

## EVOLUTION

# Man May Disappear As Step Toward Higher Things

MAN'S future fate is either extermination or the oblivion of having been a stepping-stone for a higher sort of being in the evolution of the future, Sir James Jeans, noted English scientist, recently warned in a public lecture:

"Man's success has come to him only yesterday in the history of the earth," he said. "He had to fight wild beasts, and man has not always prevailed. He must still fight for his position on earth.

"If man fails in his fight, he may be

exterminated by smaller beings, perhaps by microbes.

"If he succeeds, his capacities may gradually be extended and increased until he develops into something entirely different and possibly superior to man of the present.

"Posterity ten million years hence may well differ as much from us as we do from our lowly ancestry of ten million years ago."

*Science News Letter, November 2, 1935*

## PHILOLOGY

# Place of A at Beginning Of Alphabet is Explained

IN LANDS of the Near East, a man does not start on a journey or begin work without calling God's name. And that, says Dr. George Lamsa, is why the alphabet begins with A.

A is for alep, ox. And in the days when some thoughtful person devised alphabet signs to represent sounds, the ox was worshipped as a god for its strength. It was proper, in the Near East, to begin the alphabet with a sign of deity.

Dr. Lamsa, Assyrian student of languages and Biblical subjects, has aroused interest by his new explanation of the alphabet's evolution.

Oriental psychology, he declares, played an important part in the alphabet's early form. But this has heretofore been overlooked.

The second letter, B, stood for house. But Dr. Lamsa points out that this was not merely chosen as a familiar object. It was a symbol of the family, or man. It properly came second to God. The third sign, which meant camel, stood for transportation. And so on through the early alphabet, there are certain meanings deeper than those ordinarily assigned to the picture-signs.

Dr. Lamsa compares the alphabet's evolution to that of the automobile: from a two-cylinder affair, to four, six, eight cylinders.

Writing started with signs. The crude signs in Near Eastern writing changed

to a wedge-shaped system called cuneiform writing. And then somewhere in the Near East, he believes, the great invention of an alphabet was made, so that a small set of signs might serve to express a whole language.

When and where the alphabet was invented is still debated in scientific circles, because of missing links in the evidence. Dr. Lamsa points out that the Near East is likely to remain a land of missing documents on this and other important historic matters. The reason is again Near Eastern psychology. When Assyrians and other Near Eastern peoples became Christian, or otherwise changed their religion, they swept out and destroyed the literature of their pagan past.

"Not many people realize," said Dr. Lamsa, "that this was, and still is, true. If I were to become a Mohammedan, I would have to burn my religious books. And any swine I possessed must be killed."

Race and religion are responsible for the changes that have taken place in the alphabet, since its introduction, he finds. As an example, Assyrians, Greeks, and others left the Nestorian Christian church in Persia, in 431 A.D. and as Jacobites they made changes in the characters of their alphabet.

This sort of difference survives in the Near East today, Dr. Lamsa points out. A man will say that he is a Jacobite or a

Nestorian. The other man may reply, "Write." And the form of writing he uses is his passport of identity, accepted by the stranger.

Dr. Lamsa is best known for his translation of the Four Gospels of the Bible from the Aramaic version. Aramaic, which was spoken by Jesus, is still the language of the land of the New Testament.

*Science News Letter, November 2, 1935*

## PUBLIC HEALTH

## New Way to Measure Extent of Mottled Enamel

DISCOLORED teeth with ugly brown spots that no amount of scrubbing with any kind of tooth paste or powder will polish to shiny whiteness, are the unfortunate lot of all the children in certain towns in the United States.

Just how much there is in the whole country of this disfiguring, incurable condition, known as mottled enamel, is unknown. A method for determining the extent of the disease, however, has now been developed by Dr. H. Trendley Dean and Elias Elvove of the U. S. Public Health Service. Dr. Dean described the method at the meeting of the American Public Health Association.

Mottled enamel is caused by fluorine in the water used for drinking and cooking during the period when the child's permanent teeth are being calcified. It cannot be cured, but it can be prevented by using water that does not contain harmful amounts of fluorine. As little as one part of fluorine in a million parts of water will probably cause the condition. Practically, prevention is a difficult matter, since it may involve changing the water supply of a community. In many of the communities where the disease is prevalent, especially in the Southwest, the fluorine-containing water is the only water available.

At present there are in this country alone more than 300 areas where the condition is prevalent. The areas are distributed among 23 states. There are no figures as to how many American children are afflicted with the condition, but the total number must be quite large, since as many as 90 per cent. are affected in some communities and 100 per cent. in others.

The quantitative method of determining the extent of the condition has now been applied in ten cities, Dr. Dean reported. These are Amarillo, Plainview, Lubbock and Big Spring, Texas; Colorado Springs and Pueblo, Colo.; Mon-