

**BY-PATHS OF BIBLE KNOWLEDGE,
I: CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE, A
HISTORY OF THE LONDON
OBELISK WITH AN EXPOSITION OF
THE HIEROGLYPHICS**

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By-Paths of Bible Knowledge, I: Cleopatra's Needle, a History of the London Obelisk with an Exposition of the Hieroglyphics by James King

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JAMES KING

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I

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

A HISTORY OF THE LONDON OBELISK

WITH AN

EXPOSITION OF THE HIEROGLYPHICS

BY THE

REV. JAMES KING, M.A.

AUTHORIZED LECTURER TO THE PALESTINE EXPLORATION FUND.

"The Land of Egypt is before thee."—Gen. xlvii. 6.

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[The illustrations of the obelisk at Constantinople, and of Cleopatra's Needle on the Embankment, are taken, by the kind permission of Sir Erasmus Wilson, from his work, "The Egypt of the Past."]

INTRODUCTION.

THE London Obelisk, as the monument standing on the Thames Embankment is now called, is by far the largest quarried stone in England; and the mysterious-looking characters covering its four faces were carved by workmen who were contemporaries of Moses and the Israelites during the time of the Egyptian Bondage. It was set up before the great temple of the sun at Heliopolis about 1450 B.C., by Thothmes III., who also caused to be carved the central columns of hieroglyphs on its four sides. The eight lateral columns were carved by Rameses II. two centuries afterwards. These two monarchs were the two mightiest of the kings of ancient Egypt.

In 1877 the author passed through the land of Egypt, and became much interested during the progress of the journey in the study of the hieroglyphs covering tombs, temples, and obelisks. He was assisted in the pursuit of Egyptology by examining the excellent collections of Egyptian antiquities in the Boolak Museum at Cairo, the Louvre at Paris, and the British Museum. He feels much indebted to Dr. Samuel Birch, the leading English Egyptologist, for his kind assistance in rendering some obscure passages on the Obelisk.

This little volume contains a *verbatim* translation into English, and an exposition, of the hieroglyphic inscriptions cut by Thothmes III. on the Obelisk, and an exposition of those inscribed by Rameses II. Dr. Samuel Birch, the late W. R. Cooper, and other Egyptologists, have translated the inscription in general terms, but no attempt was made by these learned men to show the value of each hieroglyph; so that the student could no more hope to gain from these general translations a knowledge of Egyptology, than he could hope to gain a knowledge of the Greek language by reading the English New Testament.

In the march of civilisation, Egypt took the lead of all the nations of the earth. The Nile Valley is a vast museum of Egyptian antiquities, and in this sunny vale search must be made for the germs of classical art.

The London Obelisk is interesting to the architect as a specimen of the masonry of a people accounted as the great builders of the Ancient World. It is interesting to the antiquary as setting forth the workmanship of artists who lived in the dim twilight of antiquity. It is interesting to the Christian because this same venerable monument was known to Moses and the Children of Israel during their sojourn in the land of Goshen.

The inscription is not of great historical value, but the hieroglyphs are valuable in setting forth the earliest stages of written language, while their expressive symbolism enables us to interpret the moral and religious thoughts of men who lived in the infancy of the world.

Egypt is a country of surpassing interest to the Biblical student. From the early days of patriarchal history down to the discovery in 1883 of the site of Pithom, a city founded by Rameses II., Egyptian and Israelitish and Christian history have touched at many points. Abraham visited the Nile Valley; Joseph, the slave, became lord of the whole country; God's people suffered there from cruel bondage, but the Lord so delivered them that "Egypt was glad at their departing;" the rulers of Egypt once and again ravaged Palestine, and laid Jerusalem under tribute. When, in the fulness of time, our Saviour appeared to redeem the world by the sacrifice of Himself, He was carried as a little child into Egypt, and there many of His earliest and most vivid impressions were received. Thus, from the time of Abraham, the father of the faithful, to the advent of Jesus, the Lord and Saviour of all, Egypt is associated with the history of human redemption.

And although the Obelisk which forms the subject of this volume tells us in its inscriptions nothing about Abraham, Joseph, or Moses, yet it serves among other important ends one of great interest. It seems to bring us into very direct relationship with these men who lived so many generations ago. The eyes of Moses must have rested many times upon this ancient monument, old even when first he looked upon it, and read its story of past greatness; the toiling, suffering Israelites looked upon it, and we seem to come into a closer fellowship with them as we realize this fact.

The recent wonderful discovery of mummies and Egyptian antiquities, of which an account is given in this volume, and the excavations now being carried on at Pithom and Zoan, are exciting much fresh interest in Egyptian research.

This little volume will have served its end if it interests the reader in the historical associations of the monument, which he can visit, if he cares to do so, and by its aid read for himself what it has to tell us of the men and deeds of a long-distant past.

It also seeks to stimulate wider interest and research into all that the monuments of Egypt can tell us in confirmation of the historical parts of the Bible, and of the history of that wondrous country which is prominent in the forefront of both Old and New Testaments, from the day when "Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there," until the day when Joseph "arose and took the young Child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son."

