

THE DRAGON WELL.

By PH. BALDENSPERGER, Esq.

DR. C. SCHICK's paper on "The Dragon Well," in the October, 1898, number of the *Quarterly Statement*, speaks of the great numbers of "black and long worms" in the Birket es Sultan. In fact, the gigantic millipede—*Julus gilognatha*—abounds about the rocks of the lower pool of Gihon; and the particularity of these *Julidæ* consists in rolling themselves up as soon as touched. The smaller species, "*Glomeris*," rolls into a ball, while this one simply forms a spiral, with the head innermost. On account of this striking feature it is called "Moses' Rod,"

عَصَاةَ مُوسَى, 'Assaat Mûsa, by the Palestine natives, in memory of the miracle performed at the Court of Pharaoh—as it suddenly unfurls and continues to creep, as did the serpent transformed before the Egyptian king. Moses' rod and serpent are, or may have been, identical among the Israelites of old, and perhaps the name "Moses' Rod" was given by them to the millipede, and also to the well, for the same reason.

About 600 yards from the Birket es Sultân, lower down on the right side of the En-Rogel road, is a small cistern, to which we boys, thirty years ago, gave the name of Serpents' Well—simply because serpents lived in it. More than once did I bring out a Hanish, حنيش, which is a black coluber, the longest serpent in Palestine, attaining often three metres or more—supposed by the majority of people to be dangerous, although it is as harmless as any coluber. But the black shiny colour, its swift movements, and its powerful respiration, have given birth to numerous stories often of the most absurd kind—as its cutting a man in two by its folds, and the like. Moloch, these hanish, and the millipede, mixed with fables, may have contributed to the name of the Serpents' Well.

NOTE ON THE "DRAGON WELL."

By the Rev. JOHN THOMAS, B.A., Head Master of the Royal Grammar School, Colchester.

IN the *Quarterly Statement* for October, in an exceedingly interesting article identifying the "Dragon Well" with the Birket es Sultân, Dr. Schick writes very doubtfully as to the origin of that name, proposing, or rather mentioning, various origins for so singular a title. Is it not, after all, a mistake? It is true Josephus mentions ("Wars of the Jews," Book V, chapter 3) a Serpent's Pool, but this was at a time when

possibly, the error was already stereotyped by that conservatism which, later on, produced the Masoretic text.

At the Captivity the semi-voluntary migration of a part of the people to Egypt had given rise to another centre of tradition which finds occasionally its expression in the variations of the version of the Seventy.

Now the LXX know nothing of a dragon, or serpent, well. They simply have "the Gate of *Figs.*" A much more likely name.

It is not very difficult to see how the divergence took place. The Masoretic text has (Neh. ii, 13) תַּנְיִין, while the reading of the LXX σακῶν would have as its Masoretic equivalent תַּנְיִים.

Does it not seem as if the name had been forgotten as to meaning (and possibly as to pronunciation), and restored by Nehemiah from some MS. which did not retain the נ which the received spelling of that later time had dropped.

NOTES ON ANTIQUITIES OF THE PENTATEUCH.

By Lieut.-Colonel C. R. CONDER, R.E.

Cush.—It has been very generally supposed that the Asiatic Cush (Gen. x) was connected with the Cassites of Babylon. The latter have been supposed by many antiquaries to have been of the Akkadian or Mongol race, a conclusion which seems to be supported by the Semitic translation of their kings' names, though Dr. Hommel has endeavoured to prove that they were Arabs. Nimrod, the hero of this race, lived in the cities of Erech and Calno, where it is known that a Mongol population existed. Early Assyriologists suppose him to be represented by the Babylonian hero called Izdubar (otherwise read Gilgames), whose story was apparently of Akkadian origin. This name is written with the three signs, *IZ-DHU-BAR*, the meaning of which in Akkadian, if taken ideographically, is "man become illustrious." The sign *DHU*¹ (otherwise *AL*) is an Akkadian prefix forming the passive of verbs. The Semitic translations of *BAR* include *Amaru* "to see," hence with the passive form this name might be *Nammurutu* "glorious." The writer in Genesis may have found it written in syllables, and so rendered it Nimrod, or "hero."

Midian, Ishmael, and Moab.—The term Midianite seems to be generally applied to the inhabitants of the Eastern plateaux from Gilead to the Gulf of 'Akabah, and appears to be a geographical term—possibly connected with *Medina*, "town." One tribe of Midian (Gen. xxv, 2) was

¹ For this sign *DHU*, see Dr. Sayce's Syllabary No. 495, with the Akkadian sounds *dhu*, *dhun*, and *al*.