Haunting buildings and famous ruins, gliding around pools, walls and trees, mysteriously disappearing below ground, the serpent and all its kind invariably arrested attention through its uncanny distinctiveness from bird or beast. Its gliding motion suggested the winding river. Biting its tail it symbolized the earth surrounded by the world-river. Its patient watchfulness, the fascination it exerted over its victims, the easy domestication of some species, and the deadliness of others have always impressed primitive minds. Its swift and deadly dart was likened to the lightning; equally marvellous seemed its fatal power. It is little wonder that men who could tame and handle the reptiles gained esteem and influence. Sometimes the long life of the serpent and its habit of changing the skin suggested ideas of immortality and resurrection, and it is noteworthy that one Indian snake-festival occurs after or at the sloughing, when the sacred being is thus supposed to become purified.@@1

A very common belief associates serpents or dragons and other monsters with the guardianship of treasure or wealth; comp., *e.g.,* the golden apples of the Hesperides, and the Egyptian gods Kneph and Osiris, and the Indian Krishna and Indra. Serpents adorned with necklaces of jewels or with crowns were familiar in old superstition, and the serpent with a ruby in its mouth was a favourite love- token. Many stories tell of the grateful reptile which brought valuable gifts to a benefactor. According to a common Indian belief a wealthy man who dies without an heir returns to guard his wealth in the form of a serpent, and Italian superstition supposed that to find a serpent’s skin brought good luck (Leland).@@2 No singular preference for jewels on the part of serpents will explain the belief, and creatures like the jackdaw which have this weakness do not enjoy thiá prominence in folk-lore. A rationalistic explanation might be found in the connexion between the chthonic serpent and subterranean sources of wealth.@@3 Moreover, the serpent is often associated with metallurgy, and to serpent deities have been ascribed the working of metals, gem-cutting and indeed culture in general. The Aztec Quetzal- coatl taught metallurgy and agriculture, gave abundance of maize; also wisdom and freedom from disease. The Babylonian Ea, who sometimes has serpent attributes, introduced—like the American serpent Votan—knowledge and culture. The half-serpent Cadmus brought knowledge of mines, agriculture, and the “ Cadmean ” letters, while Cecrops inculcated laws and ways of life and was the first to establish monogamy. Although the reptile is not particularly intelligent, it has become famed for shrewdness and wisdom, whether in the Garden of Eden (Gen. iii. 1; 2 Cor. xi. 3) or generally (cf. Matt. x. 16). The Ophites (*q.v.*) actually identified the serpent with Sophia (“ Wisdom ’’) ; the old sage Garga, one of the fathers of Indian astronomy, owed his learning to the serpent-god Sesha Nãga; and the Phoenician *ycpωv i0φiωv* wrote the seven tablets of fate

which were guarded by Harmonia.@@4 Not only is the serpent connected with oracles, the beneficent *agathodaemon* of Phoenicia also symbolized immortality. In Babylonian myth a serpent, apparently in a well or pool, deprived Gilgamesh of the plant which rejuvenated old age, and if it was the rightful guardian of the wonderful gift, one is reminded of the Hebrew story, now reshaped in Gen. iii., where the supernatural serpent is clearly acquainted with the properties of the tree of life.@@5

Serpents were supposed to know of a root which brought back their dead to life, and an old Greek story told how certain mortals took the hint.@@6 In one form or another the healing powers of the serpent are very familiar in legend and custom. Siegfried bathed in the blood of the dragon he slew and thus became invulnerable; the blind emperor Theodosius recovered his sight when a grateful serpent laid a precious stone upon his eyes; Cadmus and his wife were turned into serpents to cure human ills. “ In 1899 a court in Lamaca, Cyprus, awarded £80 (Turkish) as damages for the loss of a snake’s horn which had been lent to cure a certain disease” (Murison, p. 117, n. 9). Not to multiply examples, it must suffice to refer to the old popular idea that medical skill could be gained by eating some part of a serpent: the idea that its valuable qualities would thus be assimilated belongs to one of the fundamental dogmas of primitive mankind (cf. Porphyry, *De abst.* ii. 48). Now, serpents were tended in the sanctuaries of the Greek Aesculapius (Asklēpios), the famous god of healing. Among his symbols was a serpent coiled round a staff, and physicians were for long wont to place this at the head of their prescriptions. He is also represented leaning on a staff while a huge serpent rears itself up behind him, or (on a coin from Gythium) a serpent seems to come to him from a well. At Athens, Asklepios Amynos had a sanctuary with altar and well, and among the votive offerings have been discovered models of snakes.@@7 The god-hero came from Epidaurus to the shrine at Sicyon in the form of a serpent, and the serpent sent from Epidaurus to stay a plague at Rome remained there, and a temple was erected to Aesculapius. The sanctuary of the deified healer at Cos marked the site where another serpent brought from Epidaurus dived into the earth (Pausanias, ii. 10, 3, iii. 23, 4). Hygieia, goddess of health, passed for his daughter, and is commonly identified with the woman in Greek art who feeds a serpent out of a saucer. Moreover, the temple of the earth-goddess Bona Dea on the slopes of the Aventine was a kind of herbarium, and snakes were kept there as a symbol of the medical art\*. Even in Upper Egypt a few decades ago, there was a tomb of the Mahommedan sheikh Herïdï, who— it is alleged—was transformed into a serpent; in cases of sickness a spotless virgin entered the cave and the serpent- occupant might permit itself to be taken in procession to the patient. The place was the scene of animal sacrifices and a yearly visit of women, and apparently preserved the traces of an old serpent-cult.@@8

Several practices conform to the idea that “ a hair of the dog that bit you ” is a sure remedy, and that the serpent was best fitted to overcome other serpents.@@9 At Emesa in Syria, watered by the Orontes, an image, the lower part of which was a scorpion, cured the sting of scorpions and freed the city from snakes.@@10 Constanti­nople was similarly protected by the serpent-trophy of Delphi which Constantine removed thither; an emperor was said to have performed an enchantment over the monument well known in Greek history.@@11 In modern India a walking-stick from a species of cane in the neighbourhood of a certain serpent- shrine protects against snake-bite.@@12 At Fernando Po, when there The interpretation is uncertain, but the motive has parallels (see Goblet d'Alviella, *Migration of Symbols,* London, 1894, pp. 129, 133, 167 seq.). R. G. Murison, “ The Serpent in the O.T." *(Amer. Journ. of Sem. Lang.* xxi. 128), cites an American-Indian belief in a tree of healing, or rather of knowledge, inhabited by a serpent.

@@@1 Fergusson, p. 259. Perhaps the sloughing more than any other feature stimulated primitive speculation; cf. Winternitz, p. 28.

@@@2 See Crooke, ii. 1 and 33 sqq. ; C. G. Leland, *Etruscan Roman Remains,* p. 283; Winternitz 37 seq.; A. W. Buckland, *Anthropo­logical Studies* (1891), pp. 104-139 (on serpents in connexion with metallurgy and precious stones).

@@@3 Excavators know how the popular mind associates their labours with search for hidden treasure, and no doubt the wealth of dead civilizations often stimulated the imagination of subsequent genera- tions. A gruesome lndian story (Crooke, ii. 136) shows how old treasure-chambers could actually harbour enormous and deadly snakes.

@@@4 Nonnus (Dion. xli. 340 sqq.), cited by W. W. G. Baudissin, *Stud. z. Relig.-Gesch.* (Leipzig, 1876), i. 274 seq. (pp. 255-292, Semitic serpent-cult). See, for Garga, C. F. Oldham, *The Sun and the Serpent* (London, 1905), p. 54; and, for the serpent’s wisdom, F. L. Schwartz, *Ursprung der Mythologie* (1860), pp. 55 seq.; J. Maehly, *Die Schlange im Mythus u. Cultus d. class. Volker* (1867), pp. 9 seq., 11, 23 seq.

@@@5 See H. Gressmann, *Archiv f. Religionswissenschaft, x.* 357 sqq. A Babylonian cylinder represents two figures (divine?) on either side of a fruit-tree, and behind one of them a serpent coils upwards.

@@@6 J. G. Frazer, *Adorns, Attis and Osiris* (2nd ed., London, 1907), p. 153; also his notes on Pausanias, vol. iii. p. 65 seq.

@@@7 Similar votive offerings are known in India (Oldham, 87), and, though their true significance is uncertain, in ancient Arabia, Palestine and Elam (see H. Vincent, *Canaan d'après l'exploration récente,* Paris, 1907, pp. 174 sqq.).

@@@8 A. H. Sayce, “ Serpent Worship in Ancient and Modern Egypt,” *Contemporary Review* (Oct. 1893), p. 523; cf. also Fergusson, 34.

@@@9 See, for analogies, Frazer, *Golden Bough* (2nd ed.), ii. 426 seq.

@@@10 Even clothes washed in the waters of Emesa similarly protected the wearers. See Guy Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems,* 353 sqq., and for other miscellaneous evidence, 396, 405, 495.

@@@11 Ruy Gonzalez de Clarijo, *Hakluyt Society* (1859), p. 35.

*@@@12 Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,* ix.

p. 180.