

## **"THE SPADE AND THE BIBLE."**

"IT has been tacitly assumed by the critical school that the art of writing was practically unknown in Palestine before the age of David. Therefore little historical credence can be placed in the early records of the Hebrew people. The events not being recorded at the time of their occurrence, the Bible history of them became traditional and mythical before they were finally written.

"Even Renan allies himself to this theory in his 'History of Israel.' He distinctly says that writing was unknown in the day of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and laughs at the mistakes of Moses.

"In 1888, some Fellahin in upper Egypt, while digging for nitrous soil to enrich their gardens, accidentally dug in upon certain clay tablets. It was a discovery, and the scholars were soon on the trail. Several hundred tablets were found. Prof. Sayce, of Oxford, has been at work deciphering these tablets found at Tel El Amar-na, and what do they turn out to be, now that they are deciphered? They turn out to be documents older than the Exodus, and copies of letters between Egypt and the nations of the East. Among these are communications from Palestine. From these tablets Prof. Sayce tells us that he learns that knowledge was far advanced in that early period, and that philosophy and science were common. That ancient period had advanced schools of learning, and many cities had as a possession large public libraries. For example, the old name of Hebron, a town of Judah, was Kirjath-Sepher; this was the name of the town before the Hebrews took it. That name literally means Book-Town, and it was called Book-Town because it was the seat of a public library. That was away back, centuries before the organization of the kingdom of Israel.

"But this is not all. What is more remarkable is this: The site of the city Ur of the Chaldees, the native place of Abraham, has been unearthed, and even there a library has been discovered showing that

Abraham's people were a literary people. There are to-day in the British Museum some of the sacred songs which they sung in that far-off age, and also a carved signet which they used for the stamping of deeds and contracts. This marvelously confirms the story in the Book of Genesis and testifies to the correctness of Moses who tells us that Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah from the children of Heth in a business way.

"You see the point of all this. It is this: The credibility of Scripture has been assailed, since the beginning of the present century, on the ground that the narratives contained in it are not contemporaneous with the events they profess to record, because they represent an incredible amount of civilization as existing in the ancient Eastern world, and because they are inconsistent with the accounts of classical writers, and because writing was little known or practiced at so early a date. Discoveries show that there is absolutely no ground for such adverse reasoning, and that its premise is wholly false. There was a high civilization back there; the art of writing was well known, and the state of things was precisely what the Bible represents and requires. The spade has actually uncovered the old civilization, and we see it. Its products are before our eyes, and seeing is believing.

"Sargon's name occurs but once in the Old Testament. (Isa. 20:1.) As no trace of Sargon could be found in classical writers, he was objected to as fictitious. The finger of the skeptic pointed to the name 'Sargon' in ridicule, and the Bible was charged with putting off fiction as history. How strange! The quaint old tablets of Nineveh have been exhumed, and with them the history of Sargon. It is found that so far from being a fiction he was one of the greatest monarchs that ever ruled in Assyria, and that his reign lasted seventeen years. The very event recorded by the prophet Isaiah, in connection with which his name is mentioned, is recorded in Sargon's annals, and unexpected light is thrown upon the Scripture.

"In the Bible there are several allusions to a people called the Hittites. Objectors to the historical truth of the narratives of the Old Testament, like Professor F. Newman, declared that these allusions destroyed the credibility of the Bible. There was no reference to this people anywhere in classical writers. The Bible stood alone in affirming that they once existed. It had no witnesses to confirm or corroborate its statements. Thus it was until a few years ago. But now Hittites' monuments, disinterred, are in all the leading museums of the world. This lost kingdom has been reclaimed. Its very wealth has been dug up, and it is found that it existed before the days of Abraham and long after his days, and was equal in greatness and civilization and in military progress to Assyria and Egypt. Whole volumes full of real thrill have been written during the past ten years, upon this wonderful find of the Hittites.

"Take one other case. In 2 Chron. 33:11, it is said that when Esarhaddon, King of Assyria, took Manasseh captive, he carried him to Babylon. For a long time the objectors to the Bible pointed their fingers at this record and said, here is one of the mistakes of the Bible. 'It could not be, for Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and not Babylon.' In his excavations of Nineveh, George Smith unearthed a whole library, in the palace of King Assur-banapal. It is called the stone library, for its books were clay tablets baked into stone. On these clay tablets he found written the very story of the Chronicles, and written there as it is written in the Bible. And more than that he found it explained how it came that Esarhaddon carried Manasseh to Babylon and not to Nineveh. To keep down discontent in Babylon, which was a province of Nineveh, the king built a palace there and made it his second capital, and carried prisoners of war to it and thus honored it.

"Even in the nineteenth century God keeps on confirming his own Book by unexpected surprises. And what is noticeable is this: These surprises come as needed rebuttals of specific objections against the Bible. Now remember this, that every wonderful answer to the scoff and objection of the skeptic which exploration gives us is not only a

foe of skepticism, it is at the [R2101 : page 38] same time a friend of faith. A solid and irresistible answer to an objection against the Bible is a solid and powerful argument in support of the Bible.

"As we behold the nineteen centuries after Christ confronted, by means of the pick and spade of the explorer, with the nineteen centuries before Christ, and learn for the first time how to answer objections, which for ages seemed to be unanswerable, and to explain difficulties which until now seemed too inexplicable, may we not learn a lesson of faith and of patience? Learn patience, and wait for God's own time as to the removal of difficulties that are still unsolved. Learn faith, and sit down as calmly in the presence of acknowledged objections as you do in the presence of objections which have been reconciled and which you now call harmonious facts. By means of the story of the past learn to trust the Bible for the future.

– *Dr. David Gregg.*"

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