

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.