

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

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Sta. With many thoughtful minds it is a serious question whether there has not been for some years a steady lessening of a sense of sin in the conscience of the present generation. By sin we mean want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. Much is said of vice and of crime; all forms of evil doing that work present and palpable injury upon the evil-doer himself or upon society, receive ample attention from the pulpit, the platform and the press. There has been no lack whatever of reform societies, movements, agencies looking to every imaginable betterment of man in the social sphere. Vice in well nigh all its forms and crime in every phase and stage of it, have been subjects of learned study, of careful scientific investigation, of elaborate philosophic treatment; whole libraries have been written discussing such matters in every possible relation to the present welfare of man and of society.

Be it understood, then, that in raising the question as to a lessening sense of sin in the conscience of this generation we are not ignoring so obvious a movement in current thought. In our conception sin is a

much broader term than any common to such discussion as we have referred to; it includes every form of vice and crime; anything that works injury to man, whether in the person of the agent or that of his fellow, is a sin; the whole of that wide and varied realm that attracts and absorbs the attention of the reformer belongs to the dominion of sin; but alas! while forming a part and a very real part thereof, this realm is only a very small fraction of sin's vast dominion; it is, so to speak, but the outward and visible expression, the sporadic manifestation of a far wider, far deeper evil, which is the source and soil out of which such manifestations grow.

In modern thought evil is studied chiefly as related to man i. e. as vice or crime; evil can be understood as sin only when viewed in its relation to God. Here is the distinctive difference.

If our readers will reflect upon the course of such studies as have fallen under their eye they will be impressed with the absence of such reference. One might almost say of these learned authors, that God is not in all their thoughts so seldom is it that his honor and glory figure in

Current Biblical Thought.

The Papyrus Of the Ten Commandments.

Readers of the "Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology" have been for some months aware of the turning up, among some papyrus fragments from Egypt which had come into the hands of Mr. W. L. NASH, Secretary of that Society, of a very early series of scraps of papyrus in Hebrew which proved to contain the Ten Commandments. These scraps were entrusted to Mr. STANLEY A. COOK, Fellow of Caius College Cambridge for decipherment; and their high importance was reported by him in a letter to Mr. NASH which was published in the "Proceedings" for November 12, 1902. This preliminary report was followed up in the January number of the "Proceedings" by an extended paper, by Mr. COOK, giving the text of the fragments with a translation and a discussion of the interesting questions to which the discovery has given rise. The "Jewish Quarterly Review" for April contains a similarly extended paper on the papyrus by Mr. F. C. BURKITT, who prints the text afresh, offers a translation, and supplies some very interesting remarks on the whole series of questions involved. Mr. BURKITT gives also a quasi *fac-simile* of the fragments which he assures us can be depended on as a generally trustworthy representation. There are four fragments in all, which when fitted together make a papyrus strip about five inches long and two across. The top margin is touched and also at one point the right hand margin: but except at this point all the twenty-four lines are defective at the

beginning and end alike. Traces of a twenty-fifth line are discernable; but it can only be conjectured how much longer the document was. The handwriting is in an early form of the square Hebrew script and the document can scarcely be later than the first century after Christ: that is to say, it is at least five or six hundred years older than any other piece of Hebrew writing known to scholars. Its palaeographical interest is, however, eclipsed by the nature of its contents. For it proves to contain the Decalogue in Hebrew, followed by the Shema. The Text shows a peculiar mixture of Deuteronomic and Exodic readings, and has a complexion that suggests the LXX. rather than the Massoretic form of the Hebrew text. The value of all this is, however, greatly diminished by the fact which seems to be clear that it gives us rather a liturgical than a biblical fragment. We cannot infer from it, therefore, that Hebrew MSS. of the Pentateuch were in circulation at the opening of the Christian era presenting a text like this. We are made aware only that the Ten Commandments were in use among the Jews of that day in this form. A good deal of what has been said by both Mr. COOK and Mr. BURKITT, therefore, relatively to the value of the new find and its bearing on the textual history of the Hebrew Bible will need some adjustment at this point. We must hasten to add here, however, that Mr. BURKITT takes occasion from this fragment to say some very sane things about the Massoretic text. "In these passages," at least, he believes the Masso-

retic text probably to represent a "scholarly reproduction of an old MS.," while "the NASH papyrus is not the scholarly reproduction of a MS., but a monument of popular religion, giving a text of the Commandments with the grammatical difficulties smoothed down." That seems to us precisely the case. Mr. BURKITT is, we are glad to see, even ready to admit that "the consonantal text of the Pentateuch was practically fixed in the Maccabaeian age." He sums up his conclusions about the NASH Papyrus thus: "I believe the NASH Papyrus to be a document of the first century A. D. at least. The document itself I do not believe to

have extended beyond the single column which is in great part preserved, and I think it not at all unlikely that it was folded up and buried with its former owner as a kind of charm. The writing which it contains consists of what are considered the chief passages of the Law, the text being taken from the various books, and where there were parallel texts, as in the Decalogue, the Papyrus presents a fusion of the two. The Hebrew text of the Pentateuch from which these extracts were made differed from the Massoretic text, and had many points of contrast with that of which the Septuagint was a translation." B. B. W.