THE LORDS OF THE GHOSTLAND

EDGAR SALTUS

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A History of the Ideal

By

EDGAR SALTUS

"Errons, les doigts unis, dans
l'Alhambra du songe."

RENÉE VIVIEN

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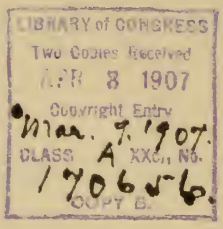

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I

BRAHMA

THE ideal is the essence of poetry. In the virginal innocence of the world, poetry was a term that meant discourse of the gods. A world grown grey has learned to regard the gods as diseases of language. Conceived, it may be, in fevers of fancy, perhaps, originally, they were but deified words. Yet, it is as children of beauty and of dream that they remain.

"Mortal has made the immortal," the *Rig-Veda* explicitly declares. The making was surely slow. In tracing the genealogy of the divine, it has been

found that its root was fear. The root, dispersed by light, ultimately dissolved. But, meanwhile, it founded religion, which, revealed in storm and panic, for prophets had ignorance and dread. The gods were not then. There were demons only, more exactly there were diabolized expressions invented to denominate natural phenomena and whatever else perturbed. It was in the evolution of the demoniac that the divine appeared. Through one of time's unmeasurable gaps there floated the idea that perhaps the phenomena that alarmed were but the unconscious agents of superior minds. At the suggestion, irresistibly a dramatization of nature began in which the gods were born, swarms of them, nebulous, wayward, uncertain, that, through further gaps, became concrete, became occasionally reducible to two great divinities,

earth and sky, whose union was imagined — a hymen which the rain suggested — and from which broader conceptions proceeded and grander gods emerged.

The most poetic of these are perhaps the Hindu. At the heraldings of newer gods, the lords of other ghostlands have, after battling violently, swooned utterly away. But though many a fresher faith has been brandished at them, apathetically, in serene indifference, the princes of the Aryan sky endure.

It is their poetry that has preserved them. To their creators poetry was abundantly dispensed. To no other people have myths been as frankly transparent. To none other, save only their cousins the Persians, have fancies more luminous occurred. The Persians so polished their dreams that they entranced the world that was. Poets can

do no more. The Hindus too were poets. They were children as well. Their first lisp, the first recorded stammer of Indo-European speech, is audible still in the *Rig-Veda*, a bundle of hymns tied together, four thousand years ago, for the greater glory of Fire. The worship of the latter led to that of the Sun and ignited the antique altars. It flamed in Persia, lit perhaps the shrine of Vesta, afterward dazzled the Incas, igniting, meanwhile, not altars merely, but purgatory itself.

In Persia, where it illuminated the face of Ormuzd, its beneficence is told in the *Avesta*, a work of such holiness that it was polluted if seen. In the *Rig-Veda*, there are verses which were subsequently accounted so sacred that if a soudra overheard them the ignominy of his caste was effaced.

The verses, the work of shepherds who were singers, are invocations to the dawn, to the first flushes of the morning, to the skies' heightening hues, and the vermillion moment when the devouring Asiatic sun appears. There are other themes, minor melodies, but the chief inspiration is light.

To primitive shepherds the approach of darkness was the coming of death. The dawn, which they were never wholly sure would reappear, was resurrection. They welcomed it with cries which the *Veda* preserves, which the *Avesta* retains and the *Eddas* repeat. The potent forces that produced night, the powers potenter still that routed it, they regarded as beings whose moods genuflexions could affect. In perhaps the same spirit that Frenchmen assisted at a *lever du roi*, and Englishmen attend a prince's levee, the Aryan

breakfasted on song and sacrifice. It was an homage to the rising sun.

The sun was *deva*. The Sanskrit root *div*, from which the word is derived, produced deus, devi, divinities — numberless, accursed, adored, or forgot. The common term applied to all abstractions that are and have been worshipped, means *That which shines* and the name which, in the early Orient, signified a star, designates the Deity in the Occident to-day.

Apologetically, Tertullian, a Christian Father, remarked: "Some think our God is the Sun." There were excuses perhaps for those that did. Adonai, a Hebrew term for the Almighty, is a plural. It means lords. But the lords indicated were Baalim who were Lords of the Sun. Moreover, when the early Christians prayed, they turned to the East. Their holy day was, as the holy day of

Christendom still is, Sunday, day of the Sun, an expression that comes from the Norse, on whom also shone the light of the Aryan deva.

To shepherds who, in seeking pasture for their flocks, were seeking also pasture for their souls, the deva became Indra. They had other gods. There was Agni, fire; Varuna, the sky; Maruts, the tempest. There was Mitra, day, and Yama, death. There were still others, infantile, undulant, fluid, not infrequently ridiculous also. But it was Indra for whom the dew and honey of the morning hymns were spread. It was Indra who, emerging from darkness, made the earth after his image, decorated the sky with constellations and wrapped the universe in space. It was he who poured indifferently on just and unjust the triple torrent of splendour, light, and life.

Indra was triple. Triple Indra, the *Veda* says. In that description is the preface to a theogony of which Hesiod wrote the final page. It was the germ of sacred dynasties that ruled the Aryan and the Occidental skies. From it came the grandiose gods of Greece and Rome. From it also came the paler deities of the Norse. Meanwhile ages fled. Life nomad and patriarchal ceased. From forest and plain, temples arose; from hymns, interpretations; from prayer, metaphysics; for always man has tried to analyze the divine, always too, at some halt in life, he has looked back and found it absent.

In meditation it was discerned that Indra was an effect, not the cause. It was discerned also that that cause was not predicable of the gods who, in their undulance and fluidity, suggested ceaseless

transformations and consequently something that is transformed.

The idea, patiently elaborated, resulted in a drainage of the fluid myths and the exteriorisation of a being entirely abstract. Designated first as Brahmanaspati, Lord of Prayer, afterward more simply as Brahma, he was assumed to have been asleep in the secret places of the sky, from which, on awakening, he created what is.

The conception, ideal itself, was not, however, ideal enough. The labour of creating was construed as a blemish on the splendour of the Supreme. It was held that the Soul of Things could but loll, majestic and inert, on a lotos of azure. Then, above Brahma, was lifted Brahm, a god neuter and indeclinable; neuter as having no part in life, indeclinable because unique.

There was the apex of the world's most poetic creed, one distinguished over all others in having no founder, unless a heavenly inspiration be so regarded. But the apex required a climax. Inspiration provided it.

The forms of matter and of man, the glittering apsaras of the vermillion dawns, Indra himself, these and all things else were construed into a bubble that Brahm had blown. The semblance of reality in which men occur and, with them, the days of their temporal breath, was attributed not to the actual but to Mâyâ—the magic of a high god's longing for something other than himself, something that should contrast with his eternal solitude and fill the voids of his infinite ennui. From that longing came the bubble, a phantom universe, the mirage of a god's desire. Earth; sea and sky; all that in them is, all

that has been and shall be, are but the changing convolutions of a dream.

In that dream there descended a scale of beings, above whom were set three great lords, Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer, collectively the Tri-murti, the Hindu trinity expressed in the mystically ineffable syllable Om. Between the trinity and man came other gods, a whole host, powers of light and powers of darkness, the divine and the demoniac fused in a hierarchy surprising but not everlasting. Eventually the dream shall cease, the bubble break, the universe collapse, the heavens be folded like a tent, the Tri-murti dissolved, and in space will rest but the Soul of Things, at whose will atoms shall reassemble and forms unite, disunite and reappear, depart and return, endlessly, in recurring cycles.

That conception, the basis perhaps of the theory of cosmological days, is perhaps also itself but a dream, yet one that, however defective, has a beauty which must have been too fair. Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, originally regarded as emanations of the ideal, became concrete. Consorts were found for them. From infinity they were lodged in idols. A worship sensuous when not grotesque ensued, from which the ideal took flight.

That was the work of the clergy. Brahmanism is also. The archaic conflict between light and darkness, the triumph of the former over the latter, diminished, at their hands, into the figurative. That is only reasonable. It was only reasonable also that they should claim the triumph as their own. Without them the gods could do nothing. They would not even be. In the *Rig-Veda*

and the *Vedas* generally they are transparent. The subsequent evolution of the Paramâtmâ, the Tri-murti and the hierarchy, had, for culmination, the apotheosis of a priesthood that had invented them and who, for the invention, deserved the apotheosis which they claimed and got. They were priests that were poets, and poets that were seers. But they were not sorcerers. They could not provide successors equal to themselves. It was the later clergy that pulled poetry from the infinite, stuffed it into idols and prostituted it to nameless shames.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* it is written: "Nothing is greater than I. In scriptures I am prayer. I am perfume in flowers, brilliance in light. I am life and its source. I am the soul of creation. I am the beginning and the end. I am the Divine."

That is Brahm. Ormuzd has faded. Zeus has passed. Jupiter has gone. With them the divinities of Egypt and the lords of the Chaldean sky have been reabsorbed and forgot. Brahm still is. The cohorts of Cyrus might pray Ormuzd to peer where he glowed. There, the phalanxes of Alexander might raise altars to Zeus. Parthians and Tatars might dispute the land and the god. Muhammadans could bring their Allah and Christians their creed. Indifferently Brahm has dreamed, knowing that he has all time as these all have their day.

The conception of that apathy, grandiose in itself and marvellous in its persistence, was due to unknown poets that had in them the true *souffle* of the real ideal. But that also demanded a climax. They produced it in the theory that the

afflictions of this life are due to transgressions in another.

From afflictions death, they taught, is not a release, for the reason that there is no death. There is but absorption in Brahm. Yet that consummation cannot occur until all transgressions, past and present, have been expiated and the soul, lifted from the eddies of migration, becomes Brahm himself.

To be absorbed, to be Brahm, to be God, is an ambition, certainly vertiginous yet as surely divine. But to succeed, consciousness of success must be lost. A mortal cannot attain divinity until annihilation is complete. To become God nothing must be left of man. To loose, then, every bond, to be freed from every tie, to retire from finite things, to mount to and sink in the immutable, to see Death die, was and is the Hindu ideal.

Of the elect, that is. Of the higher castes, of the priest, of the prince. But not of the people. The ideal was not for them, salvation either. It was idle even to think about it. Set in hell, they had to return here until in some one of the twenty-four lakhs of birth which the chain of migrations comports, and which to saint and soudra were alike dispensed, they arrived here in the purple. Then only was the opportunity theirs to rescale a sky that was reserved for prelates and rajahs.

Suddenly, to the pariah, to the hopeless, to those who outcast in hell were outcast from heaven, an erect and facile ladder to that sky was brought. The Buddha furnished it. If he did not, a college of dissidents assumed that he had, and in his name indicated a stairway which, set among the people, all might mount and

at whose summit gods actually materialized.

To those who believe in the Dalai Lama — there are millions that have believed, there are millions that do — he is not a vicar of the divine, he is himself divine, a god in a tenement of flesh who, as such, though he die, immediately is reincarnated; a god therefore always present among his people, whose history is a continuous gospel. In contemporaneous Italy, a peasant may aspire to the papacy. In the uplands of Asia, men have loftier ambitions. There they may become Buddha, who perhaps never was, except in legend.

In the *Lalita Vistâra* the legend unfolds. In the strophes of the poem one may asist at the Buddha's birth, an event which is said to have occurred at Kapilavastu. Oriental geography is unac-

quainted with the place. With the thing even Occidental philosophy is familiar. Kapilavastu means the substance of Kapila. The substance is atheism.

History has its hesitancies. Often it stammers uncertainly. But its earliest pages agree in representing Kapila as the initial religious rebel. Kapila was the first to declare the divine a human and invalid conjecture. The announcement, with its prefaces and deductions, is contained in the *Sankhya Karika*, a system of rationalism, still read in India, where it is known as the godless tract.

In the Orient, existence is usually a sordid nightmare when it does not happen to be a golden dream. Kapila taught that it was a prison from which release could be had only through intellectual development. That is Kapilavastu, the substance of Kapila, where the Buddha

was born. In the *Lalita Vistâra* it is fairyland.

There, Gotama the Buddha is the Prince Charming of a sovereign house. But a prince who developed into a nihilist prior to re-becoming the god that anteriorly he had been. It was while in heaven that he selected Mâyâ, a ranee, to be his mother. It was surrounded by the heavenly that he appeared. The fields foamed with flowers. The skies flamed with faces. In the air apsaras floated, fanning themselves with peacocks' tails. The galleries of the palace festooned themselves with pearls. On the terraces a rain of perfume fell. In the parterres Mâyâ strolled. A tree bent and bowed to her. Touching a branch with her hand she looked up and yawned. Painlessly from her immaculate breast Gotama issued. An immense lotos sprouted to receive

him. To cover him a parasol dropped from above. He, however, already occupied, was contemplating space, the myriad worlds, the myriad lives, and announced himself their saviour. At once a deluge of roses descended. The effulgence of a hundred thousand colours shone. A spasm of delight pulsated. Sorrow and anger, envy and fear, fled and fainted. From the zenith came a murmur of voices, the sound of dancing, the kiss of timbril and of lute.

That is Oriental poetry. Oriental philosophy is less ornate. From the former the Buddha could not have come. From the latter he probably did, if not in flesh at least in spirit. To that spirit antiquity was indebted, as modernity is equally, for the doctrines of a teacher known variously as Gotama the Enlightened and Sakya the Sage. Whether or

not the teacher himself existed is, therefore, unimportant. The existence of the Christ has been doubted. But the doctrines of both survive. They do more, they enchant. Occasionally they seem to combine. The Gospels have obviously nothing in common with the *Lalita Vistâra*, which is an apocryphal novel of uncertain date. The resemblance that is reflected comes from the *Tripitaka*, the Three Baskets that constitute the evangels of the Buddhist faith.

In an appendix to the *Mahavâggo*, it is stated that disciples of Gotama, who knew his sermons and his parables by heart, determined the canon "after his death." The expression might mean anything. But a ponderable antiquity is otherwise shown. Asoko, a Hindu emperor, sent an embassy to Ptolemy Philadelphos. The circumstance was set forth

bilingually on various heights. In another inscription Asoko recommended the study of the *Tripitaka* and mentioned titles of the books. Ptolemy Philadelphos reigned at Alexandria in the early part of the third century B.C. The *Tripitaka* must therefore have existed then. But the thirty-seventh year of Asoko's reign was, in a third inscription, counted as the two hundred and fifty-seventh from the Buddha's death, a reckoning which makes them much older. Their existence, however, as a fourth inscription shows, was oral. Transmitted for hundreds of years by trained schools of reciters, it was during a synod that occurred in the first quarter of the first century before Christ that, finally, they were written.

In them it is recited that Mâyâ, the mother of Gotama, was immaculate. According to St. Matthew, Maria, the

mother of Jesus, was also. Previously, in each instance, the coming of a Messiah had been foretold. The infant Jesus was visited by magi. The infant Buddha was visited by kings. Afterward, neither Jesus or Gotama wrote. But both preached charity, chastity, poverty, humility, and abnegation of self. Both fasted in a wilderness. Both were tempted by a devil. Both announced a second advent. Both were transfigured. Both died in the open air. At the death of each there was an earthquake. Both healed the sick. Both were the light of a world which both said would cease to be.

According to *Luke*, a courtesan visited Jesus and had her sins remitted. According to the *Mahâvaggo*, Gotama was visited by a harlot whom he instructed in things divine.[1] In *Matthew*, Jesus is

[1] Luke vii. 37–50. Sacred Books of the East, xi. 30.

depicted as a glutton and a wine-bibber. In the *Mahâvaggo*, the picture of Gotama is the same.[1] In *Matthew* it is written; "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth consume and where thieves break through and steal." The *Khuddakapatho* says: "Righteousness is a treasure which no man can steal. It is a treasure that abideth alway."[2] In *Luke* it is written: "As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them." The *Dhammaphada* say: "Put yourself in the place of others, do as you would be done by."[3]

The miracle of walking on the water, that of the money-bearing fish, the story of the Woman at the Well, the proclamation of an unpardonable sin, even the mediæval myth of the Wandering Jew,

[1] Matthew xi, 19. S. B. E. xiii. 92.
[2] Matthew vi. 19. S. B. E. x. 191.
[3] Luke vi. 31. S. B. E. x. 36.

may have originated in Buddhist legend.[1]

Pious minds have been disturbed by these similitudes. The resemblance between Mâyâ and Maria has perplexed. The perhaps uncertain likeness of Gotama to Jesus has occasioned irreverent doubts. But the parallelisms may be fortuitous. Probably they are. Even otherwise they but enhance the sororal beauties of faiths which if cognate are quite distinct. Then too the penetrating charm of the parables and sermons of the Buddha fades before the perfection of the sermons and parables of the Christ. The birth, ministry, transfiguration, and passing of Gotama are marvels which, however exquisite, the wholly spiritual apparitions of the Lord efface.

Other similarities, such as they are, may

[1] *Cf.* Edmunds: Buddhist and Christian Gospels.

without impropriety, perhaps, be attributed to the ideals progressus. Hindu and Chaldean beliefs constitute the two primal inspirational faiths. From the one, Buddhism and Zoroasterism developed. From the other the creed of Israel and possibly that of Egypt came. Religions that followed were afterthoughts of the divine. They were revelations sometimes more intelligible, in one instance inexpressibly more luminous, yet invariably reminiscent of an anterior light.

The light of contemporaneous Buddhism is that of Catholicism—heaven deducted, a heaven, that is, of ceaseless Magnificats. The latter conception is Christian. But it was Persian first. Otherwise, in common with the Church, Buddhism has saints, censers, litanies, tonsures, holy water, fasts, and confession. Barring confession, the extreme antiquity

of which has been attested, the other rites and ceremonies are, it may be, borrowed, but not the high morality, the altruism, the renunciation and effacement of self, which Buddhists no longer very scrupulously observe, perhaps, but which their religion was the first to instil.

Buddhism originally had neither rites nor ritual. It was merely a mendicant order in which one tried to do what is right, with, for reward, the hope of Pratscha-Parâmita, the peace that is beyond all knowledge and which Nirvana provides. That peace is — or was — the complete absence of anything, extinction utter and everlasting, a state of absolute non-existence which no whim of Brahm may disturb.

Buddhism denied Brahm and every tenet of Brahmanism, save only that which concerned the immedicable misery

of life. Of final deliverance there was in Brahmanism no known mode. None at least that was exoteric. Brahmanism rolled man ceaselessly through all forms of existence, from the elementary to the divine, and even from the latter, even when he was absorbed in Brahm, flung him out and back into a fresh circle of unavoidable births.

The theory is horrible. In the horrible occasionally is the sublime. To Gotama it was merely absurd. He blew on it. Abruptly, the categories of the infinite, the infant gods, shapes divine and demoniac, the entire phantasmagoria of metempsychosis, seemed really absorbed and Brahm himself ablated. For a moment the skies, sterilized by a breath, seemingly were vacant. Actually they were never more peopled. Behind the pall, tossed on an antique faith, new gods

were crouching and waiting. Buddhistic atheism had resulted but in the production of an earlier New Testament. From the depths of the ideal, swarms of bedecked and bejewelled divinities escorted Brahm back to a lotos of azure. Coincidentally Gotama, enthroned in the zenith, contemplated clusters of gods that dangled through twenty-eight abodes of bliss which other poets created.

In demonstrable triumph the Buddha was then, as he has been since, even if previously his existence had been omitted. But though he never were, there nevertheless occurred a social revolution of which he was the nominal originator and which, had it not been diverted into other realms, might have resulted in Brahm's entire extinction.

Wolves do not devour each other. Ideals should not either. The Oriental

heavens were wide enough to serve as fastnesses for two sets of hostile, germane, and ineffably poetic aberrations. There was room even for more. There always should be. Of the divine one can have never enough.

The gospel according to Sakya the Eremite is divine. It is divine in its limitless compassion, and though compassion, when analyzed, becomes but egotism in an etherialized form, yet the gospel had other attractions. In demonstrating that life is evil, that rebirth is evil too, that to be born even a god is evil still,—in demonstrating these things, while insisting that all else, Buddhism included, is but vanity, it fractured the charm of error in which man had been confined.

Sakya saw men born and reborn in hell. He saw them ignorant, as humanity has always been, unaware of their ab-

jection as men are to-day, and over the gulfs of existence, through the torrents of rebirth, he offered to ferry them. But in the ferrying they had to aid. The aid consisted in the rigorous observance of every virtue that Christianity afterward professed. Therein is the beauty of Buddhism. Its profundity resided in a revelation that everything human perishes except actions and the consequences that ensue. To orthodox India its tenets were as heretical as those of Christianity were to the Jews. Nonetheless the doctrine became popular. But doctrines once popularized lose their nobility. The degeneracy of Buddhism is due to Cathay.

To the Hindu life was an incident between two eternities, an episode in the string of deaths and rebirths. To Mongolians it was a unique experience. They had no knowledge of the supersensible,

no suspicion of the ideal. Among them Buddhism operated a conversion. It stimulated a thirst for the divine.

The thirst is unquenchable. Buddhism, in its simple severity, could not even attempt to slake it. But on its simplicity a priesthood shook parures. Its severity was cloaked with mantles of gold. The founder, an atheist who had denied the gods, was transformed into one. About him a host of divinities was strung. The most violently nihilistic of doctrines was fanned into an idolatry puerile and meek. Nirvana became Elysium, and a religion which began as a heresy culminated in a superstition. That is the history of creeds.

II

ORMUZD

THE purest of thoughts is that which concerns the beginning of things." So Ormuzd instructed Zarathrustra.

"And what was there at the beginning?" the prophet asked.

"There was light and the living Word."[1] Long later the statement was repeated in the Gospel attributed to John. Originally it occurred in the course of a conversation that the *Avesta* reports. In a similar manner *Exodus* provides a revelation which Moses received. There Jehovah said: *'ehyèh 'ăsher 'ehyèh.* In the *Avesta* Ormuzd said: *ahmi yad*

[1] Avesta (Anquetil-Duperron), i. 393.

ahmi.[1] Word for word the declarations are identical. Each means *I am that I am.*[2]

The conformity of the pronouncements may be fortuitous. Their relative priority uncertain chronology obscures. The date that orthodoxy has assigned to Moses is about 1500 B.C. Plutarch said that Zarathrustra lived five thousand years before the fall of Troy. Both dates are perhaps questionable. But a possible hypothesis philology provides. The term Jehovah is a seventeenth-century expansion of the Hebrew יהוה or Jhvh, now usually written Jahveh and commonly translated: *He who causes to be.* The original rendering of Ormuzd is Ahuramazda. Ahura means *living* and mazdaô *creator.* The period when *Exodus* was

[1] Avesta, Hormazd Yasht.
[2] Exodus iii. 14.

written is probably post-exilic. The period when the *Avesta* was completed is assumed to be pre-Cyrian. It was at the junction of the two epochs that Iran and Israel met.

But, however the pronouncements may conform, however also they may confuse, the one reported in *Exodus* is alone exact. In subsequent metamorphoses the name might fade, the deity remained. Whereas, save to diminishing Parsis, Ormuzd, once omnipotent throughout the Persian sky, has gone. A time, though, there was, when from his throne in the ideal he menaced the apathy of Brahm, the majesty of Zeus, when even from the death of deaths he might have ejected Buddha and, supreme in the Orient, ruled also in the West. Salamis prevented that. But one may wonder whether the conquest had not already been effected, whether

for that matter the results are not apparent still. Brahma, Ormuzd, Zeus, Jupiter, are but different conceptions of a primal idea. They are four great gods diversely represented yet originally identical, and whose attributes Jahveh, in his ascensions, perhaps absorbed.

Ormuzd represented purity and light. For his worship no temple was necessary, barely a shrine, never an image. In his celestial court were parikas, the glittering bayaderes of love that a later faith called peris, but his sole consorts were Prayers. About him and them gathered amshaspands and izeds, angels and seraphs, the winged host of loveliness that in Babylon enthralled the Jews who returned from captivity escorted by them. The allurement of their charm, enchanting then, enchants the world to-day. There has been little that is more poetic, except

perhaps Ormuzd himself, who symbolized whatever is blinding in beauty, particularly the sun's effulgence, the radiance of light.

The light endures, though the god has gone. Yet at the time, aloof in clear ether and aloft, he resplended in a sovereignty that only Ahriman disputed.

Ahriman has been more steadfast than Ormuzd. He too captivated the captive Hebrews. The latter adopted him and called him Satan, as they also adopted one of his minor legates, Ashmodai — transformed by the Vulgate into Asmodeus — a little jealous devil who, in the apocryphal *Tobit*, strangled husbands on their bridal nights. Ahriman, his master, represented everything that was the opposite of Ormuzd. Ahriman dwelt in darkness, Ormuzd in light. Ormuzd was primate of purity; Ahriman, prince of whatever is base. One had angels and

archangels for aids, the other fiends and demons. Between their forces war was constant. Each strove for the soul of man. But after death, when, in the balance, the deeds of the defunct were weighed, there appeared a golden-eyed redeemer, Mithra, who so closely resembled the Christ that the world hesitated, for a moment, between them.

It was because of these conceptions that Persia dreamed of conquering the West. At Marathon and at Salamis that illusion was looted. History tells of the cohorts that descended there. It relates further what they did. But of what they thought there is no record. It was, perhaps, too obvious. Ormuzd, god of light and, in the Orient, god of the day, was, in the darker and duller Occident, menaced there also by Ahriman. Politically the expedition is not very explicable.

Considered from a religous standpoint the motive is clear. But though the Persian forces could not uphold their light in Greece, higher forces projected it far beyond, to the remote north, to a south that was still remoter.

Originally the light was Vedic. It was identical with that of Agni, of Indra and of Varuna. But while these, without subsidence, passed, absorbed by Brahm, the light of Iran, deflecting, persisted, and so potently that it lit the Teutonic sky, glows still in Christendom, after refracting perhaps in Inca temples. Its revelation is due to Zarathrustra.

Zarathrustra, commonly written Zoroaster, is a name translatable into "star of gold" and also into "keeper of old camels." Probably it was first employed to designate an imaginary prophet, and then a series of spiritual though actual

successors by whom, in the course of centuries, the *Avesta* was evolved. Otherwise Zarathrustra and Gotama are brothers in Brahmanaspati. Both had virgin mothers. In the lives of both miracles are common. The advent of Zarathrustra was accounted the ruin of demons. When he was born he laughed aloud. As a child he slept in flames. As a man he walked on water. Before prodigies such as these fiends fell like autumn leaves. Hence, on the part of the devil, an attempt to seduce him from the divine. Mairya, the demon of death, offered him, as Mara offered Gotama, as Satan offered Jesus, the empire of the earth. Zarathrustra rebuked the devil first with stones, then with pious words. From him, as from the Buddha and the Christ, abashed the tempter retreated.[1]

[1] Darmestetter: Ormazd et Ahriman.

That victory over evil, the Parsis today regard as the capital event in the history of the world. It was the immediate prelude to the revelation of the Law which Ormuzd vouchsafed to his prophet.

The revelation occurred on a mountain, in the course of conversations, during which Zarathrustra questioned and Ormuzd, in the voice of heaven, replied. So was the Law proclaimed in India. There Mitra and Varuna sang it through the sky.[1] The expression is notable, for the song of the sky is thunder and the theophany that of Sinai. There is another *rapprochement* in Babylonian lore and a third in the *Eddas*, where it is related that to Sigurd the secret of the runes was sung.

Meanwhile, the revelation completed and proclaimed, Zarathrustra died as

[1] Rig-Veda, i. 151.

miraculously as he was born, foretelling, as he went, the coming of a messiah, his own son, Coshyos — the delayed fruit of an immaculate hymen that is not to be fecund until the end of time — but who, at the consummation of the ages, will rejuvenate the world, affranchise it from death, vanquish Ahriman, terminate the struggle between good and evil, purify hell and fill it full with glory. Then the dead shall rise and immortality be universal.[1]

Zoroaster is obviously mythical. The Buddha is also. But precisely as the Buddhist scriptures exist, so also do the Zoroastrian. They do more. Frequently they enlighten, occasionally they exalt. Written in gold on perfumed leather, the original edition, limited to two copies, was so sacred that it was sullied if seen.

[1] Zamyad Yasht. xix. 89 *sq.*

Burned with the palace of Persepolis — which Alexander, the Great Sinner, in a drunken orgy, destroyed — only frag-- ments of the fargards remain. These tell of creation, effected in six epochs, and of a *pairi-daêza.*

Delitzsch voluminously asked: *Wo lag das Paradies?* There it is. There is the primal paradise. In it Ormuzd put Mashya, the first man, and Mashyana, the first woman, whom Ahriman, in the form of a serpent, seduced. Thereafter ensued the struggle in which all have or will participate, one that, extending beyond the limits of the visible world, arrays seasons and spirits and the senses of man in a conflict of good and evil that can end only when, from the depths of the dawn, radiant in the vermillion sky, Coshyos, hero of the resurrection, triumphantly appears.

The parallel between this romance and subsequent poetry is curious. In Chaldea, before the fargards were, the story of Creation, of Eden, and of the fall had been told. In Egypt, before the *Avesta* was written, the resurrection and the life were known. Similar legends and prospects may or may not represent an autonomous development of Iranian thought. The successors of the problematic Zarathrustra, the line of magi who wrote and taught in his name, may have gathered the tales and theories elsewhere. In the creed which they instituted there is a trinity. India had one, Egypt another, Babylonia a third. Babylonia had even three of them. But in Mithra, Iran had a redeemer that no other creed possessed. In Coshyos was a saviour, virgin born, who nowhere else was imagined. In Mara, Buddhism had a Satan.

The Persian Ahriman is Satan himself. Babylon had angels and cherubs. In Iran there were guardian angels, there were archangels with flaming swords, there were fairies, there were goblins, the celestial, the poetic, the demoniac combined. Zoroasterism may or may not have had a past, it is perhaps evident that it had a future.

An inscription chiselled in the red granite of Ekbatana describes Ormuzd as creator of heaven and earth. In the *Veda* the description of Indra is identical.[1] It was applied equally to Jahveh in Judea. But above Jahveh, Kabbalists discerned En Soph. Above Indra metaphysicians discovered Brahma. Similarly the Persian magi found that Ormuzd, however perfect, was not perfect enough and, from the depths of the ideal, they disclosed

[1] R. V. x. 3. "Indra created heaven and earth."

Zervan Akerene, the Eternal, from whom all things come and to whom all return.

That conception is not reached in the *Avesta*. It is in the *Bundahish*, a work which, while much later, is based on earlier traditions, memories it may be, of antediluvian legends brought from the summits of upper Asia by Djemschid, the fabulous Abraham of the Persians of whom Zarathrustra was the Moses. But in default of the Eternal, the Avesta contains pictures of enduring charm

Among these is a highly poetic pastel that displays the soul of man surprised in the first post-mortem ambuscades. There a figure, beautiful or revolting, cries at him: "I am thyself, the image of thine earthly life."

If that life has been beautiful, the soul of man, led by itself, is conducted to heaven. Otherwise, led still by itself, it

descended to Drûjô-demâna, the House of Destruction, where, fed on insults and offal, it waited till its sins were destroyed. The waiting might be long. It was not everlasting. There was Mithra to intercede. Besides, evil was regarded but as a shadow on the surface of things. In the seventh epoch of creation, a period yet to be, the age which Coshyos is to usher, the shadow will fade. The wicked, purified of their wickedness, will be received among the blessed. Even Ahriman is to be converted. In that definite triumph of light over darkness is the resurrection and the life, life in Garô-demâna, literally House of Hymns, a pre-Christian heaven, yet strictly Christian, where, to the trumpetings of angels, hosannahs are ceaselessly sung.[1]

John — or, more exactly, his homonym

[1] Yasht. xxviii. 10, xxxiv. 2.

— was perhaps acquainted with that idea, as he may have been with other theories that the *Avesta* contains. But the possibility is a detail. It is the idea that counts. Behind it is the unique character of this doctrine which, in eliminating evil, converted even Satan.

Satan seldom gets his due. He was the first artist and has remained the greatest. In creating evil he fashioned what is a luxury and a necessity combined. Evil is the counterpart of excellence. Both have their roots in nature. One could not be destroyed without the other. For every form of evil there is a corresponding form of good. Virtue would be meaningless were it not for vice. Honour would have no nobility were it not for shame. If ever evil be banished from the scheme of things, life could have no savour and joy no delight.

Happiness and unhappiness would be synonymous terms.

It is for this reason that scoffers have mocked at heaven. Heaven may be very different from what has been fancied. But the theory of it, however unphilosophic, which Zoroasterism supplied, carried with it a creed not of tears but of smiles, a religion of lofty tolerance, one in which the demonology barely alarmed, for redemption was assured, and so fully that on earth melancholy was accounted a folly.

Though tolerant, it could be austere. Meanness, thanklessness, loquaciousness, jealousy, an unbecoming attire, evil thoughts, whatever is sensual, whatever is coarse, any promenade in mud actual or metaphorical, severely it condemned. Particularly was avarice censured. "There are many who do not like to give," Ormuzd,

in the *Vendidad*, confided to Zarathrustra. The high god added: "Ahriman awaits them."

Ahriman awaited also the harlot who, elsewhere, at that period, was holy. Yet in lapses, confession and repentance sufficed for remission, provided that in praying for forgiveness the sinner forgave those that had sinned against him. If he lacked the time, were he dying, a priest might yet save him with words whispered in the ear. That was the extreme unction, hardly administrable, however, in case of wilful omission of the *darûn*, which was communion.

This sacrament, the most mystic of the Church, was observed by the Incas, who also confessed, also atoned, who, like the Buddhists, were baptized, but who, like the Persians, worshipped the sun and, with perhaps a finer instinct of what the

beautiful truly is, worshipped too the rainbow.[1]

Huraken, the winged and feathered serpent-god of the Toltecs, was adored in temples that upheld a cross. The Incas lacked that symbol. But they had a Satan. They had also the expectation of a saviour, belief in whom could alone have consoled for the advent of Pizarro. Over what highways of sea or sky, the living Word, which Ormuzd spoke, reached them, there has been no somnambulist of history to divine. But in the splendour that Cuzco was, in the golden temples of the town of gold, along the scarlet lanes where sacred peacocks strolled and girls more sacred still — vestals whom Pizarro's soldiers raped — in that City of the Sun, the Word re-echoed. The mystery of it, reported

[1] Garcilasso: Commentarios reales.

back to the Holy Office, was declared an artifice of the devil.

Less mysteriously, through the obvious vehicle of cognate speech, it reached the Norse, stirred the scalds, who repeated it in the Eddic sagas. Loki and his ininferior fiends are, as there represented, quite as black as Ahriman and his cohorts. The conflict of good and evil is almost as fully dire. But Odin is a colourless reflection of Ormuzd. The æsir, the angels of the Scandinavian sky, are paler than the izeds. The figure of Baldr, the redeemer, faints beside that of Mithra. Valhalla, though perhaps less fatiguing than Garô-demâna, was more trite in its wassails than the latter in its hymns.

What these abstractions lacked was not the Logos but the light. However brilliantly the Iranian sun might glow, in the sullen north its rays were lost. The

mists, obscuring it, made Valhalla dim and set the gods in twilight. It stirred the scalds to runes but not to inspiration. There is none in the *Eddas*. Nor was there any in the *Nibelungen*, until the light, almost extinct, burst suddenly in the flaming scores of Wagner.

Transformed by ages and by man, yet lifted at last from their secular slumber, the Persian myths achieved there their Occidental apotheosis, and, it may be, on steps of song, mounted to the ideal where Zervan Akerene muses.

III

AMON-RÂ

"I AM all that is, has been and shall be. No mortal has lifted my veil."

That pronouncement, graven on the statue of Isis, confounded Egypt, condemning her mysteriously for some sin, anterior and unknown, to ignorance of the divine, leaving her, in default of revelation, to worship what she would, jackals, hyenas, cats, hawks, the ibis; beasts and birds. Yet to the people, whose minds were as naked as their bodies, and who, in addition, were slaves, there must have been something very superior in the lords of the desert and the air. Obviously they were wise. Among them were some

that knew in advance the change of the seasons. Others, indifferent to man and independent of him, migrated over highways known but to them. The senses of all were keyed to vibrations. They heard the inaudible, saw the invisible, and, though they had a language of their own, when questioned never replied. To slaves, clearly they were gods.

Not to the priests, however. They knew better. They but affected belief in divinities that had perhaps emigrated from the enigmas of geography and who were polychrome as the skies they had crossed. Fashioned in stone, these gods were dog-headed or longly beaked. Some, though, were alive. In temples were saurians on purple carpets, bulls draped with spangled shawls, hawks on shimmering perches, that little gold chains detained. Among gods of this character,

the Sphinx, in its role of eternal spectre, must have seemed the ideal. Others were nearly sublime. Particularly there was Ausar.

Ausar, called commonly Osiris, died for man. In an attempt to preserve harmony, in a struggle with the real spirit of actual evil which discord is, Osiris was slain. Being a god he arose from the dead. The latter thereafter he judged.

The people knew little, if anything, concerning him. They knew little if anything at all. They had a menagerie and a full consciousness of their own insignificance. That sufficed. In all of carnal Africa, the priest alone possessed what then was truth and of which a part is theology now.

Egypt, in which the evangels began, millennia before they were written, knew no genesis. Her history, sculptured in

hieroglyphics, was cut on pages of stone. It awoke in the falling of cataracts. It ended with simoons in sand. The books that tell of it are pyramids, obelisks, necropoles; constructions colossal and enigmatic; the granite epitaphs of finite things. To-day, in the shattered temples, from which all other gods are gone, one divinity still lingers. It is Silence.

In Iran sorrow was a folly. In Egypt speech was a sin. Apis could bellow, Anubis bark; man might not even stutter. It was in the submission of dumb obedience that the palpable eternities of the pyramids were piled. Yet in that darkness was light, in silence was the Word. But to behold and to hear was possible only in sanctuaries reserved to the elect. The gods too had their castes. The lowest only were fellahin fit to worship. On the lips of the others the priests held

always a finger. Crocodiles were less distant, hyenas more approachable, and the Egyptian, barred from the divine, found it on earth. He prayed to scorpions, sang hymns to scarabs, coaxed the jackal with psalms; with dances he placated the ibis. It was ridiculous but human. He too would have a part, however insensate, in the dreams of all mankind.

Yet, had he looked not down but up, he would have lifted at least a fringe of the Isian veil. The sun, taken as a symbol only, the symbol of life, death, and resurrection — phases which its rising, setting, and return suggest — was the deity, the one really existing god. Nominally, figuratively, even concretely, there were others; a whole host, a hierarchy vaster than the Aryans knew; a great crowd of divinities less grandiose than

gaudy, that swarmed in space, strolled through the dawns and dusk, thronged the temples, eyed the quick, confronted the dead. They were but appearances, mere masks, expressions, hypostases, eidolons of Râ.

Râ was the celestial pharaoh. But not originally. Originally he was part of a triad which itself was part of a triple trinity. Râ then was but one divinity among many gods. These ultimately lost themselves in him so indistinguishably that there are litanies in which the names of seventy-five of them are used in addressing him. Regarded as the unbegotten begetter of the first beginning, he succeeded in achieving the incomprehensible. He became triune and remained unique. He was Osiris, he was Isis, he was Horus. At once father, mother, and son, he fecundated, conceived, produced, and was.

From him gods and goddesses emanated in siderial fireworks that illuminated the heavens, dazzled the earth, then melted into each other, faded away or, occasionally, flared afresh in a glare dispelling and persistent. Among these latter was Amon. Glimmering primarily in provincial obscurity at Thebes, the thin fire of his shrine mounted spirally to Râ, fused its flames with his, expanding and uniting so inseparably with them, that the two became one. Amon means *hidden;* Amon-Râ, *the hidden light.*

In the infinite, time is not. In heaven there is no chronology. The date of any god's accession to supremacy there is, consequently, apart from mortal ken. None the less that of Amon-Râ is known. At the beginning of the earthly reign of Amonhoteph III., an edict, scrupulously executed throughout Egypt, determined,

on monument and wall, the substitution of Amon-Râ's name for that of previously superior gods.

The pharaohnate of Amonhoteph began about 1500 B.C. It is from that period, therefore, that dates the divinity's accession to the pharaohnate of the skies. There is, or should be, a reason for all things. There is one for that. Amonhoteph regarded himself as Amon's son. It was one of the traits of the pharaohs, as it was also of the Incas, to believe, or at least to assert, that their fathers, therefore themselves, were divine. As a consequence of the idea they prayed to their own images and likened their palaces to inns.

Originally foreigners, invaders from Akkad or Sumer, the pharaohs first conquered, then surprised. It was they that embanked the Nile, turned morasses into

meadows and piled the pyramids. More exactly, it was by their commands that these miracles were contrived. To the neolithic people whom they subjugated their divinity was clear. So elsewhere was that of the kings of Akkad. Like them, like the Incas, the pharaohs were of the solar race and so remained from the first dynasty to the Greek conquest, when Alexander, to legitimatize his sovereignty, had himself acknowledged as Amon's son.

The ceremony had its precedents. An inscription in eulogy of the great Rameses states that Amon, when possessing the pharaohs august mother, engendered him as a god. On a wall of the Temple of Luxor an earlier inscription sets forth that the god of Thebes, incarnating himself in the person of Thotmes IV., appeared in his divine form to the pharaoh's

queen, who, at sight of his beauty, conceived.

It was therefore not in the beast alone, but in man, that divinity revealed itself in Egpyt. That in Judea a similar revelation should have been withheld until after the Roman occupation is hardly explicable on the theory, general among scholars, that Moses is not a historical character, for an identical revelation had been received in Babylonia where Israel twice loitered. Moreover, a curious parallelism exists between post-Mosaic prophecy and Egyptian clairvoyance. In a papyrus of the Thotmes III. epoch — about 1600 B.C. — it is written: "The people of the age of the son of man shall rejoice and establish his name forever. They shall be removed from evil and the wicked shall humble their mouths." In commenting the passage an Egyptologist

noted that the words *son of man* are a literal translation of the original *si-n-sa*.[1] But already in Akkad a similar prophecy had been uttered.[2] It may be, therefore, that it was in Babylon that Israel first heard it.

The doctrine of a trinity, common to almost all antique beliefs, was a blasphemy to the Jews. The belief in immortality, also prevalent, though less general, was to them an abomination. The miracle of divine descent they were perhaps too practical to accept. There was no room in their creed for the dogma of future rewards and punishments, and that, together with other articles of the Christian faith, Egypt's elect professed.

The slaves and mongrels that constituted the bulk of the population were not

[1] Sayce: Guifford Lectures.
[2] Jastrow: The Dibbara Epic.

instructed in these things and would not have understood them if they had been. In Babylonia education was compulsory. In Egypt it was an art, a gift, mysterious in itself, reserved to the few. To the Egyptian, religion consisted in paraded symbols, in avenues of sphinxes, in forests of obelisks, in pharaohs seated colossally before the temple doors, in inscriptions that told indistinguishably of theomorphic men and anthropomorphic gods, and in a belief in the divinity of bulls and hawks.

These latter had their uses. In transformations elsewhere effected, the sacred bull may have become a golden calf, the golden hawk a sacred dove. In Egypt they were otherwise serviceable. The worship of them, of other birds and beasts, of insects and vipers as well, ecclesiastically indorsed, hid the myth of metempsychosis.

Of that the people knew nothing. When they died they ceased to be. Even mummification, usually supposed to have been general, was not for them. Down to an epoch relatively late it was a privilege reserved to priests and princes. When the commonalty were embalmed it was with the opulent design that, in a future existence, they should serve their masters as they had in this. Embalming was a preparation for the Judgment Day. Of that the people knew nothing either. It was even unlawful that concerning it they should be apprised.

In the Louvre is a statue of Ptah-meh, high priest of Memphis. On it are the significant words: "Nothing was hidden from him." A passage of Zosimus states that what was hidden it was illicit to reveal, except, Jamblicus explained, to those whose discretion a long novitiate

had assured. To such only was disclosed the secret that life is death in a land of darkness, and death is life in a land of light.

It was because of this that the pharaohs seated themselves colossally before the temple doors. It was because of it that their palaces were inns and their tombs were homes. It was because of it that their sepulchres were built for eternity and the tenements of their souls placed there embalmed. It was because of this that the triumphs of men were inscribed in the halls of the gods. Instead of seeking to be absorbed, it was their own inextinguishable individuality that they endeavoured to assert. Tombs, tenements, triumphs, these all were preparations for the Land of Light.

The land was Alu, the asphodel meadows of the celestial Nile that wound

through the Milky Way. To reach it a passport, visé'd by Osiris, sufficed. The first draft of that passport was held to have been written on tablets of alabaster, in letters of lapis lazuli, by an eidolon of Râ, who, known in Egypt as Thoth, elsewhere was Hermes Thrice the Greatest.

At Memphis, Hermes was regarded as representing the personification of divine wisdom, or, more exactly perhaps, the inventive power of the human mind. A little library of forty-two books — which a patricist saw, but not being initiate could not read — was attributed to him.[1] The books contained the entire hieratic belief. Fragments that are held to have survived in an extant Greek novel are obviously Egyptian, but as obviously Alexandrine and neo-platonic. In the *editio princeps* Pheidias is mentioned.

[1] Clemens Alexandrinos: Stromata vi.

Mention of Michel Angelo would have been less anachronistic. The original books are gone, all of them, forever, perhaps, save one, chapters of which are as old as the fourth dynasty and, it may be, are still older. Pyramid texts of the fifth dynasty show that there then existed what to-day is termed *The Book of the Dead*, a copy of which, put in a mummy's arms, was a talisman for the soul in the Court of Amenti, a passport thence to the Land of Light.

"There is no book like it, man hath not spoken it, earth hath not heard it" — very truthfully it recites of itself. One copy, known as the Louvre Papyrus, presents the *Divine Comedy*, as primarily conceived and illustrated by an archaic Doré. Text and vignettes display the tribunal where the souls of the dead are judged.

In the foreground is an altar. Adjacent is a figure, half griffon, half chimera, the Beast of Amenti, perhaps too of the Apocalypse. Beyond, an ape poises a pair of scales. For balance is an ostrich feather. Above are the spirits of fate. At the left Osiris is enthroned. From a balcony his assessors lean. At the right is the entrance. There the disembodied, ushered by Truth, appears and, in homages and genuflections, affirms negatively the decalogue; protesting before the Master of Eternity that there is no evil in him; praying the dwellers in Amenti that he may cross the dark way; declaring to each that he has not committed the particular sin over which they preside.

"O Eater of Spirits gone out of the windows of Alu! O Master of the Faces!" he variously calls. "O the One who associates the Splendours! O the

Glowing Feet gone out of the Night! I did not lie. I did not kill. I have not been anxious. I did not talk abundantly. I made no one weep. No heart have I harmed."

The assessors listen. "I have not been anxious. I made no one weep. No heart have I harmed." These abstentions, graces now, were virtues then, and so efficacious that they perhaps sufficed, as rightly they should, for absolution.

But while the assessors listen and Osiris looks gravely on, no one accuses. It is conscience in its nakedness, conscience exposed there where all may see it, where for the first time perhaps it truly sees itself, and seeing realizes what there is in it of evil and what of good, it is that which protests.

Still the assessors listen. Orthodoxy on the part of the respondent is to them

a minor thing. What they require is that he shall have been merciful to his fellow creatures, true to himself. Only when it is proven that he has done his duty to man, is he permitted to show that he has done his duty to gods.

The appeal continues: "I fed the hungry, clothed the naked, I gave water to them that thirsted. O ye that dwell in Amenti! I am unpolluted, I am pure."

But is it true? The scales decide. The heart of the respondent is weighed. If heavy, out it is cast to pass with him again through life's infernal circles. But, if light as the feather in the balance and therefore equal with truth, it is restored to the body, which then resurrects and, in the bark of the Sun, sails the celestial Nile to Râ and the Land of Light.

That singer gone out of Amenti, actually, like Osiris, rose from the dead. The

picture which a papyrus forty centuries old presents, is the dream of a vision that Michel Angelo displayed, a sketch for a papal fresco. Such indeed was the conformity between the underlying conceptions, that, at almost the first monition, Isis, whose veil no mortal had raised, lifted it from her black breast and suckled there the infant Jesus. Then, presently, in temples that had teemed, the silence of the desert brooded. The tide of life retreated, an entire theogony vanished, exorcised, both of them, by the sign of the cross.

At sight of the unimagined emblem, a priesthood who in secret sanctuaries had evolved nearly all but that, flung themselves into crypts beneath, pulled the walls down after them, burying unembalmed the arcana of a creed whose spirit still is immortal.

In Egypt, then, only tombs and necropoles survived. But it is legendary that, in the solitudes of the Thebaïd, dispossessed eidolons of Râ, appearing in the shape of chimeras, terrified anchorites, to whom, with vengeful eyes, they indicated their ruined altars.

IV

BEL-MARDUK

THE inscriptions of Assyrian kings have, many of them, the monotony of hell. Made of boasts and shrieks, they recite the capture and sack of cities; the torrents of blood with which, like wool, the streets were dyed; the flaming pyramids of prisoners; the groans of men impaled; the cries of ravished women.

The inscriptions are not all infernal. Those that relate to Assurbanipal — vulgarly, Sandanapallos, — are even ornate. But Assurbanipal, while probably fiendish and certainly crapulous, was clearly literary besides. From the spoil of sacked cities this bibliofilou took libraries, the

myths and epics of creation, sacred texts from Eridu and Ur, volumes in the extinct tongues of Akkad and Sumer, first editions of the Book of God.

These, re-edited in cuneiform and kept conveniently on the second floor of his palace, fell with Nineveh, where, until recently recovered, for millennia they lay. Additionally, from shelves set up in the days of Khammurabi — the Amraphel of Genesis — Nippur has yielded ghostly tablets and Borsippa treasuries of Babylonian ken.

These, the eldest revelations of the divine, are the last that man has deciphered. The altars and people that heard them first, the marble temples, the ivory palaces, the murderous throngs, are dust. The entire civilization from which they came has vanished. Yet, traced with a wooden reed on squares of

clay, are flights of little arrows, from which, magically, it all returns. Miraculously with these books a world revives. Fashioned, some of them, at an epoch that in biblical chronology is anterior to man, they tell of creation, of the serpent, the fall and the deluge. At the gates of paradise you see man dying, poisoned by the tree of life. Before Genesis was, already it had been written.

In the Chaldean Book of the Beginnings creation was effected in successive acts. According to the epic of it, humanity's primal home was a paradise where ten impressive persons — the models, it may be, of antediluvian patriarchs — reigned interminably, agreeably also, finally sinfully as well. In punishment a deluge swept them away. From the flood there escaped one man who separated a mythical from an heroic age. In the latter

epoch, beings descended from demons built Nineveh and Babylon; organized human existence; invented arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and the calendar; counted the planets; numbered the days of the year, divided them into months and weeks; established the Sabbath; decorated the skies with the signs of the zodiac, instituting, in the interim, colleges of savants and priests. These speculated on the origin of things, attributed it to spontaneous generation, the descent of man to evolution, entertaining the vulgar meanwhile with tales of gods and ghosts.[1]

The cosmological texts now available were not written then. They are drawn from others that were. But there is a vignette that probably is of that age. It represents a man and a woman stretching

[1] Lenormant: Les Origines. Schrader: Die Keilenschriften. Smith: Chaldean Genesis.

their hands to a tree. Behind the woman writhes a snake. The tree, known as the holy cedar of Eridu, the fruit of which stimulated desire, is described in an epic that recites the adventures of Gilgames.

Gilgames was the national hero of Chaldea. The story of his loves with Ishtar is repeated in the Samson and Delilah myth. Ishtar, described in an Assyrian inscription as Our Lady of Girdles, was the original Venus, as Gilgames was perhaps the prototype of Hercules. The legend of his labours is represented on a seal of Sargon of Akkad, a king who ruled fifty-seven hundred years ago.

In the epic, Gilgames, betrayed by Ishtar, tried to find out how not to die. In trying he reached a garden, guarded by cherubim, where the holy cedar was. There he learned that one being only could

teach him to be immortal, and that being, Adra-Khasis, had been translated to the Land of the Silver Sky. Adra-Khasis, was the Chaldean Noah. Gilgames sought him and the story of the deluge follows. But with a difference. On the seventh day, Adra-Khasis released from his ark a dove that returned, finally a raven that did not. Then he looked out, and looking, shrieked. Every one had perished.

Noah was less emotional, or, if equally compassionate, the fact is not recited. Apart from that detail and one other, the story of the flood is common to all folklore. Even the Aztecs knew of it. Probably it originated in the matrix of nations which the table-land of Asia was. But only in Chaldean myth, and subsequently in Hebrew legend, was the flood ascribed to sin.

Gilgames' quest, meanwhile, could not have been wholly vain. In an archaic

inscription it is stated that the city of Erech was built in olden times by the deified Gilgames.[1]

How old the olden times may have been is conjectural. Modern science has put the advent of man sixty million years ago. Chaldean chronology is less spacious. But its traditions stretched back a hundred thousand years. The traditions were probably imaginary. Even so, in the morning of the world, already there were ancient cities. There was Nippur, one of whose gods, El Lil, was lord of ghosts. There was Eridu, where Ea was lord of man. There was Ur, where Sin was lord of the moon. There were other divinities. There was Enmesara, lord of the land whence none return, and Makhir, god of dreams.

There were many more like the latter,

[1] Proc. S. B. A. xvi. 13–15.

so many that their sanctuaries made the realm a holy land, but one which, administratively, was an aggregate of principalities that Sargon, nearly six thousand years ago, combined. Ultimately, from sheer age, the empire tottered. It would have fallen had not Khammurabi surged. What Sargon made, Khammurabi solidified. Between their colossal figures two millennia stretch. These giants are distinct. None the less, across the ages they seem to fuse, suggestively, not together, but into another person.

Sargon has descended through time clothed in a little of the poetry which garments nation builders. But the poetry is not a mantle for the imaginary. In the British Museum is a marble ball that he dedicated to a god. Paris has the seal of his librarian.[1] Copies of his annals

[1] Collection de Clerq. pl. 5, no. 46.

are extant.[1] In these it is related that, when a child, his mother put him in a basket of rushes and set him adrift on the Euphrates. Presently he was rescued. Afterward he became a leader of men.

Khammurabi was also a leader. He was a legislator as well. Sargon united principalities, Khammurabi their shrines. From one came the nation, from the other the god. It is in this way that they fuse. To the composite, if it be one, history added a heightening touch.

The Khammurabi legislation came from Bel, who, originally, was a local sun-god of Nippur. There he was regarded as the possessor of the Chaldean Urim and Thummin, the tablets of destiny with which he cast the fates of men. In the mythology of Babylonia these tablets were stolen by the god of storms, who

[1] Cuneiform Insc. W. A. iv. 34.

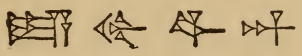
kept them in his thunder fastness. Among the forked flames of the lightning there they were recovered by Bel, who revealed the law to Khammurabi.

The theophany is perhaps similar to that of Sinai. But perhaps, too, it is better attested. A diorite block, found at Susa in 1902, has the law engraved on it. On the summit, a bas-relief displays the god disclosing the statutes to the king.

There are other analogies. Sinai was named after Sin, who, though but a moon-god, was previously held supreme for the reason that, in primitive Babylonia, the lunar year preceded the solar. The sanctuary of the moon-god was Ur, of which Abraham was emir. He was more, perhaps. Sarratu, from which Sarai comes, was the title of the moon-goddess. In *Genesis*, Sarai is Abraham's wife. Abraham is a derivative of

Aburamu, which was one of the moon's many names.[1]

Among these, one in particular has since been identified with Jahveh. In addition, a clay tablet of the age of Khammurabi, now in the British Museum, has on it:



That flight of arrows, being interpreted, means: *Jave ilu*, Jahveh is god.[2]

Other texts show that a title of Bel was Mâsu, a word that letter for letter is the same as the Hebrew Mosheh or Moses.[3]

It is in this way that Sargon and Khammurabi fuse. Meanwhile the title Mâsu, or hero, was not confined to Bel. It was given also to Marduk, the tutelary god

[1] Sayce: Guifford Lectures.
[2] Delitzch: Babel und Bibel.
[3] Records of the Past, i. 91.

of Babylon, from whom local monotheism proceeded.

That monotheism, in appearance relatively modern, actually was archaic. The Chaldean savants knew of but one really existing god. To them, all others were his emanations. The deus exsuperantissimus was represented by a single stroke of the reed, a sign that in its vagueness left him formless and incommunicable, therefore unworshipable, hence without a temple, unless Bab-ili, Babylon, the Gate of God, may be so construed.

The name of the deity, fastidiously concealed from the vulgar, was, in English, One. Not after, or beneath, or above, but before him, a trinity swung like a screen. From it, for pendant, another trinity dangled. From the latter fell a third. Below these glories were the coruscations of an entire nation of inferior

gods. The latter, as well as the former, all of them, were but the fireworks of One. He alone was. The rest, like Makhir, were gods of dream. To the savants, that is; to the magi and seers. To the people the siderial triads and planetary divinities throned in the Silver Sky augustly real, equally august, and in that celestial equality remained, until Khammurabi gave precedence to Bel, who as Marduk, Bel or Baal Marduk, Lord Marduk, became supreme.

Before Bel, then, the other gods faded as the Elohim did before Jahveh, with the possible difference that there were more to fade — sixty-five thousand, Assurnat-sipal, in an inscription, declared. Over that army Bel-Marduk acquired the title, perhaps significant, of Bel-Kissat, Lord of Hosts. Yet it was less as a usurper than as an absorber that the ascension was

achieved. Bel but mounted above his former peers and from the superior height drew their attributes to himself. It was sacrilege none the less. As such it alienated the clergy and enraged the plebs. Begun under Khammurabi and completed under Nabonidos, it was the reason why, during the latter's reign, orthodox Babylon received Cyrus not as a foe but a friend.

From the spoliation, meanwhile, no nebulousness resulted. Bel was distinctly anthropomorphic. His earthly plaisance was the Home of the Height, a seven-floored mountain of masonry, a rainbow pyramid of enamelled brick. At the top was a dome. There, in a glittering chamber, on a dazzling couch, he appeared. Elsewhere, in the vermillion recesses of a neighbouring chapel, that winged bulls guarded and frescoed monsters adorned,

once a year he also appeared, and, above the mercy seat, on an alabaster throne, sat, or was supposed to sit, contemplating the tablets of destiny, determining when men should die.

To the Greeks, the future lay in the lap of the gods. To the Babylonians the gods alone possessed it, as alone also they possessed the present and the past. They had all time as all men have their day. That day was here and it was brief. Death was a descent to Aralû, the land whence none return, a region of the underworld, called also Shualû, where the departed were nourished on dust. Dust they were and to dust they returned.

Extinction was not a punishment or even a reward, it was a law. Punishment was visited on the transgressor here, as here also the piety of the righteous was rewarded. When death came, just and

unjust fared alike. The Aryan and Egyptian belief in immortality had no place in this creed, and consequently it had none either in Israel, where Sheol was a replica of Shualû. To the Semites of Babylonia and Kanaan, the gods alone were immortal, and immortal beings would be gods. Man could not become divine while his deities were still human.

Exceptionally, exceptional beings such as Gilgames and Adra-Khasis might be translated to the land of the Silver Sky, as Elijah was translated to heaven, but otherwise the only mortals that could reach it were kings, for a king, in becoming sovereign, became, *ipso facto*, celestial. As such, ages later, Alexander had himself worshipped, and it was in imitation of his apotheosis that the subsequent Cæsars declared themselves gods. Yet precisely as the latter were man-made

deities, so the Babylonian Baalim were very similar to human kings.

For their hunger was cream, oil, dates, the flesh of ewe lambs. For their nostrils was the perfume of prayers and of psalms; for their passions the virginity of girls. Originally the first born of men were also given them, but while, with higher culture, that sacrifice was abolished, the sacred harlotry, over which Ishtar presided, remained. Judaism omitted to incorporate that, but in Kanaan, which Babylonia profoundly influenced, it was general and, though reviled by Israel, was tempting even, and perhaps particularly, to Solomon.[1]

The latter's temple was similar to Bel's, from which the Hebraic ritual, terms of the Law, the Torah itself, may have proceeded, as, it may be, the Sabbath

[1] 1 Kings xi. 5. "Solomon went after Ashtoreth."

did also. On a tablet recovered from the library of Assurbanipal it is written: "The seventh day is a fast day, a lucky day, a sabbatuv" — literally, a day of rest for the heart.[1]

In Aralû that day never ceased; the dead there, buried, Herodotos said, in honey, were unresurrectably dead, dead to the earth, dead to the Silver Sky. Yet though that was an article of faith, through a paradox profoundly poetic, there was a belief equally general, in ghosts, in hobgoblins, in men with the faces of ravens, in others with the bodies of scorpions, and in the post-mortem persistence of girls that died pure.

These latter, in searching for someone whom they might seduce, must have afterward wandered into the presence of St. Anthony. Perhaps, too, it was they who,

[1] Cuneiform Insc. W. A. ii. 32.

as succubi, emotionalized the dreams of monks. Yet, in view of Ishtar, they could not have been very numerous in Babylon where, however, they had a queen, Lilît, the Lilith of the *Talmud*, Adam's vampire wife, who conceived with him shapes of sin. In these also the Babylonians believed, and naïvely they represented them in forms so revolting that the sight of their own image alarmed them away.

From these shapes or, more exactly, from sin itself, it was very properly held that all diseases came. Medicine consequently was a branch of religion. The physician was a priest. He asked the patient: Have you shed your neighbour's blood? Have you approached your neighbour's wife? Have you stolen your neighbour's garment? Or is it that you have failed to clothe the naked?

According to the responses he prescribed.[1]

But the priest who was a physician was also a wizard. He peeped and muttered, or, more subtly, provided enchanted philters in which simples had been dissolved. These devices failing, there was a series of incantations, the *Ritual of the Whispered Charm*, in which the most potent conjuration was the incommunicable name. To that all things yielded, even the gods.[2] But like the Shem of the Jews, it was probably never wholly uttered, because, save to the magi, not wholly known. In the formulæ of the necromancers it is omitted, though in practice it may have been pronounced.

Even that is doubtful. A knowledge of it conferred powers similar to those

[1] IV. R. 50–53. *Cf.* Delitzch: *op. cit.*
[2] Lenormant: La Magie chez les Chaldéens.

that have been attributed to the Christ, and which the Sadducees ascribed to his knowledge of the tetragrammation. A knowledge of the Babylonian Shem was as potent. It served not only men but gods. Ishtar, for purposes of her own, wanted to get into Aralû. In the recovered epic of her descent, imperiously she demanded entrance:

Porter, open thy door.
Open thy door that I may enter.
If thou dost not open thy door,
I will attack it, I will break down the bars,
I will cause the dead to rise and devour the living.[1]

Ishtar was admitted. But Aralû was the land whence none return. Once in, she could not get out until, ultimately, the incommunicable name was uttered. The epic says that, in the interim, there was on earth neither love nor loving. In possible connection with which incanta-

[1] Records of the Past.

tions have been found, deprecating "the consecrated harlots with rebellious hearts that have abandoned the holy places."[1]

In addition to the *Ritual of the Whispered Charm*, there was the *Illumination of Bel*, an encyclopædia of astrology in seventy-two volumes which the suburban library of Borsippa contained. During the captivity many Jews must have gone there. In the large light halls they were free to read whatever they liked, religion, history, science, the romance of all three. The books, catalogued and numbered, were ranged on shelves. One had but to ask. The service was gratis.

Babylon, then, prismatic and learned, was the most respectable place on earth. For ten thousand years man had there consulted the stars. But though respectable, it was also equivocal. During a

[1] Lenormant; *op. cit.*

period equally long — or brief — the girls of the city had loosed their girdles for Ishtar and yielded themselves to anyone, stranger or neighbour, that asked. In the service of the goddess their brothers occasionally feigned that they too were girls. Meanwhile, from the summit of a seven-floored pyramid, mortals contemplated the divine.

Beneath was cosmopolis, the golden cup that, in the words of Jeremiah, made the whole world drunk. Seated immensely on the twin banks of the Euphrates — banks that bridges above and tunnels beneath interjoined — Babylon more nearly resembled a walled nation than a fortified town. Within the gates, in an enclosure ample and noble, a space that exceeded a hundred square miles, an area sufficient for Paris quintupled, observatories and palaces rose above the

roar of human tides that swept in waves through the wide boulevards, surged over the quays, flooded the gardens, eddied through the open-air lupanar, circled among statues of gods and bulls, poured out of the hundred gates, or broke against the polychrome walls and seethed back in the avenues, along which, to the high flourishes of military bands, passed armed hoplites, merchants in long robes, cloaked bedouins, Kelts in bearskins, priests in spangled dresses, tiara'd princes, burdened slaves, kings discrowned, furtive forms — prostitutes, pederasts, human wolves, vermin, sheep — the flux and reflux of the gigantic city.

In that ocean, the captive Jews, if captive they were, rolled, lost as a handful of salt spilt in the sea. Yet, from the depths, a few had swum up and, filtering adroitly, had reached the dignity of high place.

One was pontiff. Others were viceroys. In addition to being pontiff, Daniel was chancellor of the realm. Ezra was rector of the university. As pontiff of a college of wizards, Daniel may have known the future. As Minister of Wisdom, Ezra may have known, what is quite as difficult, the past. For the moment there was but the present. Over it ruled Belshazzar.

Yet, ruler though he was, there were powers potenter than his own: Baalim, outraged at the elevation of a parvenu god; a priesthood consequently disaffected; and, without, at the gates, the foe.

It would have been interesting to have assisted at the final festival when, beneath cyclopean arches, in the sunlight of clustered candelabra, amid the glitter of gold and white teeth, among the fair sultanas that were strewn like flowers

through the throne-room of the imperial court, Belshazzar lay, smiling, amused rather than annoyed at the impudent menace of Cyrus.

Babylon was impregnable. He knew it. But the subtle Jews, the indignant gods, the alienated priests to whom the Persian was a redeemer, of these he did not think. Daniel had indeed warned him and, vaguely, he had promised something which he had since forgot.

Beyond, an orchestra was playing. Further yet, columns upheld a ceiling so lofty that it was lost. On the adjacent wall was a frieze of curious and chimerical beasts. Belshazzar was looking at them. In their dumb stupidity was a suggestion of the foe. The suggestion amused. Smiling still he raised a cup. Abruptly, before it could reach his lips, it fell with a clatter on the lapis lazuli of

the floor beneath. Before him, on that wall, beneath those beasts, the necromancy of the priesthood had projected an armless, fluidic hand that mounted, descended, tracing with a forefinger the three luminous hierograms of his doom.

The story, a little drama, was, with the tale concerning Nebuchadnezzar, that of Daniel, and other novels quite as strange, evolved long later in the wide leisures of Jerusalem. The fluidic hand did not appear. Even had it zigzagged there was no Belshazzar to frighten.

Only the doom was real. Cyrus was clothed with it. To the trumpetings of heralds and the sheen of angels' wings, triumphantly he came. Then, presently, by royal decree, the Jews, manumitted and released, retraced their steps, burdened with spoil; with the lore of two distinct civilizations, which, fusing in the

great square letters of the Pentateuch, was to become the poetry of all mankind.

Bayblon, ultimately, with her goblin gods and harlot goddess, sank into her own Aralû. Nourished there on dust, Lilît, with the sister vampires of eternal night, fed on her.

V

JEHOVAH

A CAMEL'S-HAIR tent set in the desert was the first cathedral, the earliest cloister of latest ideals. Set not in one desert merely but in two, in the infinite of time as well as in that of space, there was about it a limitlessness in which the past could sleep, the future awake, and into which all things, the human, the divine, gods and romance, could enter.

The human came first. Then the gods. Then romance. The divine was their triple expansion. It was an after growth, in other lands, that tears had watered. In the desert it was unimagined. Only the gods had been conceived.

The gods were many and yet but one. Though plural they were singular. The subjects of impersonal verbs, they represented the pronoun in such expressions as: it rains; it thunders. "It" was Elohim. Already among nomad Semites monotheism had begun. Yet with this distinction. Each tribe had separate sets of Its that guided, guarded, and scourged. Omnipresent but not omnipotent, any humiliation to the family that they had in charge humiliated them. It made them angry, therefore vindictive, consequently unjust. It may be that they were not very ethical. Perhaps the bedouins were not either. Man fashions his god in proportion to his intelligence. That of the nomad was slender. He lacked, what the Aryan shepherd possessed, the ability for mythological invention. The defect was due to his speech,

which did not lend itself to the deification of epithets. Even had it done so, it is probable that his mode of life would have rendered the paraphernalia of polytheism impossible. People constantly moving from place to place could not be cumbered with idols. The Elohim were, therefore, a convenience for travellers and an unidolatrous monotheism a necessity which the absence of vehicles imposed. On the other hand, given every facility, it is presumable that the result would have been the same. Mythology is the mother of poetry. Idolatry is the father of art. Neither could appeal to a people to whom delicacy was an unknown god. Had it been known and a fetish, they could not have become the practical people that they are. Even then they were shrewd. Their Elohim might alarm but never delude. Israel was uncheatable even in dream.

Originally emigrants from Arabia, the nomads reached Syria, some directly, others circuitously, by way of Padan-Aram and across the Euphrates, whence perhaps their name of *Ibrim* or Hebrews — *Those from beyond.* In the journey Babel and Ur must have detained. These cities, with their culture relatively deep and their observatories equally high, became, in after days, a source of legend, of wonder, of hatred, perhaps of revelation as well.

At the time the nomads had no cosmogony or theories. The Chaldeans had both. There was a story of creation, another of antediluvian kings and of the punishment that overtook them. There was also a story of an emir of Ur, an old man who had benevolently killed an animal instead of his son. The story, like the others, must have impressed. In

after years the old man became Abraham, a great person, who had conversed with the Elohim and whose descendants they were.

The story of creation also impressed. It was enlightening and comprehensible. The parallel theory of spontaneous generation and the progressive evolution of the species which the magi entertained, they probably never heard. Even otherwise it was too complex for minds as yet untutored. The fables alone appealed. Mentally compressed into portable shape, carried along, handed down, their origin afterward forgotten, they became the traditions of a nation, which, eminently conservative, preserved what it found, among other things the name, perhaps inharmonious, of Jhvh.[1]

[1] Renan: Histoire du peuple d'Israël. Kuenen: De Godsdienst van Israël.

That name, since found on an inscription of Sargon, appears to have been the title of a local god of Sinai, whom the nomads may have identified with Elohim, particularly, perhaps, since he presided over thunder, the phenomenon that alarmed them most and which, in consequence, inspired the greatest awe. That awe they put into the name, the pronunciation of which, like the origin of their traditions, they afterward forgot. In subsequent rabbinical writings it became Shem, the Name; Shemhammephoresh, the Revealed Name, uttered but once a year, on the day of Atonement, by the high priest in the Holy of Holies. Mention of it by anyone else was deemed a capital offence, though, permissibly, it might be rendered El Shaddai, the Almighty. That term the Septuagint translated into ὁ Κύριος, a Greek form, in the

singular, of the Aramaic plural Adonai, which means Baalim, or sun lords.

That form the Vulgate gave as Dominus and posterior theology as God. The latter term, common to all Teutonic tongues, has no known meaning. It designates that which, to the limited intelligence of man, has been, and must be, incomprehensible. But the original term Jhvh, which, in the seventeenth century, was developed into Jehovah, yet which, the vowels being wholly conjectural, might have been developed into anything else, clearly appealed to wayfarers to whom Chaldean science was a book that remained closed until Nebuchadnezzar blew their descendants back into the miraculous Babel of their youth.

Meanwhile, apart from the name — now generally written Jahveh — apart too from the fables and the enduring

detestation which the colossal city inspired, probably but one other thing impressed, and that was the observance of the Sabbath. To a people whose public works were executed by forced labour, such a day was a necessity. To vagrants it was not, and, though the custom interested, it was not adopted by them until their existence from nomad had become fixed.

At this latter period they were in Kanaan. Whether in the interval a tribe, the Beni-Israel, went down into Egypt, is a subject on which Continental scholarship has its doubts. The early life of the tribe's leader and legislator is usually associated with Rameses II., a pharaoh of the XIX. dynasty. But it has been found that incidents connected with Moses must apparently have occurred, if they occurred at all, at a period not

earlier than the XXVI. dynasty, which constitutes a minimum difference of seven hundred years. Yet, in view of the decalogue, with its curious analogy to the negative confession in the *Book of the Dead;* in view also of a practice surgical and possibly hygienic which, customary among the Egyptians, was adopted by the Jews; in view, further, of ceremonies and symbols peculiarly Egyptian that were also absorbed, a sojourn in Goshen there may have been.

The spoiling of the Egyptians, a roguery on which Israel afterward prided herself, is a trait perhaps too typical to be lightly dismissed. On the other hand, if Moses were, which is at least problematic, and if, in addition to being, he was both the nephew of a pharaoh and the son-in-law of a priest, as such one to whom, in either quality, the arcana of

the creed would be revealed, it becomes curious that nowhere in the Pentateuch is there any doctrine of a future life. Of the entire story, it may be that only the journey into the Sinaiatic peninsula is true, and of that there probably remained but tradition, on which history was based much later, by writers who had only surmises concerning the time and circumstances in which it occurred.

Yet equally with the roguery, Moses may have been. Seen through modern criticism his figure fades though his name persists. To that name the Septuagint tried to give an Egyptian flavour. In their version it is always Μωυσῆς, a compound derived from the Egyptian *mô*, water, and *usês*, saved from, or Saved-from-the-water.[1] Per contra, the Hebrew form Mosheh is, as already indicated, the

[1] Josephus: Antiq. ii. 9.

same as the Babylonian Masû, a term which means at once leader and littérateur, in addition to being the cognomen of a god.[1]

Moses is said to have led his people out of bondage. He was the writer to whom the Pentateuch has been ascribed. But he was also a prophet. In Babylon, the god of prophecy was Nebo. It was on Mount Nebo that Jahveh commanded the prophet of Israel to die. Moreover, the divinity that had Masû for cognomen was, as is shown by a Babylonian text, the primitive god of the sun at Nippur, but the sun at noon, at the period of its greatest effulgence, at the hour when it wars with whatever opposes, when it wars as Jahveh did, or as the latter may be assumed to have warred, since Isaiah represented him as a mighty man, roar-

[1] Sayce: The Religion of the Babylonians.

ing at his enemies, exciting the fury of the fight, marching personally to the conflict, and, in the Fourth Roll of the Law (Numbers), there is mention of a book entitled: *The Wars of Jahveh.*

Whether, then, Moses is but a composite of things Babylonian fused in an effort to show a link between a god and a people, is conjectural. But it is also immaterial. The one instructive fact is that, in a retrospect, the god, immediately after the exodus, became dictator.

Yet even in the later age, when the retrospect was effected, conceptions were evidently immature. On one occasion the god met Moses, tried to kill him, but finally let him go. The picture is that of a personal struggle.[1] Again, the spectacle of his back which he vouchsafed to Moses is construable only as an *arrière-*

[1] Exodus iv. 24–26.

pensée, unless it be profound philosophy, unless it be taken that the face of God represents Providence, to see which would be to behold the future, whereas the back disclosed the past.

It is, however, hardly probable that that construction occurred to the editors of the Pentateuch, who, elsewhere, represented Jahveh as a butcher, insatiable, jealous, vindictive, treacherous, and vain, one that consigned all nations other than Israel to ruin and whom a poet represented trampling people in anger, making them drunk with his fury, and defiling his raiment with blood.[1]

But in the period related in *Exodus*, Jahveh was but the tutelary god of an itinerant tribe that, in its gipsy lack of territorial possessions, was not even a nation. Like his people he too was a

[1] Isaiah lxiii. 1–6.

vagrant. Like them he had no home. Other gods had temples and altars. He lacked so much as a shrine. In prefigurement of the Wandering Jew, each day he moved on. The threats of a land that never smiled were reflected in his face. The sight of him was death. Certainly he was terrible.

This conception, corrected by later writers, was otherwise revised. In the interim Jahveh himself was transformed. He became El, the god; presently El Shaddai, God Almighty. In the ascension former traits disappeared. He developed into the deity of emphatic right. Morality, hitherto absent from religion, entered into it. Israel, who perhaps had been careless, who, like Solomon, had followed Ishtar, became austere. Thereafter, Judaism, of which Christianity and Muhammadanism were the after thoughts,

was destined to represent almost the sum total of the human conscience.

But in Kanaan, during the rude beginnings, though Jahveh was jealous, Ishtar, known locally as Ashtoreth, allured. Conjointly with Baal, the indigenous term for Bel, circumadjacently she ruled. The propitiatory rites of these fair gods were debauchery and infanticide, the loosening of the girdles of girls, the thrusting of children into fires. It may be that these ceremonies at first amazed the Hebrews. But conscientiously they adopted them, less perhaps through zeal than politeness; because, in this curious epoch, on entering a country it was thought only civil to serve the divinities that were there, in accordance with the ritual that pleased them.

With the mere mortal inhabitants, Israel was less ceremonious. Com-

manded by Jahveh to kill, extermination was but an act of piety. It was then, perhaps, that the *Wars of Jahveh* were sung, a pæan that must have been resonant with cries, with the death-rattle of kingdoms, with the shouts of the invading host. From the breast-plates of the chosen, the terror of Sinai gleamed. Men could not see their faces and live. The moon was their servant. To aid them the sun stood still. They encroached, they slaughtered, they quelled. In the conquest a nation was born. From that bloody cradle the God of Humanity came. But around and about it was vacancy. In emerging from one solitude the Jews created another. They have never left it. The desert which they made destined them to be alone on this earth, as their god was to be solitary in heaven.

Meanwhile there had been no kings in

Israel. With the nation royalty came. David followed Saul. After him was Solomon. It is presumably at this period that traditions, orally transmitted from a past relatively remote, were first put in writing. Previously it is conjectural if the Jews could write. If they could, it is uncertain whether they made any use of the ability other than in the possible compilation of toledoth, such as the *Book of the Generations of Adam* and the *Wars of Jahveh*, works that, later, may have served as data for the Pentateuch. Even then, the compositions must have been crude, and such rolls as existed may have been lost when Nebuchadnezzar overturned Jerusalem.

Presumably, it was not until the post-exilic period that, under the editorship perhaps of Ezra, the definitive edition of the Torah was produced. This suppo-

sition existing texts support. In Genesis (xxxvii. 31) it is written: "These are the kings of Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel." The passage shows, if it shows anything, that there were, or had been, kings in Israel at the time when the passage itself was written. It is, therefore, at least post-Davidic. In Genesis another passage (xlix. 10) says: "The sceptre shall not pass from Judah until Shiloh come." Judah was the tribe that became preeminent in Israel after the captivity. The passage is therefore post-exilic, consequently so is Genesis, and obviously the rest of the Pentateuch as well. Or, if not obviously, perhaps demonstrably. In II Esdras xiv. 22-48 it is stated that the writer, a candle of understanding in his heart, and aided by five swift scribes, recomposed the Law,

which, previously burned, was known to none.

The burning referred to is what may, perhaps, be termed religious fiction. Barring toledoth and related data that may have been lost, the Law had almost certainly not existed before, and this post-exilic romance concerning it was evolved in a laudable effort to show its Mosaic source. What is true of the Law is, in a measure, true of the Prophets. None of them anterior to Cyrus, all are later than Alexander. Spiritually very near to Christianity, chronologically they are neighbourly too. If not divinely inspired, they at least disclosed the ideal.

Previously the ideal had not perhaps been very apparent. Apart from secessions, rebellions, concussions, convulsions that deified Hatred until Jahveh, in the

person of Nebuchadnezzar, talked Assyrian, and then, in the person of Cyrus, talked Zend, the god of Israel, even in Israel, was not unique. He had a home, his first, the Temple, built gorgeously by Solomon, where invisibly, mysteriously, perhaps terribly, beneath the wings of cherubim that rose from the depths of the Holy of Holies, he dwelled. But the shrine, however ornate, was not the only one. There were other altars, other gods; the plentiful sanctuaries of Ashera, of Moloch and of Baal. On the adjacent hilltops the phallus stood. In the neighbouring groves the kisses of Ishtar consumed.

The Lady of Girdles was worshipped there not by men and women only, but by girls with girls; by others too, not in couples, but singly, girls who in their solitary devotions had instruments for

aid.[1] Religion, as yet, had but the slightest connection with morality, a circumstance explicable perhaps by the fact that it resumed the ethnical conscience of a race. Between the altar of El Shaddai and the shrines of other gods there were many differences, of which geography was the least. Jahveh, from a tutelary god, had indeed become the national divinity of a chosen people. But the Moabites were the chosen people of Chemos; the Ammonites were the chosen people of Rimmon; the Babylonians were the chosen people of Bel. The title conferred no distinction. As a consequence, to differerentiate Jahveh from all other gods, and Israel from all other people, to make the one unique and the other pontiff and shepherd of the nations of the world, be-

[1] *Cf.* Deut. xxiii. 17, where *'alâmôth* (puellæ) is rendered in the Sapphist sense. Ezekiel xvi. 17. *Fecisti tibi imagines masculinas.*

came the dream of anonymous poets, one that prophets, sometimes equally anonymous, proclaimed. It was the prophets that reviled the false gods, denounced the abominations of Ishtar, and purified the Israelite heart. While nothing discernible, or even imaginable, menaced, however slightly, the great empires of that day, the prophets were the first to realize that the Orient was dead. When the Christ announced that the end of the world was at hand, he but reiterated anterior predictions that presently were fulfilled. A world did end. That of antiquity ceased to be.

It was the prophets that foretold it. Gloomy, fanatic, implacable and, it may be, mad, yet inspired at least by genius which itself, while madness, is a madness wholly divine, they heralded the future, they established the past. Abraham they

drew from allegory, Moses from myth. They made them live, and so immortally that one survives in Islam, the other in words that are a law of grace for all.

If, in visions possibly ecstatic, they beheld heights that lost themselves in immensity, and saw there an ineffable name seared by forked flames on a tablet of stone; if that spectacle and the theophany of it were but poetry, the decalogue is a fact, one so solid that though ages have gone, though empires have crumbled, though the customs of man have altered, though the sky itself have changed, still is obeyed the commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

From Chemos in Moab, from Rimon among the Ammonites, no such edict had come. It felled them. Amon-Râ it tore from the celestial Nile, and Bel-Marduk from the Silver Sky. The Re-

faïm hid them in shadows as surely as they buried there the high and potent lords of Greece and Rome. These interments, completed by others, the prophets began. For it was they who, in addition to the command, revealed the commandant, creator of whatever is: the Being Absolute that abhorred evil, loved righteousness, punished the transgressor and rewarded the just; El Shaddai, then really Lord of Hosts.

It may be that already in Israel there had been some prescience of this. But it lacked the authority of inspired text. The omission was one that only seers could remedy. It was presumably in these circumstances that an agreement was imagined which, construed as a condition of a covenant, assumed to have been made with Abraham, was further assumed to have been renewed to Moses.

The resulting poetry was enveloped in a romance of which Continental scholarship has discovered two versions, woven together, perhaps by Ezra, into a single tale.

"In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and earth." That abrupt declaration, presented originally in but one of the versions, had already been pronounced of Indra and also of Ormuzd. The Hebraic announcement alone prevailed. It emptied the firmament of its monsters, dislodged the gods from the skies, and enthroned there a deity at first multiple but subsequently unique. Afterward seraphs and saints might replace the evaporated imaginings of other creeds; Satan might create a world of his own and people it with the damned; theology might evolve from elder faiths a newer trinity and set it like a diadem in space;

angels and archangels might refill the devastated heavens of the past; none the less, in the light of that austere pronouncement, for a moment Israel dwelled in contemplation of the Ideal.

At the time it is probable that the story of the love of the sons of Jahveh for the daughters of men, together with the pastel of Eden as it stands to-day, were not contained in existing accounts of that ideal. These legends, which regarded as legends are obviously false, but which, construed as allegories, may be profoundly true, were probably not diffused until after the captivity, when Israel was not more subtle, that is not possible, but, by reason of her contact with Persia, more wise.

The origin of evil these myths related but did not explain. Since then, from no church has there come an adequate

explanation of the malediction under which man is supposed to labour because of the natural propensities of beings that never were. That explanation these myths, which orthodoxy has gravely, though sometimes reluctantly, accepted, both provide and conceal. They date possibly from the Ormuzdian revelation: "In the beginning was the living Word."

John, or more exactly his homonym, repeated the pronouncement, adding: "The word was made flesh." But, save for a mention of the glory which he had before the world was, he omitted to further follow the thought of Ormuzd, who, in describing paradise to Zarathrustra, likened it, in every way, to heaven. There the first beings were, exempt from physical necessities, pure intelligencies, naked as the compilers of

Genesis translated, naked and unashamed, but naked and unashamed because incorporeal, unincarnate and clothed in light, a vestment which they exchanged for a garment of flesh, coats of skin as it is in Genesis, when, descended on earth, their intelligence, previously luminous, swooned in the senses of man.

In Egypt, the harper going out from Amenti sang: "Life is death in a land of darkness, death is life in a land of light." There perhaps is the origin of evil. There too perhaps is its cure. But the view accepted there too is pre-existence and persistence, a doctrine blasphemous to the Jew as it was to the Assyrian, to whom the gods alone were immortal, and to whom, in consequence, immortal beings would be gods. In the creed of both, man was essentially evanescent. To the Hebrew, he lived a few, brief days and

then went down into silence, where no remembrance is. There, gathered among the Refaïm to his fathers, he remained forever, unheeded by God.

The conception, passably rationalistic and not impossibly correct, veiled the beautiful allegory that was latent in the Eden myth. It had the further defect, or the additional advantage, of eliminating any theory of future punishment and reward. In lieu of anything of the kind, there was a doctrine that evil, in producing evil, automatically punished itself. The doctrine is incontrovertible. But, for corollary, went the fallacy that virtue is its own reward. Against that idea Job protested so energetically that mediæval monks were afraid to read what he wrote. Yet it was perhaps in demonstration of the real significance of the allegory that a spiritualistic doctrine —

always an impiety to the orthodox — was insinuated by the Pharisees and instilled by the Christ.

The basis of it rested perhaps partially in the idealism of the prophets. The clamour of their voices awoke the dead. It transformed the skies. It transfigured Jahveh. It divested him of attributes that were human. It outlined others that were divine. It awoke not merely the dead, but the consciousness that a god that had a proper name could not be the true one. Thereafter mention of it was avoided. The vowels were dropped. It became unpronounceable, therefore incommunicable. For it was substituted the term vaguer, and therefore more exact, of Lord, one in whose service were fulfilled the words of Isaiah: "I am the first and I am the last, and beside me there is no God."

In the marvel of that miraculous realization were altitudes hitherto undreamed, peaks from whose summits there was discernible but the valleys beneath, and another height on which stood the Son of man. Yet marvellous though the realization was, instead of diminishing, it increased. It did not pass. It was not forgot. Ceaselessly it augmented.

In the Scriptures there are many marvels. That perhaps is the greatest. Amon, originally an obscure provincial god of Thebes, became the supreme divinity of Egypt. Bel, originally a local god of Nippur, became in Babylon Lord of Hosts. But Jahveh, originally the tutelary god of squalid nomads, became the Deity of Christendom. The fact is one that any scholarship must admit. It is the indisputable miracle of the Bible.

VI

ZEUS

IN Judea, when Jahveh was addressed, he answered, if at all, with a thunderclap. Since then he has ceased to reply. Zeus was more complaisant. One might enter with him into the intimacy of the infinite. The father of the Graces, the Muses, the Hours, it was natural that he should be debonair. But he had other children. Among them were Litai, the Prayers. In the *Vedas*, where Zeus was born, the Prayers upheld the skies. Lame and less lofty in Greece, they could but listen and intercede.

The detail is taken from Homer. In his Ionian Pentateuch is the statement

that beggars are sent by Zeus, that whoever stretches a hand is respectable in his eyes, that the mendicant who is repulsed may perhaps be a god [1] — suggestions which, afterward, were superiorly resumed in the dictum: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

The Litai were not alone in their offices. There were the oracles of Delphi, of Trophonios and of Mopsos, where one might converse with any divinity, even with Pan, who was a very great god. But Olympos was neighbourly. It was charming too. There was unending spring there, eternal youth, immortal beauty, the harmonies of divine honeymoons, the ideal in a golden dream; a stretch of crystal parapets, from which, leaning and laughing, radiant goddesses

[1] Odyssey, xviii. 485, v. 447, xiv. 56.

and resplendent gods looked down, and to whom a people, adolescent still, looked up.

In that morning of delight fear was absent, mystery was replaced by joy. The pageantry of the hours may have been too near to nature to know of shame, it was yet too close to the divine to know of hate. Man, then, for the first time, loved what he worshipped and worshipped what he loved. His brilliant and musical Bible moved his heart without tormenting it. It conducted but did not constrain. It taught him that in death all are equal and that in life the noble-minded are serene.

In the Genesis of this Bible there is an account of a golden age and of a paradise into which evil was introduced by woman. The account is Hesiod's, to whom the Orient had furnished the details. It may

be that both erred. If ever there were a golden age it must have been in those days when heaven was on earth and, mingling familiarly with men, were processions of gods, gods of love, of light, of liberty, thousands of them, not one of whom had ever heard an atheist's voice. Related to humanity, of the same blood, sons of the same Aryan mother, they differed from men only in that the latter died because they were real, while they were deathless because ideal.

The ideal was too fair. Presently Pallas became the soul of Athens. But meanwhile from the East there strayed swarms of enigmatic faces; the harlot handmaids of her Celestial Highness Ishtar, Princess of Heaven; the mutilated priests of Tammuz her lover; dual conceptions that resulted in Aphrodite Pandemos, the postures of Priapos, the leer of

the Lampsacene, and, with them, forms of worship comparable, in the circum-adjacent beauty, to latrinæ in a garden, ignoble shapes that violated the candour of maidens' eyes, but with which Greece became so accustomed that on them moral aphorisms were engraved. "In the mind of Hellas, these things," Renan, with his usual unctuousness, declared, "awoke but pious thoughts."

Pious at heart Hellas was. Even art, which now is wholly profane, with her was wholly sacred. The sanctity was due to its perfection. The perfection was such that imbeciles who fancy that it has been or could be surpassed show merely that they know nothing about it. At Athens, where Pheidias created a palpable Olympos, Pallas stood colossally, a torch in her hand, a lance at her shoulder, a shield at her side, a plastron

of gold on her immaculate breast, a golden robe about her ivory form, and on her immortal brow a crown of gold, beneath which, sapphire eyes, that saw and foresaw, glittered. To-day the place where the marvellous creation stood is vacant. With the gorgeous host Pallas has departed. But the torch she held still burns. From the emptiness of her virginal arms, that never were filled, proceeds all civilization.

Adjacently at Eleusis was Demeter. Pallas was the soul of Greece. Eleusis was the Jerusalem, Demeter the Madonna.

Demeter — the earth, the universal mother — had, in a mystic hymen with her brother Zeus, conceived Persephone. The latter, when young and a maiden, beckoned perhaps by Eros, wandered from Olympos and was gathering flowers

when Pluto, borne by black horses, erupted, raped her, and tore her away. The cries of the indignant Demeter sterilized the earth. To assuage her, Zeus undertook to have Persephone recovered, provided that in Hades, of which Pluto was lord, she had eaten nothing. But the girl had — a pomegranate grain. It was the irrevocable. Demeter yielded, as the high gods had to yield, to what was higher than they, to Destiny. Meanwhile, in the shadows below, Persephone was transfigured.

Thou art more than the day or the morrow, the seasons
that laugh and that weep;
For these give joy and sorrow: but thou, Proserpina,
sleep. . . .
O daughter of earth, of my mother, her crown and
blossom of birth,
I am also, I also, thy brother; I go as I came unto earth.
In the night where thine eyes are as moons are in heaven,
the night where thou art,

Where the silence is more than all tunes, where sleep
overflows from the heart, . . .
And the murmur of spirits that sleep in the shadow of
gods from afar
Grows dim in thine ears and deep as the deep dim soul
of a star.
In the sweet low light of thy face, under heavens un-
trod by the sun,
Let my soul with their souls find place and forget what
was done or undone.
Thou art more than the gods that number the days
of our temporal breath
For these give labour and slumber; but thou, Proser-
pina, death.

Like Hesiod, Swinburne erred, though perhaps intentionally, as poets should, for the greater glory of the Muses. Persephone brought not death but life. The aisles of despair she filled with hope. Transfigured herself, Pluto she transformed. She changed what had been hell into what was to be purgatory. It

was not yet Elysium, but it was no longer Hades. Plato said that those who were in her world had no wish at all for this.

It is for that reason that Demeter is the Madonna of Greece, as her ethereal daughter was the saviour. The myth of it all, brought by Pythagoras from Egypt is very old. Known in Memphis, it was known too in Babylon, perhaps before Memphis was. But the legend of Isis and that of Ishtar — both of whom descended into hell — lack the transparent charm which this idyl unfolds and of which the significance was revealed only to initiate in epiphanies at Eleusis.

Before these sacraments Greece stood, a finger to her lips. Yet the whispers from them that have reached us, while furtive perhaps, are clear. They furnished the poets with notes that are

resonant still. They lifted the drama to heights that astound. Even in the fancy balls of Aristophanes, where men were ribald and the gods were mocked, suddenly, in the midst of the orgy, laughter ceased, obscenities were hushed. Afar a hymn resounded. It was the chorus of the Initiate going measuredly by.

The original mysteries were Hermetic. Enterable only after a prolonged novitiate, the adept then beheld an unfolding of the theosophy of the soul. In visions, possibly ecstatic, he saw the series of its incarnations, the seven cycles through which it passed, the Ship of a Million Years on which the migrations are effected and on which, at last, from the Valley of the Shadow of Death, it sails to its primal home.

That home was colour, its sustenance light. There, in ethereal evolutions, its

incarnations began. At first unsubstantial and wholly ineffable, these turned for it every object into beauty, every sound into joy. Without needs, from beatitude to beatitude blissfully it floated. But, subjected to the double attraction of matter and of sin, the initiate saw the memories and attributes of its spirituality fade. He saw it flutter, and fluttering sink. He saw that in sinking it enveloped itself in garments that grew heavier at each descent. Through the denser clothing he saw the desires of the flesh pulsate. He saw them force it lower, still lower, until, fallen into its earthly tenement, it swooned in the senses of man. From the chains of that prison he learned that the soul's one escape was in a recovery of the memory of what it had been when it was other than what it had become.

That memory the mysteries provided.

Those of Eleusis differed from the Egyptian only in detail. At Eleusis, in lieu of visions, there were tableaux. Persephone, beckoned by desire, straying then from Olympos, afterward fainting in the arms of Pluto, but subsequently, while preparing her own reascension, saving and embellishing all that approach, was the symbol, in an Hellenic setting, of the fall and redemption of man.

The human tragedy thus portrayed was the luminous counterpart of the dark dramas that Athens beheld. There, in the theatre — which itself was a church with the stage for pulpit — man, blinded by passions, the Fates pursued and Destiny felled.

The sombre spectacle was inexplicable. At Eleusis was enlightenment. "Eskato Bebeloï" — *Out from here, the profane* — the heralds shouted as the mysteries

began. "Konx ompax" — *Go in peace* — they called when the epiphanies were completed.

In peace the initiate went, serenely, it is said, ever after. From them the load of ignorance was lifted. But what their impressions were is unrecorded. They were bound to secrecy. No one could learn what occurred without being initiated, or without dying. For death too is initiation.

The mysteries were schools of immortality. They plentifully taught many a lesson that Christianity afterward instilled. But their drapery was perhaps over ornate. Truth does not need any. Truth always should be charming. Yet always it should be naked as well. About it the mysteries hung a raiment that was beautiful, but of which the rich embroideries obscured. The mysteries could not have been more fascinating, that is

not possible, but, the myths removed, in simple nudity they would have been more clear. Doubtless it was for that very reason, in order that they might not be transparent, that the myths were employed. It is for that very reason, perhaps, that Christianity also adopted a few. Yet at least from cant they were free. Among the multiple divinities of Greece, hypocrisy was the unknown god. Consideration of the others is, to-day, usually effected through the pages of Ovid. One might as well study Christianity in the works of Voltaire. Christianity's brightest days were in the dark ages. The splendid glamour of them that persists is due to many causes, among which, in minor degree, may be the compelling glare of Greek genius. That glare, veiled in the mysteries, philosophy reflects.

Philosophy is but the love of wisdom.

It began with Socrates. He had no belief in the gods. The man who has none may be very religious. But though Socrates did not believe in the gods he did not deny them. He did what perhaps was worse. He ignored their perfectly poetic existence. He was put to death for it, though only at the conclusion of a long promenade during which he delivered Athenian youths of their intelligence. Facility in the operation may have been inherited. Socrates was the son of a midwife. His own progeny consisted in a complete transfiguration of Athenian thought. He told of an Intelligence, supreme, ethical, just, seeing all, hearing all, governing all; a creator made not after the image of man but of the soul, and visible only in the conscience. It was for that he died. There was no such god on Olympos.

There was an additional indictment. Socrates was accused of perverting the *jeunesse dorée*. At a period when, everywhere, save only in Israel, the abnormal was usual, Socrates was almost insultingly chaste. The perversion of which he was accused was not of that order. It was that of inciting lads to disobey their parents when the latter opposed what he taught.

"I am come to set a man against his father," it is written in *Matthew*. The mission of Socrates was the same. Because of it he died. He was the first martyr. But his death was overwhelming in its simplicity. Even in fairyland there has been nothing more calm. By way of preparation he said to his judges: "Were you to offer to acquit me on condition that I no longer profess what I believe, I would answer; 'Athenians, I

honour and I love you, but a god has commanded me and that god I will obey, rather than you.'"

In the speech was irony, with which Athens was familiar. But it also displayed a conception, wholly new, that of maintaining at any cost the truth. The novelty must have charmed. When Peter and the apostles were arraigned before the Sanhedrin, their defence consisted in the very words that Socrates had used: "We should obey God rather than man." [1]

Socrates wrote nothing. The Buddha did not either. Neither did the Christ. These had their evangelists. Socrates had also disciples who, as vehicle for his ideas, employed the nightingale tongue of beauty into which the Law and the Prophets were translated by the Septuagint and into which the Gospels were put.

[1] Acts v. 29.

It would be irreverent to suggest that the latter are in any way indebted to Socratic inspiration. It would be irrelevant as well. For, while the Intelligence that Socrates preached differed as much from the volage and voluptuous Zeus as the God of Christendom differs from the Jahveh of Job, yet, in a divergence so wide, an idealist, very poor except in ideas; a teacher killed by those who knew not what they did; a philosopher that drained the cup without even asking that it pass from him; a mere reformer, though dangerous perhaps as every reformer worth the name must be; but, otherwise, a mere man like any other, only a little better, could obviously have had no share. For reasons not minor but major, Plato could have had none either.

It is related that a Roman invader, sank back, stricken with *deisidaimonia* —

the awe that the gods inspired — at the sight of the Pheidian Zeus. It is with a wonder not cognate certainly, yet in a measure relative, that one considers what Socrates must have been if millennia have gone without producing one mind approaching that of his spiritual heir. It was uranian; but not disassociated from human things.

Plato, like his master, was but a man in whom the ideal was intuitive, perhaps the infernal also. In the gardens of the Academe and along the banks of the Ilissus, he announced a Last Judgment. The announcement, contained in the *Phædo*, had for supplement a picture that may have been Persian, of the righteous ascending to heaven and the wicked descending to hell. In the *Laws*, the picture was annotated with a statement to the effect that whatever a man may do,

there is an eye that sees him, a memory that registers and retains. In the *Republic* he declared that afflictions are blessings in disguise. But his "Republic," a utopian commonwealth, was not, he said, of this world, adding in the *Phœdo*, that few are chosen though many are called.

The mystery of the catholicism of the Incas, reported back to the Holy Office, was there defined as an artifice of the devil. With finer circumspection, Christian Fathers attributed the denser mystery of Greek philosophy to the inspiration of God.

Certainly it is ample. As exemplified by Plato it has, though, its limitations. There is no charity in it. Plato preached humility, but there is none in his sermons. His thought is a winged thing, as the thought of a poet ever should be. But in

the expression of it he seems smiling, disdainful, indifferent as a statue to the poverties of the heart. That too, perhaps, is as it should be. The high muse wears a radiant peplum. Anxiety is banished from the minds that she haunts. Then, also, if, in the nectar of Plato's speech, compassion is not an ingredient, it may be because, in his violet-crowned city, it was strewn open-handed through the beautiful streets. There, public malediction was visited on anyone that omitted to guide a stranger on his way.

Israel was too strictly monotheistic to raise an altar to Pity, the rest of antiquity too cruel. In Athens there was one. In addition there were missions for the needy, asylums for the infirm. If anywhere, at that period, human sympathy existed, it was in Greece. The aristocratic silence of Plato may have been due to that fact.

He would not talk of the obvious, though he did of the vile. In one of his books the then common and abnormal conception of sexuality was, if not authorized, at least condoned. It is conjectural, however, whether the conception was more monstrous than that which subsequent mysticity evolved.

Said Ruysbroeck: "The mystic carries her soul in her hand and gives it to whomsoever she wishes." Said St. Francis of Sales: "The soul draws to itself motives of love and delectates in them." What the gift and what the delectation were, other saints have described.

Marie de la Croix asserted that in the arms of the celestial Spouse she swam in an ocean of delight. Concerning that Spouse, Marie Alacoque added: "Like the most passionate of lovers he made me understand that I should taste what is

sweetest in the suavity of caresses, and indeed, so poignant were they, that I swooned." The ravishments which St. Theresa experienced she expressed in terms of abandoned precision. Mme. Guyon wrote so carnally of the divine that Bossuet exclaimed; "Seigneur, if I dared, I would pray that a seraph with a flaming sword might come and purify my lips sullied by this recital."[1]

Augustin pleasantly remarked that we are all born for hell. One need not agree with him. In the presence of the possibly monstrous and the impossibly blasphemous, there is always a recourse. It is to turn away, though it be to Zeus, a belief in whom, however stupid, is ennobling beside the turpitudes that Christian mysticism produced.

At Athens, meanwhile, the religion of

[1] Relation sur le Quiétisme.

State persisted. So also did philosophy. When, occasionally, the two met, the latter bowed. That was sufficient. Religion exacted respect, not belief. It was not a faith, it was a law, one that for its majesty was admired and for its poetry was beloved. In the deification of whatever is exquisite it was but an artistic cult. The real Olympos was the Pantheon. The other was fading away. Deeper and deeper it was sinking back into the golden dream from which it had sprung. Further and further the crystal parapets were retreating. Dimmer and more dim the gorgeous host became. In words of perfect piety Epicurus pictured them in the felicity of the ideal. There, they had no heed of man, no desire for worship, no wish for prayer. It was unnecessary even to think of them. Decorously, with every homage, they were being deposed.

But if Epicurus was decorous, Evemerus was devout. It was his endeavour, he said, not to undermine but to fortify. The gods he described as philanthropists whom a grateful world had deified. Zeus had waged a sacrilegious war against his father. Aphrodite was a harlot and a procuress. The others were equally commendable. Once they had all lived. Since then all had died. Evemerus had seen their tombs.

One should not believe him. Their parapets are dimmer, perhaps, but from them still they lean and laugh. They are immortal as the hexameters in which their loves unfold. Yet, oddly enough, presently the oracle of Delphi strangled. In his cavern Trophonios was gagged. The voice of Mopsos withered.

That is nothing. On the Ionian, the captain of a ship heard some one call-

ing loudly at him from the sea. The passengers, who were at table, looked out astounded. Again the loud voice called: "Captain, when you reach shore announce that the great god Pan is dead."[1]

It may be that it was true. It may be that after Pan the others departed. When Paul reached Athens he found a denuded Pantheon, a vacant Olympos, skies more empty still.

[1] Plutarch: de Oracul. defect. 14.

VII

JUPITER

THE name of the national deity of Israel is unpronounceable. The name of the national divinity of Rome is unknown. To all but the hierophants it was a secret. For uttering it a senator was put to death. But Tullius Hostilius erected temples to Fear and to Pallor. It may have been Fright. The conjecture is supported by the fact that, as was usual, Rome had any number of deified epithets, as she had also a quantity of little bits of gods. These latter greatly amused the Christian Fathers. Among them was Alemona, who, in homely English, was Wet-nurse.

Tertullian, perhaps naïvely, remarked: "Superstition has invented these deities for whom we have substituted angels." In addition to the diva mater Alemona was the divus pater Vaticanus, the holy father Vatican, who assisted at a child's first cry. There was the equally holy father Fabulin, who attended him in his earliest efforts at speech. Neither of them had anything else to do.

Pavor had. At thunder, at lightning, at a meteor, at moisture on a wall, at no matter what, at silence even, the descendants of a she-wolf's nursling quailed. They lived in a panic. In panic the gods were born. It is but natural, perhaps, that Fright should have been held supreme. The other gods, mainly divinities of prey and of havoc, were lustreless as the imaginations that conceived them. Prosaic, unimaged, without poetry or

myth, they dully persisted until pedlars appeared with Hellenic legends and wares. To their tales Rome listened. Then eidolons of the Olympians became naturalized there. Zeus was transformed into Jupiter, Aphrodite into Venus, Pallas into Minerva, Demeter into Ceres, and all of them — and with them all the others — into an irritable police. The Greek gods enchanted, those of Rome alarmed. Plutarch said that they were indignant if one presumed to so much as sneeze.

Worship, consequently, was a necessary precaution, an insurance against divine risks, a matter of business in which the devout bargained with the divine. Ovid represented Numa trying to elude the exigencies of Jove. The latter had demanded the sacrifice of a head. "You shall have a cabbage,"

said the king. "I mean something human." "Some hairs then." "No, I want something alive." "We will give you a pretty little fish." Jupiter laughed and yielded. That was much later, after Lucretius, in putting Epicurus into verse, had declared religion to be the mother of sin. By that time Fear and Pallor had struck terror into the very marrow of barbarian bones. Fright was a god more serviceable than Zeus. With him Rome conquered the world. Yet in the conquest Fright became Might and the latter an effulgence of Jove's.

Jove was magnificent. In the Capitol he throned so augustly that we swear by him still. Like Rome he is immortal. But Pavor, that had faded into him, was never invoked. The reason was not sacerdotal, it was political. Rome never imposed her gods on the quelled. With

superior tact she lured their gods from them. At any siege, that was her first device. To it she believed her victories were due. It was to avoid possible reprisals and to remain invincible, that her own national divinity she so carefully concealed that the name still is a secret. With the gods, Rome gathered the creeds of the world, set them like fountains among her hills, and drank of their sacred waters. Her early deity is unknown. But the secret of her eternity is in the religions that she absorbed. It was these that made her immortal.

To that immortality the obscure god of an obscure people contributed largely, perhaps, but perhaps, too, not uniquely. Jahveh might have remained unperceived behind the veil of the sanctuary had not his altar been illuminated by lights from other shrines. In the early days of the

empire, Rome was fully aware of the glamour of Amon, of the star of Ormuzd, Brahm's cerulean lotos and the rainbow heights of Bel-Marduk. But in the splendour of Jove all these were opaque.

Jupiter, always imposing, was grandiose then. His thoughts were vast as the sky. In a direct revelation to Vergil he said of his chosen people: "I have set no limits to their conquest or its duration. The empire I have given them shall be without end."[1] Hebrew prophets had spoken similarly. Vergil must have been more truly inspired. The Roman empire, nominally holy, figuratively still exists. Yet fulfilment of the prophecy is due perhaps less to the God of the Gentiles than to the God of the Jews. Though perhaps also it may be permissible to discern in the latter a transfiguration of

[1] Æneid i. 278.

Jove, who originally Zeus, and primarily not Hellenic but Hindu, ultimately became supreme. After the terrific struggle which resulted in that final metamorphosis, Jerusalem, disinherited, saw Rome the spiritual capital of the globe.

Jerusalem was not a home of logic. Rome was the city of law. That law, cold, inflexible, passionless as a sword and quite as effective, Rome brandished at philosophy. It is said that the intellectual gymnastics of Greece were displeasing to her traditions. It is more probable that augurs had foreseen or oracles had foretold that philosophy would divest her of the sword, and with it of her sceptre and her might. Ideas cannot be decapitated. Only ridicule can demolish them. Philosophy, mistress of irony, resisted while nations fell. It was philosophy that first undermined established

creeds and then led to the pursuit of new ones. Yet it may be that a contributing cause was a curious theory that the world was to end. Foretold in the *Brahmanas*, in the *Avesta* and in the *Eddas*, probably it was in the *Sibylline Books*. If not, the subsequent Church may have so assumed.

Dies iræ, dies illa,
Solvet sæclum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla.

Not alone David and the Sibyl but Etruscan seers had seen in the skies that the tenth and last astronomical cycle had begun.[1] Plutarch, in his life of Sylla, testified to the general belief in an approaching cataclysm. Lucretius announced that at any moment it might occur.[2] That was in the latter days of

[1] Censorinus: De die nat. 17.
[2] De rerum nat., v. 105.

the republic. In the early days of the empire the theory persisting may have induced the hope of a saviour. Suetonius said that nature in her parturitions was elaborating a king.[1] Afterward he added that such was Asia's archaic belief.[2] Recent discoveries have verified the assertion. In the Akkadian Epic of Dibbara a messiah was foretold.[3] That epic, anterior to a cognate Egyptian prophecy,[4] anterior also to the *Sibylline Books*, was anterior too to the Hebrew prophets and necessarily to those of Rome.

Among these was Vergil. In the fourth Eclogue he beheld an age of gold, preceded by the advent on earth of a son of Jove, under whose auspices the last traces of sin and sorrow were to disappear and a new race descend from heaven. "The

[1] In Augusto, 74. [2] In Vesp. 4.
[3] Jastrow: *op. cit.* [4] See back, Chapter III.

serpent shall die," he declared, adding: "The time is at hand."

The Eclogue was written 40 B.C., during the consulate of Pallio, whom the poet wished perhaps to flatter. Then presently Ovid sang the deathless soul and Tibullus gave rendezvous hereafter. The atmosphere dripped with wonders. The air became charged with the miraculous. At stated intervals the doors of temples opened of themselves. Statues perspired visibly. There was a book that explained the mechanism of these marvels. It interested nobody. Prodigies were matters of course.

The people had a heaven, also a hell, both of them Greek, a purgatory that may have been Asiatic, and, pending the advent of the son of Jove, in Mithra they could have had a redeemer. Had it been desired, Buddhism could have supplied

gospels, India the trinity, Persia the resurrection, Egypt the life. From Iran could have been obtained an Intelligence, sovereign, unimaged, and just. That was unnecessary. Long since Socrates had displayed it. In addition, Epicurus had told of an ascension of heavens, skies beyond the sky, worlds without number, the many mansions of a later faith.

Meanwhile, austerity was an appanage of the stoics, in whose faultless code the dominant note was contempt for whatever is base, respect for all that is noble. A doctrine of great beauty, purely Greek, as was everything else in Rome that was beautiful, its heights were too lofty for the vulgar. It appealed only to the lettered, that is to the few, to the infrequent disciples of Zeno and of Cicero, his prophet, who, Erasmus said, was inspired by God.

It may be that Cicero inspired a few of God's preachers. The latter were not yet in Rome. Christ had not come. At that period, unique in history, man alone existed. The temples were thronged, but the skies were bare. Cicero knew that. Elysium and Hades were as chimerical to him as the Epicurean heavens. "People," he said, "talk of these places as though they had been there." But that which was superstition to him he regarded as beneficial for others, who had to have something and who got it, in temples where a sin was a prayer.

There was once a play of which there has survived but the title: *The Last Will and Testament of Defunct Jupiter.* It appeared in the days of Diocletian, but it might have appealed when Cicero taught. Faith then had fainted. Fright had ceased to build. Worship remained, but

religion had gone. The gods themselves were departing. The epoch itself was apoplectic. The tramp of legions was continuous. Not alone the skies but the world was in a ferment. It was not until a diadem, falling from Cleopatra's golden bed, rolled to the feet of Augustus, that the gods were stayed and faith revived.

In the interim, prisoners had been deported from Judea. At first they were slaves. Subsequently manumitted, they formed a colony that in the high-viced city resembled Esther in the seraglio of Ahasuerus. Rome, amateur of cults, always curious of foreign faiths, might have been interested in Judaism. It had many analogies with local beliefs. Its adherents awaited, as Rome did, a messiah. They awaited too a golden age. For those who were weary of philosophy, they had a religion in which there was none.

For those to whom the marvellous appealed, they had a history in which miracles were a string of pearls. For those who were sceptic concerning the post-mortem, they offered blankness. In addition, their god, the enemy of all others, was adapted to an empire that recognized no sovereignty but its own. Readily might Rome have become Hebrew. But then, with equal ease, she might have become Egyptian.

For those who were perhaps afraid of going to hell and yet may have been equally afraid of not going anywhere, Egypt held passports to a land of light. Then too, the gods of Egypt were friendly and accessible. They mingled familiarly with those of Rome, complaisantly with the deified Cæsars, as already they had with the pharaohs, a condescension, parenthetically, that did not protect them

from Tiberius, who, for reasons with which religion had nothing whatever to do, persecuted the Egyptians, as he persecuted also the Jews. None the less, Rome, weary of local fictions, might have become converted to foreign ideas. In default of Syrian or Copt, she might have become Persian as already she was Greek.

Augustus had other views. Divinities, made not merely after the image of man but in symbols of sin, he saluted. With a hand usually small, but in this instance tolerably large, he re-established them on their pedestals. A relapse to spiritual infancy resulted. It was what he sought. He wanted to be a god himself and he became one. His power and, after him, that of his successors, had no earthly limit, no restraint human or divine. It was the same omnipotence here that elsewhere Jupiter wielded.

Jupiter had flamens who told him the time of day. He had others that read to him. For his amusement there were mimes. For his delectation, matrons established themselves in the Capitol and affected to be his loves. But then he was superb. Made of ivory, painted vermillion, seated colossally on a colossal throne, a sceptre in one hand, a thunderbolt in the other, a radiating gold crown on his august head, and, about his limbs, a shawl of Tyrian purple, he looked every inch the god.

The Cæsars, if less imposing, were more potent. Their hands, in which there was nothing symbolic, held life and death, absolute dominion over everything, over every one. Jupiter was but a statue. They alone were real, alone divine. To them incense ascended. At their feet libations poured. The nectar fumes confused. Rome, mad as they, built them

temples, raised them shrines, creating for them a worship that they accepted, as only their due perhaps, but in which their reason fled. In accounts of the epoch there is much mention of citizens, senators, patricians. Nominally there were such people. Actually there were but slaves. The slaves had a succession of masters. Among them was a lunatic, Caligula, and an imbecile, Claud. There were others. There was Terror, there was Hatred, there was Crime. These last, though several, were yet but one. Collectively, they were Nero.

If philosophy ever were needed it was in his monstrous day. To anyone, at any moment, there might be brought the laconic message: Die. In republican Rome, philosophy separated man from sin. At that period it was perhaps a luxury. In the imperial epoch it was a

necessity. It separated man from life. The philosophy of the republic Cicero expounded. That of the empire Seneca produced.

The neo-stoicism of the latter sustained the weak, consoled the just. It was a support and a guide. It preached poverty. It condemned wealth. It deprecated honours and pleasure. It inculcated chastity, humility, and resignation. It detached man from earth. It inspired, or attempted to inspire, a desire for the ideal which it represented as the goal of the sage, who, true child of God,[1] prepared for any torture, even for the cross,[2] yet, essentially meek,[3] sorrowed for mankind,[4] happy if he might die for it.[5]

In iambics that caressed the ear like flutes, poets had told of Jupiter clothed

[1] De Provid. i. [2] *Cf.* Lactantius vi. 17.
[3] Epit. cxx. 13. [4] Lucanus ii. 378. [5] Ibidem.

in purple and glory. They had told of his celestial amours, of his human and of his inhuman vices. Seneca believed in Jupiter. But not in the Jove of the poets. That god dwelled in ivory and anapests. Seneca's deity, nowhere visible, was everywhere present.[1] Creator of heaven and earth,[2] without whom there is nothing,[3] from whom nothing is hidden,[4] and to whom all belongs,[5] our Father,[6] whose will shall be done.[7]

"Life," said Seneca, "is a tribulation, death a release. In order not to fear death," he added, "think of it always." The day on which it comes judges all

[1] Nemo novit Deum. Epit. xxxi. Ubique Deus. Epit. xli.

[2] Mundum hujus operis dominum et artificem. Quæst. nat. i.

[3] Sine quo nihil est. Quæst nat. vii. 31.

[4] Nil Deo Clausam. Ep. lxxxx.

[5] Omnia habentem. Ep. xcv.

[6] Parens noster. Ep. cx.

[7] Placeat homini quidquid Deo placuit. Ep. lxxv.

others.[1] Meanwhile comfort those that sorrow.[2] Share your bread with them that hunger.[3] Wherever there is a human being there is place for a good deed.[4] Sin is an ulcer. Deliverance from it is the beginning of health — salvation, *salutem.*" [5]

Words such as these suggest others. They are anterior to those which they recall. The latter are more beautiful, they are more ample, there is in them a poetry and a profundity that has rarely been excelled. Yet, it may be, that a germ of them is in Seneca, or, more exactly, in theories which, beginning in India, prophets, seers, and stoics variously interpreted and recalled.

However since they have charmed the world, their effect on Nero was curious.

[1] Ep. xxvi. 4. [2] De Clem. ii. 6. [3] Ep. xcv. 51.
[4] De Vita Beata, 14. [5] Ep. xxviii. 9.

Seneca was his preceptor. But so too was Art. The lessons of these teachers, fusing in the demented mind of the monster, produced transcendental depravity, the apogee of the abnormal and the epileptically obscene. What is more important, they produced Christianity.

Christianity already existed in Rome, but obscurely, subterraneanly, among a class of poor people generally detested, particularly by the Jews. Christianity was not as yet a religion, it was but the belief of a sect that announced that the world was to be consumed. Presently Rome was. The conflagration, which was due to Nero, swept everything sacred away.

Even for a prince that, perhaps, was excessive. Nero may have felt that he had gone too far. An emperor was omnipotent, he was not inviolable. Tiberius

was suffocated, Caligula was stabbed, Claud was poisoned. Nero, it may be, in feeling that he had gone too far, felt also that he needed a scapegoat. Christian pyromania suggested itself. But probably it suggested itself first to the Jews, who, Renan has intimated, denounced the Christians accordingly. Such may have been the case. In any event, then it was that Christianity received its baptism of blood.

All antiquity was cruel, but, barring perhaps the immense Asiatic butcheries, Nero contrived then to surpass anything that had been done. Bloated and hideous, his hair done up in a chignon, a concave emerald for monocle, in the crowded arena he assisted at the rape of Christian girls. Their lovers, their brothers and fathers were either eaten alive by beasts or, that night, dressed in tunics that had

been soaked in oil, were fastened to posts and set on fire, in order that, as human torches, they might illuminate palace gardens, through which, costumed as a jockey, Nero raced.

The spectacle in the ampitheatre, which fifty thousand people beheld; the succeeding festival at which all Rome assembled, were two acts in the birthday of a faith.

Then, to the cradle, presently, Wise Men came with gifts — the gold, the frankincense, the myrrh, of creeds anterior though less divine.

VIII

THE NEC PLUS ULTRA

IT was after fastidious rites, the heart entirely devout and on his knees, that Angelico di Fiesole drew a picture of the Christ. The attitude is emulative. It is with brushes dipped in holy water that Jesus should be displayed, though more reverent still is the absence of any delineation.

Reverence of that high character history formerly observed. There is no mention of the Saviour in the chronicles of those who were blessed in being his contemporaries. One indiscreet remark of Josephus has been recognized as the interpolation of a later hand, well-intentioned perhaps,

but misguided. Jesus glows in the Gospels. Yet they that awaited the day when, in a great aurora borealis, the Son of man should appear, had passed from earth before one of the evangels was written.

It was a hundred years later before the texts that comprise the New Testament were complete. It was nearly two hundred before they were definitive. In the interim many gospels appeared. Attributed indifferently to each of the Twelve, one was ascribed to Judas. There was a Gospel to the Hebrews, a Gospel to the Egyptians. There were evangels of Childhood, of Perfection and of Mary.

These primitive memoirs were based on oral accounts of occurrences long anterior. Into them entered extraneous beauties, felicities of phrase and detail, which, with naïf effrontery, were put into the mouth of one apostle or another, even

into that of Jesus. The ascription was regarded as highly commendable. It was but a way of glorifying the Lord. Besides, the scenarii of these pious evocations the prophets had traced in advance.

"Rejoice, daughter of Zion; shout, daughter of Jerusalem, behold thy King cometh unto thee; he is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass."

That king of the poor whom Zachariah had foreseen, the stumbling block of Israel that Isaiah had foretold, the Son, mentioned by Hosea, whom Jahveh had called out of Egypt, was the Saviour, ascending in glory as Elijah had done. A passage incorrectly rendered by the Septuagint indicated a virginal birth. That also was suggestive.

The little biographies in which these

developments appeared were intended for circulation only among an author's narrow circle of immediate friends, at most to be read aloud in devout reunions. If, ultimately, of the entire collection, four only were retained, it is probably because these best expressed existing convictions. Though, irrespective of their beauties, Irenæus said that there had to be four and could be but four, for the reason that there are four seasons, four winds, four corners of the earth, and the four revelations of Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus.

It is not on that perhaps arbitrary deduction that their validity resides, but rather because the parables and miracles which they recite became the spiritual nourishment of a world. To their title of eternal verities they have other and stronger claims. They have consoled

and they have ennobled. Elder creeds may have done likewise, but these lacked that of which Christianity was the unique possessor, the marvel of a crucified god.

Saviours there had been. Mithra was a redeemer. Zoroaster was born of a virgin. Persephone descended into hell. Osiris rose from the dead. Gotama was tempted by the devil. Moses was transfigured. Elijah ascended into heaven. But in no belief is there a parallel for the crucifixion, although in Hindu legend, Krishna, a divinity whose mythical infancy a mythical prototype of Herod troubled, died, nailed by arrows to a tree.

In Oriental lore Krishna is held to have been the eighth avatar of Vishnu, of whom Gotama was the ninth. Krishna was therefore anterior to the Buddha, at least in myth. But it would be a grave

impropriety to infer that with the legend concerning him the narrative of the crucifixion has any other connection than the possible one of having suggested it. The *Bhagavad-Purana*, in which the legend occurs, is relatively modern, though the legend itself may, like the *Tripitaka*, have existed orally, for centuries, before it was finally committed to writing.

There can, however, be no impropriety in recalling analogies that exist between the Saviour and one whom the Orient holds also divine. These analogies, set forth in the first chapter of the present volume, are, it may be, wholly fortuitous, though Pliny stated that, centuries before his day, disciples of Gotama were established on the Dead Sea and, from a passage in Josephus, it seems probable that the Essenes were Buddhists, in the same degree perhaps that the Pharisees were

Parsis. But the point is also obscure. It is immaterial as well. The Gospels were not written in Jerusalem but mainly in Rome, where crucifixions were common, as they were, for that matter, throughout the East, but where, too, all religions were acclimated and the supernatural was at home.

Rome had witnessed the *tours de force* of Apollonios of Tyana. Those of Simon the Magician had also been beheld. Rome had seen, or, it may be, thought she believed she had seen, Vespasian cure the halt and the blind with a touch. The atmosphere then was charged with the marvellous. The temples were filled with prodigies, with strange gods, beckoning chimeras, credulous crowds.

There was something superior. Rome was the depository of the legends and lore of the world. A haunt of the Muses, the

sensual city was a hermitage of philosophy as well. These things collectively represented a great literary feast, of which not all the courses have descended to us, though, as is not impossible, a lost dish or two, transmuted, by the alchemy of faith, from dross into gold, the Gospels may perhaps contain.

In that case there is cause for great thankfulness. Moreover, assuming the transmutation, no impiety can be implied. It was as usual and as indicated as were papyrus and the stylus. It is common to-day for a poet, before spreading his own wings, to contemplate those of another. Inspiration is infectious.

A page of verse, whether Hindu, Persian, Egyptian, Greek, or Latin, was as useful then. Dante fed on the troubadours. They are lost and forgot. He divinely stands greater than the tallest

of them all. In a measure the same may be true of those from whom the Gospels came. Yet with a very notable difference. The *Divina Commedia* was written for all time. So too were the Gospels. But not intentionally. They were written to prepare man for the immediate termination of the world. With the most perfect propriety, therefore, anything serviceable could have been utilized and probably was. The devout had but to lift their eyes. In the words of Isaiah, there, before them, were the treasures of nations; there were the camels and dromedaries bearing from every side incense and gold; there were the sons of strangers to build up their walls.

The sons were many, the treasures as great. Even otherwise there was the Law, there too were the Prophets. Moses fasted for forty days. Elisha performed

a miracle of the loaves, if he did not that of the fishes. Job saw the Lord walking upon the sea. Jeremiah said: "Seek and ye shall find." Isaiah bid those that sorrowed come and be consoled. In the poem of that poet the servant of the Lord had vinegar when he thirsted, he was spat upon and for his garments lots were cast.

In an effort to fill in a picture of which the central figure had passed from the real to the ideal, these things may have been suggestive. So also, perhaps, was the *Talmud.* The redaction of that chaos began in the second century. But the Vedas, the Homeric poems, the Tripitaka as well, existed in memory long before they were committed to writing. The same is true of the *Talmud.* Orally it existed prior to the Christ. Considered as literature, if it may be so considered,

it is the reverse of endearing. But of the many maxims that it contains there are some of singular charm. Among others is the Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.[1] The origin of that, as already indicated, is traceable to the *Tripitaka*, which, parenthetically, were so well known in Babylon that Gotama was there regarded as a Chaldean seer. That abridgement of the Law which is called the Golden Rule is also in the *Talmud*,[2] as also, before the *Talmud* was, it was in the *Tripitaka*. The injunction to love one's enemies is equally in both. So is the very excellent suggestion that one should consider one's own faults before admonishing a brother concerning his defects. But the perhaps subtle intimation that the desire to commit adultery

[1] Talmud Babli: Baba bathra, 11 *a*.
[2] Schabbath, 37 *a*.

is as reprehensible as the act, and the rather extravagant statement that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kindgom of heaven, these, originally, were perhaps uniquely Talmudic. Currently cited with multiple others they were all so many common sayings, which, strung together in the Gospels, became a rosary of most perfect pearls.

In a passage of Irenæus it is stated that the *Gospel according to St. Matthew* was arranged by the Church for the benefit of the Jews who awaited a Messiah descended from David. A Syro-Chaldaic evangel, known as the *Gospel to the Hebrews*, had then appeared. So also had the *Gospel according to St. Mark.* But these offered no evidence that Jesus was the one they sought. Another was then prepared. Written in Greek and bear-

ing the authoritative name of Matthew, it traced from David, Joseph's descent.

The narrative continued: "Now the birth of Jesus Chirst was in this wise. When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child by the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband being a just man and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

The genealogy completed, though perhaps inadequately, since Jesus, not being a son of Joseph, could not have descended from David, the Church continued: "Now

all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and call his name Emmanuel."

The prophecy mentioned occurs in Isaiah vii, 14. In the King James version it is as follows; "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." But the Aramaic reading is: "Behold an *'almâ* shall conceive." *'Almâ* means young woman. The Septuagint, in translating it, employed the term παρθένος, or maiden. In *Matthew* the term was retained.

Matthew, at the time, had long been dead. Even had he been living it is improbable that he could write in Greek. Unfortunately there were others who could not only write Greek but read Hebrew. In particular, there was a rabbi

Aquila who retranslated Isaiah with no other purpose than the malign object of definitely re-establising the exact expression which the old poet had used.[1]

It was presumably in these circumstances that the *Evangel of Mary* was advanced. Among other elucidations, the work contained professional testimony of the immaculacy that was claimed. Additionally, in reparation of the earlier oversight, the Virgin was genealogically descended from the royal line.

That, however, is apocryphal, and if, regarding the other genealogy, exegesis has since obscured the luminousness of the method adapted by the Church, the latter's intention was none the less irreproachable, and that alone imports. Before it, before the miracle of the nativity and the divine episodes of the transfiguration, crucifixion,

[1] Renan: Les Evangiles.

resurrection, and ascension, reverently the Occident has knelt. They are indeed divine. If they did not occur in Judea, they have occurred ever since. Continuously, in the hearts of the devout, they are repeated.

Unhappily there were heretics then as now. To the Gnostics, Jesus was an æon that had never been. To the Docetists, he was a phantasm. There are always brutes that can believe but in the reality of things. There are others to whom the symbolic is dumb. In the Gospels there is much that is figurative, there is more that is ineffable, there are suggestions sheerly ideal.

"In my Father's house are many mansions," the Saviour declared. In his own ministry there are as many lights. He was a vagrant and he created pure sentiment. He was a nihilist and he

inspired a new conception of life. He said he had not come to destroy and he changed the face of the earth. He remitted the sins of a harlot and condemned both marriage and love. There are other antitheses, deeper contradictions. These perhaps are more apparent than real. Behind them there may have been the co-ordination of a central thought. Of many gospels but few remain. Among the lost evangels was one that Valentinian said was imparted only to the more spiritual of the disciples. It may be that in it a main idea was elucidated and, perhaps, as a consequence, the meaning of the esoteric proclamation: "Before Abraham was I am."

Yet though now the authoritative explanation be lacking, its significance seems to run beneath the texts. At the first apparition of Jesus, the chief preoccupation of those that stood about was what

prophet of the old days had returned in the new. Some thought him Elijah. Others Jeremiah. Antipas feared that he was the Baptist revived. Jesus himself asked the disciples whom he was said to be. Later he assured them that the awaited return of Elijah had been accomplished in John. That assurance, together with the perplexities regarding him and the esoteric announcement which he made concerning himself, can hardly indicate anything else than a belief in reincarnation.

The belief, common to all antiquity, though not necessarily valid on that account, is not discernible in Hebrew thought, perhaps for the reason that it is not perceptible in Babylonian. Yet the myth of Eden barely conceals it. It is almost obvious in the allegory of Beth-el. Solomon said: "I was set up from ever-

lasting, from the beginning or ever earth was." If the idea contained in that statement was not a part of the philosophy attributed to the Christ, it might have been. The amount of beauty stored in it is more enormous than in any other.

To the materialist the beauty is meaningless. To the mathematician it has the value of a zero from which the periphery has gone. But at the Pillars of Hercules early geographers put on their maps: *Hic deficit orbis* — Here ends the world. They had no suspicion that beyond that world there stretched another twice as great. Materialists may be equally naïf. On the other hand, they may not be. The theory of reincarnation is one that transcends the limits of experience.

Of the many tenets of the belief there

are but two with which the matter-of-fact agrees. One of them concerns the conservation of energy, the other the negation of death. Theory and practice unite in admitting that the supply of energy is invariable. Constantly it is transformed and as constantly transposed, but whether it enter into fungus or star, into worm or man, the loss of a particle never occurs. Death consequently is but the constituent of a change. When it comes, that which was living assumes a state that has in it the potentiality of another form. A tenement has crumbled and a tenant gone forth. Though just where is the riddle.

In the thousand and one nights that were less astronomic than our own, it was thought that the riddle was answered. Poets had erected an edifice of verse and called it Creation. In the strophes of

the epic the earth was a flat and stationary parallelogram. About the earth, and uniquely for its benefit, sun, moon and stars paraded. Above was a deity one or multiple. Below were places of vivid discomfort. To the latter, or to the former, the soul of man proceeded. There were no other resorts. Creation had its limits.

Poets younger yet more gray have presented a different conception. In the glare of a million million of suns they have sent the earth spinning like a midge. Beyond the uttermost horizon they have strewn other systems, other worlds; beyond the latter, more. Wherever imagination in its weariness would set a limit, there is space begun.

There too is energy. Throughout the stretch of universes the same force pulsates that is recognizable here. A deduction is obvious. Throughout infinity are

sentient beings, perhaps our brothers, perhaps ourselves.

The obvious, very frequently, is misleading. But the dream of precipitation into that wonderful tornado of worlds has the merit of more colourful idealism than that which was formerly displayed. Taken but as an hypothesis, it holds suggestions ampler than any other conveys. It intimates that just as the butterfly rises from the chrysalis, so does the spiritual rise from the flesh. It indicates that just as the sun cannot set, so is it impossible for death to be.

There are topics about which words hover like enchanted bees. Death is one of them. Mediævally it was represented by a skeleton to which prose had given a rictus, poetry a scythe, and philosophy wings. From its eyries it swooped spectral and sinister. Previously it was

more gracious. In Greece it resembled Eros. Among its attributes was beauty. It did not alarm. It beckoned and consoled. The child of Night, the brother of Sleep, it was less funereal than narcotic. The theory of it generally was beneficent. But not enduring. In the change of things death lost its charm. It became a sexless nightmare-frame of bones topped by a grinning skull. That perhaps was excessive. In epicurean Rome it was a marionnette that invited you to wreathe yourself with roses before they could fade. In the Muslim East it was represented by Azrael, who was an angel. In Vedic India it was represented by Yama, who was a god. But mediævally in Europe the skeleton was preferred. Since then it has changed again. It is no longer a spectral vampire. It has acquired the serenity of a natural law.

Regarding the operation of that law there are perhaps but three valid conjectures. Rome entertained all of them. There, there was a tomb on which was written *Umbra.* Before it was another on which was engraved *Nihil.* Between the two was a portal behind which the *Nec plus ultra* stood revealed.

The portal, fashioned by the philosophy of ages, still is open, wider than before, on vaster horizons and unsuspected skies. Through it one may see the explication of things; the reason why men are not born equal, why some are rich and some are poor, why some are weak and some are strong, why some are wise and many are not. One may see there too the reason of joys and sorrows, the cause of tears and smiles. One may see also how the soul changes its raiment and how it happens to have a raiment to change.

One may see all these things, and others besides, in the revelation that this life, being the refuse of many deaths, has acquired merits and demerits in accordance with which are present punishments and rewards.

In proportion as these are utilized or disregarded, so perhaps is retrogression induced or progress achieved. But not in Hades or yet in Elysium. These were the inventions of man for his brother. So also was the very neighbourly heaven which the early Church devised. But because that has gone from the sidereal chart, it does not follow that there is no such place. Because there is nothing alarming under the earth, it does not follow that hell has ceased to be. On the contrary. Both are constant, though it be but in the heart.

In the light of reincarnation it is

probable that neither can occur there without anterior cause. But probably too it is the preponderance of either that creates the mystery of life, as it may also foreshadow the portent of death.

Death, it may be, is not merely a law but a place, perhaps a garage which the traveller reaches on a demolished motor, but whence none can proceed until all old scores are paid. Pending payment, there, perhaps the soul must wait. But the bill of its past acquitted, it may be that then it shall be free to pursue on trillions of spheres the diversified course of endless life — free to pass from world to world, from beatitude to bliss, from transformation to transfiguration, from the transitory to the eternal; weaving, meanwhile, a garland of migrations that stretch from sky to sky, marrying its memoirs with those of the universe, and, finally, from some

ultimate zenith, reviewing, as it casts them aside, the masks of concluded incarnations.

The prospect, overwhelming in beauty, is really divine. The divine is always utopian. But there is the supreme Alhambra of dream. It exceeds any other, however excessive another may be. It is the *Nec plus ultra*. Into it all may wander and never weary of the wonders that are there. It may be unrealizable, but for that very reason it must be also ideal.

FINIS HISTORIÆ DEORUM