

THE SILOAM INSCRIPTION.

Queen's College, Oxford,

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THE printer has, after all, contrived to make mistakes in my transliteration of the Siloam inscription into square Hebrew characters. I should therefore be obliged by the following corrections of lines 5 and 6 being made: in line 5, the reading should be **כִּן . הַמְצִיא**; and in line 6 **הִצֵּר** instead of **בִּצֵּר**.

I am inclined to return to my old views as to the antiquity of the inscription. The historical evidence, at all events, seems very clear. Apart from the argument urged by M. Derenbourg, who points out that, as Shiloah signifies "a conduit," the tunnel with the inscription in it must have existed before the time when Isaiah viii, 6, was written, and have given its name to the locality, the fact that the reservoir is called simply "the pool" in the inscription is one that I cannot easily get over. If other similar reservoirs existed at the time in Jerusalem, as we know they did in the age of Isaiah, it is difficult to understand how it could be called merely "the pool" and not "the pool of Siloah" or "the king's pool" as in Neh. iii, 15, and ii, 14. At all events, as Dr. Neubauer first pointed out, the words in Is. viii, 6, have no sense, unless they refer to the passage of waters through the tunnel which supplied the pool of Siloam. It must be remembered that the Virgin's spring is the only natural one in or near Jerusalem, and that consequently the reservoir of Siloam must have been filled either with rain-water or by means of the cutting in the rock which led from the Virgin's Pool.

Now that we know the exact forms of the characters used in the inscription, there is only one—the *aleph*—which stands in the way of assigning it to a very early date. Two characters, the *waw* and the *zayin*, have more archaic forms than have been found elsewhere, and to these I should also be disposed to add the *tsadé*. The *kheth* and *'ayin* are more archaic than those of the Moabite Stone, though this would prove no more than that the alphabet of Moab had in certain respects departed further from the primitive type than the more conservative alphabet of Judah. As for the *mem*, de Vogüé's canon on the subject seems to me untenable. According to this, the "wavy *mem*" would be older than the barred *mem* which we find in our inscription. But it is obvious that the difference of form in this case depends on a difference of writing materials. The wavy *mem* would be in use where papyrus or parchment was mostly employed, while the barred *mem* would be the natural form where stone and clay were largely used for writing purposes, as we know they were at Jerusalem (Is. viii, 1; "slab," not "roll," as in A.V.; Jer. xxxii, 11, 12). The Siloam letters can be compared only with those of the early Hebrew seals, not with those of the Aramaic docketts on the contract tablets of Nineveh or those of the inscriptions on the Assyrian lion-weights. The

latter are written in Aramaic not in Hebrew, and in an Aramaic alphabet, not a Jewish one. Nineveh, moreover, is geographically too far from Jerusalem to allow of a comparison being safely made, while the proper names occurring in the tablets seem to show that the contracting parties belonged to more than one nationality, and the characters, though of the same age, are not always of the same form. A good deal of misconception seems to exist on the subject of these Assyro-Aramaic inscriptions, some of which have been supposed to be as early as the 9th century B.C. This, however, is not the case, the oldest being not earlier than the reign of Tiglath-Pileser II, and all belong to the century between 740 and 640 B.C.

One of the chief lessons taught us by the discovery of the Siloam inscription is that similar inscriptions still exist in Palestine if they are looked for in the right place. This is underground. It is useless to expect to find remains of the præ-exilic period except by the help of systematic excavation. Not only in Jerusalem itself, but also in the south of Judah, ancient Jewish monuments still lie buried, waiting for the spade to uncover them. I was greatly struck, when riding from Beit-Jibrin to Gaza, by the number of ancient *tels* or mounds which I passed, each marking the site of an old city. To say nothing of Um Lakis, supposed to represent the site of Lachish, though the natives insisted upon calling it Um Latis to me, we have the great mound of Ajlân or Eglon, which must go back to the days of the Jewish monarchy, and is only exceeded in size by that of Zêta, a still unidentified site. But the whole plain abounds with *tels* of considerable size, and Gaza itself would be a fine field for digging.

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THE interesting account of Lieutenant Conder's visit to Khûrbet 'Erma, induces me to ask consideration for the further suggestion regarding that spot, that there stood "the nameless city" of 1 Sam. ix. The scene of Saul's anointing is nameless in the Scripture narrative, which gives no authority for the statement of Josephus that it was Ramah. Possibly he inferred it from the mention of "the seer's house" (ver. 18). Little stress can be put on the wording of Saul's question as a stranger to a stranger in the city gate. It is significant that throughout the chapter Samuel is never once spoken of as "dwelling" in that city. "He is in the city" (ver. 6). "He came to-day to the city, for the people have a great sacrifice on the high place" (ver. 11). The people are not accustomed to eat till he comes, for he blesses the sacrifice." . . . "Now therefore get you up for about this time ye shall find him" (13). Such are the terms employed, which not only do not say that he dwelt in the city, but suggest the opposite, even that he was there for the occasion of the sacrificial feast.