan group, and when we realise how popular this venerable myth was in ancient

Europe, we feel no surprise to find it perpetuating itself under a Christian cloak, and that the hero, once accepted by the new creed, should become one of the most venerated and popular saints in the calendar.

The Crusaders' enthusiasm for the Eastern soldier-saint who led them to victory, soon spread among the nobles and warriors of Europe, and England, Aragon, and Portugal adopted him as their patron. It is said that in England this dated from 1349, when King Edward III was besieging Calais. Thomas of Walsingham has recorded how on that occasion the king, as if moved by a sudden impulse, drew his sword, exclaiming: "Ha! Saint Edward! Ha! Saint George!" His words and action seemed to arouse new vigour in his soldiers, and, falling on their foes, they routed the French with a great slaughter. Ever since St. George has replaced Edward the Confessor as the patron saint of England. Next year the celebrated order was instituted, whilst in 1415 St. George's Day was made a major double feast, and ordered to be observed the same as Christmas Day, and all labour to be suspended. At the same time St. George received the title of spiritual patron of the English soldiery.

In 1545 St. George's Day was observed as a red-letter day, with special Collect, Epistle, and Gospel; but in the reign of Edward VI it was abolished, and the holding of the chapter of the Garter on St. George's Day was transferred to Whitsuntide. But next year, when Queen Mary reigned, this enactment was reversed, and ever since the ancient practice has been followed, and the chapter held on the feast-day of the saint.

A large and beautiful church which stood between Ramula, the ancient Arimathea, and Lydda or Decapolis, was dedicated by the Emperor Constantine the Great to St. George over his tomb. Ramula was also known as Georgia, and its inhabitants claimed that St. George had been a native of their town.

A temple of Juno at Constantinople was taken over by the Christians and also dedicated to St. George by the first Christian emperor, and, according to one tradition, the bones of the hero were translated from his tomb near Lydda, to the church in the great city of Constantine.

Baring-Gould says: "At an early date his head was in Rome, or at all events one of his heads, for another found its way to the church of Mares-Moutier, in Picardy, after the capture of Byzantium by the Turks, when it was taken from a church erected by Constantine Monomachus, dedicated to the saint. The Roman head, long forgotten, was rediscovered in 751, with an inscription on it which identified it with St. George. In 1600 it was given to the church of Ferrara. In Rome, at Palermo, and at Naples

there were churches at a very early date consecrated to the martyr. In 509 Clotilda founded a nunnery at Chelles in his honour; and Clovis II placed a convent at Barala under his invocation. In this religious house was preserved an arm of St. George, which in the ninth century was transported to Cambrai; and fifty years later St. Germain dedicated an altar in Paris to the champion.

"In the sixth century a church was erected to his honour at Mayence; Clothaire in the following century dedicated one at Nimègue, and his brother another in Alsace. George had a monastery dedicated to him at Thetford, founded in the reign of Canute; a collegiate church in Oxford placed under his invocation in the reign of the Conqueror. St. George's, Southwark, dates from before the Norman invasion. The priory church of Griesly in Derbyshire was dedicated to Saints Mary and George in the reign of Henry I.

"The Crusades gave an impetus to the worship of our patron. He appeared in light on the walls of Jerusalem waving his sword, and led the victorious assault on the Holy City. Unobtrusively he and St. Michael slipped into the offices and exercised the functions of the Dioscuri. Robert of Flanders, on his return from the Holy Land, presented part of an arm of the saint to the city of Toulouse, and other portions to the Countess Matilda and to the Abbey of Auchin.

"Another arm of Saint George miraculously fell from heaven upon the altar of Saint Pantaleon at Cologne, and in honour of it Bishop Anno founded a church."

The French have an interesting variant of the story of St. George and the Dragon which makes clear the essential unity of slayer and slain. It relates how there lived in the castle of Vaugrenans a lady whose great beauty had proved a snare to herself and others, and who was changed into a basilisk for her misdeeds, and terrorised the country in that form.

Her son George, unlike his mother, was very pious, and as brave and handsome as he was good. He was now faced with conflicting duties, but decided he must free his country from the depredations of the monstrous reptile which preyed upon it. He therefore did battle with and slew it, and his horse trampled its remains beneath its hoofs. But in spite of his victory George was sad at heart and uneasy in conscience, so he asked St. Michael, himself a dragon-slayer, and a witness of the combat, what was the punishment due to him who had slain his own mother. St. Michael uncompromisingly and sternly replied that he ought to be burnt and his ashes scattered to the winds, and George accepted the verdict and underwent the punishment. But his

ashes fell in one heap instead of scattering, and a young girl who was passing gathered them up. Not far away she saw an apple of Paradise, which she ate. In due course she gave birth to a son, and when her child was baptised, it cried in a loud voice, "I am called George, and I have been born on this earth for the second time."

Another French version is evidently of Egyptian origin, and an adaptation of the legend of Horus and Set. It is embodied in a bas-relief in the Louvre, in which a hawk-headed St. George garbed in Roman military uniform and mounted on a horse, is killing a dragon in the form of Set's crocodile. This has been described by M. Clermont-Ganneau, but his interpretation of the relief is not accepted by all scholars.

The ancient Christmas custom known as mumming, which still survives in some country places, often takes the form of acting a play representing a version of the legend of St. George and the dragon.

Mr. Moore, in his "Manx Folk Lore," has given us the text of one of these plays as it is acted in the Isle of Man. The performers there are known as the White Boys, probably because they are dressed almost entirely in white. The *dramatis personæ* of the play include the King of Egypt, Prince Valentine, and Sambo, besides the hero and villain who give their names to the piece.

In Derbyshire, on the other hand, the actors are known as the Guizers, and go from house to house, decked out in ribbons. St. George introduces himself with the following lines when the play begins:

"I am St. George, the noble champion bold,
And with my glittering sword
I've won three crowns of gold;
It's I who fought the fiery dragon,
And brought it to the slaughter;
And so I won fair Sabra
The King of Egypt's daughter.
Seven have I won, but married none,
And bear my glory all alone.
With my sword in my hand
Who dare against me stand?
I'll swear I'll cut him down
With my victorious brand."

The saint's challenge is accepted by a champion known as the "Slasher," but he is quickly slain. The "king" then enters, announcing himself to be "King of England, the greatest man alive." Then a doctor is called, and after a long oration picks up the fallen Slasher saying:

"Here! take a little out of my bottle,
And put it down thy throttle."

The slain man recovers and rises, and the play is over.

In Oxfordshire some fifty years ago a corrupted version of this play used to be performed. St. George had become King George and his antagonist was "Boney." After sweeping the ground and repeating a lot of doggerel, the two would fight, and King George would be slain, and raised to life again when the doctor was called in. This play ended with a dance.

It has been suggested (by Lord Wyfold) that the origin of the famous white horse on the Berkshire Downs was an attempt to represent not a horse at all, but the dragon slain by St. George.

"Anyone looking at the beak, the eye, the elongated body and tail of this curious figure must realise that it could never have been intended for a horse," he writes. "It is surely a representation of one of those prehistoric monsters commonly called dragons. Local tradition supports this opinion, for the hill just below it is called Dragon's Hill, and the story goes here that the dragon was slain by St. George. The Grims Ditch on the Berkshire Downs is called in a charter of the tenth century '*draegeles bæce*'—'the dragon's ridge or beak.'"

The tradition at Ashdown that "King Gaarge did here the Dragon slay, And down on yonder hill They buried him, as I heard tell," is related in verse by Hughes.

In "The Horse in Myth and Magic," I have suggested another theory to account for the strange form of this hill-side monster which is that it represents the hen-headed horse that symbolised the British goddess, Ceridwen. But that dragons really did exist in prehistoric days is probable. Remains of a dinosaur were discovered not far from the White Horse in a quarry, and possibly their owner when alive was the original of the sculpture.

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CHAPTER XVIII

ST. PATRICK AND THE IRISH SERPENTS

THE history of Ireland, like that of all ancient countries, leads us back into enchanted realms of legend and romance where truth is hard to discover. But it seems certain that in dim, far-off ages the island was occupied by successive invaders from the south. The Phœnicians are said to have represented one wave of invasion, the Greeks another, and Persian and Egyptian influence can also be clearly traced. All these peoples were ophiolaters, and naturally brought their religion with them. The Phœnician mariners were responsible for the introduction of sun and serpent worship into many countries, and the Roman emperor Elagabalus (born about 205) was high priest to the Syro-Phœnician sun-god of the same name, who had a temple at Emesa. Deane has suggested that the name Elagabal is *El-og-ob-el*, that is the serpent-god *Og*, *Ogham*, or *Ogmios*, whose worship was introduced into Gaul and Ireland by the Phœnician mariners.

He was even then an ancient deity, for his name occurs in Deuteronomy (iii. 4) as the cognomen of the famous monarch of Bashan overthrown by Joshua. And his kingdom, known as *Argob*, was afterwards renamed by the Greeks *Trachonitis*, i.e. the Country of the Dragon. According to Deane, *Argob* is *Aur-og-ob*, *Aur* meaning light, *og* being the name of the deity, and *ob*, his symbol, the serpent. Here we have the solar deity *Aur* united with the serpent-deity *Aub* (or *Ob*).

Other authorities identify "Og, king of Bashan," with the Typhon or Python of mythology, but Faber considers that *Og* is the deluge deified, whence is derived *Oc* and *Oceanus*. If this supposition is correct, the serpent would naturally be his emblem, as we may see from the mythology of all lands, Egyptian, Asiatic or Scandinavian.

Hargrave Jennings reminds us that in ancient times the figure on the Irish harp,—now represented as a beautiful woman with celestial wings,—was "a dragon with extended forky pinions, and piscine or semi-fish-like or basilisk extremity." He justly says: "There must have been some governing, excellent armorial

reason, special and authorised, for the changing of this first figure of a dragon into a woman, or a siren, or a virgin, on the Irish Harp; and this fact assists the supposition of an identity, at some time, of these two figures, all drawn from the double sign 'Virgo-Scorpio' in the Zodiac."

If Faber is right in seeing the deluge deified (and personified) in the serpent-god Og, we have what probably is the clue to the mystery, for the Virgin, like the dragon, is everywhere the symbol of the Watery Deep. As Jennings says: "The Virgin Mary, the 'Star of the Sea' and Patroness of Sailors, rules and governs the ocean, and her colours are the ultramarine of the 'Deep,' and sea-green, when viewed in this phase of her divine character." Enmity has been placed between the Serpent and the Woman; the symbol of the ancient faith has changed; but the object of it, the unfathomable, infinite Giver of Life, dark and terrible, yet gloriously beautiful, is still the same.

Even to-day in Ireland, stupendous monuments remain to recall the ancient worship of sun and serpent, but Deane tells us that the Irish Druids "assimilated themselves rather to those of Gaul than of Britain," and recognised Ogham, or Ogmios, identified with the god Og of Trachonitis as their principal deity. He was represented as holding in his hands "the club of Hercules, surmounted by the Caduceus of Mercury, the wings of which were attached to the club. The staff of the caduceus terminated in a ring."

Hu, or Pridain, the god of the Celtic nations was also symbolised by a serpent, and the dragon, or horned serpent as worshipped in Mexico and Egypt, although not a European reptile, is found represented on Gaulish coins and ensigns.

The Egyptian Serpent-god, Thoth, was known to the ancient Irish as *Tat*, *Taith* or *Tait*, and his name was used to designate the first day of the month of August, that being the month of harvest, and Tait being the god who presided over agriculture.

The month which among the Egyptians corresponded with August was called by the name of the god Thoth.

Relics of the worship of the Persian Sun-god, whose symbol was a serpent, have been found in a wonderful cruciform cavern at New Grange, in the county of Meath, of which Deane says, its "consecration to Mithras is indisputable." Three stones were dug up in this cavern on which were rudely carved mystical figures like coiled serpents, that may compare with the figure of the omphalos.

Long before St. Patrick appeared in this world, Diancecht, the Gaelic god of medicine, is said to have been the saviour of Ireland from a horrible fate. Morigu, the fierce and terrible

wife of Camulus (whom the Romans identified with Mars), had brought forth a son of horrible appearance, and Diancecht, with prophetic insight, counselled that he would become a danger to the country unless destroyed in his infancy. His advice was accepted, and the monstrous child was killed. Diancecht then opened the infant's heart and found within it three serpents, which, had they been allowed to grow to full size, could have depopulated the whole of Ireland. Needless to say, the god soon slaughtered the reptiles, then fearing lest even their dead bodies might be productive of evil, he burnt these to ashes, and, to make assurance still more sure, flung the ashes into the nearest river. His precaution was justified, for so poisonous were even these relics that they caused the river to boil up, and killed its every inhabitant. Ever since this episode the river has been called "Barrow" (boiling).

St. Patrick has been called the apostle of Ireland, and his first arrival as a missionary in that serpent-worshipping land has been fixed as 432. He is supposed by some writers to have been a native of Cornwall, whose zeal for Christianity prompted him to cross the Channel, but according to others he was born at Kirkpatrick on the Clyde, whilst a third account asserts that his birthplace was Brittany, and that he was carried by freebooters to Ireland, and there employed in tending sheep. Be this as it may, his endeavours met with extraordinary success, and he established a large number of schools and monasteries. Various miracles are attributed to him, but, as one of his biographers remarks, "Perhaps for the sake of truth, the less said of these the better."

That there are to-day so few traces of the former Ophiolatry of the Irish may be accounted for by the legend accepted as a record of fact by a large majority of the natives, that St. Patrick banished the Irish snakes by his prayers and holy benedictions. We have seen how often the word "serpent" is used as a synonym for priest. The true meaning of the fable evidently is that the preaching of the saint converted the serpent worshippers, and uprooted the ancient religion. We may strengthen this view by noting Mr. Bryant's conclusion in a similar case. He tells us that the stories of the destruction of serpents in the Grecian Archipelago and Pelopnessus, relate in reality to their worshippers, and not to the serpents themselves.

Happily we have no such destruction to record in the case of St. Patrick. For once the means of conversion are not a reproach to religion, but appear to have been the truly Christian ones of love and reason.

The Rawlinson MS., B. 512, thus describes the absence of

snakes in Ireland: "As Adam's Paradise stands at the sunrise, so Ireland stands at the sunset. And they are alike in the nature of the soil. To wit, as Paradise is without beasts, without a snake, without a lion, without a dragon, without a scorpion, without a mouse, without a frog; so is Ireland in the same manner without any harmful animal, save only the wolf."

Like Ireland, the Isle of Man is exempt from venomous reptiles and toads, and there also this is traditionally attributed to St. Patrick, the patron saint of both islands. But according to Cambrensis, it is not impossible for snakes to live there, as is said to be the case in Ireland; and to this circumstance England is indebted for her possession of the smaller island, the ownership of which, because of its position midway between the two countries, was a matter of controversy. "Since the island allowed venomous reptiles, brought over for the sake of experiment, to exist in it, it was agreed by common consent that it belonged to Britain."

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CHAPTER XIX

WOMEN SERPENT SUBDUERS

THE "Art Journal" of 1852 says that "in Art the Conception of the Virgin Mary is figuratively represented by the virgin trampling on the head of the serpent or dragon: enveloped in rays as brilliant as those emanating from the sun, with the moon at her feet, and nimbused by a coronet of stars, seated upon the earth saved by her virgin fecundity, the serpent holding in his mouth the apple of the terrestrial paradise, as a trophy."

Volumes might be written on this subject, but here we propose to deal only with concrete instances of women serpent subduers, so will not tarry to contemplate the universal allegory of the woman and the dragon in its admittedly abstract form.

Perhaps the most famous of lady dragon-slayers is St. Margaret of Antioch, whose memory the Roman Church celebrates on July 20th. According to Hurd, "This woman had been long celebrated for her piety, and it is written of her in the breviary of Salisbury, that on a certain time she begged that she might have an opportunity of engaging with the devil, face to face, because she had formerly had many secret struggles with him. Her request was granted, and the devil appeared to her under the form of a most hideous dragon, who immediately swallowed her up. Here was the moment of trial; she recollected that she was a Christian, and although in the belly of the dragon, she marked upon herself the sign of the cross, and the monster's body burst asunder, so that the virgin came out unhurt."

Truly a commendable example of courage and presence of mind.

This lady is said to have had no less than three encounters with a dragon. These possibly may be an allegory of her prolonged sufferings and martyrdom at Antioch. In allusion to her delivery from the dragon she is the patron saint against the pains of childbirth. She has enjoyed great popularity from an early period, and in Great Britain 238 churches have been dedicated to her honour. She is said to be identical with the Semitic Aphrodite.

Another lady dragon subducer was St. Martha, the sister of

Lazarus, who, when she was stranded on the shores of Languedoc together with St. Mary Magdalene, St. Maxime, and St. Marcellus, worked some astonishing miracles. The inhabitants, seeing her powers, prayed her to deliver them from a monster called the Tarasque (the Disturber), who fed upon human flesh. According to a French writer, she had hardly entered the wood where the dragon lived, when a horrible and long-continued bellowing was heard by the anxious listeners, who tremblingly concluded that the poor unarmed woman had furnished their serpent with still another victim. But at last the bellowing ceased, and St. Martha reappeared, holding a little wooden cross in one hand, and by



UNA AND THE LION.
From "Good Words," 1868.

the other leading the monster fastened to a ribbon which was tied round her waist. She advanced with her capture into the centre of the town, glorifying the name of Christ and presented the people with the dragon still bloody from the prey he had last devoured.

The annual festival in honour of her conquest and the Order of the Tarasque, instituted by the good king René of Anjou, commemorated the saint's miracle.

Deane records a serpent-slaying tradition of the dracontic temple of Stanton Drew in Somerset. According to this: "Keyna, the daughter of a Welsh Prince, who lived in the fifth century, having left her country and crossed the Severn, for the purpose of finding some secluded spot, where she might devote herself without interruption, to religious contemplations, arrived

in the neighbourhood of Stanton Drew. She requested permission from the prince of the country, to fix her residence at Keynsham, which was then an uncleared wood. The prince replied, that he would readily give the permission required; but it was impossible for anyone to live in that place on account of the *serpents*, of the most venomous species, which infested it. Keyna, however, confident in her saintly gifts, accepted the permission, notwithstanding the warning; and taking possession of the wood, 'converted by her prayers all the snakes and vipers of the place into stones. And to this day,' remarks Capgrave, the recorder of the legend, 'the stones in that countryside resemble the windings of serpents, through all the fields and villages, as if they had been so formed by the hand of the engraver.'"

The legend of St. Hilda, who performed a similar feat, will be found in the chapter on "The Serpent-Stone."

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CHAPTER XX

THE FASCINATION OF THE SERPENT

"Fair as the first that fell of womankind,
When on that dread yet lovely serpent smiling,
Whose image then was stamped upon her mind—
But once beguiled—and evermore beguiling."

(Byron, "The Bride of Abydos," VI.)

IT is said that one of the reasons why the serpent was selected as the special symbol of Divinity was its power of fascination: for under the spell of its gaze human beings, beasts and birds may lose their self-control so as to become unable to move, resist, or flee the death awaiting them.

In the chapter on Nehushtan we have seen that Jehovah was symbolised as a brazen serpent by his Jewish worshippers, and the fact casts a curious sidelight on the Hebrew belief that mortal man must neither look on, nor be looked upon by their deity. If such awful consequences could ensue from meeting the gaze of the reptile which was his emblem on earth, as followed in the case of the basilisk, what might not be the result did man encounter the glance of Jehovah? Therefore in the Bible man is represented as hiding his face when the god visited him. To take one or two examples of this, we read how Moses when Jehovah made known his presence in the burning bush, "hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God" (Exod. iii. 6), though he had already seen, and desired a nearer view of the phenomena.

Likewise Elijah, when he heard "the still small voice," and recognised that Jehovah was addressing him, "wrapped his face in his mantle" (1 Kings xix. 13), and even the seraphims seen

by Isaiah who stood above "the Lord sitting on a throne," covered their eyes with two of the six wings they each possessed.

Returning from the mystical to the practical side of the subject, let us see what evidence can be adduced as to the reality of the alleged phenomenal power of fascination with which the serpent has been credited ever since that episode with our first mother; for if the tales that are told of its capabilities can be believed, it is little wonder that Eve was its victim!

Ælianus, the Roman naturalist who flourished about 140, tells us (Bk. II, chap. 21) that "The Phrygian history states that dragons are born which reach ten paces in length; which daily in midsummer, at the hour when the forum is full of men in assembly, are wont to proceed from their caverns, and (near the River Rhyndacus) with part of the body on the ground, and the rest erect, with the neck gently stretched out, and gaping mouth, attract birds, either by their inspiration, or by some fascination, and that those which are drawn down by the inhalation of their breath glide down into their stomach—(and that they continue this until sunset), but that after that, concealing themselves, they lay in ambush for the herds returning from the pasture to the stable, and inflict much injury, often killing the herdsmen and gorging themselves with food."

According to a writer, quoted anonymously in "All the Year Round," "In Manila there are serpents of a great length, that hang by the tail on trees, draw men and beasts with the force of their breath; and the only way to prevent it is to beat the air betwixt them and the serpent; they are called *ibitin*."

Dr. Bird has given an interesting account of the fascination of a human being by a serpent. Two lads out for a walk came upon a large black snake, and one of them wished to see if the reptile could fascinate him. He approached within a few yards of the snake, which raised its head, when "something seemed to flash from its eyes like the rays of light thrown off by a mirror exposed to the sunshine." The boy afterwards told how in a moment all his thoughts were confused, and he fancied himself in a whirlpool, every turn of which drew him nearer to the centre. All the time he was approaching the snake, but his companion, realising his danger, rushed forward and killed the creature.

Mr. J. Herbert Slater, in a recent work describes how a traveller, Mr. Lange, when exploring the regions of the Upper Amazon, was told of immense serpents with a power of fascination that drew their victim into their grasp. Mr. Lange was extremely sceptical of these tales until the case of a rubber worker named Jose Pereira was brought to his notice. He investigated this,

and found that the facts were as follows: Pereira was in his canoe, paddling down-stream, when he heard a sound that he thought was made by some animal; and running his boat aground he got his rifle ready to shoot, but seeing nothing continued his way down-stream. Still the noise was audible, but he could see nothing to account for it. Presently, feeling uneasy and afraid, he returned and sat down on the root of a tree, but soon found himself quite unable to stir. Luckily three workers from headquarters just then came down the river, and hearing a sound as of someone in distress, they first shouted, and finally landed. They found Pereira in a state of collapse, and under the root upon which he sat, appeared the head of an enormous boa-constrictor, its eyes fastened on the poor man. They fired at it and the spell was broken. The serpent was found to be 52 feet 8 inches long, and 28 inches thick. Mr. Lange vouched for the truth of this tale which is specially interesting because the victim was actually unconscious of the presence of the serpent.

In the case of small animals and birds, the alleged power of attraction which the serpent possesses over them seems to be fairly well attested by modern observers, who assert that the bird or animal which has fallen under the reptile's spell, not only does not attempt escape, but will actually draw closer to the snake, crying or moaning piteously whilst it does so, but apparently unable to control its movements once the serpent's eye has fastened upon it. But should anyone pass between the reptile and its victim so as even momentarily to obscure the vision, the spell is broken and the bird or animal can escape. It has been noticed that the serpent is generally coiled when exercising its power of attraction, so possibly this position in some way increases its magnetic force.

Catesby, writing in 1771, describing the rattlesnake, cautiously says: "The charming, as it is commonly called, or attractive power this snake is said to have of drawing to it animals and devouring them, is generally believed in America; as for my own part, I never saw the action; but a great many from whom I have had it related, all agree in the manner of the process; which is that the animals, particularly birds and squirrels (which principally are their prey), no sooner spy the snake, than they skip from spray to spray, hovering and approaching gradually nearer their enemy, regardless of any other danger; but with distracted gestures and outcries descend, though from the top of the loftiest trees, to the mouth of the snake, who openeth his jaws, takes them in, and in an instant swallows them."

A similar account is given us by Catesby's contemporary, the

naturalist Goldsmith, who, without committing himself, avers, "It is said by some that the rattlesnake has a power of charming its prey into its mouth; and this is as strongly contradicted by others. The inhabitants of Pennsylvania are said to have opportunities of observing this strange fascination every day. The snake is often seen basking at the foot of a tree, where birds and squirrels make their residence. There, coiled upon its tail, its jaws extended, and its eyes shining like fire, the rattlesnake levels its dreadful glare upon one of the little animals above. The bird or the squirrel, whichever it may be, too plainly perceives the mischief meditating against it, and hops from branch to branch, with a timorous plaintive sound, wishing to avoid, yet incapable of breaking through the fascination; thus it continues for some time its feeble efforts and complaints, but is still seen approaching lower and lower towards the bottom branches of the tree, until at last, as if overcome by the potency of its fears, it jumps down from the tree directly into the throat of its frightful destroyer.

"In order to ascertain the truth of this story, a mouse was put into a large iron cage, where a rattlesnake was kept, and the effects carefully observed. The mouse remained motionless at one end of the cage; while the snake, at the other, continued fixed, with its eye glaring full on the little animal, and its jaws opened to their widest extent: the mouse for some time seemed eager to escape; but every effort only served to increase its terrors and to draw it still nearer the enemy; till, after several ineffectual attempts to break the fascination, it was seen to run into the jaws of the rattlesnake, where it was instantly killed."

This instance may be quoted in answer to those naturalists who assert that the serpent never exercises its power of fascination when in captivity. That it does not often do so is not to be wondered at, since the conditions are necessarily entirely artificial. The serpent is probably conscious of being watched,—even if it does not see the observer, and therefore is not likely—even if able—to exercise its powers of hypnosis whilst he is present. Also it would seem that animals cannot be fascinated unless they are taken by surprise, and that forewarned is forearmed. The animal introduced into a cage can see its foe; this explains why under natural conditions the snake lies still and hidden whilst waiting for its prey, its protective colouring giving it the appearance of a fallen tree-branch.

In South Africa is a serpent known as the Booms, which has large eyes and a habit of partially coiling its body round the branch of a tree, with its head erect and its mouth open. If a flight of small birds discover the reptile, they fly round it,

uttering wild cries, till one, more terror-stricken than the rest, goes straight into the serpent's jaws.

After considering such accounts of the serpent's uncanny powers it is comforting to remember that serpents themselves can be fascinated or charmed, and we have devoted a special chapter to this aspect of our subject to which the reader who requires an antidote may turn!

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CHAPTER XXI

THE SERPENT AS AMULET AND CHARM

THE history of mankind shows a striking tendency among primitive peoples to regard the animate and inanimate objects around them as vehicles used by the gods to reveal their will, and possessed of innate occult powers which can be employed to control the evil forces so continually threatening man's life or well-being.

Civilised man, after centuries of materialistic teaching, has almost lost sight of the fact which is so evident to the child of Nature,—that the appearances and phenomena surrounding him are all miraculous, magical, inscrutable, unaccountable, unprovable, and, under proper conditions are resolvable into invisibility and apparent nothingness. It is indeed little less than a miracle that thinking beings accept their own and the world's existence in the matter-of-fact unquestioning manner so many of them do, taking everything for granted as the merest matter of course, and showing real interest only in the things affecting their immediate material environment.

But this blindness to the wonder of things is an acquired, not a natural characteristic of humanity. The prophet Isaiah attributed it to the curse of Jehovah (or Ialdabaoth), and tells us how Jehovah bade him "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isa. vi. 9 and 10).

Upon the soul of man fell the dark night of materialistic science, and long enshrouded him with its gloomy negation. But night does not last for ever, and the dawn is breaking anew with promise of a far fairer day than that to which he so sadly said farewell. It will help us to realise our gain if we look back upon that earlier day, for although its light enabled man to recognise himself as a spiritual being living in a spiritual world, yet so faint was it that the gods were dim, whilst the shadows of evil loomed black and tremendous and menacing above

his head, and charms, and incantations, and horrid bloody sacrifice of all he held most dear, seemed the only means of propitiating the forces that threatened his destruction.

And now the serpent, so sinister, yet so subtly attractive, appeared to man as a sort of link between the two worlds that pressed upon his growing consciousness. Consequently it became the principal figure in a large number of ancient charms and amulets, and the constant companion of the physician, the soothsayer and the magician; besides which it was regarded as the means by which usually invisible spirits, and sometimes even the gods, made known their will and manifested themselves to poor blind man in a form which he could understand and appreciate.

Among the ancient Egyptians this was especially the case, and they naturally esteemed the serpent very highly as an amulet, because of the importance it assumed in their eyes as a religious emblem. Mr. Wynn Westcott tells us that serpent's head amulets, "made of stone, red jasper, or paste to imitate jasper, and of cornelian," were in common use. These images have been found with mummies, and the Egyptians appear to have believed that their presence prevented the dead from being bitten by the serpents of evil in the underworld. Numerous papyri have been found full of magical charms intended to repel the attacks of Apophis and Set, during a time when these were regarded as evil deities in serpent form.

Among the collection of Egyptian amulets at University College are several models of serpents' heads which were worn to give protection from snake bite. Professor Flinders Petrie, referring to these, says that "Chapter thirty-three of the 'Book of the Dead' reads: 'Chapter whereby all serpents are kept back'; Chapter 34. 'Chapter whereby a person is not devoured by the dweller in the shrine'; Chapter 35. 'Chapter whereby the person is not devoured by a serpent in the underworld.' There is nothing in these chapters to explain the amulets further."



PREHISTORIC
EGYPTIAN AMULET.
From the collection in
University College.

Our figure represents a finger-ring intended to preserve the wearer from serpents, which is said by Professor Petrie to belong to the prehistoric period. It is made of yellow-brown limestone. At a later date serpent amulets of glass and faïence were worn as necklets by the Egyptian women.

Mr. Wake says that "the reference in Hebrew history to the *seraphim* of Jacob's family recalls the fact that Abrahams' father was *Terah*, a 'maker of images.' The *teraphim* were doubtless the same as the *seraphim*, which were serpent images

(the serpent-symbol of the Exodus is called 'Seraph'), and probably the household charms or idols of the Semitic worshippers of the Sun-god, to whom the serpent was sacred."

The Jewish people, as will be seen from the above, were deeply impregnated with these ideas, even before their residence in Egypt, and were continually returning to ophiolatrous practices, which the most terrible threats failed to make them abandon.

In confirmation of this statement, we may refer to the discovery at Taanach in Palestine of many serpents' heads, which had been used in incantations, and two serpent-like bronze knives intended as amulets to ward off the evil eye. These were mentioned by Professor Sellin in his Schweich Lectures (88).

According to Ewing, the word *lehāshim*, which occurs in Isaiah iii. 20, and is there translated tablets, with an alternative reading in the margin "houses of the soul," is derived from *lāhash*, which means "enchantments," and also the objects by which enchantments are averted.

Jahn thinks these were the figures of serpents carried in the hand by Hebrew women,* as "Arab women, before Mohammed, wore golden serpents between their breasts." The marginal reading certainly confirms this idea, for it was as "houses of the soul" that serpents were specially regarded. Isaiah said that Ialdabaoth would take these "tablets" from the daughters of Zion, together with "their cauls, and their round tires like the moon," and the other charms and ornamentations which decorated their persons. "And it shall come to pass that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well-set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty."

We have referred above to the golden serpents worn as charms by Arabian women. The following interesting paragraph from the "Daily News" of November 30th, 1869, throws light on the meaning attached to serpent amulets by modern Arabs:

"A curious picture of Arab life has just been exhibited before the Court of Assizes at Constantina in Algeria. A native, named Ben-Kem-mari, was accused of mutilating his wife by cutting off her nose and upper lip in a fit of jealousy. The mother of the victim said that to cure her son-in-law of his jealousy she had consulted a much-venerated marabout, who had given her as a charm for her daughter a serpent's head wrapped up in hemp-leaves which was to be placed in the folds of the husband's turban. The woman appealed to the public present to prove that by this method she would have cured the man of his suspicions, and several Arabs at once showed the same talisman, while a

* Perhaps the copper serpents, one of which is illustrated on p. 86.

native officer of the coast, without being consulted, called out to the judge, 'Yes, I have also a serpent's head; it gives strength to the man and fidelity to the woman.'"

In India also, to this day, the serpent is regarded as a talisman and bringer of good fortune to those in whose dwelling it takes up its abode, and Sir Edwin Arnold writes of

"... the shy black snake, that gives
Fortune to households." ("Light of Asia.")

Elizabeth Villiers tells us that the sacred Hindu talisman of the Bamboo with Seven Knots, consists of a circle "inscribed with triangles, and across the circle, forming the spokes of the wheel as it were, lie the seven-knotted bamboo and a serpent. Every part of the device has a mystic significance. The circle is the symbol of Eternity, the triangles stand for the Hindu Trinity (Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, Siva the Destroyer), the serpent for wisdom, the bamboo for the seven degrees of learning the devout must possess."

Regina Bloch, commenting on this in the "Occult Review," says that "there is another aspect of this beautiful symbol. The circle is Infinitude, with the Masters or triangles shining as Pyramids within it. In it rests the Bamboo (the human spine) with the seven knots or centres governed by the seven archangels, which are awakened by that mysterious and celestial fire—the Serpent Coil. It is an Orientalised form of the *caduceus* of Hermes, the messenger (the Hebrew for *angel* is messenger) of the gods. The central rod is the spine, the cone the pineal gland of Man, the two Serpents the turning inspirational ray of the Lord."

Rings and bracelets and other ornaments in Eastern countries were often made in the form of serpents in primeval days, and



A GNOSTIC AMULET.

served rather for amulets and charms than as ornaments. They were thought to ensure good health, strength, and long life, and were also believed to possess great protective powers, probably as securing the favour of the god whose emblem they were, or symbolising his presence.

Bracelets in the form of serpents were worn by the Grecian women in the time of Clemens Alexandrinus, as we may learn from his ignorant reproof of this custom. He says: "The women are not ashamed to place about them the most manifold symbols of the evil one; for as the serpent deceived Eve, so the golden trinket in the fashion of a serpent misleads the women." The Grecian children wore chaplets of the same kind.

Hurd tells us that in the island of Amboyna (in the Asiatic archipelago) the women wear jewels set in gold, in the form of serpents. They look upon these as sacred, and never touch them but with the most reverential awe.

The serpent's connection with Æsculapius of course made it a potent charm in every kind of illness or injury, and many allusions to this belief may be found in the works of ancient authors. Not only the flesh of the reptile, but even its skin, though long parted from the original owner, was thought to possess a magical healing power.

No doubt it was because of this that Hannibal's Amazonian cavalry women used shields made of serpent's skins.

In an old version of the life of Merlin, we read that "hadde not ben the doublet that he hadde of a serpent's skyn, deed hadde he ben with oute recouer" ("Merlin," II, 336, E.E.T.S.).

Pliny, writing about A.D. 77, said that a snake's skin eased delivery (XXX, 44), and Palladius, a Roman author of the fourth century A.D. who wrote a work on Agriculture, considered the serpent-skin's life-giving power extended even to trees. According to an old translation he wrote:

"A serpent skynne doon on this tree men lete
Avaylant be to save it in greet hete."

("Husbandrie," E.E.T.S., p. 211.)

Lawson, in his "History" (1714), says that the cast skins of the rattlesnake "are used in physic, and the rattles are reckoned good to expedite the birth. The gall is made up into pills with clay, and kept for use, being given in pestilential fevers and the small-pox. It is accounted a noble remedy, known to few, and held as a great *arcanum*."

The gipsies of Southern Europe practise a ceremonial charm in which the serpent takes a prominent place, believing that they thereby dispel all the maladies that otherwise would have afflicted them throughout the year. They take a wooden box which rests upon two cross pieces of wood, and in it they put herbs and simples along with the dried body of a snake, or lizard, which everyone present must first have touched with his fingers. They then wrap the box in white and red wool, and the oldest

man carries it from tent to tent. Everyone spits into it once, and the sorceress utters spells over it. Finally it is cast into running water. If anyone finds it, and opens it from curiosity, he and his will be the victims of all the troubles those who made the charm have escaped.

It is interesting to compare this charm with the Grecian myth of the serpent-man Erechtheus. This hero was brought up by Athena, who placed him in a chest which was confided to the care of Agraulus, Pandrosos, and Herse, the daughters of Cecrops, with strict injunctions that it was not to be opened. But unable to curb their curiosity, they opened the chest, and found within the child entwined with serpents. As soon as they saw him they were seized with madness, and cast themselves down the most precipitous part of the Acropolis. Is this myth the origin of the charm?

Goldsmith says that viper's flesh "has long been celebrated as a noble medicine. A broth, made by boiling one viper in a quart of water till it comes to a pint, is the usual method in which it is given at present; and it is said to be a very powerful restorative in battered constitutions: the salt of vipers is also thought to exceed any other animal salt whatever, in giving vigour to the languid circulation, and prompting to venery."

The "Penny Cyclopædia" notes that: "Even the last generation witnessed the great demand for these poisonous serpents in consequence of the virtues supposed to reside in their flesh. The lingering belief in the wonderfully invigorating qualities of 'viper broth' is not yet quite extinct in some places. Pliny, Galen, and others praise the efficacy of viper flesh in the cure of ulcers, elephantiasis, and other disorders arising from a corrupt state of the system. By the ancients the animal was generally served to the patient boiled like fish, as being more efficacious than when taken in the form of a powder or other dried state. Sir Kenelm Digby's beautiful wife was fed on capons fattened with the flesh of vipers."

According to both Gaelic and German folklore, the white snake, when boiled, has the property of conferring medical wisdom. The white snake is venerated as the king of serpents by the Scottish Highlanders, but other serpents are also thought by them to have curative powers in their bodies, when these have been specially treated.

For instance, the Rev. Kenneth Macdonald tells us that in the Scottish Highlands the ancient treatment of epilepsy was as follows:

"A live snake was caught and placed in a bottle, which was then filled with pure water and corked. After standing for a short

time, the infusion was given to the patient, who was kept ignorant of the nature of the drug."

The famous Nicholas Culpeper prescribes the following remedy for dropsy: "A water snake, a string being thrust through her tail, and she hung up, a vessel full of water being set underneath, into which she may thrust her head, after certain hours or days she will vomit up a stone, which being received in the vessel full of water, will drink it all up; which stone being tied about the middle of the one that hath the dropsie will dry up all the water."

Our national patron saint and hero, St. George, apart from his famous exploit in slaying the dragon, seems to have had some curious sympathetic and occult link with serpents. Mr. Frazer has given us several instances. For example, in Bohemia and Moravia, serpents are believed to be innocuous up to the 23rd of April, but obtain their poison on the saint's day, and various charms may be affected by means of serpents on this day. Thus, in Bulgaria, a wife who wishes to have a baby will cut off a snake's head on St. George's Day, and place a bean inside its mouth. Then she will either lay the head in a hollow tree, or carry it so far from her village that the crowing of the cocks is no longer audible, and there bury it in the ground. Her wish will be obtained if the bean buds.

Again, on the eve of St. George's Day witches are thought by the herdsmen and shepherds of Eastern Europe to be specially active, and all sorts of precautions are taken to guard against their knavish tricks. The Ruthenians drive their cattle out to pasture for the first time after their long drear winter on St. George's Day, and as the farmers know how busy the witches have been the preceding night casting their spells on the cows, they naturally take precautionary measures to evade the effect of these, and thwart the fell purposes of the witches. A favourite charm is to catch a snake, skin it, and fumigate the cows with the skin, on St. George's Eve, whilst to rub the udders and horns of the cows with serpents' fat is said to be equally potent to keep the witches from the cows.

Lewis Spence says, "Many kinds of amulets or talismans were used by the Breton peasantry to neutralise the power of sorcerers. Thus if a person carried a snake with him, enchanters would be unable to harm his sight, and all objects would appear to him in their natural forms."

We have seen in how many instances serpents have been (and are) used in charms against witches and the forces of evil, but



GOLD RING.
Found at Pompeii.

we find them also used by witches to aid in effecting their fell purposes; another instance of the meeting of the seemingly antagonistic meanings of this amazing symbol.

When the witches in Macbeth make the horrible mixture in their black cauldron in order to obtain from it sinister presages, among other maleficent ingredients is the

" Fillet of a fenny snake "

and

" Adder's fork and blind worm's sting "

is added to make it thoroughly effective.

Goats used to be considered as specially proof against adders, and the minister of Kirkmichael, Banff, in 1794, quotes a Gadhelic saying, implying that the goat eats the serpent or adder. " Like the goat eating the adder or serpent."

A favourite method of charming away vermin which did not hurt their feelings nor show them disrespect was to make metal images of them. The good bishop, Gregory of Tours, has told us how the city of Paris used to be free from dormice and serpents, but that in his lifetime, whilst a sewer was being cleansed, a bronze serpent and bronze dormouse were discovered, and removed. " Since then," says the bishop, " dormice and serpents without number have been seen in Paris."

As we have noted in another chapter, this was the method employed by Moses when the swarm of serpents afflicted Israel in the wilderness, and probably even at that date it was an ancient one.

A similar idea is embodied in the Celtic folk remedies for serpent bite, one of which is to bathe the wound with water in which a serpent's head had been boiled, whilst another is an ointment made from snake's tongues.

Dr. Carmichael describes a charm which consisted of pounding the embers from a peat fire in one's stocking at the threshold, or the outer doorstep, on St. Bride's Day, the ritualist concluding with the words, " I shall not injure the serpent nor shall the serpent injure me."

George Henderson says that " in Skye at least," he has heard the charm " On St. Brigit's Day the serpent will say from off the knoll: ' I will not injure Nic Imheair, neither will Nic Imheair injure me,' repeated on St. Brigit's Day, the woman doing so having placed a burning peat in one of her stockings, and pounding at it the while on the threshold of the outer door (a specially sacred place) as a precaution against the entrance of evil spirits. . . . It is proper to add that another variant of the serpent rhyme typifies the serpent as queen. . . . ' On St. Bride's

(Brigit's) Day the queen will come from the knoll,' and its association with the act of pounding a burning peat on the threshold involuntarily reminds one of the Siberian ' Fiery Snake,' or *zagovor* (invoked for kindling amorous longing), with which has been compared the folk belief that with the beginning of every January—i.e. at the end of the festival in honour of the return of the sun towards summer—the Fiery Snake begins to fly, enters into the *izbá* through the chimney, turns into a brave youth and steals by magic the hearts of fair maidens. In a Servian song a girl who has been carried off by a ' fiery snake ' calls herself his ' true love,' and it is thought that in mythical language the ' Fiery Snake ' is one of the forms of the lightning. ' The blooming earth, fructified by the rains poured forth during the first spring storms, is turned in the myth into the bride of the Fiery Snake. But the wedder of nature became looked upon at a later period as the patron of weddings among the children of men, and so the inducing of love-pangs naturally became ascribed to the Fiery Snake ' (Ralston)."

In Africa the Bakongo who desires that his dog should be a good hunter uses the following charm. He sends for the special medicine-man for dogs, who takes the head of a viper, some chalk, various leaves, and mint, which he mixes and makes into a bundle. A small portion of this he encloses in a leaf twisted like a funnel. Next, he catches a wasp and presses its juice into the funnel, then, adding a little palm wine he squeezes the moisture from this mixture into the dog's nose, and thereafter it is a good hunter and trekker.

Whittier in his description of the home of an American Indian chief says:

" Loosely on a snake-skin strung,
In the smoke his scalp-locks swung
Grimly to and fro." (" Bridal of Pennacook," II.)

Here we have the snake-skin—the emblem of life, supporting the symbols of death,—in short, the Encircled Serpent.

Endless other instances of the use of this all-embracing symbol as a charm of everywhere respected potency for good or ill, might easily be adduced; but enough to illustrate the subject have now been given, so we will pass on.

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CHAPTER XXII

SERPENT CHARMERS

WHEN Ra, the Egyptian Sun-god, had made a heaven for himself, and decided to retire from his earthly activities, he remembered how, during his reign on this planet, he had nearly lost his life through a snake-bite. Fearing that the same misfortune might befall his successor, he determined to destroy the power of all the poisonous serpents which lived on earth. He therefore commanded Thoth to summon Keb, the Earth-god, to his presence, and on his arrival told him that war must be made against the serpents that lived in his lands. He was also to go to the god Nu, and bid him set a watch over all the reptiles that were on the earth or in the waters, and to draw up a written document for every place that serpents were known to inhabit, with strict orders that they must bite no one. They were never to forget that though Ra was retiring from the world, his rays would continue to fall upon them. In his place their father Keb would keep watch over them, and would be their father for ever. Then, as a further protection against the serpent's possible malice, Ra promised to disclose to magicians and snake-charmers the especial word of power, *hekau*, with which he guarded himself against the attacks of reptiles, and also to transmit it to his son, Osiris. Thus those who wisely listen to the formulæ of snake-charmers (and their children also) will always be immune from the bites of serpents. This legend shows how ancient is the profession of snake-charmer, since these magicians are said to owe the foundation of their craft to a decree of Ra himself.

The magical and religious writings of the Egyptians of every period contain charms or spells for use against serpents, scorpions, and poisonous reptiles of every kind, and Dr. Budge tells us that "the text of Unas, which was written towards the close of the fifth dynasty, contains many such spells, and in the Theban and

Saïte Books of the Dead several chapters consist of nothing but spells and incantations, many of which are based on archaic texts, against crocodiles, serpents, and other deadly reptiles, and insects of all kinds." He adds that "all such creatures were regarded as incarnations of evil spirits, which attack the dead as well as the living, and therefore it was necessary for the well-being of the former that copies of spells against them should be written upon the walls of tombs, coffins, funerary amulets, etc." This seems strange in a country where the serpent was the sacred emblem of Divinity, but as we have seen, even Ra himself, the king of the gods, was not immune from their poisonous bite, when they represented the darker side of the circle of All-Being.

The most famous serpent charmers of the past were the Psylli, a people of Cyrenaica, whose power Pliny ascribes to a peculiar odour emitted from their persons which the serpents abhorred. These people, from the most ancient times down to the present day, have been regarded as holy by the Egyptians, and even now are looked upon with awe and wonder. According to Minutoli, "The people consider them as holy. At certain festivals, for example, on the day before the departure of the great caravan to the Holy Kaaba, they go forth in procession with live snakes around their necks and arms, having their faces in contortions like an insane person, until foam falls from the mouth. They sometimes also tear the serpents with their teeth. When they are in this condition, the people press around them, especially the women, in order, if it is possible, to touch their foaming mouths with their hands."

Travellers have given us many curious accounts of a class of men in Egypt, who, like the ancient Psylli, apparently possess a secret art which enables them to command and control serpents.

Lane, writing on this subject, says:

"I have met with many persons among the more intelligent of the Egyptians who condemn these modern Psylli as impostors, but none who has been able to offer a satisfactory explanation of the most common and most interesting of their performances, which I am about to describe.

"Many Rifa'ee and Sa'adee durwee'shes obtain their livelihood, as I have mentioned on a former occasion, by going about to charm away serpents from houses. A few other persons also profess the same art, but are not so famous. The former travel over every part of Egypt, and find abundant employment; but their gains are barely sufficient to procure them a scanty subsistence. The charmer professes to discover without ocular perception (but perhaps he does so by a peculiar smell), whether

there be any serpents in a house; and if there be, to attract them to him; as the fowler, by the fascination of his voice allures the bird into his nest. As the serpent seeks the darkest place in which to hide himself, the charmer has, in most cases, to exercise his skill in an obscure chamber, where he might easily take a serpent from his bosom, bring it to the people without the door, and affirm that he had found it in the apartment; for no one would venture to enter with him after having been assured of the presence of one of these reptiles within: but he is often required to perform in the full light of day, surrounded by spectators; and incredulous persons have searched him beforehand, and even stripped him naked; yet his success has been complete. He assumes an air of mystery, strikes the walls with a short palm stick, whistles, makes a clucking noise with his tongue, and spits upon the ground; and generally says, 'I adjure you by God, if ye be above or if ye be below, that ye come forth: I adjure you by the most great name, if ye be obedient, come forth; and if ye be disobedient, die! die! die!'

"The serpent is generally dislodged by his stick, from a fissure in the wall, or drops from the ceiling of the room. I have often heard it asserted that the serpent-charmer, before he enters a house in which he is to try his skill, always employs a servant of that house to introduce one or more serpents; but I have known instances in which this could not be the case, and am inclined to believe that the durwee'shes above mentioned are generally acquainted with some real physical means of discovering the presence of serpents without seeing them, and of attracting them from their lurking places. It is, however, a fact well ascertained, that the most expert of them do not venture to carry serpents of a venomous nature about their persons until they have extracted the poisonous teeth. Many of them carry scorpions, also within the cap, and next the shaven head; but doubtless first deprive them of the power to injure; perhaps by merely blunting the sting. Their famous feats of eating live and venomous serpents and scorpions . . . are regarded as religious acts."

The celebrated moo'lid or anniversary birthday festival of the seyd Ibrahee'm is attended by the Saadee'yeh durwee'shes of Rashee'd, who exhibit their feats with serpents: "some carrying serpents with silver rings in their mouths, to prevent their biting; others partly devouring these reptiles alive."

In a later chapter, Lane, describing the celebration of the festival of the Birth of the Prophet, says: "It used to be a custom of some of the Saadee'yeh on this occasion . . . to perform their celebrated feat of eating live serpents, before a

select assembly, in the house of the Sheykh El-Bek'ree : but their present sheykh has lately put a stop to this practice in the metropolis ; justly declaring it to be disgusting, and contrary to the religion, which includes serpents among the creatures that are unfit to be eaten. Serpents and scorpions were not unfrequently eaten by Sa'adees during my former visit to the country. The former were deprived of their poisonous teeth, or rendered harmless by having their upper and lower lips bored, and tied together on each side with a silk string to prevent their biting ; and sometimes those which were merely carried in processions had two silver rings put in place of the silk strings. Whenever a Sa'adee ate the flesh of a live serpent, he was, or affected to be, excited to do so by a kind of frenzy. He pressed very hard with the end of his thumb, upon the reptile's back, as he grasped it, at a point about two inches from the head ; and all that he ate of it was the head and the part between it and the point where his thumb pressed ; of which he made three or four mouthfuls : the rest he threw away. Serpents, however, are not always handled with impunity even by Sa'adees. A few years ago a durwee'sh of this sect, who was called 'el-Fe'el' (or the Elephant), from his bulky and muscular form, and great strength, and who was the most famous serpent eater of his time, and almost of any age, having a desire to rear a serpent of a very venomous kind which his boy had brought among others that he had collected in the desert, put this reptile into a basket, and kept it for several days without food, to weaken it : he then put his hand into the basket to take it out, for the purpose of extracting its teeth ; but it immediately bit his thumb ; he called for help, there were, however, none but women in the house, and they feared to come to him, so that many minutes elapsed before he could obtain assistance : his whole arm was then found to be swollen and black ; and he died after a few hours."

The special correspondent of "The Times" at Luxor wrote to that paper an interesting account, published March 19th, 1923, of the feats of an Egyptian serpent charmer named Moussa : "A little man and swarthy, with a bristling, untrimmed moustache, lean-faced and quick of movement—as perhaps you have to be in dealing with cobras and scorpions and such. Dressed in black with a white turban on his head, carrying a longish cane in his hand, he led the way—we five English following—amid the rubbish heaps and piles of broken masonry and old mud bricks which litter the dusty plain about the temple of Karnak. As he walked he harangued the world at large, chanting, in a high-pitched monotone, texts, we were told, from the Koran, and

powerful incantations taught him by his grandfather. A great man must his grandfather have been. He learned all his lore from Hakim Syed Suleiman himself, a Sheikh so potent that every snake and scorpion in Egypt knows and trembles at his name to-day." Moussa asked the English party he was conducting where they would like him to look for snakes, and they "directed him along the old mud brick wall of the Romans, full on the face of which the sun was beating. And the snakes came.

"First, a thin grey snake, perhaps three and a half feet long, hauled struggling out of a hole in the old wall and flung upon the sand at our feet. We were assured that it was abominably poisonous ; but from the shape of its head it looked as harmless as a grass snake at home." Moussa seemed to discover the whereabouts of the reptiles by his sense of smell. "Again he smelled something ; smelled it from afar—something big—perhaps a cobra ! And presently, before a group of three holes close together in the wall, he stopped in a very fury of exhortation. Every charm that his grandfather ever knew must surely have been invoked as the little man threatened and commanded and thrashed at the wall with his stick. . . . At last . . . reaching his bare arm almost to the shoulder deep into one of the black openings, he drew out, the reptile doing its best to resist, a struggling cobra getting on for five feet long. It certainly was a formidable looking thing as it slid this way and that over the sand, or stopped to rear its head and expand its hood like a uræus of one of the old Egyptian kings come to life. To the creature thus upreared, its black tongue flickering in and out of its narrow slit of a mouth, Moussa, stooping down before it, slowly reached out his hand. Very gradually, almost imperceptibly, he brought it nearer and nearer to that wicked-looking head, until it was but six inches away, plainly within striking distance. Then gently, as if in exhausted surrender, the serpent reached forward and softly laid its head in the upturned palm. It was an extraordinary dramatic curtain to the play.

"And are they really wild creatures that he thus discovers for the tourist ? You will hear many stories, various theories. But day after day he goes, now here, now there, and never fails to produce both scorpions and snakes. People have told me how they took him out into the desert and he found them there as easily as in the familiar mud brick wall at Karnak."

A picturesque and dramatic narrative of serpent charming as practised in ancient Egypt by the wise men and sorcerers of that country, and by their one-time pupil, Moses, and his partner, Aaron, may be found in Exodus. I need make no apology for

giving it in the Bible words, though the story is so familiar to us all.

"The Lord said unto him [Moses], What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand" (chap. iv. 2-5). "And Moses . . . returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand" (chap. iv. 20, and xvii. 9).

As we see from the above, the rod carried by Moses was now regarded as "the rod of God," so it is not surprising to find it henceforth treated with veneration, and given an honoured position in the tabernacle. When Moses was again commanded by Jehovah to perform a miracle he was specially instructed: "The rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thy hand," and later, when its services were once more in request, we read that "Moses took the rod from before the Lord" (Num. xx. 9).

There is nothing improbable in the Bible story, nor was the feat it relates likely to work conviction upon a people familiar with such "miracles." The snaky rod or staff is one of the significant hieroglyphs which figure in ancient Egyptian sculptures, and when it is curved at the lower as well as the upper end, it represents the *lituus* or augur's divining-rod. It is evident that this was the origin of the snaky rod of Moses, and it has been said that the sceptre of Romulus also took this form.

According to the testimony of modern travellers, snake-charmers of this day appear to be able to benumb and stiffen the snakes they carry about with them. Snowden remarks that "The snake-staves of Cyprus, which are said to have belonged to sorcerers, may very well have been among the insignia of men who practised this mysterious art. Even for those who see it nowadays without reverence, the feat is weird. So it must have been for this old writer" (the author of the Biblical description), "who could not rank it as a natural phenomenon, because in his view there were no such phenomena."

So far the magic rod has been connected only with Moses in the narrative, but next time that it comes into prominence it is no longer in the hand of the leader, but is spoken of as Aaron's rod (Num. xvii. 10). The explanation of this is said to be that two or more versions of the legend have been combined by the compiler of Exodus, and that the priestly account assigning the

first place to Aaron, the founder of the priestly body, has here the ascendancy.

Critics have noted that in the older sections which are indisputably Judean, Aaron is scarcely mentioned, and even when his name does appear, he takes no rôle of importance, but is merely there as the supporter of Moses; and it has been inferred that his name was probably inserted in these places by the editor, to make the story a more harmonious whole. This theory is supported by the incident recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Numbers, when all the rods of rival would-be leaders of the people were laid up "before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness," and when they were examined next day, Aaron's rod alone had "brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds," thereby giving a sign that Aaron and his descendants were to be priests for ever.

Whether this rod was supposed to be identical with that which was turned into a serpent, or no, does not clearly appear, but its blossoming alone among all the rods of the tribes certainly confirms our conjecture as to why, in the paragraph we are next to consider, it is no longer spoken of as Moses' rod, but as Aaron's.

"The Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent. And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the Lord had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods" (Exod. vii. 8-12).

There are several other allusions to serpent charming in the Bible, though perhaps not so many as we might have expected to find in the literature of a people who had resided so long a time in Egypt. In Deuteronomy xviii. 11, the command is given:

"There shall not be found among you . . . a charmer." From this it would appear that the leader and high priest of the Israelites did not want any emulative rival to perform similar miracles to his own, and so divert the people's obedience from himself by a like claim to supernatural powers. Still the art was not a lost one, though possibly only practised by "the stranger within their gates," for in the Psalms of David (lviii. 4-5), the wicked are compared to "the deaf adder (Heb. : *nâch â sh*) that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of her charmers,

charming never so wisely." And in Jeremiah [viii. 17] we read the prophet's warning :

"Behold I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord." "Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment," said the preacher (Eccles. x. 11), probably quoting a popular proverb of his day, that may have been originated to justify the forbidden calling of serpent charming.

India, like Egypt, is a stronghold of the serpent charmer, and Goldsmith says that "In India there is nothing so common as dancing serpents, which are carried about in a broad flat vessel somewhat resembling a sieve. These erect and put themselves in motion at the word of command. When their keeper sings a slow tune, they seem by their heads to keep time ; when he sings a quicker measure, they appear to move more briskly and lively."

This description is corroborated by that of Dr. Davy, who is quoted in the "Penny Cyclopædia," as saying: "One remarkable characteristic of these dangerous serpents (the Cobra Capello) is their fondness for music. Even when newly caught they seem to listen with pleasure to the notes, and even to writhe themselves into attitudes. The Indian jugglers improve greatly on this instinct, and, after taming them by degrees, instruct them even to keep time to their flageolet."

A writer in "Illustrated Travels" says that Madras "is celebrated throughout India for its jugglers and serpent charmers. . . . These fellows always have a few *cobra-di-capello* serpents in their bags, with which they are ready to amuse and astonish those who are not familiar with their performances. These serpents are among the most dangerous of all, and their bite is



INDIAN SERPENT CHARMER.
From a native drawing.

almost always mortal. The jugglers do not, as has been sometimes said, remove the poison fangs, they trust rather to the natural slowness and timidity of this serpent, who rarely has resort to his weapons of offence when he is in a state of repletion from food, and digestion is going on. They accustom the animals at

such times to their handling and to their grimaces. Whoever has had any practical experience with serpents, knows that simple touch, and light passes made along the body, exercise a kind of magnetic influence, and tame them without difficulty. While such influences are going on they neither seek to bite nor to escape. It is only the first passes that are in any way dangerous, for if they should fail to calm they might stimulate. The serpent charmers to render themselves invulnerable, make use of certain roots with which they describe circles around the head of the reptile, hoping thus to take away its power of poisoning."

The following paragraph from the "Daily Mail" of May 22nd, 1923, describes the use of incantation in the capture of a python, when other means had failed.

"CALCUTTA.

"FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.

"Workmen engaged in the construction of a building at Tollygunge, a suburb of Calcutta, were startled a few days ago to see a python twelve feet long wriggling its way through the works. One of the men pinned its head beneath a sack, and it was finally secured under a packing-case. Most of the men, however, refused to continue work, and it was decided that it would be necessary to cage the creature in order to remove it. Eventually some native Ojhas (magicians) appeared who chanted incantations over the snake, rendering it apparently quiescent, when four daring spirits were sufficiently bold to smother the snake with sacks and force it into a cage."

We are reminded of the simile in the "Ramayana": "Like a wild and hissing serpent quelled by incantations high" (Trans., Romesh Dutt). The most powerful charm of words used by the Indians against serpents is said to be: "Oh! serpent, thou who art coiled in my path, get out of my way; for around thee are the mongoose, the porcupine, and the kite in his circles ready to take thee."

Philostratus has described another Indian method of charming serpents. "They take a scarlet robe embroidered with golden letters, and spread it before a serpent's hole. The golden letters have a fascinating power; and by looking steadfastly, the serpent's eyes are overcome and laid asleep."

Although Mohammedans are generally classified into the two great divisions of Sunnites and Shiites, yet within the Islamic faith is an enormous number of sects and monastic orders. Among them all, but one Order, that of the Isawiya, lays claim to the exercise of occult powers. These include the practice of serpent charming, along with the exorcism of evil spirits and diseases, thought-reading, etc.

This Order was founded by Mohammed ben Aissu, a great mystic, in A.D. 1523-4, in Morocco, and was originally purely a Sufi order, the practices for which it is now celebrated being only gradually adopted and at first condemned by some of its chief members.

Hurd tells us that "Several of the Negroes have the art of charming these venomous reptiles, and will venture to handle and play with them without any manner of fear or reluctance. These magicians, likewise, can, by their fascinations, heal such persons as have had the misfortune to be dangerously wounded by them."

Major Tremearne says that in Nigeria it is believed that snakes will not harm twin sons, and although this does not apply to North Africa, yet there, anyone can "catch snakes by pounding up a certain creeper (name unknown), mixing it with water, and rubbing it upon his hands and arms, while pieces of garlic or onion rubbed on the legs will drive snakes away."

The following amusing paragraph concerning serpent charming that failed, appeared in the "Daily Express" of November 23rd, 1923. It is headed "Faulty Diagnosis."

"A native woman complained to the Bulawayo magistrate that she consulted her village medicine-man for a defect in her father's eyesight, and also mentioned a slight defect in her own. The medicine-man took a serious view of the matter, saying there was a live snake in her stomach, and he would kill it for fifty shillings. He finally accepted as a fee a shirt, a blanket, and a goat, the goat to supply the medicine by which the snake would be killed. There was no cure."

In Hungary there is a belief that all snakes, frogs, toads, and other noxious reptiles can be driven away on the morning of Holy Saturday when the cattle bell is heard.

Casaubon, the famous Swiss divine, who flourished in the seventeenth century, said that he knew a man who could at any time summon a hundred serpents together and draw them into the fire. Upon one occasion, when a serpent larger than the others would not obey, he merely repeated his charm, and it came forward like the rest to submit to the flames.

This recalls to us Virgil's assertion: "The cold snake is in the meads by incantations burst" ("Bucolics," Ecl.8); from the same authority we learn that Umbro, a general of the Marsi, was wont by enchantment and dexterity "to sprinkle sleep on the viper's race, and the noxious-breathing hydras; their fury he assuaged, and by his art their stings he healed" ("Æneid," Book VII, Davidson's Translation).

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE SERPENT AS A PORTENT

A PROHIBITION against enchantment is found in Leviticus xix. 26 : "Ye shall not eat anything with the blood : neither shall ye use enchantment, nor observe times." The word here translated enchantment is in Hebrew *menachesh*, the exact meaning of which is doubtful.

But as Mr. Gardner has pointed out, the root of the word seems to denote a serpent, and points to divination by serpents.

In Egyptian hieroglyphs a snaky rod or staff curved at both ends represented the *lituus* or augur's divining-rod, and the asp of the ancient Egyptians was regarded as sacred and therefore essentially fitted to reveal Heaven's will. Plutarch explains that this is "on account of a certain resemblance between it and the operations of the Divine power." But the Hebrew lawgiver did not preach this doctrine, and in Leviticus xx. 27 a further prohibition against ophiomancy may be found by the student, though the authorised version again veils the meaning. In the Egyptian language the serpent is called *oub*, and Moses, born and educated in Egypt, doubtlessly used the word in this sense, though our translators have rendered it "familiar spirit" and the A. V. runs :

"A man also, or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death : they shall stone them with stones ; their blood shall be upon them."

In the sixth verse of this same chapter, mention is again made of "such as have familiar spirits," which in the Hebrew is "oboth," or female serpents.

Deane has remarked that the same word which denotes "divination" in Hebrew, Arabic and Greek, also denotes a serpent. He has further pointed out that in Canaan, where the priesthood were the wizards, necromancers and sorcerers, so often alluded to in the Old Testament, the name of the sacred serpent was *Aub*, *Ob*, *Oph* and *Op*, which as we have just noted, is the same word

as that used for wizards, and those who have familiar spirits ; for example the witch of Endor is spoken of as an *ob* or *oub*, and was applied to by Saul for an oracle.

To-day among the negroes the same name is found, and the obi-man, or obi-woman is habitually consulted in any case of doubt and difficulty, just as was the ob-woman, or oub-woman of Endor by Saul.

The decrees against ophiomancy did not destroy the Hebrew's belief in it, which extended even to dreams in which snakes figured. Thus in the Jewish tract, "Berachoth," we read that if one dream of a serpent his income is safe, and if he dream that a serpent bites him he may be sure of having his income doubled ; but if he dream that he is killed by the bite he will lose his income.

In ancient Greece, Apollo, the inspirer of the Delphic Oracle, was worshipped under the form of a serpent, and according to Hyginus and Ælian, it was the serpent Python who uttered the oracles at Parnassus, while the tripod of the pythoness, called by Athenæus the Tripod of Truth, was formed of a triple-headed brazen serpent. The veracity of this oracle was so famous that its answers came to be used as a proverbial term for certain and infallible truth, and Cicero queries, "Would that oracle at Delphi have ever been so celebrated and illustrious and so loaded with such splendid gifts from all nations and kings, if all ages had not had experience of the truth of its predictions ? Let this fact remain—which cannot be denied, unless we will overthrow all history—that that oracle has told the truth for many ages."

But there is so much to relate about the Python that we have reserved a special chapter for it, and must refer our readers thereto for further particulars, merely mentioning the subject here because it is the most famous case in history of the prophetic power ascribed to the serpent.

Another Grecian example of a serpent oracle is afforded by a legend of the serpents of Ceres, and a chance appearance of a serpent is interpreted as a portent in the second book of the Iliad. There we read that when the wearied and discouraged Greeks would have abandoned the siege of Troy and returned homeward, Ulysses, inspired by Minerva, stayed their flight by reminding them of the portent that had been sent by the gods in response to their sacrificial offerings, and its interpretation by Calchas the priest.

"And near our holy altar . . .

. . . There appeared a huge portent,

A dragon with a bloody scale, horrid to sight, and sent

To light by great Olympius ; which crawling from beneath

The altar, to the platan climb'd, and ruthless crash'd to death

A sparrow's young, in number eight, that in a top-bough lay
 Hid under leaves; the dam the ninth, that hover'd every way,
 Mourning her loved birth, till at length the serpent watching her,
 Her wing caught, and devour'd her too. This dragon, Jupiter,
 That brought him forth, turn'd to a stone; and made a powerful mear.
 To stir our zeals up, that admired, when of a fact so clean
 Of all ill as our sacrifice, so fearful an ostent
 Should be the issue. Calchas, then, thus prophesied th' event:
 'Why are ye dumb strook, fair-hair'd Greeks? Wise Jove is he hath
 shown

This strange ostent to us. 'Twas late, and passing lately done,
 But that grace it forgoes to us, for suffering all the state
 Of his appearance (being so slow) nor time shall end, nor fate,
 As these eight sparrows, and the dam (that made the ninth) were eat
 By this stern serpent; so nine years we are t' endure the heat
 Of ravenous war and in the tenth, take in this broad-way'd town!
 Thus he interpreted this sign; and all things have their crown
 As he interpreted, till now. The rest, then, to succeed
 Believe as certain. Stay we all till that most glorious deed
 Of taking this rich town, our hands are honour'd with.' "

The Greeks were won over by Ulysses' argument and gave a far-echoing shout of applause. To their foes, the Trojans, also, a serpent was an omen of great significance. In the Twelfth Book of the "Iliad" we read how, during a sortie of the Trojans against the Grecian fleet, as the former were about to pass the protecting wall and dyke that guarded the vessels of their foes:

... "This prodigy did strike
 Their hearts with some deliberate stay: a high-flown eagle soar'd
 On their troops left hand, and sustain'd a dragon all engorged,
 In her strong seres, of wondrous size, and yet had no such check
 In life and spirit but still she fought; and turning back her neck
 So stung the eagle's gorge, that down she cast her fervent prey
 Amongst the multitude; and took upon the winds her way,
 Crying with anguish. When they saw a branded serpent sprawl
 So full amongst them from above, and from Jove's fowl let fall;
 They took it an ostent from him, stood frighted, and their cause
 Polydamas thought just."

He therefore advised Hector to rest contented with the laurels they had already won that day, and not push their efforts further in attack upon the Grecian fleet:

"For this I fear, will be th'event, the prodigy doth meet
 So full with our affair in hand. As this high-flying fowl
 Upon the left wing of our host, implying our control
 Hover'd above us, and did truss within her golden seres
 A serpent so imbrued and big, which yet in all her fears,
 Kept life and fervent spirit to fight, and wrought her own release
 Nor did the eagle's eyrie feed; so though we thus far pease
 Upon the Grecians, and perhaps may over-run their wall.
 Our high minds aiming at their fleet, and that we much appal
 Their trussed spirits; yet are they so serpent-like disposed

That they will fight, though in our seres, and will at length be loosed
 With all our outcries, and the life of many a Trojan breast
 Shall with the eagle fly, before we carry to our nest
 Them or their navy."

However, Hector proved himself in advance of his times, for he rejected Polydamas' ingenious interpretation of the augury, saying he attached little weight to such signs, since by Jove

" 'One augury is given
 To order all men, best of all, Fight for thy country's right.' "

In the Thirteenth Book we read how Jove responded to Hector's faith by assisting him and his host.

The serpent was not only highly thought of as a portent at this period, but sometimes even directly inspired the prophet. We may remember how a serpent licked Cassandra behind the ears, and she, filled with prophetic rage, foresaw the coming troubles and foretold the awful doom awaiting Troy, whilst blind Plutus, after a serpent had licked his eyelids saw with clear vision the present, the past and the future.

When, during Xerxes' first expedition against Greece, the Athenians decided to abandon their city to the Persians without attempting its defence, their decision is said to have been much influenced by the following incident. It had been believed from ancient times in Athens, that a certain large serpent was a divine guardian of the temple of Minerva in the citadel; and it was an established practice to place cakes as an offering to this reptile, every new moon. When the crisis arose, and a decision had to be taken, the chief priest of the temple declared that the cakes, which hitherto had never failed to be eaten by the divine serpent, now remained untouched: proof that the goddess herself had forsaken the citadel.

The contemporary historian remarks that whatever truth there was in this, it not a little contributed to induce the Athenians readily and quietly to leave the city.

A Roman example of divination by serpent has been preserved for us by Plutarch who related of Tiberius Gracchus, the Roman censor and consul, that "he once caught a pair of serpents upon his bed, and that the soothsayers after they had considered the prodigy, advised him neither to kill them both, nor to let them both go. If he killed the male serpent, they told him his death would be the consequence; if the female, that of Cornelia," his wife. "Tiberius, who loved his wife, and thought it more suitable for him to die first, who was much older than his wife, killed the male, and set the female at liberty. Not long after this he died."

His son, also named Tiberius, was likewise warned of his approaching death by serpents, this ill-omen in his case being followed by many others. "He had a helmet that he wore in battle, finely ornamented and remarkably magnificent; two serpents that had crept into it privately, laid their eggs and hatched in it. Such a bad presage made him more afraid than the late one," which we may add, was that the sacred chickens used in augury would not come out of their pens to eat.

An example of this widespread belief in the prophetic gift of the serpent is recorded in "Bruce's Travels." There we read how in Abyssinia Mr. Bruce made friends with the Shum, or priest of the river, so as to get what information he could from him. He asked him if he had ever seen any spirit. "He answered without hesitation, Yes: very frequently. He said he had seen the spirit the evening of the 3rd (just as the sun was setting), under a tree, which he showed our traveller at a distance, who told him of the death of a son, and also that a party from Fasil's army was coming; that, being afraid, he consulted his serpent, who ate readily and heartily, from which he knew no harm was to befall him from his visitors."

The Shum had before this conversation recited a prayer to the god of the river, in Mr. Bruce's presence, and the latter now asked him why he had prayed for the preservation of serpents. "He replied, Because they taught him the coming of good or evil. It seems they have all several of these creatures in the neighbourhood, and the richer sort always in their houses, whom they take care of, and feed before they undertake a journey, or any affair of consequence. They take this animal from his hole, and put butter and milk before him, of which he is extravagantly fond; if he does not eat, ill-fortune is near at hand.

"Before an invasion of the Galla, or an inroad of the enemy, they say these serpents disappear, and are nowhere to be found. Fasil, the sagacious and cunning governor of the country, was, as it was said, greatly addicted to this species of divination, inasmuch as never to mount his horse, or go from home, if an animal of this kind, which he had in his keeping, refused to eat."

Wilkinson says that the Slavonian Morlacchi still consider that the sight of a snake crossing a road is an omen of good fortune.

Even the dead body of a serpent was by some peoples thought to possess prophetic properties. The Gaelic legend of Farquhar the Leech ascribes to a royal physician strange powers, not only of healing, but of insight, as following the partaking of broth made from a serpent's body, and Lucan refers to the winged serpents of Arabia as forming one of the ingredients of a broth

brewed by a Thessalian witch named Erictho with the object of resuscitating a corpse, and procuring replies to the questions of Sextus, the son of Pompey ("Pharsalia," Book VI, 677).

As we might expect, the serpent was a highly esteemed portent in many parts of India, and Maurice says that "it was the general opinion in Hindustan that the serpent was of a prophetic nature."

In Papua is a mountain which is said by the natives to be the retreat of an immortal snake. Certain among them claim to know the language of this serpent and to be able to communicate with him, and his reputation as an oracle is of the highest order.

But Murray, who sojourned among the Papuans, was incredulous of this, and said, "I have made many endeavours to find the snake talkers, but they are never at hand when I am in the district. There may, or may not be, a big snake amongst the hills, but its record vies with that of the sea-serpent."

Whether Murray's scepticism was justified or not, we must admit that there was nothing unlikely in the story that aroused it. Everywhere that serpents are found, men have believed it possible to ascertain the will of the gods through their means, and even thought that the gods themselves assumed the snake form when they would communicate with man. And, when newer religions have banished the gods to Hell, and made them assume the rôle of demons, the serpent has traversed the circle with them, and still been regarded as the interpreter of their will.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE OPHITES

THE serpent is generally regarded by the Christian Churches of to-day as being solely an emblem of evil, or its personification, the Devil.

This is owing to misunderstanding of its deep and double significance which formerly gave it a position of the very highest honour and importance in religious typology, and made it the symbol chosen to represent the Deity as All.

Let us see if we can reconstruct the chain of reasoning which led the learned Egyptian Gnostics of "the Brotherhood of the Serpent" to adopt this strange emblem, and to see in it at one and the same time the apparently antagonistic principles of good and evil, the Divine Wisdom, and the subtlety of the devil, the Creator and the destroyer.

Since form cannot exist except by limitation, the Unmanifest must accept limitation in order to become the manifest. Shadow as well as light is necessary to reveal form. To achieve Self-expression, the One must become the many. Lucifer, Son of the Morning, or the Beginning, can only accomplish the Divine Purpose of Creation by falling into Matter or Satan.

To the Unmanifest, this Matter appears as light, although actually it is darkness. For it is this which alone can reveal Itself to Itself. Without this It remains in what appears to It as darkness, unrecognised, unknown, unmanifest. Yet in reality this darkness is the pure, spiritual Light.

As Bayley says: "Once upon a time the words *ill*, *hell* and *evil* must have meant *good*, just as Devil, Lucifer, and Demon once implied 'Resplendent Living God,' the 'Lord of Light, the Living Fire,' and 'Resplendent Sole One.'

"There is a tradition that Satan was originally a Seraph, and the name Satan allied to Set, the Lucifer of Egypt, may probably

be Anglicised into the *Set* or immovable *One*. The antagonism between Set and Horus was originally a poetic conception of the amicable and eternal rivalry between night and day, and in the Avebury Temple these twin circles lie tranquilly together within the greater circle of *Tem, the Lord of Life*. At that remote age when Avebury and the neighbouring Deverel were so named, *evil* and *devil* presumably had none other than a good significance. The Gipsy name for God is still *devel*; and the French for Hell is *enfer*, the one Fire. The writer of 'The Hound of Heaven' has conceived that imperturbable 'tremendous Lover' as unescapable; the poet of Psalm cxxxix. describes even the darkness of Hell as hiding not God; and the Egyptians entitled Osiris 'Lord of the uttermost limit of everything.'"

And here we may note that the abode of the serpent Satan, or the active, energising power of God, is a Hell of Fire, produced by the intensity of his creative Forces, warring with formlessness, cold and inertia. On the physical plane this Hell is the Sun, the central fire which is the source and preserver of life in our system. Hence the solar serpent on the Gnostic gems.

M. Jules Baissac speaks of Satan in a cosmic sense, as the "Centrifugal Energy of the Universe," and points out that "Under the influence of cold everything contracts. . . . Under it life hibernates, or dies out, thought congeals, and fire is extinguished. Satan is immortal in his own Fire-Sea—it is only in the Nifl-heim" (the frozen Hell of the Scandinavians) "of the 'I AM' that he cannot exist. But for all that there is a kind of Immortal Existence in the Nifl-heim, and that existence must be painless and peaceful, because it is Unconscious and Inactive."

It is remarkable that this frozen hell, like its antithesis the fiery one, is full of serpents, the emblems of the Divine; but here, instead of being active, they form a wall, so evidently are in a passive state, probably of hibernation.

The serpent (or dragon, for the symbols are interchangeable) represents the light of manifested and therefore limited self-consciousness, as opposed to the light of the Immaterial and Unbodied. But although the reverse, it is yet the same in origin and



SECURITY IN DIVINE
PROTECTION.
A Christian symbol.

in ending. It is the One, now as Lucifer, descending into limitation—and what but limitation is all the sin and sorrow of which we are conscious?—now, again transcending materiality, enriched, and enabled by this experience of Its opposite, to realise more of Itself.

“Are God and Nature then at strife?” was the bitter cry wrung from humanity, and voiced by a great poet, in an age of questioning doubt, as one by one idols proved to have feet of clay.

“No!” comes the answer from sages of the past. “Look deeper, brothers! God and Nature, Good and Evil, Spirit and Matter are *not* at enmity. They are not even two. They are one!”

In all we may find the Divine. Though all that we now are is consumed with Its burning, fiery breath in deepest anguish, yet are we glad and triumphant. It is the Absolute Love making us one with Itself.

All this is embodied in the mystic hieroglyph of the serpent swallowing its own tail, which was possibly the earliest symbol known to, or imagined by man. The serpent is herein shown as a circle, representative of the eternity of God and a subtle emblem of immortality. Even if we regard it still as a viper it can now be thought of as destroying itself by its own venom. Seen thus, it symbolises the suicide of Death—*Mort à la Mort*.

The Phœnician serpent with its tail in its mouth may perhaps originally have been a mere mythic world snake, like the Midgard serpent of Scandinavian mythology, but later it was adopted as the emblem of eternity, probably because Fanus, the god of the year, was represented by the figure of a snake swallowing his tail to symbolise the rebirth of the new year from the old. Fanus was also the guardian deity of travellers, and here the symbol would indicate their returning home and setting forth anew.

Perhaps the most remarkable fact in the history of Ophiolatry is its Christian revival, or rather survival among the Gnostics.

The Ophites, or Oriental emblematical serpent worshippers, were a Gnostic body of very early origin which became specially prominent in the second century. Their life, however, was but a brief one, for they appear to have ceased to exist about the sixth century, and we owe our knowledge of them chiefly to Irenæus, Clement, Origen and Hippolytus. Their members derived their name from their doctrine that the serpent which tempted Eve, was no devil, but the impersonation of Divine Wisdom, the great teacher and civiliser of the human race, the parent and author of all knowledge and science.

To understand the position occupied by the serpent in the system of the Ophites, we must take a brief survey of their general

teachings. This is somewhat complicated by the fact that there were at least two schools of thought within their body who differed on important points, but as this controversy does not belong to our subject, we must take the teachings of either school where they bear upon the serpent without particularising their special source.

The Ophites believed the creator of the material world was a being subordinate and even antagonistic to the supreme God,—a limited and limiting deity, proud, revengeful, jealous,—in fact, the Jehovah of the Jewish race, whose character expresses itself in the Old Testament which proceeded from him.

To this inferior deity the Ophites gave the names of the *Demiurge*, or World-former, and Ialdabaoth, or Son of Darkness. They asserted that his empire was the starry world, and that the stars represented the cosmical principle, which seeks to hold the spirit of man in bondage and servitude, and to environ it with all manner of delusions. They further asserted that at the beginning of all things is Sabaoth, or Victory; at the end, the “Old Serpent” (Ophis). Between these are the Seraphim (Intelligences) and Cherubim (Benevolences), and their representatives. Ialdabaoth and the angels begotten by him are the spirits of the seven planets.

Origen calls the Sun, Adonai; the Moon, Iao; Mars, Sabao; Venus, Orai; Jupiter, Eloi; Mercury, Astaphai; and Saturn, Ialdabaoth. The latter to keep his six angels in subjection to himself and prevent their looking higher and discovering the wonderful realm of spiritual light above them, endeavoured to fix their attention elsewhere, and to this end called upon them to create man in their own image, and so prove their independent creative power. They did as commanded, but were unable to give a soul to the form they produced, so brought it to Ialdabaoth to animate. The Demiurge breathed a living spirit into the lifeless shape his angels had made, but as he did so, all unperceived by himself, the spiritual seed passed from his own being into the nature of man, and he was deprived of this higher principle of life. He saw with amazement and wrath that a creature created by himself, within his own kingdom, was rising above both himself and his kingdom.

His aim was now to prevent man gaining consciousness of his higher nature and of the higher order of the world to which he had become related—to keep him in a state of blindness and slavish submission to his will. It was for this reason he issued that command to the first man that he should not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

But Divine Wisdom had all this time been watching and

overruling things to a preordained end, and at this point employed the serpent as an instrument (or, even according to some leaders of these sects, Itself assumed the serpent's form), to defeat the cruel purpose of Ialdabaoth, by tempting the first man to disobedience.

"And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. iii. 4, 5).



ABRAXAS.
Basilidean type.

Thus according to the Ophite system the "fall" of man was the transition from a state of unconscious limitation to one of conscious freedom. Man was now endowed with wisdom, and renounced his allegiance to Ialdabaoth, even as the latter had foreseen. Furious at being thus thwarted, the Demiurge sought revenge, and thrust man from the upper aerial regions, where hitherto he had dwelt in an ethereal body, down to the dark earth,

and confined him in the dark physical body.

The present outcome of the conflict between these great powers, is that man finds himself placed in a position, where on the one hand the seven planetary spirits seek to hold him under their thrall, and to suppress the higher consciousness in his soul; while, on the other hand, the wicked and purely material spirits try to tempt him into sin and idolatry, which would expose him to the vengeance of the jealous and severe Ialdabaoth. Truly, a terrible position were this all. But "Wisdom" never ceases to impart new strength to man's kindred nature. She is continually renewing in him the higher spiritual influence, and has found means to preserve through every age, in the midst of the Demiurge's world, a race bearing within them the spiritual seed which is related to Her own nature.

Madame Blavatsky has pointed out that "The Beings, or the Being, collectively called Elohim, who first (if ever) pronounced the cruel words, 'Behold the man is become as one of

us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live for ever . . . must have been indeed the Ilda-Baoth, the Demiurge of the Nazarenes, filled with rage and envy against his own creature, whose reflection created Ophiomorphous."

The Nazarenes or Nasarees mentioned above appear to derive their name from Nazoraus, which epithet is primarily an appellation of a Deity; "it is formed after the analogy of Hebrew proper names ending in *iah* as Zachariah, the *iah* representing Jehovah (pronounced Yahveh, Yahu, or Yah), and is derived from the familiar Old Semitic *nazar*, meaning *keep*, guard, protect, so that the Syriac 'Nazarya' is very nearly Guardian-Yah" (Dr. W. B. Smith).

Among many of the ancient nations was a belief in two antagonistic serpents, one representing everything that was evil: crooked, crawling and deadly; whilst the other was the Reconciler, the Life-giver, the Angel of the Dawn, and was winged and radiant. Each of the Gnostic sects was founded by an initiate, and their tenets were based upon a deep knowledge of the inner meaning of the symbolism of all nations. The Gnostic *Naaseni* postulated the opposition of these two Dragons as one of their leading tenets, and identified the radiant and perfect Serpent with Jesus Christ, or Sophia; but Jehovah (or Ialdabaoth) was considered by them to be the creator of, and identical with, Ophiomorphous, the Serpent of Evil, the leviathan, that crooked serpent mentioned by Isaiah (xxvii. 1-3).

The Gnostic Archbishop King speaks of Ialdabaoth: "Fixing his jealous eye on the abyss of matter, his looks envenomed with passion were suddenly reflected as in a mirror; the reflection became animate, and there arose out of the abyss Satan, Serpent, Ophiomorphous—the embodiment of envy and cunning. He is the union of all that is most base in matter, with the hate, envy, and craft of a spiritual intelligence."

As their name implies, the Christian Ophites worshipped the serpent as a holy symbol, and it is possible they were influenced in this by the analogous idea in the Egyptian religion which regarded the serpent as the symbol of Kneph, who resembled the Sophia of the Ophites. Their method of celebrating the "Lord's Supper" was to place a living serpent which they kept for the purpose, upon the dish, that it might crawl over and around the bread. The officiating priest then broke the bread and distributed it to the communicants. Each of these kissed the sacred serpent in addition to partaking of the sacramental bread, after which rite it was once more confined. At the close of this ceremony, termed by the Ophites the perfect sacrifice, the

worshippers sang a hymn of praise to the Supreme, whom the serpent in Paradise had revealed to mankind.

These symbolical rites which have been described by Epiphanius, were only practised by a small sect of the Christian Ophites, but the Sethites, mentioned by Theodore and Hippolytus, and classed with the Ophites by Irenæus, were of a similar faith. So also were the Peratœ, who honoured the serpent of Eden.

The Ophites were called in Latin, *Serpentarians*, and by the Asiatics were named *Nahassians* or *Naasians*, from the Hebrew *nāchāsh*, a serpent. The serpent was called by its devotees the



ABRAXAS IN FOUR-HORSED CHARIOT AS RISING SUN.
A Gnostic talisman.

Megalistor, or Great Builder of the Universe (Maia, or Bhuddist Illusion). Apropos of this we may quote Mr. Hargrave Jennings who says:

"The serpent-worshippers seemed to have placed at the head, or nearly at the head of all things (Maia), and most intimately connected with the serpent, a certain principle which they called 'Sophia.' This is clearly a translation of the word 'Bhudda'* into Greek. It also reminds us that the old Bhuddas are always under the care of the Cobra-Capella."

On the other hand, however, some authorities think that the Ophite ceremonies were derived from Bacchanalian mysteries in which serpent worship was prominent.

The Supreme God was known to the Ophites, and also to the

* The Enlightened One.

Gnostic followers of Basilides of Alexandria, by the mystical name of Abraxas. This word is said to have been coined by Basilides in the second century from the sum of the Greek numeral letters expressing the number 365. Thus $\alpha=1$, $\beta=2$, $\rho=100$, $\alpha=1$, $\epsilon=60$, $\alpha=1$, $\varsigma=200$; total 365. This number may either have figured the 365 emanations collectively, or the 365 orders of spirits occupying the 365 heavens who formed the earth and ruled its destiny. Jerome, however, considers the word to be identical in meaning as it is in numerical value, with Mithras, or the sun which the ancient Persians worshipped. He explains this by saying, "For the sun being the fountain of light, and the immediate cause of day, may with great propriety be said to preside over all the days of the year."

Great importance as a Talisman was attached to the name



ABRAXAS.
Double serpent.



ABRAXAS.
Single serpent.

Abraxas, and Abraxas stones, often mounted as rings, were much worn, and highly esteemed as charms against physical ills in the Roman Empire, about the time that Christianity was becoming established there.

Abraxas is generally represented with the body of a man, but his head is that of a cock or hawk to signify watchfulness and foresight. His legs are formed of twin serpents, symbolising mystery, vitality and eternity; in one hand he grasps the scourge of power and authority, whilst with the other he holds a shield, the emblem of wisdom. But many variations of this design may be found figured on the existing examples of Gnostic amulets and gems, now scattered abroad in various private and public collections. In no less than thirty-six of these, Abraxas is figured with the head of a cock, which is a reference to the sun (see figures), whilst in one he is represented with the

characteristics of Apollo, or the Sun, rising in the East, in the quadriga, or four-horsed chariot.

Madame Blavatsky says that "just as the I A O of the mysteries was distinct from Jehovah, so was the later Iao and Abraxas of some Gnostic sects identical with the god of the Hebrews, who was the same with the Egyptian Horus. This is undeniably proven on 'heathen' as on the Gnostic 'Christian' gems. In Matter's collection of such gems there is a Horus seated on the lotus, inscribed ABPAΣAΞ IAΩ (Abraxas Iao), an address exactly parallel to the so frequent EΙΣ ZEΙΣ ΣΑΡΑΠΙ (Eis zeis sarapi) on the contemporary heathen gems; and therefore only to be translated by 'Abraxas is the one Jehovah' (King's Gnostics). But who was Abraxas? As the same author shows—the numerical or Kabalistic value of the name Abraxas directly refer to the Persian title of the god 'Mithra,' Ruler of the year, worshipped from the earliest times under the appellation of 'Iao.' Thus, the Sun, in one aspect, the moon or the Lunar genius in another, that generative deity whom the Gnostics saluted as 'Thou that presidest over the Mysteries of the Father and the Son, who shinest in the night-time, holding the *second rank*, the first Lord of Death.' "

Notwithstanding these complications it will now be clear that the serpent of Genesis must not be confounded with Ophiomorphous, or yet with the pernicious serpent called by the Iranians Azi Dahāka, who sprang out of the sky to blight the creation of Ahuramazda; or with the serpent Ahi or Vritra, which is a pure nature myth of the ancient Aryas of India.

Neither must we illustrate the story of Genesis by the temptation of Krishna in the Bhagavata Purana which concluded with the conquest of the serpent. "The shrewd and friendly serpent of Genesis" must not be distorted into the Babylonian dragon of chaos which, though overcome by the light god, was permitted to work ruin for a period in the latter days (Rev. xii. 9). The curse pronounced on the serpent of Genesis is quite separate from the main story.

We may gain further light upon its meaning by comparing with it the classic myth of the garden of the Hesperides which reminds us in so many respects of the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden. The similarity will at once be noted. In the former the golden apples of the goddess Hera were said to be kept by the Hesperides nymphs, with the aid of the dragon or serpent, Ladon. The guardian serpent was conquered, or, as some accounts tell, killed, by Hercules the deliverer, and the apples recovered; though not without the aid of the giant Atlas, who was fabled to bear the heavens upon his shoulders. Hercules

persuaded Atlas to fetch the apples, and whilst he was absent, bore the weight of the heavens for him upon his strong shoulders.

But although in both myths we find the garden, the apples and the serpent, there are also important discrepancies, the inner meaning of the story being somewhat clearer in the Grecian version. Here the serpent, representing the Principle of Evil, or Ialdabaoth, prohibits mankind partaking of the sacred fruit which would make them wise and happy. But in the Jewish myth the serpent, representing Divine Wisdom, tempts mankind to partake of the fruit forbidden by Ialdabaoth, their ungenerous creator, and promises that doing so shall make them wise.

The Grecian story describes how Hercules, pitying man's unhappy state, slew or subdued the serpent, and thus bestowed upon man the priceless boon of which he had been deprived so long. His Christian counterpart bruised the head of the serpent which had estranged Jehovah from his people and was therefore regarded as an enemy by those unacquainted with the inner meaning of the myth. We may see herein a prophetic parable of the long persecution of learning by the Christian Churches. They bruised the head of the Serpent of Wisdom even as predicted of the seed of the woman in the third chapter of Genesis, and in return Science bruised the Churches' heel. The enmity between them yet lives. There is no reconciliation; exoterically none is possible. Yet mystically they are one.

Bishop Patrick seems to have been acquainted with Ophite doctrines, for he tells us that when the serpent so subtly tempted Eve, he was "beautiful, winged, and golden."

The Rev. Banks also appears to have been influenced by this sect, for he remarks that "Some have taken it" [i.e. the words of Gen. iii. 1, describing the serpent as "more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made"] "in the literal sense, and thought that the serpent here mentioned was not the same kind of reptile we now see him, but was a much more beautiful and intelligent creature (as the word *subtil* may signify) than he now appears to be. . . . Others have conjectured that as the name Seraphim, or Winged Serpent, mentioned in Numbers xxi. 6, 8, is likewise a name belonging to the higher rank of angels, the fiery guard of the Throne of God, that it was one of these (and he, probably, the chief of the rebellious spirits) who appeared to Eve, and seduced her from her duty. What may still further strengthen this conjecture is that it is most probable that all the information our first parents received, in regard to the consequence of their actions, was by the mediation of angels, or the *one great angel of the covenant*, the Jehovah who created them by his power."

We would particularly direct our reader's attention to the words Mr. Bankes has italicised, as showing that the idea of the Ophites that Jehovah was *not* the Supreme God was not at this period confined to their sect. Here is a priest of the Church of England asserting it without explanation or apology.

Unfortunately no date is mentioned as to when Bankes' Bible was published, so we can only judge of this from such internal evidence as the long s, which is used in the text, and the dedication "To the Right Honourable and Right Reverend Father in God, Lord James Beauclerc, by Divine Permission, Lord Bishop of Hereford," afford. This dedication would appear to establish the general harmony of the writer with the tenets of the English Church of his day, possibly coloured by Gnostic doctrines.



ABRAXAS BRANDISHING WHIP.

Bankes again refers, a few pages further on, in commenting on Genesis xviii. 17, to the "Jehovah-angel," and later makes it plain that he considers Jehovah as the second person of the Christian Trinity, afterwards incarnated as Jesus Christ. Altogether it seems a curious mix-up of orthodoxy and Gnosticism that the reverend gentleman presents to his readers.

Another Gnostic religious system in which serpent worship figured was that of the Manicheans, of which Oldham remarks that they "seem to have borrowed largely from the old Sun and Serpent worship. In prayer they turned towards the Sun. According to them Christ dwelt in the Sun, came from thence to sojourn upon the earth, and afterwards returned there." They also held that Christ was an incarnation of the Great Serpent, which they said glided over the cradle of the Virgin Mary, when she was asleep, at the age of a year and a half.

Although they utterly disclaimed the title of Christians, they were reckoned among the heretical bodies of the Church, and their sect spread rapidly in spite of almost continuous persecution, drawing adherents from the remnants of old Gnostic sects, and lingering on into the Middle Ages influencing other sects.

The famous Christian military order of the Templars is said by some historians to have fallen away from the Christian faith, and adopted a body of secret and heretical doctrine which had originated in contact with Islam in the East; but other writers hotly deny this.

The Templars were accused by their persecutors of worshipping

a mysterious idol named Bahomet, which seemed to connect them with Ophiolatry. It was said to have two heads, one male and the other female, and to be environed with serpents, the sun and the moon.

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CHAPTER XXV
NEGRO OPHIOLATRY

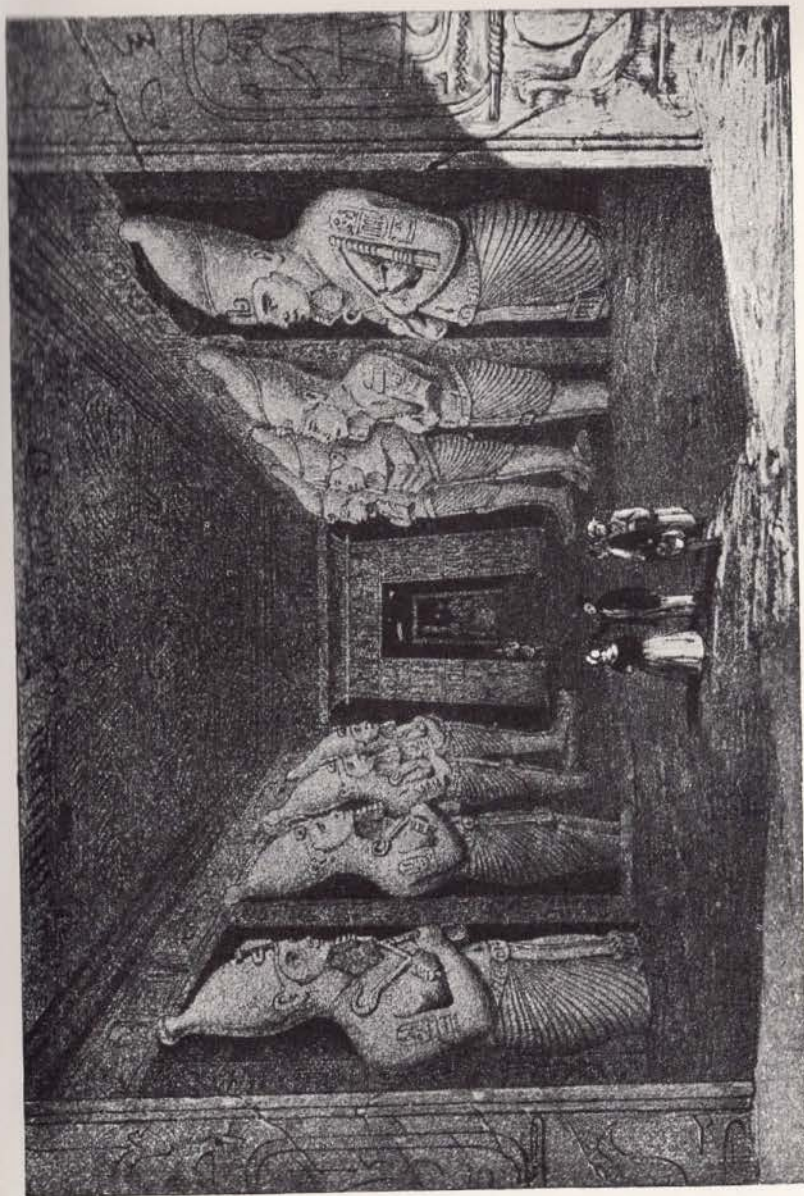
PRACTICALLY all over Africa serpent worship appears to have existed from time immemorial and cannot be traced to any local origin, but seems to have arisen spontaneously. It was found in full swing by the first European explorers in Whidah and the Congo, and though its origin is lost in the mists of antiquity, the custom is not even now extinct.

According to some writers snake-charmers were originally brought to Egypt from West Africa, so if they are correct, the cult can hardly have been introduced from the land of the Pharaohs, though probably some interchange took place at a very early period.

All over North Africa are scattered colonies of West African serpent worshippers—the Hausas. But Ophiolatry appears to have been known in these parts centuries before A.D. 1000, which is the date said to have seen the Hausa advance guard. The form taken by the serpent worship of these negroes certainly does not suggest that it was derived from the Ophiolatry of Egypt; but is exactly what we might expect to find evolved by a people in the low stage of development that the Hausas have achieved.

According to Major Tremearne, these Hausas of Northern Africa spend their whole existence in combating evil influences exercised by various orders of spiritual beings which they call by the general name of *bori*. "All through life, neglect or an unintentional slight to a *bori* will bring immediate punishment, and even if by proper attention to the rites, the Hausa manages to escape the more serious illnesses and misfortunes, he will have to succumb at the end when claimed by the spirit of old age, Mallam Tsofo. Although, therefore, Allah is supposed to be The One God, above all, it is the *bori* which receive all the real attention," and must be invoked and appeased by magical rites.

The conception of a totem among these people appears from their own accounts to have arisen from their belief in spirits. Many of the *bori* were wont to appear in animal forms, particularly those of serpents or wild beasts, and "certain trees were



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noted for the attraction which they had for the *bori*, so it became the custom to identify an animal or a tree with the spirit invoked. . . . Gradually, however, the connection was lost, and to-day a person may have a bori as well as a totem for his kangida (patron), or even a bori only."

Major Tremearne tells us further that "when it was desired to consult the totem, incense was burned at nights at the foot of some specially sacred tree, and sooner or later the reptile would appear. 'The totem must appear when summoned thus, for incense attracts the bori, and they drive the animal to the spot required' . . . showing that there is still a connection between the bori and the totem animal."

If the clan was in trouble and the totem was long in appearing when invoked, this was regarded as evidence of its unfaithfulness. The first time this occurred, it would probably be let off with a warning, the second time it might be caught, fastened up and censed, and set free if things improved, in the hope that after such a lesson it would do better; but if things did not improve, it would be killed, and a new totem appointed in its room.

This was the procedure in Gobir. The faithless totem was not always killed, however, but in Daura, and also in Nigeria, the priests would bring a larger serpent to drive it away.

Several species of snake are worshipped, and the practices differ slightly, but the following was said to be the procedure in Daura: "In addition to the ordinary offering, each year a black bull or he-goat was killed, the blood was spilt upon the ground for the snake, while the meat was cut up and eaten by the worshippers. . . . Then the priestly king or a priestess would dance around with the skin still wet with blood."

"The offering to the snake-totems consists of eggs and milk. . . . The proper place to put it is upon an ant-heap or by a hollow tree, and incense should be burned at the same time. 'If the totem likes you it will come out, and you can then make your supplication.'"

Certain bori are known as the *Babbaku*, or the "Black Ones," and all of these "either farm or hunt in the forest, and are no doubt either pagan nature-gods, or else ancestral spirits." The chief of these bori is *Dakaki* (Crawler) or, "as he is better known in Hausaland, *Mai-Ja-Chikki* (The Drawer along of the Stomach), i.e. the snake. He it is who, when the bori are released, comes out first and sweeps their playground.

"He gives any illness (so it is necessary to propitiate him), and the proper offering is four calabashes of milk and four eggs, placed alternately in a circle, though a sacrifice of a red cock with a black breast and a grey hen is made on important

occasions. 'If you leave the eggs and milk for three days in the *gidan tsafi* you will find the milk drunk and the eggshells empty, a tiny hole having been pierced in each.' At the same time Dakaki is very fond of blood, and is one of the first to drink that which has run from the sacrificed animal."

Major Tremearne proceeds to describe a ritual dance in which the human performers believe themselves to be mounted by bori, and so completely dominated by their mounts as to be really identical with them. "At the dance he (Dakaki) crawls, or rather pulls his body along the ground, raising his head now and then to look around, but the other Masu-Bori put their hands before their eyes when he does this, for if he were to see any of the onlookers he might become angry, and kill them with a glance. He thus appears to be the personification of the evil eye. Should any of his followers wish to consult him, his head and that of the questioner are covered with a black cloth so as to bring them together. When it is time to go he is shown the hole in a drum, and, thinking it to be a hollow tree, he sneezes and goes inside—leaving the visible human mount in the ring, of course."

Our author tells us that "The reason why the snake occupies so important a place among the Hausas is no doubt on account of the widespread worship of that reptile in West Africa, though whether the Hausas regard it, like others, as the symbol of the male principle is not clear." He adds, "Whether it is the serpent itself or the spirit in it that is worshipped, I cannot say. Each of these opinions has been put forward with regard to other peoples in West Africa, and I feel inclined to believe that both ideas exist in the minds of the Hausas, for, whereas Mai-Ja-Chikki is the snake, Dan Musa is said by some to be the spirit in the snake."

The negroes of Issapoo, in the island of Fernando Po, West Africa, according to Mr. Hutchinson, consider the cobra de capella to be their guardian deity, with power to bless or curse, give them what they desire, or inflict illness and death. They hang the skin of one of these serpents with its head uppermost, from a branch of the highest tree in the public square, and carry out an annual ceremony of placing it in position. When this rite is completed, all the children who have been born within the past year are brought to the spot, and their hands are made to touch the tail of the serpent skin, the idea evidently being to invoke the protection of the serpent-god.

Although the narrator does not expressly say that a serpent is killed to provide a new skin each year, it seems probable from his account that this is the case, and that the god is symbolically sacrificed to himself.

Another ceremony connected with the serpent also appears to be performed especially with the idea of benefiting or protecting the children of the tribe. It has been described by Hurd, who tells us that "the Fetiches are the particular deities of the Negroes" of the Coast of Guinea. "On that day, which answers to our Sunday, the Blacks assemble themselves together in a spacious square, in the centre whereof is a sacred tree, called the tree of the Fetiche. . . . The whole day is spent in dancing and capering round the tree of the Fetiche, and in singing and drumming upon divers instruments of brass. The priest frequently sits near the centre of the place before a kind of altar, on which he offers up some sacrifices to the Fetiches, and some men, women and children sit promiscuously round the celebrant, who reads or pronounces a kind of homily to them. At the conclusion, he takes a wisp of straw, twisted hard, which he dips into a pot full of some particular liquid in which there is a serpent. He either besmears or sprinkles the children with this holy water, mumbling over them a certain form of words, and he observes the same ceremony with respect to the altar, and afterwards empties the pot; and then his assistants close the service with some inarticulate, unintelligible sounds, loud acclamations, and clapping of hands."

In 1863, according to the account of Captain Richard F. Burton, who was sent thither on a governmental mission, snake-worship was in full swing at Dahomey. There were horrible clay images of Legbo, the demon deity of the natives, and in a small, round mud hut, whitewashed within and without, with a thatched roof, was an establishment of sacred snakes, some ten feet long, of a non-poisonous variety.

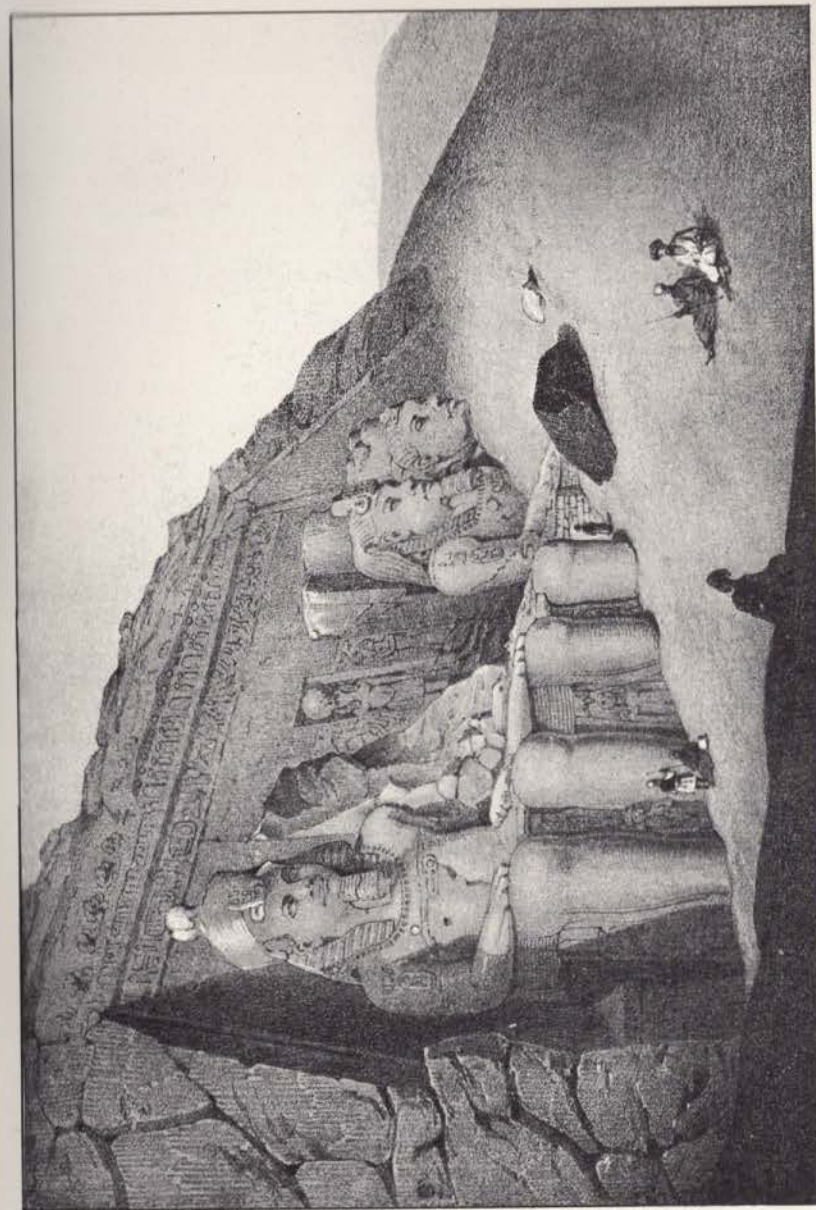
On the other side of the road their devotees, seated upon tree-roots, kept guard over them. There also were fetish schools, where any child that had been touched by a snake had to be taken from its parents for a year, and at their expense taught the dances and songs of serpent worship.

He who even by accident killed a snake of the sacred variety in Dahomey was put to death in still earlier days, but at the period of which we are writing this had been commuted to the following penalty. The offender was placed in a hole under a hut of dry fagots, thatched with grass that had been generously greased with palm oil. Sometimes a dog, a kid and two fowls were placed along with him, and he himself drenched with palm oil. The hut was set aflame, the doors of light wicker and grasses fastened, and the snake-slayer had to break out and rush through the fire to the nearest running water, followed by the Serpent priests, who beat him mercilessly with sticks and pelted him with clods.

Thus his punishment was to suffer by fire and water, and also to run the gauntlet. Many died under this triple ordeal. Thirteen days later a commemoration service was held in honour of the deceased python. Serpent worship was prevalent on the coast, and when the Dahomans conquered Whydah, they did so in defiance of the fetish power of a sacred serpent which had been left unaided to defend the passage of a marsh that a few soldiers could have held without difficulty. Yet in spite of the failure of their guardian to adequately protect them, the liberty to continue the worship of the snake almost reconciled these people to the rule of their conquerors.

A vivid description of the worship of snakes in Dahomey has been bequeathed to us by Mr. Leighton Wilson in his "Western Africa." He says: "A house in the middle of the town is provided for the exclusive use of these reptiles, and they may be seen here at any time in very great numbers. They are fed, and more care is taken of them than of the human inhabitants of the place. If they are seen straying away they must be brought back; and at the sight of them the people prostrate themselves on the ground, and do them all possible reverence. To kill or injure one of them is to incur the penalty of death. On certain occasions they are taken out by the priests or doctors, and paraded about the streets, the bearers allowing them to coil themselves around their arms, necks and bodies. They are also employed to detect persons who have been guilty of witchcraft. "If in the hands of the priest they bite the suspected person, it is sure evidence of his guilt, and no doubt the serpent is trained to do the will of his keeper in all such cases."

Mr. Frazer also gives us glimpses of these snake-worshippers. "Among the Ewe-speaking peoples of the Slave Coast in West Africa human wives of gods are very common. In Dahomey they swarm, and it has even been estimated that every fourth woman is devoted to the service of some deity. . . . In every town there is at least one seminary where the handsomest girls, between ten and twelve years of age are trained. They stay for three years learning the chants and dances peculiar to the worship of the gods, and prostituting themselves to the priests and the inmates of the male seminaries. At the end of their noviciate they become public harlots. But no disgrace attaches to their profession, for it is believed that they are married to the god and that their excesses are caused and directed by him. . . . Children born of such unions belong to the deity. As the wives of a god, these sacred women may not marry. . . . Amongst these polygamous West African gods the sacred python seems to be particularly associated with the fertility of the earth; for he



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is invoked in excessively wet, dry, and barren seasons, and the time of year when young girls are sought out to be his brides is when millet is beginning to sprout."

When this season arrives the old priestesses, armed with clubs, appear as if mad, and rush shrieking through the streets, seizing and carrying off to be the python's brides any little girls between eight and twelve years of age whom they may find out of doors. The more pious of the people will sometimes purposely leave their daughters in the streets at these times as they consider it an honour to be dedicated to the god, and probably also they have the idea of assisting him in his labours for mankind.

These wives, and priestesses of Dañh-gbi, the Python-god, have an organisation of their own. As a rule they live in a group of huts enclosed by a fence, and there the novices undergo their three years of initiation. The novices are not always young girls, as any woman, if she publicly simulates possession, and utters the conventional cries that are supposed to denote the god's presence within, is immediately admitted into the order.

A writer in *Man* (1910, Art. 40) says, that the Mahalbawa think that they are descended from the *kwakiya* (a short black snake), and that any member of the clan who killed a reptile of this species would himself die. An animal that the *kwakiya* has killed must not be eaten by a member of this clan.

Hurd also tells us that the negroes "cannot be induced by any means whatever" to injure or kill a serpent, "though never so dangerous or destructive." For "they firmly believe that some person or another in their neighbourhood would infallibly die upon the spot where such animal should lose its life." And this brings us to a very remarkable and firmly held point of doctrine.

The West African negro not only believes that his ancestors still haunt their old surroundings in the forms of serpents or other creatures. He believes that a living man can possess as many as four souls, one of which lives out in the bush and is called his bush soul. If this animal soul should be trapped or shot it means the death of its human owner. These bush souls are often looked upon as an hereditary possession that passes from father to son and from mother to daughter. Frazer gives an instance of the operation of this curious belief at Ongek in the Gaboon. A French missionary spent the night in the hut of a Fan chief. Before daylight the rustling of dry leaves aroused him, and on lighting a torch he saw to his horror a huge, black, poisonous snake, coiled, and about to strike. He was on the point of shooting the creature when his arm was suddenly struck up by the chief, who, extinguishing the torch, cried, "Don't fire, I beg of you. In killing the snake you would kill me. That

serpent is my *elangela*. Fear nothing!" Having thus saved its life he seized and caressed the reptile, which appeared delighted by his attentions. He then carried it to another hut, where he laid himself down beside it, after exhorting the missionary never to speak of what he had seen.

There are two distinct cults of fetish worship in the West Indies, Voodoo, or Voudou, and Obeah (Tchanga and Wanga). The Voodoo serpent worship in Haiti and elsewhere, is evidently closely connected with the West African cults we have just been considering, one of the names of Dañh-sio being Vodunhwe. But between the Voodoo and the Obeah cults are important differences. In the former the will of the god is communicated only through a priest and priestess; the ritual is carried out at night, and the serpent must be displayed in a cage. The worshippers make their offerings to it and implore its assistance, whilst the priestess standing within the cage becomes inspired and gives forth oracles. Dancing and an orgy follow, and sometimes a child is sacrificed, "the goat without horns."

The Obeah cult requires for its rites only a priest or a priestess, instead of the two, and the presence of the snake is not essential. Its sacrificial victims too are slain by poison instead of meeting a bloody death as in the rites of Voodoo.

Both these cults have sprung from slaves, Obeah from slaves bought at Koromantin, and Voodoo from those bought at Dahomey.

Deane says that the Koromantynes, who worship a serpent which they call Oboni, assert that when he is angry nothing but a human victim will appease him. The words Oboni and Obeah suggest Egyptian influence since *ob* was an Egyptian word for serpent. The familiar of the Witch of Endor was also called Ob (or Aub).

Among the Tshi people of West Africa, their local god, Djwijnahnu, appears in the form of a serpent attended by other serpents, and formerly it was the custom to offer human sacrifices to him, whilst if he did not make an appearance, special sacrifices were offered in order to propitiate him.

The Swahili of Zanzibar believe that an eclipse of the moon is caused by a snake devouring that planet, and they think that the most efficacious means of preventing its entire annihilation is to shout and beat drums to frighten the greedy monster from his prey. Experience has proved that these means are successful after a few hours' application.

Another natural phenomena, the rainbow, is said by some tribes to be the heavenly serpent, Dañh-sio, or Dañh-gbi. This deity is thought to confer riches upon men and is represented on

earth by a coiled or horned serpent of clay in a calabash, and also by the python. It is said to enter rivers at their source, and cause disastrous floods when it passes through them to the sea.

Mr. Frazer tells us that "The Akikuyu of British East Africa worship the snake of a certain river, and at intervals of several years they marry the snake-god to women, but especially to young girls. For this purpose huts are built by order of the medicine-men, who there consummate the sacred marriage with the credulous female devotees. If the girls do not repair to the huts of their own accord in sufficient numbers, they are seized and dragged thither to the embraces of the deity. The offspring of these mystic unions appears to be fathered on God (Ngai); certainly there are children among the Akikuyu who pass for children of God."

The national gods of Whydah (or Whidah) in the Bight of Benin, are symbolised by the serpent, tall trees, and the sea, and of these emblems the snake is the most highly honoured and venerated.

The species adored by this people is perfectly harmless, and is a welcome guest in all their dwellings. It even deposits its young in their beds, and is not disturbed, as it would be thought the height of impiety to remove them.

In every crisis or emergency that arises the serpent is invoked, and where the difficulty assumes national importance the king himself makes special offerings at the serpents' shrine. The chief temple in the kingdom is known as the "Serpent's House," and to this processions and pilgrimages are often made. Victims are sacrificed there daily, and oracles sought. A large establishment of priests and priestesses with a pontiff at their head serve the god and administer the religious rites. The priestesses are known as "the children of God" and have the sacred figures of the serpent marked upon their bodies.

In olden days the most beautiful of these people's prisoners of war were sacrificed to the serpent-gods. The Dutch factor, W. Bosman, has described how the highest divinities at Whydah were in the form of a certain species of snakes "which swarm in the villages, reigned over by that huge chief monster, uppermost and greatest, and as it were grandfather of all, who dwelt in his snake-house beneath a lofty tree, and there received the royal offerings of meat and drink, cattle and money and stuffs."

On one occasion Bosman found the King of Whydah much enraged, and His Majesty told him how that year he had sent larger offerings to the snake-house than was his usual custom, so that he might ensure plentiful crops; but that one of his viceroys, whom he pointed out to Bosman, had asked him in

the name of the priests to send yet more, as they threatened a barren year. His Majesty's reply was that he should send no more, and that if the snake would not grant a plentiful harvest, he might let it alone, as he could not inflict more damage than he had already done, most of the corn being rotten in the field.

The python god is held to be immortal, almighty and omniscient, and, with the exception of the priests, only the king may see it, and he but once.

Mary Kingsley tells us that in the neighbourhood of Benin "there is a Ju-Ju ordeal pond or river, said to be infested with dangerous and poisonous snakes and alligators, through which a man accused of any crime passing unscathed proves his innocence."

Among these Whydanese is a tribe called Eboes. Shephard says this is "a word of the same import as *Oboes*, which might mean the people or worshippers of *Ob*, the Serpent-god. These people still practise a kind of serpent-worship—they worship the *guana*, a species of lizard."

The Eboes believed that the most acceptable offering they could make at the shrine of the *guana* was a human victim. They feed the sacred serpents with milk.

A similar cult is to be found among the Brass River people of the Niger Coast Protectorate, where the tribal and war-god, Ogediga, was imaged as a python, and consequently pythons were so sacred that they were allowed to commit damage of every description, whilst by an article of the treaty of 1856, white men were forbidden to kill them.

Ogediga has a numerous attendant priesthood.

Mary Kingsley, writing in 1899, says: "The Pagan portion of the inhabitants of the Brass district have still their old belief in the Ju-Ju priests and animal worship. The python is the Brass natives' guardian angel. So great was the veneration of this Ju-Ju snake in former times, that the native kings would sign no treaties with her Britannic Majesty's Government that did not include a clause subjecting any European to a heavy fine for killing or molesting in any way this hideous reptile. When one appeared in any European's compound, the latter was bound to send for the nearest Ju-Ju priest to come and remove it, for which service the priest expected a dash, *id est*, a present; if he did not get it, the chances were the priest would take good care to see that that European found more pythons visited him than his neighbours; and since as a rule these snakes were not found until they had made a good meal of one of the white man's goats or turkeys, it came cheaper in the long run to make the usual present.

"It is now some twenty years ago that the then agent of Messrs. Hatton and Cookson in Brass River found a large python in his house, and killed it. This coming to the ears of the natives and the Ju-Ju priests, caused no little excitement; the latter saw their opportunity, worked up the people to a state of frenzy, and eventually led them in an attack on the factory of Messrs. Hatton and Cookson, seized the agent and dragged him out of his house on to the beach, tied him up by his thumbs, each Ju-Ju priest present spat in his mouth, afterwards they stripped him naked and otherwise ill-treated him, besides breaking into his store and robbing him of twenty pounds' worth of goods. The British Consul was appealed to for redress, and upon his next visit to the river enquired into the case, but, *mirabile dictu*, decided that he was unable to afford the agent any redress, as he had brought the punishment on himself."

This writer also tells us that the Brassmen seldom sacrifice human beings to their Ju-Ju (gods) except in war, when all prisoners become victims, but that occasionally a Ju-Ju snake secured a small child by creeping into a house when the older people were sleeping or away. She tells us how once when passing through a small fishing village on the St. Nicholas River, whilst most of the villagers were away fishing, she heard terrible screams and found several women wringing their hands and running to and fro, before the door of a small hut. At first she vainly tried to ascertain the cause of their trouble, but "at last one of them trembling, with the most abject fear and quite unable to speak," pointed to the entrance. The interior was so dark that nothing was visible, but Miss Kingsley courageously entered, and when her eyes had adapted themselves to the gloom, saw "a large python ten or twelve feet long, hanging from the ridge-pole of the hut immediately over a child that was calmly sleeping. To snatch up the child and walk out was the work of a moment."

The mother of the child was overwhelmed with gratitude for the deliverance of her little one, but, when asked why she had not saved it herself, replied that she dare not have interfered with the snake as Miss Kingsley had done. This lady then enquired of "several of the more intelligent natives" if it would have been contrary to the Ju-Ju law for a mother to rescue her child in such a case. Some replied in the negative, but others said that had she done so, she would have been liable to be killed herself, or pay a heavy fine to the Ju-Ju priests, and Miss Kingsley says she is inclined to believe the latter version to be correct. No doubt, however, quite apart from fear of temporal punishment, this woman would shrink from violating her religious convictions, and in the python saw the god.

In Kiziba, a district of Central Africa, to the west of Lake Victoria Nyanza, if a woman accidentally kills a snake with her hoe, as she works in the field, she is greatly troubled, and hurries immediately to the serpent priest with the offending weapon and a propitiatory offering of two strings of cowries and an ox-hide. All her fellow-villagers accompany her on this mission of pacification. The priest who receives the offerings beats his drum, which is a signal that all women are to cease working in the fields until further notice. The priest next enshrouds the serpent's corpse in a portion of the ox-hide and buries it with due solemnity. The day following he performs a ceremonial rite of purification. From the guts of a leopard or hyæna, and earth dissolved in water, he prepares a compound with which to disinfect the guilty village, commencing with the house of the woman who slew the serpent. After this he repairs to the fields where the women of the community have collected their hoes. He purifies these by dipping them into the liquid, and then twirling them around so that the drops of water fly off. After this is accomplished the villagers breathe freely once more, for the spirit of the serpent is appeased and the danger from its anger averted. The women may now fearlessly return to their usual work in the fields.

Lander, writing about 1825, stated that "the worship of the snake still prevails in Central Africa. Among the idols in a temple of the Yaribeans is one with the image of a snake upon his head; which reminds us of the Egyptian priest with the *asp* of Isis."

The Zulus believe that they can guard themselves from bites of snakes by inoculation, though its results are not permanent, and it has to be annually renewed. This is done about October. Men, women and children have a fragment of skin cut from the back of the left hand, and the poison of a snake is mixed with spittle and rubbed into this wound. It is said that no snake will go near anyone thus treated; and what is even more remarkable, this virus is so virulent that if the shadow cast by an inoculated man touches that of a man not so protected, the latter will fall to the ground as if shot, overcome by the poison transmitted through the shadow.

The Caffres are said to specially dread the boa-constrictor, or an enormous serpent which resembles it, and from superstitious reasons fear to kill it. Formerly a man who slew one of these reptiles, whether in self-defence or for other reasons, was required to lie in a stream of running water during the day, for several weeks on end, and no beast was permitted to be killed at the hamlet to which he belonged until this penance had been properly

carried out. The body of the serpent was then buried in a trench, dug close beside the cattle-fold, and its burial-place, like that of a child, kept undisturbed. The period of penance is now reduced from weeks to days.

Among the Baganda the god Selwanga was represented by a python, and it was kept in a temple and attended by priests and mediums. A woman fed it with milk and then a medium possessed by the god gave oracles which were interpreted by a priest. Sacrifices were made to it and sterile women were thought to obtain children through its power. The wife of the chief god, Mukasa, was a pythoness, sister of Selwanga.

The Bageshu had a similar cult of a serpent they named Mwanga. Its temple, built upon a hill, was visited by childless women.

In Madagascar serpents are regarded with superstitious fear and are supposed to be the emissaries of the god Ramahavaly.

The Bush negroes of Dutch Guiana reverence a good divinity in the serpent Papagado, which must not in any way be injured, and the serpent generally occupies a prominent position in their thoughts.

Ethiopia, which lay to the south of Egypt, and is now largely the country known as Abyssinia, according to traditions had an old myth that its first ruler was a serpent named Arwe, and this word still means a serpent in Ethiopian. Nagash was a title of the kings of Ethiopia, as Pharaoh was of the kings of Egypt; the Arabs spoke of them as Nagashi, and the title Negus of Abyssinia is still existent.

The Shangalla, a race of negroes on the northern frontier of Abyssinia, worship serpents, trees and the heavenly host.

From the brief survey we have taken of Negro Ophiolatry the reader will have gathered how deeply it is rooted in the hearts of the African people, and how firmly established it is even to-day, in the outlying districts of this great continent. Whilst it is an extraordinarily low form of Ophiolatry and does not attain to the conception of the Encircled Serpent, it no doubt reflects the state of mental culture arrived at by the peoples who practise it, a stage which a large proportion of them are now rapidly leaving behind.

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CHAPTER XXVI

CHINESE SERPENT LORE

IT is difficult to trace with certainty the origin of so ancient a conception as the sacred dragon of China, but it seems beyond doubt that the Chinese monster is the descendant of the early Babylonian water-dragon who controlled the rain supply of that country, as Osiris in Egypt controlled the Nile.

The influence of Babylonian civilisation radiated over a wide area for two or three thousand years, and reached the Shensi province of China before the Aryans entered India—probably during the third millennium B.C.

According to M. Terrien de Lacouperie's theory the civilisation of China came, not only from Babylon, but from the ancient culture which appears to have had its origin between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, i.e. from Assyria, Persia, Media and Babylonia. From this region also the sun and serpent worship associated with the Dravidian civilisation of India is said to have been derived; so that the Ophiolatry of these two countries seems to have had a common source. Some writers even consider it probable that the Indian serpent emblem of Infinity was the origin of the Great Serpent or Dragon of Chinese mythology—the supreme god, known as the Dragon King, to whom prayers are regularly offered. At all events it is well known that Buddhist India strongly influenced the religion of China. The characteristics of the Nāgas or snake-gods of India were bestowed upon the Chinese dragon gods, and Buddhist dogmas regarding the pearl-protecting dragon deity of sun and water seem to have been grafted upon Chinese ideas of Babylonian origin concerning a water dragon not originally connected with pearls.

Elliot Smith says that in China and Japan "the dragon is, like the Indian Nāga, a beneficent creature, which approximates more nearly to the Babylonian Ea or the Egyptian Osiris. It is not only the controller of water, but the impersonation of water and its life-giving powers: it is identified with the emperor, with his standard, with the sky, and with all the powers that give, maintain, and prolong life and guard against all kinds of

danger to life. In other words, it is the bringer of good luck, the rejuvenator of mankind, the giver of immortality."

Adi-Buddha, the One Supreme Intelligence, is entitled by Fa-hwa-King, the "Great Dragon of Wisdom, born of Fire and Water," and Sangha, the third Person of the Buddhist Trinity, has been described as "the Voice of Manifestation of the Dragon." Sakya Muni—a name adopted by Buddha, according to the legendary accounts given by the Mongol books,—which are only translations from the Thibetan or Sanskrit,—is entitled "the King of Serpents, the Tree of Knowledge, and the Sun." This phraseology means that he was the king of initiates, and it is in this sense that the dragon was the emblem of the Chinese emperors. The emperor's throne is therefore known as the Dragon's Seat, and his dresses of State are embroidered with the likeness of a dragon.*

As Madame Blavatsky points out: "The aphorisms in the oldest books of China, say plainly that the 'Dragon' is a human, albeit *divine* Being. Speaking of the 'Yellow Dragon,' the chief of the others, the Twan-ying-t'u, says: 'His wisdom and virtue are unfathomable . . . he does not go in company and does not live in herds (he is an ascetic). He wanders in the wilds beyond the heavens. He goes and comes, fulfilling the decree (Karma); at the proper seasons if there is perfection he comes forth, if not he remains (invisible).' And Kon-fu-tyu is made to say by Lü-lan, 'The Dragon feeds in the pure water of Wisdom and sports in the clear waters of Life.'"

The colour yellow, so much insisted on, at once suggests the yellow robe of the Buddhist monk and reminds us that serpent is often but another name for priest. But it would seem to have other meanings, even when thus connected with the sacred colour.

De Visser quotes from an ancient sage, who said, "When the yellow dragon, born from yellow gold a thousand years old, enters a deep place, a yellow spring dashes forth, and if from this spring some particles arise these become a yellow cloud."

"The ancient texts . . . are short, but sufficient to give us the main conceptions of Old China with regard to the dragon. In those early days (just as at present) he was the god of water, thunder, clouds, and rain, the harbinger of blessings, and the symbol of holy men. As the emperors are the holy beings on earth, the idea of the dragon being the symbol of Imperial power is based upon this ancient conception."

The Buddha of the Chinese, Fo-hi, that is Fo, the victim, who lived about 3300 B.C., was the celebrated founder of the Chinese Empire, and was raised to the throne because of his

* Compare description of King Arthur.

extraordinary merits, and honoured with the epithet of Tyen-Tse, or the "Son of Heaven." He is said to have chosen a dragon or dragon-horse to be his assistant, or, according to some writers, actually himself to have been half-man, half-serpent in form. His disciples also seem to have assumed the dual shape, and Madame Blavatsky tells us that "the men of Fohi (or the 'Heavenly Man') are called the twelve *Tien-Hoang*, the twelve hierarchies of Dhyanis or Angels, with human faces and Dragon bodies; the dragon standing for *divine Wisdom* or Spirit; and they create men by incarnating themselves in seven figures of clay—earth and water—made in the shape of those Tien-hoang."

Because of the connection of the dragon with Fo-hi it is the national emblem of China. It was always borne upon the Imperial banners and became the symbol of royalty and of everything sacred.

It is sculptured on their temples and engraven on their postage stamps and interwoven in the garments of their chief nobility. It is named "the Father of Happiness," and temples shaded by groves are built in its honour. "The Chinese," writes Cambry, "delight in mountains and high places, because there lives the dragon upon whom their good fortune depends."

In the "Shu King" the dragon is referred to as one of the symbolic figures painted on the upper garment of the Emperor Hwang Ti, who is said to have reigned in the twenty-seventh century B.C., and belongs to the mythical period of the five Tis. This ruler was the son of the thunder-god, had a dragon-like countenance, and was transformed into a dragon when he died.

Many of the Chinese emperors claimed the honour of being sons of the dragon-gods, and just as the Egyptian Pharaoh was an avatar of Osiris and Horus, so the Chinese emperor was regarded as an avatar or incarnation of the dragon, and was so closely associated with him in the minds of the people that it was anciently believed that any failure on his part to control the dragon's action in making or withholding rain, etc., might cause the dynasty to be overthrown by the angry and ruined peasantry.

The Emperor Yaou was the son of a red dragon, and is said to have been ten cubits in height. He appointed the sage Shun to be his successor, and his choice was confirmed by the appearance of a beautiful dragon-horse which arose from the river bearing in its mouth a scaly cuirass for Shun, who was six cubits high and seems to have been able to assume various forms at will.

Another divine emperor, Shennung, known as "the blazing god," was born under the influence of a sacred dragon. He is

said to have had the body of a man and the head of an ox (or bull). T'aihao or Pachai or Fushi, had the body of a serpent, the head of a man and the virtue of a sage, and his successor, Nükua, was like unto him in form, but his virtue was that of a holy man.

Though Confucius did not assume the dragon shape, the Chinese told the Jesuits that as soon as he was born, two dragons came to guard him against all sorts of harm, thus confirming his divine mission.

The souls of the dead are said to be carried to Heaven by winged dragons, and ghosts are sometimes seen riding on dragons and wearing blue hats. The gods also use them as horses, and emperors and holy men have the same privilege. Hu, the founder of the Hea Dynasty, had a carriage drawn by two dragons.

The Emperor K'i, who flourished 2197 B.C., is said to have had his car drawn by two dragons, and this fable may have been the original of the stories of Medea and Triptolemus. The text referring to K'i is given by Gould as follows: "K'i of the Hia dynasty danced with Kiutai at the Tayoh common. He drove two dragons. The clouds overhung in three layers. In his left hand he grasped a screen; in his right hand he held ear ornaments; at his girdle dangled jade crescents." The commentator tells us that Kiutai is the name of a horse, and that dance means to dance in a circle.

Ping I (Icy Exterminator) was also described as driving two dragons. He was fabled to dwell in Tsung Ki pool near the fairy region of Kwa-Sun.

According to De Visser, the dragon-horse is a vital spirit of Heaven and Earth, and more particularly of river water. It has the tail of a huge serpent.

The dragon of China is said to have nine characteristics and eighty-one scales. Bayley points out that "the number eighty-one is nine times nine, and as the immutable nine was the symbol of immutable Truth, eighty-one may be obviously understood as a ninefold nine or the fundamental Truth of Truths. Kiao, a Chinese name for the mystic Dragon, may be equated with *ak iao*, the great and ever-existent Beginning and the End."

We may also note that the sum of eight and one is nine, and that nine is the product of the sacred three multiplied by itself. The serpent is universally the symbol of Wisdom. What is Wisdom but the understanding of Truth?

But according to some writers the scales of the dragon number in all one hundred and seventeen, of which eighty-one have a power for good, but thirty-six have an evil influence, since the

Dragon is the symbol of All, and not only the Preserver, but also the Destroyer. Again, we would point out that the sum of each of these numbers is the mystic nine, and that this can hardly be merely coincidence.

The number five seems to be almost as closely connected with the dragon as is the number nine. In times of drought he is invoked as the Dragon of the five lakes and four seas (nine). He is said to display the five colours (black, red, yellow, white and blue or green) and De Visser quotes a religious text which says:

"A dragon in the water covers himself with five colours;
Therefore he is a god."

He has five claws, and he is one of the five guardians of the world. The date of the festival of the dragon-boats coincides with this number, being the fifth of the fifth month.

The dragon is said by Gould to move "like a spirit; he wishes to be small and he becomes like a silkworm; great, and he fills all below heaven; he desires to rise, and he reaches the ether; he desires to sink, and he enters the deep fountains. The times of his changing are not fixed; his rising and descending are undetermined; he is called a god (or spirit)."

In representations of the dragon, a sphere, often with a spiral attachment, is generally placed before his mouth. This is probably the thunder-bolt which he is casting forth in his capacity as thunder-god. But de Visser would see in it the moon, about to be swallowed by the dragon, who thus causes the fertilising rain. Professor Elliot Smith says that "The Chinese themselves refer to the ball as the 'precious pearl,' which, under the influence of Buddhism in China, was identified with the 'pearl that grants all desires' and is under the special protection of the Nâga, i.e. the dragon. . . . The germs of civilisation were first planted in China by people strongly imbued with the belief that the pearl was the quintessence of life-giving and prosperity-conferring powers: it was not only identified with the moon, but also was itself a particle of moon-substance which fell as dew into the gaping oyster."

This is borne out by the saying of the Chinese mystics: "The bright moon-pearl is concealed in the oyster, the dragon is there." The reflection of the moon on rippling water is symbolised as the 'Golden Dragon,' or 'Yellow Dragon,' the chief of Chinese dragons and probably a sun-god. Since, as Mackenzie tells us, the dragon was also "connected with the moon, and the moon with the bamboo, it might be expected that the dragon and bamboo would be closely linked. One of the holy men is credited with having reached the lunar heaven by cutting down a

bamboo, which he afterwards transformed into a dragon. He rode heavenwards on the dragon's back."

But the pine tree is that most specially connected with the transformed serpent, and an ancient Chinese sage has declared that branches of pines which are three thousand years old have underneath their bark "accumulations of resin in the shape of dragons, which, if pounded and consumed in a quantity of full ten pounds, will enable a man to live 500 years" (De Groot). It is also stated that a dragon may assume the shape of a tree growing under water, and De Visser relates the story of a boat that collided with some driftwood which proved to be a dragon.

The definition of a dragon as a large serpent cannot be applied to the dragon of China, which is a weird compound of several animals. From Wang Fu and other native writers we learn that it has a camel's head, a demon's eyes, a stag's horns, a cow's ears, a serpent's neck, an eagle's claws, a tiger's feet, and a carp's scales, whilst its body has three joints, these being head to shoulders, shoulders to breast, and breast to tail. In addition to all these properties those dragons which are not winged possess a wonderful swelling on their heads called the *chi'ih muh*, which, acting like a gasbag, gives them the power of soaring through the air. The male is whiskered, and in addition can be distinguished by its undulating horn, thickest at the top. A female dragon has a straight nose.

But though thus fearfully and wonderfully compounded, Chinese writers assert the dragon has the nature of a serpent, and we may read in the "Shu iki" how a snake turns into a dragon. "A water-snake after 500 years changes into a *kiao*, a *kiao* after 1000 years changes into a *lung*." For the benefit of the uninitiated we here interpose with the explanation that a *kiao-lung* is a dragon with fish-scales. To continue: "A *lung* after 500 years changes into a *kioh-lung*," i.e. a horned dragon, "and after 1000 years becomes a *ying-lung*." This is the apotheosis, and means a dragon with wings.

In Japan still another transformation is added to those given above. This is the *p'an-lung*, or coiled dragon which is not yet ascended to heaven. Apparently this is identical with the Rain Dragon, which we shall find to be a prominent figure in Chinese dragon lore.

Like the serpent genii and jinn of Western countries, the dragon gods of China and Japan are able to assume the forms of other beings at will, and may sometimes appear as a man, sometimes as an animal or tree, or even as an implement. There is a great variety of form among dragons in their own shapes, for there are

dragon-horses, dragon-cows, dragon-dogs, dragon-snakes, dragon-toads, and others too numerous to mention, all hairy, feathered or scaled creatures being more or less associated with the dragon proper.

This is not remarkable, for the philosopher Hwai Nan Tsze, who died 122 B.C., declared that the dragon is the origin of all creatures, winged, hairy, scaly and mailed.

The gleaming river so often symbolised by the snake, also suggests the gleaming sword, and many are the Chinese and Japanese legends of dragon-swords, which became for a time the property of mortals, though these were never able to retain them very long. A typical example of these stories is to be found in the Books of the Tsin Dynasty, and relates how an astrologer studying the heavens discovered among the stars the spirits of two magic swords which were shining directly over the places on the earth where in former times two swords had been hidden. It was decided to look for these, and, deeply buried in the earth, was found a luminous box of stone. Within this box were the two swords with inscriptions upon them stating that they were dragon-swords. As soon as they were removed from their burial-place their heavenly counterparts faded from the sky.

There are also sea-dragons who control the storms and have to be propitiated by offerings. Possibly the sea-serpent is a relation of these deities, who guard the pearls and other treasures of the deep. But Elliot Smith suggests that their prototypes were the sharks which constituted the special danger encountered by the diver exploiting the pearl beds.

An old Chinese legend tells how one of these dragons assumed the shape of a little girl, and sat at the entrance of a cavern playing with three lovely pearls. But as soon as a man appeared the seeming child fled into a cave and took on the shape of a dragon again, hiding the pearls in its left ear.

But it is not only sea-dragons who love pearls. The dragons of the clouds also delight in them, and wear them under their chins, and it is said that when they fight, fire-balls and pearls fall to the ground, and this gives promise of abundant supplies of water in the future.

The Chinese say that the dragon-gods are hatched from stones, and especially from beautiful stones, certain of which are known as dragons' eggs. They tell how when these split, thunder is heard, and lightning flashes forth, and much water flows from the stone. Then the dragons are born, and at once fly into the sky. At first they are only the size of a worm or a baby serpent, but their growth is quick.

De Visser relates a legend of these dragon eggs. An old woman

once found five of them lying in the grass. When they split she carried the new-born serpents to a river and set them free. For her kind action she was rewarded with the gift of the power to foretell the future, and she became first a sibyl and then a priestess, and was called by the people "the Dragon-Mother." When she went to the riverside to wash clothes, the fishes, who were subjects of dragons, "used to dance before her." Mackenzie explains this last incident by telling us that "certain fish were regarded as forms of the shape-changing dragon. The Gaelic dragon sometimes appeared as the salmon, and a migratory fish was in Egypt associated with Osiris and his 'mother.'"

The Dragon-Mother of the Chinese myth though probably originally a goddess and mother of the sun, was not immortal, and when she died she was buried on the eastern side of the river. Mackenzie thinks this eastern bank had some special meaning, for the dragons objected violently to the burial of their "Mother" on that side, and their protest took the form of a terrible storm, and of removing her grave to the western bank. Perhaps some forgotten sun-myth is involved in the explanation of this story. The dying sun sinks to his rest in the west. Surely then this was the correct quarter or aspect in which to bury the dead. The yellow dragon, newly born, might be unfitted for his long journey if the first object that met his view were to be the corpse of his Dragon-Mother. It was fitting that their resting-places should be side by side. Even to-day the peasantry believe that there is always wind and rain near the Dragon-Mother's grave, and solemnly explain that the dragons love to "wash the grave." They pour out their libations upon it. But Mackenzie suggests another explanation of this battle over the burial site. He says that "In ancient Egypt the conflict between the solar and Osirian cults was a conflict between the 'cult of the east' and the 'cult of the west.'" The rivalry between the two cults is reflected in one particular Pyramid text in which the dead is "adjured to go to the west in preference to the east, in order to join the sun-god. But to the solar cult the east was 'the most sacred of all regions.' In the Pyramid texts it is found that the old doctrine of the west as the permanent realm of the dead, a doctrine which later is so prominent, has been quite submerged by the pre-eminence of the east ('The Religious System of China'). This east-and-west theological war, then, had its origin in Egypt. How did it reach China, there to be enshrined in the legend of the Dragon-Mother?"

In the "Yih lin" there is mentioned a black dragon which vomits light and transforms darkness into light. The influence of the solar cult is manifest in the idea that the vital spirit of

the dragon is enshrined in its eyes. Dragon skins, even after they have been cast, shine in the darkness, and dragons' eyes are described as dazzling the beholder by their light.

The mountain dragon of Mount Chung is also a sun-god, as is indicated by his title of the "Enlightener of Darkness." When he "opens his eyes it is day, when he shuts his eyes, it is night. Blowing he makes winter, exhaling he makes summer. The wind is his breath."

The Blue, or Azure Dragon, represents the eastern quarter of the heavens and the first of the seasons, spring. Professor Elliot Smith says: "the attributes thus assigned to the Blue Dragon, his control of water and streams, his dwelling on high mountains whence they spring and his association with the East will be seen to reveal his identity with the so-called 'god B' of American archæologists, the elephant-headed god *Tlaloc* of the Aztecs, *Chac* of the Mayas, whose more direct parent was Indra."

De Visser tells us that the earliest reference to the dragon is found in the "Yih King" and shows that the dragon was "a water animal akin to the snake, which (used) to sleep in pools during winter and arises in the spring." It is "the god of thunder who brings good crops when he appears in the rice fields (as rain) or in the sky (as dark and yellow clouds) in other words when he makes the rain fertilise the ground."

In the fifth appendix to the "Yih King," which is said to have been written by Confucius, it is asserted that "*K'ien* (Heaven) is a horse, *Kw'un* (Earth) is a cow, *Chen* (Thunder) is a dragon.

The representation of a dragon is considered to be a potent charm averting misfortune and conferring occult power. Because of this the Chinese and Japanese frequently paint upon the front of their houses and over their doors dragons' heads with wide open mouths, large teeth and fiery eyes, with the object of protecting the peace of their families from being disturbed by the envious or unkindly disposed.

In conformity with this idea the ecclesiastical vestments of the Wu-ist priests are decorated with dragon figures. Upon each side of the chief vestment is embroidered a large dragon arising above the billows. These represent the fertilising rain and are surrounded by gold-thread figures representing clouds, and spirals typifying rolling thunder. Mountains are embroidered upon the back to symbolise the world. These decorations are said to enable the wearer to control the order of the world, and to avert unseasonable and calamitous events such as drought, untimely and superabundant rainfall and eclipses.

The Chinese Buddhist pilgrims often refer to this control over the elements exercised by the Nāgas, and Sung-Yun tells us how

Buddha travelled to Udyāna to convert a Nāga king whose wrath had brought about a violent storm.

Fa Hien tells us how in his time (A.D. 400), the dragons of the Tsung-ling mountains caused wind, rain, snow and other weather phenomena. But the kindly dragon of Sankisa, the worship at whose temple was conducted by Buddhist priests, caused fertilising rain. He also describes a little snake, or Nāga, which apparently he saw when at Oude. Its ears were edged with white, and it was fed and worshipped daily.

In the seventh century Hiouen-Tsiang found the inhabitants of Takshasita in Northern India going in procession to pray for rain at the shrine of Elapatra Nāga, and this power of controlling the elements is still ascribed to the serpent-gods of China, Manchuria and Korea.

The dragon is the rain-god of China and intimately connected with water and therefore with agriculture. As the Rain Dragon he is said to pour forth from his mouth the waters which descend on the earth in the form of rain, and in this rôle is as closely connected with water as was the serpent shape of Osiris with the Nile or as Indra was with the cloud dragon of India.

Because of this it is generally believed that the dragon was the originator of wells. These are usually found within deep mountain caves. Such a one is situated at the summit of Mount Pien, in Hu-cheu. It flows from a cave and is known as the "Golden Well Spring," its birthplace being called the "Golden Well Cave." It is thought to penetrate the mountain so deeply that it is impossible to reach the end of it.

As de Visser has pointed out, although the ancient texts are short, they are "sufficient to give us the main conceptions of old China with regard to the dragon. He was in those early days, just like now, the god of water, thunder, clouds and rain, the harbinger of blessings, and the symbol of holy men."

The dragon lives in pools, but rises to the clouds, and brings rain, and floods the rivers.

During the Chinese dry season, which in that land is winter, the dragons are said to sleep in their pools. Referring to this the ancient Chinese work "Yih Ling" remarks that "a dragon hidden in water is useless." The dragons hibernate thus all through the winter that they may "preserve their bodies," but when spring arrives they begin to stir uneasily. Then they awake and fight with each other, and there is no need here of Indra's services.

Their angry challenges are heard in the thunder, and as they close in combat the rain pours forth from their mouths in torrents. The human beings below are gladdened by the results of this

battle of dragons; so long as it is not too fierce and deadly. But if very large numbers of dragons are engaged, sometimes the war becomes fatal instead of beneficent in its effects on the earth dwellers. The rivers rise and flood the land, and men, and cattle, and trees, and dwellings are swept away to destruction. If all is to go well with the agriculturist the blue and yellow dragons must prevail. No mortal ought to watch these battles of the dragons. Not only is it unlucky, but fraught with deadly peril thus to pry into the mysteries. De Visser quotes a Chinese metrical verse on the subject.

"When they fight the dragons do not look at us,
Why should we look at them when they are fighting?
If we do not seek the dragons,
They also will not seek us."

A curious and most interesting parallel to the above verse is given by Mr. Mackenzie. He says: "In Gaelic Scotland the serpent, which is associated with the goddess Bride, sleeps all winter and comes forth on 1st February (old style), known as 'Bride's Day.' A Gaelic verse tells in this connection:

"The serpent will come from the home
On the brown day of Bride,
Though there should be three feet of snow
On the flat surface of the ground."

(Carmichael's 'Carmina Gadlica.')

"As in China a compact was made with the Bride serpent or dragon:

"To-day is the Day of Bride,
The serpent shall come from his hole,
I will not molest the serpent,
And the serpent will not molest me."

Mackenzie points out, that evidently "some very ancient belief, connected with the agricultural mode of life, lies behind these curious verses in such far separated countries as Scotland and China. Bride and her serpent come forth to inaugurate the season of fruitfulness, as do the battling dragons in the Far East."

In both China and Japan the "Bob-tailed Dragon" is regarded with veneration. "His fidelity as a friend," Mr. Conway tells us, "led to the ill return of an attack by which his tail was amputated, and ever since his soured temper has shown itself in raising storms. When a violent tempest arises, the Cantonese say, 'the bob-tailed dragon is passing,' in the same proverbial way as the Aryan peasantries attribute the same phenomenon to their storm gods."

It is chiefly by agriculturists that the dragon rain-god is worshipped and this only when he makes his power felt by withholding, or giving too abundantly of this blessing, on which occasions the farmers earnestly implore him for more or less rain, as their needs dictate. When a drought occurs, on the front door of every farmer's house a tablet is erected with the inscription "To the Dragon King of the Five Lakes and the Four Seas." An altar of incense is placed before this tablet and here are laid out the sacrificial offerings to propitiate the gods. Sometimes processions are formed to further gain celestial favour. On these occasions a huge image of a dragon made of paper or cloth is sometimes carried through the streets to the accompaniment of gongs and trumpets whose sound perhaps it is hoped, may be the means of arousing the dragons from their too prolonged slumbers.

Nu Kwa, the mother-goddess of China, takes a prominent part in the Chinese version of the myth of the deluge. She was determined to save mankind from the watery death and waged war against the demons who sought to destroy the world. When she had succeeded in staying the floods she created guardians to protect the four quarters of the earth and rule over the seasons. In the north she placed the Black Tortoise as the winter deity responsible for droughts. The south was given two guardians, the Red Bird, who presided over the summer, and the Golden Dragon, who guarded the sun. The east was ruled by the Blue Dragon, the chief spirit of water and rain, who controlled the spring; and the west was guarded by the White Tiger associated with the fruitful autumn season.

These seasonal dragons not only provided for the food supply of the people by pouring forth the rain in their stormy battles, but they supplied them with medicines to heal their diseases. After a thunderstorm a certain plant known as the Red Cloud herb might be found growing beside the pools in which the dragons took their rest, and this was highly esteemed for its curative properties. Not only so, but the dragons cast their bones along with their skins from time to time, and fossil bones, supposed to be these castings, were credited with wonderful medicinal properties.

However, certain Chinese writers claimed that dragons were immortal, and therefore denied the genuineness of the supposed dragons' bones. Shi Ch'än says that Su and Kan "submit that dragons are divine beings, and resemble the principle of immortality (never-in-themselves-dying principle)"; but there is the statement of the dragon fighting and getting killed; and further, in the "Tso-chw'en," in which it is stated that there

was a certain rearer of dragons who pickled dragons for food (for the Imperial table?).

Hung King gets over the difficulty by asserting that dragons cast off their bodies without really dying.

The Chinese celebrate the Feast of Lanterns, or Dragon Feast, at their New Year, which corresponds with that of the Jews, and occurs in October at the high tides. On the 15th of the first month they carry in procession through the streets a dragon effigy constructed of bamboo, linen and paper, and in front of it they bear a red ball, probably as a symbol of the sun, though it also appears to be connected with the moon, since the Chinese name it "the Pearl of Heaven." Dragons in their offices as gods of the four quarters were guardians of both sun and moon, although they were also the sun and moon "devourers" who caused the eclipses. We should expect it to be the golden dragon, but De Groot says it is the azure dragon, the head of which rose as a star to usher in spring at the beginning, which is thus borne in triumph at this festival, and honoured and saluted with music and drums and explosions of crackers.

Although the red ball appears to connect the dragon with solar rites, it is evidently as a Water-god that he is chiefly honoured. Whilst the feast is in progress nothing may be thrown into water for fear of profaning it, and Hargrave Jennings emphasises this aspect of the festival, saying:

"Here we have the rites of Aphrodite or Venus, or the Watery Deity, observed even in China, which worship, in Protean forms, being the worship of the Dragon or Snake, prevails, in its innumerable contradictory and effective disguises, over the whole world. How like are the noises and explosions of crackers, etc., to the riot or rout of the Corybantes amongst the Greeks, to the outcry and wild music of the priests of the Salic, and, in modern times, to the noises said to be made at initiation by the Freemasons, whose myths are claimed to be those (or imitative of those) of the whole world, whose Mysteries are said to come from that First Time, deep buried in the blind, unconscious succession of the centuries!"

The annual festival of the dragon-boat, which Bayley tells us is held in China to this day, is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth month at water festivals. Dragon boat races were a feature of these festivals and according to De Groot, were "intended to represent fighting dragons in order to cause a real dragon fight which is always accompanied by heavy rains. The dragon-boats carried through the streets may also serve to cause rain, although they are at the same time considered to be substitutes." From de Visser we learn that these boats were also

used by the emperors for pleasure trips and that the yih bird painted on their prow was intended "to suppress the water-gods."

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CHAPTER XXVII

JAPANESE OPHIOLATRY

THE early history of Japan is obscured by the mist of ages, and the stories related of beings who are said to have lived in prehistoric times are consequently delightfully vague. There is no Shinto creation myth. The Mikados and chiefs of tribes claimed descent from deities.

The Japanese divide their history into four eras: (1) The age of the *Kami*, or spiritual rulers. (2) The age of *Wō-sei*, or the government of the kings. (3) The age of *Hasei*, or the government of the Sio-guns. (4) The age of *Wō-sei-ishin*, or restoration of the government of the kings. The first of these periods relates to the spiritual rule of the *Kami* and is wrapt in uncertainty and fable, even the language of that time being almost lost, though one or two books said to represent it still exist. The chief record of antiquity is the *Ko-zi-ki*, the title, which is a Chinese one, meaning "A Record of Ancient Things." This was written some twelve hundred years ago, and in it may be found the genealogy of celestial beings and things, of spiritual beings and things, and of material beings and things.

Many fables are told herein of celestial beings or deities, who appear to have been continually hostile to each other, and serpent legends are not lacking, for certain of the gods were of that form. On one occasion Amateras, the Sun-goddess, had to hide from Susa-no-wō, the god of the Ocean, and complete darkness covered the universe, until the *Kami* coaxed Amateras from her retreat and banished her persecutor. Whilst in exile, Susa-no-wō killed a huge dragon with seven heads who had been annually coming for the daughter of an earth-god, having first intoxicated him with sake (rice beer). The River Hi "was changed into a river of blood" by the slaughter of the monster. In its tail a sword was found which Susa-no-wō presented to Amateras, perhaps as a peace-offering. This sword was known by the name of Kusanagi; it afterwards became the property of the Emperor, and one of the three sacred objects preserved by the imperial power in Japan. It was said that the warrior who wielded it could put to

flight an entire army. The sword was worn by the boy-Emperor at a naval battle, but he failed in his efforts to wield it, and the enemy were victorious. In this dilemma the boy's grandmother, Nu-no-ama, seized him in her arms, and jumped into the sea.

Apparently no record of this event was preserved, for in later centuries when the Emperor Go Shirakawa was ruling in Japan, certain barbarian peoples declared war on him, and his first action was to call for the Kusanagi sword. But it was nowhere to be found! Search having failed to reveal its whereabouts, the Emperor commanded magic ceremonies to be performed, and shortly afterwards he had a wonderful dream, in which a royal lady, who had died hundreds of years before, appeared to him, and said that the Kusanagi sword was in the possession of the dragon-king in his palace at the bottom of the ocean.

The Emperor when he awoke told his chief minister what the night had revealed, and commanded him to go quickly to the two women divers, Oimatsu and her daughter Wakamatsu, and bid them fetch it. The divers at once consented to try, and were taken across the ocean in a boat to the spot where the boy-Emperor had been drowned. A religious rite was first celebrated, and then they plunged into the sea. They did not appear again for a whole day, but when they returned to the boat they had a wonderful story to tell of a city they had found below the waves. They could not enter it, for silent sentinels with gleaming swords forbade. But after waiting long outside they had seen a holy man, who told them the city could only be entered by Buddha's aid, so they had returned to their friends in the boat. Oimatsu then proceeded to tell some of the wonders of that land they had visited, and how trees grew there which bore on their branches clusters of glittering gems. Only each tree was guarded by a poisonous serpent, so that they could not pluck its fruits. Next day the divers went again to the wonderland below the waves, but this time provided with sutra-charms by the chief priest of the temple of Kamo, which enabled them to enter the golden gem-set city. But the palace of the dragon-king was guarded by invisible sentries which they could not pass. They had looked through a window, however, and seen a mighty serpent with a sword in his mouth. His eyes shone like suns, and his tongue was red as blood. In his coils lay a boy child fast asleep. The serpent saw the women and said, "You have come here to take the Kusanagi sword, but I shall never part with it. It does not belong to the Emperor of Japan. Long ago it was taken from this palace by a dragon-prince who went to live in the River Hi. He was killed by Susa-no-wō, who carried off the sword. But after many years a sea-dragon took the form of a princess,

and married a prince of Japan. She was the grandmother of the boy-Emperor who attempted to wield the sword, and she it was who leapt into the sea with them during the battle of Dan-no-ura. You now see this boy asleep in my coils."

The Emperor of Japan was greatly troubled when the divers delivered their message, for he knew that his army was destined to defeat unless he could obtain the Kusanagi sword.

A magician now spoke up and told of a powerful spell which would compel the dragon to yield the sword. This proved successful, and when the women divers again went to the city under the sea, they brought back the sword in triumph. The Emperor took it to the fight and won a great victory.

After this the sword was deposited in the temple of Atsuta, and there it long remained, but at last a Korean priest stole it, and was crossing the ocean with it to his own land when a terrible storm broke upon the ship. As in the Bible story of Jonah, the captain of the vessel knew that someone on board had offended the deity who had raised the storm, and he asked, "Who among us has offended the dragon-king of Ocean?" The Korean priest said, "I will throw my sword into the waters for a peace-offering." He did so, and the storm was stilled.

The dragon-king generously restored the sword to the temple of Atsuta, and there it remained for one hundred years, after which it was carried back to the palace of the dragon-god in the Ocean Kingdom, and no more returned to the Empire of Japan.

Similar stories of dragon-swords may be found in Chinese myth. They could not long be retained by human beings.

The chronicles of the gods and heroes of Japan are full of fabulous stories of the dragon. It dwells at the bottom of the sea as its proper element, and is represented as a huge long four-footed snake. Kœmpfer says that, "Some of the Japanese emperor's clothes, his arms, scimitars, knives, and the like; as also the furniture and hangings of the imperial palace, are adorned with figures of this dragon." He also tells us that the Japanese soldiers eat the flesh of the serpent called Fitakutz, "believing firmly that it has the virtue of making them bold and courageous."

Whilst Kœmpfer was travelling, his guides pointed out to him a temple which they said had been erected in memory of a victory gained on the shores of the lake Oitz, by a famous dragon over a scolopendra.

Gould gives a Japanese dragon story "extracted from a native journal of the day." It is called "The White Dragon," and illustrates the power of changing form which is so constantly attributed to snaky monsters. It runs as follows:

"There is a very large pond at the eastern part of Fu-si-mi-shi-ro-yama, at Yama-shiro (near Kioto); it is called Ukisima. In the fine weather little waves rise up on account of its size. There are many turtles in it. In the summer-time many boys go to the pond to swim, but never go out into the middle or far from the shore. No one is aware how deep the centre of the pond is, and it is said that a white dragon lives in that pond, and can transform itself into a bird, which the people of the district call O-gon-cho, i.e. golden bird, because when it becomes a bird it has golden plumage. The bird flies once in fifty years, and its voice is like the howling of a wolf. In that year there is famine and pestilence, and many people die. Just one hundred years ago, when this bird flew and uttered its cry, there was a famine and drought and disease, and many people died. Again, in the fifth year of Tempo, fifty years back from the present time, the bird flew as before, and there was once again disease and famine. Hence the people in that district were much alarmed, as it is now just fifty years again. They hoped, however, that the bird would not fly and cry. But at 2 a.m. of the 19th of April it is said that it was seen to do so. The people, therefore, were surprised, and now are worshipping God in order to avert the famine and disease. The old farmers say, in the fine weather the white dragon may occasionally be seen floating on the water, but that if it sees people it sinks down beneath the surface."

White snakes are from time to time seen in Japan, and are greatly venerated as messengers of the gods. They are carried to a temple when found. The white snake is worshipped at a temple known as Miyo-ken in Nagasaki.

Professor Elliot Smith tells us that "the snake takes a more obtrusive part in the Japanese than in the Chinese dragon, and it frequently manifests itself as a god of the sea. The old Japanese sea-gods were often female water-snakes. The cultural influences which reached Japan from the south by way of Indonesia—many centuries before the coming of Buddhism—naturally emphasised the serpent form of the dragon and its connection with the ocean. But the river-gods or 'water-fathers,' were real four-footed dragons identified with the dragon-kings of Chinese myth, but at the same time were strictly homologous with the Nāga Rajas or cobra kings of India."

In spite of the slight variation of form noted by Professor Elliot Smith, the traditions relating to the dragon in Japan have evidently been derived from a Chinese source, and the Japanese dragon is practically identical with that of China, and therefore is essentially a water deity.

The dragon water-gods of Japan, like those of China, possess many pearls. A reference to this belief may be found in the name of the mountain Ryushuho, which means "Dragon Pearl Peak." When the Buddhist temple called "Cloud-Dragon Shrine" was in process of building, a dragon presented one of the priests with a pearl which it was carrying in its mouth. Hence the names of temple and mountain. It is easy to trace the association of the pearl with the water dragon. Not only are the pearls found beneath deep waters, but every drop of rain or dew suggests the shining globular form of the beautiful gleaming stone. The pearl is also suggestive of the moon, and the latter is the controller of the Tides, and may often be seen in Japanese drawings surrounded by dragon clouds.

The sea-gods of old Japan were snakes or dragons, and the Mikados claimed descent from the sun-goddess and from Toyotama bime the "Abundant Pearl Princess," a Japanese Melusina who was the daughter of the Dragon King of Ocean. This god was known as *Oho-watsumi* ("sea-lord or sea-snake"), by *Toyotama hiko no Mikoto* (Abundant Pearl Prince). During storms sailors threw jewels into the waters to pacify him, for, like the Indian nāga king, his kingdom lay at the bottom of the sea. Among the many jewels he possessed were two which had the property of granting all desires. These were known as the Jewels of Flood and Ebb. The white jewel is the "Pearl of Ebb" and the blue jewel the "Pearl of Flood."

The Empress Jingo, according to an old legend, perhaps in virtue of her descent, obtained the "jewel that grants all desires" from a sea-god. Soon after it had come into her possession the Japanese fleet was dispatched to Korea to demand tribute. The Koreans met it with their own navy, but as the fleets were about to join in battle, a Japanese god threw the "Pearl of Ebb" into the sea, and at once both navies found themselves high and dry. The King of Korea was not to be turned from his purpose by such happenings, and he leapt at once on to the ocean-bed, and, followed by his troops, marched to attack his foes. But now the Japanese god threw the Pearl of Flood into the sea, and the waters returned and drowned almost all the brave Koreans. Then a tidal wave devastated the Korean coast, and only retreated when the Pearl of Ebb was once more cast into the sea by the god.

The King of Korea was glad to make peace at any price after such terrible manifestations of the sea-god's displeasure, and sent back the Japanese vessels laden with tribute to the Empress, who thus won a great victory without the smallest loss to Japan.

Such stories as the above are the logical sequence to the identification of pearls with the moon, the influence of which upon the tides is thereby symbolised.

Aston mentions some Japanese pictures in which the Abundant Pearl Prince and his daughter are shown with dragons' heads above their human ones.

It is written in the Historical Records of Japan that the Emperor Hwang brought to ground the dragon on which he rode by means of a copper charm. Having first collected copper from the mountain, he cast a tripod. How much the mystic form now taken by the metal, and how much the metal itself contributed to the result, we do not know, but as soon as the tripod was made, a dragon came down to him and submitted to be used as a mount. The monarch having set the fashion of dragon riding, the bolder spirits among his devoted subjects, to the number of seventy, followed his example, and took aerial flights on their strange steeds.

This adventurous emperor is also remembered because he made the liquor of immortality (soma) from dragons' blood (cinnabar).

Although Japanese dragons are so fond of copper that they can be lured into the service of man by its means, they hate and dread iron, which by its "pungent nature" injures their eyes. Being water-gods they naturally object to see water defiled, and the Japanese believed that if iron and filth were thrown into ponds, the wrath of the dragons was visited upon the land in the form of terrible, devastating hurricanes.

According to Hurd, the Supreme Being is represented in Japan as a Moor, perfectly black with bare breast. He has four arms and four heads, and a crown shaped like a pyramid. Around his image a serpent "of monstrous size" is twined, and "two devils, the one with the horn of a stag, and the other with the head of a dog, lay hold of the serpent's head."

There are Japanese traditions to the effect that he sometimes appeared to mankind in the form of a serpent.

The Emperor Hachiman who reigned in Japan A.D. 200-310, bore physical mark of his divine descent, for he had a dragon's tail. He was worshipped as a war-god.

Kura-okami, the dragon or serpent-god who controls rain and snow, had Shinto temples "in all provinces," and Gardner tells us that a temple was erected to the honour of a lake-dwelling dragon which destroyed a monstrous serpent that had devastated the country-side. Horses were offered as sacrifice to the dragon rain-gods, and at one time human beings were the victims.

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GARUDA.
From a native design.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AUSTRALIAN AND POLYNESIAN OPHIOLATRY

IN Australia the serpent occupies an important position as a clan totem, and is also the subject of myths and Bushman paintings. The Warramunga tribe of North Central Australia have conceived a huge mythical totem serpent, the sire of all snakes. It lives in a water-hole, from whence, if offended, it may emerge to destroy human beings, so must be treated with great respect. The men of this totem will not call it by its proper name—Wollungua—as this might lessen their power over it, and it might come out of its watery home and devour them, but they perform certain ceremonies for increasing their totems. These rites give pleasure to the Wollungua, and thereby prevent its coming forth to slay. A large keel-shaped mound is made to resemble its supposed form. The men of the tribe walk around this, stroke it, and then hack it to pieces. A visit is paid to the water-hole, and the men with bowed heads solemnly beg Wollungua not to injure them. It is evident that in these ceremonies, despite their primitive form, something very like worship with prayer and ritual may be found.

The Coast Murring tribe in New South Wales had an initiatory ceremony on the attainment of puberty, at which the totem name, Brown Snake, was shouted, and a medicine-man produced a live brown snake out of his mouth.

The Anthropological Institute have recorded a case of a medicine-man whose clan totem through his mother was the kangaroo, but whose secret (i.e. individual totem) was the tiger snake. Snakes of that species therefore would not hurt him. It is said that an Australian usually gets his individual totem by dreaming he has been transformed into one of the species.

Some of the tribes of New South Wales fable the existence of two serpents, each forty miles long, which may be met with on the way to the other world, or in it. These are said to be killed and eaten by the dead, but are immediately reproduced. Certainly the prospect of having to eat a forty mile serpent is not a pleasant one, and it is no wonder such uncanny reptiles are held in dread by the blacks!

In Australia the serpent-slayer is the goddess who gave fire to mankind. At Western Point, Victoria, the legend tells that the good old man Pundyil opened the door of the sun, so that its light poured forth upon the earth and revealed to his daughter, Karakorok, that the earth was full of serpents. She thereupon went about destroying them, but before she had completed this task her staff broke in two, and as it broke a flame burst forth from it. Thus was fire brought to this world.

Here the serpent appears to be immediately and instinctively regarded as an enemy as soon as seen. Yet it is indirectly the means of introducing the greatest of gifts to mankind. As an enemy it is also viewed in the mythology of the Korta of British New Guinea, where certain harmful mythical beings known as *tabu* are represented as snakes. These correspond to the beings called *paipai*, which are said to cause sickness in the Roro speaking tribes. Serpents are also used by the native sorcerers in their unholy rites.

It appears certain that Polynesian serpent worship is not a spontaneous native production, but was introduced there from a foreign source. We find the dragon stories of the Old World scattered among the natives of these islands, and Sir George Grey, in the "Journal of the Ethnological Society," compares extracts from a Maori Dragon legend with passages from Spenser's "Faerie Queene," remarking that "their strict verbal and poetical conformity with the New Zealand legends are such as at first to lead to the impression either that Spenser must have stolen his images and language from the New Zealand poets, or that they must have acted unfairly by the English bard."

The snake is seldom met with in New Zealand or other Polynesian islands, yet the Maori legend describes a dragon "in size large as a monstrous whale, in shape like a hideous lizard; for in its huge head, its limbs, its tail, its scales, its tough skin, its sharp spines, yes, in all these it resembled a lizard."

It seems quite probable, however, that the Maoris brought these legends with them when they first migrated to these islands. The absence of Sanskrit roots in the language appears to indicate that this was in pre-Sanskritic times. Fornander has traced back the history of the Hawaiians to the fifth century, and from the folklore of the country has arrived at the conclusion that the migration from the Indian Archipelago, whence he derives them, may be approximately assigned to the close of the first or to the second century. The ancestors of these people were by no means savages when they entered the Pacific. Their elaborate historical legends prove that they were to a certain extent civilised, and their manners and customs confirm this, and show that since

coming to these islands the race has greatly deteriorated. There is also abundant evidence that these people were once clever navigators, and used to construct decked vessels capable of carrying one or two hundred persons, together with water and stores for a voyage of some weeks' duration. Their religious ideals appear to have undergone as great a deterioration as their knowledge of the arts of civilisation.

It would be interesting, if it were possible, to follow up the cause or causes that have drawn the Hawaiians downward. However, authorities do not even agree as to the country from which this people originated, so lost in oblivion is their early history.

Ellis, writing in 1829, said: "A tabular view of a number of words in the Malayan, Asiatic, or the Madagasse, the American and the Polynesian languages, would probably show that, at some remote period, either the inhabitants of these distant parts of the world maintained frequent intercourse with each other, or that colonies from some one of them originally peopled in part or altogether the others. . . . Either part of the present inhabitants of the South Sea Islands came originally from America, or tribes of the Polynesian have, at some remote period, found their way to the (American) continent."

Bloxham, the English naval chaplain, arrived at a similar conclusion, and in his book, "The Voyage of the Blonde," referring to the mo-o, or reptile divinities, he says it was difficult to obtain an explanation of their name, because the Hawaiians had "nothing of the shape of serpents or large reptiles in their islands."

A light on the possible origin of Ophiolatry among this people comes from Mr. Mackenzie, who says: "In Polynesia the eternal conflict between bird-god and serpent-god is illustrated in wood-carvings. The Egyptian winged disk, as adopted by the islanders, shows the bird in the centre with a struggling snake in its beak. . . . In those areas in which the winged disk is found, are found also traces of Egyptian ideas which of course were not necessarily introduced by the Egyptians themselves."

All the dragon-gods of Hawaii were descended from *Mo-o-inanea* (the self-reliant dragon), a mother-goddess, who appeared sometimes as a woman and sometimes as a dragon. In Polynesia the dragon is called *mo-o* and *mo-ko*. Mr. Westervelt, who has made a study of the mo-os, says that, "Mighty eels, immense sea turtles, large fish of the ocean, fierce sharks, were all called mo-o. The most ancient dragons of the Hawaiians are spoken of as living in pools or lakes. These dragons were also known as Kupuas, or mysterious characters, who could appear as animals or human

beings according to their wish. The saying was 'Kupuas have a strange double body.'"

The natives themselves seem to have felt that this alleged fact required some explanation, and Mr. Westervelt continues: "It was sometimes thought that at birth another natural form was added, such as an egg of a fowl or a bird, or the seed of a plant, or the embryo of some animal, which, when fully developed, made a form which could be used as readily as the human body. These Kupuas were always given some great magic power. They were wonderfully wise and strong and skilful. Usually the birth of a Kupua, like the birth of a high chief, was attended with strange disturbances in the heavens, such as reverberating thunder, flashing lightning, and severe storms which sent the abundant red soil of the islands down the mountain-sides in blood-red torrents, known as *Ka-ua-koko* (the blood rain). The name was also given to misty fine rain when shot through by the red waves of the sun."

Mr. Westervelt says that "one dragon lived in the Ewa Lagoon, now known as Pearl Harbour. This was *Kane-kua-ana*, who was said to have brought the pipi (oysters) to Ewa. She was worshipped by those who gather the shell-fish. When the oysters began to disappear about 1850, the natives said the dragon had become angry and was sending the oysters to Kahiki, or some far-away foreign land." We may compare this belief of the natives in the pearl-protecting dragon with the Chinese dragon, who fills a similar office, and wears a pearl under his chin (see p. 257).

The same writer tells us that "the greatest dragon of the island" of Maui "was *Kiha-wahine*. The natives had the saying, '*Kiha* has *mana*, or miraculous power, like *Mo-o-inanea*.' She lived in a large deep pool on the edge of the village Lahaina, and was worshipped by the royal family of Maui as their special guardian."

Hawaiian legend tells of two famous dragons that lived in a river. Westervelt says they were called "the moving boards that made a bridge across the river." Another form taken by Hawaiian dragons was that of large stones, some of which were associated with the groves of hau trees. Upon these stones ferns and flowers were laid and referred to as "Kupuas," the material objects in all cases being regarded simply as the abodes of the immaterial spirits of the gods.

The Maori conception of the Supreme God is of a high quality. Among the Tahitians he was regarded as "the first and principal God, uncreated, and existing from the beginning, or from the time he emerged from *Po*, or the world of darkness."* "He was

* "Polynesian Researches,"

said to be the father of all the gods, and creator of all Things,"* and Dr. Turner says "the unrestricted, or unconditioned may fairly be regarded as the name of this Samoan Jupiter."

This king of the Samoan gods was symbolised as a dragon, and the Rev. George Brown, a missionary and explorer, describes his image saying that "this god had the body of a man to the breast only, and the body of an eel (*muraena*) below. This eel's body lies down in the ocean, and from the chest to the head lies down in the house. This is the god to whom all things are reported. The inferior gods are his attendants." The same symbolism is found in the Fiji Islands where the supreme Deity Ndengei is adored under the form of a huge serpent.

The worship of certain of the gods was common to all the people in a group of islands. Others were gods of villages, or families, whilst some were gods (or perhaps guardian angels) of individuals. Their temples corresponded to these divisions, and were either national, for a single village, or for the god of a family. The priests were a special order, the priesthood being hereditary; but in some cases the father of a family was the priest to his own household and presented the offerings and prayers to the family god, who was probably a deified ancestor.

The following incident described by Mr. Williams in his "Missionary Researches," casts an interesting sidelight on missionary methods, and suggests it would be well if those who carry the Bible to other lands remembered the command found therein,—"Thou shalt not kill." Those who love or admire an earthly artist do not destroy his work, but seek by all means to preserve it, and those who truly love God, the Master Artist, will hold His creation sacred, whatever form it is found in. Our missionary had probably never thought of this. He writes: "While walking on one occasion, across a small uninhabited island, in the vicinity of Tongatabu (Samoa Islands), I happened to tread upon a nest of sea-snakes. At first I was startled at the circumstance, but being assured that they were perfectly harmless, I desired a native to kill the largest of them as a specimen. We then sailed to another island where a number of heathen fishermen were preparing their nets. Taking my seat upon a stone under a *tou* tree, I desired my people to bring the reptile, and dry it on the rocks; but as soon as the fishermen saw it, they raised a most terrific yell, and seizing their clubs, rushed upon the Christian natives, shouting, 'You have killed our god, you have killed our god!'

"I stepped in between them, and with some difficulty stayed their violence, on the condition that the reptile should be

* Tahitian Dictionary.

immediately carried back to the boat. This incident shows, not only that they worship these things, but that they regard them with the most superstitious veneration."

We wonder how Mr. Williams would like to see the holy symbols of his own faith insulted and destroyed by a missionary of alien creed. It is not so many centuries ago that Christians would have burnt such an intruder alive for his pains. We can only marvel at the forgiving spirit these "heathen fishermen" displayed.

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CHAPTER XXIX

NORTH AMERICAN OPHIOLATRY

THE ancient monuments of the Western United States consist chiefly of enormous structures of earth and stone formed to resemble the shapes of beasts, birds, reptiles, and even men. These remains are chiefly confined to Wisconsin, and extend across that territory from Ford du Lac, in a south-western direction, ascending the Fox River, and following the general course of the Rock and Wisconsin Rivers to the Mississippi. Similar artificial elevations of more or less design are said to be found in Michigan, Iowa and Missouri.

But the most extraordinary and interesting of these earthworks yet discovered is that known as the Great Serpent, which is situated on Brush Creek at a point known as the "Three Forks," near the north line of Adam's county, Ohio. It lies upon the crest of a crescent-form spur of land, which rises about 150 feet above the waters of Brush Creek at its base. That side of the hill which borders the stream is a perpendicular wall of rock, whilst the other side slopes fairly rapidly to the level of the surrounding country. The top of this hill is slightly convex, but has an almost even surface 150 feet wide by 1000 feet long, measuring from its extremity to its junction with the tableland.

Occupying the extreme summit of this hill is the great serpent, its head lying close to the point, whilst its body winds backwards for 700 feet, conforming to the curve of the hill, and terminating in a triple coil. Its entire length, if extended, would certainly be 1000 feet.

The neck of this gigantic serpent is stretched out, and slightly curved, whilst its widely opened mouth appears as if in the act of swallowing or ejecting an oval shape which is partially within its jaws. The oval is formed by an embankment of earth, and is without any perceptible opening. It is regular in outline, and about 4 feet high, its diameters measuring 160 and 80 feet. Within this oval the ground is slightly raised.

There once existed a small circular elevation of much burned large stones in the centre, but these have been thrown down and scattered, probably under the prevailing idea that gold was

hidden below them. The point of the hill inside which this egg-shaped figure rests, appears to have been artificially cut to make it conform to its outline, leaving a smooth platform, 10 feet wide, and sloping slightly inwards, all around it. Upon each side of the serpent's head are two small triangular mounds, 10 or 12 feet across. These are not high, and though too well marked to be overlooked, are yet so much obliterated that they cannot be satisfactorily traced.

The prolonged and concerted effort that must have been put forth to produce this extraordinary monument shows the tremendous importance its makers attached to it. It cannot be regarded as the offspring of an idle fancy or savage whim. Its position, and the harmony of its form, are evidence of well-thought-out design, and it appears to have been commenced and finished in accordance with a matured plan, and not to have been the result of several successive unconnected efforts. It clearly and unmistakably portrays a serpent with open jaws, and what we may suppose to be an egg. If we assume for the work a religious origin, we can only see in it the recognised symbol of some all-obsessing idea, which we can but guess at. Possibly it represents the vivification of the Mundane Egg (which constituted the act of creation) by the Divine Life, here typified by the serpent, even as it was in ancient Egypt.

It is interesting to note that among the animal effigies of Wisconsin, structures in the form of serpents frequently occur. I do not know if these have been more completely mapped in recent years, but some time ago a certain Mr. Pigeon, of Virginia, made drawings of a number of them, and stated that near to the junction of the St. Peters and Mississippi Rivers there were many of these monuments together, consisting of—first, a circle and square in combination, as at Circleville in Ohio, with a platform round its base; second, near by, the effigy of an enormous animal resembling an elk, in length, 195 feet; third, in the same vicinity, a large conical mound, 300 feet in diameter at its base, and 30 feet high, its summit being covered with charcoal. This mound was surrounded by one hundred and twenty smaller mounds arranged in the form of a circle. Twelve miles to westward of these, but within sight of them, was a large, conical, truncated mound, 18 feet high and 60 feet in diameter at the base, built upon a raised platform or bottom. This was surrounded by a circle 365 feet in circumference. Entwined around this circle, in a triple coil, was an embankment in the form of a serpent, 2310 feet in length. At the centre of the body this embankment was 18 feet in diameter, but diminished as it neared the head and tail in proper proportion. The elevation

of the head was 4 feet, of the body 6 feet, of the tail 2 feet. The central mound was capped with blue clay beneath which were ashes and charcoal mixed with sand.

Mounds built in serpentine form have also been found at Gottenburg in Iowa. A range of such mounds raised at regular intervals, and measuring altogether two and a half miles in length, occurs seven miles north of these on the Turkey River. Twenty miles westward of this locality was the figure of a huge serpent with that of a tortoise in his mouth. This effigy was found to be 100.4 feet long, 18 feet broad at its widest part, and 6 feet high, whilst the tortoise was 18 feet by 12 feet.

Mr. Pigeon gave accounts of many other such monuments, but we will content ourselves with one more description, and then pass on to see what traces of Ophiolatry may be discovered among the yet existing races of North America.

On the lowlands of the Kickapoo River, Mr. Pigeon discovered a mound with eight radiating points, which unquestionably was intended to represent the sun. It was 60 feet in diameter at the base, and 3 feet high. The points extended outwards about 9 feet. Surrounding this central figure were five crescent-shaped mounds arranged as a circle. Many analogous structures were discovered at other places, both in Wisconsin and Iowa, as e.g. at Cappile Bluffs, on the Mississippi River, a conical truncated mound, surrounded by nine radiating effigies of men, the heads pointing inwards.

We are not surprised to find these representations of the sun side by side with those of the serpent, for the serpent was an emblem of the sun which itself was the emblem of the Divine Creator. As Faber has said: "Everywhere we find the Great Father exhibiting himself in the form of a serpent, and everywhere we find the serpent invested with the attributes of the Great Father, and partaking of the honours which were paid to him."

Deane has a plate representing an Indian priest of the solar serpent worship in the country north-west of Louisiana. Both sun and serpent are tattooed upon his breast; and in his hand he holds a kind of instrument shaped like a tadpole. Upon its rounded head is figured the sun, and this is penetrated by the head of a serpent—the tail of which forms the waving handle of the instrument.

It is evident that the mystery of the serpent deeply impressed itself upon the American Indians, and the emblem was held by them in the greatest possible veneration, as expressive of the All-Father. This is reflected in their language, the words which express "spirit" and "serpent" being similar in many tribes.

Leland has collected some very interesting traditions and folklore of the Algonquin Indians gathered directly from Indian narrators. He points out that the "affinity between the myths and legends of the North-eastern Indians and those of the Eskimo, could hardly be passed over, nor, at the same time the identity of the latter and of the Shaman religion with those of the Finns, Laplanders and Samoyedes." His collection, as he rightly says, is "of value to those who are interested in the study of the relations of the aborigines of America with the Mongoloid races of the Old World."

The tales of At-o-sis, the Serpent, are particularly interesting, at least from our point of view, as in them we find the Serpent was also symbolic of evil, so that here, too, it is encircled.

To these simple aborigines, as to so many early peoples, matter was a manifestation of Mind, and had a dreamlike quality of impermanence; hence their belief that any strong mental emotion could change the form in which the soul found itself temporarily embodied. The universality of this conviction in ancient times, and the numerous legends bearing it out, tempt one to question whether there may not have been in far-off days a fluidity in matter, which it does not now possess. We know that on the physical plane a somewhat analogous change to that we are postulating has actually taken place; the world has evolved through gaseous and fluid stages to its present state of apparent solidity. And the bodies of all living creatures upon it are even now repeating this process in a modified form, so that the interim between birth and death has been defined as the passage from a liquid to a solid condition.

The world is old, and becoming rigid and fixed in its shape. Perhaps its matter can no longer respond to the vibrations of thought, which having created, may easily have modified the plastic forms that its substance took for the manifestation of life on its surface.

Primitive peoples recognised the essential oneness of all life, and its common source; a belief modern thought is slowly returning to. Granted this, there is nothing absolutely impossible in transformation of form, given a sufficiently strong thought to accomplish it.

But even if we cannot admit that such transformations were actual happenings on the material plane, there is another hypothesis to be considered before we write down primeval man as an imaginative poet whose speech meant something totally different to the sense it conveyed. There is abundant evidence,—written in blood,—that the savage was in deadly earnest about such ideas. Dreams appear with such vividness to children of

Nature, that we may think of them as causing a real confusion and difficulty of distinction between their events and those of the material world, to these unsophisticated peoples; and thus becoming the source of strange beliefs.

As we have seen, these beliefs are by no means peculiar to them, but are wellnigh world-wide. It is only in comparatively recent times that the Christian Churches have abandoned them, as witness their cruel persecution in our own country of those they supposed possessors of occult powers of changing form.

Let us peruse together some of the weird stories told by the Indians of America concerning this interchangeability of bodily shape between men and serpents.

Leland has preserved for us the following Passamaquoddy tale of how Glooskap, the hero or demigod of the Algonquin Indians, changed "Certain Saucy Indians into Rattlesnakes." The tale was related by an old woman to Mrs. Wallace Brown, wife of the agent in charge of the Passamaquoddies in Maine.

"You know At-o-sis, the Snake? Well, the worst of all is Rattlesnake. Long time ago the Rattlesnakes were saucy Indians. They were very saucy. They had too much face. They could not be put down by much, and they got up for very little. When the great Flood was coming Glooskap told them about it. They said they did not care. He told them the water would come over their heads. They said that would be very wet. He told them to be good and quiet, and pray. Then those Indians hurrahed. He said, 'A great Flood is coming.' Then they gave three cheers for the great Flood. He said, 'The Flood will come and drown you all.' Then these Indians hurrahed again, and got their rattles, made of turtle-shells, in the old fashion, fastened together, filled with pebbles, and rattled them and had a grand dance. Afterwards when the white men brought cows and oxen into the country, they made rattles of horns.

"Yes, they had a great dance. The rain began to fall, but they danced. The thunder roared, and they shook their rattles and yelled at it. Then Glooskap was angry. He did not drown them in the Flood, however, but he changed them into rattle-snakes. Nowadays, when they see a man coming, they lift up their heads and move them about. That's the way snakes dance. And they shake the rattles in their tails, just as Indians shake their rattles when they dance. How do you like such music?"

These Indians still keep up a very curious snake-dance.

Another story related by Mr. Leland tells how two girls were changed to water-snakes, and this tale he found was so widely spread, and told in so many different forms, and so deeply connected with tribal traditions and totems, as to convince him it

was pre-Columbian in origin, and not a later importation as he at first thought. It is told by the Passamaquoddy Indians, and is given by Leland as follows:

"Pocumkwess, or Thoroughfare, is sixty-five miles from Campobello. There was an Indian village there in the old times. Two young Indian girls had a strange habit of absenting themselves all day every Sunday. No one knew for a long time where they went or what they did. But this was how they passed their time. They would take a canoe and go six miles down the Grand Lake, where, at the north end is a great ledge of rock and sixty feet of water. There they stayed. All day long they ran about naked or swam; they were wanton, witch-like girls, liking eccentric and forbidden ways.

"They kept this up for a long time. Once while they were in the water, an Indian who was hunting spied them. He came nearer and nearer, unseen. He saw them come out of the water and sit on the shore, and then go in again: but as he looked they grew longer and longer, until they became snakes. He went home and told this. (But now they had been seen by a man they must keep the serpent form.) Men of the village in four or five canoes went to find them. They found the canoe and clothes of the girls; nothing more. A few days after, two men on Grand Lake saw the snake-girls on shore, showing their heads over the bushes. One began to sing:

" ' We are going to stay in this lake
A few days, and then go down the river.
Bid adieu to our friends for us;
We are going to the great salt water.'

"After singing this they sank into the water. They had very long hair.

"A picture of the man looking at the snake-girls was scraped for me by the Indian who told the story. The pair were represented as snakes with female heads."

The following curious legend, suggestive of Ulysses and the Cyclops, was told to Mr. Leland by Tomah Josephs at Campobello, N.B.:

"Of old time it befell that Glooskap had an enemy, an evil man, a sinful beast, a great sorcerer. And this man, after trying many things, made himself a great serpent, hoping so to slay the Master.

"Of old time Glooskap met a boy whose name was 'Nmmok-swess, the Sable. And the boy had a flute: whoever played on it could entice unto him all the animals. And once, when the Master was afar, the boy broke the flute, and in his great sorrow

he would not return home, but wandered away into the wilderness. Now Glooskap knew in his heart that the flute was broken : he who is a magician knows at once of a great evil. And coming home, he asked of the grandmother where the boy was, and she could only weep. Then the Master said, ' Though I roam forever yet will I find the boy.' So he went forth, and he tracked him in the snow for three days ; and on the third night he heard someone singing in a hollow ; and it was a magic song, that which the *m'téoulin* sings when he is in dire need and death is near. And making a circle about the place, Glooskap looked down and saw a wigwam, and heard the voice more distinctly as he drew nearer, and it was the voice of the boy, and he was singing a song against all of the snake kind. And he was wandering about the wigwam seeking a straight stick. Then Glooskap understood all the thing, and how the boy had been enticed into the wilderness by the evil arts of At-o-sis, the Snake, and that the Great Serpent was in the wigwam, and had sent him out to seek a straight stick. Then Glooskap, singing again softly, bade him get a very crooked one, and told what more to do. So the boy got an exceedingly crooked one ; and when he entered, the Snake, seeing it, said, ' Why hast thou got such a bad stick ? ' And the boy answering said, ' Truly it is very crooked, but that which is crookedest may be made straightest, and I know a charm whereby this can be done ; for I will but heat this stick in the fire, and then I will make it quite straight, as you shall see.' Now At-o-sis was very anxious to behold this wonderful thing, and he looked closely ; but the boy, as soon as the end of the stick was red-hot, thrust it into his eyes and blinded him and ran forth.

" Yet the Snake followed him ; but when he was without the wigwam he met the Master, who slew him out of hand. Of old times. This is an end of the story."

Mr. Leland, in a note, says that the enemies of Glooskap are all cannibals, and the straight stick was required to roast him on. One more story from Leland, also of Passamaquoddy origin.

" Far away, very far in the north, there dwelt by the border of a great lake a man and his wife. They had no children, and the woman was very beautiful and passionate. The lake was frozen over during the greater part of the year. One day when the woman cut away the ice, she saw in the water a bright pair of large eyes looking steadily at her. They charmed her so that she could not move. Then she distinguished a handsome face ; it was that of a fine slender young man. He came out of the water. His eyes seemed brighter and more fascinating than ever ; he

glittered from head to foot ; on his breast was a large shining silvery plate. The woman learned that this was At-o-sis, the Serpent, but she returned his embraces and held conversation with him, and was so charmed with her lover that she not only met him more than once every day, but even went forth to see him in the night. . . .

" At last the husband's suspicions being fairly aroused (by her frequent absences) he resolved to watch her, . . . and said that he would be gone for one day. He went to the top of a hill not far distant, whence he watched her. She went to the shore



WOMAN AND THE SERPENT.
Native drawing on birch bark.

From Leland.

and sat there. By and by there rose up out of the lake, at a distance, what seemed to be a brightly shining piece of ice. It came to the strand and rose from the water. It was a very tall and very handsome man, dressed in silver. His wife clasped the bright stranger in her arms, kissing him again and again. The husband was awed by this strange event. He went home, and tried to persuade his wife to leave the place and to return to her people. This she refused to do. He departed ; he left her forever. But her father and mother came to find her. They found her there ; they dwelt with her. Every day she brought to them furs and meat. They asked her whence she got them. ' I have another husband,' she replied ; ' one who suits me. The one I had was bad, and did not use me well. This one brings all the animals to me.' Then she sent them away with many presents, telling them not to return until the ice had formed ;

that was in the autumn. When they returned she had become white. She was with young, and soon gave birth to her offspring. It consisted of many serpents. The parents went home. As they departed she said to them, 'When you come again you may see me, but you will not know me.'

"Years after some hunters, roaming that way, remembered the tale, and looked for the wigwam. It was all there, but no one was in it. But all the woods about the place were full of great black snakes, which would rise up like a human being and look one in the face, then glide away without doing any harm."

It would of course be easy to fill a volume with similar tales to the above of the loves of ophitic monsters; for Arabian, Hindoo, and other Oriental folklore abounds with them.

Mooney tells us that the Cherokees regard the rattlesnake as the head of the serpent tribe, and fear and respect him accordingly. Few of them will kill a rattlesnake willingly, and if they are obliged to do so, must atone for the crime by asking pardon of the snake's ghost, either in their own person or by means of priestly mediation, according to a set formula. They believe that if they neglect these rites, the relations of the slain serpent will send one of their number as an avenger of blood to track down the murderer and sting him to death. It is considered to be quite essential to behead the snake, bury the head deeply and hide the body in a hollow log; since if the remains were left exposed the other snakes would be so angry that they would cause deluges of rain to fall, and make all the streams overflow their banks.

Should a Cherokee dream that he has been bitten by a snake, he is treated in just the same way as if it had really happened to him, for they think that the ghost of a snake has actually bitten him, and that if proper remedies were not applied the place would swell and ulcerate though possibly not until years later.

For fear of offending the serpent, a Cherokee will never say he has been bitten by a snake, but politely says, "I have been scratched by a briar."

The Mohicans and Delawares also paid great reverence to the rattlesnake. They called it their grandfather, and believed it to be their special guardian divinely sent to warn them by its rattle when danger lurked unseen. They would on no account destroy one, but believed that if they ungratefully did so, the rest of the species would quickly take revenge.

De Charlevoix, the Jesuit traveller, said that the Natchez had the figure of a rattlesnake, carved from wood, placed among

other objects on the altar in their temple, to which they paid great honours.

Carver tells of a Menominee Indian who carried a rattlesnake with him, "treating it as a deity and calling it his great father." From this and other cases we may infer that not only did these Indians consider serpents sacred as the visible symbols of their gods, but also as embodying the souls of their ancestors, and other incorporeal spirits known to them as *Manitous*.

In a MS. in the possession of the New York Historical Society, it is asserted that the Menominees translated the *manitou* of the Chippeways as "Snake." The MS. continues: "Whether the word was first formed as a name for a surprising or disgusting object, and thence transferred to spiritual beings, or whether the extension of its signification has been in an opposite direction, it is difficult to determine."

The Linni Linape also are said by Heckwelder to have called the rattlesnake grandfather, and refused on any account to have it destroyed.

Henny relates that the Indians around Lake Huron held a similar belief, and called the rattlesnake their grandfather.

The Potawatomi Indians greatly honoured the rattlesnake because its warning so often saved them from an approaching enemy. But Keating says that this gratitude would not deter a youth, anxious to obtain a rattle, from killing one of these snakes for the purpose, though he would apologise profusely for doing this, and would explain that he needed the rattle to adorn his person and meant no insult to the snake. Then, to prove his goodwill he would leave a piece of tobacco by the carcass. He had not killed the serpent, but only destroyed its body.

The Ojibways dread to kill a rattlesnake, and, if they meet one on their path, they will entreat it to go away and leave themselves and their families in peace. Henry says that once, when an Englishman attempted to kill a rattlesnake, the party of Ojibway Indians with whom he was journeying, begged him to desist, and tried to appease the creature, alternately addressing it as grandfather, smoking over it, and begging its protection for their families when they were away, also asking that it would open the heart of the British Agent so that he would fill their canoe with rum. Next day a storm overtook them on Lake Huron, and they considered this to be due to the wrath of the insulted serpent, and made further pacificatory efforts, throwing dogs into the waves as sacrifices.

Bricknell has left it on record that the Indians of Carolina would not molest a snake in their path, but would pass by on the other side, because they thought that if they were to kill it

the serpent's relations would have their vengeance by slaying some of their people in return.

For the same reason the Semimole Indians spared the rattlesnake, lest if they destroyed its body the soul would incite its living kindred to revenge. Bartram relates how when they discovered they had one of these reptiles in their camp they begged an English traveller to rid them of the intruder. They were relieved when he had killed it, but tried to scratch the slayer that the spirit of the snake might be appeased.

Schoolcraft says that shortly after the Iowas commenced erecting their village beside the mouth of Wolf River, a youth came with the news that he had seen a rattlesnake on a hill not far away. At once a medicine-man went to the place indicated, and taking with him presents of tobacco and other things, he presented them to the snake, and had a long talk with the reptile. When he returned to his people he told them they might travel fearlessly as peace had been made with the snakes.

The serpent dance of the Moquis of Arizona seems to combine snake-worship and ancestor worship in the same rite, and is also expressive of clan totemism, as may be seen from the following native account of its origin obtained by J. G. Bourke.

"Many years ago the Moquis used to live on the other side of a high mountain beyond the San Juan River in Colorado. The chief thought he would take a trip down the big river, so he made himself a boat of a hollow cotton-wood log, took some provisions and started down. The stream carried him to the seashore, where he found some shells. When he arrived on the beach he saw a number of houses on the cliff, in which lived many men and women who had white under their eyes, and below that a white mark on their cheeks. That night he took one of the women as his wife. Shortly after his return the woman gave birth to snakes, and this was the origin of the snake family or clan which manages the dance. When she gave birth to these snakes they bit a number of the children of the Moquis. The Moquis then moved in a body to their present villages and they have this dance to conciliate the snakes so they won't bite the children."

The dancers belong to a secret society which is a sort of Serpent Brotherhood. The dresses worn by the Moquis whilst engaged on these dances consist of cotton kilts, painted a reddish yellow and ornamented by narrow bands of yellow and green and a black border. Around this is a fringe of small bells of lead or tin. A snake spotted with white is painted in the folds of the kilt. The dancers' arms and legs are bare, but on their backs they wear fox or coyote skins which fall to their heels.

The dance commences with a solemn march around a sacred stone, shaking rattles, chanting and waving snake-wands to which eagle feathers are fastened. Then a number of women attired in white and red mantles come forward carrying baskets of corn-meal which they scatter around. A procession of the head priest and a number of male performers, who follow him, two by two, march towards the sacred rock, carrying live snakes in their mouths and hands, and when they reach the further end of the space that has been made ready for the dance, they spit the serpents on to the ground, and turning towards the sacred rock they stamp their left foot twice, making a curious noise, half-grunt, half-wail. For almost an hour a mad dance of weird figures and wriggling snakes amongst whirling clouds of corn-meal is kept up, and then the snakes are liberated and the dancers return to their ordinary dress and employments.

The Zuñis also practise strange serpent-dances.

The legends of the Chippewa Indians, which Longfellow described as forming an Indian Edda, include the story of the conflict of Manobozho with the serpent, Meshekenabek. Manobozho, described by Mr. Leland as a "demi-devil," is by other writers spoken of as "the Great Teacher," and Longfellow has attributed many of his exploits to the Iroquois hero, Hiawatha.

In the following tradition which was related by Kah-ge-ga-gah-boowh, a chief of the Ojibway Indians, Manobozho figures as a beneficent power at war with the spirit of evil embodied in the serpent, who closely corresponds with the Egyptian Typhon and the Scandinavian Midgard. We may look upon him as the Indian Noah.

The story runs that Manobozho returning home one day after a long journey missed the young cousin who lived with him, and shouted his name in vain. Then as he searched the sand for footprints, he found the trail of Meshekenabek, the serpent, and knew that his cousin had been carried off by his sworn foe. Arming himself, he set forth in pursuit, and followed the track across river and mountain till he reached the Lake of Devils, now known as Manitou Lake, and there the trail ended in its waters. This was the stronghold of Meshekenabek, and it was full of evil spirits, his servants and companions, most of them in serpent form, and in the centre of them all could be seen the horrid form of his foe, coiling around his helpless cousin. The demon's head was red as blood, and his cruel eyes glowed like fire, whilst his body was armed by hard and glittering scales of every shade and colour. Manobozho, with angry indignation, vowed revenge, and commenced proceedings by ordering the clouds to depart from the sky, the winds to be still, and the

sun to shine with fierceness upon the lake, that thus Meshekenabek might be driven from its waters to the cool shade of the trees upon its banks. Then, seizing his bow and arrows, he changed himself into the broken stump of a dead tree, near the place where he thought his enemies would come to land. All happened as he had planned, and Meshekenabek, followed by hosts of evil spirits, came to the shore. They saw the withered trunk, and suspecting it might be a disguise of Manobozho, one of them twisted his tail around it and tried to tear it down, but it stood firm, and they passed on into the shade of the trees after their chief. Whilst they all slept, the watching Manobozho drew his bow, and sent an arrow to the heart of Meshekenabek. With a howl that shook the mountains, the monster awoke, and with its attendants plunged into the lake, where they vented their rage by tearing the hapless cousin into a thousand pieces. As soon as Meshekenabek realised that he was wounded unto death, his wrath became ten times more terrible, and he and his evil spirits rose to overwhelm Manobozho.

The waters of the lake responded to his passion, and rising from its dismal depths, rolled forward in great waves, roaring like thunder, and carrying rock and tree before it with resistless fury. The wounded form of the Great Serpent rode upon the foremost wave, his red eyes glaring horribly, and the hot breaths of his satellites hissing fiercely above the retreating Manobozho. As the latter fled he thought of his children, the Indians, and running by their villages, he shouted to them to flee to the mountains, for the Great Serpent was drowning the earth in his dying wrath, and sparing none. At last he himself took refuge on a high mountain beyond Lake Superior, and there he found many men and animals who had taken refuge from the flood that already covered even the highest hills. The waters still rose, and soon even the mountains, except that on which Manobozho stood, disappeared. Then he collected wood, and made a raft, and on this the human beings and animals all placed themselves. It was none too soon, for as they did so, the rising flood closed over the mountain that had been their refuge. For days they floated on the wild waters, and some died, and all grew sorrowful, and begged Manobozho to disperse the floods that they might live. But though the serpent-foe was now dead, yet Manobozho was powerless to renew the world unless he had some earth as a nucleus for the task. Hearing this, the beaver volunteered to dive to the bottom of the deep and obtain what was needed. He bravely attempted the task, but was drowned by the waters. The otter next tried, but shared the same fate. Then the musk-rat ventured on the quest, and

was gone so long that it was thought he too was dead, when suddenly he arose and feebly swam to the raft, too weak to speak. He died as soon as he got on board, but, clasped between his fingers, were some grains of earth. Manobozho took these and dried them in the sun, then rubbed them into fine powder in his hands and blew them over the flood. No sooner had he done so than it began to subside, and at last disappeared, leaving no trace but a thick sediment which was the dust Manobozho had blown from the raft. Meshekenabek's evil companions, now that their leader was dead, returned in fear to the depths of the Lake of Devils, and never more dared to come forth. And in gratitude to the beaver, the otter and the musk-rat, the Indians held them sacred, and as their brethren, and they never killed or hurt them, till the medicine of the white man made them forget their debt and become ungrateful.

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CHAPTER XXX

THE SOLAR SERPENT IN MEXICO

THE latest discoveries of the sites of the ancient Maya civilisation of Central America, where these "Greeks of the Western World" developed their culture more than two thousand years ago, have been brought about by a curious phenomena of present-day civilisation,—the American passion for chewing gum! The basic ingredient of this gum is chicle, and the Maya forests of Central America are its source. The chicle hunters and their mule teams have opened up tracks through the dense woodlands that now cover what were once the centres of Maya civilisation. The European War interrupted this work of discovery, and it was not resumed until 1922 or 1923. In March of 1924 the news was published of the discovery of a large unknown ruined city, covering several square miles, with pyramids, stone stairways, and majestic monuments, in the bush of the Central American Colony of British Honduras. "The modern theory which has been mainly worked out by two famous British archæologists, Dr. Gann and Mr. W. J. Perry," said the "Daily Mail" in a leading article of March 31st, "is that the Mayas appeared in Central America some time between 1000 B.C. and the Christian Era. It is further thought that they or their rulers derived their civilisation from ancient Egypt, and travelled slowly with it eastward, crossing the vast Pacific. The points of resemblance between the Maya civilisation and ancient Egypt are too numerous and too peculiar to be explained by some imaginary impulse in all prehistoric peoples to build pyramids or to develop on the same line."

Although we must admit that Egypt and Greece at their greatest reached a higher point of development, this scarcely lessens the wonder of that attained by these strange people whose origin is lost in antiquity. The Mayas actually appear to have possessed a more perfect system of chronology and astronomy than any other people of the ancient world, and to have arrived at the knowledge that the astronomical year does not contain an exact number of days.

The Spanish adventurers found in this district powerful kingdoms and immense populations; and to the accounts they were able to collect from oral testimony and tradition, and the evidence supplied by recent researches, and the vast ruins, and traces of extinct peoples, we owe all that is known of the inhabitants of America in the prehistoric ages.

Both Mexican and Peruvian legends seem to indicate that at some remote period, strangers from the Old World, in some unexplained manner, reached and settled upon American shores, and certain writers on ethnology have strongly supported this opinion.

Le Plongeon, who gave up a great part of his life to studying the language and antiquities of Mexico, states that "one third of this tongue (the Maya) is pure Greek." "Who," he asks, "brought the dialect of Homer to America? or who took to Greece that of the Mayas?"

The theory has often been advanced that the lost cradle of civilisation was not "somewhere" in Europe or Asia, but at some point midway between Europe and America, and this, according to the theory of Ignatius Donnelly, was the island continent of Atlantis, now submerged by the ocean. Donnelly's theory, upheld by a weighty mass of evidence, was that the civilisations of Europe, Mexico, Peru, Egypt, and the Mississippi Valley were all off-shoots or colonies of the parent Atlantean Island.

We do not propose to examine this theory here, but it has been remarked that practically every feature in the religion of the New World suggests that its origin must have been one with that of the religions of Egypt and Asia. There is the same deification of the sun, the same pyramidal monuments and the same worship of the serpent as emblem of the sun. Symington, writing in 1878, said, "That the Phœnicians crossed the Atlantic can be safely inferred from the many very striking resemblances between Mexican antiquities, and the wonderful architecture of Peru, which is equal to, and somewhat like, the Egyptian, and those of the Etruscans, linked by the colossal stone sculptures on Easter Island, all of which point to a common origin."

On this point indeed authorities seem to be in agreement. Spence Hardy writes: "The ancient edifices of Chi Chen, in Central America, bear a striking resemblance to the topes of India. The shape of one of these domes, its apparent size, the small tower on the summit, the trees growing on the sides, the appearance of masonry here and there, the style of the ornaments, the small doorway at the base, are all so exactly similar to what I had seen at Anarâdhapura that when my eye first fell upon

these remarkable ruins I supposed that they were presented in illustration of the dagobas of Ceylon."

Humboldt, and other authors, think that the Buddhist Bonzes crossed over from China, and turned the Wheel of the Law in Mexico and Central America. Humboldt remarks that "Thibet and Mexico offer some striking resemblances in their ecclesiastical hierarchy, in the number of their religious confraternities, in the extreme severities of their penances, and in the order of their religious processions."

Again, Saint-Patrice writes: "In Asia the elephant is the usual symbol of Buddha; in Yucatan it is also a frequent symbol, although it is not a native of America. The famous temple of Palengue in this country corresponds exactly in its chief details with the Buddhist temple of Boro-Budor in the isle of Java. The high-priest of Mixteca bore the title of *Tay Sacca*, the man of *Sakya*, *Tay* meaning 'men,' *sacca* having no meaning in their language, but merely employed to designate a monk. Some other significant terms are *Zaca*-than, 'the place of *Sakya*'; *Zaca*-tepec, 'the mountain of *Sakya*.' In China, Buddhists were often spoken of as 'Sons of *Sakya*,' *Sakamuni* being the name that was bestowed upon Buddha during his lifetime, his original name being *Gautama*." Nor is this all. Saint-Patrice further quotes Vining as saying, "The country known as Guatamala, in Central America, is named after Buddha, being a corruption of *Gautama*-than, the land of *Gautama*."

Mr. Davenport says that "there is no doubt whatsoever as to the early intercourse between China and Japan, on the one hand, and America on the other. In a museum at St. Petersburg there is a great collection of gold, silver, copper, and stone articles obtained from the tumuli of the ancient Moguls in Siberia, which are identical in design, workmanship, and materials to similar articles found under like circumstances in Peru, Mexico and California. The inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands are of unquestionable Mongolian origin. The armour belonging to Montezuma, which was obtained by Cortes, and is now in a museum at Madrid, is known to be of Asiatic manufacture, and is supposed to have belonged to one of Kublai Khan's generals. To anyone who has resided in China the resemblance of some of the Indian tribes to the Chinese is striking, while their dialect contains numbers of similar words, lists of which have been drawn up. For example, near Shanghai is a lake known as *T'ai hu* (Great Lake): in Nevada is a fine trout lake bearing the name of *Tahu*. The legend of *Quetzacoatl* has a decidedly Buddhistic ring." Our readers can judge for themselves of this last statement as we have included the legend in this chapter.

De Bourbourg, according to Madame Blavatsky, "hints that the chiefs of the name of *Votan*, the *Quetzco-Cohuatl* (*Quetzacoatl*), or serpent-deity of the Mexicans, are the descendants of Ham and Canaan. 'I am Hivim,' they say. 'Being a Hivim, I am of the great race of the Dragon (snake). I am a snake myself, for I am a Hivim.'"

Lord Kingsborough in 1831 published an enormous work to prove that the Mexicans were the Lost Tribes of Israel, and the Spanish historians Acosta and Torquemada were so greatly impressed by the similitude, and yet so utterly unbelieving in the theory of a Hebrew origin, that they were forced to regard the Mexicans as a parody of the Devil's in the New World on God's chosen people in the Old! Cortes shared these views, and reported that "the Devil had positively taught to the Mexicans the same things which God had taught to Christendom." The possibility of a common origin apparently never occurred to these dogmatists.

But however we arrive at it, the conclusion of a prehistoric connection between the people who created the Central American monuments and Asia, appears to be inescapable. The elephant has never been known in any part of America, yet as we have seen above, Saint-Patrice noted the use of the elephant as a symbol in Yucatan, and Professor Elliot Smith in a recently published book ("*Elephants and Ethnologists*") gives a woodcut of a sculpture at Copan of the profile of an elephant's head, and justly remarks that "the shape of the head, the form of the trunk, the position of the lower lip, the tusk, and under surface of the trunk, reveal its identity as an Indian elephant quite as definitely as the Indian turban of the rider and his elephant goad." He proceeds to point out that "The irrelevant addition of the spiral ornament, which is not justified by any natural feature of the elephant, but is an arbitrary convention found in certain ancient representations of the elephant in India and Eastern Asia," is a further proof of identity.

Professor Smith considers that the Cambodian and Central American temples have a relationship that cannot be explained away. The source of their common inspiration, he says, "can be located in Indo-China," and the period that "exerted the main influence was from the fifth to the twelfth centuries A.D."

As we have already seen, some authorities put the date of the first intercommunication between Asia and America very much earlier than this.

For instance a reference to the introduction into America of the Indian Ophiolatry seems to be intended in the legend told in the *Mahabhârata* that Arjuna, the companion and *chela* of

Krishna, is said to have descended into Patâlâ, the "antipodes," and there to have married Ulûpi, the daughter of the King of the Nâgas. Apparently Patâlâ is America, and the Nâgas were initiates. The above is said to have taken place some five thousand years ago.

The similarity of the names of the Indian Nâgas and the American Nargâl is certainly remarkable and is explained as follows by Brasseur de Bourbourg :

"The Nargal was the Chaldean and Assyrian chief of the Magi (Rab-Mag), and the Nâgal was the chief sorcerer of the Mexican Indians. Both derive their names from Nergal-Serezer, the Assyrian god, and the Hindu Nâgas. Both have the same faculties and the power to have an attendant *dæmon*, with whom they identify themselves completely. The Chaldean and Assyrian Nargal kept his *dæmon*, in the shape of some animal considered sacred, inside the temple ; the Indian Nâgal keeps his wherever he can—in the neighbouring lake, or wood, or in the house in the shape of some household animal."

The history of ancient Mexico is divided into two distinct and very different periods—that of the Toltecs, and that of the Aztecs. Both were Nahua nations and spoke a language which still survives. The Toltecs are said to have come from some undefined country in the north, which bears out the theory defined above, and to have brought to Anahuac its oldest and highest native civilisation. They appear to have been a people of gentle and peaceful instincts, which were reflected in their religion. But in the eleventh century they were nearly exterminated by a terrible famine and pestilence, and the survivors fled to the south. Their place was taken by the Aztecs, and the rule of these people was largely a reversion to savagery. They grafted upon the institutions of the Toltecs many cruel and terrible practices. An anomalous form of civilisation was thus produced which astonished the invading Spaniards by its mingled mildness and ferocity.

The Aztecs, or Mexicans, like their predecessors, came originally from the north, and for long lived a migratory life, but in 1325, after a series of adventures, they at last halted on the southwestern borders of the principal lake. There they saw, perched upon the stem of a prickly pear which grew from the crevice of a rock washed by the waves, a royal eagle of enormous size and great beauty, with a serpent in his talons, and his broad wings open to the rising sun. They hailed the auspicious omen announced by the oracle, as indicating where they were to build their future city, and here on piles sunk into the marshes they erected their huts of reeds and rushes, living on the fish of the

lake and such vegetables as they could raise in their floating gardens. They called the place Tenochtitlan, i.e. "a cactus on a stone," to commemorate its miraculous origin, though it was only known to Europeans by its other name of Mexico, derived from their war-god Mexitli. The eagle and the cactus form the arms of the modern Mexican republic, but the serpent does not take the prominent part we should expect from the position it occupied in the omen, and the high veneration in which it was held. This is the more remarkable because the Aztec sculptures and paintings and other relics of the aboriginal inhabitants of Mexico prove that almost everyone of their deities was symbolised by either a serpent or a dragon ; and these Mexican paintings, like the Egyptian and Persian hieroglyphs,



"EPOAC," A BURNING SERPENT.
From a chronological hieroglyphic of the Aztecs.

describe the sacred symbol of the uræon in almost all its variations. It seems in fact clear that in Mexico, as in Egypt and Persia, the serpent was a symbol of divinity as such, rather than a representative of any particular deity, or his attributes.

As in so many countries where Ophiolatry prevailed, the kings of the early races of Central America laid great stress on the alleged fact that they were descendants of serpents, the suggestion being that they were therefore of divine origin, and so had a special claim on the allegiance of their subjects.

The principal deity of the Aztecs, subordinate only to the Supreme Being, Teo-tl, was the impersonation of the active, creative energy, Tezcatlipoca, or Tonacatlcoatl, also known as Tonacateuctli. This god, like the Hindu Brahma, the Greek Phanes, and the Egyptian Phtha, was the "Creator of heaven and earth," "the God of Providence," "the Great Father," who is present in heaven, earth and hades, and rules the world. To typify his eternal youth and unfailing power he is depicted in paintings and on monuments as a young man, encircled by the sun, Tonatiuh, which was his celestial emblem and intended to denote that he was the intermediate father, or Demiurgic Creator. The sun as his visible representative, and the immediate source and sustainer of life, was honoured in the great and solemn

feast of Raimi, with its emblematical ceremonial, which referred to the sun as the reproductive and preserving power of nature. In Mexico, where the primitive religion reflected the fiercer nature of the people, the Raimaic ceremonies took a sanguinary form, and acknowledgment of the reproductive principle was accompanied by propitiation of its antagonistic principle, as we see in the orgies of Huitzliopochtli in his character of the Destroyer. According to Sahagim, Tezcatlipoca, in his character of the God of Hosts, was thus addressed by the Mexican High Priest: "We entreat that those who die in war may be received by thee, our Father the Sun, and our Mother the earth, for thou alone reignest."

We have not yet shown the connection of this deity with the serpent, but when we consult the etymology of his names this becomes at once apparent. It should further be borne in mind that the sun was symbolised by the serpent, even as the god was by the sun. Tonacateuctli signified Lord Sun, from *Tonàtiuh*, Sun, *catl*, person, and *teuctli*, master or lord. Again, Tonacatl-coatl, means the Serpent Sun, from *Tonàtiuh* and *catl* as above, and *coatl*, serpent. Or, if we adopt another etymology which seems to have been most generally accepted by early writers, we have Tonacateuctli, Lord of our Flesh, from *to*, our, *nacatl*, flesh or body, and *teuctli*, master or lord. We also have Tonacatl-coatl, Serpent of our Flesh, from *to*, our, *nacatl*, flesh, and *coatl*, serpent.

According to Mexican traditions of Creation, as recorded in the sacred "Popul Vuh," "Everything was without life, calm and silent; all was motionless and quiet. Void was the immensity of the heavens, the face of the earth did not manifest itself yet: only the tranquil sea was and the space of the heavens. All was immobility and silence in the darkness of the night; only the Creator, the Maker, the Dominator, the Serpent covered with feathers, they who engender, they who create, were on the waters as an ever-increasing light. They are surrounded by green and blue."

Here we may note another striking coincidence with Egyptian symbology. According both to the Mayas and Egyptians the Great Serpent was of a blue colour with yellow scales. Yellow or gold is the solar hue, and it is the priestly colour of Buddhism, and the royal colour in China.

But although the Supreme was thus personated in his creative energy by a serpent, he is also represented as at war with a serpent, and this warfare Humboldt explains by saying: "The serpent crushed by the great spirit Teotl when he takes the form of one of the subaltern deities is the genius of evil."

So that in Mexico also we have the eternal circle and find the serpent swallowing his tail! But we shall explain this further shortly.

The name of the primitive Aztec goddess, or Great Mother,—the wife of Tezcatlipoca, was Cihuacohuatl, Cioacoatl, or Tonacacihua. She was also known by other names, all referring to her attributes. The etymology of the first name is *Cihua*, woman or female, and *coatl*, serpent—Female Serpent, whilst Tonacacihua is Female Sun, from *Tonàtiuh*, Sun, *nacatl*, body or person, and *Cihua*, woman.

She was said to have given birth to twin children, one male and the other female, the progenitors of mankind. She was known to the Aztecs as "our lady and mother"; "the first goddess who brought forth"; "who bequeathed the sufferings of childbirth to women, as the tribute of death"; "by whom sin came into the world." Yet she was highly venerated in spite of the troubles she was said to have introduced. Twins, among the Mexicans, are called *cohuatl*, or *coatl*, which by the common people is corrupted into *coate*, in honour of this goddess. She is almost always represented as accompanied by a huge snake or feather-headed serpent (Tonacatl-coatl, "Serpent Sun"), and of course the monkish interpreters saw in her the Mexican representative of Eve. Veytia ("History of Antigua") remembers having seen a Toltec or Aztec map which pictured a garden containing a single tree, around which was coiled a serpent with a human face; but Prescott seems to consider his statement as of doubtful veracity, so I give it for what it is worth.

It is a regrettable fact, but the Spanish conquerors, in their zeal for their own faith, not only ruthlessly destroyed the monuments and records of the ancient Mexicans, but even went to the length of distorting such traditions as they recorded, so as to make them appear to support their own religion; and further, they invented horrible and repulsive features for the sacred rites of the aborigines, as justification for their own fiendish cruelty in their dealings with these people. The first Bishop of Mexico, the infamous Zumanaga, gave orders that all Mexican MSS. procurable were to be burnt. It will be seen therefore that it is extremely difficult to restore even the outlines of this ancient creed, though fortunately from time to time later discoverers have placed fresh evidence before us, which they have rescued, often in scattered fragments, from the general ruin.

In nearly all primitive religious systems there is not only a Great Father and Mother, and a Great Impersonal Unity from whom these proceed, but there is also a demigod, half-human,

half-divine, who comes for a while to earth to be the Great Teacher of mankind. He instructs them in religion, government, and the arts, and when his mission is accomplished, mysteriously disappears. This being, to whom divine honours are often paid after his withdrawal from the world, is sometimes the Son of the Sun, or of the Demiurgic Creator who presides as the head of the pantheon. He is born of a human mother, a virgin, who mysteriously conceives, and after giving birth to her semi-divine son, is usually elevated to the rank of a goddess. This Teacher not only reveals the will of the Great Father, but is the mediator between God and man.

We may find him as Buddha in India; as Zoroaster in Persia; Osiris in Egypt; Thoth in Phœnicia; Hermes or Cadmus in Greece, and Odin in Scandinavia. Many more instances will occur to the student. This demigod was as clearly recognised in the New World as in the Old, especially by the more advanced nations.

Among the Aztecs he bore the name of Quetzacoatl, the Feathered Serpent, and was regarded with the highest veneration as an incarnation of the "Serpent Sun," Tonacatlcoatl, and, as is indicated by his name, the feathered serpent was his recognised symbol. He was thus symbolised in accordance with a custom which prevailed in that country of connecting with a god or goddess the symbols of those deities from whom they have sprung, or to whom they maintain some relation. To this day the Hopi Indians of Mexico symbolise the sun as a serpent with its tail in its mouth. The cult of the feathered snake in Yucatan was certainly a form of sun-worship, the feathers possibly typifying the clouds which in these tropical countries surround the sun at noon.

The heavy rains which pour from them are accompanied by thunder and lightning, also symbols of the celestial serpent. The temples of this god were distinguished by being circular, another allusion to the sun. His festivals were the most gorgeous of the year, and to him the great temple of Cholula was dedicated.

The principal temple at Chichen-itza was also erected to the honour of this deity. It stands upon the summit of a pyramid 85 feet high, which is built in nine terraces with stairways on four sides. The front stairway has balustrades which are so formed as to represent a huge feathered serpent, symbolical of the Maya god Ku Kulcan (or Kukulcan) the founder and guardian of the city, and according to most authorities, identical with Quetzacoatl, who was his Aztec equivalent. From the temple is a drop of nearly 100 feet, at the base of which lies a dark and mysterious

whirlpool, the dwelling of the Aztec rain- and thunder-god, Tlaloc (known as Chac to the Maya people), and like Ku Kulcan, said to be one with Quetzacoatl. Here, in times of drought and famine, the awful rite of *Cenote* used to be celebrated. Priests led sacrificial maidens to the temple known as Epcoatl, or the serpent-pearl, to be anointed and consecrated, after which they were cast into the whirlpool. Most of them perished in its dismal waters, but the few who rose to the surface and survived the ordeal were dragged out and eagerly questioned as to what they had seen and heard below. After their visit to Tlaloc they were regarded as his sacred priestesses with power to interpret his oracles. Young children also were sacrificed to this deity at the water festival in the first month of the Mexican year. Some were butchered upon holy hills, whilst others were thrown into the whirlpool. The infants who were drowned were called Ep-coatl. Like Tlaloc's temple they were serpent-pearls.

This strange connection between the serpent and the pearl cannot have been suggested by any natural analogy, for none exists, but we find them linked together also in Chinese thought. Mere coincidence can scarcely account for this, so we are driven back on the supposition of a common origin. If we reject the Atlantean theory, we must suppose the imagery to have been introduced into America through North-eastern Asia by some of the early immigrants, perhaps when Europe was still in the Neolithic phase of culture,—though it may have been much later,—for between 300 B.C. and A.D. 700 when sailors had commenced to explore these vast oceans and were exploiting Polynesia, there is said to have been a more or less constant influx of Old World customs and ideas from India, China, Japan, Babylon, Egypt and Eastern Africa. Out of the extraordinary medley of religious ideas thus introduced, the Mexican priesthood built up the system we are considering upon foundations laid thousands of years before.

When we examine the meaning of the name Tlaloc it affords us a hint of the origin of its owner. It is usually translated "pulque of the earth," from *tlal* (*li*), earth, and *oc* (*tl*), pulque. Pulque is the fermented juice of the agave which is used as a beverage by the Mexicans and is the equivalent of the Indian drink *soma*. *Soma* is represented by a god in India, many of whose characteristics have been absorbed by the god Indra, and to Indra we must look as the original of Tlaloc, or at least as the source of many of his most marked attributes. Here, in America, we find him depicted with the head of the Indian elephant—having apparently got confounded with the Indian Ganesa when Indian ideas were introduced. Tlaloc is the elephant-headed

rain-god of Mexico, sometimes called the long-nosed god, and named by the cautious Schellas "god B."

There is a design in the Codex Troano, showing this deity pouring rain from a water jar (just as Indian and Babylonian gods are often depicted), trampling, while he does so, upon the head of a serpent who appears to be endeavouring to prevent the rain from reaching the earth. It is two against one, for a rain goddess has taken up her position on the reptile's tail and is also emptying a water-pot!

The drawing here shown is from the Codex Cortes, and my readers will recognise in it the Indian conception of Vritra, as the withholder of waters. This idea is depicted in an almost endless variety of forms in the various American codices, even as it was by the Vedic poets who sang of the exploits of Indra.



THE
SERPENT RAIN-CONTAINER.
From the Codex Cortes.

We have noticed that Tlaloc is thought to be one with Quetzacoatl, the feathered serpent and rain-god, yet in these designs we see him represented as the deadly foe of the serpent rain-god. Professor Elliot Smith has remarked on this strange confusion, and says that from the point of view of its Indian analogies it is "peculiarly significant, for the same phenomena are found in India. The snake and the dragon can be either the rain-god of the East or the enemy of the rain-god; either the dragon-slayer or the evil dragon who has to be slain. The Indian word *Nāga*, which is applied to the beneficent god or king identified with the cobra, can

also mean 'elephant,' and this double significance probably played a part in the confusion of deities in America. In the Dresden Codex the elephant-headed god is represented in one place grasping a serpent, in another issuing from a serpent's mouth, and again as an actual serpent. Turning next to the attributes of these American gods we find that they reproduce with amazing precision those of Indra. Not only were they the divinities who controlled rain, thunder, lightning and vegetation, but they also carried axes and thunderbolts like their homologues in the Old World. Like Indra, Tlaloc was intimately associated with the East and with the tops of mountains, where he has a

special heaven, reserved for warriors who fell in battle and women who died in childbirth."

Returning to our examination of the imposing ruins at Chichen-itza, the following description of that known as the "Caracol" is given by Stephens:

"It is circular in form and is known by the name of the Caracol, or Winding Staircase, on account of its interior arrangements. It stands on the upper of two terraces. . . . A grand staircase forty-five feet wide, and containing twenty steps, rises to the platform of this terrace. On each side of the staircase, forming a sort of balustrade, rest the entwined bodies of two gigantic serpents, three feet wide, portions of which are still in place; and amongst the ruins of the staircase a gigantic head, which had terminated at one side the foot of the steps."

Du Paix, when exploring in Mexico, discovered many such examples of sculptured serpents. He gives the following description of one which was found near the ancient city of Chochimilco carved from a block of porphyry:

"Its long body is gracefully entwined, leaving its head and tail free. There is something showy in the execution of the figure. Its head is elevated and curiously ornamented, its open mouth exhibits two long and pointed fangs, its tongue (which is unusually long) is cloven at the extremity like an anchor, its body is fancifully scaled, and its tail (covered with circles) ends with three rattles."

He also tells us of a serpent carved in red porphyry which he found at Tepeyaca. It was large in size, and represented in an attitude of repose, coiled upon itself in spiral circles, whilst the entire surface of its body was ornamented with long, broad feathers, and its tail ended in four rattles. Du Paix describes it as "the monarch or giant of its species," and says that in pagan times it was "a deity greatly esteemed under the name of Quetzacoatl, or Feathered Serpent." He adds that it is extremely well sculptured, and there still are marks of its having been once painted with vermilion.

The story of Quetzacoatl's life, compiled from various sources, is as follows: The god of the "Milky Way,"—i.e. of Heaven—the Great Father of gods and men sent a message to a virgin of Tulan telling her that the gods had willed that she should bear a son without knowing any man. This she did, and the son was Quetzacoatl. He was tall and of fair complexion with an open forehead, large eyes, long hair, and a thick flowing beard. He became the high priest of Tulan and established wise laws, regulated the calendar, and instructed the people in the use of metals and the arts of agriculture. He hated cruelty and war,

strove to abolish bloody sacrifices, and lived a most exemplary life. During his benign governance the greatest happiness prevailed. His reign was the golden age of Anahuac. Under his direction the earth was covered with luscious fruits and gorgeous flowers which needed no cultivation; it was not necessary to dye cotton, for it grew of all colours; there were vast numbers of beautiful and sweetly singing birds, and an ear of Indian corn was as much as a single man could carry.

From some unexplained cause Quetzacoatl incurred the anger of one of the principal gods, and had to leave the country. When he arrived on the shores of the Mexican Gulf he bade farewell to his disciples, promising that he and his descendants would visit them again on some future date, and then, entering his wizard skiff made of serpents' skins, he embarked on the vast ocean for the fabled country of Tlapallan. After his disappearance his countrymen deified him and erected temples to his honour. They confidently expected his return, and this paved the way for the entry of the Spaniards, whose light skins and long dark hair and beards were regarded as evidences of their affinity with the long-looked-for divinity, and who were destined so cruelly to shatter their hopes. But it would seem that the temple of the benevolent Quetzacoatl when the Spaniards arrived there, was not in keeping with his former reputation, and it is evident that a great deterioration of ideals had taken place since the days when fruits, flowers, and perfumes were regarded as the proper offerings to this god.

Prescott has given us the following vivid description of the horrors found in this temple, but, as we have already noted, the invaders' accounts were extremely biased, and must be received with considerable reserve:

"Among the *teocallis* in the enclosure was one consecrated to Quetzacoatl, circular in its form, and having an entrance in imitation of a dragon's mouth, bristling with sharp fangs and dropping with blood. As the Spaniards cast a furtive glance into the throat of this horrible monster, they saw collected there implements of sacrifice, and other abominations of fearful import. Their bold hearts shuddered at the spectacle, and they designated the place, not inaptly, as the 'Hell.'"

At the head of thirteen lesser gods, and inferior only to Tezcatlipoca, was Huitzliopochtli, the god of war, and patron deity of the nation. Among these Indian tribes, especially in the northern continent, the serpent was regarded as being the symbol of wisdom and magic. Success in war is of course dependent on these two things, so we feel no surprise when we find that the image of Huitzliopochtli was surrounded by

serpents and rested on serpent-shaped supporters. His sceptre consisted of a single snake, and his great drum was made of serpent-skin.

His mother was a priestess of the great Tezcatlipoca, and her name is variously given as Coatlantona (Robe of Serpents), Coatlcué (Serpent of the temple) or Coatleyue (Serpent Woman). She was exceedingly devout, and one day, whilst she was walking in the temple, she saw descending through the air a wonderful ball made of many coloured feathers. She reverently placed this in her girdle and at once became pregnant, and later brought forth the divine Huitzliopochtli, fully armed, holding in one hand a spear, in the other a shield, and adorned with a crest of green feathers upon his head.

It is possible that this serpent mother of Huitzliopochtli was really an impersonation of the great serpent goddess Cihuacohuatl, the wife of Tezcatlipoca, the serpent sire of Quetzacoatl; but in any case it is easy to see that there is a more intimate connection between the various deities of the Mexican pantheon than at first sight would appear from the scanty scraps of their mythology which have reached us.

We must here note how closely the serpent and the bird are connected in American, as in Old World mythology. The story of the conception and birth of Huitzliopochtli affords a striking instance of this, and his name is a further confirmation, for it means "Humming-bird to the left," and this god always wore the feathers of the humming-bird on his left leg.

We have already noted the name of the sun-god, Quetzacoatl, signifies "Feathered Serpent," and that in mythological pictures the Creator of the World was represented as a feather-headed snake, thus combining two solar symbols in a single form. Nor are these the only instances; if we consider the etymology of his other name, Ku Kulcan, it points, though more doubtfully, in the same direction. *Ku* in the Mayan language means God, and *can* serpent. *Kul* is obscure, but may be a corruption of *Kukum*, feather. We then have *Kukumcan* or *Kukulcan*, the Feathered Serpent-God.

This curious connection of the serpent with the bird, must not be overlooked in considering the many symbols in which the serpent is represented carrying or enfolding the egg of the bird. Symbolism so much insisted on cannot be meaningless, and something more than the usual interpretation of the serpent and egg, as representing respectively activity and passivity, is evidently at once indicated and concealed.

We have already seen that the temple of the benign and generous Quetzacoatl was said to be a hell of bloody horror, so we shall

not be surprised when we are told that the sacred shrines of the war-god were also infernos of terrors.

The temples of this deity were the most stately and august of the public edifices, but his altars are said to have reeked with the blood of human hecatombs in every city of the empire.

According to Prescott's account the great *teocalli* (House of God) or cathedral where Huitzliopochtli was enthroned and worshipped, stood in the midst of a vast area encompassed by a wall of stone and lime, about 8 feet high, ornamented on the outer side by figures of serpents raised in high relief, which gave it the name of the *coatepanlli*, or "wall of serpents."

Prescott remarks that the "emblem was a common one in the sacred sculpture of Anahuac, as well as of Egypt," and other temples of Mexico seem to have had their *coatepanlli*. Within the *teocalli* "was a large block of jasper, the peculiar shape of which showed it was the stone on which the bodies of the unhappy victims were stretched for sacrifice. Its convex surface, by raising the breast, enabled the priest to perform his diabolical task more easily, of removing the heart. At the other end of the area were two towers, or sanctuaries, consisting of three stories, the lower one of stone and stucco, the two upper of wood elaborately carved. In the lower division stood the images of their gods. . . . Before each sanctuary stood an altar with that undying fire upon it, the extinction of which boded as much evil to the empire as that of the vestal flame would have done in ancient Rome. Here, also, was the huge cylindrical drum made of serpents' skins, and struck only on extraordinary occasions, when it sent forth a melancholy sound that might be heard for miles,—a sound of woe in after time to the Spaniards. . . .

"Before the altar in this sanctuary stood the colossal image of Huitzliopochtli, the tutelary deity and war-god of the Aztecs. His countenance was distorted into hideous lineaments of symbolical import. In his right hand he wielded a bow, and in his left a bunch of golden arrows, which a mystic legend had connected with the victories of his people. The huge folds of a serpent, consisting of pearls and precious stones, were coiled round his waist. On his left foot were the delicate feathers of the humming-bird, which singularly enough gave its name to the dread deity. The most conspicuous ornament was a chain of gold and silver hearts alternate, suspended round his neck, emblematical of the sacrifice in which he most delighted. A more unequivocal evidence of this was afforded by three human hearts smoking and almost palpitating, as if recently torn from the victims, and now lying on the altar before him! The adjoining sanctuary

was dedicated to a milder deity; this was Tezcatlipoca, next in honour to that invisible Being, the Supreme God, who was represented by no image and confined by no temple. . . . But the homage to this god was not always of a more refined or merciful character than that paid to his carnivorous brother; for five bleeding hearts were also seen in a golden platter on his altar. The walls of both these chapels were stained with human gore. 'The stench was more intolerable,' says Diaz, 'than that of the slaughter-houses in Castile!' And the frantic forms of the priests with their dark robes clotted with human blood, as they flitted to and fro, seemed to the Spaniards to be those of the very ministers of Satan!"

Cortes wished to be allowed to erect the cross and the images of the Virgin and her Son in this temple, and asserted that the false gods of the Mexicans would soon shrink before his deities. But "Montezuma was greatly shocked at this sacrilegious address. 'These are the gods,' he answered, 'who have led the Aztecs on to victory since they were a nation, and who send the seed-time and harvest in their seasons. Had I thought you would have offered them this outrage, I would not have admitted you into their presence.'" Cortes apologised and withdrew, leaving Montezuma to expiate, if possible, the crime of exposing the shrines of his gods to such profanation by strangers.

Gomez has also described the statue of Huitzliopochtli in vivid colours: "His body," he says, "was beset with pearls, precious stones and gold, and for collars and chains around his neck, ten hearts of men made of gold. It had also a counterfeit vizard, with eyes of glass, and in its neck, death painted, all of which things had their considerations and meanings."

To this god it was that the bloodiest sacrifices of Mexico were made. His temples were the most splendid and imposing; in every city of the empire his altars were drenched with human blood, and to supply them with sacrificial victims the emperors made war on the surrounding peoples, and after conquest levied a certain number of men, women and children by way of indemnity. The victims were borne in triumphal processions, with the sound of music, to the summit of the great pyramidal temples, where the priests bound them to the sacrificial stone, and in sight of the crowds of worshippers slashed open the breast and tore from it the bleeding heart, which he held up as offering before the image of the god, while the captor carried off the carcase to serve as a feast.

In his character of war-god, Huitzliopochtli was also the god of lightning, which is the spear of the gods, and their chief weapon of war. As the god of lightning he was necessarily connected

with the summer, which is the season of both lightning and sunshine, and therefore, to a certain extent, he had power over the crops and fruits. And here his connection with the humming-bird becomes understandable, for this bird is the harbinger of summer. The ancient Mexican race of the Nahuatl believed that Huitzliopochtli controlled the weather, and they placed an image of the rain-god, Tlaloc, near him, so that he might compel the rain-maker, if necessary, to do the right thing by the crops!

The rain-god was also closely associated with the lightning, and consequently with its symbol, the snake, and in some of his images he is shown holding a serpent of gold to typify his power over the lightning. In native manuscripts he is often portrayed as having over his lips an angular blue stripe curved downward and rolled up at the ends. This is supposed to have been originally suggested by the coils of two snakes, their mouths with long fangs in the upper jaw meeting in the centre of the upper lip. The snake is universally symbolical, not only of rain but of water, no doubt because its sinuous curving motion suggested the wavelets rippling over the lakes.

Torquemada says that the images of Huitzliopochtli of Mexico, Quetzacoatl, and Tlaloc were each represented by a golden serpent, bearing different symbolical sacrificial allusions. He further assures us that serpents were often used in the symbolical sacrificial ceremonies of the Mexicans, and gives us the following example: "Among the many sacrifices which these Indians made, there was one which they performed in honour of the mountains, by forming serpents out of wood or of the roots of the trees, to which they affixed serpents' heads, and also dolls of the same, which they called *Ecatotowin*, which figures of serpents and fictitious children they covered with dough, named by them *Tzoalli*, composed of the seeds of *Bledos*, and placed them on supports of wood, carved in the representation of hills or mountains, on the top of which they fixed them. This was the kind of offering they made to mountains and high hills."

The wife of Huitzliopochtli was named suggestively *Teoyaomi-qui*, from *Teo*, sacred, *Yaoyotl*, war, and *Miqui*, to kill. Like Kali, the consort of Siva, her image was adorned with the emblems of life and death. She was represented with full maternal breasts, even as Kali in her character of mother, but she was literally enveloped in serpents, and decorated not only with shells and feathers, but the teeth and claws of a tiger. Her necklace was formed of six severed hands. The girdle that encircled her waist had skulls dependent from it.

One of her statues stands in the city of Mexico, carved from a block of basalt, 9 feet in height and 5½ feet in breadth. As can be

imagined it is a most repulsive figure, at least to European eyes accustomed to view the outer form of things without reference to their inner meaning. A cast of it was brought to England in 1823 by Bullock, and is described by him as a "monstrous idol, before which thousands of human victims were annually sacrificed on the altar. . . . Its form is partly human, and the rest composed of rattlesnakes and the tiger. The head, enormously wide, seems that of two rattlesnakes united, the fangs hanging out of the mouth, on which the still palpitating hearts of the unfortunate victims were rubbed as an act of the most acceptable oblation. The body is that of a deformed human frame, and the place of arms supplied by the heads of rattlesnakes placed on square plinths and united by fringed ornaments. Round the waist is a girdle, which was originally covered with gold, and beneath this, reaching nearly to the ground and partly covering its deformed cloven feet, a drapery entirely composed of wreathed rattlesnakes which the nations call *cohuatlucuye*, or garments of serpents, on each side of which is a winged termination of the feathers of the vulture. Between the feet, descending from the body, another wreathed serpent rested its head on the ground, and the whole composition of this deity is strictly appropriate to the infernal purpose for which it was used, and with which the personal ornaments too well accord. From the neck, spreading over its deformed breast, is a necklace composed of human hands, hearts, and skulls—fit emblems of the sanguinary rites daily performed in its honour."

The rattlesnake was the species held as specially sacred in Mexico, and many representations of this and other serpents have been discovered by explorers among the ruins of its ancient civilisation. One of the finest examples of these images, according to Bullock's account, was found in a deserted portion of the cloister of the Dominican convent, opposite to the palace of the Inquisition. It represented an enormous serpent, coiled, but partially erect, with its jaws extended in the act of devouring an elegantly dressed female, shown crushed and struggling.

Bernal Diaz, the companion of Cortes and historian of the conquest of Mexico, tells us that living rattlesnakes were preserved as sacred in the great temple of Mexico. He says: "Moreover, in that accursed house they kept vipers and venomous snakes, who had something at their tails which sounded like morris bells, and these are the worst of vipers. They were kept in cradles and barrels, and in earthen vessels, upon feathers, and there they laid their eggs and nursed up their snakelings, and they were fed with the bodies of the sacrificed, and with dogs' meat."

Stephens describes one of the ancient pyramids of America as

being a quadrangular stone building, 66 feet on each side at the base and rising, in its present condition to the height of 33 feet. It "is called *El Sacrificatorio*, or 'The place of sacrifice.' On three sides there is a range of steps in the middle—on the side facing the west there are no steps, but the surface is smooth, and covered with stucco, grey from long exposure. By breaking a little at the corners we saw that there were different layers of stucco, doubtless put on at different times, and all had been ornamented with painted figures. In one place we made out part of the body of a leopard, well drawn and coloured." The top of the pyramid was used as a sacrificial altar, and from time to time a human victim was offered. "The barbarous ministers carried up the victim and extended him upon the altar. Four priests held the legs and arms, and another kept his head firm with a wooden instrument made in the form of a coiled serpent." The chief priest then opened the breast with a flint knife and tore out the heart which, while yet palpitating, he offered to the sun, "and then threw it at the feet of the idol."

The same author tells us that among the ruins at Uxmal is a large and imposing building called Casa de la Monjas, or House of the Nuns. It is placed upon a high terrace and approached by a flight of steps. Its form is quadrangular and encloses a large courtyard. "Passing through the arched gateway," he says, "we enter this noble courtyard, with four great façades looking down upon it, each ornamented from one end to the other with the richest and most elaborate carving known in the art of the builders. The façade on the left is most richly ornamented, but is much ruined. It is 160 feet long and is distinguished by two colossal serpents entwined, running through and compassing nearly all the ornaments throughout its entire length. At the north end where the façade is most entire, the tail of one serpent is held up nearly over the head of the other, and has an ornament upon it like a turban with a plume of feathers. There are marks upon the extremity of the tail, probably intended to represent the rattlesnake, with which the country abounds. The lower serpent has its monstrous jaws wide open, and within there is a human head, the face of which is distinctly visible in the stone. The head and tail of the two serpents at the south end of the façade are said to have corresponded with those of the north, and when the whole was entire, in 1836, the serpents were seen encircling every ornament of the building. The bodies of the serpents are covered with feathers. Its ruins present a lively idea of the large and many well-constructed buildings of lime and stone, which Bernal Diaz saw at Campeachy, with figures of serpents and idols painted on their walls."

Pietro Martire thus described the idol found by the Spaniards at Campeachy :

"Our men were conducted to a broad cross-way, standing on the side of the town. Here they were shown a square stage or pulpit four steps high, partly of clammy bitumen, and partly of small stones, whereto the image of a man cut in marble was joined, two four-footed unknown beasts fastening upon him, which, like mad dogges, seemed as they would tear out his entrails. By this image stood a serpent besmeared all with gore blood devouring a marble lion, which serpent, compacted of bitumen and small stones incorporated together, was seven-and-fortie feet in length, and as thicke as a greate ox. Next unto it were three rafters or stakes fastened to the ground, which three others crossed, under-propped with stones, in which place they punish malefactors condemned ; for proof whereof they saw innumerable broken arrowes, all bloudie, scattered on the ground, and the bones of the dead cast into an inclosed court neere unto it."

A group of deities called Centeotl presided over the agriculture of ancient Mexico, each of them personifying some attribute of the maize plant. But the chief goddess of the maize was Chicomecohuatl (Seven-serpent), her name alluding to the fertilising power of water, which, as we have seen, was here as elsewhere symbolised as a serpent. Her image, which is now in the National Museum at Mexico, is girdled with snakes.

According to Mr. Hamel, the sacred dances of the Hopi Indians seem to be expressive of clan totemism rather than of Ophiolatry. Several of the figures in the Maya codices represent human beings, who are evidently personifying deities since they wear the symbolic masks of animal gods. In the Codex Cortesianus one of the human figures wears the mask of a snake ; but whilst the Hopi usually contents himself by carrying the head of the creature he personifies, the Mexican dresses in the skin. The head-dress is often most elaborate, the animal's head being shown with gaping mouth, red lips dotted with black, and a lolling, red tongue. The heads are generally painted green, sometimes they are white or brown, but never red or yellow. According to Hopi folk-tales the waters of the world come from the breasts of a great snake, and sometimes a female figure, perhaps personifying Chicomecohuatl, with serpent as head-dress is symbolised with water flowing from her breasts. Another symbolical figure wears a mask of a human head, but has a snake's body with curious markings and represents the feathered serpent (or sun) ceremonially.

Mr. Hamel tells us that "the following strange ceremony is practised by the Mexicans and is not unlike the Hopi snake-dance.

It is celebrated once in every eight years about October or November. After fasting for some days, says one who has seen the dance, the natives disguised themselves in all manner of animal and bird dresses, and came up dancing to the chosen spot where the rain-god had been placed before a pool of water in which live snakes and frogs were swimming. The Macateca, which may be rendered 'those from Deerland,' then seized upon the wriggling reptiles with the mouth, never touching them with the hand, and attempted to swallow them alive, dancing all the time. He who managed to swallow the first snake cried out 'papa, papa,' and danced about the temple. After two days of these extraordinary exertions a procession was formed and all marched slowly four times round the temple. Then came a feast of fruit and pastry which had been placed ready in baskets for the purpose, and the ceremonial was ended. The old men and women present, knowing that there would be no repetition of the dance for eight years, wept bitterly at the close of the performance."

It appears that the Mexicans used also to keep live serpents in their houses. Deane says that in Couliacan, "Nunnez de Gusman found in the year 1531, the houses filled with thousands of serpents mingled together," to which the inhabitants showed great reverence.

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CHAPTER XXXI

THE AMPHISBÆNA

THE name Amphisbæna signifies an animal that can walk in both directions, and was bestowed by naturalists on a genus of serpent-like, limbless lizards distinguished by their bodies being nearly the same uniform thickness from head to tail; and their heads being so small, and their tails so thick and short that it is difficult at first sight to distinguish one from the other.

These facts, united with the reptile's habit of proceeding either backwards or forwards, as suits its purpose, have given rise to the popular belief throughout Brazil and other parts of South America, the native countries of this genus, that it possesses two heads, one at each extremity, and that it is impossible to destroy the animal by merely cutting it in two, since in case of such an accident, the two heads mutually seek each other, and soon reunite their severed bodies as if nothing had happened.

The flesh of this remarkable reptile, if dried and then reduced to a fine powder, was confidently administered as a sovereign and infallible remedy in all cases of dislocation and broken bones; it being very naturally assumed that a creature gifted with the power of healing an entire division of its own body should at least be able to cure a simple fracture in another's case. It is only about two hundred years ago that similar remedies were in use in the most advanced European nations, and learned doctors administered the bezoar or rhinoceros horn with as much confidence as the simple Brazilian does the powdered flesh of the amphisbæna, whilst in older days we have Pliny's word for it that "the dead" amphisbæna was worn as a remedy for rheumatism (XXX, 36), and the living as a safeguard in pregnancy (XXX, 43).

Popular opinion further supposes this reptile to be blind, and

as the eyes are nearly imperceptible, the error is understandable. Probably the antipathy felt by most people to serpents in general is responsible for the belief that the amphisbæna is venomous, but there is not the smallest foundation for this in reality, as it is quite without fangs, and its teeth are too small, and in other ways incapable of inflicting a wound.

Poets, however, are not always trustworthy guides to Natural History, and, if we turn over their pages, we shall find that the good fame of our lizard has suffered at their hands not a little.

Milton thus refers to it :

"Complicated monsters head and tail,
Scorpion, and asp, and amphisbæna dire,
Cerastes horn'd, hydrus, and elops drear,
And dipas." ("Paradise Lost," X, 524.)

Surely a formidable collection !

Tennyson speaks of

"Two vipers of one breed—an amphisbæna,
Each end a sting." ("Queen Mary," III, 4.)

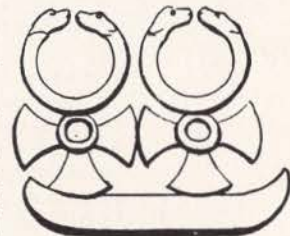
Shelley views the monster in a favourable light, and represents the Spirit of the Hour as saying :

"Yoked to it [my car] by an amphisbenic snake
The likeness of those winged steeds will mock
The light from which they find repose." ("Prometheus," III, 4.)

Perhaps the "cerastes horned" referred to above by Milton was the *Tisiphone Shawii*, or Horn Snake, about which some marvellous stories used to be current in olden days connecting it with the amphisbæna. That somewhat credulous naturalist, Lawson,

writing in 1714, says: "Of the horn-snakes I never saw but two that I remember. They are like the rattle-snake in colour, but rather lighter. They hiss exactly like a goose when anything approaches them. They strike at their enemy with their tail, and kill whatsoever they wound with it, which is armed at the end with a horny substance, like a cock's spur. This is their weapon.

I have heard it credibly reported by those who said they were eyewitnesses, that a small locust tree, about the thickness of a man's arm, being struck by one of these snakes at ten o'clock in the morning, then verdant and flourishing, at four in the



AMPHISBÆNIC ANKH.
Brought as tribute by subject
people to Egypt.

afternoon was dead, and the leaves red and withered. Doubtless, be it how it will, they are very venomous. I do not think the Indians pretend to cure their wound."

Although Lawson repeats this story we may gather from the last sentence but one that he had his doubts as to its authenticity.

Catesby, writing later of the Water Viper, says :

"The tail of this viper is small towards the end and terminates in a blunt horny point about half an inch long. This harmless



RING FOUND AT
POMPEII.

Many similar were
discovered.

little point hath given a dreadful character to its owner, attributing to him another instrument of destruction besides that he had before; imposing a belief on the credulous, that he is the terrible Horn Snake, armed with death at both ends, though in reality of equal truth with that of the two-headed amphispæna; yet we are told that this fatal horn, by a jerk of the tail, not only mortally wounds men and other animals, but if by chance struck into a young tree, whose bark is more easily penetrable than in

an old one, the tree instantly withers, turns black, and dies."

The Amphispæna is also described by Lucan as haunting the deserts of Libya (9, V. 719).

Whittier has a humorous poem on "The Double-headed Snake of Newbury" which he prefaces with the following quotation :

"Concerning ye Amphispæna, as soon as I received your commands I made diligent inquiry; . . . he assured me it had really two heads, one at each end; two mouths, two stings or tongues.—Rev. Christopher Toppan to Cotton Mather."

Our sceptical poet, however, makes fun of the two-headed snake!

"Far away in the twilight time
Of every people in every clime,
Dragons and griffins and monsters dire,
Born of water, and air, and fire
Or nursed, like the Python, in the mud
And ooze of the old Deucalion flood,
Crawl and wriggle and foam with rage,
Through dusk tradition and ballad age.
So from the childhood of Newbury town
And its time of fable the tale comes down
Of a terror which haunted bush and brake,
The Amphispæna, the Double Snake!

Whether he lurked in the old town fen
Or the grey earth-flax of the Devil's Den,

Or swam in the wooded Artichoke,
Or coiled by the Northman's Written Rock,
Nothing on record is left to show;
Only the fact that he lived we know,
And left the cast of a double head
In the scaly mask which he yearly shed.
For he carried a head where his tail should be,
And the two, of course, could never agree,
But wriggled about with main and might,
Now to the left and now to the right;
Pulling and twisting this way and that,
Neither knew what the other was at."

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CHAPTER XXXII

THE BASILISK

THE basilisk, or cockatrice, is regarded by some writers as identical with the "royal serpent" of Egypt which was worn on the head-dress of kings to symbolise their divinely appointed dominion. Hence the term *basilica*, a royal palace, Gr. *basilike*, from *basileus*, a king. The form of these buildings was adopted for Christian churches because of these sacred associations.

The Egyptians had held basilisks in such honour that they made golden images of them and consecrated and enshrined these in the temples of their gods. But though Christianity adopted the name and form of the basilica for her churches, she apparently soon forgot the derivation of the term; and in mediæval days the position of the basilisk had undergone such a revolution in religious thought, that it was used to symbolise sin generally, and the special attribute of St. Vitus in particular!

The reason of this degradation must be sought in the dualism of orthodox Christianity, which did not recognise God as All.

Death and destruction, that monotheists had considered to be but the darker aspects of the All-embracing One, or Encircled Serpent, the dualists regarded as the attributes of a second, and opposing power. The basilisk, hitherto a warning symbol of the awful unapproachableness of Deity, was now the emblem of sin, and as such, was to be trodden under foot and destroyed by Christian saints.

And this not only figuratively but literally. In those days when possession by the devil was an undisputed doctrine, no doubt these imaginary reptiles were thought of as the habitation of demons.

The saints seem to have realised their newly imposed responsibilities as basilisk destroyers, for we read how the abbot, St. John, by prayer slew a basilisk which lay hidden in the bottom of a deep well and reduced the monks of the monastery he had founded to the greatest distress for want of water; and Leo IV, by a similar method, is said to have rescued Rome from a basilisk

whose poisonous breath had brought a terrible pestilence upon the inhabitants of his pontificate.

The basilisk is mentioned five times in the Bible by its name of cockatrice, once translated adder, though in the old quarto edition, imprinted at London by Robert Barker, printer to the King's most excellent Majesty, 1615, it is rendered as cockatrice.

The passage referred to is Proverbs xxiii. 31-32, now printed: "Look not upon the wine when it is red. . . . At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder" (margin, cockatrice). But in the older version translated, "In the end thereof, it will bite like a serpent and hurt like a cockatrice."

Isaiah three times speaks of the cockatrice: "The weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den," he promises (xi. 8). Again, threatening, he says: "Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent" (xiv. 29).

Later, speaking of the wicked, he tells us that "they hatch cockatrice eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper" (lix. 5). In the old quarto this is rendered: "They hatch cockatrice egges, and weave the spider's webbe: he that eateth of their egges dieth, and that which is trod upon breaketh out into a serpent." This the commentator explains, "Whatsoever cometh from them is poison and bringeth death. They are profitable to no purpose."

Jeremiah also threatens: "For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord" (viii. 17). The old quarto only varies from the above in having the word "sting" instead of bite. The commentator explains the passage as follows: "God threateneth to send the Babylonians among them who shall utterly destroy them in such sorte as by no means they shall escape."

Most ancient writers have recorded their belief in the actual existence of the basilisk, or regulus, or little king of serpents, and they have handed down for our instruction drawings and minute descriptions of this deadly monster, and hair-raising tales of their adventures in connection with it. It is described as about a foot long, with a black and yellow skin and fiery red eyes.

The basilisks obtained their title of kings of serpents, because all other dragons and snakes to preserve themselves from being struck dead, or burnt up alive, or losing the flesh from off their bones, behaved like good courtiers, and the moment they heard the distant hiss of their monarch, although they might be enjoying a banquet of the most delicate and delicious fare, would turn

tail in a *sauve qui peut* style, and leave the feast for the sole enjoyment of their royal master.

There were three if not four varieties of this reptile, with differing, but equally deadly methods of destruction. They inhabited the deserts of Africa, and indeed could only inhabit a desert since they made one wherever they approached.

One species effected this by scorching and burning all in their neighbourhood. Every living thing withered and died before them, whether it were animal or vegetable. They were like a breathing upas.

A second kind of basilisk might be described as a sort of wandering Medusa's heads, for their glance, like Vathek's eye, caused such horror to seize him upon whom it fell, that he instantly died; though some writers said that to enable it to exercise this power, it must perceive the object of its wrath before being perceived by it.

Pliny, who mentions the basilisk more than once in his writings, gravely says:

"There is not one that looketh upon his eyes but he dieth presently. The like property has the basilisk. . . . The Cyrenaic province produces him of the greatness of not more than twelve fingers, and remarkable for a white spot like a diadem, on his head. He drives away all serpents by his hissing, nor does he impel his body like the rest by a multiplied flexion, but advances lofty and upright (*celcus et erectus in medio*). He kills the shrubs, not only by contact, but by breathing on them, scorches up the green herb, and splits the rocks: such power of evil is there in him." It was formerly believed that if killed by a spear from on horseback, the power of the poison conducted through the weapon killed not only the rider, but the horse also ("Hist. Nat.," Book VIII, c. 21, and Book XXIX, c. 4).

Claudius Ælian, the Roman naturalist and historian, confirms this description, for he says of this nightmare reptile that its poison is so penetrating as to kill the largest serpents by its vapour only; and that it will kill a man by merely biting the end of his stick!

Dioscorides, Galen, Solinus, Ælian and others, are eloquent upon basilisks, as are Avicenna, Grevinus, Scaliger and many early writers.

And in more modern times Trevisa described the basilisk as "The king of serpents that with smile and sight slayeth beasts." With his description we may compare the words of Richard in "The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke."

"Tut, I can smile, and murder when I smile."

This species of basilisk was a favourite figure with our English poets. Spenser thus refers to it:

"Like as the Basiliske of serpent's seede,
From powrefull eyes close venim doth convey
Into the looker's hart and killeth farre away."

("Faerie Queene," IV, 8, 39.)

And Shakespeare makes Lady Anne say in answer to Richard's observation on her eyes:

"Would they were basilisks to strike thee dead!"

to which he replies:

"I would they were, that I might die at once."

("Richard III," Act I, 2.)

We have seen in another chapter the power of destructive fascination attributed to the serpent's gaze. This was intensified in its supposed offspring the basilisk, and it is evident that originally the interpretation of the alleged phenomena was the same. Both notified the presence of God on whom no man could look and live, and before whom the face must be veiled, lest the Deity's glance cause death to him on whom it fell.

The third variety of the basilisk by its touch caused the flesh to fall from the bones of the miserable wretch with which it came into contact, be he man or beast, so was sufficiently terrible, though perhaps more easily avoided.

But dreadful and unapproachable as the basilisk was, it yet had its enemy before whom it quailed. And this was none other than the weasel. This redoubtable foe, when preparing for the fray, would eat some rue, which was the only plant the basilisk could not wither, and which of course always happened to be growing at hand when wanted. Thus fortified the weasel would attack the basilisk, and never rest until he was stretched stiff and dead before him. Therefore when men discovered the den of a basilisk, they had only to turn in a weasel, and the result was sure.

Yet another method of slaying the horrid monster was for the hunter to take with him a mirror, and by its means to reflect the deadly glance upon its origin, and so, with poetical justice, to destroy the basilisk with his own weapon.

The fourth kind of basilisk is regarded by some writers as being the cockatrice proper and a distinct species. To the charms of the basilisk it added a dragon's tail armed with a sting, whilst it shared its power of destroying with a glance.

This is represented in heraldry as a winged monster having the

head, body and feet of a cock, the tongue barbed, and the tail of a dragon. Ælian has told us of the method by which this monster might be destroyed. It had a tremendous antipathy to its parent, the cock. And this was not without cause, for as soon as a cock crew within its earshot its doom was sealed, and it expired. Because of this, African travellers used to carry around with them the bird of dawn as a protection against the dangerous cockatrice.



A HERALDIC COCKATRICE.

No doubt originally the cock was a symbol of the watchfulness of Deity, as the serpent was of Its wisdom, both attributes being combined in the cockatrice.

That quaint old writer, Dr. Thomas Browne, in his "Pseudodoxia Epidemica," wrote thus of the basilisk: "Many opinions are passant concerning the basilisk, or little king of serpents, commonly called the *Cockatrice*: some affirming, others denying, most doubting, the relations made hereof. That such an animal there is, if we evade not the testimony of Scripture and human writers, we cannot safely deny."

The good doctor here certainly spoke the truth, but modern science has none the less refused to allow the existence of the basilisk!

He goes on to inform us that what "we vulgarly call a cockatrice, and wherein (but under a different name) we intend a formal identity and adequate conception with the basilisk, is not the basilisks of the ancients, whereof such wonders are delivered.

"For this of ours is generally described with legs, wings, a serpentine and winding tail, and a crest or comb somewhat like a cock; but the basilisk of elder times was a proper kind of serpent, not above three palms long as some account; and differenced from other serpents by advancing his head, and some white marks or coronary spots upon the crown; as all authentic writers have delivered."

This cockatrice, or basilisk, was said to be produced from the eggs of ancient cocks (*ova centonina*), hatched under toads or serpents. But the learned Dr. Browne, though he accepted the existence of the cockatrice on the authority of "Scripture and

human writers," could not credit the story of the mode of the creature's production. He says, "As for the generation of the basilisk, that it proceedeth from a cock's egg hatched under a toad or serpent, it is a conceit as monstrous as the brood itself."

He proceeds to tell us that this idea was derived from an Egyptian tradition concerning the ibis, "for an opinion it was of that nation that the ibis feeding upon serpents, that venomous food so inquires their oval conceptions, or eggs within their bodies, that they sometimes came forth in serpentine shapes; and therefore they alwaies brake their eggs, nor would they endure the bird to sit upon them."

Although Browne treats most of the fables about the basilisk with contempt, he still upholds the story of its deadly glance. He thus justifies his opinion: "According to the doctrine of the antients, men still affirm that it killeth at a distance, that it poisoneth by the eye, and by priority of vision. Now that deleterious it may be at some distance, and destructive without corporal contraction, what uncertainty soever there be in the effect, there is no improbability in the relation. For if plagues or pestilential atoms have been conveyed in the air from different regions; if men at a distance have infected each other; if the shadows of some trees be noxious; if torpedoes deliver their opium at a distance, and stupify beyond themselves; we cannot reasonably deny that (besides our gross and restrained poisons, requiring contiguity unto their actions) there may proceed from subtiller seeds more agile emanations, which contemn those laws, and invade at a distance unexpected. That this venation shooteth from the eye, and that this way a basilisk may empoison, although thus much be not agreed upon by authors, some imputing it unto the breath, others unto the bite, it is not a thing impossible.

"For eyes receive offensive impressions from their objects, and may have influences destructive to each other. For the visible species of things strike not our senses immaterially, but, streaming in corporal raies, do carry with them the qualities of the object from whence they flow, and the medium through which they pass. Thus, through a green or red glass, all things we behold appear of the same colours; thus sore eyes affect those which are sound, and themselves also by reflexion, as will happen to an inflamed eye that beholds itself long in a glass; thus is fascination made out; and thus also it is not impossible what is affirmed of this animal; the visible raies of their eyes carrying forth the subtilest portion of their poison, which, received by the eye of man or beast, infecteth first the brain, and is from thence communicated unto the heart. But that this destruction should be the effect of the first beholder, or depend on priority of aspersion,

is a point not easily to be granted, and very hardly to be made out upon the principles of Aristotle, Alhazen, Vitello, and others."

Johnston relates the attributes of the basilisk without comment until he comes to its alleged power of annihilating by its glance. Here he admits that his credulity is somewhat strained, for he remarks: "I would scarcely believe that it kills with its look, for who first could have seen it?" The worthy physician apparently did not know the method of hunting the reptile with a looking-glass, into which our reader has been initiated.

As confirmatory evidence of the basilisk's parentage we may quote from the "Chronicles of Basle," which report that in August, 1474: "A cock of this city was accused and convicted of the crime of laying eggs, and was condemned to be burnt with one of his eggs." Apparently no one was bold enough to place the remainder under a toad or serpent, or if they were, history is silent as to the result.

That a cock should lay eggs, is perhaps not so impossible as we might once have thought it, for recent testimony is forthcoming of hens which have changed their sex, and it is conceivable that such might retain the power of egg production, though I certainly have not heard of any so doing.

The following paragraph from the "Daily Mail" of October 13, 1923, is an instance of changed sex:

"POULTRY SEX CHANGE.

"Mr. E. Nicholson, of Brampton, Cumberland, states that among his poultry is a Rhode Island Red which is changing its sex. The bird laid eggs last winter, but during the summer it grew the comb and head ornamentations of a male bird. It now gives a distinct crow, and is seeking to mate with hens. At the recent British Association meetings, Dr. F. A. E. Crewe, of Edinburgh University, mentioned the case of a Buff Orpington hen, which, after laying eggs, and being the mother of chickens, turned into a cock."

Perhaps some such freaks of Nature were noted by our ancestors and gave rise to the story of the parentage of the cockatrice.

We may note the old saw to the effect that

"A whistling woman and a crowing hen
Are neither good for God nor men."

Fearful potentialities lay concealed in the ill-omened bird's masculine propensities.

This superstition is even now widely diffused in Italy, Germany and Russia, and it is the universal belief the crowing hen should at once be killed by its owner, or he will die before it does.

Gubernatis remarks that "As the same belief exists in Persia, the discussion of Sadder with regard to it is interesting, to prove that the hen which crows like a cock must not be killed, because if it becomes a cock, that means that it will be able to kill the demon (therefore at Persian tombs they were accustomed to set a cock free)." Is the demon referred to the cockatrice?

Baptista Porta will not allow that a cock alone has power to produce a monster such as the basilisk. According to his opinion, if a hen's egg be placed in a ditch full of serpents, corruption (tabes), arsenic, and other poisons, it also will produce an animal noxious to the sight and touch. But he warns the bold experimenter to proceed with caution, lest in trying to produce this monster he, like Frankenstein, give birth to a creature that would do him a mischief.

The basilisk after death was not without uses. Its body was hung up in the temple of Apollo, and also in private houses, and was considered to be a sovereign remedy against spider's webs. It was also suspended in the temple of Diana, and there had the effect of preventing any swallow from entering the sacred precincts.

Pliny tells us of the praises with which magicians spoke of the efficacy of the basilisk's blood, which was regarded as being an antidote to sorcery, and also potent to gain success in petitions (XXIX, 19).

The basilisk's body was evidently in demand in quite recent times, for in certain apothecary's shops faked ones were exhibited. These were really the carcasses of small birds without feathers, having their heads raised, wings like a bat's, and very short necks.

According to Beeton, "at Venice and other towns on the Continent, animals are shown which are called basilisks. They are, however, only small thornbacks, with their fins stretched out and artificially arranged so as to resemble young cocks. This Calmet says he observed in an apothecary's shop in Paris."

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Keats employed this legend as the theme of his poem, "Lamia." He there introduces us to the lady in her serpent form, before the events just related had taken place, and pictures her as longing to assume the human shape, and crying :

"When from this wreathéd tomb shall I awake !
When move in a sweet body fit for life,
And love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife
Of hearts and lips ! Ah miserable me !"

The poet goes on to describe her beauty, which even in her serpent form must have been sufficiently attractive.

"She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue ;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd ;
And full of silver moons, that as she breathed,
Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—
So, rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
She seem'd at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.
Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars like Ariadne's tiar :
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet !
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete :
And for her eyes : what could such eyes do there
But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair ?"

The transformation into human shape was not effected without pain, even though Mercury had touched her with his "lythe Caducean charm."

"the serpent now began
To change ; her elfin blood in madness ran,
Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,
Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent :
Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,
Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,
Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.
The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,
She writh'd about convuls'd with scarlet pain :
A deep volcanian yellow took the place
Of all her milder-moonéd body's grace ;
And, as the lava ravishes the mead,
Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede ;
Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,
Eclips'd her crescents, and lick'd up her stars :
So that, in moments few, she was undrest
Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,
And rubious-argent : of all these bereft
Nothing but pain and ugliness were left.
Still shone her crown ; that vanish'd, also she
Melted and disappear'd as suddenly."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE LAMIÆ

THE Jinn known as lamiaë were first recognised in Egyptian mythology, and the conception afterwards travelled to Greece and Italy, and was adopted by both those countries. The lamiaë were believed to be malignant female spirits who wandered about at night, usually in the guise of old hags, sucking the blood and devouring the flesh of human beings, and especially of young children. Or they took the form of beautiful women to deceive and entice men, and then tore them in pieces and gorged on their bodies.

These vampires sometimes assumed the form of serpents, but, as we have noted in another chapter, this was probably an intermediate stage which marked their passage from the visible to the invisible. Still it gives them a claim to a chapter of our book.

Burton, writing on the lamiaë, records the following uncanny tale : "Philostratus, in his fourth book 'de Vita Apollonii,' hath a memorable instance in this kind which I may not omit, of one Menippus Lycius, a young man, twenty-five years of age, that going betwixt Cenchreas and Corinth, met such a phantasm in the habit of a fair gentlewoman, which, taking him by the hand, carried him home to her house, in the suburbs of Corinth, and told him she was a Phœnician by birth, and if he would tarry with her, he should hear her sing and play, and drink such wine as never any drank, and no man should molest him ; but she being fair and lovely, would live and die with him, that was fair and lovely to behold. The young man, a philosopher, otherwise staid and discreet, able to moderate his passions, though not this of love, tarried with her awhile to his great content, and at last married her, to whose wedding, amongst other guests, came Apollonius ; who by some probable conjectures, found her out to be a serpent, a lamia ; and that all her furniture was, like Tantalus' gold, described by Homer, no substance but mere illusions. When she saw herself descried, she wept, and desired Apollonius to be silent, but he would not be moved, and thereupon she, plate, house, and all that was in it, vanished in an instant : many thousands took notice of this fact, for it was done in the midst of Greece."

The serpent had turned into Lamia, and was now—

“ . . . a lady bright,
A full-born beauty, new and exquisite.”

It is here that the story told by Philostratus commences, so we will take our leave of her, lest we, like Lycius, succumb to her charms.

The fairy lady Melusine, or Melusina, who is commemorated in the celebrated French romance of that name, was a beautiful serpent-woman who consented to marry a knight named Raymondin, who knew her only in her human form, upon condition that he would bind himself with a solemn oath never to see her on a Saturday. The knight agreed to her terms, and she bore him eight sons, the exploits of seven of whom fill up a large part of the romance.

All went happily until Raymondin was persuaded by his brother to break his vow, and disturb Melusine on her day of seclusion. He found her in a bath, and was shocked to see that the lower portion of her body was like a huge serpent. Shortly after this episode, Raymondin, angered by one of his sons, reproached his innocent wife as “a false serpent,” whose offspring were sure to be no good. The lady forgave him, but her doom was sealed by his unjust aspersion, and, after a touching scene, she turned into a monstrous dragon and took flight through the window.

Afterwards, whenever any of her descendants were about to die, she hovered in this form near the castle of Lusignan, which she had built by her fairy power for her beloved, but faithless, husband.

A modern version of this legend is current in Wales, and runs as follows :

A young farmer from Anglesea whilst sojourning in South Wales, met a beautiful girl with whom he fell violently in love at first sight. Her eyes were “sometimes blue, sometimes grey, and sometimes like emeralds,” but always glittering and sparkling.

He successfully courted her, and she agreed to become his wife on condition that she might disappear twice a year for a fortnight, and that he would not question her as to where she went.

He accepted her terms and they were married. For some years all was well, but the farmer's mother could not leave the couple alone, and insisted continually that her son ought to discover where his wife went and what she did in her absences. Yielding to her nagging advice, the farmer disguised himself and followed

his wife, when she next left home, to a lonely part of a neighbouring forest. When she paused beside a dark pool he hid behind a big rock and saw her take off her girdle and throw it in the grass at her feet. Instantly she vanished, and in her place a large and handsome snake appeared.

He chased this reptile, but it disappeared into a hole near the pool. After this he went home, and when his wife returned, asked her to tell him where she had been, and when she refused, asked what she had done with her girdle ; whereat she blushed painfully, but would not answer.

When the period arrived for her next departure, her husband



HUMAN-HEADED WINGED DRAGON, OR LAMIA.

From woodcut dated 1699.

prevented her going, by seizing and hiding her girdle. She became ill, and he, thinking to destroy the charm, threw her girdle in the fire. Immediately the woman writhed in agony, and when the girdle perished, she died. The neighbours on learning the strange tale called her the Snake-Woman of the South.

Another Welsh folk-tale, which like the last, is recorded by Marie Trevelyan, is yet more gruesome.

There lived in the Vale of Taff a certain shoemaker, who married a widow for her money. Her motive in marrying him only became apparent later, but it was quickly evident that no love was lost between them.

The neighbours heard the sounds of violent quarrelling with blows that seemed to be struck on either side, proceeding from

their house, and when the woman came among them again they looked at her curiously, and remarked it was strange that she bore no traces of a bruise. At night, loud cries and groans were heard in the shoemaker's house, and a specially inquisitive neighbour determined to learn for himself what was going on, and with this object, concealed his person in a loft above the couple's kitchen. At first he disappointed his friends by refusing to tell them what he had found out, but afterwards he quarrelled with the shoemaker, and in anger, revealed the secret. He said that as soon as angry words were bandied between man and wife, the latter "assumed from the shoulders upwards the shape of a snake, and deliberately and maliciously sucked her partner's blood and pierced him with her venomous fangs."

The shoemaker kept growing weaker and thinner, and at last, after ailing for many months, he died. The doctor who had attended him declared that his death was due to a poisonous bite from a serpent, although no marks were discovered on his body.

This verdict gained credence for the spy's story, and it was further confirmed by what followed. He and the doctor were found lying helpless in the churchyard one morning apparently in a fatal sleep. When the neighbours had succeeded in arousing them they said they had been invited by the dead man's widow to drink with her to the memory of her dear departed. She had then sprung upon them in serpent shape, and stung them so severely that they had only sufficient strength to crawl to the churchyard, where they would probably have died from torpor if the neighbours had not found them.

After this the widow disappeared and was never seen again, but a serpent was continually haunting the neighbourhood, and all attempts to kill it failed. It became known as "the old snake-woman" in consequence of the sequence of previous happenings.

A rather ghastly version of the Lamia legend is given by J. Lockwood Kipling in his "Beast and Man in India." According to this a peasant one day met a beautiful but unhappy woman wandering in the woods, and taking her home with him, he married her.

Later, a holy man who passed that way was entertained by the hospitable peasant, and took occasion to warn him that his wife was a lamia, and instructed him how he might prove this, and destroy her. The peasant, following the saint's directions, made a very salt curry for supper and gave this to his wife after breaking all the drinking vessels he possessed. When they retired to bed he lay down beside her to watch what she would do, whilst he feigned sleep. Soon he saw her lovely head uplifted

from the pillow, and her neck slowly lengthen. Then a forked tongue appeared and a serpent twined around the hut seeking an exit, leaving on the bed the woman's body cold and still. With a sinuous stretch it glided through the doorway, and the watching peasant heard it lapping water from the distant river. Then it returned to its place, and the sleeping lady gave a contented sigh. But the peasant was now convinced that the holy man had been right, and that it was his duty to destroy his wife. Next day, whilst she was busy at the oven outside the hut, he thrust her into the glowing heat and piled on the wood until her body was consumed.

The holy man was wrong. The woman was not a lamia, but possessed an "outside" or "theriomorphic" (i.e. animal-shaped) soul. This may be seen at a glance by comparison with the true lamia legends here given, in all of which the human body of the lamia assumes serpent form, whilst in this tale it remains lying upon the bed, and the soul in serpent form leaves and returns to it.

We have included the story here however for purposes of comparison.

A weird tale is related by Baring-Gould of a serpent-woman. According to Kornemann "In the year 1520, there lived at Basle, in Switzerland, a tailor's son named Leonard. He entered a cave which penetrated far into the bowels of the earth, holding a consecrated taper in his hand. He came to an enchanted land, where was a beautiful woman wearing a golden crown, but from her waist downward she was a serpent. She gave him gold and silver and entreated him to "kiss her three times. He complied twice, but the writhing of her tail so horrified him that he fled without giving her the third kiss. Afterwards he prowled about the mountains seeking the entrance to the cave, filled with a craving for the society of the lady, but he could never find it again."

It seems probable that this was fortunate for him!

The name *Lamia*, by its derivation, enables us to trace the completion of the Encircled Serpent, of which so far we have only glimpsed the lower portion. It is clearly the feminine form of *Lamus*, king of the *Læstrygones*, and in some legends both are called the children of Poseidon. The analogy of other myths points to the probability that ultimately they are a pair of deities, male and female. At some early period *Lamus* and *Lamia* were worshipped as gods; but they did not attain wide popularity. Their worship died out, and legend alone remembered their existence, and finally degraded them to the rank of demons, wherein they gained a worse character than any of the once divine beings who have suffered a similar fate. The name of the

chief priest in Thibet is still the Lama, and among the Ophidians the serpent was known as Lamia. Both names may be found in the geographical nomenclature of Greece and Asia Minor; so it seems probable that Lamus and Lamia belong to the religion which spread from Asia over Thrace into Greece.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

SERPENT GENII AND JINN

IT was quite in accord with primitive philosophy that the manes or ghosts of the dead should continue after death the influence they enjoyed whilst in the body, and finally pass into the ranks of the gods. The distinctions between the two races of beings, the divine and the human, which seem so fundamental to modern minds, did not occur to those whose ideas of the visible and invisible universe alike, were entirely animistic. Thus it is that the savage makes no clear distinction between ghosts and demons, and his idea of the demon is based on his idea of the human soul, with added powers and qualities. This animistic theory perfectly accords with the stories so widely spread in folklore of demons who consort with men and women in their sleep, or even in their waking life, and by whose means children belonging almost equally to both worlds, may be brought into being. There are almost endless orders of these spirits, among whom we may mention the fauns and satyrs of Greek mythology, the *domovoi* or domestic spirits represented in Scotland by the Brownies, and in Lithuania by the *kaukas*, the Japanese Oni, who bring the winds, the Chinese air-dragons, whose battles are the cause of waterspouts, the demons of floods whose havoc is told of in ancient Egyptian and Akkadian mythology, the Nixies of Northern Europe, the Kelpies of Scotland, and the fiery, flying serpents of Russia. Many more could be enumerated, but these will suffice to illustrate the classes of beings among whom the serpent seems to be the favourite shape when they assume a physical body. Even those who habitually appear in human guise, when pressed by untoward circumstances, frequently resort to it, perhaps as an intermediary form between the physical and the psychical.

Censorinus has told us that the word "genial," used to describe festivities of all sorts, was derived from the name of these beings, and that therefore those who indulge themselves in sensual pleasures are said to lead a genial life. Pope in this sense says :

"Is this a dinner? this a genial room?
No, 'tis a temple and a hecatomb."

("Moral Essays," IV. 155.)

The Christians banished the genii to Hell when their creed became uppermost, though about the third century they reappeared, transformed into guardian angels! Among early writers on Christianity the Genius is represented as an evil spirit condemned to eternal punishment for his pride and rebellion (see Tertullian, "Apol.," 32, etc.). The Moslem conception of the jinn, though sprung from a totally different source, seems to accord with this early Christian idea of the genii as rebellious and fallen spirits. The jinn are said to have been created two thousand years before Adam, but owing to sin to have been degraded from their original high estate. It is impossible to cover the whole ground of this fascinating subject in one chapter, but we will take some typical examples of the legendary lore that has accumulated around it in various countries, commencing with our own beloved Britain.

An interesting legend of serpent genii is attached to Vortigern's Castle which stands in the lovely Nant Gwynant, or Vale of Waters, in Wales. My readers will remember how this unfortunate British prince had invoked the aid of Hengist and Horsa* against the invasion of the Scots and Picts, and how the treacherous Saxons, having conquered these foes, turned their arms against their hosts, massacred the British nobles, and held captive their prince till he yielded to all their demands.

Vortigern, still unsubdued at heart on regaining his liberty, summoned to his council all the sages of his kingdom, and by their advice commenced to build a fortress in Nant Gwynant that should secure him from the attacks of his foes. Having collected all the necessary materials for the building, the work was duly commenced, but to the consternation and amazement of all concerned, it was found that the walls constructed during the day with so much care, were every night removed by the supernatural agency of certain spirits known as Goblin Builders, whose home was in Snowdon.

Again the wise men were called together in consultation, and their counsel was as follows: "This castle will never be completed until the stones are sprinkled with the blood of a child who has no earthly father." In this predicament the prince sent east and west in every valley and village in Britain, and still his workmen laboured, and the Goblin Builders overthrew all that they wrought. At last, as one of the emissaries was passing through a village, he paused to watch a group of boys at play, and heard them dispute with one whom they contemptuously named "a son without a father."

The messenger at once sought this child's mother, and securing

* See "The Horse in Magic and Myth."

both her and her son, brought them to Vortigern. There the woman acknowledged that hers had been a strange fate, and that the boy she had brought up owed his birth to an Incubus. On the journey this child had amazed his captors by the astonishing wisdom of his speech, and he was now called upon to reply to the sages assembled to decide his fate. The youthful Merlin, for it was none other than he, at his first word entirely confounded and shamed the council of wise men, for he showed their ignorance. He then offered to tell the Prince why his building failed, if he might have private audience. This being granted, Merlin conducted Vortigern to the summit of Snowdon, and there, within the mountain, he disclosed to him a fearful sight. Two dragons,—one white and one red,—were engaged in furious fight. "As long as these contend," said the child, "it will be impossible to build your castle. They have great power and the spirits obey them, but you see in me one who is the son of a greater than they, and who has knowledge which can control them. You cannot sacrifice me if you would, but instead I can be your friend if you desire."

Needless to say Merlin's proffered friendship was eagerly accepted, and after this there were no further obstacles to building the castle. Great and marvellous were the works which Merlin performed there, and later Vortigern gave it to him for his own dwelling, and constructed another for himself, where he ended his days when the persecution of the Saxons had driven him to despair. To this day the traveller may behold the Cell of the Diviner in a dark rock, and near it the Tomb of the Magicians, which latter is an enormous stone said to cover the grave where the ignorant wise men were enclosed after giving false counsel to the British Prince. He who is brave enough to enter a black cavern nearly on the top of the mountain, may, if he search far enough, find the golden chair which Merlin hid there from the Saxons, and the jewels and money which he laid in heaps around it. No doubt some of the miners who penetrate the mountain's heart will some day find these hoards of treasure.

Nor is this the only legend connecting serpent genii with the famous British necromancer. Merlin is said to have constructed his famous grotto for the love of the fairy Viviana, or White Serpent, with whom he lived in that magical retreat, and whose treachery converted it into an eternal dungeon. Welsh traditions name this same neighbourhood as the scene of Merlin's grotto, and some say it is to be found, covered with "the stone that can never be removed," near Carmarthen, but the Bretons claim it as belonging to their country. Anyhow the voice of the mighty master of magic may often be heard among the hollow rocks of

Carmarthen, reverberating in thunder along the mountains, and lamenting his weakness in yielding to the charms of the entrancing White Serpent.

Principal MacIver-Campbell, in his "Memoir of Clan Iver," tells us that the true members of the Clan Iver were supposed to be invulnerable to serpents. He quotes a Gaelic rhyme said to have been uttered by a serpent or adder, which being interpreted is, "I have sworn to Clan Iver and Clan Iver has sworn to me, that I would not injure Clan Iver and that Clan Iver would not injure me." Principal MacIver-Campbell suggested that the lines may have commemorated an alliance between Clan Iver and some race symbolised by the serpent with "every probability that the alliance referred to is that which is known to have existed between the MacIvers in Perthshire and the Clan Donnachaidh, or Robertsons, one of whose cognisances was the serpent which still appears as one of the supporters in the arms of their chief, Robertson of Strowan."

Another form of the rhyme is to the effect that "On St. Brigit's Day the serpent will say from off the knoll: 'I will not injure Nic Imhair, neither will Nic Imhair injure me.'" The Clan Iver are of Norse origin.

George Henderson supplies us with the following story of a serpent being the soul or parent of a human child. "A man and wife in Ardnamurchan went to the hill for heather. When tired pulling it, the wife lay down and slept. The husband sat down, and when his eyes were about to close, on looking towards his wife he saw a serpent disappearing down her mouth. He wakened her and they went home, but he did not tell her what he had seen. On getting home he went to the doctor, who advised him to feed his wife well, and to give her plenty of flesh meat, so that the serpent, getting sufficient food in this way, might not begin to gnaw herself. The woman was surprised at the change in her fare, and she ate well. In due course she was delivered of a child, and round the child's neck was coiled the serpent."

Among our Roman ancestors the serpent genii were good spirits and the regular symbol of the genius or guardian spirit of every man was a serpent. Because of this belief, the serpents were fed and encouraged to such an extent in the Romans' houses, that if it had not been that these were sometimes destroyed by fire, it would have been difficult to live for them.

A design of serpents, birds and flies found in a bakehouse at Pompeii evidently represents guardian genii, though according to Garnier it symbolises Beelzebub in his double aspect as Destroyer and Renewer. "The name Beelzebub signifies 'the

Lord of the fly,' and the fly represented the god in both his aspects; for flies by their larvæ consume dead carcasses, and in doing so produce life again in another form. Hence as Lord of the fly, he is represented by the double figures of swallows pursuing flies and by serpents; the one representing the exoteric aspect of the god, the other his real or esoteric character."

This explanation is certainly tempting, but not very probable, considering the situation which the painting occupied. Dyer seems to have more likelihood on his side when he says of the "two little birds in chase of large flies. These birds, thus placed in a symbolical picture, may be considered in perfect accordance with the spirit of ancient mythology, as emblems of the genii of the place, employed in driving those troublesome insects from the bread." He also speaks of the "guardian serpents." Doubtless they were the *genii loci* of the bakehouse. Another similar design was found in the kitchen of the house of Pansa at Pompeii, and according to Dyer, represents "the worship offered to the Lares, under whose protection and custody the provisions and all the cooking utensils were placed. In the centre is a sacrifice in honour of these deities, who are represented below in the usual form of two huge serpents brooding over an altar." Above this design is another showing two male figures standing one on each side of an altar at which a priest (drawn on a much smaller scale) appears to be sacrificing, whilst a woman holds a cornucopia. All have black faces, and "the heads of the male figures are surrounded with something resembling a glory." "Are these figures," asks Dyer, "meant for the Lares themselves? On each side are represented different sorts of eatables."

Garnier, however, speaking of this painting, says: "The two gods in the upper compartment, who are being sacrificed to by a priest, are shown by the rays around their heads to be sun-gods, while their black faces identify them with their Cushite originals. In the lower compartment are shown two serpents, as in the other picture, to represent their true esoteric character."

This writer completely ignores the eatables,—a ham, a loin of pork, a string of birds, a spitted eel, etc., pictured at the sides of the painting,—and its situation, which all point to Dyer's conjecture being the true one.

But it is to Greece we must go for the full development of this conception of the serpent genii. These genii were good spirits or guardian angels of the male sex, corresponding to the Junones who protected the female sex. They were believed to spring into being with every mortal at his birth, and after having attended

and directed him through life, to expire with him. It is to this belief that Tennyson refers when he says :

“ A fairy shield your Genius made,
And gave you on your natal day.” (“ Margaret.”)

Offerings of wine, flowers, incense, parched bread, and corn sprinkled with salt were made to them, especially on birthdays, and on some occasions swine were sacrificed in their honour, but Censorinus wrote that it was not usual to sacrifice to the genii with the blood and slaughter of anything, for since these offerings were made on birthdays we ought not to take life from other creatures on that day on which we received it. Arrian tells us that the genii carried men's prayers to the gods and interceded for them.

The genii were sometimes called *Præstites*, or chief governors, because they were set over the management of all things. Not only did they preside over men, and houses, but over countries, and even continents, according to the Grecian teaching. Asia, for instance, was symbolised by a female figure holding in her right hand a serpent, and in her left the beak of a ship.

The serpent was also the *genius loci* of Phrygia and the surrounding islands, as can plainly be seen from the coins and medals issued in the district, whilst at Hierapolis a large serpent was worshipped in this capacity.

The Greeks indeed believed that every spot or locality in town or country, buildings, mountains, rivers, woods, every wall, door or hearth, was guarded by its own peculiar genius, or presiding spirit portrayed under the form of a serpent. Images of these reptiles were therefore frequently represented feeding upon an altar, or with an altar between them, as in the drawing which is taken from a painting in the *Thermæ of Titus*, where it was used as a sign to deter passers-by from “ committing a nuisance ” by reminding them of the respect due to the genius residing there.

We find a reference to these sacred serpent genii in Virgil (“*Æneid*,” Book V, 78), which may be considered also in connection with the chapter on Bacchanalian Ophiolatry. There we learn how *Æneas*, before celebrating the annual funeral festivities of his father “ went from the assembly to the tomb with many thousands, in the centre of a numerous retinue attending. Here in due form, by way of libation, he pours on the ground to Bacchus two bowls of wine, two of new milk, two of sacred blood ; then scatters sacred flowers, and thus speaks : ‘ Hail, holy sire . . . ’ He said ; when from the bottom of the shrine a huge slippery snake trailed along, seven circling spires, seven folds,

gently twining round the tomb, and gliding over the altars ; whose back azure streaks, and whose scales drops of burnished gold brightened up ; as the bow in the clouds draws a thousand various colours from the opposite sun. *Æneas* stood amazed at the sight. At length the reptile, creeping with his long train between the bowls and smooth polished goblets, gently tasted the banquet, and harmless retired again into the bottom of the



GENII LOCI.

From a painting in the *Thermæ of Titus*.

tomb, and left the altars on which he had fed. *Æneas* with the more zeal pursues the sacrifice begun in honour of his father, in doubt whether to think it the genius of the place, or the attendant of his parent.”

Plutarch relates that when Cleomenes, king of Sparta, was crucified by order of Ptolemy, the soldiers who guarded his body on the cross that his friends might not take it away, observed a great serpent winding around his head and “ covering all his face so that no bird of prey dare touch it. This struck the king with superstitious terrors, and made way for the women to try a variety of expiations ; for Ptolemy was now persuaded that

he had caused the death of a person who was a favourite of Heaven, and something more than mortal. The Alexandrians crowded to the place, and called Cleomenes a hero, a son of the gods, till the philosophers put a stop to their devotions by assuring them that as dead oxen breed bees, horses wasps, and beetles rise out of the putrefaction of asses, so human carcasses, when some of the moisture of the marrow is evaporated, and it comes to a thicker consistence, produce serpents. The ancients, knowing this doctrine, appropriated the serpent, rather than any other animal, to heroes."

We meet with the serpent household genius in the Swedish fairy tale of "Little Vigg's Adventure." In this story "the Christmas Sprite" calls one snowy evening at a house where a little boy named Vigg is left all alone, "Mother Gertrud" having gone to do the Christmas shopping. The sprite offered to take Vigg with him on his round of inspection, which is to decide who are to have Christmas presents, and to bestow them on those considered worthy. Vigg accepts the invitation, and is lifted into the sprite's sleigh, and driven off. Soon they arrived at a small barnyard which they entered. "From the doorway of the barn a tiny head was put forth, with two glittering eyes that stared at the sprite. It was the head of the gnome-snake, that curved itself and bowed a kind welcome. The sprite lifted its cap and asked :

" 'Snake, Snake, ring-tailed,
Come out of the earth,
And tell me what
Is this house worth ? ' "

" Then the gnome-snake answered :

" 'Here, after good work is rest,
For Industry is their guest ;
Here are three cows and one horse,
And here is no waste and no loss.' "

" 'That is not much,' said the sprite.

" 'Ah, but it becomes much more when man and wife are industrious. They began with empty hands and now they take care of their old parents.'

" 'That is good so far,' said the sprite ; ' but how do they treat the cows and the horse ? '

" The gnome-snake answered :

" 'Full is the bag and full the pail,
The horse is fat with a shining tail.'

" ' Well, snake, and how do you like the children in the house ? '

" The ring-tailed snake answered :

" ' Merry is the boy,
The girl is fair and coy ;
His temper is a little wild,
But the maiden's soft and mild.' "

" ' So ! ' said the sprite, smiling ; ' they must have Christmas presents. Good night now, ring-tailed snake, and a good Christmas sleep to you.'

" ' Good-night you kindest sprite
Till Christmas morning light.'

" And the gnome-snake drew his head within the barn-door. Under the sleigh seat was a chest. The sprite opened it and took out all sorts of things. An ABC book and penknife for the boy, thimble and psalm book for the girl, and yarn, shuttle and thread for the mother, almanac and clock for the father, and a pair each of spectacles for the grandfather and the grandmother.' All of which gifts were softly deposited within the doorway that their recipients might find them in the morning. Thus the Christmas sprite and Vigg went from house to house, Vigg finally being set down in his own home again. It is interesting to find this idea of the serpent genius in the folklore of so northerly a country as Sweden.

Arabia is haunted everywhere by genii, and even to-day these are firmly believed in by all classes of Arabians, and often are thought to take the form of serpents. Pausanias has told us how the vipers that lived under the balsam trees in Arabia were regarded by the natives as sacred to the trees (Pau., IX. 28, 4). Probably they were thought to be the spirits of the trees. J. Welhausen tells how once in Arabia, when a wood never before invaded by man was burned down that the land it occupied might be cultivated, certain white snakes flew out of it with loud lamentations. No doubt these were looked upon as the dispossessed spirits of the trees.

The immediate source of the Jewish Paradise myth, including the principal details about the serpent, was most probably Jerahmeelite, i.e. it was derived from the North Arabian kinsfolk of the Israelites, part of whom had entered Canaan before Israel, and became to a large extent the religious perceptors of Israel. It is the Arabian belief that tree spirits often took the form of serpents, which accounts for a serpent being the offerer of the apple to Eve. It was its own possession which it was giving.

As my readers will know the " Arabian Nights " abounds

with tales of genii and jinn, and the "Story of the First of the Three Ladies" provides us with an example of these beings in serpent shape. The narrator tells how whilst walking along a path she beheld a snake approaching her, "followed by a serpent which was endeavouring to destroy it: the tongue of the snake was hanging from its mouth in consequence of excessive fatigue," and says the lady, "it excited my compassion; so I took up a stone and threw it at the head of the serpent, which instantly died: the snake then extended a pair of wings and soared aloft into the sky, leaving me in wonder at the sight. At the time of this occurrence I had become so fatigued, that I now laid myself down and slept; but I awoke after a little while, and found a damsel seated at my feet, and gently rubbing them with her hands; upon which I immediately sat up, feeling ashamed that she should perform this service for me, and said to her, Who art thou, and what dost thou want? How soon hast thou forgotten me! she exclaimed; I am she to whom thou hast just done a kindness killing my enemy: I am the snake whom thou savest from the serpent; for I am a Jinneeyeh, and the serpent was a Jinnee at enmity with me; and none but thou delivered me from him."

Under very similar circumstances the serpent jinn appear again in "The Story of Aboo Mohammad the Lazy." The hero and narrator says: "While I was absorbed in meditation, lo! two serpents approached me; one tawny-coloured, and the other white; and they were contending together. I therefore took up a stone from the ground and struck with it the tawny serpent, and killed her; for she was oppressing the white one. Then the white serpent departed, and was absent for a while; after which she returned, accompanied by ten other white serpents; and they came to the dead serpent and tore her in pieces, so that there remained only her head; which having done, they went their way. Thereupon I laid myself prostrate on my bosom in that place, through weariness; and while I was so lying, meditating upon my case, a being whose voice I heard, but whose form I saw not, called to me, So I said to the person who addressed me, 'By the object of thy worship, acquaint me who thou art!' Whereupon the invisible speaker assumed the form of a man, and replied, 'Fear not; for they kind conduct hath become known to us, and we are a tribe of the believing jinn; if then thou hast any want, acquaint us with it, that we may have the pleasure of performing it. . . . I am a brother of the white serpent whose enemy thou killest.'"

Thus encouraged, Aboo confided his troubles, and received such practical help from the jinn as enabled him to overcome them.

The doctrine is firmly rooted in Egypt, and Lane says: "It is believed that each quarter in Cairo has its peculiar guardian genius, or Agathodæmon, which has the form of a serpent."

We learn from J. F. J. Fitzpatrick that among the Montols of Northern Nigeria, "in many of the compounds there will be found a species of snake, of a non-poisonous sort, which, when full grown, attains a length of about 5 feet and a girth of 8 or 9 inches. These snakes live in and about the compound. They are not specially fed by the people of the place, nor are places provided for them to rest in. They live generally in the roofs of the small granaries and huts that make up the compound. They feed upon small mammals, and no doubt serve a useful purpose in destroying vermin which might otherwise eat the stored grain. They are not kept for the purpose of destroying vermin however. The Montols believe that at the birth of every individual of their race, male or female, one of these snakes, of the same sex is also born. If the snake be killed, his human partner in life dies also, and at the same time. If the wife of a compound owner gives birth to a son, shortly after the interesting event, the snake of the establishment will be seen with a young one of corresponding sex. From the moment of birth, these two, the snake and the man, share a life of common duration, and the measure of the one is the measure of the other. Hence every care is taken to protect these animals from injury, and no Montol would in any circumstances think of injuring or killing one. It is said that a snake of this kind never attempts any injury to a man. There is only one type of snake thus regarded."

Speckmann tells us that the Zulus believe every man to be attended by an ancestral spirit, known as an *ihlozi*, in the body of a serpent, "which specially guards and helps him, lives with him, wakes with him, sleeps and travels with him, but always underground. If it ever makes its appearance, great is the joy, and the man must seek to discover the meaning of its appearance. He who has no *ihlozi* must die. Therefore, if anyone kills an *ihlozi* serpent, the man whose *ihlozi* it was dies, but the serpent comes to life again."

A witch, on the contrary, instead of a harmless snake, often has, as her familiar, "a venomous species of serpent, sometimes a horned viper, sometimes a black serpent, sometimes a green one that lives in banana trees."

Their lives are so closely interwoven that the death of the reptile is thought to entail that of the witch and vice versa.

The Bakongo of equatorial Africa regard the water-sprites as the special protectors of the snakes which live among the stones of the river-banks, and are sometimes said to incarnate

in their form. They are thought to possess powers very similar to those attributed by us to fairies, and when in their own proper forms are said by those who claim to have seen them to have short little bodies of a whitish colour. They are credited with keeping the water sweet and clean and fit to drink, but are also held responsible for fissures, landslips, etc.

Weeks tells us that among the Bakongo the belief prevails that "if a woman, while *enciente*, dreams of running water, snakes, or water-sprites, she believes that her child will be an incarnation of a water-sprite. The sprites inhabit the streams, and the snakes live among the stones near the water-courses, hence to dream of snakes or running water is equivalent to dreaming of the water-sprites themselves. Therefore, directly such a child is born, a cloth is tied round it and no one is permitted to know its sex, except the 'doctor,' until it receives its name. A few days after the birth of the child a particular kind of 'doctor' is called, who starts a dance which lasts all night, and is accompanied with much drinking and drumming, and the firing of many guns if the family is sufficiently wealthy. A bower of palm fronds is erected as a shelter for the father, mother and baby; and all the plates, dishes, and pots used during the accouchement are placed near the booth. At dawn the 'doctor' takes a plate of palm wine, and, dipping some leaves in it, he sprinkles the baby, the mother, and the father, after which he asks the crowd three times if they know the child's name. They answer 'No, we do not know the name.' Thereupon, the doctor shouts out, 'It is Lombo.' At once the people make a noise by clapping the palms of their hands on their open mouths. The folk, on hearing the name Lombo, know that the child is a girl, for if it were a boy its name would be Etoko; and they also know from the name given that the mother has dreamed either of running water, or snakes, or water-sprites. The 'doctor' receives a fee of one fowl, fifteen strings of beads, and all the utensils that were placed near the booth at the commencement of the ceremonial dance.

All the girls called Lombo and the boys named Etoko are supposed to be incarnations of water-sprites, or possess in some strange way the *orenda*, or nature, of the snake. . . . The sprites are supposed to endow one thus born with various powers and fairy gifts. . . . It is believed they have the power, not only of imparting good luck, but also of inflicting many misfortunes. . . . These children quickly become aware of the deference paid to them by their families and neighbours, and they develop into arrogant little pests, as they find that their demands are not refused.

"Snakes are either under the special protection of the water-sprites, or are incarnations of them, and, on account of this connection, snakes are not killed or hurt in a house where these sprite children have been born; and neither Lombo nor Etoko children are allowed to kill snakes, lest they should murder one of their own kith and kin. They do not drive them from their houses, and the snakes, apparently conscious of their immunity, are very frequently found in the houses of men and women called Etoko and Lombo. Again, the most vulnerable part of a snake is its head, and people must not strike these sprite children on the head. There is an indefinite but clear connection in the native mind between the water-sprite, the snake, and the Lombo and Etoko children. It is believed that the only new thing about an infant is its body. The spirit or soul of the child is thought to be old, and to have belonged either to a deceased person, or to a living person" who, as Mr. Weeks later explains, will soon die, "or, as stated above, to a water-sprite. . . . They notice the child speaks at an early age of strange matters the mother has never taught it."

According to Bastian, in Siam the spirit of the *takhien* tree is said to appear sometimes in the shape of a serpent, and sometimes in that of a woman. A curious legend is related of a Buddha priest, who was transformed into a serpent because he had killed the tree Elapatra, and in this form resided in a beautiful lake near Taxila.

In the days of Hiuen-Tsiang, when the inhabitants of the surrounding country wished for fine weather or its opposite, they resorted to the spring, taking with them a priest, and "snapping their fingers, invoked the serpent" who immediately granted their wishes.

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CHAPTER XXXV

THE FURIES

THE Eumenides was one of the complimentary and propitiatory titles given to those sanguinary goddesses the Erinnyes, Furiæ, or Diræ, by the ancients; as they considered it unlawful, or at least most impolitic, to utter any of the true names of these dread beings. The literal translation of the name Eumenides is "The Gracious Goddesses," and many such flattering titles were bestowed on the Furies. For instance, Pausanias tells us that at Athens the name by which they were known was "the Awful Goddesses."

Various accounts have been given of their origin. According to some writers, they were the daughters of Nox and Acheron, but others assert that Pluto and Proserpine were their parents.

Virgil takes the former view and in the twelfth book of the "Æneid," describes their birth and character as follows:

"Two pests there are, the dire sisters called; whom, with hellish Megæra, joyless Night at one and the same birth brought forth, and bound with equal spires of serpents, and added to them wings swift as the wind. These at the throne of Jove, and at the court of the incensed sovereign present themselves, and sharpen terror in the minds of feeble mortals, what time the king of gods prepares baleful death and diseases, or terrifies guilty cities with war."

Or, according to Tooke's quaint translation:

"Deep in the dismal Regions void of Light,
Two Daughters at a Birth were born to Night;
These their brown Mother, brooding on the Care,
Endu'd with windy Wings to fleet in Air,
With Serpents girt alike, and crown'd with hissing Hair,
In Heav'n the Diræ called."

The number of the Eumenides has also been variously given. Originally they were said to be many, but Virgil speaks of three, and later writers usually name three, Tisiphone, Alecto and

Megæra, to which some add Nemesis. But for her different parentage we should feel tempted to count Bellona, the goddess of war among the Furies, but she is said to have been the daughter of Phorcys and Celo, and therefore was a sister of the Gorgons. She is, however, often accompanied by the Diræ, and like them her head is covered with snakes in place of hair. Her mission, too, is very similar, though perhaps more specialised. Like them she is regarded as a minister of the vengeance of the gods, and therefore as stern and inexorable.

The worship of these dread beings was conducted in silence at Athens. A festival named after them the Eumenideia, was celebrated yearly in their honour with sacrifices of black sheep, and libations of honey and water; the worshippers who engaged in the festival being adorned with garlands of flowers. Only freemen of good character were allowed to take part in these solemnities.

Frazer has conjectured that "the snakes which were the regular symbol of the Furies, may have been originally nothing but the emblems or rather embodiments of the dead; and that the Furies themselves may, like Æsculapius, have been developed out of the reptiles, sloughing off their serpent skins through the anthropomorphic tendency of Greek thought" ("G. B.," IV, 74).

They were generally represented as of grim aspect, with bloodstained garments and numerous serpents wreathing around their heads in place of hair. They held a burning torch in one hand, and a whip of scorpions in the other, and were always attended by Terror, Rage, Paleness, and Death. Tisiphone is the fury of whose doings the poets have told us most. Virgil has described how Æneas saw in Hell an iron tower rising aloft; "and there wakeful Tisiphone, with her bloody robe tucked up around her, sits to watch the vestibule both night and day. Hence groans are heard, the cruel lashes resound, the grating, too, of iron, and clank of dragging chains. Æneas stopped short, and starting, listened to the din. 'What scenes of guilt are these? O virgin, say.' . . . Then thus the prophetess began, ' . . . Cretan Rhaamanthus possesses these most ruthless realms; examines and punishes frauds; and forces everyone to confess what crimes committed in the upper world he had left (unatoned) till the late hour of Death, hugging himself in secret crime of no avail. Forthwith avenging Tisiphone, armed with her whip, scourges the guilty with cruel insult, and in her left hand shaking over them her grim snakes, calls the fierce troops of her sister Furies.'"

It is related of Œdipus, King of Thebes, that being angered

by the unkindness and neglect of his sons he invoked the Fury, Tisiphone, to make dissension between them.

"The Fury heard, while on Cocytus' brink
Her snakes unty'd, sulphureous waters drink;
But at the summons, roll'd her eyes around,
And snatch'd the starting serpents from the ground.
Not half so swiftly shoots along in air,
The gliding lightning, or descending star.

A hundred snakes her gloomy visage shade,
A hundred serpents guard her horrid head.

She toss'd her meagre arms; her better hand
In waving circles whirl'd a fun'ral brand;
A serpent from her left was seen to rear
His flaming crest, and lash the yielding air.
But when the Fury took her stand on high,
Where vast Cithæron's top salutes the sky,
A hiss from all the snaky tire went round:
The dreadful signal all the rocks rebound,
And thro' th' Achaian cities send the sound."

(Pope's "Thebais of Statius," Bk. I, l. 124 *et seq.*)

Ovid has also described the attributes of Tisiphone in the following lines:

"Then fell Tisiphone with Rage was stung,
And from her Mouth th' untwisted Serpents hung.

Girt in a bloody Gown a Torch she shakes,
And round her Neck twines speckled Wreathes of Snakes.

Part of her Tresses loudly hiss, and part
Spread Poison as their forked Tongues they dart,
Then from her middle Locks two Snakes she drew,
Whose Merit from superior Mischief grew." ("Met.," Bk. IV.)

Although Tisiphone has attracted the poets' attention more than her sisters it would seem that Alecto closely rivals her claims, if she does not outstrip them.

It is said by Virgil that the "heart's delight" of "baleful Alecto" "are rueful wars, strifes, and deceits, and noxious crimes. Her, even her father, Pluto's self abhors, her hellish sisters abhor the monster; into so many shapes she turns herself, so hideous are her forms, with so many snakes the grim Fury sprouts up." The goddess Juno when in her resentment against the Trojans she wished to make strife between King Latinus and Æneas, called up Alecto and thus addressed her: "Virgin,

offspring of Night, perform me this task, this service, your own peculiar province . . . Thou canst arm to war the most cordial brothers, and by animosities embroil families; thou canst introduce into houses scourges and firebrands of death; with thee are a thousand specious prettexts, a thousand arts of doing mischief; ransack thy fruitful bosom, unhinge the established peace, sow crimes that lead to war; let the youth incline to, and at once demand and snatch up arms."

Juno did not appeal to Alecto in vain. The Fury, "infected with Gorgonian poisons" at once repaired to the palace of Latinus and attacked his wife Amata. "At her the goddess flings from her dark locks one of her snakes, and plunges it deep in her bosom down to its inmost recesses, that, by the monster, driven to fury, she may embroil the whole family. He, sliding between her robes and smooth breast, rolls on with imperceptible touch, and, in the transport of her rage, steals on her unawares, infusing into her a viperish soul: the huge snake becomes a chain of wreathed gold around her neck, he becomes a long winding fillet, and entwines her hair, and in slippery mazes creeps over her limbs. And while the first infection, downward gliding, with its humid poison attacks her senses, and blends the mingling fire with her bones; and while her mind has not yet felt the flame throughout her bosom, she spoke with softer accents to her husband Latinus, endeavouring to persuade him to break off the promised wedding between their daughter Lavinia and the Trojan exile, Æneas.

"When, having tried him by these words in vain, she finds Latinus resolutely fixed against her, and the serpent's infuriated poison had now sunk deep into her bowels, and crept through all her frame; then, indeed, in wretched disorder, startled by hideous monsters, she rages frantic with unexampled fury through the ample bounds of the city; as at times a whip-top whirling under the twisted lash, which boys intent on their sport drive in a large circuit round some empty court; the engine driven about by the scourge is hurried round and round in circling courses; the unpractised throng and beardless band are lost in admiration of the voluble box-wood, they lend their souls to the stroke. With no less impetuous career is the queen driven through the midst of cities, and among crowds all in fierce commotion." Now here, now there, the Fury sped everywhere, bringing discord and madness until she had accomplished her mission. "After she seemed sufficiently to have kindled the first transports of rage, and embroiled the counsel and the whole family of Latinus; forthwith the baleful goddess is borne on dusky wings to the walls of the bold Rutulian. . . .

Here, in his lofty palace, was Turnus enjoying repose at the black hour of midnight. Alecto lays aside her hideous aspect and Fury's limbs; she transforms herself into the shape of an old hag, ploughs with wrinkles her loathsome front, assumes grey hairs with a fillet, and binds on them an olive bough; she takes the form of Calybe, the aged priestess of Juno's temple," and shows herself to the youth, inciting him to war.

Turnus at first derided the hag, thinking her to be that she seemed, but his mocking words aroused Alecto's true nature, and whilst he yet spoke "a sudden trembling seized his limbs; his eyes stiffened; with so many snakes the Fury hisses, and a shape so horrid discloses itself: then, as he hesitates, and purposes more to say, rolling her fiery eyeballs, she repelled [his words] and reared the double snakes in her hair, clanked her whip" and spoke "in outrageous accent." . . . "Turn thy eyes to these signs: I came from the abode of the dire sisters; wars and death in my hand I bear.' Thus having spoken she flung a firebrand at the youth, and deep in his breast fixed the torch, smoking with grim light. Excessive terror broke his rest, and sweat bursting from every pore drenched his bones and limbs. Frantic for arms he raves, for arms he searches the bed and the palace; a passion for the sword, a cursed madness after war, and indignation besides rage [in his breast]. As when with loud crackling a fire of twigs is applied to the sides of a bubbling cauldron, and by the heat the water dances; within the violence of the water rages, and high the smoky fluid in foam overflows; nor can the wave now contain itself; in pitchy steam it flies all abroad. Therefore, now that peace is profanely violated he enjoins the chief of the youth to repair to King Latinus, and orders arms to be prepared to defend Italy, to expel the enemy from their territories [adding] that he is a sufficient match for Trojans and Latins both" ("Æneid," Book VII).

Such were the works of Alecto, and certainly they link her closely with Bellona, and account for their companionship on so many occasions. Alecto's mission at last accomplished, she lifted up "her wings hissing with snakes," and hied to the centre of Italy. There "under lofty mountains lies a place of high renown, and celebrated by fame in many regions, the valley of Amsanctus: the side of a grove, gloomy with thick boughs, hems it in on either hand; and in the midst a torrent, in hoarse murmurs and with whirling eddies, roars along the rocks. Here are shown a horrible cave and the breathing-holes of grisly Pluto; and a vast gulf, having burst Hell's barriers, expands his pestilential jaws; into which the Fury, abhorred demon, having plunged out of sight, disburthened heaven and earth."

The Furies play an important rôle in the story of Orestes, a son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Agamemnon, having been cruelly murdered by Clytemnestra and her lover, Orestes was commissioned by Apollo to avenge his father's death, which he accordingly did by slaying the murderers. But the command of the god and the justice of his cause could not deliver Orestes from the Furies of a mother slain. He fled to Delphi to seek the protection of Apollo, but the Furies pursued him through many lands to the very shrine, thirsting for vengeance.

"Gorgon-like they come,
Vested with sable stoles, their locks entwined
With clustering snakes."

Apollo, instead of shielding him, commands Hermes to convey Orestes to Athens to take his trial for murder under the arbitration of the goddess Athena. Claspng her sacred image, Orestes invokes her protection, claiming that if his deed was a crime he has expiated it by sacrifices and prayer.

"Pale now, and dim, the blood-mark on my hand,
Washed clean away the matricidal stain."

But the Furies are implacable and declare that no god shall save him from their wrath, and they sing the

"Soul-binding, lyreless, mortal-blighting strain,"

which shall make him wholly theirs. Athena, however, insists on a fair trial for the stranger, and invites the whole Athenian people to witness the justice of the court of Areopagus. The judges are appointed, the ceremonies are performed and the votes for condemnation and acquittal counted, and found to be equal. Then Athena as president gives her casting vote for Orestes, and he departs, saved from the Furies, purified and pardoned, to rule his paternal kingdom.

The Italian poet Dante saw the Furies when, led by Virgil he visited Hell. He has told us how there he

" . . . beheld uprisen
At once three hellish furies, stain'd with blood :
In limb and motion feminine they seem'd :
Around them greenest hydras twisting roll'd
Their volumes ; adders and cerastes crept
Instead of hair, and their fierce temples bound.
He [that is Virgil] knowing well the miserable hags
Who tend the queen of endless woe, thus spake :
' Mark thou each dire Erynnis. To the left,
This is Megæra ; on the right hand, she
Who wails, Alecto ; and Tisiphone

I' th' midst.' This said, in silence he remain'd.
Their breasts they each one clawing tore ; themselves
Smote with their palms, and such thrill clamour raised,
That to the bard I clung, suspicion-bound.

' Hasten Medusa : so to adamant
Him shall we change ; ' all looking down exclaim'd :
' E'en when by Theseus' might assail'd, we took
No ill revenge.' ' Turn thyself round, and keep
Thy countenance hid ; for if the Gorgon dire
Be shown, and thou shouldst view it, thy return
Upwards would be forever lost.' This said,
Himself, my gentle master, turn'd me round ;
Nor trusted he my hands, but with his own
He also hid me. Ye of intellect
Sound and entire, mark well the lore conceal'd
Under close texture of the mystic strain."

("Hell," Canto IX, l. 38.)

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THE SNAKE-STONE

Oldfield Hawley

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE SNAKE-STONE

IF we may believe the testimony of ancient writers, the serpent, though

"Like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head."

("As You Like It," II. I.)

Many are the accounts of the serpent-stone, its beauty and its wonderful qualities, that have been handed down to us, apparently in all seriousness, and with perfect good faith. It was said that this marvellous stone was to be found in the serpent's brain, but that he who would secure its lustre and wondrous powers must extract it from the *living* reptile,—a task few would care to attempt. The same rule applied to the Draconius, described by Albertus Magnus as being of a black colour and pyramidal shape. This had to be taken from the head of the dragon whilst it lay still panting, in order to preserve its virtue. Comparing this with certain modern practices, we perceive that the cruelty latent in human nature has not changed much, though dragons have vanished, and serpents no longer carry potent stones!

But sometimes the serpent-stone was freely given to man with all its virtues intact as a reward for showing goodness of heart, or in gratitude for benefit conferred. Serpents of an earlier period, if human evidence can be relied on, must have been inhabited by a very much higher order of spirits than those now animating them, in fact, by guardian genii and demigods, as the ancients believed: unless we assume that their name was a veil for priest and initiate which was in constant use.

An instance of the serpent-stone being bestowed in gratitude upon a human benefactor may be found in the "Gesta Romanorum," where we read how the Emperor Theodosius, the Blind, instituted a Bell of Justice, which any injured person might

ring, and gain thereby immediate attention to his cause. The bell-rope hung from a public part of the palace. Close to this spot a serpent had made her nest, and one day in her absence a toad took possession of it, and refused to vacate it when the rightful owner returned.

The serpent twisted herself around the dangling rope and rang the bell for justice. This she obtained, and by the Emperor's special command the toad was killed. A few days later Theodosius was reposing on his couch when the serpent entered his chamber, bearing a precious stone in her mouth. She glided up to the Emperor's face and laid it on his eyes, and then left the room again. The blind monarch instantly regained his sight.

Another somewhat similar legend is related by Matthew Paris of a miserly Venetian named Vitalis. This man fell into a pit in which were a lion and a serpent, and was rescued from the terrible death which threatened him by a woodcutter whom he promised to reward by giving him half his property. The lion and the serpent also escaped from their predicament by climbing the ladder brought by the woodcutter, and testified their gratitude by crouching at his feet. Later, when the poor man was eating his meagre meal in his little hut, the lion entered, bringing with him a dead goat as a present. The serpent followed, carrying in his mouth a precious stone which he laid on the woodcutter's plate. The woodcutter went to Venice, and there found Vitalis in his palace feasting with his friends in joy for his deliverance. On being reminded of his promise, he denied that he had ever seen the woodcutter, and ordered his servants to throw him into prison, but before this could be effected the peasant fled. He made his way to the judges of the city and told his wrongs. They were at first incredulous, but when he produced the jewel the serpent had given him, and led them to the dens of the lion and the serpent, who again fawned on their benefactor, the judges were convinced, and compelled the ungrateful Vitalis to perform his promise. Matthew Paris adds that this story was told by King Richard to expose the conduct of ungrateful men.

In Pausanias we read of the carbuncle that "a Charake prophet had, near as big as an egg, which they said he found where a great rattlesnake lay dead, and that it sparkled with such surprising lustre as to illuminate his dark winter house like strong flashes of continued lightning, to the great terror of the weak, who durst not, upon any account, approach the dreadful fire-darting place, for fear of sudden death. When he died it was buried with him, according to custom."

Timberlake, writing in 1611, tells of a great jewel which was taken from a serpent's head and used in conjuring.

In the narrative of a voyage in Her Majesty's ship "Samarang," Captain Sir Edward Belcher says, "At my last interview with the Sultan of Guning Taboor, he conveyed into my hand—suddenly closing it with great mystery—what they term here the snake-stone. This is a polished globe of quartz, about the size of a musket ball, which he described as of infinite value, an heirloom, reported to have been extracted from the head of an enchanted snake."

In the history of Alexander it is stated that he found serpents in the Vale of Jordan "with collars of huge emeralds growing on their backs."

Alphonso, in his "Clericalis Disciplina," mentions a serpent with eyes of real jacinth, and Milton gives his serpent eyes of carbuncle, but in this case it is confessedly a poet's imagination.

In France the serpent which bears a jewel in its head is called *vouivre*, and is described as being a reptile from 3 to 6 feet long, with only one eye in its head, which shines like a jewel and is called the carbuncle. This is said to be of inestimable value, and those who can secure one of these treasures are thereby made enormously rich. Many French legends relate how the serpent has been robbed of this jewel and the terrible punishments that in most cases have followed.

"The jewel that grants all desires" is said to be possessed alike by Indian Nāgas, and Chinese and Japanese dragons.

In the "Mahābhārata" the Pandava hero, Arjuna, after being killed in battle, is brought to life again by his Nāga wife, who had obtained this wondrous serpent-stone from the Nāga monarch.

The Nāgas were guardians of pearls and the females are portrayed as adorned with pearl necklaces. In early Buddhist art, that enemy of Nāgas, the mongoose, is often represented as clasped in the right hand of Kubera, the god of riches, spitting forth jewels. It has obtained these by devouring their lawful possessors, the Nāgas, and so become a fitting emblem of many of the devotees of the god of wealth! No wonder it cannot retain such ill-gotten goods! Kubera is not only the god of wealth, but also of justice, and is a form of Yama, the god of death. In his aspect as god of justice (Dharma) he is symbolised in the "Mahābhārata" as a "blue-eyed mongoose with one side of his body changed into gold." Wealth unrighteously acquired, justice, death; the treasure all spit forth. The allegory is complete.

In "Shi i ki," a Chinese work dating from the sixth century, pearls are said to be spit out by dragons, and when the sky dragons engage in combat, pearls fall to the ground. De Groot

speaks of these "thunder pearls" that have fallen from the mouths of dragons. They shine so brightly that they illuminate a house at night.

Wang Fu's description of the dragon mentions that a dragon has "a bright pearl under its chin," though most serpents wear the "precious jewel" in their heads.

Further information about the Chinese dragon pearls will be found in the chapter dealing with Chinese dragons.

A Japanese story tells how an Indian Buddhist abbot called Bussei (Buddha's vow) went on a voyage to obtain the dragon pearl "that grants all desires" which was owned by Sagara, the dragon-king of the ocean. "Arrived in the midst of the sea, Bussei performed a ceremony and repeated a charm which caused Sagara to appear, whereon the abbot, making a mystic sign, demanded the pearl. But the dragon-king neutralised the mystic sign and wrathfully rising in the air caused a terrible storm to gather. The boat was wrecked, and all on board except Bussei were drowned. Bussei afterwards left Southern India for Japan."

But serpent-stones are of various kinds and have different origins assigned to them. In some parts of Great Britain the name has been bestowed on certain perforated, rounded stone or glass beads, which are occasionally discovered, and are popularly supposed to have a supernatural power of healing the bites of serpents. These relics are believed by archaeologists to have been used in ancient days as spindle-whorls, that is, small fly-wheels which were used to keep up the rotary motion of the spindle. But according to an old tradition dating from the Druids, they were produced by a number of serpents placing their heads together, and hissing until the foam from their mouths became consolidated into these beads,—now a powerful charm against disease.

Pliny has given us a curious account of this "serpent's egg," or anguinum (from *anguis*, a snake) which was worn as a distinguishing badge by the Druids. It was formed, he says, by the poisonous spittle of a great many serpents twined together in the heat of summer. If gathered at moonlight, and afterwards worn in the bosom, it was a mighty talisman.

W. Mason has embodied this belief in poetic form in his "Ĉaractacūs," where the Druid sings:

"From the grot of charms and spells,
Where our matron sister dwells,
Brennus, hast thy holy hand
Safely brought the Druid wand,
And the potent adder-stone,
Gender'd 'fore the autumnal moon?
When in undulating twine

The foaming snakes prolific join ;
 When they hiss and when they bear
 Their wondrous egg aloft in air ;
 Thence before to earth it fall,
 The Druid in his hallow'd pall
 Receives the prize,
 And instant flies,
 Follow'd by the envenom'd brood,
 Till he cross the crystal flood."

This superstition has been minutely described by Edward Lhwyd, the Welsh antiquary, in a letter quoted by Borlase.

"In most parts of Wales, and throughout all Scotland, and in Cornwall, we find it a common opinion of the vulgar, that about Midsummer-Eve (though in the time they do not all agree) it is usual for snakes to meet in companies; and that, by joining heads together, and hissing, a kind of bubble is formed, which the rest, by continual hissing, blow on until it passes quite through the body, and then it immediately hardens, and resembles a glass ring, which whoever find (as some old women and children are persuaded) shall prosper in all his undertakings. The rings thus generated are called *Gleineu Nadroeth*, in English, Snake-stones. They are small glass amulets, commonly about half as wide as our finger-rings, but much thicker, of a green colour usually, though sometimes blue, and waved with red and white."

Mr. Lhwyd further says :

"I am fully satisfied they were amulets of the Druids. I have seen one of them that had nine small snakes upon it. There are others that have one or two or more snakes."

This serpent-stone is known by many different names. It has been called by such varying terms as the *ovum anguinum*, the adder-stone, the adder-gem, the adder-bead, the Druidical bead, and in Wales and Ireland, the Magician's or Druid's glass (*Gleini na Droedh* and *Glaine nan Druidhe*). They have been found in British barrows and specimens of them can be seen in museums. They are composed of variously coloured glass, blue, green, red, pink and brown, etc., some being ribbed and some plain, whilst some are streaked with brilliant hues. The Druids held them in high estimation. According to their account these invaluable objects could only be found on a particular day of the moon, and the special virtue residing within them secured success in lawsuits, and free access to the king.

That these charms were not always successful, however, we learn from Pliny, for he knew of a Gaulish knight who was executed by the Emperor Claudius because he wore one of these beads when entering a Court of Justice, it being believed that its influence would improperly wrest judgment in his favour.

Pliny attributes the production of these stones to snakes convoluted together in the summer, and notices the statements of the Druids with regard to this mystic creation ("Nat. Hist.," XXIX, c. 3).

Pennant commenting upon Pliny's opinion, says :

"Our modern Druidesses give much the same account of the *ovum anguinum*, *Glain Neidr*, as the Welsh call it, or the *Adder-gem*, as the Roman philosopher does, but seem not to have so exalted an opinion of its powers, using it only to assist children in cutting their teeth, or to cure the chin-cough, or to drive away an ague. We have some of these beads in our cabinet. They are made of glass, and of a very rich blue colour : some are plain, others streaked."

In ancient Gaul also these beads of paste or glass were highly esteemed as amulets under the name of serpents' eggs. The explanation of their existence there too was said to be that serpents coiling together in a writhing mass, brought them into being from their slaver, and shot them into the air from their hissing jaws. If a spectator was quick and brave enough to catch one of these eggs in his garment before it touched the ground, he had to mount his horse and gallop off at full speed, for the whole pack of serpents would pursue him, and his only means of preservation was to cross a river which the snakes could not pass.

The proof of the genuine character of his trophy was that if it was cast into a stream it would float against the current, even though it was hooped with gold.

Adder-stones are still recognised as such in those parts of Britain where there is a Celtic population that yet retains the immemorial superstitions of their race; and the tale of the origin of these beads from the slaver of serpents was until lately believed by the peasantry of Scotland, Wales and Cornwall, as it was by the Druids of ancient Gaul.

The beads, as we have seen, are perforated, and the Highlanders of Scotland give an explanation of this as follows : when the bead has just been blown together by the joint action of the massed serpents, one of the reptiles pushes his tail through the still viscous glass.

In 1699 many of these beads were in use as charms all over Scotland. Children had them hung around their necks to protect them from whooping-cough and other ailments, and they were thought to have the property of repelling evil spirits and generally of ensuring the prosperity of the wearer. When one of these valuable amulets was not in use it was kept in an iron box, so that the fairies might not steal it, since it is well known that the Good People detest iron.

The Welsh peasantry believe that these beads possess all sorts of medicinal virtues, and that they are especially efficacious for maladies of the eyes.

In Cornwall, Midsummer-Eve was said to be the time when the serpents gathered together to make the beads, but in Wales it was generally thought to be spring, and especially May-day Eve. Even in recent years, according to Mr. Frazer, "persons in the Principality have affirmed that they witnessed the great vernal congress of the snakes, and saw the magic stone in the midst of the froth."

In confirmation of the above accounts of extraordinary assemblages of serpents, I append the following, cut from a popular weekly some twenty years ago :

" A PYRAMID OF SERPENTS

" A German traveller and naturalist describes a spectacle he once witnessed in the savannahs of Izacubo, in Guiana, which he well characterises as ' the most wonderful and terrible ' that can be seen.

" We were ten men on horseback, two of whom took the lead, in order to sound the passages, whilst I preferred to skirt the great forests. One of the blacks who formed the vanguard returned full gallop, and called to me :

" ' Here, sir, come and see serpents in a pile ! ' "

" He pointed out something elevated in the middle of the savannah, which appeared like a bundle of arms. One of my company then said :

" ' This is certainly one of those assemblages of serpents which heap themselves on each other after a violent tempest. I have heard of these, but have never seen any ; let us proceed cautiously, and not go too near. ' "

" When we were within twenty paces of it, the terror of our horses prevented our nearer approach, to which, however, none of us were inclined. Suddenly the pyramidal mass became agitated ; horrible hissings issued from it, thousands of serpents rolled spirally on each other, shot forth out of the circle their hideous heads, presenting their envenomed darts and fiery eyes to us.

" I own I was one of the first to draw back ; but when I saw that this formidable phalanx remained at its post, and appeared to be more disposed to defend itself than to attack us, I rode round it, in order to view its order of battle, facing the enemy on every side.

" I then sought what could be the design of this numerous assemblage, and I concluded that this species of serpent dreaded

some terrible enemy, which might be the great serpent, or the cayman, and that they reunited themselves after having seen their enemy, in order to resist or attack him in a mass."

As further evidence on this point, I quote from the " Penny Cyclopædia " : " Open copses, dry heaths, newly cleared woodlands, and sandy wastes are the usual haunts of the viper, which, in winter, is frequently found in its hybernaculum, intertwined with several of its own species, and in an almost torpid state. These conglomerations may have given rise to the mode in which the celebrated *ovum anguinum* was produced."

The ophites was a serpentine stone, and according to Pliny was so called because it was spotted like a snake. Others said it was thus named because he who carried it might walk among serpents with impunity. Pliny distinguishes two kinds of ophites, the hard and the soft. The former may have been some variety of granite ; the latter a variety of serpentine, perhaps the Tuscan gabbro or ophiolite. But it is impossible to identify with certainty any one of the various substances, some of which were unquestionably fabulous, to which the name ophites was applied by Orpheus, Dioscorides, Pliny and other classic writers. The *ovum anguinum* described by Pliny appears from his account to have been a fossil echinoderm.

Within living memory these fossils were treasured as Druidical relics, and thought of as possibly possessing a portion, at least, of the virtue attributed by the ancients to the ophites.

In olden days ophites were thought to have the power not only of speech, but of prophecy. The physician Eusebius is said never to have parted with his ophites, but carried them in his bosom and obtained oracles from them, which were given in a small voice that resembled a low whistling.

Arnobius the Younger, a bishop in Gaul in the second half of the fifth century, confessed that he could never meet with one of these stones without addressing questions to it which, he tells us, were " answered occasionally in a clear and sharp small voice."

To give one more instance of these oracular snake-stones, Falconet, speaking of the ophite, says that " it is shaggy, hard, heavy, black, and has the gift of speech ; when one prepares to cast it away, it produces a sound similar to the cry of a child. It is by means of this stone that Helanos foretold the ruin of Troy, his fatherland . . ." etc.

The serpent-stone pictured in our chapter-heading is that now well-known fossil shell, the *Ammonite*, which was formerly supposed to be a coiled and petrified serpent, though its old Latin name *Cornua Ammonis* was bestowed on it because it was

thought to resemble the horns sculptured on the head of Jupiter Ammon.

The legends of the saints have invested these stones with a special interest :

“ They told how in their convent cell,
A Saxon princess once did dwell,
The lovely Ædelfled,
And how, of thousand snakes, each one
Was changed into a coil of stone
When holy Hilda pray'd.” (“ Marmion,” Scott.)

And not only were the snaky foes thus petrified, but they were decapitated as well! There is said to be a similar tradition of Saint Keyna. This saint, finding herself surrounded by serpents, in a wood at Keynsham, between Bath and Bristol, changed them into headless stones by the fervour of her prayers.

These ideas were not confined to the unlettered, but were seriously entertained by men of learning. Wormius describes ammonites as petrified adders. Langius thought them to be either the vertebræ of serpents or convoluted marine insects. The curio-dealers of the period took up the idea, and there were few fossil collections which they did not supply with what they were pleased to term *a perfect Cornu Ammonis*; that is an ammonite, to which a carved serpent-head had been ingeniously attached.

Other learned men, Torellus Sarayna, Frascatorius, etc., attributed the formation of these stones to the plastic forces of the earth, and regarded them as a freak of Nature; but the religious were somewhat pained by such unbelief, as the following extract from an annotated edition of Marmion, published in 1841, will illustrate. It also serves to show how recently the idea of the miraculous origin of these serpent-stones was held.

“ The reliques of the snakes which infested the precincts of the convent, and were at the abbess's prayer, not only beheaded but petrified, are still found about the rocks, and are termed by Protestant fossilists *Ammonitæ*.”

Oh, those unbelieving Protestants!

The ancients held these stones in high estimation, and as of the highest value to the dreamer. Thus Pliny: “ *Hammonis cornu inter sacratissimas Æthiopiæ gemmas, aureo colore, arietim cornus effigiem reddens, promittitur præ divina somnia representare*”; even now the Indians are said to believe them to have wonderful properties.

In India the ammonite is found in the bed of the Gandhakî River of the size of an orange. It is known as the Sâlagrâma stone, and being chief of the inanimate objects sacred to Vishnu,

it enjoys the highest veneration of most of the Vaishn'avas, and is a profitable object of traffic.

According to another idea, the serpent-stone is a porous substance often consisting of charred bone. It is thought to possess the virtue of extracting the venom from a snake-bite when applied to the wound, and has been used in all quarters of the globe for this purpose.

Carmichael tells us that in Scotland “ A product called *clach-nathrach*, serpent-stone, is found on the root of the long ling. It is of steel-grey colour, has the consistency of soft putty when new and of hard putty when old, and is as light as pumice-stone, which it resembles. It is of globular form, and from one to three inches in diameter. There is a circular hole about a quarter of an inch in width, through the centre. This substance is said to be produced by the serpent emitting spume round the root of a twig of heather. The *clach-nathrach* is greatly prized by the people who transmit it as a talisman to their descendants.”

The bezoar, a name for certain calculi or concretions found in the stomach or intestines of some animals, especially ruminants, was also entitled the serpent-stone.

The word is derived from the Persian, *bâdzahr*, *pâdzahr*, (*pâd*, expelling, + “ *zahr*,” poison), so called because it was considered an antidote to poison. In some Eastern countries this belief still prevails. The stone was formerly supposed to have been formed of the poison of serpents which had bitten the creature, combined with the counteracting remedy with which Nature had supplied it. In the Middle Ages this stone was considered to be a potent charm against the plague also. We find the following entry in the inventory of the jewels of Charles the Fifth, made at Yuste after his death. “ A box of black leather lined with crimson velvet, containing four bezoar stones, variously set in gold,” one of which the Emperor instructed was “ to be given to William Van Male, his gentleman of the chamber, being sick, as it was suspected—of the plague.”

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CHAPTER XXXVII

THE NĀGA IN NATURE MYTH

THE earliest mythology which we have any record of in India is that found in the Védas, and this is essentially symbolic of the energies and phases of Nature. Half the hymns and prayers of the *Rig-Veda* are addressed either to Agni, the god of fire, or to Indra, the god of light and thunder-storm, the third most prominent deity being Varuna, the god of water. But it must be recognised that the almost numberless gods of the Hindu pantheon are really but personified attributes of the sacred triad, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

The cobra, or hooded serpent, is the favourite symbol of the early solar mythology, and it seems certain that it is of independent origin, and not borrowed, as has been suggested, from the aboriginal tribes. Its intimate connection with sun-worship proves how closely it is related to orthodox Hinduism. Surya, the sun-god, who is a form of Vishnu, is represented with a canopy above his head formed of the hoods of a five or seven-headed Nāga. And the Nāga demigods are described in Brahmanical writings as the celestial serpents belonging to Surya. For instance, it is directed in the *Paraskara Grihy Sutra* that oblations are to be offered to "The Lord of the overpowering serpents belonging to Surya." This god, in the Védas, occupies a subordinate place as a merely elemental deity, though from the date of the *Bhagavat Gita* he was invested with the character of the Supreme Being, and took precedence of his former rival, Siva, in many places.

Perhaps there is no feature of Hindoo mythology more strongly emphasised than their conception of the Deity as originally floating or moving upon the face of the waters. One of the most striking instances of this is that of Surya (or Vishnu) as Narayana, resting on the serpent of infinity. The serpent Sesh Nāg, or Sesha, is represented as twisted into innumerable folds, to form a couch which floats upon the waters, whilst its seven heads are inflated so as to produce a canopy, in the shelter of which Surya reposes. This design forms one of the sculptures in the caves of Ellora and is depicted with many variations, on the walls of buildings in Upper India. There is another fine representation of this

theme on a rock in the Ganges thus described by Wilkins: "Nearly opposite Sultan Ganj, a considerable town in the province of Bahar, there stands a rock of granite, forming a small island in the Ganges, known to Europeans by the name of 'the rock of Ichangiri,' which is highly worthy of the traveller's notice for the vast number of images carved upon every part of its surface. Among the rest there is Hari (i.e. Vishnu in his character of preserver), of a gigantic size, recumbent upon a



OBLATIONS TO SURYA.
As depicted on a gateway of Sanchi Tope.
From Fergusson's "Tree and Serpent Worship."

coiled serpent, whose heads (which are numerous) the artist has contrived to spread into a kind of canopy over the sleeping god; and from each of its mouths issues a forked tongue, seeming to threaten instant death to any whom rashness might prompt to disturb him. The whole lies almost clear of the block on which it is hewn. It is finely imagined and is executed with great skill."

In Hindu legend Vishnu is said to recline upon his serpent couch during the four months of the periodical rains, and so is definitely connected with the seasonal changes. The Hindus

also believe that at the end of every *Calpa* (creation or formation) all things are absorbed by the Deity, and that in the interval that elapses before another period of creative activity, the god again reposes upon the serpent Sesha (Duration), whose other names are Vasuki (the Eternal), and Ananta (Endlessness).

Sesha is usually represented as seven-headed, but, when used as a symbol of infinity or eternity, is sometimes described as having a thousand heads, the better to express space unbounded and time without end. The world is said to rest upon one of these heads. His crest is decorated with jewels,—the shining stars. Vishnu is fittingly enthroned amid his myriad coils.

Not only was Sesha a couch for Deity, but according to Hindu allegory his vast form was used as a rope by the gods to churn the ocean in order to recover the Amrita, or elixir of life. The gods on this occasion stood on the mountain Mandara, which was fixed on the back of a tortoise that represented one of the Avatārs of Vishnu.

The Nāgas are not mentioned under this name in the Veda, and must not be confused with the serpents so often referred to therein as foes of Indra and the Devas, and described in connection with the evil Asuras, or Dasyus, or Serpas, whose leader was the dragon Vritra. These, according to the commentator Sayana, represent atmospheric phenomena, but it seems more probable that they represent tribes hostile to Indra and his Nāgas. In support of this we may quote Dr. Oldham, who says: "The hooded serpent was . . . a totem of the people who claimed descent from the Sun. And the Nāga demi-gods, who are described in Brahmanical writings as 'The Celestial Serpents belonging to Sūrya' (the Sun-god), were deified chiefs of the Solar race."

He tells us further that "It is to these ancient deities, rather than to the great gods of the Brahmans, that the Hindu people first turn in times of trouble. To the Nāga they pray for rain for their crops, and to the Nāga, or the Deva, they pay their vows in time of pestilence or famine. To these also they offer the first milk of their cows, and the first fruits of their harvest."

From the *Mahābhārata* we learn that Swarga, the heaven over which Indra ruled, was tenanted by Devas and by Nāgas.

But in the *Rig-Veda* it is not to the Nāgas that the prayer for rain is addressed. The worshippers of the strong and valiant god, Indra, have appealed directly to him to overcome the great serpent or cloud dragon, Vritra, which had dammed up the rivers so that they could no longer flow.

According to Dr. Oldham's interpretation, this Vritra was a great chief of the solar and serpent-worshipping Asuras, who

claimed, and was believed to hold, the power of controlling the elements. In support of this, Dr. Oldham points out the frequent references in the Vedic hymns "to the withholding of rain by the Asuras, and especially by the great chief Vritra, and to the consequent drought, ceasing on the death of the enemy. These passages," he says, "relate to the belief which survives to this day, that the Nāga rajās were able to control the elements."

Returning to the text of the fable it narrates how Indra responded to his votaries' prayers, and slew the serpent with his thunder-bolt, when immediately the pent-up waters burst forth in rivers to the sea.

As an allegory of natural phenomena the picture is continually apposite. The conflict is not even now over. Again and again must the dragon be slain and the waters released. Perhaps the monster is hydra-headed, but anyhow the trouble has once more to be faced.

Prayers are addressed to the god to renew the battle. Even earthly efforts may assist him in the fight which calls for all his strength and prowess. The worshipper is said to have placed a bolt in Indra's hands, and the sacrifice is thought of as helping the weapon to slay the dragon. We can imagine how vividly this people of poets visualise the fable. Their parched and thirsty land is wilting and dying for lack of cooling rains, and the cruel cloud-dragon has swallowed all the water! At last! The beneficent Indra has gathered his forces for battle with the monster. The sky darkens at his awful approach, his thunder peals forth, his lightning weapon flashes, and he cleaves the serpent's belly with his knife. Out rush the imprisoned waters in tropical storm, drenching the parched earth and causing the rivers to overflow and refresh the land whilst gods and men rejoice. Because of this feat Indra is known as *Vritra-han*, "the destroyer of Vritra."

According to some versions of the legend it was in the form of a bull that Indra encountered the dragon Vritra, and released the cows (clouds) he had stolen. Indra was invoked as a bull, and to him both bull and cows were sacred among the Hindus.

A reference to this symbolism will be found in the following translation,—by an Indian poet,—of the *Rig-Veda*.

"I will sing the wondrous story,—
Thunder-armed Indra's glory,—
How he won from Vritra's might
Captive waters sparkling bright,
Cleft for them the mountain way,
Rolled the rivers rich and gay!

Indra pierced the dragon cloud,—
Darkening mountains in a shroud,
Twashtri forged the lightning-dart,—
Fashioned with celestial art,
As the milch-kine to the fold
Rivers to the ocean rolled!

Like a bull, impetuous, strong,
Indra, hymned in ancient song,
Drank the Soma three times given,
Grasped the forkéd brand of heaven,
Smot the first-born fiend of might,
Rolling up the mountain's height.

Darkling Vritra hid the world,
Lightning-lances Indra hurled,
And his thunder's deadly stroke
Clouds to pieces rent and broke,
Like a tree by woodsman felled
Fell the fiend by Indra quelled!

Rolled the rivers fresh and new,
Ceaseless waters onward flew,
Bursting torrents, copious fed,
Bore away the shapeless dead;
Indra's foe bereft of breath,
Slept the endless sleep of death!" (Ramesh Dutt.)

Although the people are nominally converted to the Moham-medan faith, traditions of the serpent race yet persist in the wild border country between India and Persia. The village of Gor-i-Mār, or grave of the serpent, perpetuates in its name the memory of a great serpent said to have been killed by Ali. And the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush have a tradition that the Bashgul Valley was once dominated by a huge serpent who devoured travellers rash enough to venture there, but who was finally killed by Imra, or Indra.

Andrew Lang, writing in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," points out that "in the traditions of Vedic devotees, Indra was not a god without an irrational element in his myth," and he argues that many of the legends about Indra "have no necessary connection with the worship of a pure Nature-god as a Nature-god would now be constructed by men. The legends are survivals of a time in which natural phenomena were regarded, not as we regard them, but as persons, and savage persons, and became the centre of legends in the savage manner.

Thus he accounts for the barbaric myth of the origin of Vritra, which he gives as follows: "Once, though uninvited, Indra drank some soma that had been prepared for another being.

The soma disagreed with Indra ; part of it which was not drunk up became Vritra the serpent, Indra's enemy. Indra cut him in two, and made the moon out of half of his body. This serpent was a universal devourer of everything and everybody." He adds, "If this invention is a late priestly one, the person who introduced it into the *Satapatha-Brahmana* must have reverted to the intellectual condition of Bushmen. In the fight with Vritra, Indra lost his energy, which fell to the earth and produced plants and shrubs."

We have seen above that Sun and Water are alike represented by the serpent symbol in Indian myth.

In the "Aitareya Brāhmana," which is of later date than the Vedic hymns, in the portion known as the "Serpent Mantra," it is said that the earth is the *Sarpa-Rājñī*, or Queen of Serpents, and mother of all that moves. According to the Hindu explanation this means that the solid earth was condensed from a trail of cosmic dust or fire-mist, which had swept through space in a serpentine form.

Another Hindu Nature myth directly connecting the earth with the serpent is as follows :

Kulika, or as he is sometimes called Kulikétu, was one of the chiefs of the Nāgas. But for no wrongdoing on his part, he was continually tormented by the inferior gods, known as the Suras, and complained of his trouble to the Supreme Lord. In answer to his prayer, Brahma is said to have ordained that henceforward he should receive adoration like the *devas* from each human being, and that anyone who refused to render such homage to him should perish by some unnatural death and be deprived of the power to rise higher in the scale of created beings.

The myth has been explained as follows by Mr. Hardwick in his "Christ and other Masters." "It directs us to behold in Kuliketo an emblem of the earth before it had been subjected to human culture, when it felt itself tormented by the Suras, or, in other words, assaulted by the armies of the firmament—the rain, the lightning, and the tempest. In the midst of this disorder, man, who had been hitherto regardless of the soil on which his lot is cast, and the material out of which his body is constructed, was bidden by the Lord of creation to render homage to the powers and processes of nature, to propitiate the ungenial elements, and welcome in all forms round him the immediate presence of Divinity. According, therefore, to this myth, the serpent was not absolutely and directly charged with the origination of all evil ; yet suspicions of such agency were nevertheless implied from first to last in the conception of the story. There was lurking under its fantastic imagery an idea that matter, in the

whole compass and duration of it, was intrinsically evil, and might therefore be identified with that which was the recognised embodiment of the evil principle."

Dr. Oldham remarks that the "supposed ability of the Nāga rajas to control the elements, and especially the waters, arising no doubt from their connexion with the sun, led apparently to their association with springs, streams and lakes. In these the serpent-deities were supposed to dwell, although the cobra is not a water-snake and cannot live under water. Every lake and every spring in Kashmir, and in many other parts of India, was sacred to one or other of the Nāga demi-gods, or to the sun."

The sun and its symbol, the serpent, seem everywhere to have been closely associated with ocean, lake, river and rain, indeed with water generally.

The chariot of Varuna, the sea-god, is represented as having been drawn by three-headed Nāgas, and in the "Mahābhārata" the ocean is said to be the dwelling-place of the Nāgas (Adi, "Astika," p. xxii) whilst after Vritra had been slain, his followers took refuge in the sea (Vana, "Tirthayatra," p. ciii). Even now among the Hindu Kush, springs, or rather the spirits embodied by them, are thought to resent any impurity cast into their waters by causing storms, and Elliott tells us that a snowstorm produced in this manner is said to have induced the Shahi Jaipal to submit to the Amir Subuktigin.

As we should expect from their connection with the sun, and earth and rain, serpents are regarded as the representatives of agriculture in Indian myth. This is the oldest interest of the people ; they also are thought to haunt the streams and woods of the country-side, and the festivals in their honour are celebrated by young and old, rich and poor, throughout Western India. The children have holiday, and the serpent images are crowned with flowers. The popular faith ascribes the veneration of serpents to gratitude for the forgiveness shown by the queen of serpents to the husbandman who killed her little ones by the stroke of his plough. Many tales of serpent genii are told in India, and de Visser would have us note that in them we find the Nāga monarch "not only in the possession of numberless jewels and beautiful girls, but also of mighty charms, bestowing supernatural vision and hearing. The palaces of the Nāga kings are always described as extremely splendid, abounding with gold and silver and precious stones, and the Nāga women, when appearing in human shape, were beautiful beyond description." He records the story of an evil Nāga protecting a big tree that grew in a pond, who failed to send forth thunder and cloud when the tree was felled, because he was neither despised nor

wounded, but his body became the support of the stupa (a dome-shaped shrine or monument) and the tree became a beam in the same edifice.

This is noteworthy because it is rare to find the Nāga as a tree demon in India, though it is often so represented in China and Japan.

The following story of a water spirit is entwined around the broken statue of a hooded serpent which reposes on a certain tank near Jait, in the district of Mathura, and relates how in olden times a raja married a foreign princess, and, after staying awhile in her distant country, wished to bring her home. The lady, however, refused to accompany him unless he first declared his lineage. The raja said that if she insisted on his doing so she would have cause to regret her curiosity; but finding her determined, he conducted her to the riverside, where he repeated his warning. Still the princess insisted, and her husband now told her she must not be alarmed at whatever she saw, or she would lose him. As he spoke, he commenced to descend slowly into the water, all the while begging her to give up her purpose until the river rose to his neck. Then, after a last effort to persuade his obdurate spouse, he dived, and rose again in the form of a Nāga (serpent); erecting his hood over the water, he said, "This is my lineage! I am a Nagbansi." The princess was unable to repress an exclamation of grief, and her unfortunate husband was thereby turned into the statue of stone which may be seen to this day.

Another Indian legend, recorded by Deane, related how a member of the Buddha family fell in love with, and married the daughter of a serpent-king, and in time became sovereign of the country. But although his wife had obtained a human body in which to manifest, a snake with nine heads sometimes was visible behind her neck, and one night whilst she slept her husband cut this reptile in two. The result was that she became blind.

It would seem that the husband ought to have recognised the nine-headed serpent as an essential part of his Nāga wife, for de Visser tells us that "the Nāgas are depicted in three forms: common snakes, guarding jewels; human beings with four snakes in their necks; and winged sea-dragons, the upper part of the body human, but with a horned ox-like head, the lower part of the body that of a coiling dragon. Here," he adds, "we find a link between the snake of ancient India and the four-legged Chinese dragon."

This is the form adopted in Tibet, and it is also found in Japan. It is interesting to note that according to Gerini the word *Nāga* means not only snake but elephant. Elliott Smith remarks that

"both the Chinese dragon and the Mexican elephant-god are thus linked with the Nāga, who is identified both with Indra himself and Indra's enemy, Vritra. This is another instance of those remarkable contradictions that one meets at every step in pursuing the dragon. In the confusion resulting from the blending of hostile tribes and diverse cultures the Aryan deity who, both for religious and political reasons, is the enemy of the Nāgas becomes himself identified with a Nāga!"

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

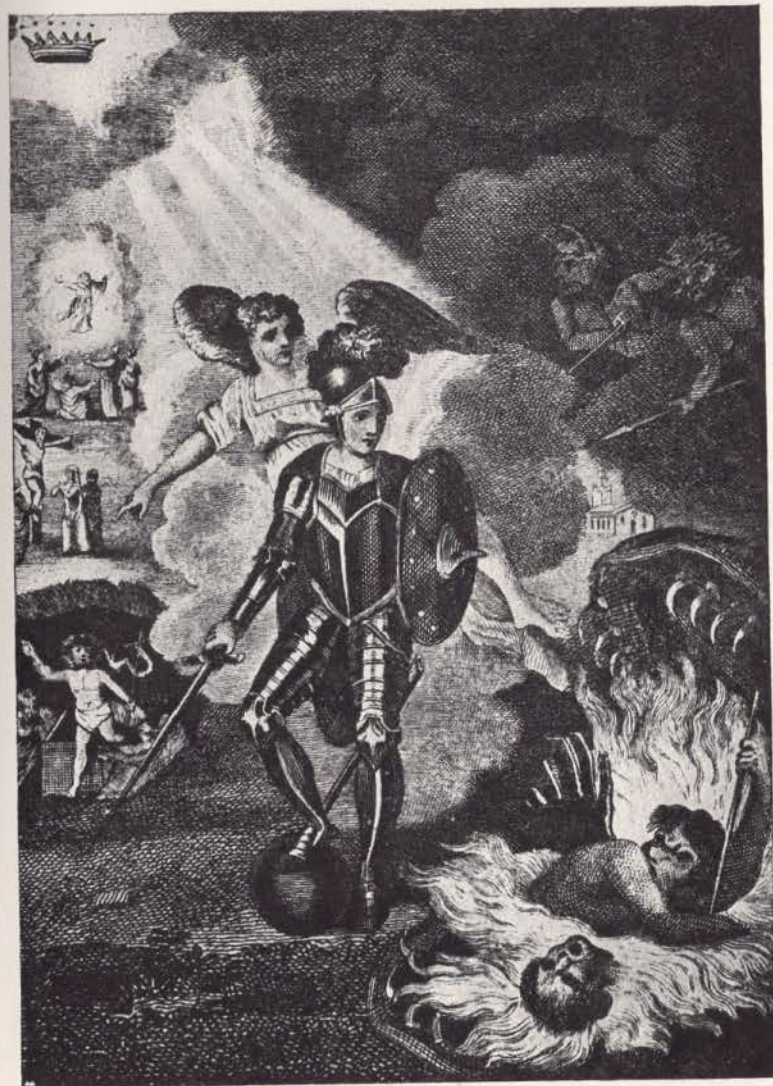
SATAN AS A SERPENT

THE conception of the serpent as the emblem of evil is not nearly so widespread as the idea that it is the appropriate symbol of Deity, but it may be found early, as in the case of Apep, Apôpi, or Apophis, the serpent of the Egyptian Hades, which is represented on mummy cases. Apep was taken as a figure of Typhon, the wicked brother of Osiris, who at various periods was considered as sun-god, demigod, or king. Typhon, who is mentioned by Plutarch as having made war against Jove, killed Osiris, and was himself attacked by Osiris' son, Horus. The last-named deity is often represented as standing upon Typhon, who lies prostrate in the serpent form of Apep, nailed to the earth by the spear of the god which pierces his head. But though apparently conquered he survives to work evil.

This evil serpent, Apep, or Typhon, was identified by the priests of later dynasties with Set, or Sît, the god of the hated Hyksos kings. The contrast between this evil being and the beneficent Osiris and Isis was immense. Yet the theologians of the Delta saw in it but the completion of the circle of the serpent, and Maspero tells us that they "soon assigned a common origin to these rival divinities of Nile and desert, red land and black. Sibû (the earth-god) had begotten them. Nûit (Nut) had given birth to them one after another when the demiurge had separated her from her husband; and the days of their birth were the days of creation."

In this later version Set was one of the guardians of the four pillars that supported the firmament, instead of being an evil deity.

Maspero says: "In the beginning earth and sky were two lovers lost in the Nû, fast locked in each other's embrace, the god lying beneath the goddess. On the day of creation a new god, Shû, came forth from the primæval waters, slipped between the two, and seizing Nûit with both hands, lifted her above his head with outstretched arms. Though the starry body of the goddess extended in space—her head being to the west and her loins to the east—her feet and hands hung down to the earth.



THE SERPENT MOUTH OF HELL.

These were the four pillars of the firmament . . . and four gods of four adjacent principalities were in charge of them. Osiris, or Horus, the sparrow-hawk, presided over the southern, and Sit over the northern pillar ; Thoth over that of the west, and Sapdi, the author of the zodiacal light, over that of the east."

The character of the serpent Apep, and of his struggle with the sun, has been clearly defined by Champollion as representative of the conflict of darkness with light ("Lettres," p. 231 *et seq.*). Occasionally, though very rarely, Apep appears to be the conqueror, and his triumph over Ra is considered to be the explanation of a solar eclipse. A similar explanation is common to the peoples of many widely separated countries. In one very ancient form of the Egyptian legend, the sun is represented by a wild ass running round the world along the sides of the mountains that uphold the sky, and the serpent which attacks it is called Haiû ("Book of the Dead," chap. xl, Naville's Edn., Vol. I, pl. LIV).

We have seen in the chapter on The Serpent Gods of Egypt that there are other explanations of this dualism, and that it is more apparent than real, the truth probably being that there were at almost all periods of Egyptian history two interpretations of the current symbolism, one that revealed only to initiates, the other intended for popular consumption.

Although as the result of conquest the symbolism might be reversed, the underlying truths remained the same, but though the priestly caste was aware of this, the uneducated people must often have been strangely puzzled as they witnessed the gods of earlier faiths denounced as devils by later theologians.

The Hebrews were evidently troubled to know how to reconcile the apparently opposing creeds of their former masters and teachers ; and inclined now to one aspect, now to the other. Their sojourn in Egypt had had a tremendous moulding influence on their religion. It had undermined its stability and monotheistic purity, because only the exoteric aspect of the Egyptian creed was known to them. This remark does not apply to their leader Moses. According to Manetho, Moses had formerly been a priest of Egypt, and as Sharpe says, "the whole history of the fall of man is of Egyptian origin. The temptation of woman by the serpent, and of man by the woman, the sacred tree of knowledge, the cherubs guarding with flaming swords the door of the Garden, the warfare declared between the woman and the serpent, may all be seen upon the Egyptian sculptured monuments."

The walls of ancient Thebes, Elephantine, Edfou and Karnak bear witness that long before Moses taught or Esdras wrote,

its story was embodied by rites and symbols in the religious ceremonials of the Egyptians. We have recorded some of the interpretations of this legend and its various forms in other chapters, so need only remark here that it does not necessarily involve the recognition of an opposing power of evil, though probably it was so understood by the uninitiated, and the influence of the exoteric reading, in later times, identified the evil being with the serpent form.

Bishop Patrick tried to reconcile the traces of monotheism in the scriptural account, with Christian dualism. He thought the serpent tempter of Eve, when flying, was resplendent like fire, having assumed the form of a seraphim or angel of the presence. In later times the serpents in the wilderness were called by this name, from a root which signifies "to burn," and Eve took the serpent tempter for one of these heavenly messengers sent down to enlighten her, "for she was not so simple as to think that beasts could speak." The bishop strengthened his argument by quoting St. Paul's assertion, "Satan is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. xi. 14), and the apostle's fear, expressed in the same chapter, that "as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty," so he might lead the Corinthians astray. Deane demolishes the worthy bishop's interpretation, saying Eve's reply conclusively proves that she saw the serpent as a real serpent. He admits, however, "that the devil on this occasion assumed the form of one of the angelic seraphim was a tradition of the East, adopted or invented by the Doctors of the Jewish Church. Rabbi Bechai on Genesis iii. 14, observes: 'This is the secret (or mystery) of the holy language, that a serpent is called *saraph* as an angel is called *saraph*,' and 'hence the scriptures called serpents *seraphim* (Num. xxi. 6-8), because they were the offspring of the old *saraph*.'"

That it was from the Egyptians that Moses obtained the fundamentals of the Hebrew religion—according to Anna Kingsford—is occultly intimated in the scriptural passage, "And the Children of Israel borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver and jewels of gold; and they spoiled the Egyptians." A large and powerful section of the Jews understood these teachings only exoterically, and saw the serpent as the type of the evil one, and named it Aibu, "the enemy." Threatening and terrible, yet tempting and strangely attractive, unsleeping, winged, fiery, fanged, it was coiled around the Tree of Life, the relentless foe of creation, and of Osiris—Jehovah, whom they had adopted as their tribal god.

To these uninitiated Hebrews a god made in the image of man, a personal anthropomorphic being, who would fight their battles,

make their laws, judge and rule them as a king, was an absolute necessity. An abstract conception of Divinity, even if within their mental grasp, suggested nothing beautiful or desirable. As we have seen, only a portion of the highly cultured Egyptian people had attained to the higher ideal wherein Deity was symbolised by the limbless serpent.

The view-point of the Hebrews is made plain by Dr. H. Pratt, who in explaining the Kabala says: "Spirit was to man a bodiless, disembodied, or deprived and degraded being, and hence was termed by the ideograph *Nahash* 'Deprived': represented as appearing to and seducing the human race—men through the Woman. . . . In the picture from this *Nahash*, this spirit was represented by a serpent, because from its destitution of bodily members, the Serpent was looked upon as a deprived and depraved and degraded creature."

Yet the Hebrews were at first strictly monotheists, the very strong personality with which they endowed their god necessarily involving a darker side to his character, so that he in himself completed the circle, and left no space for an evil being. The cardinal principle of their original theology was that Jehovah was the author both of good and evil, who hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exod. x. 27), and sent a lying spirit among the prophets of Ahab (1 Kings xxii. 20-3); and the Satan of the book of Job is described as coming among the sons of God to present himself before the Lord. He was a willing messenger who executed the designs of Jehovah; not an impersonation of an opposing evil power. This was a later conception founded partly on memories of the exoteric Egyptian creed, and partly from the intercourse of the Jews with the Persians during their period of exile.

In the Persian or Iranian mythology, a personal power of evil was conspicuously recognised as being self-existent, and as potent as deity. Ormuzd the good god was perpetually thwarted and opposed by Ahriman, described in the Zenda Vesta as the evil principle.

The Zoroastrians represented the latter as a serpent, the wicked *Aji Dahaka*, or *Azhi-dahaka*, and he is fabled to have assumed a serpent's shape in order to destroy the first human beings. He is said to have introduced evil and disease into the world, but to have been conquered by Thrita, or Thraetaona, who showed mankind how to combat disease, which according to the allegory is the result of poisoning by the bite of this evil serpent. It was one of the popular beliefs among the Persians that in Hell scorpions and serpents stung the feet of the wicked, and it is written in the Sadder (Porta 47), "When you kill serpents, you shall

repeat the Zenda Vesta, and thence you will obtain great merit ; for it is the same as if you had killed so many devils."

Later sects sought to rise from this dualistic idea to the higher conception of the Encircled Serpent. Thus the Zarvanites represented Ormuzd and Ahriman as twin sons proceeding from the fundamental principle of All, and among the Parsees in and around Bombay, Zoroaster's doctrine has reached the stage of pure monotheism.

The following stanza from Fitzgerald's version of the Persian poet, Omar Khayyám, clearly postulates the ultimate responsibility of the Creator for evil as well as for good. The Snake is His creation, an Idea of His mind.

" Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And who with Eden didst devise the Snake ;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness give—and Take."

The devil of the gospels is in some respects very different to the Zoroastrian conception. He is not a co-creator of man as is Ahriman, and powerful though he admittedly is, yet is an inferior and subjected being. It is probably rather to Egypt than to



From the effigy of a bishop in the Temple Church, London.

Persia that Christianity owes its idea of Satan. For instance, the design of Horus spearing Typhon is said to be the original of the Christian conceptions of Michael the Archangel conquering Satan, and St. George slaying the dragon. Again, numerous papyri have been found full of magical charms intended to repel the attacks of Apep and Set as evil deities. Among these ancient Egyptian remains are many serpents representative of evil, with curious names having such

meanings as Long-flame, Tongue-seizer and Burning-wheel ; some of them have flames of fire issuing from their mouths, and may have been the originals of European Christian representations of devils, sculptured and painted in churches and elsewhere.

Christian theology, except when influenced by Gnosticism, has, like its Jewish parent, accepted the obvious interpretation that the exoteric reading of the Biblical text suggests. It has connected the serpent with Satan, and regarded both as

personified evil. Stillingfleet, who was bishop of Worcester in the seventeenth century, remarked that " wherever the Devil reigned the serpent was held in some peculiar veneration," and his remark still represents the attitude of unenlightened Christian orthodoxy. In fact, the word " dragon " is in many Christian countries a synonym for the devil. Cambry tells us that the devil's tomb in England is because of this called "*Draghedanum sepulcrum*" (Monuments Celtiques). The castle of Drogheda in Ireland is alternatively the Devil's castle. In Languedoc the meteoric fires and Will-o'-the-Wisps are called *Dragg*, and in Bretagne, *Dreag* ; and the word *Drouk* in Bretagne signifies Devil.

In Revelation xii. 9, and xx. 2, we find " the dragon," " that old serpent," and " the devil," used as synonymous terms, and even to-day the orthodox Christian sees in the dragon the hieroglyph of the evil one, whose head the Messiah was to crush.

Frazer says : " We know from Scripture that the old serpent, which is the devil, has been or will be shut up under lock and key for a thousand years (Rev. xx. 1-3), and that the number of the Beast is six hundred and sixty-six (Rev. xiii. 18). A simple mathematical calculation based on these irrefragable data pointed to the year 1666 as the date when the final consummation of all things and the arrival of the Beast in question might be confidently anticipated."

History has related the unfortunate results of these misguided beliefs. We will not enter into them here, as we merely wish to illustrate the symbolic connection of the Devil with the serpent in Christian thought.

The doctrine of duality often tended towards the grotesque and absurd when it borrowed and distorted the symbols of the monotheist. Particularly was this so when it degraded the most sacred symbol of all to represent the Devil. The following is a fair example of the mythology to which its teaching gave rise, hundreds of such tales being in circulation in mediæval times. This one is related by Gubernatis, who says that according to a popular proverb the Devil is known by his tail ; and " to show that women know more than the devil, it adds that they also know where the devil secretes his tail, or where he keeps his poison, for his poison and power to harm are in his tail. A devil without a tail would not be a real devil ; it is his tail which betrays him ; and this tail is the serpent's tail.

" In the forty-fifth story of the Afanassief, the devil-serpent comes every night to visit the young widow in the form of her deceased husband, eats with her and sleeps with her till morning ; she grows thinner every night, like a candle before the fire ; but

her mother counsels her to let a spoon drop when she is sitting at table, that, in lifting it, she may scrutinise the guest's feet; instead of his feet she only sees his tail. Then the widow goes to the church to be purified."

Swedenborg definitely placed the serpent among "evil uses" in Hell, and carefully explained that "the evil uses existing on earth are from Hell, and not from the Lord," saying that "if



CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM.
From old engraving.

this subject is not understood, evil, as well as good uses may be ascribed to the Lord, and both may be imagined to have been created at the same time; or they may be attributed to nature, and their origin to the Sun. Men cannot be freed from these two errors, unless they know that there is nothing in the natural world whose cause and origin is not found in the spiritual world; that good is from the Lord, and evil from the devil—that is from hell. All those things that are good uses appear in heaven; all those that are evil uses appear in hell; wild beasts of every kind, as serpents, scorpions, large snakes, crocodiles . . . in a word,

all things that do injury to and kill men. Such things appear to the life in the hells, just like those on earth. It is said they appear there, but still they are not there as on earth, for they are the actual correspondents of the cupidities that flow from their evil loves, and take such forms before the beholder. . . . Hence it is evident that corresponding things in the natural world have not originated from the Lord, were not created in the beginning, and have not sprung from nature through her sun; but that they are from hell. That they are not from nature through her sun is plain, for the spiritual enters by influx into the natural, and not the reverse. And that they are not from the Lord is plain, because hell is not from Him, nor anything in hell therefore that corresponds to the evils of its inhabitants. . . . Noxious things are produced on earth by influx from hell" ("God, Creation, Man," 339, 340).

It would appear from the above as if Swedenborg did not recognise the Encircled Serpent, but a few paragraphs farther on we find him saying:

"That all uses, both good and evil, have a spiritual origin—that is, the sun where the Lord is—may be illustrated by this experience. I heard that goods and truths were sent down through the heavens by the Lord to the hells, and that the same having passed by degrees to a great depth, were there turned into evils and falsities opposite to the goods and truths sent down. . . . From these things it is evident that even evil uses are from the spiritual sun, but that good uses are changed to evil uses in hell."

Dante also found Hell swarming in some parts with terrible serpents who tortured the damned by their poisonous bites. He says:

" I saw a crowd within
Of serpents terrible, so strange of shape
And hideous, that remembrance in my veins
Yet shrinks the vital current. Of her sands
Let Libya vaunt no more: if Jaculus,
Pareas and Chelyder be her brood,
Cenchris and Amphisbæna, plagues so dire
Or in such numbers swarming ne'er she show'd,
Not with all Ethiopia, and whate'er
Above the Erythræan sea is spawn'd.

Amid this dread exuberance of woe
Ran naked spirits wing'd with horrid fear,
Nor hope had they of crevice where to hide,
Or heliotrope to charm them out of view.
With serpents were their hands behind them bound,
Which through their reins infix'd the tail and head,
Twisted in folds before. And, lo! on one
Near to our side, darted an adder up,

And where the neck is on the shoulders tied,
 Transpierced him. Far more quickly than e'er pen
 Wrote O or I, he kindled, burn'd and changed
 To ashes all, pour'd out upon the earth.
 When there dissolved he lay, the dust again
 Uproll'd spontaneous, and the self-same form
 Instant resumed. . . .

. . . As one that falls
 He knows not how, by force demoniac dragg'd
 To earth, or through obstruction fettering up
 In chains invisible the powers of man,
 Who, risen from his trance, gazeth around,
 Bewilder'd with the monstrous agony
 He hath endured, and wildly staring sighs ;
 So stood aghast the sinner when he rose.

Oh ! how severe God's judgment, that deals out
 Such blows in stormy vengeance."

From the last two lines it is clear that Dante recognised that even the serpents of Hell were the ministers of God, and not of an antagonist power. The allegory may perhaps be read as follows :

The serpent is the symbol of the Divine, and at its touch sin necessarily dissolves into nothingness. The hardened sinner so closely associated with a mode of thought and life he has long followed, has built for himself this thought-body which is purely evil, and cannot exist alongside with the consciousness of the Divine Presence. But the inner soul of man is immortal, and the Vision past, clothes itself anew with the thought-form which is its only means of manifestation.

Does not the touch of the sacred serpent imply that the erring soul may some day build a purer thought-form, one that is in harmony with the Divine, and will rejoice and gain new vigour from the vision of Its Presence ? Dante said " No," but the Encircled Serpent has another message to tell.

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CHAPTER XXXIX

THE SEA-SERPENT

THE Sea-Serpent is generally looked upon as a mythical or imaginary reptile. But from very early times startling accounts have been brought home by voyagers of enormous serpent-like creatures seen by them in mid-ocean, varying in length from 80 to 800 feet. These reports have in recent years been confirmed from time to time by modern travelers of undoubted trustworthiness, the only question being whether they were in a position for observation beyond possibility of mistake. Of course no one disputes the existence of what we may call the smaller sea-serpents or *Hydridae* which frequent the coasts of Asia and the islands of the Pacific, and swim together in troops.

But it is the Great Sea-Serpent that interests us, and we will first consider some of the ancient myths and legends which have gathered around its monstrous form, and then glance at a few of the accounts of those who claim to have seen it in more recent times. Quite apart from historical and semi-historical examples, the sea-serpent has everywhere been recognised in folklore, among such widely differing peoples as the Eskimo, Fijians, Japanese, Icelanders, Basques, Red Indians and Chinese.

Some of the Biblical hymn writers praise Jehovah for smiting Rahab, otherwise the serpent, also a poetical name for the sea. Thus Isaiah (xxvii. 1) says, "In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing

serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea."

And again the prophet apostrophises Jehovah, saying, "Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?" (li. 9).

In Psalm lxxiv. 13, 14, we read, "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness."

From the last quotation we learn that the serpent (leviathan) had many heads. Ewing and Thomson say that "after they had been smitten, the flesh was given to the *Tziyyim* to eat; but others think of the leviathan as flung into the sea, whence he might still be roused. The details of this myth had been forgotten when the historical books were composed, or considered irreverent."

The sea-serpent (Nāhāš) so often represented as the victim of Jehovah's wrath is referred to by the prophet Amos (ix. 1-3) in the following passage, as being at his service:

"I saw the Lord standing upon the altar: and he said, . . . Though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them."

It has been suggested that Amos probably derived the idea of the sea-serpent from Arabic sources. But the sea-serpent or *Tinnin* (=Heb. *Tannin*) of the Arabs appears to have been a poetic simile to express the phenomena of the waterspout (see "Mas'ūdī," I, 266 f.; "Kazwīnī," I, 132 f.) and not believed to have a literal existence, as was evidently the case with the sea-serpent of the Biblical writers.

Hindu tradition in the Puranas connects the sea-serpent with the story of the deluge, and like the Bible, represents it as serving the will of God, but as a saviour, not as a destroyer.

"The Lord of the Universe," wishing to preserve the pious king, Satyavrata, from the sea of destruction brought about by the depravity of the age, thus addressed him: "In seven days from this time, O thou tamer of enemies, the three worlds will be swallowed up in an ocean of death; but in the midst of the destroying waters, a large ship sent by me for thy use shall stand before thee. Then shalt thou take all medicinal herbs, all the varieties of seeds, and accompanied by seven saints, encircled by pairs of all brute animals, thou shalt enter the spacious ark, and remain in it, safe from the flood, on one huge ocean, without light, except the radiance of the holy companions. When the ark shall be agitated by an impetuous wind, thou shalt fasten it with a large sea-serpent on my horn; for I will be near thee."

All happened as the Lord of the Universe had foretold. Satyavrata, safely within the ark with all his company, invoked the god, who thereupon appeared again upon the vast ocean in the form of an enormous fish of blazing gold, a million leagues in length and with one stupendous horn. To this the king attached his ship by a cable made of a vast serpent, and happy because of his own preservation, praised the destroyer of Madhu.

In the "Æneid" we may read how the vengeance of Neptune, god of the sea and of horses, upon his sacrilegious priest, Laocoön, for violating the sacred image of the Trojan horse, was appropriately enough carried out by means of two enormous serpents of the sea.

The story told by Virgil relates how the Greeks, disheartened by their unsuccessful warfare against Troy, were at last inspired by Minerva to build a horse's form the size of a mountain, and to give out that they had abandoned their project, and made this offering to the gods to ensure their safe voyage home. Within the image of the horse they cunningly concealed a band of selected soldiers, whilst the main body of the army re-embarked and set sail. The Trojans believed that the Greeks had really gone, not knowing they had only sailed for Tenedos, an island opposite Troy, where they had concealed themselves to await results from their stratagem. Nor were they disappointed. The simple Trojans, completely deceived, joyously threw open their city gates, and issuing forth, viewed with amazement the wondrous horse left by the Greeks. Their prince, Thymœtes, was the first to advise that the image should be dragged within the city walls and lodged in the tower, but Capys and others were more prudent, and, fearing a trap, urged its destruction. Laocoön, the son of Priam, a priest of Apollo, came hurrying from the top of the citadel at this juncture and joined Capys in warning the people to put no faith in the horse, which, without doubt, concealed some mischievous design of their deceitful foes. Even as he spoke he hurled his massy spear against the sides and belly of the monster. His weapon stood quivering, and the hollow caverns sent forth a groan. His warning might have been heeded and Troy saved, but at this moment some Trojan shepherds appeared dragging with them a youth whose hands were bound behind him. The crowd gathered around this new source of interest and vied with each other in insulting the captive. But by his mournful accents he turned their resentment to sympathy, and then told a piteous tale of how his fellow-countrymen to regain the favour of Minerva (which they had lost by stealing her sacred image, the Palladium), and secure a prosperous homeward voyage, had decided to offer up himself as a

sacrifice to the angry goddess. The generous Trojans, moved by the youth's tears and tale of sorrow, unloosed his bonds,—King Priam himself commanding it, and speaking as a friend to the supposed refugee. The latter, whose name was Sinon, appealed to all that was sacred to witness that he now had no further obligations to his cruel fellow-countrymen, but was free to disclose their designs in leaving behind them the horse.

Firstly, he said it was an offering to Minerva in lieu of the stolen Palladium, and secondly, Calchas, their Priest and soothsayer, had announced that should the Trojans violate the image, signal ruin would befall them. "But," continued the youth, "Calchas commanded it to be built of this enormous size that you might not drag it within your city, as in that event you would gain the protection of the Goddess and the Greeks and their posterity meet a fearful doom."

The easily swayed Trojans believed the story of perjured Sinon, but before they had time to act upon it an awful portent was presented to their horrified sight. The priest, Laocoön, who, seeing his warning unheeded, had withdrawn from the controversy, was sacrificing a stately bullock at Neptune's altar, when lo, from Tenedos, two serpents with orbs immense, their crests bedropped with blood, and thick manes of hair upon their heads and necks, came across the sea, their heads held high above the waves, whilst many scaly coils trailed behind them in the waters. A loud noise was made by the foaming of the briny ocean as onward they sped, and now they reached the shores, and their glaring eyes were seen to be suffused with fire and blood, whilst their quivering tongues licked their hissing mouths. The spectators fled in panic, as the serpents gained the land, and with resolute motion advanced towards Laocoön. They twined themselves around the little bodies of his two sons, and mangled their tender limbs. The priest seized weapons and rushed to the rescue, but in vain. The serpents bound him with their mighty folds. Twice they grasped him round the middle and twice twisted their scaly backs about his neck. Vainly he strove to tear asunder their knotted spires whilst he raised shrieks of despair to Heaven, bellowing as does a bull who has fled wounded from the altar, his priestly garlands dripping with blood.

Their ghastly mission accomplished, the two serpents glided to the citadel of Minerva, and hid themselves beneath the feet and shield of the stern goddess. And now terror reigned among the Trojans, and they said to each other, "See! the priest Laocoön hath been judged according to his works. He cast his weapon against the holy image and the gods have justly slain him." They united in urging that the statue should be

drawn within the city. They flung wide the Scaean Gate and pulled down the protecting wall. Rollers were placed under the horse's feet and ropes attached to its neck, and with singing and dancing it was drawn into the fortress.

At last night fell on the feasting and rejoicing, and the Trojans, wearied, retired to rest. And now the Grecian hosts returned from Tenedos, and Sinon released the hidden warriors from their wooden prison. With joy they emerged sliding down by a rope to the ground. They assaulted the helpless city buried in sleep



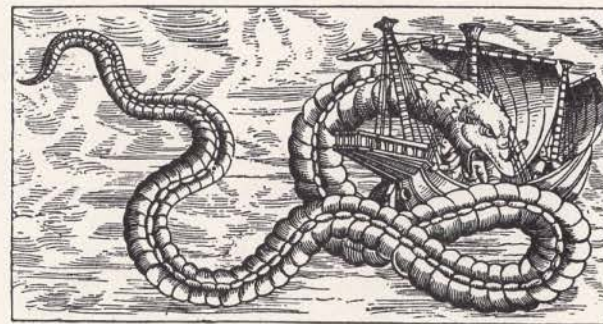
THE LAOCOÖN.

and wine, and set the buildings ablaze and pitilessly slaughtered the inhabitants.

After this terrible destruction had overtaken the doomed city there appeared to Æneas, who alone survived of all the great chiefs that had fought against the Greeks, his mother, Venus. She removed the veil from his eyes that he might know, not mortals, but the gods, the unrelenting gods, were the conquerors of Troy. "See," she said, "how Neptune with his mighty trident shakes the walls and overturns the whole city from its basis; how Juno stands with spear and shield in the Scaean Gate; and calls fresh hosts from the ships; and how Minerva sits refulgent in a cloud with her terrible Gorgon shield."

This dramatic tale of the fate of Laocoön and his sons has gained enduring celebrity from the remarkable group of sculpture representing it, which originally decorated the baths of Titus, among the ruins of which it was found in 1506. The names of the artists who executed this masterpiece are also preserved to us. They are Agesander, Polydorus and Athenodorus, natives of Rhodes (Pliny, XXXVI, 5), and seem to have lived in the time of the early emperors, Lessing believes, in the reign of Titus.

This beautiful sculpture clearly portrays the intense mental agony of the victims; the father, with his youthful sons, one on either side, writhing and expiring in the complicated folds of the serpents, their physical strength rapidly sinking beneath the



THE SEA-SERPENT OF OLAUS MAGNUS.

From old woodcut.

irresistible power of the huge reptiles entwined around their exhausted limbs. One of the boys, in whose side a serpent has fixed its deadly fangs, appears to be fainting, the other not yet bitten is endeavouring to disengage one of his feet from the serpent's embrace. Laocoön himself is strong in his suffering. His hands and feet are convulsed with terrible effort, and every muscle is in action, yet in spite of the agony it expresses, there is nothing unbeautiful in his face. The sculpture displays a perfect knowledge of anatomy and the human form.

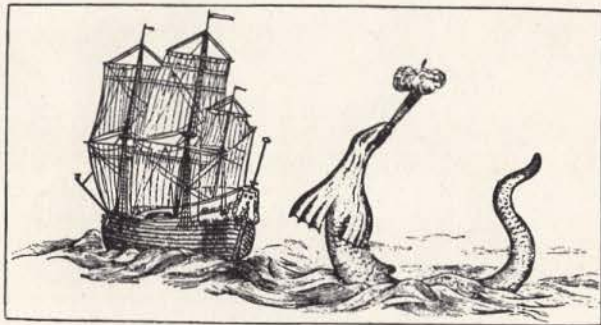
The original group is in the Vatican Museum at Rome, and is in every way a masterpiece.

Among ancient descriptions of the sea-serpent that of the Swedish bishop, Olaus Magnus, is one of the most vivid and interesting, and the realistic woodcut which accompanies it makes us feel that he must have been an eye-witness. But he takes the precaution to tell us that this was not so, and that his

account is only from hearsay. He describes the creature as being 200 feet long and 20 feet in circumference, with a short mane and fiery eyes. In the picture it is represented on the surface of the water, coiling its head above a ship, from which it is about to seize its human prey. It was said to have been seen about the middle of the sixteenth century.

Another vivid account of a sea-serpent from what should be a trustworthy source, has been bequeathed to us by the missionary Hans Egede, afterwards Bishop Egede. In the year 1734 he went to Greenland to missionise, and in his story of the voyage he describes a sea-serpent which was seen near the ship on the 6th of July.

"Its head when raised, was on a level with our maintop. Its snout was long and sharp, and it blew water almost like a whale;



SEA-SERPENT SEEN BY HANS EGEDE IN 1734.
From old woodcut.

it had large broad paws or paddles; its body was covered with scales; its skin was rough and uneven; in other respects it was as a serpent; and when it dived, the end of its tail, which was raised in the air, seemed to be a full ship's length from its body."

A second missionary accompanying Egede made the drawing which we here reproduce.

The famous Norwegian naturalist, Erik Pontoppidan, Bishop of Bergen, at one time thought the sea-serpent fabulous, but in his book, which was published in 1755, he states that he had since been convinced of its reality by "full and sufficient evidence from creditable and experienced fishermen and sailors in Norway, of whom hundreds testify that they have seen them annually."

This writer tells us that sea-serpents usually live at the bottom of the sea, except in July and August, which is their spawning time. They then rise to the surface in calm weather, but should the least disturbance occur, immediately sink below,

Pontoppidan considers that the Norwegian and Greenland sea-serpents are distinct varieties, the former being perfectly smooth-skinned and with a mane hanging like a bunch of seaweed from its neck, whilst the latter has a scaly skin. He estimates the length of these serpents to be about 600 feet, which length in calm weather rests in folds on the surface of the sea. The colour is a dark brown, variegated in places. The eyes are large and bluish with the appearance of bright pewter plates. The forehead is high and broad, but in some the snout is sharp, whilst in others it is flat.

The fishermen of Norway have no doubts as to the actual existence of the sea-serpent and can relate endless tales of its being seen in their fiords.

In the "Zoologist" for the year 1847 many accounts were given of the appearance during that year of the sea-serpent in the Norwegian fiords.

In 1848 an account of a sea-serpent that had been seen by Captain M'Quhae was published, and is one of the best known of those which proceed from reliable sources.

Captain M'Quhae was commander in H.M.S. "Dædalus," and was in the South Atlantic Ocean near the Tropic of Capricorn, and not very far from the African coast, when he encountered the monster. The weather was dark and cloudy, and there was a long ocean swell. The creature was swimming rapidly with its head and neck above water.

In his report to the Admiralty, Captain M'Quhae describes it as "an enormous serpent, with head and shoulders kept about four feet constantly above the surface of the sea"; and he adds: "As nearly as we could approximate by comparing it with the length of what our maintopsail-yard would show in the water, there was at the very least sixty feet of the animal *à fleur d'eau*, no portion of which was, to our perception, used in propelling it through the water, either by vertical or horizontal undulation. It passed rapidly, but so close under our lee-quarter that had it been a man of my acquaintance I should have easily recognised his features with the naked eye; and it did not, either in approaching the ship or after it had passed in our wake, deviate in the slightest degree from its course to the south-west, which it held on at the pace of from twelve to fifteen miles per hour, apparently on some determined purpose. The diameter of the serpent was about fifteen or sixteen inches behind the head, which was without any doubt that of a snake; and it was never during the twenty minutes that it continued in sight of our glasses once below the surface of the water; its colour a dark brown, with yellowish white about the throat. It had no fins, but something like the

mane of a horse, or rather a bunch of seaweed, washed about its back."

We must congratulate the shade of the gallant captain that he was not ruled by the destructive impulse that is the bane of most white men, to shoot the rare phenomena on sight. Figures prepared from a sketch by him were published in the "Illustrated London News" of October 28th, 1848.

In 1875 Captain Drevar saw a battle between a sea-serpent and a whale from the deck of the "Pauline" of London when proceeding with a cargo of coals from Shields to Zanzibar. The "Pauline" was carried out of her course, and after a severe storm found herself off Cape San Roque. Here several sperm whales were noticed playing around her. The crew were watching these when they suddenly saw what filled them all with terror. Starting straight from the deeps an enormous serpent appeared, and twisted itself in two mighty coils around the largest of the whales, which it proceeded to crush in the manner of a boa-constrictor. The unfortunate whale vainly struggled, bellowed, and lashed the water into foam, for its efforts were as nothing against the enormous power of its dreadful adversary, whose strength may be gauged from the fact that its victim's ribs could be heard cracking, one after another with a report like that of a small cannon.

In the year 1877 several instances of the sea-serpent's appearing were recorded by different seers. On May 21st Captain Melhuish, of the barque "Georgina," sighted a sea-serpent. He described it as being 50 feet long and 11 inches thick, and dark grey and yellow in colouring. It remained in view for twenty minutes, and was seen by the mate, and all the crew who were on the deck. The crew for some days before this monster showed itself had seen smaller ones playing around the ship.

Next month the captain and officers of H.M. Yacht "Osborne" saw a sea-serpent off the coast of Sicily. This reptile had a smooth skin without scales, and a bullet-shaped head. It was a tremendous length and from its back projected a ridge of fins 15 feet long and 6 feet apart. Its motions were slow.

In July, Captain Nelson of the American ship "Sacramento" caught a distant view of a sea-serpent, of which he could see 40 feet. And in October the chief officer of the "Samatra" saw one of these creatures in the Red Sea, but did not enter the fact in the log-book for fear of being laughed at. But a man-of-war soon after saw the same reptile close to Suez, and reported it.

Another circumstantial account of the appearance of a sea-serpent was given by Captain J. F. Cox of the British ship "Privateer," when he arrived at Delaware breakwater on

September 9th, 1879. He wrote: "On August 5th, one hundred miles west of Brest (France), *weather fine and clear*, at 5 a.m., as I was walking the quarter-deck I saw something black rise out of the water about twenty feet, in shape like an immense snake of three feet diameter. *It was about three hundred yards from the ship*, coming towards us. It turned its head partly from us, and went down with a great splash, after staying up about five seconds, but rose again three times at intervals of ten seconds, until it had turned completely from us, and was going from us at a great speed, and making the water boil all round it. *I could see its eyes and shape perfectly*. It was like a great eel or snake, but as black as coal tar, and appeared to be making great exertions to get away from the ship. I have seen many kinds of fish, in five different oceans, but was never favoured with a sight of the great sea-snake before."

A party of people standing on the pier at Llandudno, in 1882, saw a snake-like creature two hundred feet long, black in colouring, travelling at a rapid pace towards the Great Orme.

In 1909 a sea-serpent was seen by Captain Harbord, of the steamer "Sultan," who thus describes his experience:

"I saw it, the chief officer saw it, quartermaster, and the second steward, who had just come on the bridge to speak to me. We saw it for about fifteen minutes, travelling south. When people talk about sea-serpents and monsters, etc., we always ask them as to what brand of whiskey they drink, and advise them to change their brand. I have been to sea for over twenty years, been all over the world, and round it many times. I have been sailing the China seas for the past thirteen to fourteen years, but I never saw anything like this huge sea monster before. The length of the monster would be fifty feet, and from the top of its back to the water would be seventeen to eighteen feet high. It was of great bulk. The body was light brown in colour."

Many of us can recollect the account given in a newspaper by Miss Rider Haggard of a sea-serpent seen by her in July, 1912. She collected a great many letters from widely different sources which confirmed her evidence indirectly by giving accounts of a monster seen by the writers during the same month.

A still more recent appearance of this monster was recorded in the "Daily Express" of December 8th, 1923. The account was humorously headed: "An old Friend. The sea-serpent rears its head again," but seems to be well attested.

"The officers of the French mail steamer 'Pacifique,' on their arrival in Sydney, told a surprising story of the supposed presence near Noumea of a giant sea-serpent. They declare it is about twenty-five feet long. Mr. Martin, the wireless operator, sighted

the monster when the 'Pacificque' was near the Loyalty Islands, and called the attention of several of the crew to it. Two native women were crossing the bay eight miles from Noumea when they also heard a detonation like a gun-shot and turning round, they saw, at a distance of about eighty yards, a weird animal, which whistled for some seconds, and threw up in the air at a great height a jet of smoke and then a torrent of water. The head was standing about ten yards out of the water, and looked like a seahorse head, with long hair on the neck. It was dark brown in colour. The animal seemed gifted with great speed. The two women were nearly mad with fright, but had presence of mind to turn their little craft towards Freycinet Island. The animal when last sighted was making for Noumea Harbour."

The huge size and terrifying aspect of the great sea-serpent peculiarly fitted it to be regarded as a special messenger of the gods, and we should have expected to find it appearing in mythology in this character much oftener than is the case. As we have seen, when it does appear it indifferently plays the rôle of saviour or destroyer, according to the will of the deity who directs it.

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CHAPTER XL

THE MIDGARD SERPENT

ACCORDING to the Eddaic lore of the ancient Scandinavians, many ages before this earth was made there existed two worlds. One of these was the nebulous world named Niflheim, and it lay far to the north, whilst far to the south was Muspeheim, or the fire world. Between these worlds was Ginungagap, the yawning deep. In the midst of Niflheim was the spring Hvergelmer, and this spring was the dwelling-place of a terrible serpent named Nidhug, whose venom flowed along with the twelve ice-cold rivers called the Elvigogs that had their fount in Hvergelmer, and who was continually gnawing at the roots of the great world tree, the ash, Ygdrasil. Thus there was an evil being in serpent's form in prechaotic Niflheim.

This dualism in the prechaotic era is one of the most interesting points in Scandinavian mythology, which indeed enfolds a very elaborate development of the idea of an evil principle. For the esoteric interpretation of this, the student should turn to the chapter on The Ophites. But the great type or representation of evil was not the serpent, but Loki.

In the Sacred Scrolls of the Norse goddess, Saga, Loki is described as the brother of Odin, just as Typhon and Ahriman are said to be brothers of Osiris and Ormuzd. Originally a fire-god, his name was derived from the old word *liechan*, to enlighten, and he is thereby identified with Lucifer, the light-bringer. In the early Scandinavian mythology Loki is a beneficent and generous god, and the principle of good, not of evil, but like all other fire-gods, he was finally thought of as embodying only its destructive powers, and thence came to be considered as the Evil One and the author of all the misfortunes which have befallen gods and men.

Not content with the evil he was personally able to achieve, when in Jötunheim, or the home of the giants, Loki became the parent of a monstrous brood destined to bring awful anguish

alike on gods and men. The chief of these was the great Midgard serpent, Jormungand, which, according to Eddaic lore, encircles the round disk of the ocean-surrounded earth, holding its tail in its mouth. This fire-begotten serpent's other parent was the giantess, Angur-boda (the anguish-boding) who dwelt in Jötunheim. His sister was Hel, the goddess of Death (also originally a beneficent goddess), and his brother, the awful wolf, Fenris. These three monsters increased in size with such alarming rapidity that Odin began to fear lest when they had obtained their full stature and strength, they might invade Asgard, and destroy the gods. The All-Father therefore determined to fetter their powers ere such a calamity occurred. He flung Hel into Niflheim that she might rule over the dead, and Fenris was securely bound by a magic skein, but Jormungand was cast into the depths of the ocean. There he continued growing until at last he encircled the earth and was able to grasp his own tail.

" Into mid-ocean's dark depths hurled,
Grown with each day to giant size,
The serpent soon inclosed the world,
With tail in mouth, in circle-wise ;
Held harmless still
By Odin's will." (" Valhalla," J. C. Jones.)

Loki's evil career also at last came to an end ; he was captured and bound by strong cords to the points of rocks in a cave, and above his head was hung a serpent, in such manner that its venom fell, drop by drop, on to his face. Well earned, as we may think his punishment, yet he had one faithful friend. His wife Sigyn took pity on him. She stands beside him, and holds up a cup to catch the drops as they fall and empties it as often as it becomes full. But she cannot entirely save him, for while she is emptying the vessel the dreadful drops fall upon Loki's face, and cause him to shriek with anguish, and writhe his body so violently that the whole earth shakes, and men say there is an earthquake.

The story of the Midgard serpent is largely connected with that of Thor. The first occasion on which the Thunderer encountered Jormungand was when he visited the giants, and was mockingly challenged by them to pick up their cat, and with all his vast strength could only raise one of its paws from the ground. Thor did not then know that he was in reality attempting to lift the terrible world-encircling snake, which the giants, by their magic, had caused to appear to him in feline form.

The following account of how Thor went fishing for this monster is found in the Prose Edda of Scandinavian mythology :

" Thor went out of Midgard under the semblance of a young man, and came at dusk to the dwelling of a giant called Hymir. Here Thor passed the night, but at break of day, when he perceived that Hymir was making his boat ready for fishing, he arose and dressed himself, and begged the giant would let him row out to sea with him. Hymir answered that a puny stripling such as he could be of no great use to him. ' Besides,' he added, ' thou wilt catch thy death of cold if I go so far out and remain so long as I am accustomed to do.' Thor said, that for all that, he would row as far from the land as Hymir had a mind, and was not sure which of them would be the first who might wish to row back again. At the same time he was so enraged that he felt sorely inclined to let his mallet ring on the giant's skull without further delay, but intending to try his strength elsewhere, he stifled his wrath and asked Hymir what he meant to bait with. Hymir told him to look out for a bait for himself. Thor instantly went up to a herd of oxen that belonged to the giant, and seizing the largest bull, that bore the name of Himinbrjót, wrung off his head, and returning with it to the boat, put out to sea with Hymir. Thor rowed aft with two oars, and with such force that Hymir, who rowed at the prow, saw with surprise how swiftly the boat was driven forward. He then observed that they were come to the place where he was wont to angle for flat fish, but Thor assured him that they had better go on a good way further. They accordingly continued to ply their oars, until Hymir cried out that if they did not stop they would be in danger from the great Midgard serpent.

" Notwithstanding this, Thor persisted in rowing further, and in spite of Hymir's remonstrances was a great while before he would lay down his oars. He then took out a fishing-line, extremely strong, furnished with an equally strong hook, on which he fixed the bull's head, and cast his line into the sea. The bait soon reached the bottom, and it may be truly said that Thor then deceived the Midgard serpent not a whit less than Utgard-Loki had deceived Thor when he obliged him to lift up the serpent in his hand : for the monster greedily caught at the bait, and the hook stuck fast in his palate. Stung with pain the serpent tugged at the hook so violently that Thor was obliged to hold fast with both hands by the pegs that bear against the oars. But his wrath now waxed high, and assuming all his divine power, he pulled so hard at the line that his feet forced their way through the boat and went down to the bottom of the sea, whilst with his hands he drew up the serpent to the side of the vessel. It is impossible to express by words the dreadful scene that now took place ; Thor, on one hand, darting looks of ire on the serpent,

whilst the monster rearing his head spouted out floods of venom upon him.

"It is said that when the giant Hymir beheld the serpent, he turned pale and trembled with fright, and seeing, moreover, that the water was entering his boat on all sides, he took out his knife, just as Thor raised his mallet aloft, and cut the line, on which the serpent sunk again under water. Thor, however, launched his mallet at him, and there are some who say that it struck off the monster's head at the bottom of the sea, but others assert with equal certainty that he still lives and lies in the ocean. Thor then struck Hymir such a blow with his fist, nigh the ear, that the giant fell headlong into the water, and Thor, wading with rapid strides, soon came to the land again."

It is evident that Thor's blow did not kill the serpent, because in a later encounter which we are now about to relate, each antagonist slew the other. To our ears this culmination is somewhat startling, but one of the distinguishing features of Northern mythology is that its gods were finite and mortal, and even as men, had to pass through the gateway of death to attain spiritual life.

The fleeting years therefore inevitably at last brought with them the decline of the gods, and evil and the forces of destruction triumphed in the world. It was then that the awful Midgard serpent aroused by the wild commotion of the opposing powers around him, lashed the sea into enormous waves by his writhing contortions, and then crawled on to the land to join in the fray.

"In giant wrath the Serpent tossed
In ocean depths, till, free from chain,
He rose upon the foaming main ;
Beneath the lashings of his tail,
Seas, mountain high, swelled on the land ;
Then, darting mad the waves acrost,
Pouring forth bloody froth like hail,
Spurting with poisoned, venom'd breath
Foul deadly mists o'er all the Earth,
Thro' thundering surge, he sought the strand."

("Valhalla," J. C. Jones.)

There the powers of good and evil were engaged in desperate deadly struggle, all the pent-up antagonism of ages at last let loose.

Thor attacked again the Midgard snake, and won immortal fame by slaying him with his sword, Miölnir. But he lost his life in the encounter, for suffocated by the floods of venom

vomited upon him by the dying serpent, he recoiled nine paces and fell dead upon the ground.

"Odin's son goes
With the monster to fight ;
Midgard's Veor in his rage
Will slay the worm ;
Nine feet will go
Fiörgyn's son,
Bowed by the serpent
Who feared no foe."

(Sæmund's "Edda," Thorpe's Trans.)

After this terrible conflict in which everything is destroyed, a new world is born. The earth rises a second time from the waters, and is clothed in fresh verdure. The gods rise from the dead and assemble on the Ida plains to discuss the strange events of the past. A new and brighter sun shines in the heavens, and everywhere is beauty, plenty and joy.

But the end is not yet. The Scandinavian mythology has provided humanity with two heavens and two hells, a heaven and hell before this happy recreation, and a heaven and hell that follow it. In the former state of existence those who died a straw-death (i.e. from old age or illness) went after death to the domain ruled by Hel, but those who fell by the sword went to Valhal, and took part with Odin in the first conflict on the plain of Vigrid.

The second heaven is called Gimle, and is more radiant than the sun. In it the virtuous will live for evermore and enjoy delights without end.

The second hell is named Nastrand, which means "strand of corpses," and is situated far from the sun, in the lowest region of the universe. It is in the form of a huge cave, its doors opening to the north. The walls are built of serpents wattled together, their fanged heads facing into the cave, which they fill with their streaming venom. In this horrid flood the wicked have to wade, their faces dyed in gore, whilst strong-venom'd serpent fangs pierce their very hearts. Their hands are held helpless by rivets of red-hot stones. The flames, which burn, yet do not consume, enwrap their clothes, and ravens continually tear the eyes from their heads. From out this cave of horrors the damned are carried by the venom'd floods into Hvergelmer, that fearful well in Niflheim. Here their souls and bodies are subjected to yet more terrible tortures; for they are surrounded and torn by countless clusters of serpents, and carried from one agony to another by Nidhug, the primeval black-winged dragon of uttermost darkness. But awful as this serpent-infested hell of

Scandinavian mythology is, it yet compares favourably in at least one respect with the hell of Christian theologians. For it is not eternal. At last there comes a Mighty One to the great judgment, and Nidhug sinks. In her final vision in Völuspá the *vala* foresees a time when all that is evil shall vanish and be washed away by the eternal streams of goodness. The last vision of the *vala* is :

“There comes the dark
Dragon flying,
The shining serpent
From the Nida-mountains
In the deep.
Over the plains he flies ;
Dead bodies he drags
In his whizzing plumage.
Now must Nidhug sink.”

Madame Blavatsky says : “ In the epic poem of Finland, the Kalewala, the origin of the Serpent of Evil is given : it is born from the ‘ spittle of Suoyatar . . . and endowed with a living soul by the Principle of Evil,’ Hisi. A strife is described between the two, the ‘ thing of evil ’ (the Serpent, or Sorcerer), and Ahti, the Dragon ; ‘ Magic Lemminkainen.’ The latter is one of the seven sons of Ilmatar, the virgin ‘ daughter of the air,’ she ‘ who fell from heaven into the sea,’ before Creation, i.e. Spirit transformed into the matter of sensuous life. There is a world of meaning and Occult thought in these few lines, admirably rendered by Dr. J. M. Crawford, of Cincinnati. The hero Lemminkainen, the good magician,

‘ Hews the wall with might of magic,
Breaks the palisade in pieces,
Hews to atoms seven pickets
Chops the *Serpent wall* to fragments.
· · · · ·

When the monster little heeding
· · · · ·

Pounces with his mouth of venom
At the head of Lemminkainen.
But the hero, quick recalling,
Speaks the Master words of knowledge.’ ”

Not only in Scandinavia is the World Serpent found. The myth has been traced in almost every country on the globe where Ophiolatrea has prevailed. Dr. Anderson describes the ceremony of the laying of the foundation-stone of a native pagoda at Shuaykeenah. An offering was made to the great earth serpent,

which consisted of a round earthen vase, containing gold, silver and precious stones, besides rice and sweetmeats. It was closed with wax in which a lighted taper was stuck.

The Bagobos of the Phillipine Islands have a quaint belief as to the cause of earthquakes. They think that the world rests upon a great post which a large serpent is endeavouring to take away. When the serpent shakes this post the earth quakes. Then the Bagobos feel it is time to stop his pranks, so they beat their dogs so as to make them howl. The weird cries alarm the serpent and cause him to cease from his efforts. So the howl of dogs arises from every house in a Bagobo village so long as an earthquake continues.

“ In countries where the Two Principles were represented by two serpents,” says Jablonski, “ instead of the ecliptic, the *solstitial colures* were described under these symbols. Thus in Egyptian hieroglyphics, two serpents intersecting each other at right angles, upon a globe denoted the earth. These rectangular intersections were at the solstitial points.”

Deane has told us that we may find the same poetical fiction in Hindûstan. There it is said that the founder of Delhi, when about to lay the foundations of that city, was informed by a Brahmin that “ provided he placed the seat of his government *on the head of the serpent that supports the world*, his throne and kingdom would last forever.” This globe enfolding serpent is known in Hindu mythology as Asootee, and it has been suggested that the idea originated in the early consecration of the serpent to the sun ; and the subsequent conversion of a serpent biting its tail, into an emblem of the sun’s path. We may see this exemplified in the Tasmanian version of the myth. This would appear to be an older and purer form of the legend ; for the world girdling serpent is not represented as an evil power, but is known as the *bunyip*, i.e. the “ Good Hoop,” or the Universal Eye. In this form it is easy to recognise the Encircled Serpent and the Sun as interchangeable symbols of the Divine, and to see in the World Snake the Eternal One, Who enfolds and upholds the Universe.

With this thought we may fittingly close our book.

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