

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

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It is not without significance that the chapter on Holy Scripture stands

**The Vital
Question for
Bible Students.**

first in the Westminster Symbols. Its position indicates the fundamental relation existing between one's doctrine of Scripture and the other articles of his faith. Perhaps the most vital question at present confronting the student of the Bible is—What think you of the Scriptures themselves? Our attitude towards the Book can hardly fail decisively to affect our attitude towards its several statements. Unquestionably one who regards it as a *revelation of the mind of man* concerning himself, the world, its author, its origin, and its destiny, may still find the Bible an interesting, and even a very important book. But, obviously, he will, in the very nature of things, take up towards it an attitude wholly different from one who esteems it to be a *revelation of the mind of God* upon these several points. Even as a record of what men have believed concerning God, and what duties they have conceived themselves as owing to God, the Bible will always occupy a conspicuous place in the history of the development of the human mind, and partic-

ularly of the so-called religious instincts of man.

Viewed in this light, however, the Bible at once takes its place alongside of other similar

**An Effect to be
Considered.**

records. Its statements are at once stripped of the element of finality—except for those who think that in religious matters the human mind reached the acme of its development some two thousand years ago. Further, its statements will have only a relative value, and command only a qualified assent and reverence. A stream cannot rise higher than its source. If the Bible be a revelation of the minds of its various authors, it will command assent and reverence only in proportion as we may esteem its several authors to have been qualified to deal with the large and intricate problems that they have assumed to handle. We may at our pleasure, add to, subtract from, modify, or even wholly set aside what they have to say. We would, of course, do this with that courtesy of phrase that is characteristic of our advanced and cultured age; but to expect us to refrain from doing it, would be to require us to lay aside that intellect-

A LEAF FROM THE HEBREW ECCLESIASTICUS.

ANOTHER DISCOVERY AND ITS POSSIBILITIES.

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An introductory note to the book of Ecclesiasticus in the Douay Bible informs us that its author was Jesus, the son of Sirach, of Jerusalem, who flourished about two hundred years before Christ, and that it is not in the Jewish canon, though "received as canonical and divine by the Catholic Church." The additional statement is made that, "It was first wrote in the Hebrew, but afterwards translated into Greek by another Jesus, the grand-son of the author." This seems to have been done in or about the year 132 B. C., in the reign of Ptolemy Euergetes.

A leaf of the original Hebrew was brought to England in the spring of 1896 by those two remarkable ladies of Cambridge, England, the twin sisters, Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Gibson, to whom the world is so deeply indebted for their discoveries at the St. Catherine Convent, Mount Sinai.

Mrs. Lewis, at the conclusion of her account of this discovery, speaks of it* in great glee as a well deserved retribution on the author, the son of Sirach, who appears to have been a woman-hater. She says: "The names of Deborah, Ruth, and Judith do not occur in his list of national heroes; and one of his aphorisms runs: 'Better is the wickedness of a man than the goodness of a woman.' (Ecclesiasticus xlii. 14). It seems therefore a just judgment upon him that the Hebrew text of his book, the text which he actually wrote, should have practically disappeared for fifteen centuries, and should have been brought under the eyes of a European scholar, I might say, a scholar of his own nation, by two women."

She tells us, in her bright and interesting way, how the discovery was made. The sisters were returning from their third journey to Mount Sinai, where the Syriac Palimpsest of the four Gospels, and the Jerusalem lectionaries had been discovered.

They had made a journey, by way of "the river of Egypt" and Gaza, to Jerusalem. The "leaf of the Hebrew Leviticus" was,

**In the Shadow of Mount Sinai*, pp. 179, 180.

along with many other specimens of similar appearance, in a "box," or, as we would say, trunk, belonging to Mrs. Gibson which fell into the hands of custom-house officials at Jaffa, where it made a very narrow escape from destruction. After describing some of their difficulties with this representative of Moslem rule, Mrs. Lewis tells us :

"But our troubles were not yet at an end, for the custom house officials at Beyrout had sent a message to those at Jaffa to be very particular about that box, and they accordingly overhauled and rumbled up everything that was in it, placing a heavy pair of boots on the top of a broché silk evening dress, and treating fancy creations of French millinery art as if they were like their own ragged uniforms. The bundle of Hebrew fragments passed, of course, under their scrutiny, and might possibly have been impounded had not Joseph (their dragoman) come to the rescue. He took advantage of the law that exempts both the Bible and the Coran from the confiscation that is now extended to almost all other books. 'Do you not see that these are Hebrew?' he exclaimed, 'and the ladies say their prayers in Hebrew. Do you want to prevent them from saying their prayers?'"

"This expostulation sufficed equally for the second bundle of fragments which we had bought only a few days previously."

The ladies reached home on May 3d, and went to work developing photographs and examining the fragments of writing they had brought. All which formed part of the canonical books of the Old Testament were identified, and all the rest seeming to be portions of the Talmud or of private Jewish documents, were put into the hands of Dr. Solomon Schechter, Reader in Talmudic to the University, for examination.

"He held up a large vellum leaf, saying, 'This is part of the Jerusalem Talmud, which is very rare; may I take it away?' 'Certainly,' I replied. Then he held up a dirty scrap of paper. 'This too is very interesting; may I take it away and identify it?' 'Certainly.' 'May I publish it?' I replied, 'Mrs. Gibson and I will only be too happy if you find that it is worth publishing.' Dr. Schechter departed, and an hour afterwards we received a telegram: 'Fragment very important; come to me this afternoon.' Again there came a letter as we were sitting down to lunch. Here it is :

“UNIVERSITY LIBRARY,
“Cambridge, May 13, 1896.

“Dear Mrs. Lewis: I think we have reason to congratulate ourselves; for the fragment I took with me represents a piece of the original Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus. It is the first time that such a thing was discovered, &c.

(Signed)

SOLOMON SCHECHTER.’”

Mrs. Lewis wrote the same afternoon to both *The Athenaeum* and *The Academy*, giving a description of the leaf, and five weeks later, an announcement was made in *The Athenaeum*, “to the effect that nine more leaves of the same Hebrew text of Ecclesiasticus” had been discovered by two of the learned librarians of the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Further examination showed that these belonged to the same manuscript with the leaf brought by the sisters and identified by Dr. Schechter.

These had been brought to England by Professor Sayce about the same time with the single leaf, and Mrs. Lewis adds:

“It is natural for me to think that my letter of May 13th, published on May 16th, was of some assistance in guiding Messrs. Neubauer and Cowley to this result.”

The discovery of this leaf and the nine others of the Hebrew original of an apocryphal book may seem, at first sight, of little importance, and it *may* prove to be of little practical value. Yet, there are three possible results which may prove the discovery to have been another, not unimportant, “link in God’s great counsels.”

1. In the first place, it is very likely to stimulate scholars to further and more diligent research leading to important discoveries in the future.

Dr. Schechter’s visit to Egypt during the same month, and his gaining access to a very large collection of Hebrew fragments in the Genizah synagogue at Cairo, was evidently a result of this discovery, and it is an earnest, doubtless, of other efforts to come.

2. In the second place, this discovery suggests a possible explanation of some apparent contradictions in the Gospels. Dr. Stalker, writing in *The Contemporary Review* for January, says:

“Some of our distinguished scholars had translated the Greek book of Ecclesiasticus into Hebrew, when a fragment of the original Hebrew accidentally turned up; and the contrast between

this and the version made by the scholars was a spectacle to gods and men." He then observes, "It is hoped that many of the curious discrepancies between the different Gospels can be cleared up by tracing the discrepant words back to the Aramaic original." He also remarks, however, "I should like to see the primary assumption that Aramaic and not Greek was the original language of Jesus, thoroughly investigated by our own English scholars, before this line of speculation is carried much further amongst us."

Of course, if our Saviour taught in Greek exclusively, no such result can be expected from this source.

3. A third possibility (or I should, perhaps, say, *probability*), is that through this discovery, new light will be thrown on the reliability of some assumptions of radical higher criticism as to the dates of Old Testament books. What these radical assumptions are can hardly be better stated than by quoting from the article of that most competent of scholars in this department, Dr. Willis J. Beecher, in the February number of *The Bible Student*:

"The Jews whom Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile had no ancestral monotheistic traditions or institutions. Save a few historical or prophetic scraps and fragments, neither they nor their ancestors had any literature, nearly all the books of the Old Testament being of later date. Old men among them could remember when Deuteronomy was published, but most of the laws attributed to Moses were first reduced to writing *several generations later than the exile.*"

Now, Mrs. Lewis informs us that, before this discovery of a part of the Hebrew Ecclesiasticus, "Professor D. S. Margoliouth, of Oxford, had already made the advantages which would accrue from the reconstruction of the Hebrew Ecclesiasticus the subject of his very brilliant inaugural lecture." Of these advantages one, he tells us, would be an enlargement of the now rather limited Hebrew vocabulary, "both in quality and quantity." But a more important result than this would follow. "The reconstruction of the verses of Ben Sira (*i. e.*, the translation back into the original Hebrew), whether accomplished by me or some abler Hebraist, will give us for Hebrew what has hitherto been wanting, *a book of a certain date* (italics mine), to serve as a sort of foundation stone for the history of the language. If by

200 B. C. the whole Rabbinical farrago, with its terms and phrases and idioms and particles, was developed, and was the classical language of Jerusalem, and the medium for prayer and philosophical and religious instruction and speculation, then, between Ben Sira and the books of the Old Testament there must lie, in most cases, the deep waters of the captivity, the grave of the old Hebrew and the old Israel, and the work of the new Hebrew and of the new Israel.”

Now it must occur to every one capable of thinking on the subject, that if the evidences of the existence of the materials for this enlargement of the Hebrew vocabulary, and all that may be classed under the term “Rabbinical farrago,” already developed and existing as early as 200 B. C., were plainly seen through the imperfectly transparent medium of a translation, the *original Hebrew* would probably exhibit these evidences in an entirely unmistakable way. The fact that some attempted restoration or reconstruction of the Hebrew text from the Greek and Syriac translations may have been a somewhat ridiculous failure, can hardly be supposed to affect this probability.

I think that every reader will acknowledge that the discovery, at first sight apparently unimportant, of the leaf of the Hebrew Ecclesiasticus, has in it important *possibilities*, at least.

NOTE.—Since the account of the discovery of the leaf of the Hebrew Ecclesiasticus, and of the other fragments above referred to, was written by Mrs. Lewis, a warfare has been in progress among Semitic scholars, and especially between Professors Schechter and Margoliouth, which brings to mind the old question, “*Tantaene animis coelestibus irae?*” The *genuineness* of the Hebrew fragments is the question, and this shows us that it is wise to think of the results of the discoveries merely as “*possibilities*.” However, Nöldeke, “the acknowledged corypheus of Simitic scholars,” Kautsch, Smend and König join with Schechter in maintaining the genuineness of the leaves, and their conclusion seems to be in accord with the very general conviction of Semitic scholars.

P. P. F.

“THE BREAD OF LIFE.”

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Every form of created life which comes under our observation is dependent upon food for its support. “Every living thing is a feeding thing.” Its feeding is the test and sign of its life. The