

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE MOABITE STONE.

BY RAY J. FRANK, L.L.M.

There are strange things in the age we live in, and not the least are its antiquarian curiosities.

The Country of Moab lies on the eastern side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, an assemblage of blue mountains. It was long ago a region of great beauty, abounding in cities, industry, and wealth; it is now a wilderness of roving Arabs.

The stone was found by a missionary, a Mr. Klein, at a place called Dhiban, in a field of ruins. The attempt to remove it was not well planned. It was a series of mishaps. In an evil hour Mr. Klein let out the secret of its value. It became at once an object of superstition with the Arabs, and to avert the calamity which they fancied must fall upon them if they would let it be taken out of the country by the sacrilegious cupidity of strangers, they lit a fire upon it, made it red-hot, and with cold water splintered the magnificent relic into fragments. What a debt the world owes to ignorance and blind zeal. It is on acts like these that fanaticism plumes itself. Well, what of the stone, the mutilated stone, now an illustration of the explosive energy of steam? With no little pains, and in a manner of stealth, two large fragments of it were recovered; afterwards some of the smaller ones; and now as the fruit of laborious ingenuity and perseverance the stone is again itself, almost entire, built up into its original form, but woefully disfigured by the rough treatment it received.

It is a piece of basalt, black, but with a tint of blue, very hard and compact, and of great weight; three and a half feet in length and two and a half in breadth and thickness, and rounded off for ornament at the top in the style, as tradition tells us, of the Sinaitic tables; not a big thing to look at, but if the Arabs had been less fanatical, and had stood upon their rights, and known more of science than they do, and more of the zeal of scientific men, they could have made a bargain about the Moabite stone that would have driven them frantic with exultation and surprise.

Now, what is it that gives so singular an interest to that mass of black basalt—what is the riddle of its preciousness—a block of stone picked out of an unsightly heap of rubbish? How many a straggler heedlessly gazed at it, how many a footstep idly trod upon it, a neglected worthless thing, a wreck among wrecks, a ruin for reptiles to creep upon, or foxes to frisk about it, or crows to perch upon it; and yet when the infidels of Europe were casting doubt on the authenticity of the historical records of the Bible, and employing all their powers of criticism to prove them to be only oriental fictions, there in the meantime lay the stone of Moab, a silent witness to the fidelity of those records; nay, a witness whose voice must carry all before it; a witness cotemporary with those very things; a witness come down to us from the living scenes of the history itself, come down in stern and unchallengeable veracity on a march of 3,000 years to confound those critics, and prove to the world that the Bible has nothing to fear from the merciless rigour of criticism, the verities of science, or all the scorn of infidelity.

There is an inscription on the stone. It was set up by a king of Moab whose name was Mesha to perpetuate the glories of his reign. We find in the Bible the names of only three kings of Moab, and curiously enough, Mesha is one of them. He was a cotemporary of Ahab, and Ahab is also on the stone, and so is Omri, the father of Ahab. The inscription says that Mesha had wars with these Israelitish kings, long and sanguinary wars; he and they were implacable enemies.

The names of forts or strongholds are on the stone, and of shrines of idolatry. Not a few of them are old acquaintances with readers of the Bible. But how strange to see them there—like antique fossils—memorials of the historical past, *Dibon, Madaba, Baalnaan, Bozor, Kiriathaim*, etc. Mesha tells how he built this one, decorated that, and laid another in blood and ashes. He was a truculent and dashing warrior.

The inscription contains 1,000 letters. But owing to the injury of fire and breakage only 700, or thereabouts, are in existence. The gaps, however, can be easily filled up in the case of broken sentences, but in

the case of proper names conjecture can give us little help.

The letters in which the inscription is written are of the old Phœnician type, and are similar to the capitals of our own alphabet, only that they are turned backwards. The language is Hebrew, but not just the Hebrew of the Scriptures. The difference is one of dialect; and it has also an Arabic complexion—a very interesting fact for philologists. The territory of Moab was so situated as to have a purely speaking Hebrew people on the one side, and a race of Arabian origin on the other.

The date of the stone is about 900 B. C. It was engraved according to one opinion in the second year of the reign of Ahab king of Israel. It is older than Homer, and is in all likelihood written in the same characters as those used by David in the Psalms, and by Solomon in his correspondence with Hiram king of Tyre. From my point of view the stone is of the deepest interest and importance. It is like another chapter added to the Bible, and throws light on historical portions of it that were greatly obscured by the mist of antiquity. It is a confirmation of the truth of Scriptural history. Not that the Bible needs to lean on evidence like that. It is its own witness. It carries its divine credentials in its bosom. It speaks to the heart of men as no other book ever did. It is omniscient. Its voice is the voice of God. A Christian does not need such evidence as antiquarians dig out of ruins or drag out of the crypts of mouldering sepulchres to prove that the Bible is divine. He knows on what he builds his hope; and if there were no monuments of any kind, no stony registers of forgotten cities, nor slabs from the uncovered palaces of Chaldean plains, nor hieroglyphics from the Nile, his hope would still rest there. How do I know that a plant is a work of creative intelligence and not a thing of chance or circumstance? Is it not by the marks of wisdom and of purpose which I can trace upon it? Itself tells the story of its origin. In the veins of every leaf and in the hue of every petal it unfolds the wonderful skill of the hand that fashioned it, and gave it all its grace and mystery. And so there is a character—a self-witnessing power in the Bible that proclaims it to be the conception not of man but of God. A Christian does not need such evidences for his faith as that of the stone of Moab, but it can be used to stop the arrogance of a sceptic.

The land of Moab does not figure much in history. But when the Romans were there it was celebrated for its opulence and power. All that, however, has passed away. Under the rule of the Turks Moab has shrunk into a desert. The standard of Mohammed is a crescent, a thing that gives the idea of growth and expanding splendour; but by what fatality is it that the crescent of the Moslems wherever it has moved has been the baleful star of only misery and blight!

There are scenes of singular interest in Moab, but what makes them objects of attraction is not any living or modern beauty they possess so much as that they tell of a magnificence that is long ago extinct. Memorials of art are everywhere, archways, pillars, massive gates, roads, inscriptions, and other vestiges of an ancient civilization. The roads which the Romans constructed ages ago can still be traced winding along the valleys, piercing the rocks, or straggling up the steep of the mountains, grand solid highways, such as any nation might be proud of. They had also a system of irrigation, and their tanks or reservoirs for the collection and distribution of water are found all over the country, and in a state of singularly good preservation. The whole landscape, now so ruinous and wild, waved and bloomed like a garden at the beginning of the Christian era. At a place called Moshita are the remains of a palace of vast proportions, a grand monument of oriental taste and magnificence, standing in lone majesty on the desert. It rivals the Alhambra, that fairy-like palace of the Spanish Moors, in the exquisite style of its ornamentation. Who built it, or when it was built, is not known.

THE HOME MISSION COMMITTEE'S APPEAL TO MINISTERS FOR MONEY.

SIR, I was much surprised recently to receive a circular from the Home Mission Committee setting forth "the embarrassed state of the funds," and also the resolution of the Committee, in the emergency, to reduce the supplement promised to weak congregations and to mission stations, and to ask our ministers,

by large personal contributions, to aid in making up the deficiency in the funds.

I am not at all surprised that the income of the Committee is inadequate. This has been the case for several years. The deficiency has been increasing, not because the contributions of the Church are diminishing, but because its Home Mission work is greatly and rapidly extending. This last is surely not to be regretted. We should be thankful that God is assigning so great a work to our Church and opening to her wide and effectual doors of usefulness. I write in no fault-finding spirit; I have perfect confidence in the zeal of the Committee, and in its prudence in managing the great work entrusted to it, and I admire the liberality of many of its members evinced by their large and generous contributions.

But there are two things I exceedingly regret. One is the Committee's proposal to reduce the grants. I believe these cannot be much reduced without seriously injuring, in some cases perhaps ruining, weak congregations and mission stations, suspending progressive work, and either subjecting our ministers and missionaries to very great hardships, or compelling them to leave fields of usefulness. The expenditure and the income should by all means be equalized, not, however, by repudiating debts, but by increasing liberality on the part of our people.

The other thing I regret is the call on ministers to give personally what they ought rather to induce and help their congregations to give. This is a sad mistake, and it may become a most dangerous precedent. Many of our ministers are not able to respond to this call. They can hardly clear their own way and live respectably. The National Policy will make this still more difficult by increasing the expense of living. Many have less salary than is given to some ministers of supplemented congregations. Our ministers, in general, contribute largely to the schemes of the Church, doing their full share of this work, and being in not a few cases the largest contributors in their respective congregations. It is not right, therefore, to burden them by this special appeal, or make it in such a manner that they must either give what they have not to spare or be affronted.

The truth on which I wish to insist, and which has been overlooked, if not positively repudiated by the action of the Committee, is that if we are to obtain adequate means to carry on the work of the Church, it must be through the instrumentality of our ministers instructing our people and inciting them to do their duty. The ministers are the natural and appointed leaders of the people; and he is not the most successful minister who does the most himself, but who incites and encourages the greatest number to exert themselves according to their ability.

It is clearly the duty of ministers to acquire a thorough knowledge of the work of the Church and to master all its details. They should be able to state definitely what the Church is doing for its own extension and the advancement of the cause of Christ. They should be able to give a full account of the destitute fields which it is our duty to cultivate, of the rapid settlement of new townships, and of the tide of emigration pouring into the North-west Territory, to meet the spiritual wants of which must tax the energies of our people to the very uttermost. They should be able to state the peculiar difficulties with which these pioneers have to contend, and also the prospect of their becoming at no distant day not merely self-sustaining but also powerful auxiliaries in sending the gospel to regions beyond. They should be able to show what the Church should endeavour to do towards the formation of the national character of the Dominion, and towards giving form to its religious belief and tone to its religious sentiment. Everything possible should be done to create and foster an earnest missionary spirit. Duty to Christ in this respect should be much insisted on; while compassion towards the spiritually destitute should be excited and intensified in view of the high spiritual privileges with which we are favoured. In this way our people will be led to give with intelligence, discrimination, constancy, and heartiness and according to their ability, and they will accompany their gifts with their prayers. The Church has ample resources wherewith to carry on the work assigned to her, and these are the means by which alone her resources can be effectually developed and utilized. This is the legitimate and efficient way in which the ministers should exert themselves in support of our missions, not merely by giving all they are