

BIRTH OF CIVILISATION.

ELLIOT SMITH'S THEORY.

(BY G.M.L.)

In our Australian aborigines we have an example of a people of primitive mentality, obeying tribal rules, following a totem system, and retelling poetic legends whose significance they are quite unable to grasp. The aborigine is not alone in this respect, and, since Darwin's theory invaded every branch of science, the ethnologist has been imagining that some divine spirit within the human breast spoke softly to the savage, told him what was right and what was wrong, whom he was to marry and whom he was to leave alone, and whispered tales of wise gods into his inward ear.

W. J. Perry, in "The Growth of Civilisation," declares that the Australian aborigine has his legends, his ability to make polished stone instruments, and his totemism from stray wanderers from Egyptian colonies, established in New Guinea somewhere before the third millennium, B.C. The aborigine himself says that he owes his totemic system to strangers who came to them from the sky in time past, and then went away, presumably skywards. These men were from the outer fringe of that civilisation that was born in Egypt and from which all our civilisations have sprung.

When Sir James Fraser discovered in volume after volume of "The Golden Bough" that the same legends appeared in different shapes amongst primitive peoples scattered as far apart as the Bantus and the Red Indians, and that myths, like that of the Deluge, appear in lands separated by oceans, the Darwinism then in fashion explained the phenomena by declaring that the human species had sprung up in various parts of the earth, and had independently spun the same religions, the same myths, the same epics, unconscious of the fact that other tribes, oceans distant, were evolving in precisely the same way.

At the beginning of the century the Germans were maintaining the theory of the dispersion of civilisation from a single centre, but outside Germany it fell on deaf ears, until the English investigation, beginning with the Egyptian research of Professor Grafton Elliot Smith, led to the establishment and elaboration of a theory that has turned our conceptions of the history of early civilisation upside down. Elliot Smith was led towards the theory by the discovery of suggestive similarities between skulls found in pre-dynastic mummies and skulls found in England and New Zealand. Then this evidence, which Fraser had been collecting for so long to grind a different axe, was strengthened by one amazing discovery after another. The late Dr. Rivers investigated the custom of preserving the dead amongst the Melaneseans, and their megalithic monuments, discovering convincing similarities between their methods and those

of the ancient Egyptians. His conclusions were confirmed by Elliot Smith's discovery that the natives of the Torres Straits Islands preserved their mummies by exactly the same methods as those employed in pre-historic Egypt. The evidence became overwhelming. One of the prettiest incidents in the story is provided by the Rev. Dr. Fox, a missionary on San Christoval, in the Solomons. He sent to Elliot Smith and Rivers a description of the mastaba tombs and the dolmens, that are to be found on that island, concluding his description by asking whether they could explain a strange head-dress worn by the carved figure upon one of the tombs. As he gave them his picture of the image he was unaware that he was describing to the delighted ethnologists a characteristic of the statues of Cheops, one of the builders of the pyramids.

The investigations have been carried on by W. J. Perry, formerly of the University of Manchester, now at the University of London, who has devoted some years to the elaboration of the theory. His predecessors had established the fact that a civilisation originating along the banks of the Nile had been spread through Sumer, Turkestan, India, China, the Pacific Islands, and the Americas. In parts of all these lands are traces of the vanished civilisation, in the shape of megalithic monuments, irrigation, the custom of mummifying the dead, and dual settlements. As the Tartars pushed across Europe so had the Manchus descended upon China, the Aztecs upon Mexico, the Aryan peoples upon the Ancient East, until one by one these older civilisations were half destroyed, and half absorbed by the fighting tribes. Thus, Perry builds up his story. Along the Valley of the Nile there developed a civilisation that originated these cultural elements, amongst others, ships, copper instruments, glass, gold work, weaving, the idea of immortality, the "Children of the Sun" myth, and mummification. Around the third century B.C. migrations had been made, in an ever-widening circle, to the valley of the Euphrates, Turkestan, Crete, Western Europe, Indonesia, Mexico, South America, China, and relics of these voyages are to be found in the Pacific Islands. Neither the Vikings nor Columbus first "discovered" America. Carvings have been found in Central America, representing elephants, animals not known in that continent during our era. Eventually, during a period of, perhaps, a thousand years, the prosperous civilisations are destroyed by the more virile food-gathering tribes, beyond the outer fringe. Then, in another thousand years, the barbarians have absorbed half of the old civilisation they attempted to destroy. But the evidence for the existence of the older peoples is almost wiped away. Here there is a broken monolith and there a quaint legend mumbled by the father of some savage tribe; here a carved figure and there the custom of burying the dead with their feet towards the setting sun.