

# SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, MAY 20, 1887.

## COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

WE MEET ALMOST DAILY with evidence of the increasing interest in folk-lore. There is, however, in some quarters a lack of specific knowledge as to the exact aims and methods of folk-lore studies, which must be removed before that general co-operation can be secured on which the success of these investigations is so largely dependent. Mr. Gomme, director of the English folk-lore society, is about to publish a book in order to present in simple and accessible form the needed information. This book will both supply collectors with suggestions as to what is required of them, and also form a scientific guide to the work of classification and comparison. Mr. Gomme points out the conditions of human life which would naturally give rise to religious beliefs, customs, and traditions, and then shows how the existence of such a thing as folk-lore is recognized when it is observed that there either exists or has existed, among the least cultured of the inhabitants of all the countries of modern Europe, a vast body of curious beliefs, customs, and narratives which are by tradition handed from generation to generation. These are essentially the property of the least-advanced portion of the community. They are neither supported nor recognized by the prevailing religion, by the established law, nor by the recorded history of the various countries. To this body of customs and beliefs there is constant addition made, arising from the explanation of newly observed phenomena by the uncultured portion of the community. The writer differentiates carefully savage custom and folk-lore, and says that the study of the former is necessary for the explanation of the latter. In not a few cases folk-lore is almost our only means of approaching the prehistoric period in the life of nations. Mr. Gomme offers as a definition of the science of folk-lore the following: it is "the comparison and identification of the survivals of archaic beliefs, customs, and traditions in modern ages." In this connection, it may be well to call attention to the letter, on another page, pleading for an American dialect society.

No. 224 — 1887.

## THE AMERICAN ORIENTAL ASSOCIATION.

THE American oriental association met in annual session in the Athenaeum building, Boston, on Wednesday morning, May 11. In the absence of the president, Prof. W. D. Whitney, who, though considerably improved, has not yet, we are sorry to say, recovered his usual health, Vice-President Dr. A. Peabody presided. Considering the season fixed for the meeting, which is a particularly unfortunate one for those heavily engaged in university-work, the attendance was fair. Professor Lanman, in his report as secretary of the association, referred to the loss the society had incurred in the death of four of its members, — Professor Stenzler of Breslau (Germany); Dr. Alexander Wylie of London; Mr. H. C. Kingsley, treasurer of Yale college; and Prof. Charles Short of Columbia college. After speaking briefly of the services rendered by these gentlemen to the cause of learning, further remarks eulogizing the memory of the last named were made by Professors Thayer of Harvard, and Hall of the Metropolitan museum, New York.

The number of papers presented at the meeting was unusually large, a most welcome indication of the growth of oriental scholarship in this country. The reading of them, some merely in extract, consumed the greater part of the session, which lasted till late in the afternoon, with a short intermission at noon. Perhaps the most interesting of all was the first, by Dr. W. Hayes Ward, editor of the *Independent*, who offered a new and most happy interpretation of a scene depicted on a number of Babylonian seals which had hitherto baffled the ingenuity of scholars. On these seals we find a mythical figure in the act of ascending or resting his hands on what the late George Smith, the eminent Assyriologist, had taken to be a tower, but which Dr. Ward showed was a mountain. Behind the figure there is a portal out of which the personage ascending the mountain, or resting his hands upon the mountain-peaks, had evidently come. This scene, Dr. Ward proved, by a chain of arguments which left no doubt as to the correctness of his interpretation, is a symbolical representation of the rising of the sun, who at daybreak proceeds from the 'gate' behind which he was shut in during the night, and now climbs to the mountain-heights in order to illumine the world.

In the course of a discussion on this very suggestive paper, participated in by Professors Lyon

of Harvard college, and Jastrow of the University of Pennsylvania, further proofs were offered confirming, from certain references to the sunrise in the cuneiform texts, the mythological notions attributed by Dr. Ward to the Assyrians from a study of the seals in question.

Prof. Isaac Hall followed with an account of an important Syriac manuscript in the Union theological seminary of New York. Dr. Hall gave specimens of the manuscript, which will probably be published in the journal of the society.

Rev. Mr. Winslow had an interesting communication to make on the completion of an edition of the 'Book of the dead.' The publication of this, the most famous literary production of the ancient Egyptians, was undertaken at the instigation of the International congress of orientologists, under the superintendence of Prof. Eduard Naville of Geneva. An idea of the labor involved in this task may be gathered from the fact that the distinguished Swiss *savant* has been engaged in the preparation of it during the past twelve years. More than thirty papyri copies of the work were employed by him, besides the inscriptions on the walls at Thebes. As a result, two large folio volumes and one in quarto lie before us, containing the text, an elaborate introduction, and many thousands of variant readings. The old Egyptians carried the notion that this life was but a preparation for the next, to much further excess even than the Christians of the middle ages. Their entire philosophy and religion hinged around the one point of a future life; and hence it happens that their religious book *par excellence*, their Bible as we might say, was a 'Book of the dead,' or rather a 'Book *for* the dead,' containing an elaborate ceremonial and important instructions, all bearing directly upon death and the future world. The honors and distinctions which have been fairly showered upon Professor Naville since the completion of his enormous task, by the crowned heads of Europe and by learned societies, give proof of the great importance attached to this publication, which may indeed be said to mark an epoch in the history of Egyptology. At the suggestion of Mr. Winslow, the executive committee of the American oriental association adopted resolutions tendering its congratulations to Egyptologists and to Professor Naville, upon the appearance of the work.

Prof. D. G. Lyon announced a new publication in the department of Assyriology, which he believed to be as important to Assyriologists and Semitic scholars in general as the 'Book of the dead' was to Egyptologists. He referred to Prof. Friedrich Delitzsch's Assyrian dictionary, the first fascicule of which has just been issued.

The work had been announced already ten years ago, since which time scholars have been most anxiously waiting for it. Professor Lyon dwelt upon the enormous labor involved in it and on its great importance; but to judge from the first part, which only embraces a small portion of the first letter, the dictionary, when completed, will be of an enormous size, and it is doubtful whether it can be finished in less than a decade, to say the least, that is, if Professor Delitzsch continues it on the large scale mapped out in this fascicule. There is certainly no one better qualified for this prodigious undertaking — which, when completed, will be a monument to German scholarship — than Delitzsch, who is acknowledged to be without a superior as an Assyrian scholar; and his courage in not shrinking from the difficulties it involves is in itself worthy of our highest admiration. Assyriology is perhaps the youngest of the sciences. Scarcely three generations have passed since the first attempt was made to decipher a line of cuneiform writing; but so rapid is the progress which has been made, more especially during the past two decades, that such an undertaking as that of Delitzsch has become at least a possibility.

The afternoon session was opened with a paper on 'Ikonomatic writing in Assyrian,' from Prof. Morris Jastrow, jun., which treated on the transition from picture-writing to phonetic writing in the Assyrian cuneiform system in connection with a theory advanced recently by Dr. D. G. Brinton of the University of Pennsylvania. The latter assumed an intermediate stage between the method of expressing thought by pictures, and purely phonetical writing, to which he gave the name of 'ikonomatic writing,' and which consisted in using pictures or symbols for the purpose of indicating a word or words similar or identical in *sound* to the object represented by the picture. We find this method, which is the principle upon which the ordinary rebus rests, very widely employed in the Egyptian, Chinese, and in Mexican pictography. Thus, in the first named, *nefer* is the name of a lute, and represented by a picture of that instrument. But *nefer*, by a coincidence of sound (but not of stem), also signifies door, conscript soldier, and colt. Accordingly, by the adoption of the ikonomatic device, the picture of the lute is employed to recall any of these three words, though generally with some determinative sign as an aid to the reader to enable him to know which of the various *nefers* is meant. In the Mexican and Mayan systems, as Dr. Brinton shows, this method is carried to much further excess, a remote similarity of sound being sufficient to warrant the use of a picture or symbol in this way.

Professor Jastrow gave quite a number of instances to prove the existence of this phenomenon. He also suggested, that, with the aid of the ikonomatic method, certain phases of the *polyphonic* character of the cuneiform signs — according to which the sign *bn*, for example, could also be read *pn*; the sign *ag*, also *ak* and *ak*; and many more similarly — could be more satisfactorily accounted for than by assuming, as has hitherto been done, that such an interchange of consonants is purely arbitrary. Professor Jastrow, in conclusion, dwelt upon the bearings which all this had on the question as to the origin of the cuneiform writing.

After a discussion on this paper by Professors Lyon, Ward, and Toy, the last named read an interesting paper on the famous Lokman, the Aesop of the Arabs. After presenting the various theories that have been brought forward about this very mysterious personage, Professor Toy developed a new one, which may perhaps be best described as the legendary hypothesis with some historical basis.

Dr. Richard Gottheil of Columbia college followed with a learned disquisition on Baheira, and presented a careful copy of one of the Baheira legends in Syriac, which he had made from a Berlin manuscript. Besides this, Dr. Gottheil gave descriptions of two Syriac manuscripts now in New York. Papers were also presented by Professor Avery, Rev. Jos. Chandler, Dr. Jackson of Columbia college, and three by Professor Hopkins of Bryn Mawr college, which were only read in abstract by Professor Lanman. Dr. Selah Merrill, late U.S. consul to Jerusalem, made some remarks on the discovery of the second wall of Jerusalem and the bearings this discovery had upon determining the site of the holy sepulchre.

Before adjourning, the society elected the following officers for the ensuing year: president, Prof. W. D. Whitney; vice-presidents, Professors Peabody and Saulsbury and Dr. Ward; recording secretary, Prof. D. G. Lyon; corresponding secretary, Prof. C. R. Lanman; executive committee, Professors Thayer and Hopkins, President Gilman of Johns Hopkins, Dr. Hall, and Mr. Cothiel. A number of new members were elected, and it was decided to hold the next meeting in October, at either New Haven or Baltimore.

#### HEALTH MATTERS.

A RARE DISEASE. — The ship *Albana* recently arrived in New York from Manila. Of her crew of nineteen, seventeen became ill on the voyage, four of whom died. Five of the patients were

removed to the Long Island college hospital, where the diagnosis of beri-beri has been made. This disease has already been referred to in *Science* as a rare one, not occurring in this latitude except when imported from Japan, India, or other countries. It begins with fever, and pain in the loins and extremities: these are soon followed by paralysis of the lower then of the upper extremities, and sometimes extend to the muscles of the trunk, particularly those of respiration. The disease is in reality a multiple neuritis, involving especially the spinal nerves. The prognosis is usually considered grave, though the statistics of the Japanese navy would indicate that the mortality is not so great as is generally supposed. The cases that recover require considerable time, however, for the regeneration of the affected nerves. The medical director-general of the Japanese imperial navy has just published a report on this disease as it occurs in that branch of the service. In 1878 there were 1,485 cases, with 32 deaths; in 1879, 1,978 cases, with 57 deaths; during 1885 there were but 9 cases; and in 1886, only 3 cases, none of them being fatal. This remarkable result is attributed by the director to the improvement in the food furnished to the sailors. The few who contracted the disease in recent years had not had the benefit of the improved food.

SMALL-POX HOSPITALS. — One of the important subjects connected with sanitary administration is the location of small-pox hospitals in towns and cities. For the sake of the patients who are removed to these institutions, it is very essential that the distance which they are transported should be as little as possible; while, on the other hand, for the protection of the public, such hospitals should be situated so far from the inhabited portions of the town as not to be a factor in the spread of the disease. Mr. W. H. Power, a medical inspector of the English local government board, has given especial attention to this subject, and the evidence accumulated by him seems to indicate that a small-pox hospital in a town causes a greater incidence of small-pox in the vicinity. Within an area contained by a circle described three-quarters of a mile from the West Ham small-pox hospital, the death-rate from this disease was never less than twice, and sometimes even ten times, greater than the general rate; the number of cases showing a progressive decrease as the distance from the hospital increased. Mr. Power has studied the theories that the wind was a factor in this increase of cases near the hospital, and that the nurses and others were the channel of communication, but has found them inadequate to explain all the facts.