

SOCIETY SPLIT OVER BABYLONIAN TABLETS

Hilprecht Dispute About Nippur Excavations Not Confined to Philadelphia Savants.

LIKELY TO QUIT UNIVERSITY

Belief That His Resignation Will Be Accepted—Officials Reply to Charge of Tampering with Inscriptions.

Special to The New York Times.

PHILADELPHIA, Nov. 26.—Society in one of the greatest American cities divided into opposing camps; old friendships broken; a controversy that, starting three years ago, still becomes more bitter day by day; a dispute that continually involves more and more persons, who originally had nothing to do with it. This is the situation in Philadelphia at the present time.

The cause of it? A few clay tablets which about one American in two millions is able to read, clay tablets on which Babylonian clerks painfully inscribed certain business records so many thousand years ago that a difference of opinion as to just what millennium before Christ any particular tablet belongs to appears relatively unimportant.

It is an extraordinary quarrel—that between Dr. Herman Volrath Hilprecht and his friends and supporters on the one side and Dr. Hilprecht's critics and their friends on the other. Extraordinary not on account of anything unusual in its original character—disputes between archaeologists are as frequent now as in the days when the Humanists called each other unpleasant names (in Ciceronian Latin) in the Gardens of Lorenzo the Magnificent and the later days of Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Blotton of Aldgate. The Philadelphia quarrel is remarkable, in the first place, for its almost unexampled bitterness, and in the second place because of the many well-known persons who have unwillingly become entangled in it.

Dr. Hilprecht himself, as most persons know, is a scholar of international reputation. The account of his achievements and the list of his distinctions in the American "Who's Who" occupies nearly half a page. Still a comparatively young man—he was born in Germany in 1859—he is a member of many learned societies in this country and Europe, has received honors from England, Germany, Turkey, Denmark, and from various American bodies, and has written many important works on archaeological subjects both in English and German.

It is this eminent student who is accused by other students, equally eminent, of various particularly shabby frauds—silly, unnecessary frauds—and who is hitting back with quite as much force as has been directed against him. "Fraud," in speaking of the accusations against Dr. Hilprecht, is used in the sense of scholarly or learned fraud. In what, according to the latest accounts, he is saying about some of his enemies, no such limited definition is necessary.

As to some of the earlier stages of the Hilprecht controversy, newspaper readers are fairly familiar. It is declared that the professor went to Nippur to take up the work of excavation that had been begun by the Rev. Dr. John P. Peters on behalf of the University of Pennsylvania, and that in his reports on the work Dr. Hilprecht deliberately ignored what had been done by Dr. Peters and by a number of young scholars. The University of Pennsylvania's labors at Nippur, which, the resultant vendetta among the archaeologists notwithstanding, have been productive of an immense addition to the world's information regarding the earliest known civilization, have extended over a period of many years. From the earliest period Dr. Hilprecht was in general charge of the work. What has been continually and vigorously declared is that the excavations which first excited the entire archaeological world and proved the existence at Nippur of a field of amazing richness, were not due to his initiative, were, indeed, continued despite his protest.

"Dr. Peters was the first field director," said one of Dr. Hilprecht's critics, "Dr. Hilprecht having general control. In the first season Prof. Hilprecht left Nippur after a short visit, declaring that he did not believe the excavations there would reveal anything. But, as the world knows, very important finds were made, and then Dr. Peters resigned from his position on the expedition staff, owing to his dissatisfaction with Dr. Hilprecht's management. Dr. Peters was succeeded as field director by J. H. Haynes, who had assisted Dr. Peters, and Mr. Haynes had practically concluded the work of the expedition before Prof. Hilprecht returned to Nippur. Prof. Hilprecht did not personally find any of the bricks or tablets or other objects. Indeed, they were all boxed and ready for shipment before he arrived, and he saw only a few which were unpacked for his inspection."

This is the start of the trouble—the accusation of Dr. Hilprecht had taken the glory that in reality belonged to others. The controversy before long led to another much more serious charge against the German-American scholar.

It may be described as the "Temple Library" quarrel—a quarrel that agitated learned circles and societies all over the civilized world and that had all the unpleasant effects of an unexpected bombshell in the placid pleasantries of Philadelphia.

Many thousands of words have been written about this controversy, but the whole thing can be put into a sentence: Dr. Hilprecht was accused of reproducing in his book on Nippur a certain cuneiform tablet and describing it as having been dug up from the site of the "Temple Library" at Nippur, whereas, in reality, he had bought it from Daniel Z. Noorian, a dealer of New York and the East.

Mr. Noorian declared that he sold the tablet to Dr. Hilprecht—that it came from a merchant of Bagdad named Abu Habba, who had obtained it from a peasant, who had dug it up at a distance of not less than 300 miles from Nippur.

The "Temple Library" controversy raged long and fiercely—its embers, indeed, have not yet cooled. Dr. Hilprecht's critics asserted that the "Temple Library" was, to put it bluntly, a figment of the Professor's own imagination—that there was no such thing as a Temple Library, or, at any rate, no trace of one. The immense numbers of inscribed tablets found at Nippur (at various points, it was asserted) were said to be more in the nature of present-day books for young scholars—multiplication tables, lists of weights and measures, syllabaries, and the like.

Many of these tablets had been translated by Dr. Hilprecht, and some of his bitterest critics could not withhold their admiration of the scholarship displayed by him in this work.

The wretched dispute continued. Among other organizations that became involved was the Society of Biblical Literature, before which charges against Dr. Hilprecht were brought. After a long discussion the society demanded from Prof. Hilprecht a complete recantation. This was at the beginning of 1908. Some two months afterward Dr. Hilprecht issued a volume of 350 pages as his reply. In it he paid his respects to two of his accusers in the following words:

"In all of this controversy thrust upon the public and me I have had but two real antagonists. Dr. John P. Peters and Dr. Morris Jastrow, Jr., have either originated or inspired everything that has been done, said or suggested.

"In the industrious promulgation of the charge that I have been dishonest as a scholar and scientist and even the vulgar purloiner of property belonging to others, Dr. Peters has avowed his motives to have been anxiety for the good name of American scholarship.

"I would be a hypocrite did I avow anything but the strongest resentment of the course Dr. Peters has seen fit to take. Nevertheless, Dr. Peters in all his enormous activity against me has been open and above board.

"It has not been so with Dr. Jastrow. He has at times fed a hidden stream that has come to the surface only in many a swamp and morass without willing disclosure of the parent source. His activities have been persistent and untiring, and the method and means employed by him surely most contemptible.

"Under the pretext of righteous indignation, he sets himself to work gradually to

poison the minds of both laymen and scholars who do not happen to be familiar with Assyriological discussions, and by taking words and sentences out of their context, in which alone they are intelligible; by posing as an authority in certain branches of Assyriology, as to which his statements and declarations are lacking the necessary foundation, and, therefore, carry no weight among Assyriologists; by making his personal views appear as facts, when they are but malicious insinuations and unjustifiable accusations."

Before the Hilprecht question had been disposed of (it was finally shelved) by the Society of Biblical Literature, an even more serious attack was made upon the Professor. This was in the Board of Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania and the Board of Managers of the Department of Archaeology and Museum of the university. The outcome was what Dr. Peters called "a most beautiful example of the art of whitewashing"—and some resignations.

There was one phase of these charges which so far has never been made public. Dr. Hilprecht was accused not only of the "literary dishonesty" described in the foregoing, but also of keeping from the University of Pennsylvania certain of the finest of the objects that had been dug up at Nippur. A chance remark by a member of Dr. Hilprecht's own family, at a social gathering in Philadelphia was said to have resulted in the discovery that—for instance—a remarkable goat's head that ought to have been at the university was at the professor's home in Jena. It was not suggested that there had been actual dishonesty on Dr. Hilprecht's part—only that he had failed fully to understand the terms of his contract with the university.

The animosities engendered by this dispute among the members of the university boards continue to this day—have, indeed, become more acute. Dr. Hilprecht is married to a very wealthy woman, a leader of Philadelphia society. She was Mrs. W. H. H. Robinson, daughter of Samuel A. Crozier, multi-millionaire mill owner. The marriage, which was the sensation of the day when it took place in 1903, was quite unexpected by the friends of either the bride or bridegroom. The Hilprechts' home in Philadelphia is a centre of artistic and musical culture. Mrs. Hilprecht was a great patron of music before her second marriage, and Dr. Hilprecht has, of course, attracted the artists and scholars.

And this is how Philadelphia society, which is no fonder of Assyriology than is society elsewhere, became involved. Dr. and Mrs. Hilprecht have many powerful friends. The university officials who took the anti-Hilprecht side are also influential. Result, the situation mentioned at the beginning of this article.

The crisis was reached a few days ago. Dr. Hilprecht, it was announced, had resigned his professorship in the University of Pennsylvania on account of what he declared to be actions "so petty and disgusting as to be almost beyond belief." He asserted that while he was in Germany last Summer he had been informed by friends in this country that some one had been tampering with "his tablets" from Nippur, had been making changes in the inscriptions. On hearing this he hurried back to America, and, with a committee, visited the museum of the University of Pennsylvania, and found that some of his most valuable tablets were missing and that others had been tampered with. On finding that this had been done he sent in his resignation. It is understood that the resignation will be accepted. It is said by some persons that Dr. Hilprecht is much surprised at being taken at his word.

However this may be, the university authorities put a very different construction to that of Dr. Hilprecht on the "tampering" with "his" tablets—which happen to belong to the university. It appears that while Dr. Hilprecht was away Dr. Byron Gordon was appointed director of the department of archaeology and museum of the university. This position is superior to that of Dr. Hilprecht, but when Dr. Gordon asked the person whom Dr. Hilprecht had left in charge of "his" cases at the museum for the keys, the person in question—a private employe of Dr. Hilprecht—flatly refused to deliver them. Thereupon, according to the officials' story, the services of a locksmith were obtained and entrance was forced. That any tablets were "tampered with" is an accusation the officials laugh at.

This is not to be taken as meaning that the information has been obtained from Dr. Gordon. It has not. He is silent. So is Dr. Hilprecht. The politest servant in Philadelphia tells inquirers at the Hilprecht home that Dr. Hilprecht is very sorry, but he has nothing to say.

And so the matter stands. On one side or the other, up to date, charges involving a goodly proportion of the crimes on the calendar have been made. "Tense" is an altogether insufficient word to describe the situation, and it is generally supposed that something, or somebody, is about to drop with a bang.

POSED AS MESSENGER TO ROB

Lad Stole a Valuable Coat When Lessberger's Maid Left the Door Open.

Following a visit at the home of Edward Lessberger, a rich metal manufacturer, 118 East Sixtieth Street, by a lad who professed to be a messenger boy, Mr. Lessberger's \$150 overcoat disappeared yesterday afternoon. It was recovered in a pawnshop in Third Avenue, where the lad—Alexander Maehr of 304 West Fifty-second Street—was trying to dispose of it. Maehr was locked up in the East Sixty-seventh Street Station, charged with grand larceny.

When Maehr called he said he was a messenger boy and had come in response to a call. The maid was sure no one had called a messenger, but he insisted that she ask. Leaving the door ajar, the girl went upstairs to ask Mrs. Lessberger, and when she returned she told the lad no call had been made. Maehr then left.

Ten minutes later Lessberger discovered that his overcoat had been taken from the hatrack which stands a few feet from the front door. Police Headquarters were notified and detectives started to look for the overcoat. They returned to the station without a trace of the missing property, but a moment later the telephone rang and the pawn broker notified the police that a young man was trying to pawn a coat that probably did not belong to him. The detectives went to the pawn shop and Maehr was arrested.

MAY BUY THE HOUSEKEEPER.

Proprietor of Collier's Weekly Negotiating for a Western Periodical.

Robert J. Collier, owner of Collier's Weekly, has obtained an option, it was learned yesterday, for the purchase of The Housekeeper, a weekly magazine published in Minneapolis. Mr. Collier said last night that the option which he holds still has three or four days to run, and that he would decide within a day or so whether or not he would close the purchase.

Mr. Collier said that if he bought The Housekeeper it would be as an investment, and that the periodical would be continued as an independent publication. As the transaction had not yet been closed, he could not, he said, go into more detail about his plans for it.

The Housekeeper is published by The Housekeeper Corporation of Minneapolis. It is credited with a circulation of some 350,000 copies. Lucian S. Kirtland is editor. It is the principal household periodical published in the West.

STOLE AUTO IN BROADWAY.

Chauffeur Says Motor Worth \$4,000

Was Taken from Before Metropolitan Opera House.

Bird H. Smith of 48 Convent Avenue reported to the police of the West Thirtieth Street Station last night the loss of an automobile worth between \$3,500 and \$4,000, belonging to his employer, George B. Post, of 129 East Sixty-ninth Street. He had left the automobile outside the Metropolitan Opera House, he said, while he was in a restaurant, and when he returned it was gone. Smith did not know the number of the car. The makers, he said, were the Pope Manufacturing Company.

Smith told the police that he had heard that two men jumped into the car and drove away, but that he was not able to get a description of them.

Detectives were detailed on the case.