



Internal Thorns

JACK-in-the-pulpit, looks like a harmless and even helpless herb. Perfectly smooth, even to the overarching spathe of its flowers, and of a most tempting green, it would seem to be an easy mouthful for any wandering cow or rooting pig that might chance upon it in the woods.

But things are not always what they seem. Buried in the plant's tissues, especially in its solid underground bulb (or, more properly, its corm) are millions of microscopic needle-shaped crystals of calcium oxalate, by-products of its metabolism. These are in effect its internal thorns, for they pierce and lacerate the tongue and mouth lining if the plant is chewed.

The wounds, though very numerous, are so minute that by themselves they would cause no grief. But there is an acrid substance in the sap that follows the crystals into their tiny cuts, and sets up a most disagreeable stinging sensation. One Indian name for the plant was "memory-root."

If you care to find out why it got this name, dig up a Jack-in-the-pulpit—being careful to take one where there are plenty of others to make the loss

good. Cut the corm in two with a sharp knife. Rub the fresh surface on your tongue. (N.B.: Don't under any circumstances bite or chew it!)

At first, you will think nothing has happened. But after a few seconds you will realize that something very decidedly has happened. There will be a feeling in your tongue as of ten thousand tiny red-hot imps dancing around. It will do you no good to rinse your

mouth, or to wipe your tongue with a handkerchief. All you can do is grin and bear it—or at least, bear it.

Unless you have been so rash as to get an overdose, no ill consequences will ensue. Gradually the hot prickling will subside, and after a quarter of an hour or so will stop altogether. You will then be an initiate of the Order of the Memory-Root.

Science News Letter, April 18, 1942

ARCHAEOLOGY

Oldest Story in the World Unearthed For Study

Myths of Creation and the Garden of Eden, Written 1,000 Years Before the Bible, Are Now Deciphered

THE world's oldest story can now be told. Myths of Creation, the Garden of Eden and the Deluge, written a thousand years before the Bible, have now been deciphered from Sumerian cuneiform tablets found buried in Iraq.

After ten years of study, Dr. Samuel N. Kramer, of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, has reconstructed "the oldest literature in the world." This Sumerian literature, dating back to 3,000 B.C., profoundly influenced the Christian, Hebrew, Greek and Mohammedan cultures, but its existence was never even suspected until a few years ago.

The Sumerians themselves, whose culture and invention of the cuneiform writing were assimilated by the Babylonians and Assyrians, left not a single trace of their civilization in the Biblical or classical literature. The very name Sumerian was erased from the mind and memory of man for over two thousand years.

The Nippur excavations in modern Iraq, begun in 1890 by the University of Pennsylvania, brought to light 30,000

cuneiform tablets and fragments, 2,000 of which contain the literature of the forgotten Sumerians. These startling documents have been partially reconstructed and deciphered by Dr. Kramer. Many beautiful legends and myths are now restored, forerunners of the familiar Greek and Biblical stories. The American Philosophical Society has just published Dr. Kramer's "Preliminary Survey of the Oldest Literature in the World."

Since 95% of all the Sumerian tablets are commercial or economic in character, scholars will now have a fairly accurate picture of the social and economic life of ancient Sumer. So far, little is known about the Sumerians beyond the fact that they were a non-Semitic race, flourishing in southern Babylonia from the beginning of the fourth to the end of the third millennium B.C., and were the dominant cultural group of the Near East during that time. They are credited with the invention of cuneiform, which made the cultural progress of western Asia possible. Their religious and spiritual concepts profoundly influenced the Hebrews and the Greeks, who became in turn the spiritual forefathers of our modern world. In addition, they produced a vast literature, largely poetic in character, consisting of epics and myths, hymns and lamentations, proverbs and "words of wisdom."

Dr. Kramer's preliminary survey includes the translation of a beautiful myth concerning the descent of the Queen of Heaven to the Nether World. The restoration of all the literature, however, will require many years to complete.

Science News Letter, April 18, 1942

SCIENCE NEWS

LETTER SUBSCRIPTION COUPON

To Science News Letter, 1719 N St., N. W. Washington, D. C.

Start my subscription to SCIENCE NEWS LETTER for 1 year, \$5
 Renew 2 years, \$7

Name _____

Street Address _____

City and State _____

(No extra postage to anywhere in the world)

