MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY

SOLOMON AND SOLOMONIC LITERATURE

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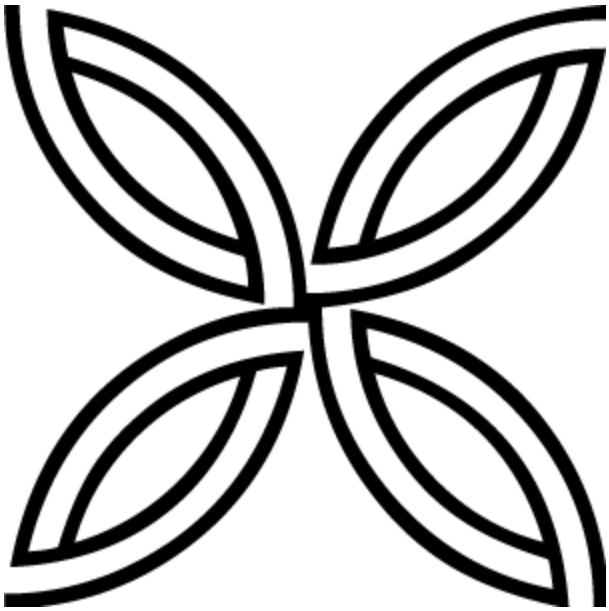

Preface.

An English lady of my acquaintance, sojourning at Baalbek, was conversing with an humble stonecutter, and pointing to the grand ruins inquired, “Why do you not occupy yourself with magnificent work like that?” “Ah,” he said, “those edifices were built by no mortal, but by genii.”

These genii now represent the demons which in ancient legends were enslaved by the potency of Solomon’s ring. Some of these folk-tales suggest the ingenuity of a fabulist. According to one, Solomon outwitted the devils even after his death, which occurred while he was leaning on his staff and superintending the reluctant labors of the demons on some sacred edifice. In that posture his form remained for a year after his death, and it was not until a worm gnawed the end of his staff, causing his body to fall, that the demons discovered their freedom.

If this be a fable, a modern moral may be found by reversing the delusion. The general world has for ages been working on under the spell of Solomon while believing him to be dead. Solomon is very much alive. Many witnesses of his talismanic might can be summoned from the homes and schools wherein the rod is not spared, however much it spoils the child, and where youth’s “flower of age” bleaches in a puritan cell because the “wisest of men” is supposed to have testified that all earth’s pleasures are vanity. And how many parents are in their turn feeling the recoil of the rod, and live to deplore the intemperate thirst for “vanities” stimulated in homes overshadowed by the fear-of-God wisdom for which Solomon is also held responsible? On the other hand, what parson has not felt the rod bequeathed to the sceptic by the king whom Biblical authority pronounces at once the worldliest and the wisest of mankind?

More imposing, if not more significant, are certain picturesque phenomena which to-day represent the bifold evolution of the Solomonic legend. While in various parts of Europe "Solomon's Seal," survival from his magic ring, is the token of conjuring and fortune-telling impostors, the knightly Order of Solomon's Seal in Abyssinia has been raised to moral dignity by an emperor (Menelik) who has given European monarchs a lesson in magnanimity and gallantry by presenting to a "Queen of the South" (Margharita), on her birthday, release of the captives who had invaded his country. While this is the tradition of nobility which has accompanied that of lineal descent from the Wise Man, his name lingers in the rest of Christendom in proverbial connexion with any kind of sagacity, while as a Biblical personality he is virtually suppressed.

In one line of evolution,—whose historic factors have been Jahvism, Pharisaism, and Puritanism,—Solomon has been made the Adam of a second fall. His Eves gave him the fruit that was pleasant and desirable to make one wise, and he did eat. Jahveh retracts his compliments to Solomon, and makes the naïve admission that deity itself cannot endow a man with the wisdom that can ensure orthodoxy, or with knowledge impregnable by feminine charms (Nehemiah xiii.); and from that time Solomon disappears from canonical Hebrew books except those ascribed to his own authorship.

That some writings attributed to Solomon,—especially the "Song of Songs" and "Koheleth" (Ecclesiastes),—were included in the canon, may be ascribed to a superstitious fear of suppressing utterances of a supernatural wisdom, set as an oracle in the king and never revoked. This view is confirmed and illustrated in several further pages, but it may be added here that the very idolatries and alleged sins of Solomon led to the detachment from his personal self of his divinely-conferred Wisdom, and her personification as something apart from him in various avatars (preserving

his glory while disguising his name), an evolution culminating in ideals and creeds that have largely moulded Christendom.

The two streams of evolution here suggested, one issuing from the wisdom books, the other from the law books, are traceable in their collisions, their periods of parallelism, and their convergence,—where, however, their respective inspirations continue distinguishable, like the waters of the Missouri and the Mississippi after they flow between the same banks.

The present essays by no means claim to have fully traced these lines of evolution, but aim at their indication. The only critique to which it pretends is literary. The studies and experiences of many years have left me without any bias concerning the contents of the Bible, or any belief, ethical or religious, that can be affected by the fate of any scripture under the higher or other criticism. But my interest in Biblical literature has increased with the perception of its composite character ethnically. I believe that I have made a few discoveries in it; and a volume adopted as an educational text-book requires every ray of light which any man feels able to contribute to its interpretation.

Chapter I.

Solomon.

There is a vast Solomon mythology: in Palestine, Abyssinia, Arabia, Persia, India, and Europe, the myths and legends concerning the traditional Wisest Man are various, and merit a comparative study they have not received. As the name Solomon seems to be allegorical, it is not possible to discover whether he is mentioned in any contemporary inscription by a real name, and the external and historical data are insufficient to prove certainly that an individual Solomon ever existed.1But that a great personality now known under that name did exist, about three thousand years ago, will, I believe, be recognised by those who study the ancient literature relating to him. The earliest and most useful documents for such an investigation are: the first collection of Proverbs, x–xxii. 16; the second collection, xxv–xxix. 27; Psalms ii., xlv., lxxii., evidently Solomonic; 2 Samuel xii. 24, 25; and 1 Kings iv. 29–34.

As, however, the object of this essay is not to prove the existence of Solomon, but to study the evolution of the human heart and mind under influences of which a peculiar series is historically associated with his name, he will be spoken of as a genuine figure, the reader being left to form his own conclusion as to whether he was such, if that incidental point interests him.

The indirect intimations concerning Solomon in the Proverbs and Psalms may be better understood if we first consider the historical books which profess to give an account of his career. And the search naturally begins with the passage in the Book of Kings just referred to:

“And God gave Solomon wisdom and intelligence exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand on the seashore. And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all

the children of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spake three thousand parables, and his songs were a thousand and five. He spake of trees, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, birds, reptiles, fishes. And there came people of all countries to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."

This passage is Elohist: it is the Elohim—perhaps here the gods—who gave Solomon wisdom. The introduction of Jahveh as the giver, in the dramatic dream of Chapter iii., alters the nature of the gift, which from the Elohim is scientific and literary wisdom, but from Jahveh is political, related to government and judgment.

As for Mahol and his four sons, the despair of Biblical historians, they are now witnesses that this passage was written when those men,—or perhaps masculine Muses,—were famous, though they are unknown within any period that can be called historical. As intimated, they may be figures from some vanished mythology Hebraised into Mahol (*dance*), Ethan (the *imperishable*), Heman (*faithful*), Calcol (*sustenance*), Darda (*pearl of knowledge*).

In speaking of 1 Kings iv. 29–34 as substantially historical it is not meant, of course, that it is free from the extravagance characteristic of ancient annals, but that it is the nearest approach to Solomon's era in the so-called historical books, and, although the stage of idealisation has been reached, is free from the mythology which grew around the name of Solomon.

But while we have thus only one small scrap of even quasi-historical writing that can be regarded as approaching Solomon's era, the traditions concerning him preserved in the Book of Kings yield much that is of value when

comparatively studied with annals of the chroniclers, who modify, and in some cases omit, not to say suppress, the earlier record. Such modifications and omissions, while interesting indications of Jahvist influences, are also testimonies to the strength of the traditions they overlay. The pure and simple literary touchstone can alone be trusted amid such traditions; it alone can distinguish the narratives that have basis, that could not have been entirely invented.

In the Book of Chronicles,—for the division into two books was by Christians, as also was the division of the Book of Kings,—we find an ecclesiastical work written after the captivity, but at different periods and by different hands; it is in the historic form, but really does not aim at history. The main purpose of the first chronicler is to establish certain genealogies and conquests related to the consecration of the house and lineage of David. Solomon's greatness and his building of the temple are here transferred as far as possible to David.2David captures from various countries the gold, silver, and brass, and dedicates them for use in the temple, which he plans in detail, but which Jahveh forbade him to build himself. The reason of this prohibition is far from clear to the first writer on the compilation, but apparently it was because David was not sufficiently highborn and renowned. "I took thee from the sheepcote," says Jahveh, but adds, "I will make thee a name like unto the name of the great ones that are in the earth;" also, says Jahveh, "I will subdue all thine enemies." So it is written in 1 Chronicles xvii., and it could hardly have been by the same hand that in xxii. wrote David's words to Solomon:

"It was in my heart to build an house to the name of Jahveh my God; but the word of Jahveh came to me, saying: 'Thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight; behold a son shall be born unto thee who shall be a man of rest, and I

will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon [Peaceful], and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days: he shall build an house for my name: and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.'"

In Chapter xvii. Jahveh claims that it is he who has subdued and cut off David's enemies; his long speech is that of a war-god; but in the xxii. it is the God of Peace who speaks; and in harmony with this character all the bloodshed by which Solomon's succession was accompanied, as recorded in the Book of Kings, is suppressed, and he stands to the day of his death the Prince of Peace. To him (1 Chron. xxviii., xxix.) from the first all the other sons of David bow submissively, and the people by a solemn election confirm David's appointment and make Solomon their king.

Thus, 1 Chron. xvii., which is identical with 2 Sam. vii., clearly represents a second Chronicler. The hand of the same writer is found in 1 Chron. xviii., xix., xx., and the chapters partly identical in 2 Samuel, namely viii., x., xi.; the offence of David then being narrated in 2 Samuel xii. as the wrong done Uriah, whereas in 1 Chron. xxi. the sin is numbering Israel. The Chroniclers know nothing of the Uriah and Bathsheba story, but the onomatopœists may take note of the fact that David's order was to number Israel "from *Beer-sheba* unto Dan."

The first ten chapters of 2 Chronicles seem to represent a third chronicler. Here we find David in the background, and Solomon completely conventionalised, as the Peaceful Prince of the Golden Age. All is prosperity and happiness. Solomon even anticipates the silver millennium: "The king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones." It is only when the fourth chronicler begins (2 Chron. x.), with the succession of Solomon's son Rehoboam, that we are told anything against Solomon. Then all Israel come to the new king, saying, "Thy father made our yoke grievous," and he

answers, “My father chastised you with whips, but I with scorpions.”
All this is so inconsistent with the accounts in the earlier books of both David and Solomon, that it is charitable to believe that the third chronicler had never heard the ugly stories about these two canonised kings.
In the First Book of Kings, Solomon is made king against the rightful heir, by an ingenious conspiracy between a wily prophet, Nathan, and a wily beauty, Bathsheba,—Solomon’s mother, whom David had obtained by murdering her husband.
It may be remembered here that David had by Bathsheba a son named Nathan (2 Sam. v. 14; 1 Chron. iii. 5), elder brother of Solomon, from whom Luke traces the genealogy of Joseph, father of Jesus, while Matthew traces it from Solomon. It appears curious that the prophet Nathan should have intrigued for the accession of the younger brother rather than the one bearing his own name. It will be seen, however, by reference to 2 Samuel xii. 24, that Solomon was the first legitimate child of David and Bathsheba, the son of their adultery having died. John Calvin having laid it down very positively that “if Jesus was not descended from Solomon, he was not the Christ,” some theologians have resorted to the hypothesis that Nathan married an ancestress of the Virgin Mary, and that Luke gives *her* descent, not that of Joseph; but apart from the fact that Luke (iii. 23) begins with Joseph, it is difficult to see how the requirement of Calvin, that Solomon should be the ancestor of Jesus, is met by his mother’s descent from Solomon’s brother. It is clear, however, from 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25, that this elder brother of Solomon, Nathan, is a myth. Otherwise he, and not Solomon, was the lawful heir to the throne (legitimacy being confined to the sons of David born in Jerusalem), and Jesus would not have been “born King of the Jews” (Matt, i. 2), nor fulfilled the Messianic conditions. It is even possible that Luke wished to escape the

implication of illegitimacy by tracing the descent of Jesus from Solomon's elder brother. But the writer of 1 Kings i. had no knowledge of the Christian discovery that, in the order of legal succession to the throne, the sons of David born before he reigned in Jerusalem were excluded. Adonijah's legal right of succession was not questioned by David (1 Kings i. 6).

When David was in his dotage and near his end this eldest son (by Haggith), Adonijah, began to consult leading men about his accession, but unfortunately for himself, did not summon Nathan. This slighted "prophet" proposed to Bathsheba that she should go to David and tell him the falsehood that he (David) had once sworn before Jahveh that her son Solomon should reign; "and while you are talking," says Nathan, "I will enter and fulfil" (that was his significant word) "your declaration." The royal dotard could not gainsay two seemingly independent witnesses, and helplessly kept the alleged oath. David announced this oath as his reason,—apparently the only one,—for appointing Solomon. The prince may be credited with being too young to participate in this scheme.

Irregularity of succession and of birth in princes appeals to popular superstition. The legal heir, regularly born, seems to come by mere human arrangement, but the God-appointed chieftain is expected in unexpected ways and in defiance of human laws and even moralities. David, or some one speaking for him, said, "In sin did my mother conceive me," and the contempt in which he was held by his father's other children, and his father's keeping him out of sight till the prophet demanded him (1 Sam. xvi. 11), look as if he, also, may have been illegitimate. Solomon may have been technically legitimate, but in any case he was the son of an immoral marriage, sealed by a husband's blood. The populace would easily see the divine hand in the elevation of this youth, who seems to have been himself impressed with the like superstition.

Unfortunately, Solomon received his father's last injunctions as divine commands. At the very time when David is pictured by the Chronicler in such a saintly death-bed scene, parting so pathetically with his people, and giving such unctuous and virtuous last counsels to Solomon, he is shown by the historian of Kings pouring into his successor's ear the most treacherous and atrocious directions for the murder of certain persons; among others, of Shimei, whose life he had sworn should not be taken. Shimei had once called David what Jahveh also called him, a man of blood, but afterwards asked his forgiveness. Under a pretence of forgiveness, David nursed his vengeance through many years, and Shimei was now a white-haired man. David's last words addressed to Solomon were these:

"He (Shimei) came down to meet me at Jordan, and I sware to him by Jahveh, saying, 'I will not put thee to death with the sword.' Now therefore hold him not guiltless, for thou art a wise man, and wilt know what thou oughtest to do unto him; and thou shalt bring his hoar head down to the grave in blood."

Such, according to an admiring annalist, were the last words uttered by David on earth. He died with a lie in his mouth (for he had sworn to Shimei, plainly, "Thy life shall not be taken"), and with murder (personal and vindictive) in his heart. The book opens with a record that they had tried to revive the aged king by bringing to him a beautiful damsel; but lust was gone; the only passion that survived even his lust, and could give one more glow to this "man of blood," was vengeance. Two aged men were named by him for death at the hands of Solomon, who could not disobey, this being the last act of the forty years of reign of King David. His dying word was "blood." One would be glad to believe these things mythical, but they are contained in a record which says:

"David did that which was right in the sight of Jahveh and

turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

This traditional incident of getting Uriah slain in order to appropriate his wife, made a deep impression on the historian of Samuel, and suspicious pains are taken (2 Sam. xii.) to prove that the illegitimate son of David and Bathsheba was "struck by Jahveh" for his parents' sin, and that Solomon was born only after the marriage. Even if the youth was legitimate, the adherents of the king's eldest son, Adonijah, would not fail to recall the lust and murder from which Solomon sprang, though the populace might regard these as signs of Jahveh's favor. In the coronation ode (Psalm ii.) the young king is represented as if answering the Legitimists who spoke of his birth not only from an adulteress, but one with a foreign name:

"I will proclaim the decree:
The Lord said unto me, 'Thou art my son;
This day have I begotten thee.'"

(It is probable that the name Jahveh was inserted in this song in place of Elohim, and in several other phrases there are indications that the original has been tampered with.)

The lines—

"Kiss the son lest he be angry
And ye perish straightway."

and others, may have originated the legendary particulars of plots caused by Solomon's accession, recorded in the Book of Kings, but at any rate the emphatic claim to his adoption by God as His son, by the anointing received at coronation, suggests some trouble arising out of his birth. There is also a confidence and enthusiasm in the language of the court laureate, as the writer of Psalm ii. appears to have been, which conveys an impression of popular sympathy.

It is not improbable that the superstition about illegitimacy, as under some conditions a sign of a hero's heavenly origin,

may have had some foundation in the facts of heredity. In times when love or even passion had little connexion with any marriage, and none with royal marriages, the offspring of an amour might naturally manifest more force of character than the legitimate, and the inherited sensual impulses, often displayed in noble energies, might prove of enormous importance in breaking down an old oppression continued by an automatic legitimacy of succession.
In Talmudic books (*Moed Katon* , Vol. 9, col. 2, and *Midrash Rabbah* , ch. 15) it is related that when Solomon was conveying the ark into the temple, the doors shut themselves against him of their own accord. He recited twenty-four psalms, but they opened not. In vain he cried, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates!” But when he prayed, “O Lord God, turn not Thy face from Thine anointed; remember the mercies of David thy servant” (2 Chron. vi. 42), the gates flew open. “Then the enemies of David turned black in the face, for all knew that God had pardoned David’s transgression with Bathsheba.” This legend curiously ignores 1 Chron. xxii., which shows that Jahveh had prearranged Solomon’s birth and name, and had adopted him before birth. It is one of many rabbinical intimations that David, Bathsheba, Uriah, and Solomon, had become popular divinities,—much like Vulcan, Venus, Mars,—and as such relieved from moral obligations. Jewish theology had to accommodate itself ethically to this popular mythology, and did so by a theory of divine forgiveness; but really the position of Hebrew, as well as Christian, orthodoxy was that lustful David and Bathsheba were mere puppets in the divine plan, and their actions quite consistent with their being souls after Jahveh’s own heart.

1
The name given to him in 2 Sam. xii. 25, Jedidiah (“beloved

of Jah"), by the prophet of Jahveh, is, however, an important item in considering the question of an actual monarch behind the allegorical name, especially as the writer of the book, in adding "for Jahveh's sake" seems to strain the sense of the name—somewhat as the name "Jesus" is strained to mean *saviour* in Matt. i. 21. Jedidiah looks like a Jahvist modification of a real name (see p. 20).
2
This was continued in rabbinical and Persian superstitions, which attribute to David knowledge of the language of birds. It is said David invented coats of mail, the iron becoming as wax in his hands; he subjected the winds to Solomon, and also a pearl-diving demon.

Chapter II.

The Judgment of Solomon.

It may occur to mythographers that I treat as historical narratives and names that cannot be taken so seriously; but in a study of primitive culture, fables become facts and evidences. A grand harvest awaits that master of mythology and folklore who shall bravely explore the legends of David and Solomon, but in the present essay mythical details can only be dealt with incidentally. Some of these may be considered at the outset.

It is said in 1 Kings i.:

"Now King David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and cherish him; and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And the damsel was very fair; and she cherished the king and ministered to him; but the king knew her not."

That this story is characteristic of lustful David cannot blind us to the fact of its improbability. Whatever may be meant by "the coasts of Israel," the impression is conveyed of a long journey, and it is hardly credible that so much time should be taken for a moribund monarch. Many interpretations are possible of the name Abishag, but it is usually translated "Father (or source) of error." However this may be, the story bears a close resemblance to the search for a wife for Isaac. When Abraham sent out this commission he also "was old and well stricken in age," and of Rebekah it is said, "The damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her." (Gen.

xxiv.) Rebekah means “ensnarer,” and Abishag “father (source) of error”; and both women cause trouble between two brothers.

There is an Oriental accent about both of these stories. In ancient Indian literature there are several instances of servants sent out to search the world for a damsel fair and wise enough to wed the son and heir of some grand personage. Maya, the mother of Buddha, was sought for in the same way. This of itself is not enough to prove that the Biblical narratives in question are of Oriental origin, but there is a Tibetan tale which contains several details which seem to bear on this point. The tale is that of Viśākhā, and it is accessible to English readers in a translation by Schiefner and Ralston of the “Kah-Gyur.” (Trübner’s Oriental Series.)

Viśākhā was the seventh son of Mrgadhara, prime minister of the king of Kośala. For this youth a bride was sought by a Brahman, who in the land of Champa found a beautiful maiden whose name was also Viśākhā. She was, with other girls, entering a park, where they all bathed in a tank,—her companions taking off their clothes, but Viśākhā lifting her dress by degrees as she entered the water. Besides showing decorum, this maiden conducted herself differently from the others in everything, some of her actions being mysterious. The Brahman, having contrived to meet her alone, questioned her concerning these peculiarities, for all of which she gave reasons implying exceptional wisdom and virtue. On his return the Brahman described this maiden to the prime minister, who set forth and asked her hand for his son, and she was brought to Kośala on a ship with great pomp. The maiden then for a long time gives evidence of extraordinary wisdom, one example being of special importance to our inquiry. She determines which of two women claiming a child is the real mother. The king and his ministers being unable to settle the dispute, Viśākhā said:

“Speak to the two women thus: ‘As we do not know to which of you two the boy belongs, let her who is the strongest take the boy.’ When each of them has taken hold of one of the boy’s hands, and he begins to cry out on account of the pain, the real mother will let go, being full of compassion for him, and knowing that if her child remains alive she will be able to see it again; but the other, who has no compassion for him, will not let go. Then beat her with a switch, and she will thereupon confess the truth of the whole matter.”

In comparing this with the famous judgment of Solomon there appear some reasons for believing the Oriental tale to be the earlier. In the Biblical tale there is evidently a missing link. Why should the false mother, who had so desired the child, consent to have it cut in two? What motive could she have? But in the Tibetan tale one of the women is the wife, the other the concubine, of a householder. The wife bore him no child, and was jealous of the concubine on account of her babe. The concubine, feeling certain that the wife would kill the child, gave it to her, with her lord’s approval; but after his death possession of the house had to follow motherhood of the child. If, however, the child were dead, the false claimant would be mistress of the house. Here, then, is a motive wanting in the story of Solomon, and suggesting that the latter is not the original.

In the ancient “Mahosadha Jataka” the false claimant proves to be a Yakshini (a sort of siren and vampire) who wishes to eat the child. To Buddha himself is here ascribed the judgment, which is much the same as that of the “wise Champa maiden,” Viśākhā. Here, also, is a motive for assenting to the child’s death or injury which is lacking in the Biblical story.

Here, then, we find in ancient Indian literature a tale which may be fairly regarded as the origin of the “Judgment of Solomon.” And it belongs to a large number of Oriental

tales in which the situations and accents of the Biblical narratives concerning David and Solomon often occur. There is a cave-born youth, Aśuga, son of a Brahman and a bird-fairy, with a magic lute which accompanies his verses, and who dallies with Brahmadetta's wife. A king, enamored of a beautiful foreign woman beneath him in rank, obtains her by a promise that her son, if one is born, shall succeed him on the throne, to the exclusion of his existing heir by his wife of equal birth; but he permits arrangements for his elder son's succession to go on until induced by a threat of war from the new wife's father and country to fulfil his promise. A prime minister, Mahaushadha, travels, in disguise of a Brahman, in order to find a true wife; he meets with a witty maiden (Viśākhā), who directs him to her village by a road where he will see her naked at a bathing tank, though she had taken another road. This minister was, like David, lowly born; a "deity" revealed him to the king, as Jahveh revealed David to Samuel; he was a seventh minister, as David was a seventh son, and Solomon also.

Although the number seven was sacred among the ancient Hebrews, it does not appear to have been connected by them with exceptional wisdom or occult powers in man or woman. The ideas in which such legends as "The Seven Wise Masters," "The Seven Sages," and the superstition about a seventh son's second-sight, originate, are traceable to ancient Indo-Iranian theosophy. It may be useful here to read the subjoined extract from Darmesteter's introduction to the "Vendîdâd." Having explained that the religion of the Persian Magi is derived from the same source as that of the Indian Rishis, that is, from the common forefathers of both Iranian and Indian, he says:

"The Indo-Iranian Asura (the supreme but not the only god) was often conceived as sevenfold: by the play of certain mythical formulæ and the strength of certain mythical numbers, the ancestors of the Indo-Iranians had been led to

speak of seven worlds, and the supreme god was often made sevenfold, as well as the worlds over which he ruled. The names and the attributes of the seven gods had not been as yet defined, nor could they be then; after the separation of the two religions, these gods, named Aditya, ‘the infinite ones,’ in India, were by and by identified there with the sun, and their number was afterward raised to twelve, to correspond to the twelve aspects of the sun. In Persia, the seven gods are known as Amesha Spentas, ‘the undying and well-doing one’; they by and by, according to the new spirit that breathed in the religion, received the names of the deified abstractions, Vohu-manô (good thought), Asha Vahista (excellent holiness), Khshathra Vairya (perfect sovereignty), Spenta Armaîti (divine piety), Haurvatât and Ameretâot (health and immortality). The first of them all was and remained Ahura Mazda; but whereas formerly he had been only the first of them, he was now their father. ‘I invoke the glory of the Amesha Spentas, who all seven have one and the same thinking, one and the same speaking, one and the same father and lord, Ahura Mazda,’” (Yast xix. 16.)1

In Persian religion the Seven are always wise and beneficent. The vast folklore derived from this Parsî religion included the Babylonian belief in seven powerful spirits, associated with the Pleiades, beneficent at certain seasons, but normally malevolent: they all move together, taking possession of human beings, as in the case of the seven demons cast out of Mary Magdalene. In Egypt the seven are always evil. But neither of these sevens are especially clever. In Buddhist legends they are not so carefully classified, the seventh son or daughter manifesting exceptional powers, sometimes of good, sometimes of evil, but they are usually referred to for this wit or wisdom. In the Davidian and Solomonic legends these notions are found as if merely adhering to some importation, and without any perception of the significance

of the number seven. David is an eighth son in 1 Sam. xvi. 10–13, but a seventh son in 1 Chron. ii. 16. Solomon is a tenth son in 1 Chron. iii. 1–6, but the seventh *legitimate* son in 2 Sam. xii. 24–25. The word *Sheba* means “the seven,” but the early scribes appear to have understood it as *shaba* , “he swears,” as in Gen. xxi. 30–31, where after the seven ewe lambs have given the well its name, *Beersheba* , it is ascribed the significance of an oath. *Bathsheba* is commonly translated “Daughter of the Oath,” but there can be little doubt that the name means “Daughter of the Seven,” and that it originated in the astute tricks by which that fair foreigner made herself queen-mother and her son king, above the lawful heir, whom she was instrumental (perhaps purposely) in getting out of the way by furthering his wishes.

Moral obliquities are little considered in these fair favorites of translunary powers. Viśākhā, in one Buddhist tale, gets herself chosen by the Brahman as bride of a great man by her care to veil her charms at the bath; in another tale she attracts a prime minister in disguise, and becomes his wife, partly by laying aside all of her clothing at a bathing tank where she knows he will see her. Bathsheba’s fame is similarly various. Her nudity and ready adultery with the king did not prevent her from passing into Talmudic tradition as “blessed among women,” and to her was even ascribed the beautiful chapter of Proverbs (xxxi.) in praise of the virtuous wife! In the “Wisdom of Solomon” she is described as the “handmaiden” of the Lord in anticipation of the Christian ideal of immaculate womanhood.

A similar development might no doubt be traced in the beautiful story of Vi[’]s[=]akh[=]a of Shravasti, the most famous of the female lay-disciples of Buddha. The queries put to her by Buddha and her explanations of her petitions, which had appeared enigmatic, are related in Carus’s *Gospel of Buddha* , and in form correspond with the very different questions and solutions that passed between the