

and the hieroglyphics of Egypt to a time very near to that of the deluge, and we know that the earliest post-diluvian colonists of Europe erected megalithic monuments on which they engraved markings mysterious to us, but, perhaps to them, significant of great events in their history. To us the most important of these records of the deluge, in addition to the Hebrew Scriptures, are preserved in the tablets of baked clay which have been disinterred from the library of Assurbanipal, King of Nineveh, the grandson of the biblical Sennacherib. This enlightened monarch, living at a time when the Assyrian Empire had attained its highest degree of prosperity, between 600 and 700 B.C., conceived the idea of collecting the earliest Babylonian records, for his own gratification and for the instruction of his people. He caused copies of the oldest documents preserved in the Chaldean temples to be engraved on tablets of fine clay, afterward baked into tiles, and thus preserved for all time. These precious documents, some of them probably of great antiquity in his own time, he caused to be stored in the record-chamber of his palace, and such of them as have been collected now enrich the museums of European capitals.

One series of these tablets relates the history of a great Chaldean hero, Isdubar or Gilgames, lord of the city Erech,* a mighty hunter and warrior, and apparently identical with the biblical Nimrod. His story, read into modern language, seems to indicate that he became an innovator in religious matters. He neglected the time-honored worship of Istar or Astarte, the mother of men, symbolized by the moon and the planet Venus, and under the guidance of a shaman or prophet named Heabani, who appears in sculptures in the guise of an American medicine-man, clad in a bull's skin and with horns on his head, to have gone over to the worship of other gods. Istar resents this secession from her service, and visits him with a noisome disease, and he is advised that if he will consult a certain Hasisadra or Um-Nepisthim, who enjoys an immortal life and resides in an island at the mouths of the Euphrates and Tigris, he will be healed. He makes the pilgrimage, meeting with many adventures, and on visiting the immortal sage is not only relieved of his malady, but, as Hasisadra is the Chaldean Noah, called Xisuthrus by the Greeks, the story of the deluge is related to the hero and is incorporated in the poem, of which it now constitutes by much the most interesting portion. It was first translated by the late George Smith more than twenty years ago, and other translations have been made by several German and English scholars—the latest being that of Mr. Pinches of the British Museum.† In its more essential features it corresponds closely with the account in Genesis, but recognizes a number of gods at variance with one another, and embellishes the story with many fanciful features. It makes the

* One of the towns said in Genesis to have belonged to Nimrod—"Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh."

† Pinches' translation is given in the well-known "International Teachers' Bible," published by Messrs. Collins; Bible Readers' Manual, p. 12.