

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-

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

human body has no self-sustaining life. It is wholly dependent upon sustenance from without. This sustenance must not only be sufficient in quantity but appropriate in kind. It must be suited to the need of the body. A pathetic story is told of two English explorers in a sterile and uninhabited part of Australia. Their supply of food ran low, and, following the example of the natives, they began to eat the leaves and roots of a plant called Nardoo. It appeased the cravings of hunger, and filled them with a sense of comfort and repletion. But they grew weak and emaciated. One of them died of starvation and the other was rescued by a timely intervention from the very jaws of death. An analysis of the food showed that it lacked certain elements essential to the sustenance of a European.

All this is equally true of man's spiritual nature. The life of the human soul is not independent or self-sustaining. It is dependent for its support upon sufficient and appropriate spiritual food.

Now the high claim which Jesus Christ makes for himself is that he is the proper and divinely provided food for the soul. What bread is to man's body such is he to man's spirit. He is not simply the Procurer and Dispenser of spiritual food, he is himself that food. "I am that bread of life." "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6: 48, 51). He is the bread of which the manna was merely a type; which does for us what the manna could not do for those to whom it was given; which does for the sinful and dying man what the tree of life was intended to do for sinless man in the Garden of Eden. He sustains the soul in a life which is imperishable and eternal. "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever." "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life" (vv. 51, 54). These are great words to come from the lips of one in the form of man. But they are words of truth and soberness, and are in beautiful harmony with all else that he has taught us concerning himself. When we study his glorious Person and Work as they are revealed in Scripture we find that he brings to us all that we need for the support of our spiritual life. All the elements that are required for true soul-food are found in him.

1. In asserting this high claim he emphasizes the fact that he is of *Divine origin and nature*. He says to the Jews: "Verily,

verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world” (vv. 32, 33). “I am the living bread which came down from heaven.” As he said to them on another occasion: “Ye are from beneath; I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8: 23). And as Paul says: “The first man is of the earth earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven” (I. Cor. 15: 47). Such must be his origin and nature in order that he may be true bread for the soul. The food which man’s spiritual nature requires must come from above; earth cannot produce it. The *body* of man is of the earth. The Lord God formed it “of the dust of the ground.” “Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return,” is the Divine sentence concerning it. It springs from the earth, it goes back to the earth; and hence it draws all its nourishment from the earth. It is sustained in life by appropriating that which the earth supplies. We speak truly when we speak of our “Mother-Earth.” As to our bodily part we are literally sons of the earth. We came forth from her womb, we are nourished at her breast, and we must sleep at last in her embrace. But, the *soul* of man is of another origin. The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

“Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.”

It is Jehovah’s breath. It comes from God and therefore must draw its sustenance from Him. “In Him we live and move and have our being.” Separated from Him the soul dies, just as inevitably as the body when it is cut off from communication with the earth. Says the psalmist: “My soul wait Thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.” True spiritual food must be from above; it must come down from God out of Heaven. All that the earth affords is but husks which the swine eat; it is not suited to the nature and need of the soul; it cannot sustain spiritual life. To be what he claims to be—the Bread of Life—Christ must be Divine.

2. It is equally necessary that he be human. He must be the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. Here again nature fur-

nishes an analogy. The nutritive properties that are in the earth we appropriate, not directly, but indirectly. They are conveyed to us second-hand, and through mediums. A plant gathers some of them up into itself, and we get them by eating the plant. Some of them are stored up in the body of an animal, and we get nourishment from eating the animal. The plant or the animal is the connecting link between us and the earth. It bridges the chasm which separates us from the earth. It might be called the mediator between us and Mother-Earth. Through it we become partakers of the earth's fulness. So Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God is revealed in Scripture as the Mediator between God and man. He bridges the chasm between us and the Father of our spirits. Through Him we are made partakers of the Divine nature. "In Him," says Paul, "dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" and "of his fulness," as John says, "have all we received" (John 1: 16). Divine life, divine love, divine grace and truth are incarnated in Him, and brought down to us in a form suited to our apprehension and appropriation. Through Him, and through Him alone, is the life of God conveyed to us, and sustained in us. "This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, *and this life is in His Son*. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I. John 5: 11, 12). How clearly does our Lord express it all when he says (John 6: 57), "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me!" Might not a stalk of wheat, if endowed with speech, take up a like parable, and say, "As the fruitful earth hath sent me, and I live by the earth, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me?" This "nature is an image of grace." Through these earthly things to which our Lord has called our attention, we are helped to understand the heavenly mysteries of which He has told us.

3. Another truth which is emphasized in this connection is that Christ becomes the Bread of Life for us by giving up his own life. This need not offend us. The plant or the animal cannot minister to our bodily life except by losing its own. It dies that we may live. So Christ becomes the Source and Support of our spiritual life through His vicarious death. "The bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world." "This expression, *my flesh*, especially in connection,

as it is here, with the future *I will give*, which points to a fact yet to occur, can only refer to the sacrifice of the cross.” (Godet.) To the same effect he says again, “Verily, verily I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (v. 53). When he thus speaks of his flesh and blood as separate from each other the reference is clearly to his violent death—to his body broken and his blood shed for us. On another occasion he said, “Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (Jno. 12: 24). In order that the life which was in Him as the only-begotten of the Father might be communicated to others, it was necessary that, like the grain of wheat, he should die.

4. The physical act by which food for the body is appropriated is *eating*. The spiritual act by which we appropriate the bread of life is *believing*. “This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and *believeth on him*, may have everlasting life” (v. 40). “He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that *believeth on me* shall never thirst” (v. 35). “Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (Jno. 3: 16). The one act is not more essential than the other. One must eat in order to live. Let him refuse to eat and he perishes inevitably, even though he may be in the midst of plenty. So faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to spiritual and eternal life. In order that we may be profited by his sacrificial death, we must receive and rest upon him as “the propitiation for our sins.” “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8: 24). “*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*”

The physical act of eating is not more simple than the spiritual act of believing. A child does not understand the laws of nutrition, yet it eats and is nourished. So, one may not understand the philosophy of salvation, and yet believe on Christ, and have life through his name. If only we accept him as he has given himself on the cross, appropriating him as our very own, we shall find from a blessed experience that his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed!