

the volume to be issued immediately to all subscribers to the Græco-Roman Branch, under the title of *Fayoum Towns and their Papyri*. Though Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt have already paid three visits to the Fayoum, they do not feel that they have yet exhausted its possibilities. The committee of the Egypt Exploration Fund have entrusted them this winter with a fourth expedition, on a new site, for which pecuniary support is urgently needed.

J. S. C.

The Origin of the Alphabet.

IN my excavation of the prehistoric palace at Knossos I came upon a series of deposits of clay tablets, representing the royal archives, the inscriptions on which belong to two distinct systems of writing—one, hieroglyphic and quasi-pictorial; the other, for the most part, linear and much more highly developed. Of these the hieroglyphic class especially presents a series of forms answering to what, according to the names of the Phœnician letters, we must suppose to have been the original pictorial designs from which these, too, were derived. A series of conjectural reconstructions of the originals of the Phœnician letters on this line were, in fact, drawn out by my father, Sir John Evans, for a lecture on the origin of the alphabet, given at the Royal Institution, in 1872, and it may be said that two-thirds of these resemble almost line for line actual forms of Cretan hieroglyphics. The oxhead (*Aleph*), the house (*Beth*), the window (*He*), the peg (*Vau*), the fence (*Cheth*), the hand (*Yod*), seen sideways; and the open palm (*Kaph*), the fish (*Nun*), the post or trunk (*Samekh*), the eye (*Ain*), the mouth (*Pe*), the teeth (*Shin*), the cross-sign (*Tau*), not to speak of several other probable examples, are all literally reproduced.

The analogy thus supplied is, indeed, overwhelming. It is impossible to believe that while on one side of the East Mediterranean basin these alphabetic prototypes were naturally evolving themselves, the people of the opposite shore were arriving at the same result, by a complicated process of selection and transformation of a series of hieratic Egyptian signs derived from quite different objects.

The analogy with the Cretan hieroglyphic form certainly weighs strongly in favor of the simple and natural explanation of the origin of the Phœnician letters, which was held from the time of Gesenius onwards, and was only disturbed by the extremely ingenious, though over-elaborate, theory of De Rougé.

Whether, however, the Phœnician letters, or rather their pictorial originals, were actually selected from the Cretan characters is a different question, and on this I wished to express myself more guardedly. The correspondences are, indeed, so striking that they certainly seem to point to, at least, a generic connection, though one form at least, the camel's head and neck (*Gimel*), must have been adopted on Syrian soil.

What I ventured to suggest at the Bradford meeting was that the points of community might be ultimately explained by the powerful settlement of the Ægean island peoples on the coast of Canaan, represented by the Philistines and the abiding name of Palestine. The biblical traditions, which gave part of them, at least, the name of Kerethim or Cretans, have been recently confirmed by an important piece of Egyptian evidence going far to show that Kaphtor, whence they traditionally came, is the same as the insular realm of the Kefts, the chief representatives of Mycenæan culture on Eighteenth Dynasty monuments. The prolonged sojourn of the Caphtorim or Philistines, in their new home, would itself explain the absorption of local elements among the hieroglyphic forms that they had originally brought over. We know that they shortly lost their indigenous speech and became Semitized.

On the walls of the tomb of Rekhmara, the Governor of Thebes under Thothmes III.—in the first half, that is, of the fifteenth century B. C.—the Keft chieftains are seen bearing precious vases, and ingots, and golden oxheads as tributary gifts to Pharaoh. It is of great interest in relation to the chronology of the clay archives of Knossos that on several of the tablets, with linear inscriptions—in this case, no doubt, containing inventories of the royal treasure—there appear, beside the written record, pictorial representations of vases, ingots, and oxheads, precisely similar to those of the Egyptian

painting. It seems probable from this that part of the clay archives of the palace of Knossos go back to the fifteenth century B. C. The date of the most recent is at all events limited by that of the destruction of the palace itself. Of the numerous relics found within this great building there are none which point to a period as late as the latest prehistoric elements of Mycenæ itself. It would be extremely unsafe to bring down anything found within its walls later than, at most, the twelfth century B. C.—[*Arthur J. Evans in London Times.*]