

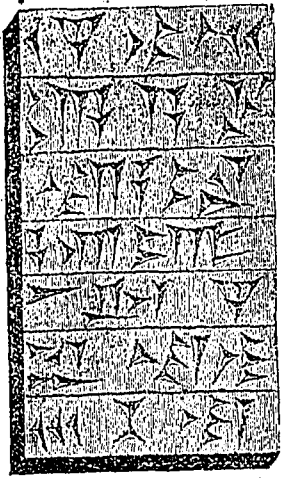


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CUNEIFORM WRITING.

THE A, B, C OF WRITING.

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What do we know about methods of writing from thirty-two to thirty-five centuries ago? Was writing of any kind practised in those times? Was it possible to write the books of Moses in his times? Just now these are interesting questions. The forthcoming revision of the Old Testament Scriptures turns public attention anew to the ancient character of these venerable writings and to the certainty of their accurate transmission from the dim past down to our own day.

Attacks on the genuineness and authenticity of these books have been made throughout the ages from every possible point. But our means for meeting these attacks seem to increase with every new advance of historic discovery. To the five oldest books of the Bible the formidable objection has been raised that they purport to come down to us from a time before the art of alphabet writing was in use. Many years ago Andrews Norton, the Unitarian, declared that there was no satisfactory evidence of alphabetic writing at the period of Moses. If known to others it was improbable that it was known to the Hebrews. He said they could not have learned it of the Egyptians, and this would send us back to Abraham for it. "But it would be idle to argue against the supposition that it was known at the time of Abraham."

The Scriptures say that "Moses wrote the goings out of the people of Israel according to their journeys, according to the commandment of the Lord," and that he bade the Levites "take this book of the law and put it into the side of the ark of the covenant." Could this have been done?

The Bible lands of that early period lie between the valleys of the Euphrates and the Nile. Their ancient governments and civilizations have long since perished.

Babylon and Nineveh are shapeless mounds, the palaces and cities of Egypt are ruins, Phœnicia has left no literature and almost no historic monuments. But it is univer-

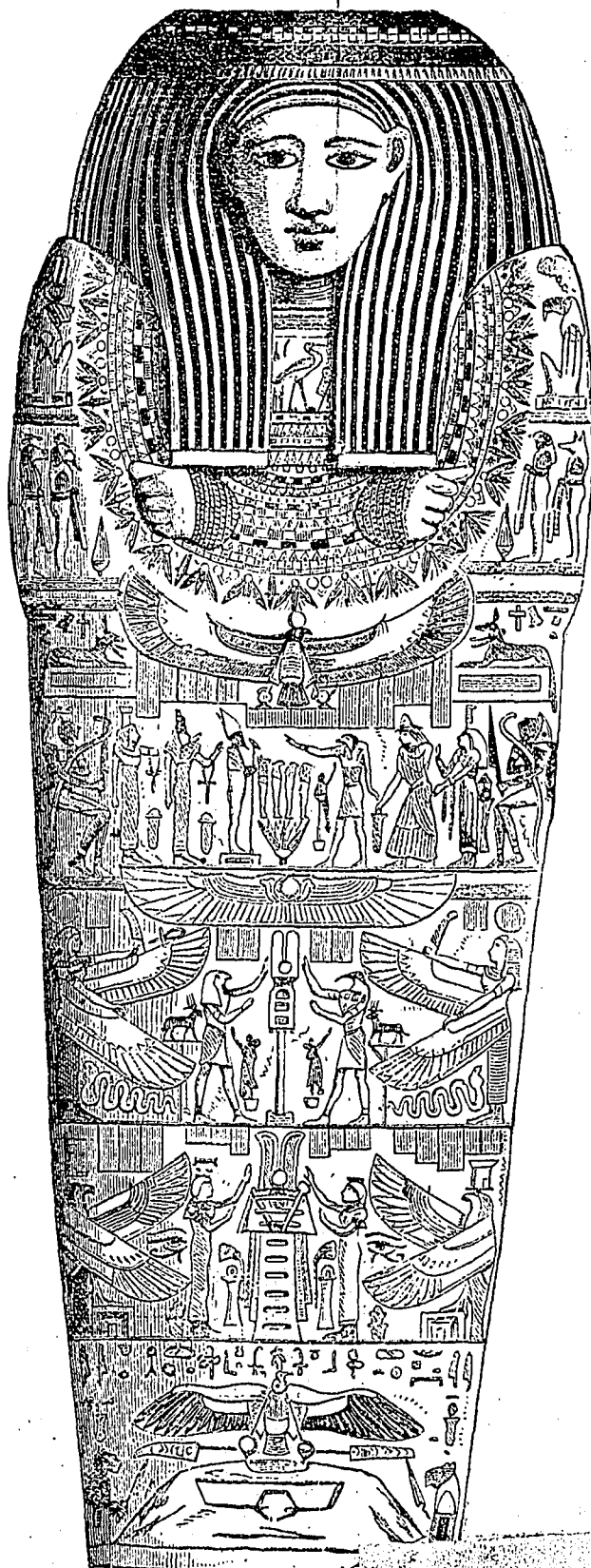
sally agreed that, if writing was known anywhere, it was in these lands.

If we turn to the valley of the Nile and ask whether a man "instructed in all the

wisdom of the Egyptians" of that time could know how to write, we learn that at the time of Moses two kinds of writing were in common use among the Egyptians. They had the hieroglyphic, or picture writing. All writing seems to have begun in the making of rude pictures. The scenes portrayed on the accompanying illustration of a mummy-case are endeavors to give a record of the character and destiny of the deceased person. Within the case is usually found another and fuller record called "the book of the dead." At the top of the lower division of the case a line of characters is seen which in shape more nearly approach the appearance of ordinary writing. But when these are analyzed they are found to be pictorial signs which have become conventional symbols of sounds. This was the hieroglyphic writing. After a time the pictures were taken to represent the first sound in the name of the object. Then the pictures were simplified more and more until they became the arbitrary signs of sounds. Thus the Egyptian name for the owl, "Mulak," was first written by making a picture of an owl. Then the picture was taken to signify the sound of M, the first sound in "Mulak." In the peaks of the letter M may still be seen the two ears of the owl, while the descending V shape shows what is left of the beak, and the two perpendicular standards supporting its sides, I J, are the legs of the bird. About one thousand of these signs were used. This hieroglyphic writing antedates anything we have learned of Egyptian history. It is found as far back as the age of the Great Pyramid and is much older than any other known writing. The common use of pen and paper also goes back to the same distant era.

At the time of Moses the Egyptians had also the hieratic, or priestly, writing, which had been in use for a thousand years. This was derived from the other, but approached more closely to a phonetic use of letters. It was evidently intended to give the priests a written character not generally known to the people. That eminent Egyptologist, Sir Gardner Wilkinson, says, "We know that hieroglyphics were commonly understood by all educated persons." The position and training of Moses necessarily made him acquainted with the hieratic system which was the germ of alphabetic writing.

The discoveries and investigations of the last forty years have placed us in a far better position than that held by Andrews Norton when he declared against the probability that Moses could write alphabetically and scouted the possibility of the art being known at the time of Abraham. We have in hand a store of material of which he could know nothing. Isaac



A MUMMY CASE, WITH INSC

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