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ISRAEL IN EGYPT : THE PERIOD OF THEIR  
SOJOURN AND THEIR NUMBERS AT THE  
EXODUS AND IN THE WILDERNESS. By the  
Rev. H. MOULE, M.A., A.V.I.

MY object in this paper is to show, first, that the text of Scripture, interpreted by itself, states the period of the sojourn in Egypt to have been no more than 215 years; and secondly, that in round numbers 600,000 men, more precisely 603,550 men, from which the whole population at the Exodus and in the wilderness may be estimated at 2,500,000, is the number originally given by Moses, and is correct and true. The proof of the second of these propositions will of itself show how untenable is the theory laid down in a paper in the Journal of our Transactions on "The Numerical System of the Old Testament;" according to which theory, every one of the fifty or sixty numerical statements with reference to the adult male population of the Israelites at the Exodus and in the wilderness has, through "only a few trivial mistakes on the part of the scribe, a few slight misapprehensions on the part of the reader," been exaggerated a thousandfold. In the course of my argument it will also appear, that the existence of error in the original text to such an extent as in that paper is supposed, materially affects, in this case at least, the truth and inspiration of a large portion of the narrative. And mainly for this reason I propose, if permitted, to show in an appendix that of the five reasons assigned for this *casual* alteration of numbers—which reasons are, in fact, only conjectures—the first two rest on an error, and the fifth rests upon another conjecture.

2. Taking, for a moment, my two propositions together, I point to the fact that the raising up of a *nation* in the midst of another *nation* and within a *given time*, was the subject of

previous prophecy. Then, Moses, who records the several prophecies respecting this, records also their fulfilment. And with reference to *the nation*, his record of fulfilment is not only in general terms, speaking of it as "a great and populous nation,"—"as the stars of heaven in multitude;"—not only in round numbers, perhaps grounded, as reports of killed and wounded after a battle are, on some rough estimate; but it is given with the most remarkable fulness, variety, and exactness of detail of two numberings taken at the opening and the close of a period of thirty-eight years.

3. Let us look first at two or three of the prophecies. With reference, doubtless, to the more remote as well as to the nearer future, Jehovah promised Abraham to make of him "a great nation," and to make his seed "as the sand of the sea," "as the dust of the earth," and "as the stars of heaven for multitude." But, with distinct reference to the nearer future, He speaks thus of Abraham's seed in the line of Isaac and Jacob: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them 400 years. And also that nation whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterwards shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again."\*

4. To Jacob the general promise is repeated: "I will make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude."† And on his way into Egypt he is encouraged by the assurance: "I am God, the God of thy fathers; fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will *there* make of thee a great nation."‡

5. Now on a comparison of these two more particular promises, the following points are clear. 1. It was in Egypt that the seed of Abraham was to become a great nation. 2. It was from Egypt, then, that they were to come out with great substance. 3. Consequently, it was there that they were to serve and be afflicted. 4. It was from Canaan that they were to go down into Egypt, and it was to Canaan that from thence they were to return; and in Canaan—"a country not theirs"—Isaac and Jacob, the seed of Abraham, at the time of the utterance of the prophecy to Jacob, had been living as "strangers" and pilgrims for nearly 200 years. The period, therefore, during which they were to be "strangers in a land which was not theirs," cannot be conterminous with that of their servitude and affliction. The 400 years of the pro-

\* Gen. xv. 13, 14, 16.

† Gen. xxxii. 12.

‡ Gen. xli. 3.

phesy, just as the 430 years afterwards given by Moses as the exact period of the sojourning, cover the whole period. The former reaches from the birth of Isaac, the latter from Abraham's call, to the coming out of Egypt. Whereas the period of four generations, at the close of which they were to return to Canaan, reaches back no further than to the time of Jacob and his family going down thither. 5. The opening sentence of the prophecy to Abraham is therefore clearly parenthetical, and amounts to this, "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land not theirs 400 years, during a portion of which time they shall serve and be afflicted." All this appears to me sufficiently evident from the prophecies. The record of their fulfilment fully confirms it.

6. Moses writes thus :\* "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was 430 years. And it came to pass at the end of 430 years, *even the selfsame day it came to pass*, that all the hosts of the Lord went out of the land of Egypt." Now, the form of expression in the first clause of this passage is very marked. I see no reason whatever for altering the translation. The exactness of expression, therefore, which is so clearly intimated in the last clause, ought to be extended to the first clause of the passage; and the words, "the sojourning of the children of Israel," ought to be considered as inclusive of the whole sojourning in Canaan as well as in Egypt. I would rest nothing on the addition to this effect made in the Samaritan Pentateuch and in the Alexandrine copy of the Septuagint. I turn rather to certain incidental but very exact notices of ages and dates in the history, which, fixing very exactly both the stay in Egypt and the sojourn in Canaan, prove that Moses intended in the 430 years to include both.

7. First, as to the period of the stay in Egypt, he informs us† that he was himself in the fourth generation from Jacob; and even that Levi was his maternal grandfather. He and his father Amram were the only two in the line of succession who were born in Egypt; Kohath and Levi having been born before the descent. He further lets us know that Levi, dying at the age of 137, must have lived in Egypt about 87 years, that Kohath lived to the age of 133, and Amram to 137, and that he himself was 80 years old at the Exodus. On the extreme hypothesis, then, that Amram was born during the first year of the sojourn in Egypt, and that Moses was born in the last year of Amram's life, the stay in Egypt cannot possibly be stretched beyond 215 years; whilst analogical

\* Exod. xii. 40.

† Exod. vi. 16—20; Numb. xxvi. 59.

cases in the previous history show that there is no improbability, certainly no impossibility, in Levi having had a child born to him after having been 70 or 80 years in Egypt, when he was 120 or 130 years old, nor in his daughter, so born to him, having given birth to Moses when 55 or even 65 years of age. And thus, the whole period of 215 years is seen to have been spanned (even as Moses says it was spanned) by the three periods of existence in Egypt: first, by that extending from the entrance thither of Levi and Kohath, to the birth of Jochebed and her husband Amram; secondly, by the space of time between their birth and that of their son Moses; and lastly, by the first 80 years of his life.

8. Now, on turning to the previous history, it is, to say the least, very remarkable that a few incidental notices of dates in the lives of the Patriarchs will give us the other half of the 430 years, as the period of their sojourn "in a land which was not theirs," even in Canaan. From Abraham's entrance into Canaan to the birth of Isaac was 25 years. From that date to the birth of Jacob was 60 years. On his arrival in Egypt, Jacob tells Pharaoh that the number of his years was 130. We thus get again 215 years. Now these several coincidences are too many and too exact to be the result of accident; yet so incidental as to forbid the idea of design on the part of the historian. Though undesigned, however, by Moses for such a purpose, they appear to me evidently intended by Him who inspired Moses, to guide us to the truth in this important question.

9. But how marvellous then the increase of population from seventy persons to 2,500,000 in 215 years! Yes, and the inspired writers admit and assert the marvel; and more than that, they give us one or two special instances of this increase. In the first seventy years\* Moses says of the children of Israel, that "they were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them." The king that arose, who knew not Joseph, evidently felt the value of the people; but was acquainted with their purpose at some time to quit Egypt for Canaan, and such was their increase in his time (within the first 100 years) that he feared, lest, joining with some enemy of Egypt, they would be strong enough to get them out of the land.† For this reason *the servitude and affliction* foretold to Abraham was brought upon them. The endeavour to keep down the population extended even to the attempt by various devices to destroy every male child. But the recorded marvel is this,

\* Exod. i.

† Ib.

that "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew."\* Again, after the first attempt to destroy the males, Moses says, "the people multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty."† And this must have been the case more than eighty years before the Exodus.

10. By the fact that Moses was the grandson of Levi our attention is further called to this, that child-bearing, not only before, but for some time after, the Flood, continued to a far more advanced period of life than it does in these modern times. And in this is a cause of increase of the Israelites which renders all modern analogies, especially that of France, utterly futile. But again, while Moses was in the fourth generation from Jacob (and other individuals might have been similarly situated), we have intimations that in other families (and perhaps also in this), there might have been ten and even twelve generations in 215 years. In the genealogy of Ephraim ‡ Joshua is stated to have been at least the tenth in descent from Jacob. And of the correctness of this statement we have the remarkable confirmation in the recorded fact, that Joseph within seventy years saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. This would give, if we reckon from Joseph, an average of seventeen years for a generation, and twelve of these then might have been included in 215 years.

11. It is time, however, that we turn to the positive and distinct statements which Moses makes as to this much-questioned number. Only first let me again notice that which, by the author of the paper on "The Numerical System of the Old Testament," appears to be completely overlooked, namely, the interweaving of the idea of the vast multitude of people into the entire history of the Exodus, and its intimate connection with prophecy, with miracle, and with directions from Jehovah. I point first to its connection with prophecy. God had said to Abraham, "Thy seed shall be as the stars of heaven." And Moses writes, "Your fathers went down into Egypt, threescore and ten persons; and now the Lord thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude."§ To Abraham it is promised, "I will make of thee a great nation;" and to Jacob, "Fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will *there* make of thee a great nation." And Moses not only asserts that God had in their case "taken a nation from the midst of another nation,"|| but he enacts a law that in all their subsequent generations every Israelite on presenting his first-fruits should confess before the Lord, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and

\* Exod. i. † Ib. ‡ 1 Chron. vii. 20—27. § Deut. x. 22.  
|| Deut. iv. 34.

he went down into Egypt and sojourned there with a few, and became *there* a nation great, mighty, and populous.”\*

12. Take next the two statements which may be said to be in round numbers. The first occurs in the solemn description of the march out of Egypt “of all the hosts of the Lord;”† the second is in the address of Moses to Jehovah, when a supply of flesh for a whole month had been promised. “The people amongst whom I am are 600,000 footmen; and Thou sayest, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?”‡ It has been said that numbers have nothing to do with the miracle, in the narrative of which they occur: we may receive the miracle while giving up the numbers as untrustworthy. Have numbers nothing to do with this miracle?

13. But turning now to the more exact statements of numbers, let any judge if *casual* error in all of these together be within the range of possibility. In the second and in the last year in the wilderness, Moses, at the command of Jehovah, “took the sum of the congregation of the children of Israel, all that were able to go out to war.” On the first occasion he and Aaron did this in conjunction with twelve assessors, each of them a head of the house of his fathers. On the second occasion Eleazar was appointed with Moses, and, as we may conclude, the same number of assessors. At each census every tribe is numbered separately (46,500, 74,600, &c.), and then the sum total is set down—in the first instance 603,550, and in the second 601,730.§

14. These numbers are exclusive of the tribe of Levi, which subsequently is numbered with the same exactness. The families of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari are first numbered separately, and the total is then given—22,000 souls.|| The firstborn males, instead of whom the Levites were taken as the Lord’s, were found on a similar numbering to exceed the number of the Levites by 273. This minute difference is noted, and five shekels a head, or 1,365 shekels redemption money required of the 273, and, according to the word of the Lord, given by Moses to Aaron and his sons.

15. In giving the arrangement of the camp¶ in four divisions of three tribes each, the number of each tribe is repeated; the number of each division is given; and the grand total is again stated to be 603,550.

\* Deut. xxvi. 5.  
§ Numb. i. xxvi.

† Exod. xii. 40.  
|| Numb. iii.

‡ Numb. xi. 21, 22.  
¶ Numb. ii.



16. But the most remarkable occurrence of this exact number, especially as exhibiting the impossibility of any *casual* alteration, or the so-styled "high exaggeration through a *smear* or a *blot*," is that found in the statement of the amount of gold and silver and brass used in the work of the tabernacle. The silver is said to have amounted to 100 talents and 1,775 shekels. Of the 100 talents were cast the sockets or bases of the sanctuary, and the sockets or bases of the vail—"a talent for a socket." Of the 1,775 shekels were made the hooks for the pillars; and the chapiters were overlaid and filleted. It may be remarked, by the way, that these sockets, weighing about 1 cwt. each, were the only foundation of the tabernacle, and five tons weight of metal is not too much to allow for such a purpose. What, however, is the source of this vast supply of silver? Moses replies, "A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for every one that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, *six hundred and three thousand and five hundred and fifty*."\* Now a talent contained 6,000 half-shekels; 600,000 contributors then, of half a shekel each, would be required to make up 100 talents; and 3,550 contributors of the odd 1,775 shekels added to these, exactly complete the thrice-repeated total of the first census, 603,550. Now, when two amounts exactly agree, and when, by him who gives them, they are evidently intended so to agree, it is incredible that *casual* error should occur with such coincidence in both. If accidental in one, it must have been designed in the other.

17. Further, if the amount of metal in this passage be exaggerated, there must be equal exaggeration in the description of the tabernacle and its furniture,† and equal error in the recorded instructions respecting it given to Moses by Jehovah.‡ For the amount of metal is not in excess of the work done and required to be done. By error, then, in this numerical statement, at least a cloud would be thrown over seven chapters of the Book of Exodus.

18. Notwithstanding all this, the theory of a *casual* alteration of numbers is extended to this very passage. The last "set of numbers from the Pentateuch," with which readers of the paper on "The Numerical System of the Old Testament are troubled," is the sum total of the metals used in the work of the tabernacle. Discredit and doubt are cast upon the statement by the inquiry—"Is there not some misapprehension of

\* Exod. xxxviii. 26.

† Exod. xxxv.—xxxviii.

‡ Exod. xxv.—xxvii.

figures here?" And the only two reasons given for this doubt are not any of *the five*, but first, that the weight of these metals, together with that of boards, hangings, and fittings, was too great to be easily transported from place to place; and, secondly, that the gold of itself was too considerable a sum for the Israelites to have become possessed of *by borrowing* of the Egyptians.

19. Now, by a brief consideration of these two reasons further light may be thrown upon the truth, the reasonableness, and the consistency of the history and of the numbers contained in it. First, if in proportion to the reduced number of 600 men the able-bodied Levites had been only 20 or 30, the removal of ten or twelve tons from place to place by these would certainly have been difficult. But what if, according to the census, they were 7,000? \* What if that number was divided into three bodies, with special portions of this burden allotted to each? † What if, according to their respective burdens, the princes of the congregation provided for one, two waggons and four oxen; for another, who had to carry everything on their shoulders, no waggons; and for the third, who had to carry the silver, the brass, and the boards, four waggons and eight oxen? could not 7,000 men, with six waggons and twelve oxen, transport with perfect ease twelve tons weight? But, is there not here a marked adaptation of the power employed to the burden to be borne, which serves to confirm the statement respecting the latter?

20. As to the second reason, "a considerable sum (£259,840) for the Israelites to have become possessed of by *borrowing* of the Egyptians," ‡ I would observe that it must be well known to any Hebrew scholar that the first and principal signification of שָׁאַל (*shâ-al*) is to *ask, demand, or require* without any idea of return being involved; that in the Hebrew Scriptures this is the prevailing meaning of the word; that in its three occurrences in the Book of Exodus the Septuagint substitutes αἰτέω, and the Vulgate *peto* or *postulo*; and that if these and the following circumstances be duly weighed, it must be admitted that either *ask, demand, or require* would in all these cases be a fitter rendering than the word, to *borrow*.

21. The circumstances to which I refer are these: this transaction of the Israelites was the subject of a divine command, twice repeated; and in each repetition of this command an expression is used, which, to my mind, serves to clear up the

\* Numb. iv. 22—41.

† Numb. vii. 1—9.

‡ Exod. iii. 22; xi. 2; xii. 35, 36.

whole affair. In the first instance\* every woman is directed to *ask, demand, or require of her neighbour and of her that sojourneth with her in her house*; and in the second,† every man is to ask, demand, or require of *his neighbour*, and every woman of *her neighbour*, jewels of silver and jewels of gold, or gold and silver vessels. Now, when this request or demand was made, the Israelites were all gathered into the land of Goschen. On the infliction of the plague of flies they were so separated from the Egyptians that neither that nor any subsequent plague touched them. The question, then, to be asked here, is this: How came it that numbers of the rich Egyptians should at that time not only dwell in Goschen, but sojourn even in the houses of the Israelites? And the reply lies on the very face of the narrative. With the increasing conviction on their minds that Egypt was being destroyed by the judgments of the God of Israel, and with the immunity enjoyed in Goschen before their eyes, they sought, in numbers increasing as each plague descended, to share in that immunity; and fleeing to Goschen with their riches, entreated shelter even under the roofs of the persecuted race. The Israelites, bearing in mind the divine direction, naturally and fairly asked a recompense in the portable wealth of the time. But, besides this, they had for more than two centuries resided in one of the most fertile portions of the most fertile land in the world, as a pastoral and an agricultural, if not a trading, people. They must have had houses and lands of which to dispose, and produce of various kinds, which they could not carry with them. Might they not, in exchange for real property, have demanded a very considerable amount of gold and silver? Yes. Only take the Scripture narrative as it stands,—only admit that a nation of upwards of 2,000,000, after a residence of 200 years, went forth from another—and *that a rich and powerful nation*—and there is nothing whatever to excite suspicion of a misapprehension of figures in the statement, that the former had become possessed of £259,840.

22. For, in conclusion, what was this Egypt of which so much is made, when her history appears adverse to Scripture, and of which, when her history and her monuments tend to confirm Scripture history, so little is made? Was she an insignificant nation with a population “not to be put at less than a million,” and likely to be thrown into a state of terror and commotion by the rising of 600 armed men, and the emigration of a retinue of 2,500 or even of 6,000? Was she not, rather, that Egypt which, 200 years prior to the Exodus,

\* Exod. iii. 22.

† Exod. xi. 2.

became, in God's providence, the market of the surrounding countries? Nay, which 200 years beyond that time was evidently a country of a pastoral, an agricultural, and even a commercial character? Was she not already renowned for wisdom, and famous for her arts and her science? Was she not the Egypt of the Obelisks, the Sphinx, and the Pyramids? —the Egypt of Zoan, of Memphis, and of Thebes—

—Θῆβαι

Αἰγυπτίαι, ὅθι πλεῖστα δόμοις ἐν κτήματα κείται,  
 Αἶθ' ἑκατόμυλοι εἰσι, διηκόσιοι δ' ἄν' ἑκάστην  
 Ἄνῆρες ἐξοιχνεῦσι σὺν ἵπποισιν καὶ ὄχεσφιν.\*—*Iliad* ix. 381.

23. Yes, in a country with such vast cities, and capable of producing such immortal works, Israel was formed into a nation. Great by the side of such a nation as this, and, with the aid of her God, shaking off its dominion, Israel marched forth “with a high hand.” There is every reason, then, to believe that the riches, partly amassed during 200 years’ residence in such a country, and partly acquired in that terrible struggle for her independence, must have been vast. There is no just reason to doubt the repeated statement of Moses, that the armed force of Israel at the Exodus was 600,000 men.

\* “And all that opulent Egyptian Thebes  
 Receives, the city with an hundred gates,  
 Whence twenty thousand chariots rush to war.”

COWPER'S TRANSLATION.

## APPENDIX.

I HAVE asserted in the foregoing paper that the first two reasons or conjectures assigned for such a *casual* "alteration of numbers" in the Hebrew text as shall leave "the history of facts incorrupt," are based upon error, and that the fifth is a conjecture resting upon another conjecture. The first is as follows:—

25. "The word for *thousand* in Hebrew (eleph) also means *ox*. This may have led to one or two mistakes, if not more." But how? For אֵלֶף (eleph), even in its plural form אֵלֶפִים (äläphim), can be translated *oxen* only *four times* throughout the Old Testament, and in the historical books only *once*; where, in the authorized version, it is represented by the word *kine*. In the singular אֵלֶף it *never* signifies *ox*. Whereas, if many *thousands* are to be expressed, the word for *thousands* is always אֵלֶף, *singular* (exactly according to our idiom *five hundred*, and *ten thousand*); אֵלֶפִים, the plural, is used only when the number of thousands is *under ten*. How, then, is it possible that in any one of the alleged cases of "highly exaggerated numbers," such exaggeration could have been caused by אֵלֶפִים, which in those high numbers is never used, sometimes signifying *oxen*? The second reason is this:—"Marginal comments and corrections and the figures heading *haphthoroth* or liturgical sections, may have become incorporated with the text."

26. The possibility of marginal comments and corrections having become incorporated with the text is not to be denied; although its probability to any large extent is so questionable that before this reason, even so far, can have any weight, instances of such probable incorporation must be adduced. As to *Haphthoroth*, they exist only in the Prophets. They must here, therefore, be confounded with *Parashoth*—the liturgical sections of the law. These I have looked through, and not a single instance can I find of the probable incorporation of the כפף, or כסס at the head of the fifty-four sections with any passage containing one of the so-called exaggerated numbers.

27. The following is the fifth reason:—"But the most fertile source of errors in the text of Scripture as regards numbers is

the very inartificial manner in which those numbers were represented. The letters of the alphabet were employed to signify units, tens, and hundreds; two dashes or dots after a letter made it represent so many thousands. A smear, therefore, or a blot would raise an authentic into a highly exaggerated number. Again, numbers might be mistaken for words, and words for numbers."

28. Now the use of Hebrew letters on the Maccabean coins is a fact. But their use in the original manuscripts of the Old Testament is not by any means an established fact. On the contrary, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts known invariably express numbers in words. And considering the scrupulous regard of the Jews for the integrity of the sacred text, we may fairly conclude that it was ever so done. This conclusion is confirmed, too, by the fact that the Septuagint translators did the same. Discrepancies and difficulties, some of which are given in the paper to which I refer, led Glassius and others to conjecture that these had arisen from an early use of numerical letters. This is the only ground for the conjecture. Yet this conjecture is now converted into a fact; and asserted to have been "the most fertile source of errors in the text of Scripture."

29. Happily, the one attempt in the paper to apply this one of the five reasons to the elucidation of a text—one of the texts, singularly enough, on which Glassius grounds his conjecture—fails to convince. It is the passage which states the number of men smitten at Bethshemesh, because the men of that place looked into the ark.\* The Authorized Version of the words (with which the Septuagint and the Vulgate nearly agree), is this:—"And He smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord; even He smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men." I must say I consider this translation anomalous. "The exaggeration," therefore, here does not of necessity exist in the Hebrew text. By Dr. Waterland, and others, another rendering is given, which removes this exaggeration: "He smote the men of Bethshemesh because they looked into the ark of the Lord, and he smote of the people threescore and ten men out of fifty thousand." One objection to this rendering in the paper on "The Numerical System of the Old Testament" is, that fifty thousand for the male population of so inconsiderable a town as Bethshemesh is an improbable number. To this I reply that the text intimates that on an occasion of such great national and religious interest, the

\* 1 Sam. vi. 19.

men of Bethshemesh did not stand alone. The *difference* between *men* and *people*, which the Vulgate marks by the words *viros* and *plebis*, and which is asserted not to exist in the Hebrew, does exist there; and the most literal rendering of the words so far is this—"He smote *of* or *among* the *men* of Bethshemesh because they looked into the ark of the Lord, and he smote *of* or *among* *the people*."

30. The other objection to this rendering of the words "seventy out of fifty thousand" is, that it involves the insertion of the preposition *out of*. But no forced or unnatural insertion of that preposition is required in such a connection. Glassius in his "*Philologia Sacra*," states the omission of *מ* *of*, or *out of*, to be an established idiom. And one of the examples given by him exactly meets and illustrates the case before us. It occurs in the intercession of Abraham on behalf of Sodom—\*

אולי יחסרון המשים הצדיקים חמשה  
Five therighteous fifty lack peradventure

"Peradventure there lack five *of* the fifty righteous." On which Glassius remarks, "*pro* מהמשים *de* quinquaginta viris."

31. In preference to so reasonable a rendering, the paper on "The Numerical System of the Old Testament" suggests the following:—"Still I think I shall be pardoned if I suggest that in the old Hebrew character the symbols of 'out of a thousand,' and 'fifty thousand,' might be most easily mistaken for one another; and that the *seventy* itself is but a mistake for the *indefinite number seven*. Those who understand Hebrew are aware that the tens are expressed by the plurals of the units. 'Seventy' is in the Hebrew expressed by 'sevens.' Here is an opportunity for error; to which we may add, that though the character expressing 'seventy,' is not particularly like that denoting 'seven,' the names of the letters Ain and Zain are not unlike one another." In short, the rendering to be obtained by this singular process is to be, "out of a thousand *people* He smote several."

32. Now let the symbols for "out of a thousand," and for "fifty thousand," in the old Hebrew character be produced, that their similarity and the facility with which one might be mistaken for the other, may be seen. I cannot myself regard the suggestion to be pardonable without this.

33. The supposed *casual* substitution, however, of the symbol of "seventy," for the symbol of "seven," was an impossibility.

For even, if for a moment it be admitted that numerical letters were then in use, and if further it be admitted that *through the similarity of the names of the letters Ain and Zain*, a careful scribe might accidentally have written "seventy" instead of "seven," yet the concord of Hebrew numerals would have necessitated an alteration of the text, designed to agree with this accident. The words in the present text are שבעים איש, *shiveem eesh*. Had it originally been *seven* instead of *seventy*, it would have been written שבעה אנשים, *shivvah anáshim*. Alteration to such an extent from the mistake of one letter or symbol for another is evidently, then, an impossibility.

The CHAIRMAN.—The first thing we have to do is to return a vote of thanks to Mr. Moule for his paper. I may also state that our Honorary Secretary has in his hands a letter from the author of the paper read on the 7th February last year, which is the cause of the papers read here to-night being written. It appears desirable that that letter should now be read.

Captain F. PETRIE then read the following letter from the Rev. Dr. Thornton :—

I am glad to have the points I have mooted thoroughly discussed ; but I most strongly and emphatically protest against the way in which my name is mixed up with that of Dr. Colenso, whose avowed opinions lie under the gravest censure of the religious body to which he professes to belong, and of which I also am a humble member and minister. Should Mr. Gosse's paper be printed, I shall request that this protest be appended to it. I desire to repeat what I have already said, that my argument differs *toto celo* from Dr. Colenso's. He says, "Because these numbers seem incredible, therefore the Bible, of which they are part, is not the Word of God." I say, "Because the Bible is, every part of it, the Word of God, therefore some of these numbers must be considered incorrect." I propose to rectify, or to disregard, some of the numbers ; he flings away numbers and Book together. He writes as a professed and avowed sceptic, I as a stanch believer. He is ready and willing to allow the whole Book to be a clumsy forgery ; I hold to the Book, and shall be ready to hold to the numbers also, if I find any argument to show that they must really be considered an integral part of the Book.

Whilst I protest against being in the smallest degree identified with that unhappy enemy of the Bible, I thank Mr. Gosse for the tone of his paper. I am sure he did not intend to cause—he certainly has not caused—the least uneasiness either to me or those who think with me. I am glad to find he has an opinion, holds it stoutly, and is ready and able to defend it. I respect and admire the man who does so, however much he may differ from me, and am quite open to conviction, and thankful for all reasoning that may tend to preserve me from error. Surely from the collision of minds, in loving argument rather than in hostile dispute, sparks will be struck out to glitter in concert with the Great Lamp of Truth.



Mr. Gosse's arguments are, I must confess, not all new and not all overpowering. Those which he urges against Colenso are to be found, I think, in the late Dr. M'Caul's able and interesting defence of the Pentateuch. Those which more nearly concern me fail to convince me that my views, as a whole, are erroneous, whatever be the correct way of applying the principle to details. I will say this much, that the careful weighing of his and Mr. Graham's remarks, inclines me to think that I have been hasty in putting the number of the Israelite warriors so low as I have done, and that the words of the sacred narrative are, as he suggests, too strong to be applied to a tribe consisting of only two or three thousand. But I cannot see that I am giving up my Bible and all its blessed teachings, its comforts for the present and its hopes for the future, if I decline to believe that a son was two years older than his father (2 Chron. xxii. 2), and at the same time eighteen years younger (2 Kings viii. 26), or that 40,000 (1 Kings iv. 26) and 4,000 (2 Chron. ix. 25) are the same number. If any of these numbers are incorrectly transcribed, so may others have been.

I must repeat and adhere to the principles I laid down in my original paper, viz. :

1. Many, though not all, of the numbers which we find in our present text of the Old Testament, are not the numbers given by authors of the various books, but have in some way become incorrect or are misunderstood, some being greater, some smaller than the real numbers.

2. Numbers and facts stand on a different footing, the latter being capable of none but intentional falsification, the former being easily corrupted.

3. While we fully believe that the Deity can do, and does, whatever He wills, and that all miracles recorded in Scripture *as such*, did really take place, still we must also hold that He is not lavish of unnecessary miracle.

The "fallacy of quotations" is one into which I always am reluctant to run the risk of falling; but I cannot forbear saying that if a want of reliance on the correctness of Old Testament numbers, as at present understood, be a mark of declension from the faith—if it be an article of the Christian belief that 50,070 men were smitten for looking into the ark, or that Samson slew one thousand in an afternoon—I am an unbeliever in excellent company. The late Rev. T. H. Horne is not usually considered to have identified himself with the sceptical or even the "Broad" schools of his or any other time, but I find in his well-known "Introduction to the Scriptures" the following:—

"Many of these numbers which to us appear almost incredible in some places, and contradictory in others, are owing to mistakes in some similar letters." "The corruption may be accounted for from the transcribers having carelessly added or omitted a single cipher" (Append. III. i. § 3). "If there be no mistake in the numbers, which probably are incorrect" (Append. III. viii. 6). "It is possible that there may be a corruption in the numbers" (*ib.* 8). Exactly my view.

With respect to the Rev. H. Moule's paper, "*Israel in Egypt*," Dr. Thornton says, in a second letter :—The following are the *Old Hebrew* letters to which I referred in section 8 of my paper :—

" *Fifty* thousand 7LKY

" *From* a thousand 7LKY

" *Two* thousand (*perhaps*) 7LKY for YZ7LK

" *In* a thousand 7LKY

"The *form* of the letters is copied from Ballhorn's 'Alphabete orient. u. occident. Sprachen.'

"In other matters I do not wish to engage in controversy with one who is really on the same side as myself in defending the truthfulness of Revelation against its enemies."

On account of the lateness of the hour the discussion was then adjourned to June the 19th.