

ARCHAEOLOGY ILLUMINATES THE BIBLE

Introduction A hundred years ago there were learned critics who claimed that the Bible was full of historical blunders. Today the situation has changed—almost dramatically. The discoveries of archaeology in Bible lands have created a new confidence in the historical accuracy of Holy Scripture. This new confidence is echoed in the words of Sir Frederic Kenyon, spoken during his Presidential address to the Victoria Institute, in 1950:

"In the latter years of the nineteenth century, the champions of Christianity were mainly on the defensive. Within the sphere of religious study, a school of thought asserted itself which questioned the authenticity and trustworthiness of the fundamental documents of Christianity, and applied the utmost freedom of scepticism to their narratives. Against this attitude the state of our knowledge of Biblical archaeology did not supply arguments which could effectively convince those who did not wish to be convinced. The advocates of the Christian faith fought at a disadvantage, and on the defensive.

"Now all this has changed, and the point which I wish to make is that we are no longer on the defensive. It is no longer the Christian scholar that is out of date. The up-to-date scholars are now those who recognise the authenticity and authority of the Christian literature; it is the critics, who formerly claimed to be 'advanced', who are now belated and behind the times. The last half-century has been a period of wonderful, almost sensational, advance in our knowledge of the conditions under which our religion took its form, and in which the books which contain its credentials were produced; and discovery after discovery has tended to establish the essential soundness of the traditions which, from the point of view of scholarship, are the title-deeds of our faith."

In this lesson we will review some of the major archaeological discoveries which have helped to create this new mood of confidence in the Bible.

(See Chart No. 2 — *Archaeology Illuminates the Bible*)

Discussion 1.—A QUICK LOOK AT ANCIENT BIBLE LANDS

The "Middle East" was the birth-place of the Bible, and the cradle of the human race. The great nations of antiquity—Egypt, Assyria, Phoenicia, Babylon and Persia—were clustered there. The Bible narratives are knitted at a thousand points to the history of these nations.

With the passing of centuries, the Middle East has become a vast tomb. A dozen civilisations are buried there. The hand of time has slowly, silently drawn across their giant forms an ever-deepening blanket of sand. Forgotten by the world, and undisturbed by the storms of time, they have slumbered for thousands of years. The Middle East has thus become a gigantic museum, crammed with the relics of departed greatness. At the same time, this region is an enormous library. Beneath its restless sands, and on the stony faces of its storm-whipped monuments are preserved chronicles of the mighty empires of the past.

This library, the oldest and biggest in the world, with its clay tablets and cylinders, its rolls of papyrus, its scraps of broken pottery, and its slabs of stone, is also a huge treasury, prepared by the hands of men long dead, filled with evidence of the historical accuracy of the Sacred Scriptures and reserved by God against the present hour of need!

The world contains no more fascinating drama than the story of how, in the last one hundred years, this great library of the Middle East has been opened by the inquisitive spade of the excavator and the patient skill of the decipherer. Nor does the world contain a more formidable challenge to the scores of modern doubters who have sought, by voice and pen, to discredit the trustworthiness of the Bible.