

## THE VALUE OF ARCHEOLOGICAL STUDY FOR THE BIBLICAL STUDENT.

BY G. H. RICHARDSON.

THIS topic was suggested to the writer by three particular incidents coming under his own notice during a period of three weeks. Going into a Bible-class presided over by a minister he heard him quote from Canon Farrar to the effect that the Ten Commandments was "not only the earliest historic code which has come down to us, but also the most profound and the most comprehensive." Not only this but the minister went on to apply this to the whole of the Mosaic legislation.

Visiting another Bible-class we listened to a solemn teacher as he told of Samson. With marvelous imaginative power the teacher, a graduate, pictured the gigantic effort of Samson when he tore down the pillars against which he had been leaning. A picture was hanging on the wall before the class representing these pillars as about thirty feet high and having a diameter of between four and five feet.

The third case was a conversation with a student of the fourth year in residence at a theological seminary who questioned the writer's exegesis and who, to prove his point, talked of the "Hebraisms," the "Semitic idioms," the "special renderings" of the "New Testament Greek." Repeatedly we heard of "Biblical" Greek.

Can it be possible that all the archeological light of the last fifteen to twenty years has not yet been shed abroad in our theological seminaries and preachers' studies? Can it be that not even a ray has found its way to these places? Can it be that our responsible teachers do not know, or do not care to know, what is going on in the great world where the Bible scenes took place? We do not like to think so, and yet such unwelcome truth is forced upon

us, especially when we recall that a few minutes before giving a lecture on the papyri last spring (1913), a graduate of two leading American universities gravely stated that "the Papyri must be a very interesting people." (We will overlook it by charitably hoping he meant the Habiri mentioned in the 'Tel el-Amarna tablets, but even then it is lamentable.)

Looking around us we note, with some astonishment, that very few theological seminaries spend much time on the study of archeology. Where it is taught only too often is the matter dealt with in order to prove that every historical reference in the Old Testament is correct, or that the higher critic is wrong. Turning over the catalogue of an eastern college, and reading under the head "Archeology," we find these words: "Passages once triumphantly paraded by the skeptic and the critic have been vindicated and set in their true light, while the pages of the Divine Book have been illustrated and explained in a manner formerly impossible." Leaving aside the latter part of the statement we note that the former part of the statement is an indication of the general attitude of our seminaries toward archeology. In passing we ask: "Why should skeptic and critic be so joined? Is there any relationship between the two, or is this due to a misunderstanding of the work of the critic?"

There are notable exceptions, e. g., Dr. R. W. Rogers of Drew Theological Seminary, and Dr. F. C. Eiselen of Garrett Biblical Institute, who are willing to deal with the subject in all its bearings.

But we come back to the three incidents mentioned above.

When Canon Farrar wrote the book from which the minister-teacher quoted the above extract, the Mosaic legislation was "the earliest historic code" which had come down to us. But was the minister in charge of a modern Bible-class not aware that in December 1901 and January 1902 there was discovered on the acropolis of Susa by M. de Morgan, excavating for the French government, a block of black diorite, nearly eight feet high, on which are to be read sixteen columns of text containing the famous code of Hammurabi (c. 2250 B. C.) written one thousand years before Moses? We do not need to ask how this great block found its way to Susa from Babylon, for this is not at all material to the discussion. What is of importance is, that this code, or some edition of it, has unmistakably influenced the whole Mosaic legislation. Space forbids any detailed discussion or even exhibition of the parallels which are numerous. The literature on this subject is easily accessible. Enough to state that "the Hammurabi code must

have been the immediate or remote progenitor of the Hebrew legal system."<sup>1</sup>

Illustrators of the Biblical stories are directly responsible for many of our crude ideas concerning the Bible. Take the case mentioned above. Where did the artist derive his information concerning Philistine buildings? Is not the desire to exaggerate the seeming miraculous the cause of exaggerating the narrative in picture? It is simply inconceivable that any human being could break into pieces, by mere push or pull, such gigantic pillars as are represented, only too often, in our illustrated Bibles. Commentators and apologists seem to realize this for they speak of the pillar as formed of sections built one upon the other. The evasion is too plain. On the other hand there is no need to bring in mythology and the growth of legend. The slightest acquaintance with the archeological discoveries in Palestine since 1903 would have settled the difficulties and saved many from scepticism. Professor MacAlister while excavating at Gezer found a temple whose column bases still remained in position, and on these wooden pillars were erected such as are mentioned in 1 Kings vii. 2. The temple where Samson performed his feats to amuse his Philistine lords would have a large portico on which the people would sit to watch him. Underneath, the lords and their wives and friends would sit. When Samson was tired he would be led to the portico. Now the portico was supported by pillars resting on column bases such as MacAlister found. It would be possible for a very strong man to move these pillars out of the perpendicular seeing that they merely stood on the top of the stone base, and when they were thus once moved, the weight of the building would push them off their bases. This is all the story asks for. It does not ask for an enormous stone building and gigantic stone pillars. These are the creations of the artists. Does it take away the early glamour from the story? Perhaps so, but in doing so it gives us the truer representation.<sup>2</sup>

Coming to the third case we were not much surprised, for almost every theological seminary has still its chair of "New Testament Greek" where the student of the Greek Testament is taught that the Greek he studies in his class-room is a distinct variety. We have found very few professors who have even the slightest acquaintance with the remarkable discoveries of papyri since 1897.

<sup>1</sup>R. F. Harper, *The Code of Hammurabi*; Kittel, *The Scientific Study of the Old Testament*; Chilperic Edwards, *The Oldest Law in the World*; L. W. King, *The Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi*; Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible*; Driver, *Exodus* (Cambridge Bible Series).

<sup>2</sup>MacAlister, *Bible Sight-Lights from the Mound of Gezer*.

Occasionally one hears of the "Logia" as if this were the only discovery. In fact papyrology is a science still unknown to the majority. Perhaps this will sound like an exaggeration to many, but we speak from our own knowledge of conditions as we have found them in our experience with faculties before whom we have spoken.

Yet if any fact is proven it is that there never was such a special kind of Greek as to claim the specific title "New Testament" Greek. After years of careful research among the papyri "the assumption of a special 'New Testament,' or 'Biblical,' Greek is hopelessly refuted by the observations made in this field." The language to which we are accustomed in the New Testament is, on the whole, just the kind of Greek that simple, unlearned folk of the Roman imperial period were in the habit of using. In the time of the New Testament writers the various dialects of Greek had become unified and men no longer spoke their own Attic, Doric, or Ionic, but a single Greek language,—the KOINH. As to the "Hebraisms" of the New Testament on which so many "special renderings" and dogmas have been built we find that one after another has been exactly paralleled in the papyri and ostraca. Deissmann, who is the master in this field of research, estimates that the total number "of 'Biblical' words in the New Testament is (at the utmost) 1 per cent of the whole vocabulary." Space again forbids discussion or exposition in this most fascinating theme, and we refer the reader to the sources of information.<sup>3</sup>

These are but three specific cases happening, practically, at the same time. We fear, though, that this is the prevailing condition of the average Bible-class. Wherever the writer has gone and dealt with the evidences from the monuments it has been evident that ministers and laymen alike were hearing "a new doctrine." Numerous incidents of an amusing character rise before us as we write, but we will refrain from quoting them.

The value of archeology is not yet fully realized. To many the very name suggests what is dry, dead, and uninteresting. It is the mere collecting of "curios" for museum cases. No doubt much depends on one's make-up. We know more than one person to whom archeology is the most fascinating of studies. It gives us back the life, literature, customs, manners, religions, of our ancestors. We see their hopes, we know their fears, we learn what manner of men they were. It is an all-important study for the

<sup>3</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East; Bible Studies; New Light on the New Testament; The Philology of the Greek Bible*; Moulton, *Grammar of the New Testament Greek*; Dr. James Hope, *The Science of Language and the Study of the New Testament*.

Bible-student, or the student of history in general. The Bible is an eastern book, written by Orientals of the long ago. How shall we read it? How shall we approach it? Through western eyes, and under the dominance of western ideas and standards? To do so will be to fail to grasp the meaning of the writers. We cannot understand the literature or life of the Oriental without becoming Orientals. How shall we understand the Oriental, then, unless we study his monuments? Much misunderstanding of the Bible is due to this neglect. The extreme conservative on the one hand, and the extreme literary critic on the other, have failed because they treated the Biblical writers too much like western writers.

The East has a peculiarity all its own. We cannot take for granted that an Oriental means exactly what we would mean if we used the same expressions. Only by living over the life, and thinking the thoughts of the Oriental can we really understand him.

An amazing amount of light has been shed upon the Bible by the discoveries of the past fifty years. The ancient world is almost as familiar as the world of our own day. We see not only the great and mighty but—what is just as important—the common man and his life. Chapter after chapter, and book after book of the Bible has gained new meaning under the new light. Archeology has enabled us to place Israel in its right position among the nations of the past. We can watch the growth of the life and literature of Israel as never before. Fancies have given way to facts, and history has taken the place of myth.

But if we decide to accept the light of archeology we must accept all of it. We cannot honestly accept it when it verifies a Biblical statement and reject it when it disproves. Many writers on Biblical archeology could be named who most enthusiastically write on the value of archeology after picking and choosing certain details. Yet the same writers only too readily turn against it when it disagrees with their views, and they bid us wait until some future excavations "shall give us the necessary light, for the monuments are liable to be mistaken." It does not follow that because archeology has supported some traditions it will support all, and to regard the first as a "solution," and the latter as "a conqueror's exaggeration" is not honest. Oftentimes too great a superstructure has been built upon too slender a foundation. Let us accept what has been brought to light and use it to the best of our ability for the explanation of the hard places of Bible study. The Bible-class teacher of to-day has a great and glorious task. Never were his opportunities greater. Never was more light given to the student.



To go teaching the views of a former generation without examination is a sign of ignorance. To teach them knowing them to be false is wicked. Yet we have to admit that even this is a common method in Bible-classes where the orthodox gather and are likely to be disturbed if a new view is presented. There is no justification for ignorance. There is still less for the deliberate sacrifice of truth.

Here again space forbids detailed discussion or exposition. However, the literature in this branch of knowledge is growing and is easily procurable. We recommend every Bible-student and teacher to take a thorough course, according to his ability, in Biblical Archeology.

We append a bibliography from which the student can choose for himself :

R. W. Rogers, *History of Babylonia and Assyria*. Here will be found not only the most up-to-date history to which the student will often have need to refer in his advanced Bible study, but also the most detailed account of both the discovery and decipherment of the monuments.

Hilprecht, *Explorations in Bible Lands During the XIXth Century; Recent Research in Bible Lands*.

T. G. Pinches, *The Old Testament in the Light of the Historical Records of Assyria and Babylonia*.

H. A. Harper, *The Bible and Modern Discoveries*. Still very useful, but needs to be read in the light of more recent excavations.

Clay, *Light on the Old Testament from Babel and Amurru*.

Driver, *Modern Research as Illustrating the Bible*.

Jeremias, *The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient Orient*.

A volume of great value for the advanced student is *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* by R. W. Rogers.

Some useful manuals can be found in the "By-paths of Bible Knowledge" series.

Professor Sayce has written extensively but with such bias that his books are scarcely the works for the student of to-day. Archeology is to him a weapon against the higher criticism.

We do not pretend that this is even a moderate bibliography, but if the student will master some of the above works he will be led into larger fields.