

ISHTAR AND IZDUBAR:

BEING

THE SIXTH TABLET OF THE IZDUBAR SERIES.

TRANSLATED BYH. FOX TALBOT, F.R.S.

THE original text of this remarkable tablet is lithographed in plate 48 of Vol. IV. of *Inscriptions of Western Asia*, published by the British Museum. It has been translated by myself in *Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch.*, Vol. V., p. 97.

The fifth Izdubar tablet appears to be mostly lost, but the end of its story occupies the first few lines of the sixth tablet, and therefore it is necessary briefly to advert to it.

One of the adventures of Odysseus related by Homer is his return to Ithaca disguised as a beggar. Izdubar, whose wanderings recall those of Odysseus,

may have adopted some similar disguise, which he here throws off and resumes his royal rank. I have translated the first five lines according to their apparent meaning, but there is too little of the story left to form any opinion what it was. The rest of the tablet is entirely disconnected from it. The words printed in parentheses are restorations, where the original text is effaced.

There is a part of this curious tablet which deserves particular attention, I mean the lines 14 to 19 of Column II which relate the sad fate of a King whom Ishtar changed into a Leopard, "and his own dogs bit him to pieces."

We see here beyond a doubt the ancient original of the Greek fable of Actæon and his dogs. That hero had offended Diana, who revenged herself by changing him into a stag, when his dogs, no longer knowing their master, fell upon him and tore him to pieces. The great celebrity of this fable may be judged of from the circumstance that Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (III. 206) has preserved the *names* individually of all the dogs, though there were no fewer than *thirty-five* of them.

The classical authors of Greece and Rome attribute the fate of the king to the vengeance of Diana, but our tablet ascribes it to the cruelty of Ishtar. This leads to the enquiry whether Ishtar was the Eastern name of Diana? or had similar attributes?

Now, the character of Ishtar was very multiform. She was Venus, the goddess of love. She closely resembles Diana of the Ephesians, who typified Universal Nature, and was the great and universal mother.

But on the other hand, Ishtar was the goddess of war, Enyo of the Greeks, Bellona¹ of the Latins, for Assurbanipal addresses her in his prayer for succour: "O goddess of war! lady of battles!"² and when Esarhaddon was attacked by his enemies at a critical moment of his life, when his succession to the crown of his father was in danger, he says: "Ishtar, queen of war and battle, stood by my side. She broke their bows. Their line of battle in her rage she destroyed."³

¹ At first sight this seems alien from the attributes of Venus, but the Greeks of Cythera worshipped an "armed Venus," (see *Pausanias* iii. 23). From this island she took her name of Cytherea.

² *Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch.*, Vol. I., p. 347.

³ *Records of the Past*, Vol. III., p. 104.

But in the tablet which we are now considering, Ishtar appears in a totally different character, as the Hecate of the Greeks, the queen of witchcraft, resembling Hecate in her funereal abode, and in the potency of her magic drugs, equal to those of Circe and Medea. Indeed there is the strongest resemblance between the Ishtar of this tablet and those most renowned enchantresses. The kettle, or cauldron, or pot, filled with magic herbs, reminds us of Medea, who on one occasion spent no less than nine days and nights in collecting herbs for her cauldron, visiting many lands for that purpose in her car drawn by dragons (see Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, VII. 234). And Circe, in Homer, loves Ulysses (as here Ishtar does Izdubar), yet nevertheless transforms all his companions into swine as soon as they have tasted of her noxious viands.¹ Moreover, Ishtar was the full moon, for which reason she was called the goddess *Fifteen* in Assyrian, because the month consisting of thirty days the full moon was of course on the fifteenth day.

These different accounts of the goddess Ishtar

¹ See *Odyssey*, Book x.

seem perplexing in their diversity: but the theory is maintained by many scholars that all the great goddesses of antiquity were originally one, viewed in various lights. Their attributes, when examined, are found in reality to melt into each other. But the poets took care to keep them distinct, and to provide them with separate adventures, and the priests of various cities had likewise a great interest in individualising their own deities. Thus Ishtar of Arbela was by no means the same divinity as Ishtar of Nineveh.

Hecate was fabled to be the daughter of Asteria, which is merely a Greek form of the name of Ishtar, and varies at other times to Astaroth, Astarte, Astrateia, and Asterodia. Pausanius (III. 25) mentions an Artemis Astrateia, whose worship was brought to Greece from the East.

But to return to the story of Actæon, which we thus find unexpectedly among the legends of the East.

The persistence of popular fables is a curious subject of contemplation. The *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* contain stories identical with some in

Homer's *Odyssey*, and even in early semi-fabulous Greek history. In Egypt has been found a story, that of the "Doomed Prince," identical with one long known in Europe. In fact there was much greater literary intercommunication between distant nations in very ancient times than is commonly supposed.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are several stories derived apparently from the Assyrian literature, besides that of Pyramus and Thisbe, which he expressly states to be a tale of Babylon.



ISHTAR AND IZDUBAR.

COLUMN I.

- 1¹ he had thrown off his tattered garments :
 2 his pack of goods he had laid down from his back :
 3 (he had flung off) his rags of poverty: and clothed him-
 self in a dress of honour :
 4 (with a royal robe) he covered himself :
 5 and he bound a diadem on his brow.
 6 Then ISHTAR the Queen lifted up her eyes to the throne
 of IZDUBAR :
 7 Kiss me, IZDUBAR ! she said : for I will marry thee !
 8 Let us live together, I and thou, in one place :
 9 thou shalt be my husband, and I will be thy wife.
 10 Thou shalt ride in a chariot of lapis lazuli and gold,
 11 whose wheels are golden and its pole resplendent.
 12 Shining bracelets thou shalt wear every day.
 13 By our house the cedar trees in green vigour shall
 grow :
 14 and when thou shalt enter it
 15 (suppliant) crowds shall kiss thy feet !
 16 Kings, Lords, and Princes shall bow down before thee !
 17 The tribute of hills and plains they shall bring to thee
 as offerings :
 18 thy flocks and thy herds shall all bear twins :
 19 thy race of mules shall be magnificent :
 20 thy (triumphs) in the chariot race shall be proclaimed
 without ceasing,

¹ Lacuna.

21 and among the chiefs thou shalt never have an equal !

22 (Then IZDUBAR) opened his mouth and spoke,

23 (and said) to ISHTAR the Queen :

24 (Lady ! full well) I know thee by experience !

25 Sad and funereal (is thy dwelling place :)

26 sickness and famine (surround thy path :)

27 (false and) treacherous is thy crown of divinity !

28 (Poor and worthless) is thy crown of royalty !

29¹ poison :

30¹ (many things) I will omit,

31 (many deeds of cruelty) and slaughter :

32 (yes ! I have said it) I know thee by experience !²

[And so on, through twelve more lines, which are greatly broken, to the end of Column I. I have restored in parentheses some of the fractured parts, but of course I cannot guarantee that it is done correctly.]

¹ Lacunæ.

² The meaning of all this (as appears quite plainly from the Second Column) is that Ishtar was, like Hecate in the Greek mythology, the queen of witchcraft, the cruel, the merciless.

COLUMN II.

- 1 Wailings thou didst make
 2 for TARZI thy husband
 3 (and yet) year after year with thy cups thou didst poison
 him !
 4 Thou hadst a favourite and beautiful eagle :
 5 thou didst strike him (with thy wand), and didst break
 his wings :
 6 then he stood fast in the forest, (only) fluttering his
 wings.
 7 Thou hadst a favourite lion, full of vigour :
 8 thou didst pull out his teeth, seven at a time !
 9 Thou hadst a favourite horse, renowned in war :
 10 he drank a draught, and with fever thou didst poison
 him !
 11 Twice seven hours without ceasing
 12 with burning fever and thirst thou didst poison him !
 13 His mother the goddess SILILI with thy cups thou didst
 poison.
 14 Thou didst love the King of the land
 15 whom continually thou didst render ill with thy drugs,
 16 though every day he offered libations and sacrifices.
 17 Thou didst strike him (with thy wand), and didst change
 him into a leopard !
 18 The people of his own city drove him out from it,
 19 and his own dogs bit him to pieces !
 20 Thou didst love a workman,¹ a rude man of no instruc-
 tion,
 21 who constantly received his daily wages from thee, &c.
 22 and every day made bright thy vessels.

¹ This incident is evidently introduced, in contrast with the last one, the royal lover, with the meaning that, "Thy love has been fatal to all alike : whether high or low, rich or poor."

- 23 In thy pot a savoury mess thou didst boil for him,
 24 (saying) Come, my servant, and eat with us on the
 feast-day,
 25 and give thy judgment on the goodness of our pot-
 herbs !
 26 The workman replied to thee :
 27 Why dost thou desire to destroy me ?
 28 Mother ! thou art not cooking ! I will not eat !
 29 For I should eat food bad and accursed,
 30 and the thousand unclean things thou hast poisoned it
 with !
 31 Thou didst hear that answer (and wert enraged)
 32 Thou didst strike him (with thy wand), and didst change
 him into a pillar ;
 33 and didst place him in the midst of the desert !
 34 I have not yet said a crowd of things ; many more I
 have not added !
 35 Lady ! thou wouldst love me, as thou hast done the
 others !
-
- 36 ISHTAR this (speech listened to)
 37 and ISHTAR was enraged and (flew up) to heaven.
 38 ISHTAR came into the presence of ANU (her father),
 39 and into the presence of ANNATU her mother she came.
 40 O my father, IZDUBAR has cast (insults upon me).

[Here ends Column II. ; and Column III. being almost entirely destroyed, and Column IV. nearly so, this part of the story of Ishtar remains isolated from the rest. Column V., which is well preserved, had therefore better be treated at another time, and as an independent subject.]

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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