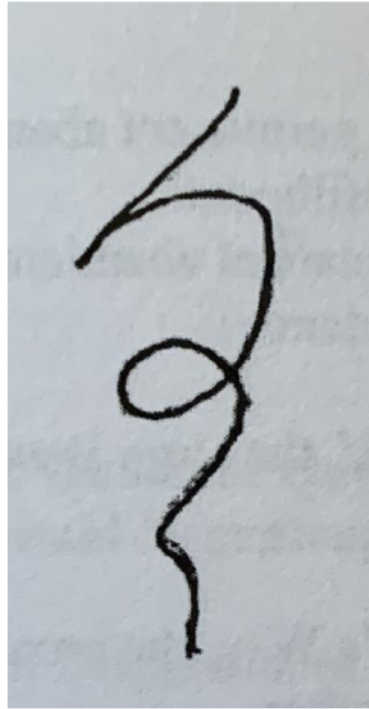


THE SERPENT MYTH



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It is not necessary for the purpose of this essay to furnish a definition of religion, or to assign any period, or place to the origin of man. It will be sufficient to allege that among all races, in every place, and from the earliest times, man has had some ideas of a God superior to himself in power and goodness, and almost as universally has evolved the notion of a Being more powerful and also more wicked than himself.

In association with these notions of a God, and of a Devil or of evil beings, we find almost as universally a system of symbolic representations of God and Devil. Almost alone among the nations, the Hebrews believed that their God, Jehovah, Elohim or Jah, must not be imaged or pictured either in human or animal form, or represented by any design of man's fancy; yet the Hebrew philosophic Rabbis in their Talmudic and Kabbalistic volumes described their ideas of God in language descriptive of a great human personality; they believed in a Personal God, in contradistinction to the conception of a Supreme Absolute; Power.

All other races have represented their notions, of Divine Persons in pictorial designs and in statuary, using human or animal forms, or monstrous designs of mixed nature, in some of which the human element predominated, while in others was shown a human head conjoined with the body or limbs of animals, birds, reptiles or fishes.

Other races again worshipped gods which they pictured in symbols derived from the material world, or from mathematical ideas. For instance, the Arabs who are Mohammedans, revere the Stone block in the Kaaba, as the only emblem of Allah on earth; the Persians denoted God by the figure of a globe; and Pythagoras represented Divinity by a triangle - the sacred delta.

We may perhaps, however, be correct in saying that the most universal symbols employed by the priesthoods throughout the world's history to represent the Supreme God, have been the sun and the serpent. The latter emblem has, moreover, been used both for good and for evil; for the Good God, the Creator and Preserver, and also for the Devil who is the Tempter and the Destroyer.

It is somewhat curious that almost all men have represented the Good Gods as above their heads, and the realm and powers of Evil as below them; there is, however, found in some religions, a belief that God and Good are in the East, and in association with the rising sun; and the Devil, Hell and Hades in the West, the quarter of the setting sun.

The natural history of the serpent or the snake lends itself in a curiously complete manner to a symbolism of the idea of a divinity and of a devilish power in opposition.

The slow, noiseless movement of a serpent, without any visible limbs, suggests a mysterious power, and also the motion of the heavenly bodies through, the sky, even as these are themselves symbols of the Gods. The annual casting off of its skin, and its reappearance in bright and glossy scales, suggests death and a future life, or death and successive rebirths. Its deadly fangs, envenomed for destruction, and its sudden yet stealthy appearance from concealment near our paths, suggest the religious idea of Satan lying in wait to ensnare man by sudden temptations.

Although in Britain we nearly always see snakes crawling on the ground, in tropical countries it is not uncommon to see a serpent erect; there were thus two emblematic views of its potency in ancient religions, to find the serpent erect or raised on a support was an emblem of good, but of evil when it was pictured and conceived of as supine and gliding along the ground. Again, we find that the spotted skin of the serpent was thought to be symbolic of the starry heavens; and yet again the design of a serpent coiled into a ring with its tail in its mouth suggested the circle of infinitude and was taken to mean omnipotence and omniscience; lastly, the design of a serpent coiled in several successive rings is symbolic of the spiral of evolution by cycles and of recurring ages and of reincarnation.

We not only find the serpent figuring in numerous religions, sometimes as a type of Goodness, truth, light and wisdom, and in others as Evil, darkness, death and ignorance, but in very many faiths and among many races we also find a record of the contest between the Good and the Evil typified by a struggle between a god, demi-god or great man, and the serpent or dragon as a representative of destruction, temptation, or sin.

It must be remembered that in many languages the words devil, serpent and dragon are for mythological and religious purposes interchangeable; our English Bible confuses them. In *Revelations*, xii. 9, and xx. 2, we find "the dragon"; "that old serpent", and "the devil", used as synonymous terms. We read, moreover, that Michael the Archangel seizes and binds him for a thousand years. Then again, we are all familiar with the fight between St. George and the Dragon and can easily refer to stories of the warfare, between Horus and Typhon in Egypt, between Apollo and the Python in Greece, and Krishna and the serpent Kaliya as told in Hindu mythology, and the conquest by the god Thor of a serpent, in the old Scandinavian traditions. Modern critics of these old myths have argued that in many instances these stories of warfare were intended to represent either the daily conquest of darkness by the solar light, or the annual termination of the destroying periods of autumn and winter by the return of spring and summer through the sun's greater light and heat due to its position relative to the earth.

It seems probable that one additional reason why the serpent was chosen as a special symbol of the Mysterious Divinity, was because of its powers of fascination, for under the gaze of serpents, men, animals and birds may lose their self-control and power of escape from danger; so the Bible pictures man all aghast at the appearance of Jehovah, the divine ideal of the Jews. Compare the story of Moses, when God appeared to him (*Exodus*, iii 6); and of Elijah, when God appeared as a still small voice, following a mighty wind, an earthquake and fire (*I. Kings*, xix.); and the apparition of God to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (*Genesis*, iii. 8).

Curiously enough it is alleged that serpents can themselves be fascinated or charmed by certain Hindu fakirs and others, while such magicians cannot fascinate men and women.

The history of astronomy, which was first cultivated by the priests of all religions, shows us that from the earliest times groups of stars, the zodiacal belt in which is contained the apparent movement of the sun in its yearly course, and the track of the theoretic terrestrial pole in the heavens, the varying position of the Pole star through the centuries due to the precession of the equinoxes, have all been typified by the serpent or dragon. Even in the astronomy of today we find star-groups called serpents, constellations named Serpens, Ophiuchus, and Draco. These names have come down to us in association with star-clusters from very ancient times. Arabian astronomers kept the

science alive during the dark ages of Europe, and they named many single stars also with titles related to the snake and dragon.

Among the ancient Egyptians the Serpent, was one of the most notable emblems of their religion; it is found pictured everywhere on their monuments and their papyri. It is found simple and prostrate, or erect; it is seen hooded, crowned, winged and conjoined with animal and with human forms. Serpent-worship existed on the banks of the Nile for thousands of years, and in its various forms, sometimes associated with the worship of the Sun's disk and sometimes contrasted with it, may still be examined in the remains of hundreds of sarcophagi, tombs and temples, some of them more ancient than the Pyramids. In ancient Egypt as elsewhere, some serpents were types of divine goodness, others of malignant deities.

In the tombs of ancient Egypt various snakes and serpents have been found, carefully preserved as mummies; some are bandaged up and laid in recesses, others are preserved in wooden or bronze snake-cases. The 'uræus' is the snake most frequently found as a mummy. The outer wrappings may have the serpent shown in relief or painted in colour; some are human-headed, others have a hawk's head.

The serpent's head as an amulet was in common use, made of stone, red jasper, or paste to imitate jasper, and of cornelian; it has been found with mummies, and the Egyptians appear to have believed that its presence prevented the dead from being bitten by the Serpents of evil in the Underworld. In later times serpent-amulets of glass were worn by Egyptian women as necklets.

The 'cerastes', a horned snake of Egypt, is mentioned by *Herodotus* (ii.74) as being common near Thebes, of small size - and having two horns; he says they are harmless, and that when they died, they were buried in the temple of the Great Gods, to whom they were sacred. This information is not accurate; the female cerastes alone is horned, and they are all noxious to man. *Diodorus Siculus* says the hawk was venerated in Egypt because it killed these snakes. The sculptures of Thebes; however, do not show the cerastes as related to its gods.

As an emblem of good the Egyptians generally depicted the serpent in an erect position, and chose especially the cobra, asp, or uræus. This snake is still found in Egypt, and even at the present time the natives have a superstitious reverence for it. This asp was a deadly reptile and hence was called, *thermuthis* (death-dealing). The name 'uræus' is derived from the word 'ouro', a king, still found in the Coptic language; it is also known as the basilisk, from the Greek word *basileus*, a king. These titles appear to have arisen from the use of the asp as a decoration on the head-dress of kings and queens, as on the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt. The asp is pictured around the disk of the God. Horus and the head of Osiris, and it was used as an emblem of the Great God Kneph, who was the Divine Spirit which moved on the waters as distinguished from Ptah, who was the Creator God.

The serpent and solar disk are pictured as guarding the Gates of Hades. The sacred asp was kept in the temples of Isis and of many other gods, and it was allowed to crawl about among the offerings of special foods set out for the gods. Many minor gods were represented by various forms of serpents. There was Nehebka for example, who had a human body and limbs with a serpent-head; some of his figures are ithyphallic; he represented the annual growth of vegetation and human procreation. Some serpents as emblems were winged, and became known as Seraphim; and the Meben and Teshet were winged snakes. The Goddess Rennu was also asp-crowned; she also presided over

vegetation and gardens, and Eusebius considered her to be the original of the later named 'Agathodaimon' or 'Good Genius'.

As an emblem of evil the ancient Egyptians figured the serpent as Apap or Apophis - the evil being who was fighting against goodness and light. Apap was taken as a figure of Typhon, the wicked brother of Osiris, who was variously considered as god, demigod, or king. Osiris was the son of Seb, celestial fire, answering to Hephaistos of the Greeks, and Saturn of the Romans. Typhon killed Osiris and is himself attacked by Horus, who was the son of Osiris by Isis, his sister-deity. Horus is often found represented as standing upon Typhon, who lies prostrate in the serpent-form of Apap and is pierced through the head to the earth, yet still survives to do evil. Set, the God of the Hyksos kings, was despised and hated by the priests of later dynasties and by them was also typified by the evil serpent Apophis. The design of Horus spearing Apophis is probably the original of the later conceptions of Michael the Archangel conquering Satan, and of St. George vanquishing the Dragon.

Numerous papyri have been found full of magical charms intended to repel the attacks of Apophis and Set as evil deities. Among ancient Egyptian remains are many other serpents representative of evil, with odd names having such meanings as Long-flame, Tongue-seizer, and Burning-wheel; some of these are shown with flames of fire issuing from their mouths, and these may have been the source of mediaeval European Christian representations of devils seen in old paintings.

In the ancient Hindu forms of worship the serpent figured largely; the most notable examples being Sesha or Ananta, which was often represented by a seven-headed cobra, and was described occasionally as thousand-headed; this seems to have been a symbol of Infinity or Eternity, space unbounded and time without limit. The seven-headed form is also styled the Couch of Vishnu, which bore him on the Ocean of Space during the period of Pralaya. The thousand-headed type represented the Ruler of Patala, the Under-world. Vishnu himself is also represented surrounded by the coils of a serpent. Mahadeva, a form of Shiva, may be seen sculptured having a snake around his neck, and serpents on both arms. Bhairava, considered as an Avatar of Shiva, is figured sitting on the coils of a serpent whose head rises higher than that of the God. Parvati, the Shakti of Shiva, is pictured with serpents around her neck and girdle. (Moor, *Hindoo Pantheon*).

Surya the Sun-god, is also shown overshadowed by a seven headed serpent. The Serpent Kaliya was, according to Hindu myths, slain by the God Vishnu, who pierced its head with a spear, while on earth in his incarnation of Krishna, because it poisoned the air around; Kaliya is considered by students of comparative Hinduism and Egyptology, to be the same evil deity as the Apophis of Egypt and the Greek Python, by students of comparative Hinduism and Egyptology.

The form of serpent most often alluded to in Hindu myths appears to have been the cobra, which the Hindus called Nag or Naga. Among some tribes and at certain periods the chief Naga was an important benign deity earnestly worshipped; at other periods and among other tribes the Nagas were types of evil deities. According to Dr. Oldham certain races considered themselves of Solar descent, and all such revered the Naga serpent.

Vasuki was the name of a vast serpent said in allegory to have been used by the Gods as a rope to churn the Ocean in order to recover the Amrita, or beverage conferring immortality; the Gods stood on the mountain Mandara, which was fixed on the back of a

tortoise, which represented one of the Avatars of Vishnu. The great warrior Ravana once conquered the great Serpent Vasuki in Bhogavati, the Serpent capital of Patala.

Garuda was a figure, part man and part bird; he was a vahan or vehicle of Vishnu. Garuda was a foe to serpents, thence was called Nag-antaka. The Great God Shiva was often pictured as wearing serpent ear-rings; these are called Naga-kundala. This Garuda was once sent by Vishnu to give assistance to Rama in his war with Ravana in Lanka or Ceylon, by destroying the serpent-arrows of Ravana, which had the quality of splitting up into noxious snakes after they had left the bow of the warrior. Vishvamitra conferred upon Rama the power of converting his arrows also into sarpavanas, which destroyed the sarpas or serpents of Ravana (Moor).

In the *Aitareya Brahmand*, of later date than the Vedic hymns, in the portion known as the "Serpent-mantra," it is said that the earth is the Sarpa-Rajni, or Queen of Serpents, and Mother of all that has movement. The Hindu explanation is that the solid round earth was condensed from a trail of cosmic dust or fire-mist, which swept through space in sinuous form. This may have been the origin of the phrase: "The Spirit of God moved over the chaos".

The serpent is even today associated with worship in India, as it was with the temples of Isis and Osiris in Egypt; in temples priests may still be found who entice the sacred snakes from their holes by the sounds of a pipe, to accept the offerings of milk supplied by worshippers. It was once a common practice in India to hide away money in holes in the earth and putting a snake with it, as a religious guardian emblem, and also, perhaps, to deter marauders from investigating.

It was not only in Egypt and India that the serpent was so notable an emblem; the cult of the Serpent was also almost universal throughout Asia in ancient days, and traces of its presence have been discovered wherever the archaeology of religion has pursued its studies. The oldest cult of Chaldæa seems to have been worship of the Sun, and the serpent was often used as its emblem. Sabæanism, the cult of the Sun and Stars, for long prevailed, and it is from Chaldæa that the East of Europe obtained its earliest lessons in astronomy; this old Chaldæan star-lore teems with serpent-emblems in many forms. In the temple of Bel at Babylon were statues of goddesses holding serpents. The God Bel is, by some, said to have been first named Obel (ob = serpent and el = God). The word Dragon was an old title applied to any large serpent, and we have all heard of the Apocryphal story of Bel and the Dragon. The Assyrians used the dragon as a standard, as do the Chinese of our own day. Ancient Persia also used a dragon-standard.

The Persians recognised two supreme beings, Ormuzd the Good, and Ahriman the Evil God. They represented the world by an egg, and pictured two serpents contending for the mundane egg, a design which has been found in many of their temples. In the ancient Zendavesta, the sacred book of Persia, and in the Rig-Veda of India, is found the notion that both evil and disease came from the serpent, and that Thritha, or Thraetaona, both conquered the great Serpent of Evil and showed man how to combat disease, which was considered a sort of poisoning by the Evil Serpent of the world (Berdoe).

In Constantinople there exist the remains of a most curious column, believed to represent three serpents twisted round each other in erect position. This pillar is of great age; it was found in Persia, brought thence by the conquering Greeks, and set up near the temple of Delphi. It was subsequently carried off and erected in its present place by the Roman Emperor Constantine.

Ethiopia, which lay to the South of Egypt, and is now mainly the country known as Abyssinia, had, if traditions may be relied on, an old myth that its first ruler was a serpent, named Arwe, and this word still means a serpent in Ethiopian. Naghash also was a title of the kings of Ethiopia, as Pharaoh was of the kings of Egypt; the Arabs spoke of them as Nagashi, and the title Negus of Abyssinia still survives. Compare these names with the Hebrew Nachash referred to later.

The Negro races of West Africa, of Whydah, of Dahomey and of the Congo territory, all have a very old serpent-worship. From these districts the Negroes were deported as slaves to the mainland of America and islands of the West Indies. These Negroes took their primitive beliefs, with them. The results are seen in what is known as Voodoo or Obeah worship, faith in the virtues of serpents and black magical arts. Ob was an Egyptian word for serpent, and the familiar of the Witch of Endor was called Ob (or Aub). The Mohammedans have the greatest aversion from snakes of all sorts, believing them to be types of the greatest evil; they abhor, from this cause, everything long and slight, and carefully break up hairs that may fall from their heads lest they should turn to these hateful reptiles.

The Greek and Latin authors contain some slight natural history of the serpents and snakes of Greece, Italy and Egypt. See, for instance; Herodotus, Pliny, Virgil, Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus, Pausanias and Ælian. These writers, however, chiefly reproduce legends, myths and fancies about serpents. For example, Pliny mentions, the notion that snakes are produced from the human spinal marrow after bodies have been buried. Plutarch says the serpent is in no fear of old age and moves so freely without limbs that it is a proper symbol of the planets in the sky. Virgil in the *Æneid* refers to the divine nature of serpents, and describes a sacred snake as issuing from the tomb of Anchises, after his son Æneas had performed sacrifices before it; it was a fiery serpent rolling itself along the ground and singeing the grass over which it passed - poetic fancy.

In the legendary myths of Greece we find that Typhon, the evil deity of Egypt who was killed by Horus, the Sun, reappears as Python, the serpent slain by Apollo the Sungod, at a place on which subsequently the Temple of Delphi was built; Python seems to have been the original deity of the place. Public assemblies at Delphi were called Pythia, and the Pythian games were instituted soon after its foundation. The priestess at Delphi delivered oracles seated on a tripod upon which was a design of three serpents entwined. There was another oracle at the cave of Trophonius, and serpents were kept in the cave and worshippers had to bring offerings and food to them in order to ensure attention to their requests.

In Greek art the most common example of the serpent used as an emblem is seen in the caduceus, a wand carried by Hermes, the Messenger of the Gods of Olympus, who became at a later period the Mercury of the Romans. Hermes was deemed to be a son of Zeus, the Ring of Heaven; he was swift in movement, eloquent of tongue, master of music, inventor of the lyre (hence said to be identical with the Hebrew Jubal); also forerunner of astronomers and mathematicians; lord of commerce, and first in craft and cunning; he also conducted the souls in their pilgrimage to Hades. The caduceus is not a staff nor a walking stick, but a wand or light sceptre carried in the hand. It is generally depicted about half as long as the figure carrying it; around the wand are twisted two serpents below a pair of wings. The serpents, have their heads looking up at the head of the wand; their bodies form two circles said to represent the Sun and the Moon; the highest circle is the larger; their tails are free below. Some authors say the serpents

are male and female. This wand in the hand of Hermes was said to possess magical powers, and could induce sleep, or waking, and also dreams, and by such dreams could reveal arts and modes of healing.

Hermes was also considered as the God of the Twilight, and by Max Muller is said to be the equivalent deity to Sarameya, Son of the Twilight, of the Vedas. Hermes with his serpent wand is related also to Thoth or Taaut of ancient Egypt, who was deemed a great scribe, author and physician, and the oldest Egyptian papyri on medicine are dedicated to Thoth.

The Greek mythical demi-god-physician Asklepios is usually represented as a solemn-looking, bearded, aged man bearing a staff on which a serpent, the emblem of wisdom, is entwined. He was the great healer and so-called Founder of the art of medicine; legend says that Asklepios even raised the dead, and this art so alarmed Pluto, God of the dead, that he appealed to Zeus the King of the gods, in fear that men might escape death altogether. Zeus killed the physician-demi-god by lightning. The story also narrates how Asklepios was in the house of a patient named Glaucus, who had died; he was sitting watching the dead body, when a serpent crawled up the staff which he held in his hand. He killed it; and then another serpent crawled up, carrying a herb in its mouth. This he applied to the first serpent, and it revived. Asklepios, says of the same story, that when he took some of the same herb he brought his patient Glaucus back to life. Hence it has been suggested that the snake-entwined staff typified the discovery that the remedies which would cure animals might also cure men, and that physicians might experiment on animals with advantage. From serpents also medicines were prepared; and it has been suggested that the power of fascination possessed by serpents led to the discovery of the treatment of disease by the fascination of hypnotism. We are also familiar with Hygieia, the so-called Goddess of Health, said to be the daughter of Asklepios; she is figured as holding a wand with two serpents; but this figure is of doubtful antiquity. The most famous temple of Asklepios was at Epidauros in Greece. His worship was introduced into Rome at a time when a plague was raging there. A mission was sent from Rome to the Greek Temple, and brought back the god in the form of a serpent. When the vessel anchored in the Tiber, the serpent swam ashore to an island in the river and upon this island the first Roman temple to Æsculapius was at once built.

Herakles, of the Greeks, who performed the famous Twelve Labours, was known to the Romans as Hercules; he is often represented as an infant strangling two serpents. According to the myth, Herakles was one of the twins born of Alkmene, who had been visited by Zeus (Jupiter) King of the gods, during the absence of her husband Amphitryon at the wars; Hera (or Juno) wife of Jupiter, sent two serpents to destroy the child but he strangled them.

The Bible has, as is well known, many references to serpents. In Hebrew the common names for serpent are 'nachash' and 'saraph', in Greek 'ophis' and 'drakon', and in Latin 'serpens' and 'coluber'. There are indeed four other Hebrew Bible words which appear to refer to snakes; they are: 'shephiphon', the asp or perhaps cerastes; 'okshub', an adder; 'pethen', a cobra; and 'tziphouni' or 'tsepha', a cockatrice. These were either real or fabulous reptiles. 'Nachash' in its several forms is mainly symbolical of evil, and 'saraph' a type of safety. The Bible calls attention to the deadly nature of these reptiles, and also to their instinct as shown by their clever avoidance of dangers. Jesus bids us to be wise as serpents, while Genesis in narrating the fall of Eve notes that the serpent was more subtle than any other beast of the field. Christians have very generally taken the serpent in this case to have been their Devil - Satan, but the

story as told in *Genesis* gives this idea no support. Readers will note that in *Exodus* iv 3, the Lord changes a rod in the hand of Moses into a serpent, and in verse 4 it becomes a rod again in his hand. In *Exodus*, vii. 10 Aaron throws down his rod and it becomes a serpent, the magicians of Pharaoh do the same, but the serpent of Aaron swallows up the serpents of the magicians.

We next notice the 'fiery serpents' described in *Numbers* (xxi. 5-7) sent to afflict those Israelites who murmured while on their journey from Mount Hor to Edom; from the story they would appear to have been snakes with very powerful venom, causing a burning pain. The Brazen Serpent of *Numbers*, xxi. 8-9, is called Saraph; it was made, by Moses, of brass, and was hanged upon a pole in sight of the people of Israel, who were being killed by the fiery serpents. Yahweh decreed that those who were bitten should be healed if they looked upon this symbol, and it was so. Christians have been taught to consider this incident as a type of salvation by Jesus, who was sacrificed upon a wooden cross. This Brazen Serpent is alleged to have been preserved from the time of Moses down to that of Hezekiah; for in II. Kings, xviii. 4, we read that finding a superstitious reverence being paid to the ancient emblem; the King had it destroyed to check idolatry, and by way of contempt he called it "Nehushtan", - which means a trifling brass object. Note also the "fiery flying serpents" mentioned in *Isaiah*, xxx. 6, in association with vipers, with which the prophet threatened his countrymen; they were presumably only symbolic, for we never hear of them again in Jewish history.

It is rather a curious fact that the Old Testament refers the serpent in turn to each of the Four Elements of the old philosophers. In *Numbers*, xxi. 6, we read of fiery serpents; in *Job*, xxvi. 13, of flying serpents, as related to air; in *Genesis*, iii. 1, of the serpent of the field, related to earth; and in *Isaiah*, xxvii. 1, of the dragon in the sea. The mythical Leviathan and Behemoth have been by some persons considered as names for the sea serpent; but look at *Isaiah*, xxvii. 1. The very curious Old Testament narrative of the Fall of Man through temptation by the Serpent has never been universally accepted by either Jews or Christians as an actual fact. It is probable indeed that at the present day very few indeed believe the story to be the narrative of a real event. Modern thought indeed is in favour of the idea that from man's first appearance on this earth he has gradually and continuously evolved higher human faculties, and has developed in mind, powers and goodness; that man is still improving, and that there never was a Fall of Man.

Among authors who have made a special study of so much as remains of the ancient lore of serpent-worship, serpent-gods and serpent-devils, we find every variety of conclusion as to the meaning of the Serpent-Tempter and the Fall of Man. Was it a literal fall from Edenic permanent happiness, a fall from a deathless eternity for a single couple, Adam and Eve ? Or were Adam and Eve and all their descendants intended for perpetual Edenic joy ? Was the story an allegory of Man falling away from Divine Laws, to evil deeds, false gods, superstitions and impurity, as symbolised by a serpent ? Or was it an emblem of Adam and Eve experiencing sexual love, and the discovery of the power of physical procreation ?

No one can decide what the myth really meant when it was first formulated. In the old religious myths it was, as in the Old Testament, almost always a serpent that tempted woman, man, or mankind; but one famous English Divine, Dr. Adam Clarke, wrote a learned essay, in which he tried to prove that the tempter of *Genesis* was in truth an ape; this seemed to him to make the story more probable (*Notes on Genesis*, 1836). Much curious philological learning has been expended on the relations of the Hebrew word

'nachash' (NChSh), the serpent, of which 'nak' or 'nack' is the root. Many languages have shown a tendency to prefix an 's' sound to 'n'; in English we have snake; *hag* or *hac* are also old English words for snake,

There are scattered about the world a few scanty remainders of what may once have been very grand erections of massive stones of a prehistoric age. Those extant in France, England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland are now commonly called Druidic remains; Stonehenge in Wiltshire and Karnac in Brittany are the most important of these. Some of these ancient erections are formed of long curving rows of single stones; and Dr. Stukeley and some other archaeologists have considered these the remains of temples of serpent-worship; the most notable are those at Avebury and Stanton Drew. The Karnac remains are also deemed to be of the same character. At Avebury or Abury, in Wilts., there were long lines of stones and circles, which it is believed formed a serpent-temple in Druidic times. Now the place of the head of this serpent was called Hackpen, and this was down to the time of Stukeley the archaeologist: 'pen' is an old Saxon word meaning 'head'.

The serpent and wisdom, were always related ideas; compare *nak*, *naga*, with *sagax*, wise, and *saga*, a song of wise history. Again, *nak* is a reptile which may cause death; compare *neco*, to kill, and *kaino*, to kill; Cain, one who killed. The Rev. Dr. Adam Clarke declared that an Arabic root *chan*, or *khanas*, led to three words with the several meanings of devil, ape and seduced: *koph* also is Hebrew for ape; compare *ophis*, the Greek for serpent. Th and ch are often found convertible; compare *nachas*, or *nathas*, reversed, with *Sathan*. It has even been suggested that *nachash* has led to the devil being called *nick*, and at last in English, Old Nick. Perhaps these are only resemblances and connections evolved by the fancies of philologists; anyone desirous of reading how far this process of wordplay can be carried should consult *Myths Traced to their Primary Source*, by Morgan Kavanagh (1856).

An Arab story of the serpent and the temptation of Eve is given in Masudi's history, written in A.D. 956, as follows: The Devil, wishing to get into the Garden of Eden to tempt Eve, asked all the animals in turn to carry him in, but they all refused; until at last the serpent, which had at that time an erect form and was gorgeous in beauty, agreed to do so, and carried the Devil into the Garden, and so the fall of Eve was accomplished. The serpent was punished for this act by the Archangel Michael, who cut off his limbs,, and thus ever after crawling, on the ground it had to feed on refuse.

Under the general title of Gnostics there were in the first centuries of Christianity sects of religious persons who made attempts to combine the old theologies of Egypt, Greece and Rome with the new teachings of Jesus. There is extant a great number of engraved gems which were designed and cut under Gnostic influences. The serpent figures largely upon these gems, especially in the form called the 'Agathodæmon', or Good Genius; these gems were used as talismans or amulets to ensure good and to avert evil fortune. This Agathodæmon is figured very often as a great serpent, lion-headed, surmounted by seven or twelve rays of light, and sometimes by the seven vowel-letters; and is generally recognised as being a type of the Sun-god. With this symbol are often found letters forming the name 'Abraxas', and also the names Chnuphis, Chnoubis, or Chnoumis. Salmasius considered these words derived from the Coptic 'chnoub', meaning gold; but Jablonsky derived them from 'chnoum', good, and 'is', spirit. This serpent is identical with the asp or 'urseus' (a sort of cobra) of ancient Egypt, and the same serpent figures in ancient religious sculpture in India. 'Chnoubis' became the 'Canopus'

of classic Greece, and the Canopic vases for holding the organs of the dead are often pictured with snakes as heraldic supporters.

As to the doctrines of these Gnostics, very little accurate information can be obtained; the writings of their teachers, Saturninus, Basilides, Valentinus, Marcion, have not come down to us, and our knowledge of their beliefs and mode of worship has to be derived from the extant writings of the orthodox Christian fathers who condemned them. There was, however, one Gnostic sect called the 'Ophites' which worshipped the serpent openly, as a being to be revered, because, it had, by tempting Eve, led to a knowledge of good and evil, and so had opened the way for men to learn wisdom and reach up to the Divine through intellect in opposition to the will of Jehovah, who intended man to remain in a state of innocence.

In the Talmud we read that Benjamin, son of Jacob, Amram the father of Moses, and Jesse the father of David, all died, not because of their sins, for they never sinned, but only because of the original sin in Eden caused by the Serpent.

In the tract 'Yoma' it is said that no one was ever injured or died in Jerusalem from the bite of any serpent; and again in Yoma we read: "Dust is the serpent's food; to it no delicacy has any other flavour than that of dust"; and Rabbi Assi said: "No delicacy satisfies a serpent so well as dust".

Rabbi Akiva wrote:

When God said to the Serpent, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go." the Serpent replied, "If this be thy will then I shall be like a fish - having no feet". Then God added, "And thou shalt eat dust"; and the Serpent replied, "I will also eat dust if the fishes do so." Then God in anger seized the Serpent and tore its tongue in two, saying: "Oh thou evil one, as thou didst do the great sin with thy tongue, so will I show for ever that it was thy tongue which caused thee these punishments"; and the tongues of all serpents has been forked ever since.

In the tract 'Ta'anith' it is narrated that the animals, vilifying the Serpent, asked it how it benefited by biting men; and the Serpent answered: "I am no worse at any rate than a man who slanders another man."

In the 'Berachoth' is a note that in one action alone, fish, men and serpents act alike (Hershon on Genesis). *Verbum sapienti satis est.*

The Talmud also says that the serpent, like all other noxious animals, has its uses; its saliva cures skindiseases which cause scabs. That it had its use as a drug appears from a regulation quoted in the tract Shabbath: "He only breaks the Sabbath who kills the serpent for healing purposes, and not he who kills it for his own safety."

The later Rabbis who flourished after the Mishna was written, were rather fond of magical practices, and they held that incantations would on a Sabbath render poisonous serpents harmless for the day. In Berachoth we read that if one dreams of a serpent then his income is safe; if he dreams that he is bitten by a serpent then he is sure of having his income doubled; but if he dreams that the bite kills him, then he loses his income.

In the tract 'Sanhedrin', on the myth of the Serpent tempting Eve, it is suggested that it is a sin to add to the word of God. Now God told Eve not to eat of the fruit of the tree, nor to touch it, but when the Serpent tempted her to do so, Eve said also that she was not allowed to touch the tree; on this the Serpent pushed her against the tree and

said: "See now, you have not died from touching the tree, neither would you die from eating of its fruit." The Talmudic idea was that the Serpent wanted Eve to eat the fruit and so become wise, and then to marry her after having killed Adam; but the result was far different; Eve was punished, and enmity was put between Eve and the Serpent-Tempter.

The mystical Kabbalah of the Hebrew philosophical Rabbis, in describing the relations of the Divine powers to humanity, refers to the Serpent and to the Sephiroth in these terms: "Behind the shoulders of the Bride - Malkuth, the Inferior Mother, the latter letter Heh - the Serpent rears its head. But its head is broken by the waters of the Great Sea - Binah, the Superior Mother, the former letter Heh." This is said to mean that the serpent is an emblem of centripetal force ever seeking the centre: the mystical Eden - Aidinn, Paradise - to tempt the bride Eve, and then the mystical Adam, the 'Microprosopus', the Heavenly Man.

The Hebrew Rabbis recognised the serpent as a type of evil in general, of the great Samael, the Evil Genius, the serpent of death, who brought death into the world, and of the Yetzer-ha-Ra, or evil angel at the left side of every man. Men, said the Kabbalistic Rabbis, are throughout life accompanied by two angels, one on the right hand to prompt them to good works, and one on the left to encourage them to evil and so to bring death to their Neshamah or Souls.

The later Rabbis, since the coming of Jesus, have alleged that it is the evil left-hand angel from whose efforts the Lord's prayer asks for safety, in the words, "Deliver us from evil (or from the Evil One)". Teachers of the so-called occult sciences have allocated the zodiacal signs to the twelve sons of Jacob; to the twelve tribes of Israel, and to the twelve labours of Hercules. It will be remembered that Jacob on his death-bed made special references in addressing his children, and Dan was referred to as "a serpent by the way"; Dan is generally now associated with the zodiacal sign called Scorpio.

Occultists of Eastern schools have considered the serpent as a bi-sexual emblem, containing both lingam and yoni, the mouth being a type of the female as was the fish's mouth (note the *os tincea* of medical language), and the tail was considered masculine (note the figure of a serpent as a ring, with its tail in its mouth).

Duncan, in his remarks on symbols, says: "The three autumnal zodiacal signs were Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius; along the whole of these is extended the long constellation called Serpentarius, the man holding a serpent in his hands; he is also called Ophiuchus, and by some is said to represent Asklepios. In the same part of the sky is placed Draco, the Dragon of the Hesperides, the Garden of the Golden Apples. The same reasons which induced those who first named these star-groups, to clothe the Sun at its Vernal Equinox with the attributes of the Ram - Aries, and of the Bull - Taurus, led them to array the Sun at the Autumnal Equinox with the attributes of the heavenly Serpent."

The Western occult school of Hermetic philosophers, who became merged with the Rosicrucians. of mediaeval Europe, adopted some of the Kabbalistic imagery with regard to serpents, and combined it with the astronomic and astrologic notions which came to the West from the Chaldeans through the Greeks and also through the Arabs; and so such notions form part of the so-called occult science of our day, in which it is notable that the serpent-myth has three forms of development; as an evil symbol it becomes the

Scorpion, as an emblem of good it is pictured as an Eagle, and the Snake is of mixed nature.

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