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XLIX. *Remarks on Mr. Carter's Paper on the Gopher-wood.*
By CHARLES T. BEKE, Esq.

To the Editors of the Philosophical Magazine and Journal.

Gentlemen,

I OBSERVE that my paper on the Gopher-wood of Scripture, which appeared in the Number of your Magazine for August last, has given rise to the observations upon the same subject, made by Mr. Carter in your last Number.

That gentleman justly states my argument to be, that the word גֹּפֶר (*gópher*) is probably the same as כֹּפֶר (*kópher*); that *kopher* means *pitch*; and that consequently the wood in question would appear to be that of a *pitch tree*.

The first of these propositions Mr. Carter allows to be "highly probable"; but at the same time that he admits *gopher* to be identical with *kopher*, and thus agrees with me in all that I really contended for, he thinks it very questionable that the latter word means *pitch*, as it is rendered in the received English and all other authorized versions, for the reason, principally, that the verb כָּפַר (*kaphár*), from which כֹּפֶר (*kopher*) is plainly derived, is nowhere used in Scripture in the sense of 'to cover or daub with pitch.'

But this reasoning must surely have been adopted too hastily; for Mr. Carter can never intend it to be his meaning that a derivative word is not to be used in a secondary sense, because the root to which it is to be traced cannot in every case have attached to it the same secondary meaning as that of its derivative*. Were it so, the use of *kapher* and its derivatives, in the sense of 'to purge away or pardon' (Ps. lxx. 3.); 'to atone' (Lev. iv. 35); 'to disannul or obliterate' (Isa. xxviii. 18.); 'a ransom' (Exod. xxi. 30.); 'a [covered?] bason' (1 Chron. xxviii. 17.), or even 'pitch';—all of which meanings have plainly a direct reference to the primary signification of

* It is scarcely necessary to adduce any illustration of the consequences of opposing what is, in fact, a fundamental principle of language: one example presents itself, however, which is so very apposite, that I cannot refrain from citing it. It is in the Latin verb *tegere*, to *cover*, which besides its derivatives *tegmen*, *tegimen* and *tegumen*, of which the meaning, generally, is a 'covering', whether signifying in particular a 'garment', a 'hide', a 'shade', a 'shelter', &c., has also another derivative, namely, *tegula*, which word is exclusively applied to the article used for the covering of dwellings: yet because not one passage in any author can be found in which the verb *tegere* has of itself the particular import of 'to tile', it would certainly never be contended that, *therefore*, *tegula* does not signify a *tile*.

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the verb 'to cover,'—would be erroneous: and it may be added that (independently of all other objections to it,) Mr. Carter's suggestion that *kopher* means *cypress*, must, upon his own reasoning, be wholly untenable, for not one passage can be found in Scripture in which *kaphar* has the particular import of 'to cover with cypress'.

Indeed, if there be any word which has attached to it a fixed and unequivocal meaning, it seems to be this word *kopher* (Gen. vi. 14.), which, as far as my information extends, is not attempted to be rendered otherwise than by the word 'pitch', in any version of the Bible, excepting in that of Mr. Bellamy, —the authority of which version, however, I may be allowed unqualifiedly to dispute. But it is not necessary to depend solely upon the received translations for the determination of the true signification of this word, seeing that the Arabic كمر, the Chaldee כופר, and Syriac כܡܪ, are all employed to express the same word 'pitch'. Nor does the proof of its meaning rest even here; for we find the Hebrew word גֹּפְרִית (*gōphrith*), brimstone,—in Arabic كبريت, in Chaldee כּוּבְרִית, and in Syriac ܕܒܪܝܬ, —which word is evidently derived from גֹּפֶר or כֹּפֶר in its secondary signification of *pitch*, on account of the resemblance, however partial or indirect, of the one substance to the other, and not from its primary meaning 'a covering', with which brimstone cannot possibly have any connexion.

The process of the dérivation of the word *gophrith* may be thus stated. The vegetable pitch with which Noah's ark was covered, was that substance to which the name of *kopher*, or *gopher*, was applied in the first instance: this name was afterwards (as, in fact, has been the case with its English representative 'pitch',) extended to the Asphaltus, or *mineral* pitch; and from the resemblance which brimstone bears to asphaltus, not only in its mineral origin, but also in the effect produced upon it by heat, the former substance thence derived its appellation, as being 'a substance like *gopher*'.

The opinion advanced by Mr. Carter, that mineral rather than vegetable pitch was the product of the country where the ark was built, and that, in fact, the pitch obtained from wood could scarcely have been known to Noah, is founded upon the assumption that the situation of that country was in the neighbourhood of Babylon, and also that society in that early time existed in a state of infancy as regards its culture and knowledge. On the latter point I will refrain from saying more for the present, than that I apprehend the

evidence which we possess upon the subject ought to lead us to a very different conclusion; and with respect to the former assumption, I will refer to the paper "on the former extent of the Persian Gulf," which appeared in your Number for last month (February), from which, if the facts adduced in it are correct, the inference would appear to be that the ark could not possibly have been built anywhere in the neighbourhood alluded to by Mr. Carter.

I am not aware of any ground (beyond mere tradition, which is not to be depended upon,) for attributing any particular locality to Noah's antediluvian residence, excepting that, in the absence of all arguments for a contrary opinion, the most philosophical course is to assume that in the neighbourhood where the ark rested, there also it was built; in which case Armenia or the north of Mesopotamia has the greatest claim to be considered in that light.

It is not, however, intended to enter here upon the discussion of this subject, neither shall I attempt to determine to what particular species of tree the gopher-wood belonged; but agreeing as I entirely do with Mr. Carter, "that a reference to the existing productions of the climate in which the ark was built may not be irrelevant to such an inquiry," I will, in conclusion, merely remark, that the only wood which, in the present day, grows in any considerable quantities throughout the country of Armenia, from the frontiers of Persia as far as Asia Minor, is (as I have been lately informed) a species of white pine, the product of which, namely, pitch, is an article of great traffic among the natives: hence it would seem not unreasonable to imagine that Noah and his sons, after receiving the Divine directions, may have proceeded into the pine forests of their native country, and there built the ark of the wood of the trees עֵץ גִּפְרִי (*hatzé-gopher*), which furnished at the same time the pitch כֹּפֶר (*kópher*), or גִּפְרִי (*gópher*), which was necessary for covering and preserving it, and for caulking it and rendering it water-tight.

I am, Gentlemen, yours, &c.

March 8, 1824.

CHARLES T. BEKE.

L. *On the Ancient and partly buried Forests of Holderness.*
By JOHN PHILLIPS, Esq., F.G.S., Professor of Geology in
King's College, London*.

1. SUBTERRANEAN forests, as they are termed, abound so much on all the coasts of England, and have

Read to the Yorkshire Philosophical Society on the 4th of March 1834; and communicated by the Author.