

materialism which has gripped the hearts of a multitude which ought to be intelligent. Occasionally it bursts into an oratorical threat of mob violence, but, as a rule, it slumbers strangely volcanically, as if ready to pour out its fury at any moment. It does not need counteragent force at this stage to deal with this subterranean menace. It needs enlightenment. Did not an eminent historian say that the French Revolution would have transformed Europe had the first revolutionaries but known what they wanted? We need never be afraid of intelligent revolt, but we have much reason to fear the brute revolt of unreasoning multitudes. Not only to the multitudes themselves, but to the State and the well-being of the Empire, the Universities have a duty which presses heavily upon them; and particularly is that the case in respect to the new Northern Universities placed in the very centre of the industrial district. There could be no greater bulwark for the nation's welfare than an enlightened labouring and artisan class, recognising its social needs, and urging them with such a temper as is the more forcible since it is the less tyrannical. For such a class legislation might yet do much; but it is not legislation which is needed, nor, indeed, is it any action from without. It is the kindling of the inner flames, which, alas! seemed to have slumbered into scarce-glowing embers. This will involve the sweetening and deepening of life. It will substitute the real for the false discontent—the discontent with self for the discontent with everyone else; whilst it will foster an enthusiasm for life and for the unseen glories of which life affords an occasional glimpse, instead of the constant carping fault-finding and the fellowship in quarrelsome.

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ART V.—“THE FIRST BIBLE.”¹

IN this volume Colonel Conder has set himself a hard task. It is to attempt to prove that the first Hebrew records were written on tablets, in the cuneiform script. How far his proof carries us we propose to examine in the following article. He has, to begin with, our sympathy, because he thinks that the general result of the inquiry points to the antiquity and careful transmission, of the Bible text. Anything that helps

¹ “The First Bible,” by Colonel C. R. Conder, LL.D., M.R.A.S., R.E. William Blackwood and Sons, 1902.

to establish these points, if it be built on a sure foundation, is to be welcomed.

But, in the first place, we must demur to his title. What, after all, he is endeavouring to convince us of, is not that the first Bible was in the form of a library, may we say, of tablets collected together, but that the documents upon which the history of the earliest periods of Scripture History as it has come down to us is based, took the form of tablets inscribed in a cuneiform character. This requires to be stated: perhaps, however, it leaves the actual matter for inquiry quite as interesting.

Colonel Conder's small volume is full of learning, but in many parts very discursive. He gives us, for instance, two elaborate genealogical tables, one of languages, the other of alphabets, amongst the vast amount of compressed information at the end of the volume. Such tables may be very good in their proper place, but they do not contribute much to the elucidation of the special subject under treatment.

The results which, it is contended, may be arrived at are summarized at the end of the work (pp. 197, 198). The first of these is thus expressed:

"In the time of Moses the literature of Western Asia was preserved on tablets of brick and stone, and in the cuneiform script."

And this is practically the all-important one.

An initial difficulty that occurs to us, at any rate with reference to the brick tablets, is that Palestine was not, like Egypt and Mesopotamia, a great brick-producing country. There seems to be no sufficient proof of any industry of the kind as indigenous amongst the Canaanites. True, indeed, that a certain number of inscribed tablets have been found at Amarna, containing a correspondence between a vassal court in Canaan and the Egyptian suzerain, in Babylonian characters. But it is very doubtful whether all the hands that wrote the characters were Canaanite at all.

That important laws and events were occasionally inscribed on stone is quite another thing. There were the two tables of stone containing the decalogue, "written on both their sides." Colonel Conder has given us as a frontispiece to his volume "the Ten Commandments in Cuneiform." We are not sufficiently acquainted with that script to say whether what he gives us duly represents the Hebrew or not. But, while he reminds us more than once that the tablets were written on both sides, when he comes to make his restoration in cuneiform script, he puts the Ten Commandments on one tablet, not on two. It is further to be noticed that he puts five commandments on each side of the tablet, and, so far as

we can make out, his tenth commandment is longer than the second.

Whatever the material the letters may have been written upon which Hezekiah received from Assyria—and of one of these be it remembered it is said that he *spread it* before the Lord—it does not follow that the letters which he wrote himself were on similar material or in the like script. The word used of them (אֲבָרֶת) in 2 Chron. xxx. 6, does not occur in the earlier historical books, and it may well be a loan-word derived from the later intercourse with Babylonia. To say that "the letters which Hezekiah himself sent out were brick tablets" is an unproven assertion. And as to the script, we know of nothing but alphabetic writing—the Semitic alphabet was known even in Babylonia ("Encycl. Biblica," 5357, Art. "Writing")—amongst the Hebrews and other neighbouring Semites, and our knowledge of the existence of such a character goes back to the ninth century B.C. Under these circumstances, we should like to know why "the original Hebrew tablets of the Law . . . could not, it would seem, have been written in alphabetic characters" (p. 56). If the cuneiform script was superseded in Palestine by the alphabetic characters so entirely as Conder would have us suppose, we should have expected something of the same kind to have happened in Babylonia, whereas, as a matter of fact, cuneiform was still in use in Babylonia as late as 81 A.D. The fact is, there is absolutely no connection between the cuneiform and the alphabetic writing, and such a change as Colonel Conder suggests seems almost impossible. The acrostic poems of the Old Testament, of whatever date they may be, point to a long-existing alphabetic writing, as such artificial compositions indicate a late development in literature.

Moreover, the Pentateuch, of whose authority the writer of this book is so staunch an upholder, itself speaks of written books, *not* tablets. The curses in the ordeal for jealousy (Num. v. 23) were to be written in a book and blotted out into the water of bitterness. The words of the Law were written by Moses in a book according to Deut. xxxi. 24. The king that was to rule in later days was to write a copy of the Law in a book (Deut. xvii. 18). This does not look as if there was any idea—even if we suppose for an instant that Deuteronomy was a product of the later times of the kingdom of Judah—that the law had been originally written on tablets in a cuneiform script. What "the pen of a man" (Isa. viii. 1; R.V. marg. "common characters") may exactly mean seems very uncertain. Cheyne, in his Polychrome edition of Isaiah, seems to think it only means plain unadorned writing, without any caligraphic

decorations, such as was the Siloam inscription of Hezekiah's time still existing. Moreover, Conder never discusses the question whether some of the tablets mentioned in the Old Testament may not have been of a similar character with that mentioned in St. Luke i. 63—a wooden frame with a waxen surface for writing on, which could be used over and over again.

As to the copying out of the Proverbs of Solomon in Hezekiah's reign, this expression certainly cannot be strained to imply their previous existence in tablets "perhaps not in alphabetic characters" (p. 93). It is clear from the Old Testament that there was a renaissance in the world of letters in the reign of Hezekiah. This led amongst other things to the reproduction of these proverbs, and it may very likely have been from a still lower stratum of old documents in the same old chest that there was exhumed the copy of Deuteronomy made by or for King Solomon himself, in accordance with the law of Deut. xvii. 18 (*cf.* 1 Kings ii. 3).

We need not trouble ourselves with dealing with the question of the pointing of the Massoretic text, its inconsistencies and mistakes. That part of the Hebrew text is more of the nature of a scholiast upon the original text. But Conder would also have us hold that the discrepancies in reading proper names may be due to mistaken readings of a cuneiform script. This requires more careful examination than we have space to give to it here; but it will be clear that there are other equally obvious explanations which may be true, as, for instance, in the case of the names ending with "baal" or "bosheth."

In the last chapter of his book the author deals with a certain number of alleged discrepancies between the Bible narrative and the monuments. He lays down one general condition which is not always remembered that, "If there be a discrepancy between the statements of a Hebrew writer . . . and those of an Assyrian scribe, we have no right to assume that the Hebrew account is the less reliable" (p. 147). We know of particular cases of tampering with the ancient monuments by later kings which prove that the Assyrian scribe was compelled to put down or to substitute for what was already written that which would please his royal master. But all this has nothing or little to do with "The Bible on Bricks," as one chapter of this work is entitled.

A number of notes conclude the volume, followed by two appendices. In the second of these Colonel Conder gives a rough estimate of the number of tablets which would have been required, in his opinion, on which to record what he somewhat curiously calls "the various episodes in Genesis." His

reckoning is rather vague, but apparently he considers that at the most rather more than a hundred tablets would include the whole narrative.

There are several *obiter dicta* of the writer of this book to which we must demur. He leads us to infer that the Jewish rules for writing copies of the Law were of the most binding character from the earliest times. As a matter of fact, these rules do not seem to have been formulated till after the commencement of the Christian era. The Hebrew text behind the Greek Version of the LXX., the Samaritan text of the Pentateuch, and the lately discovered papyrus containing the Decalogue and the *Shema* are surely conclusive proof of this. We cannot accept the derivation suggested (p. 33) for the name Uriah, namely "worshipper of the god Ea," and other suggestions of a similar kind require very careful and discriminating examination before being accepted. Again, it is an exaggeration to say that "Hebrew has either not possessed at any time, or has dropped, the noun-cases of the Assyrian and Arabic" (p. 50). An examination of the section on "Probable Remains of Early Case-Endings" in the latest edition of Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (§ 90) would lead to a modification of this statement.

The statement "that writing was not a general accomplishment, and that Uriah the Hittite in particular could not decipher the message" of his master (p. 86), seems to us like trifling. Even tablets were put in cases and secured—and we can scarcely imagine that the correspondence between a Sovereign and his Commander-in-Chief at the seat of war would take the form of an "open letter."

Colonel Conder has written a very interesting volume; he has taken much pains over his subject, but we cannot say that he has convinced us. There seems to be something lacking about it all. It is rather too much like a piece of special pleading. The way to the re-establishing of the Bible narrative, and especially that of the Pentateuch, in its grand and isolated position towering above all other ancient records, must be sought for in other directions. We think that the way is being made clearer by the deeper study of the oldest versions, and by such discoveries as that of the papyrus of the Decalogue. The minds of men are eagerly looking for any helps to that re-establishment, now that so much of the subjective "Higher Criticism" is reducing itself to an absurdity. The rewriting of passages of the Old Testament to bolster up new theories necessarily brings men back to the old instruction to "ask for the old paths and walk therein, and so to find rest for their souls."

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