

THE
 FIGHT BETWEEN BEL AND THE DRAGON,
 AND THE
 FLAMING SWORD WHICH TURNED EVERY WAY.
 (GEN. III. 24.)

FROM A CHALDEAN TABLET.

TRANSLATED BY

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THIS is one of the most striking narratives of the Chaldean mythology. It is found on a tablet lithographed in Delitzsch's work *Assyrische Lesestücke*, pl. 44, 45. Plate 44 describes Bel arming himself for the battle: the dragon is merely mentioned on this plate, but does not appear upon the scene.

Plate 45 describes the battle, with much animation. The weapons which Bel wielded were numerous and formidable; but by far the most curious was the flaming sword which turned every way, "to the South, to the North, to the East, and to the West, so that none could escape from it," which resembles so strongly the sword of the cherubim in Genesis which "turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life," that the same celestial weapon must surely be

intended. It is here supposed to be in the hands of Bel, the beneficent deity who, according to plate 42, had created mankind.

Several lines at the beginning and end of each face of the tablet are broken off, which causes some obscurity.

The 32nd line is very obscure. The word "eleven" is written in words at length, and very distinctly, *istin isrit* (one and ten) which is the Hebrew term for "eleven," so that there can be no doubt about the word. But *twelve* is usually the sacred number, and therefore the thought suggests itself that in this legend something had happened to one of the twelve *nabniti*, or created races, and reduced their number to eleven. Perhaps the story ran that the angels were at first divided into twelve tribes or races, and that one of these joined the dragon in the rebellion, so that "after the battle" (if that is the phrase employed by the scribe) only eleven were to be found in heaven. This certainly does not accord with the statement in plate 43, but this is a different tablet, and the scribe may have followed a different tradition, for these minor points vary much in mythology. The translation was first published by the author in *Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch.*, Vol. V., p. 1.



BEL AND THE DRAGON.

FRONT.—PLATE 44.

[Line 1 is broken.]

- 2¹ and with it his right hand he armed.
 3 His flaming sword he raised in his hand.
 4 He brandished his lightnings before him.
 5 A curved scymitar he carried on his body.
 6 And he made a sword to destroy the dragon,
 7 which turned four ways ; so that none could avoid its
 rapid blows.
 8 It turned to the South, to the North, to the East, and to
 the West.
 9 Near to his sabre he placed the bow of his father ANU.
 10 He made a whirling thunderbolt, and a bolt with double
 flames,² impossible to extinguish :
 11 and a quadruple bolt, and a septuple bolt, and a . . .¹
 bolt, and a bolt of crooked fire.
 12 He took the thunderbolts which he had made, and there
 were seven of them
 13 to be shot at the dragon, and he put them into his quiver
 behind him.
 14 Then he raised his great sword, whose name was “ Lord
 of the Storm.”

¹ Lacunæ.² Forked lightning.

15 He mounted his chariot, whose name was "Destroyer of the Impious:"

16 he took his place, and lifted the four reins¹ in his hand.

[The rest of this portion of the inscription is broken off.]

¹ Their war-chariots had two horses.

REVERSE.—PLATE 45.

Bel now offers to the dragon to decide their quarrel by single combat, which the dragon accepts. This agrees with the representations of the combat on Babylonian cylinders in Mr. Smith's *Chaldean Genesis*, p. 62, etc.

- 1 (Why¹ seekest thou thus) to irritate me with blasphemies?
- 2 Let thy army withdraw : let thy chiefs stand aside :
- 3 then I and thou (alone) we will do battle.
- 4 When the dragon heard this,
- 5 Stand back ! she said, and repeated her command.
- 6 Then the tempter rose watchfully on high.
- 7 Turning and twisting, she shifted her standing point,
- 8 she watched his lightnings : she provided for retreat.
- 9 The warrior angels sheathed their swords.
- 10 Then the dragon attacked the just Prince of the gods.
- 11 Strongly they joined in the trial of battle,
- 12 the King drew his sword, and dealt rapid blows,
- 13 then he took his whirling thunderbolt, and looked well
behind and before him :
- 14 and when the dragon opened her mouth to swallow him,
- 15 he flung the bolt into her, before she could shut her lips.
- 16 The blazing lightning poured into her inside.
- 17 He pulled out her heart ; her mouth he rent open ;
- 18 he drew his (falchion), and cut open her belly.
- 19 He cut into her inside and extracted her heart,
- 20 he took vengeance on her, and destroyed her life.
- 21 When he knew she was dead he boasted over her.
- 22 After that the dragon their leader was slain
- 23 her troops took to flight : her army was scattered abroad,

¹ Several lines appear to be broken off, including the first part of line 1, which I have restored from conjecture.

- 24 and the angels her allies, who had come to help her,
25 retreated, grew quiet, and went away.
26 They fled from thence, fearing for their own lives,
27 and saved themselves, flying to places beyond pursuit.
28 He followed them, their weapons he broke up.
29 Broken they lay, and in great heaps they were captured.
30 A crowd of followers full of astonishment
31 its remains¹ lifted up, and on their shoulders hoisted.
32 And the eleven tribes pouring in after the battle
33 in great multitudes, coming to see,
34 gazed at the monstrous serpent²
35 and²
36 And the god BEL²

[The rest of the tablet is lost.]

¹ Viz., those of the dragon.

² Lacunæ.



END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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