

*When the serpent
sloughs off his skin*



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From *Isis Unveiled*, I pp. 149-50. Frontispiece by Laura Inksetter.

What modern cosmogonist could compress within so simple a symbol as the Egyptian serpent in a circle such a world of meaning?¹ Here we have, in this creature, the whole philosophy of the universe: matter vivified by spirit, and the two conjointly evolving out of chaos (Force) everything that was to be. To signify that the elements are fast bound in this cosmic matter, which the serpent symbolizes, the Egyptians tied its tail *into a knot*.

There is one more important emblem connected with the sloughing of the serpent's skin, which, so far as we are aware, has never been heretofore noticed by our symbolists. As the reptile upon casting his coat becomes freed from a casing of gross matter, which cramped a body grown too large for it, and resumes its existence with renewed activity, so *man, by casting off the gross material body, enters upon the next stage of his existence with enlarged powers and quickened vitality*. Inversely, the Chaldean Kabbalists tell us that primeval man, who, contrary to the Darwinian theory was purer, wiser, and far more spiritual, as shown by the myths of the Scandinavian *Buri*, the Hindu *Devatās*, and the Mosaic "sons of God," — in short, of a far higher nature than the man of the present Adamic race, became *despiritualized* or tainted with matter, and then, for the first time, was given the *fleshly body*, which is typified in *Genesis* in that profoundly significant verse:

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God *made coats of skin*, and clothed them.²

Unless the commentators would make of the First Cause a *celestial tailor*, what else can the apparently absurd words mean, but that the spiritual man had reached, through the progress of involution, to that point where matter, predominating over and conquering spirit, had transformed him into the physical man, or the second Adam, of the second chapter of *Genesis*?³

¹ [Consult "Serpents bringing out Compassion," in our in our Secret Doctrine's Second Proposition Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² *Genesis* iii, 21

³ [Consult "Insights to the first chapter of Genesis," in our Blavatsky Speaks Series and "The real meaning of the first line of Genesis," in our Secret Doctrine's Third Proposition Series. — ED. PHIL.]

This Kabbalistical doctrine is much more elaborated in the *Book of Jasher*.¹ In chapter vii, these garments of skin are taken by Noah into the ark, he having obtained them by inheritance from Methuselah and Enoch, who had them from Adam and his wife. Ham steals them from [150] his father Noah; gives them “in secret” to Cush, who conceals them from his sons and brothers, and passes them to Nimrod.²

While some Kabbalists, and even archæologists say that “Adam, Enoch, and Noah might, in outward appearance, be *different* men, but they were really the self-same divine person,”³ others explain that between Adam and Noah there intervened several cycles. That is to say, that every one of the antediluvian patriarchs stood as the representative of a race which had its place in a succession of cycles; and each of which races was less spiritual than its predecessor. Thus Noah, though a good man, could not have borne comparison with his ancestor, Enoch, who “walked with God and did not die.” Hence the allegorical interpretation which makes Noah have this coat of skin by inheritance from the second Adam and Enoch, but not wear it himself, for if otherwise, Ham could not have stolen it. But Noah and his children bridged the flood; and while the former belonged to the old and still spiritual antediluvian generation, insomuch as he was selected from all mankind for his purity, his children were *post-diluvian*. The coat of skin worn by Cush “in secret,” — *i.e.*, when his spiritual nature began to be tainted by the material — is placed on Nimrod, the most powerful and strongest of physical men on this side of the flood — the last remnant of the antediluvian giants.⁴



¹ This is claimed to be one of the missing books of the sacred Canon of the Jews, and is referred to in *Joshua* x, 13, and *2 Samuel* i, 18. It was discovered by Sidras, an officer of Titus, during the sack of Jerusalem, and published in Venice in the seventeenth century, as alleged in its preface by the Consistory of Rabbis, but the American edition, as well as the English, is reputed by the modern Rabbis, to be a forgery of the twelfth century.

[The original work known under the title of the *Book of Jasher* is alluded to only in *Joshua* x, 13, and *2 Samuel* i, 18, and is considered as having been lost. There is wide room for conjecture as to its contents and nature. There are extant, however, under the same title, two Rabbinical works: one a moral treatise written in A.D. 1394 by R. Shabbatai Carmuz Levita, of which a copy in MS. exists in the Vatican Library; the other, by R. Tham, treats of the laws of the Jews in 18 chapters, and was printed in Italy in 1544, and at Cracow in 1586. An anonymous work, printed at Venice and Prague in 1625, and said to have made its first appearance at Naples, was believed by some Jews to be the record alluded to in *Joshua*. It contains the historical narrative of the *Pentateuch*, *Joshua* and *Judges*, with many additional fables. R. Jacob published a German translation of it at Frankfort on the Main in 1674. This is the work which H.P. Blavatsky has in mind. It is said in the preface to the first edition to have been discovered at the destruction of Jerusalem by Sidrus, one of the officers of Titus, who, while searching a house for the purpose of plunder, found in a secret chamber a vessel containing the Books of the Law, the Prophets, and Hagiographa, with many others, which a venerable man was reading. Sidrus took the old man under his protection and built for him a house at Seville, where the books were safely deposited. The book under consideration is most likely the production of a Spanish Jew of the 13th century. A clumsy forgery in English, which first appeared in 1751 under the same title, had a considerable success for a while. It professed to be a translation from the Hebrew into English by Alcuin of Britain who discovered it in Persia during his pilgrimage. It was reprinted in Bristol in 1829 and again in 1833. The Catalogue of the British Museum gives the name of the author as Jacob Ilive.

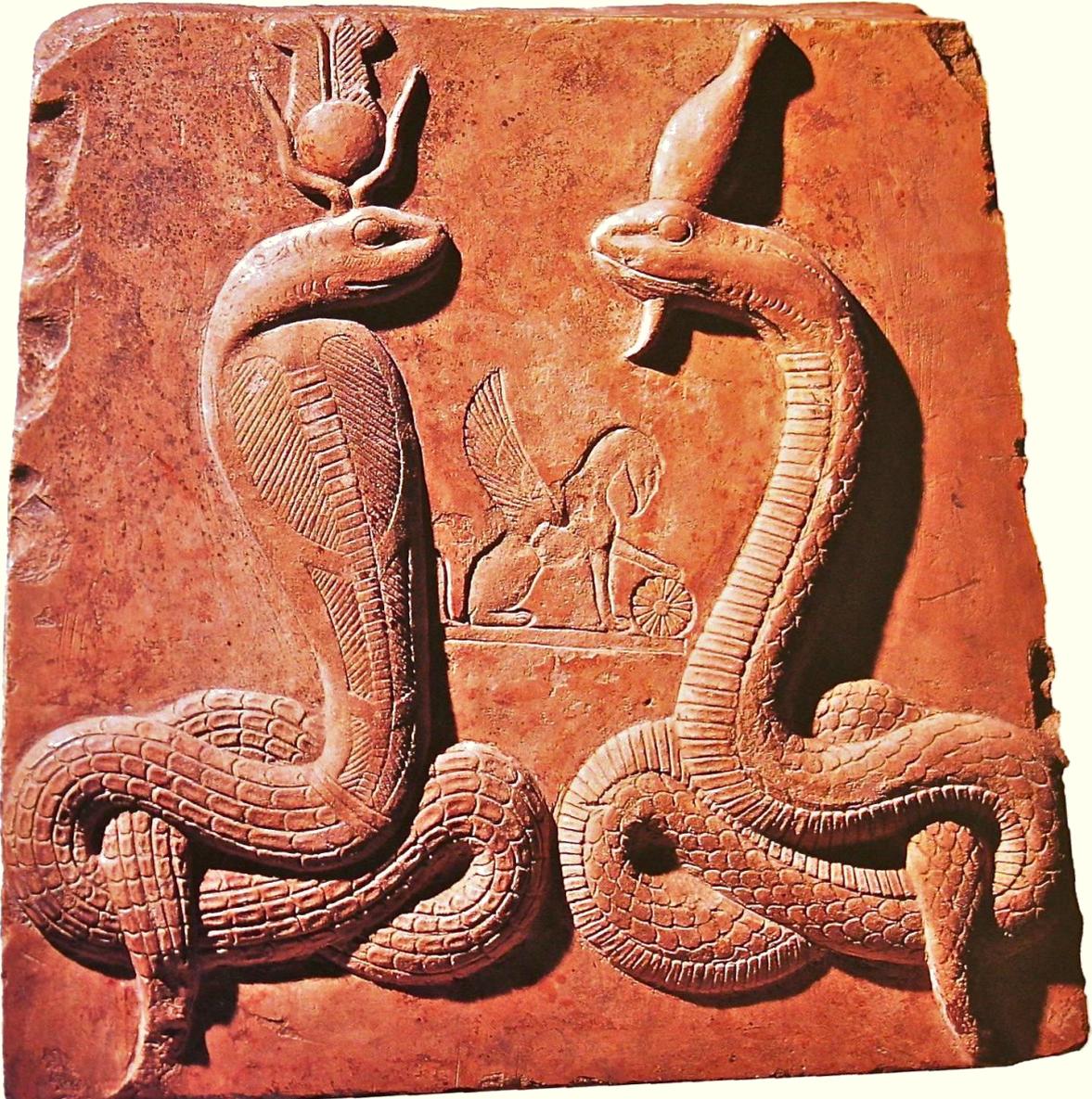
At a later date, two other editions appeared: one by M.M. Noah, New York, 1840; and one at Salt Lake City, 1887. The passages quoted by H.P. Blavatsky have been checked by the 1840 edition. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

² [*Book of Jasher* vii, 24-29. New York 1840]

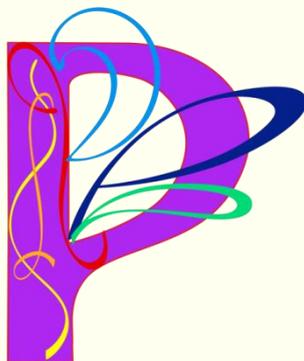
³ See Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, Vol. I, p. 201; quoting Faber.

⁴ See Cory's *Ancient Fragments*, “Berosus.” [Searchable PDF of the 1832 edition, in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series. — ED. PHIL.]

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