

some of the benefits of her modern civilization to Eastern races, she is only making a just return for the lessons imparted to her by Asiatic wisdom in past ages.

For did she not receive her Bible and her religion from an Eastern people? Did not her system of counting by twelves and sixties come to her from Babylonia, and her invaluable numerical symbols and decimal notation from India through the Arabs? Did not even her languages have their origin in a common Eastern parent? It cannot, therefore, be thought surprising if her method of expressing these languages by graphic symbols also came to her from an Eastern source.

We cannot, indeed, localize with absolute certainty the precise spot whence issued the springs of that grand flow of speech which spread in successive waves—commencing with the Sanskrit in Asia and the Keltic in Europe—over a large proportion of those two continents. Nor can we fix, beyond all liability to question, the local source of the first known purely phonographic alphabet. But we stand on sure ground when we assert that such an alphabet is to be found inscribed on Phœnician monuments of a date quite as early as the cognate Moabite inscription on the stone of King Mesha, known to belong to the middle of the ninth century B.C.¹

It was of course *a priori* to be expected that Phœnicia—one of the chief centres of trade, and the principal channel of communication between the Eastern and Western worlds in ancient times—should have been compelled to make use of graphic symbols of some kind to enable her to carry on her commercial dealings with other nations; and it may fairly be conjectured that a mere system of ideograms would have been quite unsuited to her needs. But this does not prove that the phonographic signs on Phœnician inscriptions were invented all at once, without any link of connexion with previously current ideographic prototypes. And it is certainly noteworthy that the discovery at Tel-el-Amarna in Egypt of letters from an ancient king of Jerusalem written on tablets in the early Babylonian cuneiform script² proves that a Babylonian form of ideographic writing existed in Palestine and the neighbourhood of Phœnicia as early as the fifteenth century B.C.

Those, however, who have conjectured that the Phœnician phonograms were developed out of the Babylonian cuneiform symbols, cannot be said to support their hypothesis by any satisfactory proof, literary or epigraphic.

Nor does the theory which makes the South Semitic or Himyaritic scripts³ the precursors and prototypes of the Phœnician seem to rest on sufficiently clear evidence.

On the other hand it is certain that if we investigate the development of the Egyptian hieroglyphic ideograms, we shall find that they passed into a so-called 'hieratic' writing in which a certain number of phonograms were gradually introduced. And it is highly probable that Phœnicia in her commercial intercourse with a country so close to her shores as Egypt, or perhaps through a colony actually established there, became acquainted in very early times with this Egyptian hieratic script.

Furthermore, a careful comparison of the elaborate tables printed in the latest edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica, and in the Oxford 'Helps to the Study of the Bible'—giving the Egyptian and Phœnician symbols side by side—tends no doubt to show a certain resemblance of form between five or six of the Phœnician and corresponding Egyptian letters.

Nevertheless, the comparison by no means makes it clear that *all* the Phœnician letters were derived from Egyptian models⁴, nor does it invalidate the fact that existing epigraphic evidence is in favour of regarding Phœnicia as practically the inventor of that most important factor in the world's progress—a purely phonographic alphabet.

Here, however, I seem to hear some learned native of India remark:—It may be true that the Phœnician inscriptions are prior in date to those hitherto discovered in India; but do you really mean to imply that India's admirably perfect Deva-nāgarī alphabet, which we hold to be a divine gift⁵, was borrowed from the imperfect alphabet of a nation of mere money-making traders, like the Phœnicians? Is it not the case that the earliest elements of civilization and enlightenment have always originated in the East, and spread from the East to the West—not from the West to the East? And if, as is generally admitted, the symbols for numbers, which were as essential to the world's progress as letters, originated in India and passed through

¹ The Phœnician inscriptions have been deciphered by assuming that the Phœnician language must have been akin to Hebrew. Although their age cannot be ascertained with absolute certainty, yet there is good reason to believe that some of them are of greater antiquity than the cognate Moabite inscription of King Mesha which was found at Dibon, a little N.E. of Jerusalem and south of Heshbon.

² Some of these tablets show that diplomatic correspondence passed between Babylonia and Egypt through Palestine. In fact, 'Babylonian' was in those days the language of diplomacy, as

French once was in Europe. Other tablets in Babylonian cuneiform character have proved to be letters written by the king of Jerusalem to the Egyptian monarch to whose suzerainty he appears to have been subject.

³ There are two kinds of Himyaritic inscriptions, viz. Sabæan and Minæan.

⁴ Notwithstanding the elaborate proofs given by the Abbé Van Drival in his ingenious and interesting treatise on '*l'origine de l'écriture*.'

⁵ See note 2, p. xxvi.