

The Ancients Were Modern

DISCOVERIES WHICH SHOW THAT EASTERN PEOPLES OF FOUR, FIVE, AND SIX THOUSAND YEARS AGO WERE FAMILIAR WITH A LONG LIST OF THE CONVENIENCES COMMONLY REGARDED AS MODERN INVENTIONS, AND HAD A CIVILIZATION IN MANY RESPECTS AS ADVANCED AS OURS

By May Bosman

WE of to-day are always talking of our progressiveness, our modernity. It would surprise most of us to learn that five and six thousand years ago, or even more, there were probably a score of peoples who, in many ways, were just as modern as ourselves.

Out of the soil and dust of the East there have come enough decipherable data to reconstruct a fairly complete history of the civil and political life of one of these nations, Southern Babylonia, in 3000 B.C. We also have an almost equally complete retrospect of Northern Babylonia, Sumeria, Amurru, ancient Egypt, and a dozen others even further back than that—4000 and 4500 B.C.; and in all these we find remarkable similarities to some present-day survey of methods and customs in America, or England, or any of the most advanced and civilized countries.

Babylonians and Sumerians, for instance, do not seem to have differed greatly from us. These ancient dwellers on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates, in the land now known as Mesopotamia, knew and practised many of our most cherished and lauded present-day "innovations," "inventions," and "discoveries" in matters of business, law, religion, and municipal and state administration.

As far back as 4000 B.C. they had developed an elaborate system of filing letters and documents. They had filing-cabinets with proper clay labels hung on them, and a clay card index, not only in the temple—which was the center of the commercial and civil life of the community in which it stood, as well as of its religious life—but in their business offices and private homes. Proofs of this have been found by several

archeologists, the most recent, perhaps, having been published by Professors Clarence E. Keiser and Raymond Philip Dougherty.

The Babylonians were among the most meticulous business people the world has ever seen. Filed away in their private archives are found receipted bills, inventories of all sorts, deeds, personal papers, and innumerable letters. They wrote all their letters, apparently, in duplicate, despatching one copy and keeping the other on file for future reference. This was done even in the case of social letters, as evidenced by feminine files that have been dug up.

Indeed, copies were made of every document drawn up, it would seem. Often both copies were filed away in widely different places, one being discovered by an archeologist years after the other has been deciphered, and miles from the first find.

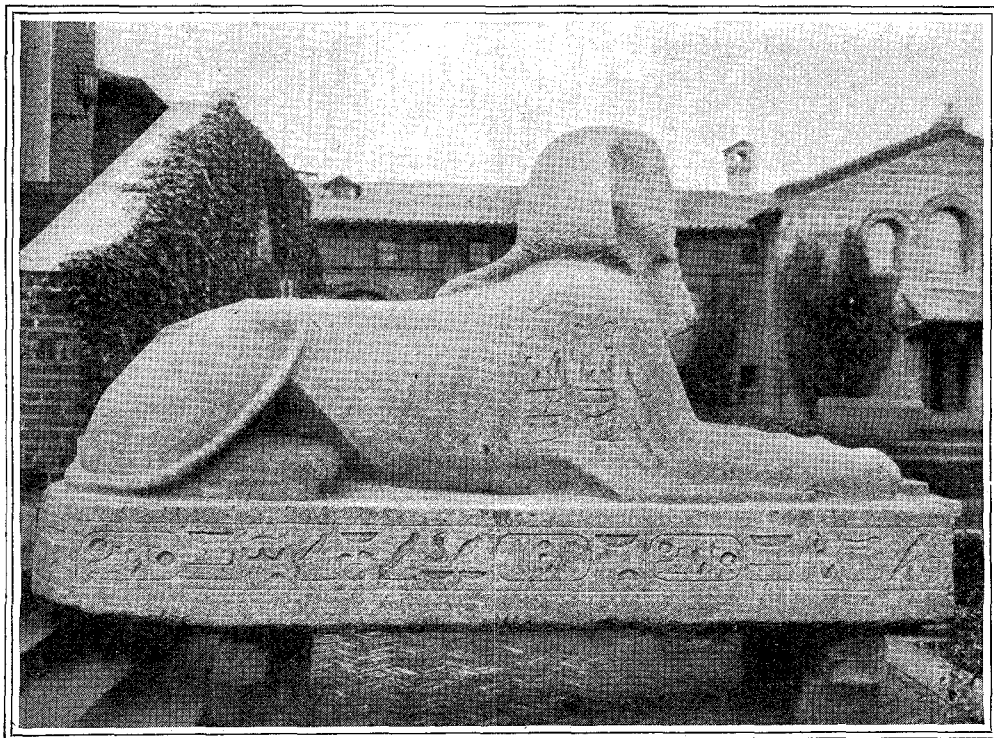
BABYLONIAN LETTERS AND MAILS

Babylonians were acquainted with the basket case, probably for desk use—a clay or copper ancestor of our wire receptacle set at a busy man's elbow, with letters in it waiting for his inspection and signature. Babylonian letters were "dictated and read," from the evidences on specimens unearthed and translated. In the margins of these are notes like "Omit—mistake of scribe," or a line is inserted in another's handwriting and the notation in the margin explains, "Omitted by scribe."

These letters, although modern in intent and contents, are curious in appearance. They were scratched with a sharp instrument, perhaps a stylus, on tiny tablets molded of adhesive clay and used while wet. The characters are what archeologists

call cuneiform, and look to the uninitiated not unlike stenographic notes. When the letter was done, it was laid in the sun to dry or baked in an oven. Then it was slipped into a clay envelope, sand was shaken in all around it, so that its sides would not be rubbed and, rubbing, be obliterated, and the flap of the envelope was

A dead-letter office, or at any event a defective postal administration, is suggested by a number of unopened letters found in one spot above the buried city of Larsa, the biblical Ellasar. Dr. Reisner has found evidence of a parcel-post division, and there is no doubt that an express and freight service existed, with an efficient system of clay



A SPHINX OF RAMESSES II (ABOUT 1300 B.C.), WHICH NOW GUARDS THE ENTRANCE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM, PHILADELPHIA—THIS MUSEUM CONTAINS ONE OF THE FINEST COLLECTIONS OF BABYLONIAN ANTIQUITIES

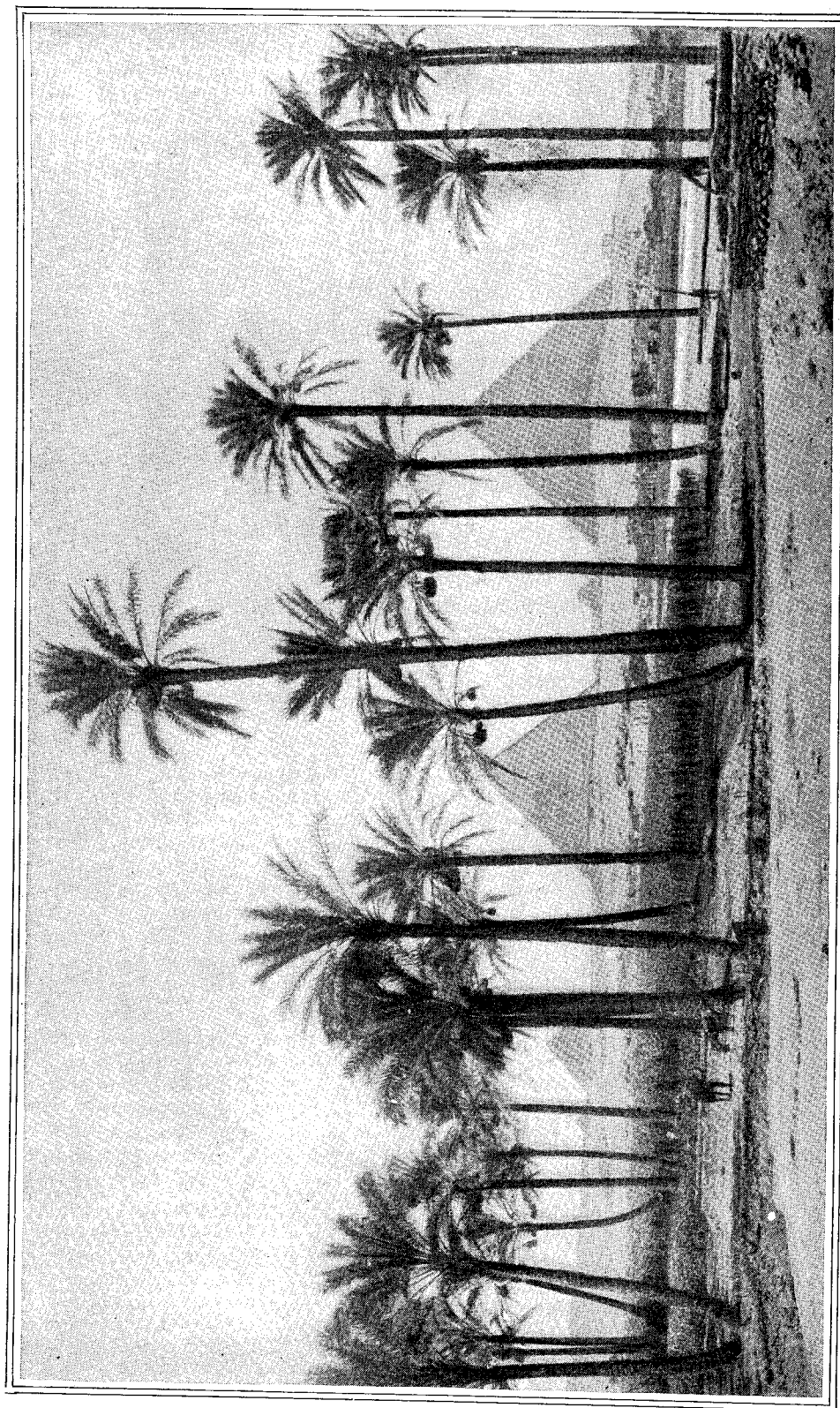
closed by pressing down the wet clay with the sender's seal. This seal impression stood in lieu of a return address. On the face of the envelope was the address of the person for whom it was intended.

Ancient peoples had a postal system. Many communications were undoubtedly sent by personal courier, but big cities had government messengers and some kind of a central office. In 2000 B.C. there were in operation not only interurban but also international mails. Professor George A. Barton and Dr. Reisner, well-known decipherers of cuneiform, are convinced of this. They have found records indicating that the cost of the interurban post was "shared by the different cities" between which it operated.

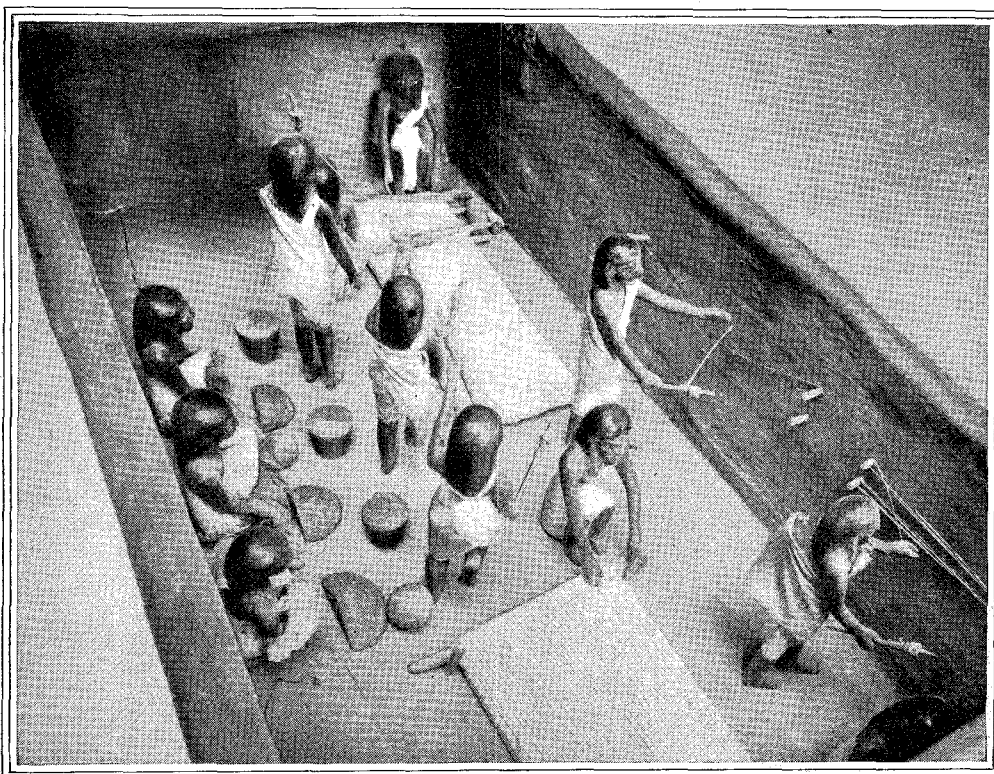
tags, or *bullae*, which Keiser has reconstructed. The label was receipted by the express delivery man and then filed by the recipient to be used, later, in balancing his accounts and in taking a business or household inventory. The Babylonians were probably the greatest inventory-takers that ever lived. By their inventories alone, a great deal of ancient history can be rewritten.

ANCIENT TRADE ON SEAS AND RIVERS

Freight was transported by caravan or boat. When by boat, clay bills of lading were made out in triplicate. Professor Barton has deciphered duplicate bills of lading for a shipment of grain, preserved in the Haverford Collection. One of these



A TYPICAL LANDSCAPE IN EGYPT, SHOWING SAND-HILLS UNDER WHICH LIE THE UNTOUCHED RUINS OF AN ANCIENT CITY—THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF SIMILAR SITES IN THE EAST, STILL UNEXPLORED BY THE ARCHEOLOGIST



AN EXHIBIT IN THE KHEDIVIAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES AT CAIRO, EGYPT—MODEL FIGURES FROM A TOMB NEAR THEBES, REPRESENTING WOMEN ENGAGED IN SPINNING FLAX AND WEAVING CLOTH

the boatman probably attached to his cargo in a conspicuous place; the other he hung about his neck. "As the boatman in these days wore very little clothing," the professor observes, "the bill of lading could have been no great burden around his neck." It was about three-eighths of an inch thick and one and one-fourth inches long. The Code of Hammurabi, written some time prior to 2000 B.C., made a Babylonian boatman responsible for goods lost or damaged in transit, so it behooved him to watch the bills. A third complete memorandum of the shipment was retained by the shipper for his always methodically kept business files.

All these ancient nations supported some kind of a merchant marine and a navy for use in time of war. Babylonians, Egyptians, and their contemporaries conducted a more or less extensive sea commerce, their vessels plying the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf, and sailing far inland through a network of canals and waterways. Evidences of trade competition survive in pottery remains, for in-

stance. There is evidence that the center of the industry shifted in different periods, and there are plentiful samples of the cheap wares that impelled the shift.

Those who sail the seas are necessarily ship-builders. When the Babylonians or the Sumerians had a vessel ready for launching, it was named and "consecrated." We name ours and "christen" it.

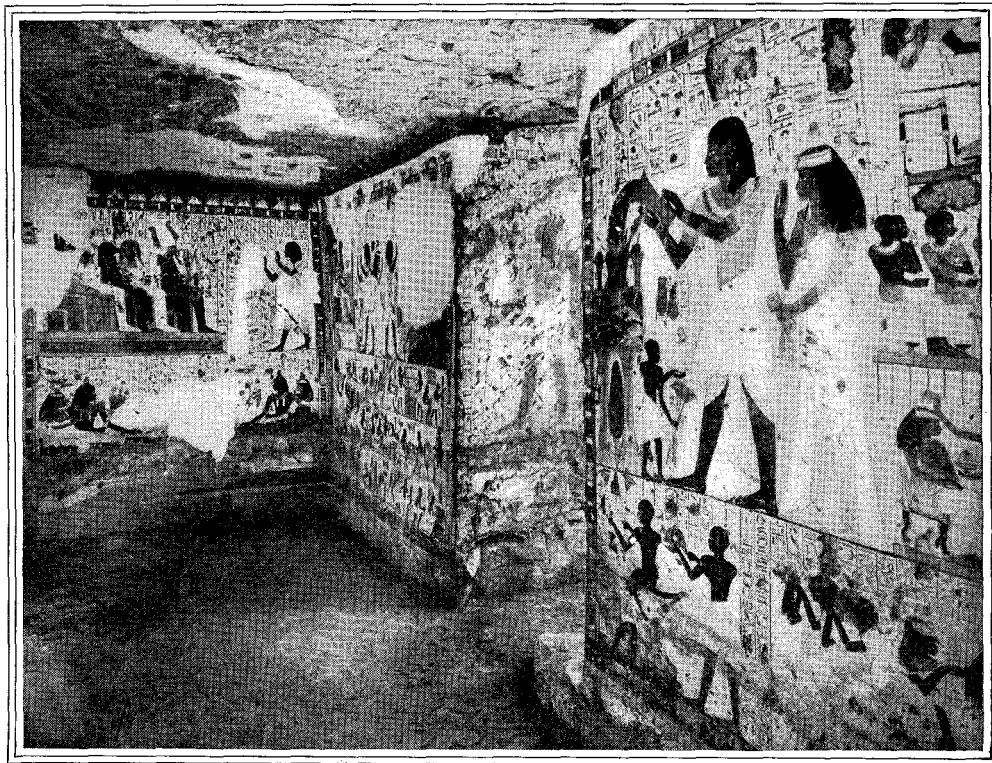
Their canals, waterways, locks, and general irrigation of arid lands are achievements over the remains of which modern science marvels. The ancient Egyptians had locks, but they were primitive contrivances of wood, worked laboriously by man power. Babylonian locks were of concrete, and some powerful leverage was employed to carry boats from a higher to a lower level, and back again.

We have no relics of cranes and engines used by these ancient peoples, but the ruins of their buildings establish the certainty of some kind of hoisting-machines of prodigious strength. Engineers who could build pyramids surely must have had mammoth derricks.

Being great engineers, the Babylonians were also skilled mathematicians. Their bookkeepers could add, subtract, multiply, and divide such sums in their heads as no modern would attempt. Mental arithmetic, Dr. Stephen Langdon points out, was probably the only arithmetic taught in the schools which in every city were connected with the local temple. Exercise tablets

no better rules, since, for this part of speech.

We have found no better numeral system than the Babylonians', for we are using theirs. They had calendars, but these differed in various centers, according to the calculations of the astronomer in charge. Langdon reminds us that we are using the Babylonian year, week, and month. In



THE DECORATED TOMB OF APUKI AND NEBAMUN, TWO THEBAN ARTISTS OF A PERIOD EARLIER THAN 1300 B.C.—DURING THEIR LIVES THESE ARTISTS HELD A HIGH SOCIAL POSITION IN ANCIENT THEBES

that have been found demonstrate that boys and girls—the sexes received equal education—were taught to do arithmetical problems involving at least three and four digits in each number without setting down their processes. No processes are ever found; only the result, often marked by the impress of a child's thumb used to eradicate a mistake on the wet clay.

Thousands of clay text-books and exercise tablets have been discovered. Dr. Arno Poebel translated a number, among them a Babylonian history with a list of kings going back to the Deluge, and a Sumerian grammar dealing exclusively with the use of the preposition. We have found

Amurru, an almost forgotten country rediscovered within the last ten years by Dr. Albert T. Clay, the week was five days long, in contrast to the Babylonian week of seven days, with special sacrifices in the temple on the seventh day. This last observance suggests our Sabbath, and was perhaps its direct origin.

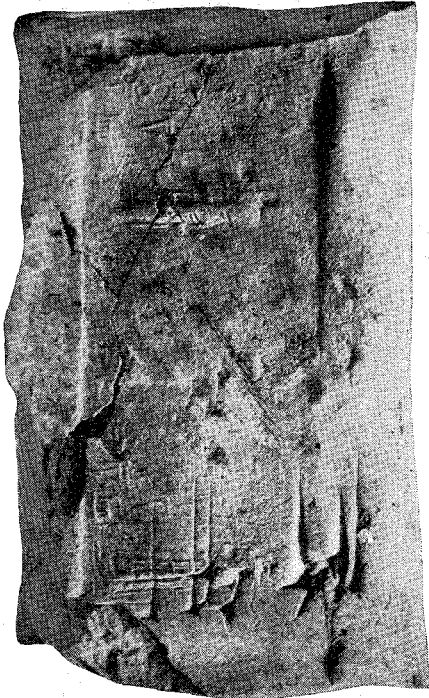
Indeed, there can be little that is new in religious forms. Langdon claims that his translations from early Sumerian tablets, dated unknown centuries before Hammurabi, who was six hundred years before Moses, prove that there was among the Sumerians, "who were the historical predecessors of the Semitic Babylonians," a rit-

ual embracing every feature of worship that has ever been in use among any people, Christian or heathen, from that day to this. It included all the sacrifices, genuflections, processions, incense-using, prayers, liturgical singing, priests—"everything that has ever been in the rubrics of religious worship in any subsequent age."

Land, then as now, was valuable; it could be bought, sold, and mortgaged. Its

practised, and "city beautifuls" may be supposed. Connected with each temple were nurseries from which workmen were despatched to set out trees and shrubs; public parks were institutions.

In the ruins of most ancient cities hitherto uncovered a foreign quarter can be traced. Flinders-Petrie, one of the greatest of the Egyptologists, was the first to note this in his excavations at Memphis. Art colonies also existed, like the Latin Quarter of Paris. James Henry Breasted



CLAY ENVELOPE (LEFT) AND LETTER TABLET (RIGHT) ADDRESSED TO ELMESHUM, A LADY OF LARSA, THE BIBLICAL ELLASAR, ABOUT 2000 B.C.—THE LETTER WAS SLIPPED INTO THE ENVELOPE AND SAND WAS SHAKEN IN AROUND IT TO KEEP THE INSCRIPTION FROM RUBBING

value was determined — "assessed" — by the location and productiveness of the soil itself, not by the building upon it. Here we see that the "single tax" is not a modern novelty.

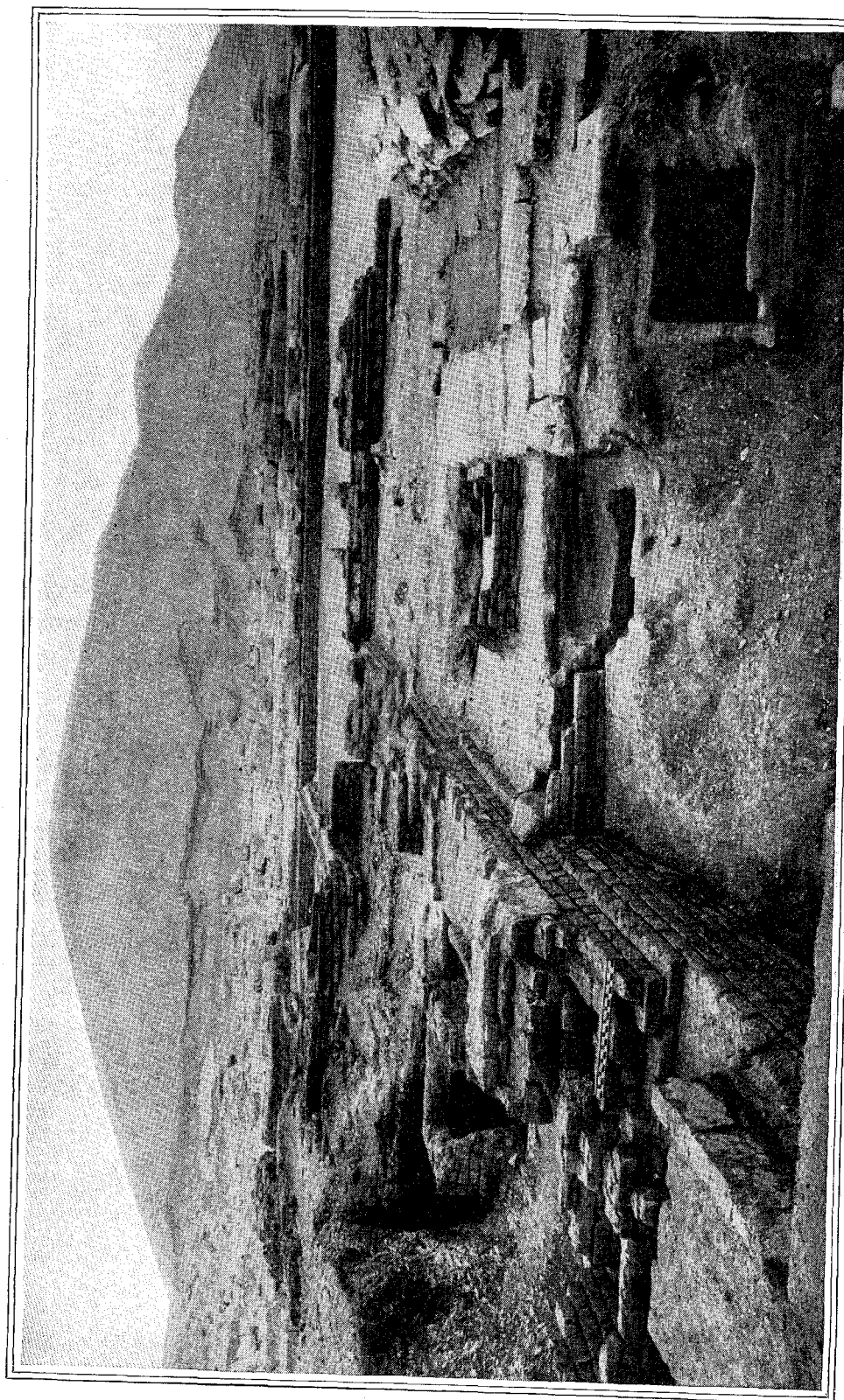
CITY LIFE IN ANCIENT DAYS

Babylonians looked upon the land as the only permanent thing in a country where the average building material was of no great permanence. They used sun-dried brick, and we may conclude that an ancient city had aspects that would not be wholly unfamiliar to us. City streets were paved with cobble-stones and asphalt. Gudea, a priest who became ruler of Sumerian Lagash as far back as 3000 B.C., knew and used asphalt. Landscape gardening was

found a sculptor's studio in the ruins of an Egyptian city, and dates it about 1400 B.C.

The "high cost of living" was only too familiar to the dwellers of these ancient cities. In the Yale Babylonian Seminary there is a tablet outlining the family budget of a householder of 2000 B.C. In the margins are little despairing notes. Unpaid bills were found filed away with this record.

When land was bought and sold in Babylonia, the transaction was marked by the execution of very modern deeds in duplicate, properly sealed. One copy was filed away in a building reserved for such documents—a kind of city hall, or administration building, which may have been a part of the temple, and which was certainly on temple grounds. A registrar of deeds was

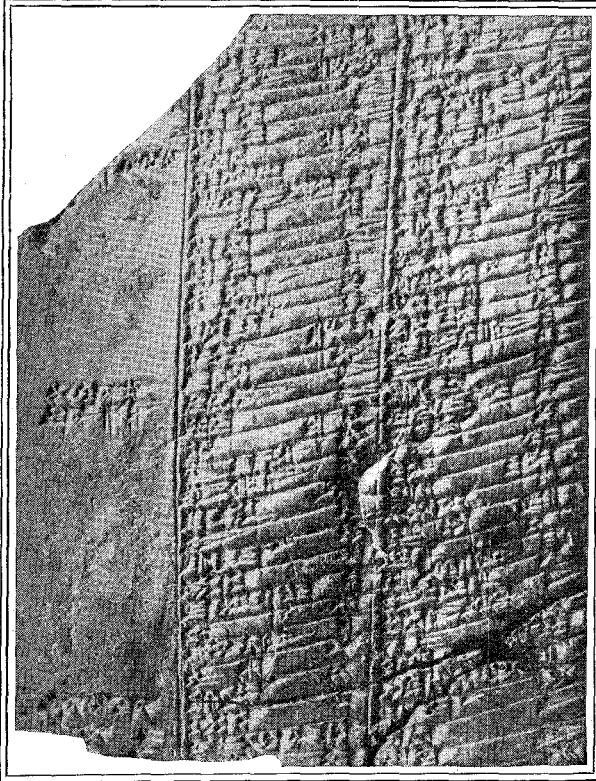


AN ANCIENT BABYLONIAN CITY IN COURSE OF EXCAVATION—IN THE FOREGROUND ARE THE WALLS OF A LARGE BUILDING, WITH THE ENTRANCES OF TUNNELS DUG BY THE EXCAVATORS—THE PICTURE GIVES SOME IDEA OF THE ENORMOUS LABOR INVOLVED IN UNEARTHING THE RECORDS OF THE DISTANT PAST

in attendance. The custom continued into Old Testament days, as is shown by the account of a real-estate transaction in the thirty-second chapter of Jeremiah.

Official records are numerous, and often are mingled in an archive with endless judicial decisions and a conglomerate of busi-

ness contracts, letters of credit, despatches, promissory notes, endorsed notes, commitments of bailment, receipts of rents, wage-lists, and records of purchases and sales of every conceivable thing from slaves to dates. Sumeria and Babylonia had judges and courts, and there must have been a high order of legal talent. After deciphering hundreds of tablets dug out of the earth above Larsa, Dr. Henry Lutz—to quote but one of the archeologists who have made similar studies—declares that he found no records that would denote a Babylonian civilization in 3000 B.C. inferior to ours.



PART OF A SUMERIAN LAW CODE WRITTEN ABOUT 2500 B.C., PROBABLY THE OLDEST CODE OF LAWS KNOWN TO MAN—THIS TABLET IS IN THE YALE COLLECTION

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BUSINESS IN ANCIENT BABYLON

Business seems to have been conducted on a scale that we would not call mean.

One big firm in Babylon, the Rothschilds of their day, did an uninterrupted banking business for six hundred years. The University of Pennsylvania Museum has many of their books. Yale has records of one Balmunamhe, a fabulously rich merchant of 2000 B.C., the Rockefeller of his time, who with his father held a monopoly of trade in several lines. His name appears on a multitude of the city's legal, real-estate, and government records. He was a heavy taxpayer, and on several occasions seems to have been elected to some government office.

Where there is wealth, there has been labor to create that wealth—and, of a surety, there have been labor troubles. In a tablet in the Yale Collection a Babylonian overseer, living some time around 3000 B.C., announces to his men a distribution of shares, but excludes the bricklayers from this proposed sharing of profits between employer and employed. Apparently the bricklayers had been on strike. They are bidden to attend their master and "state your grievance. Yours is not to benefit unless you attend."

Besides proof of profit-sharing, Babylonian business has handed down other evidences of progressive, humane practises that might well interest moderns. The temple of Erech, for instance—and we do not yet

know how many other temples, for more tablets must be deciphered before we find out—had a sick benefit fund and old age pensions in 3000 B.C. It also took a paternal interest in the children of its employees, educated them, and, as soon as they were old enough to work, apprenticed them either in the temple or outside.

This interest was extended to girls as well as to boys. Women held a high place in ancient Babylonia. She owned houses and slaves; inherited in her own right; gave promissory notes; paid taxes; went on another's bond, sometimes a man's; received equal pay for equal work with him in the temple. She was promoted over him, as the wage-lists covering several years in the temple of Erech attest.

In times of war we know that she worked in the fields, taking men's places. Wars were frequent, conscription the rule. There were frequent censuses—probably for purposes of the draft.

Light on manifold phases of civilization and on various classes of society are revealed by each new translation of ancient records. Physicians had their fees regulated by a section of the Code of Hammurabi. They could charge only five shekels for attendance on a *mushkenum*, or laborer, as against ten shekels if the patient was a member of the *avilum*, or bourgeois class.

Farmers had a bureau, or grange, with the nearest temple as headquarters. The temple looked after the farmer's welfare, loaned him blooded cattle for breeding purposes and money when he needed it—with or without interest, according to his reputation for industry—bought his crops and resold them for him, and sent him laborers for the harvest.

Priests and scholars and princes owned extensive libraries of valuable clay books laid on shelves that reached from floor to ceiling, with amanuenses and librarians in attendance and catalogues of contents. Ditto-marks appear in these, and in other places—ditto-marks precisely like ours, and employed for the same purpose. Dictionaries were known and used. Many have been found, perhaps the best-preserved being from the library of Ashurbanipal—the Sardanapalus of the Greeks—whose life and reign in Nineveh ended in 625 B.C.

One might continue indefinitely, quoting from the finds and the deductions therefrom made by the few scholars who can decipher cuneiform—I am told there are only about twelve men in the world who can read Sumerian, and eighteen who read Babylonian. More than a million clay records have already been dug out of the ground, and about half of these have been scraped of their encrusted dirt of ages and read. Many are duplicate copies, or overlap data already acquired, but the great majority reveal new historical material of enormous value.

These million tablets are but a beginning of the work that archeologists have yet to do. Hundreds of ancient cities in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Asia Minor still lie buried under tons of sand, rock, and refuse. Under a thousand heaps of fragments and rubbish there may lie archives priceless to research workers. For two thousand years the sites upon which various excavation parties are now working for the different museums of the world were used by the natives living near them as quarries for building materials. The loss in monuments and documents must have been appalling. An incident that gives an idea of what has been destroyed was the rescue of the Tel el Amarna tablets, containing the interesting official correspondence between Palestine and the suzerain government of Egypt under Amen-Hotep III and IV (1400-1350 B.C.) When found, an old Egyptian peasant woman was pulverizing them for use as a fertilizer!

THE CALL AT THE CASEMENT

IN at the casement comes a call
My lips may not transmute,
As luring and ethereal
As is a fairy flute.

It seems, the while I list intent,
'Tis blent of breeze and bird,
Or like some rare old instrument
To sudden music stirred.

It has the charm of lyric streams
That ripple o'er the stones;
The ecstasy of singing dreams
In its faint undertones.

It needs must heed—I have no choice—
Be out and far away,
The follower of that truant voice,
The spirit of the May!

Clinton Scollard

The Silver Veil

BY RAY CUMMINGS

Illustrated by Dudley Gloyne Summers

HE was one of those unusual characters whom it has always been my pleasure to make and hold as friends. I had not seen him for several years when, quite by chance, I came upon him again in New York—three thousand miles from the city where I had first made his acquaintance.

He was what you might call a seer—a professional mystic, whose powers over the occult, even in those old days in San Francisco, when he was beginning his career, brought many a trusting believer to his feet, and many a dollar of their money into his pocket.

Perhaps you may think him merely a charlatan, playing upon a credulous public with the cleverness of a born trickster. Undoubtedly he was that, to a degree; and yet the line of demarcation between his chicanery and his true psychic power was always, to me, quite indistinguishable. I was sure the trickery was there. Indeed, he once laughingly admitted as much when I accused him; yet never could I separate the dross from the gold, or determine the proportion of each.

But whether seer or trickster, he was likable enough to be any man's friend. When I met him in New York he was about thirty-five years old, tall and lean—thin, almost—but wiry with an unconscious, lithe grace. He was smooth-shaven; his skin was unusually white—a pallor, however, that suggested nothing of ill-health. His features were masculinely strong, yet of almost a feminine delicacy of mold. He wore his black, wavy hair a trifle long; his dark eyes looked out through lashes heavy as a girl's.

The strong feeling of friendship we had built up during those former years sprang readily into the hearts of both of us at this chance meeting. He insisted on taking me immediately to his studio on Central Park

South; and I could see, even before I reached the luxurious rooms where he both lived and conducted his business, that the man had prospered.

"Life is evidently treating you very kindly, Dorian," I said.

He smiled one of his rare smiles.

"You shall see," he answered, a boyish note of pride in his voice. "Things are somewhat different from the old days, Carl!"

We entered his somber, dimly lighted reception-room. Luxury and refinement showed on every hand. That always was Dorian's way. There never had been about him or his methods a hint of the garish, of the cheap and melodramatic striving for effect that is so often characteristic of the professed mystic.

My eager questions about his work met with ready response.

"For years, Carl, I have been in daily contact with one great desire of the human mind—the *desire to look into the future*. It is a universal desire—you know that as well as I. Every human being feels it at one time or another. To know what the future holds—to lift its silver veil and stand face to face with destiny—who has not longed for that?"

I remembered his crystal-gazing, the fortune-telling of his earlier years, and all those other devices and methods of foretelling the future that he and others of his profession must of necessity put to constant use. I mentioned them.

"Of course," he exclaimed. "But neither I nor any one else has ever done more, by crystal-gazing or any other method that you name, than to draw back a corner of the veil for an instant. That is not what I mean. I mean looking into the future from the present moment to the very instant of death itself; spreading out the remaining span of life like a panorama