THE EVENING NEWS.

Tuesday, - - - January 7, 1873.

THE ASSYRIAN TABLET.

THE NEWLY DISCOVERED RECORD OF NOAH'S FLOOD—LEGENDS THOUSANDS OF YEARS OLD — NEW DETAILS REGARDING THE ARK AND THE DELUGE —SIR HENRY RAWLINSON VOUCHES FOR THEIR AUTHENTICITY.

At the meeting of the Biblical Archæological Society last night, Sir Henry Rawlinson in the chair, George Smith of the British Museum read his eagerly anticipated paper, "On a Cuneiform inscription describing the Deluge," which—as we were the first to announce to the public—he discovered a short time back among the Assyrian tablets in the British Museum. There was a large attendance, and the greatest interest was manifested in the subject of the paper.

After the usual introductory business, Mr. Smith stated that for convenience of working he had divided the collection of Assyrian tablets in the British Museum into sections according to the subject matter of the inscriptions. He had recently been examining the division comprising the mythological and mythical tablets, and from this section he obtained a number of tablets, giving a curious series of legends and including a copy of the story of the flood. On discovering these documents, which were much mutilated, he searched over all the collections of fragments of inscriptions, consisting of several thousands of smaller pieces, and ultimately recovered eighty fragments of these legends, by the aid of which he was enabled to restore nearly all of the description of the flood, and considerable portions of the other legends.

These tablets were originally at least twelve in number, forming one story or set of legends, the account of the flood being on the eleventh tablet. Of the inscription describing the flood there are fragments of three copies containing duplicate texts. These copies belong to the time of Assurbanipel, or about 660 years before the Christian era, and they were found in the library of that monarch in the palace at Nineveh. The original text, according to the statements of the tablets, must have belonged to the city of Erech, and it appears to have been either written in or translated into the Semitic Babylonian at a very early period. The date when this document was first written or translated is at present very difficult to decide. As evidences of the antiquity of the record, Mr. Smith cites the numerous variant readings of the three Assyrian copies which had crept into the text since the original was written; the occasional use of the ancient hieratic characters by the more modern Assyrian copyist, who did not know their meaning; and the incorporation with the Assyrian copies of sentences which in the original were mere glosses explanatory of the text. The divisions of the lines on the original documents have been recorded by the Assyrian scribe, and among other peculiarities, showing the high antiquity of the text, is the constant use of the personal pronoun nominative, which in latter times was usually indicated by the verbal form, but not expressed.

The text itself Mr. Smith cannot place in its original composition later than the seventeenth century before Christ, while it may be much older. It professes to belong to the time of a monarch whose name, written in monograms, Mr. Smith has been unable to read phonetically, and whom he therefore provisionally calls by the ordinary values of the signs of his name, Izdubar. This monarch, from the legendary description of his reign given in the tablets, evidently belonged to the mythical period. From the heading of the tablets giving his history, Mr. Smith supposes that Izdubar lived in the epoch immediately following the flood, and thinks, likewise, that he may have been the founder of the Babylonian monarchy, perhaps the Nimrod of Scripture. This, however, is pure conjecture. After showing how it was quite natural that an early Chaldean document from Erech should be transported to Nineveh, copied and placed in the royal library there, Mr. Smith introduces the story of the flood proper with a short account of the tablets which precede it, and which account for its introduction into the narrative. Izdubar, the hero of these legends, flourished soon after the flood, and the centre of most of his exploits was the city of Erech, now called Warka, which must have been one of the most ancient cities in the world. Four cities only are mentioned in these inscriptions—Babel, Erech, Surrippak and Nipur. Two of these, Babel and Erech, are the first two capitals of Nimrod, and the last, Nipur, according to the Talmud, is the same as Calneh, the fourth city of Nimrod.

On the first five tablets of the history of Izdubar Mr. Smith has not recognized any fragment, but in the mass of material which he has collected it is possible that some portions may belong to this part of the story. Izdubar, having conquered Beleau, put on his crown, and woed and won the Princess Ishtar—the same as Venus—who was queen of beauty, but somewhat inconstant, for she had already a husband, a deity, called the "Son of Life." In course of time Izdubar fell into some illness and came to fear death, man's last great enemy. Now, the Babylonians believed in the existence of a patriarch named Sisit—the Xisuthrus of the Greeks—who was supposed to have been translated and to have attained to immortality without death. Izdubar, according to the notions of the time, resolved to seek Sisit, to ascertain how he became immortal, that he might attain to a similar honor. Izdubar had a guiding dream, the story of which is unfortunately very mutilated, few fragments of it remaining, and his subsequent journey is not in much better condition. After long wanderings he falls into company with a seaman named Urhamsi—a name similar to the Orchamus of the Greeks. Izdubar and Urhamsi fit out a vessel to continue the search for Sisit, and they sail along for a month and fifteen days and arrive at some region near the mouth of the Euphrates, where Sisit is supposed to dwell. In this journey by water there are fresh adventures, and, in their course, Urhamsi tells Izdubar of the waters of death, of which he states, "The waters of death thy hand will not cleanse." At the time when Izdubar and Urhamsi are approaching him, Sisit is sleeping. The tablet here is too mutilated to inform us how they came to see each other, but it appears probable from the context that Sisit was seen in company with his wife, a long distance off, separated from Izdubar by a stream.

To be continued.

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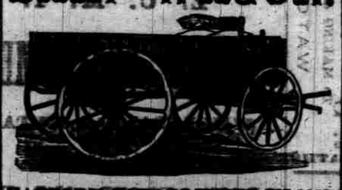

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