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VARIOUS

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THE FAUN OF PRAXITELES.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and
the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea.

VOL. XXVI. (No. 9.)

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TAMMUZ, PAN AND CHRIST.

NOTES ON A TYPICAL CASE OF MYTH-TRANSFERENCE AND
DEVELOPMENT.

BY WILFRED H. SCHOFF.

SOME four millennia before the Christian era, there lived on the alluvial plain brought down by the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and bordering the Persian Gulf, a Turanian people, who had attained to a considerable degree of civilization, who tilled and irrigated the soil, undertook large public works, and ventured long distances by sea for the exchange of goods. They worshiped a sea-god Ea, and included in their mythology was another god, Dumuzi, or *dumu-si-abzu*, "true son of the deep water." Concerning his attributes it is not necessary to elaborate; the reader may find them fully discussed by competent authorities.¹ This same god was adopted into the pantheon of the Semitic peoples who associated with, absorbed or expelled (according to various assertions) these Turanian plain-dwellers and sea-farers; and in Semitic Babylonia the Turanian Dumuzi became Tammuz, the god of youthful joy and beauty, personifying the annual death and revival of natural life according to the sequence of winter and summer. His attributes, also, have been thoroughly studied, so that for reference one need only cite J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough*, of which the third edition contains two volumes, *Adonis, Attis and Osiris*, and *The Dying God*, wherein all this literature is marshalled. Frazer's summary follows:

¹L. W. King, *Babylonian Religion and Mythology*, London, 1899; P. Jensen, *Assyrisch-babylonische Mythen und Epen*, Berlin, 1900; M. Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*; M. J. Lagrange, *Études sur les religions sémitiques*, Paris, 1905.

"We first meet with Tammuz in the religious literature of Babylon. He there appears as the youthful spouse or lover of Ishtar, the great mother-goddess, the embodiment of the reproductive energies of nature. . . . Every year Tammuz was believed to die, passing away from the cheerful earth to the gloomy subterranean world, and every year his divine mistress journeyed in quest of him 'to the land from which there is no returning, to the house of darkness, where dust lies on door and bolt.' During her absence the passion of love ceased to operate; men and beasts alike forgot to reproduce their kinds; all life was threatened with extinction. So intimately bound up with the goddess were the sexual functions of the whole animal kingdom that without her presence they could not be discharged. A messenger of the great god Ea was accordingly despatched to rescue the goddess on whom so much depended. The stern queen of the infernal regions, Allatu or Eresh-kigal by name, reluctantly allowed Ishtar to be sprinkled with the Water of Life and to depart, in company probably with her lover Tammuz, that the two might return together to the upper world, and that with their return all nature might revive. Laments for the departed Tammuz are contained in several Babylonian hymns, which liken him to plants that quickly fade. His death appears to have been annually mourned, to the shrill music of flutes, by men and women about midsummer in the month named after him, the month of Tammuz. The dirges were seemingly chanted over an effigy of the dead god, which was washed with pure water, anointed with oil, and clad in a red robe, while the fumes of incense rose into the air, as if to stir his dormant senses by their pungent fragrance and wake him from the sleep of death."

These ceremonies are described in the Babylonian account of the "Descent of Ishtar into Hades,"² wherein the worshiper of Ishtar seeking to know whether the dead may return is warned how to obtain their release from Allatu:

"If she does not give to thee her release, then turn thyself to her.
 Unto Tammuz, the husband of her youth.
 Pour out pure water, with goodly oil anoint him,
 In fine raiment clothe him, a flute of lapis lazuli let him play,
 May the goddess Belili destroy her ornaments.

 The lament of her brother she heard, and Belili destroyed her ornaments.

 O my only brother, do not let me perish!

²R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Literature*, pp. 408-413. Note also the poetical version of Ishtar's descent given by Edward Gilchrist in "The Weird of Love and Death" in *The Monist*, April, 1912.

On the day of Tammuz play for me the flute of lapis lazuli,
 The samdu flute also play for me:
 At that time play for me, O male mourners and female mourners.
 On instruments let them play, let them inhale the incense."

This annual mourning of Tammuz was spread among all Semitic peoples and continued for many centuries. That it was carried by sea wherever the Phœnician traders ventured is undoubted, and where they introduced the custom it was continued under various modifications by the natives themselves. The prophet Ezekiel is sufficient witness to its prevalence in monotheistic Palestine (viii. 14):

"Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and behold there sat the women weeping for Tammuz. Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? thou shalt again see yet greater abominations than these."

Similar rites were observed in Asia Minor for a god named Attis, and in Egypt for Osiris; with these the present inquiry is not concerned. They are fully described by Frazer in the volumes above cited.

The Babylonian Tammuz, carried to the Syrian coast and there specially localized, in the worship of the Phœnicians and Syrians, was translated to Greece, given various different names, and adopted bodily into the Greek religion. His own name was soon forgotten; but around the name Adonis (Hellenized from *adoni*, lord, an appellation of Tammuz) some of the loveliest of Greek myths were gathered; while by another way, equally accidental, came a god named Linus, annually mourned to the formula *ai λυος*, a mere pun on the Semitic phrase *ai lanu*, "woe is me," appearing in the mourning for Tammuz!

"At the festivals of Adonis," says Frazer,³ which were held in Western Asia and in Greek lands, the death of the god was annually mourned, with a bitter wailing, chiefly by women; images of him dressed to resemble corpses, were carried out as to be buried and then thrown into the sea or into springs; and in some places his revival was celebrated on the following day."

And again,⁴

"In Attica, certainly, the festival fell at the height of summer. For the fleet which Athens fitted out against Syracuse, and by the destruction of which her power was permanently crippled, sailed at midsummer, and by an ominous coincidence the sombre rites of

³ *Golden Bough*, IV, 183.

⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 185.

Adonis were being celebrated at the very time. As the troops marched down to the harbor to embark, the streets through which they passed were lined with coffins and corpselike effigies, and the air was rent with the noise of women wailing for the dead Adonis. The circumstances cast a gloom over the sailing of the most splendid armament that Athens ever sent to sea. Many ages afterwards, when the Emperor Julian made his first entry into Antioch, he found in like manner the gay, the luxurious capital of the East plunged in mimic grief for the annual death of Adonis; and if he had any presentment of coming evil, the voices of lamentation which struck upon his ear must have seemed to sound his knell."

In Greek mythology the relations of Tammuz to Ishtar and Allatu became those of Adonis to Aphrodite and Persephone. This was a matter of general knowledge among men of inquiring minds; it was explicitly stated by St. Jerome in his commentary on Ezekiel, also in his Epistles (No. 58, 3). The development of the Adonis story in Greece it is unnecessary to follow. An interesting continuance of the Babylonian story is provided by Shakespeare's poem of *Venus and Adonis*,⁸ wherein the unresponsive nature of the god is more fully outlined than was usual with the Greeks.

"I know not love,' quoth he, 'nor will not know it,
Unless it be a boar, and then I chase it;
'Tis much to borrow, and I will not owe it;
My love to love is love but to disgrace it;
For I have heard it is a life in death,
That laughs and weeps, and all but with a breath.'"

So in the Gilgamesh epic,⁹ where the fickle Ishtar woos that hero and is repulsed by him because of the fate that overtook Tammuz and her other lovers:

"Where is thy husband Tammuz, who was to be forever?
What, indeed, has become of the allallu-bird?
I will tell thee plainly the dire result of thy coquetries,
To Tammuz, the husband of thy youth,
Thou didst cause weeping and didst bring grief before him every year.
The allallu-bird, so bright of colors thou didst love;
But its wing thou didst break and crush,
So that now it sits in the woods crying, 'O my wing.'"

The Greek Adonis thus appears composite of two Babylonian heroes, Tammuz and Gilgamesh!

⁸ Lines 409-414.

⁹ Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

The story shifts now to a god of another sort entirely; to Pan, the shepherd-god of Arcadia. Pan, Πάν (the pasturer) was said to be the son of Hermes and one of the daughters of the oak-man Dryops; or, by another legend, of Zeus and the nymph Callisto. He was described as having the horns, beard, feet and tail of a goat, and his body was covered with hair. His abode was in the woods, caves or mountain-tops; he was a shepherd, hunter and fisher, and spent his idle hours sporting and dancing with the mountain nymphs. When one of these named Syrinx fled from his embraces, she was changed into a reed, from which, so Ovid tells us,⁷ Pan devised the shepherd's pipe:

"And, when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw."⁸

This Pan was an inconsiderate deity, prone to appear at unexpected times to the confusion of his devotees, whence the word "panic," fear.⁹ He was said to possess the power of inspiration and prophecy, in which he instructed Apollo; to whom the great Oracle at Delphi was consecrated. This, it will appear, is Pan's closest real connection with our present inquiry.

The original home of this jolly, if ribald, god was Arcadia. His cult found its way to Athens during the Persian War. Herodotus tells us¹⁰ that just before the battle of Marathon, certain Athenian envoys on their way to Sparta were stopped by this god and commanded to set up an altar to him, in return for which his support would be given them against the invaders. This was done, a cave being built on the Acropolis, where there were annual sacrifices and torch-races in his honor.

Later, by referring his name to a Greek word in more familiar use, or possibly by identification with the ram-headed Egyptian god Chnum, creator of the world, he was conceived as the universal god of nature, τὸ πᾶν (the α long instead of short), the pantheistic divinity.

In Christian legend, it will be well to recall, this horned and tailed deity supplied some of the distinctive features of the popular conception of Satan.

So much for Tammuz, Adonis and Pan. We come now to the circumstances under which they were supposed to have been destroyed—or as some would have it, absorbed—by Christ. The sole

⁷ *Metamorph.*, l. 691 et seqq.

⁸ Milton, *Lycidas*, 123-4.

⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., XX, 662-3.

¹⁰ VI, 105.

authority is a passage in Plutarch's dialogue *De Defectu Oraculorum*; and as it has been taken bodily from its proper context, it may be well to recall the general course of that dialogue, and the character of its author.

Plutarch is known to have lived about A. D. 46-120. He was born at Chæronea in Bœotia, trained in philosophy at Athens, and spent his active days in Rome, where he lectured on philosophy and taught the youthful Hadrian. He achieved political honors, being made consul by Trajan and procurator of Greece by Hadrian. In his old age he retired to his native town of Chæronea, where he was archon and priest of the Pythian Apollo. There he compiled the great series of "Parallel Lives" which are still a universal authority for the life and activities of the ancient world, and, there, too, he composed a series of philosophical essays, remarkable for their skilful interpretation of ancient ideas rather than for original thought; which remain a necessary stepping-stone between the system of Plato and that of the Neo-Platonists. Assuredly, then, Plutarch was not the man to whom any one might correctly ascribe an admission that the gods of Greece were dead.

Now for the dialogue *De Defectu Oraculorum*. It begins by noting the decline of belief in oracles in Greece. "There is no reason to inquire about this matter," says Plutarch in § V, "or to discuss the decay of the oracle, but rather, as we see the extinction of them all in general, except one or two, to consider this subject—for what reason they have so decayed;" and the decay is said to have dated from the Peloponnesian War.

(This will later prove to be of importance. Plutarch notes that the decay was not of his own time, but had already progressed for nearly five centuries.)

One of the speakers in the dialogue, Didymus the Cynic, flatly charges that the oracles are silent because the gods will no longer deign to converse with corrupt mankind: "It were a wonder, when so much wickedness is spread abroad, if not merely Modesty and Shame (as Hesiod said of old) should have abandoned mankind, but if the divine Providence should not have packed up its oracles out of every quarter, and taken its departure!"

The dialogue proceeds by considering whether the oracle were the direct communication of the god, or whether it proceeded indirectly by means of lesser spirits, or "dæmons." It leans to the latter view, and suggests that these dæmons may not be immortal; citing several instances, of which the much quoted passage is one. Its conclusion (§ LI) is, that the power of the exhalation, or oracle,