

A Story of Man and Creation in the Language of an Ancient People

Records in the Sumerian Language written in Clay Tablets Four to Six Thousand Years ago Reveal a most interesting Conception of the Creator and all His Creations

WHEN WE are waxing impatient with the views of our fellowmen and project ourselves into the future, we should at the same time look into the records of the past and measuring it by the present there would be some logic to back up our predictions for the future.

The undisputable records of ancient peoples that are now being unearthed and translated into modern languages reveal that those people were as diligently in search for a satisfying answer to the mystery of creation as their descendants even into the present time have ever been.

A number of tablets of baked clay containing records of an ancient people called Sumerians, credited with being the race that built the Tower of Babel, were unearthed some years ago by an expedition from the museum of Pennsylvania digging into the sand-hills that cover ancient Babylonia. Some of these tablets went to Constantinople and some of them were brought to the museum of Pennsylvania.

Due to the fact that there are only a few men in the world able to read the early Sumerian language in which the tablets were written, the decipherment has been a slow process. In twenty years only about one-tenth of the Pennsylvania Museum's Sumerian tablets have been translated. Part of these were read by Professor George A. Barton. One of the most important was deciphered by Dr. Chiera on his visit a year ago to the Museum of Antiquities in Constantinople.

Dr. Edward Chiera, who is assistant professor in Assyriology of the University of Philadelphia, has just made public the translated contents of six of these tablets, the inscriptions of which were made two thousand years B. C. or approximately four thousand years ago.

These tablets, which were dug up from a long-buried school library in Nippur on the Euphrates, give an elaborate and complex account of creation, but represent man as having once gone on all fours. They make him, however, something akin to the sheep family, not of the monkey. The tablets trace poetically his slow development into a civilized being.

The great interest in the discovery of the creation story, written on the ancient tablets, lies in the fact that the famous flood story of the Sumerians is believed by most Orientalists to have been the basis for the story of Noah in the Old Testament. Some Orientalists hold that the cosmogony of the Old Testament is very largely to be traced to Sumerian sources. Genesis supposedly was written by Moses about the fourteenth or fifteenth century B. C. The Sumerians were writing their creation stories two or three thousand years earlier.

The creation stories written at Nippur at about 2,000 B. C. are believed to be copies made for school purposes of stories in themselves thousands of years more ancient.

On the shelves of the buried school at Nippur were

found tablets which set forth many conflicting accounts of the beginning of things, and indications are, according to Dr. Chiera, that the widest possible difference of opinion existed 4,000 years ago about the origin of mankind. The priests of the Nippur temple, however, according to Dr. Chiera, copied accounts as they found them without championing one theory against another or showing any of the eagerness which marks controversies of this type in the year A. D. 1925.

The priests were engaged in the glorification of the great god, En-Lil, and, so long as the proper worship was paid to him and the proper gifts made to the temple, they apparently were satisfied. No conflict arose between science and religion.

The contents of these tablets which was made public on the eleventh of July, 1925, are indicating that evolutionary ideas permeated the Sumerian trend of thought.

Inasmuch as the Sumerians are credited by many scholars with being the earliest race of man having developed a real civilization, they may also to some extent be credited with being the founders of the civilization which exists today.

The Sumerian flood story was translated more than half a century ago by George Smith, the librarian of the British Museum. The claim that it was the original of the Old Testament account caused a bitter controversy due to the intensity with which people at that time had injected themselves into what has since been called the first evolutionary controversy. The effort to obtain Government funds to prosecute searches for further Babylonian tablets was balked by Gladstone, who denounced the project as an attack on the Bible, and the next expedition into Mesopotamia was financed by the London Telegraph.

The keynote of the Sumerian epic of creation, as

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