

EXPLORING IN NEW TESTAMENT FIELDS



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NEW TESTAMENT
FIELDS

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P R E F A C E

THE rapid accumulation during recent years of interesting facts concerning Bible lands makes it exceedingly difficult to keep in touch with the explorations in various fields.

It has therefore been thought that a short account of some of the most important of these will prove acceptable to Bible students.

A well-illustrated volume is generally very costly ; but, without incurring any additional expense, except that of a visit to the British Museum, this little book may be supplied with priceless illustrations—in the galleries. Its value will be greatly enhanced if they are sought out and studied.

Not only the remains from Athens and Ephesus, mentioned in Chapter IV. (pp. 39–43)

but many others to which reference is made are to be found in the Museum. For instance, the "politarch" inscription (p. 32) in the Entrance Hall ; the ostraca (p. 60) in the 4th Egyptian Room ; the papyri (p. 58 ff.) in the Manuscript Room ; the remains from the Catacombs (p. 88) and other antiquities (p. 92) in the Early Christian Room, and (p. 92) in the 3rd Egyptian Room are well worth a visit.

A list of the chief works consulted is given on page 99, to enable those who are interested to seek for further information on the various subjects.

In these days in which the truth and accuracy of the Bible are so constantly denied, it is well for those who know it to be indeed the Word of God, to become acquainted with all the available facts which may help them to meet the attacks of their assailants.

A. R. H.

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I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE researches and discoveries of History and Archæology during recent years have thrown a flood of light upon the study of the New Testament writings, especially by providing the necessary background for the scenes there described. But the work thus accomplished is very different to the service that has been rendered to the literature of the Old Testament. The results have been achieved, not so much by great and startling discoveries, full of dramatic interest and thrilling surprise, as by patient investigation and the careful accumulation of innumerable facts, great and small, in many fields of study.

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It has not been necessary for the spade of the explorer to restore lost empires of the East. Before the beginning of the Christian Era Assyria and Babylon had passed away, Egypt was no longer prominent, and the whole setting had changed. - All the scenes depicted in New Testament history took place within the boundaries of the Roman Empire ; and our attention is turned away from the great Eastern powers, and even from little Palestine and greater Syria, and is directed to the shores of the Mediterranean, to the great provinces of Asia Minor, and to Greece and to Rome.

The writings themselves are no longer entirely Oriental in character, nor is the outlook almost exclusively Jewish ; for while the writers, with one exception, were Jews, the chief among them was a Roman citizen, and all were subject to the Imperial power.

Recent discoveries have done much to restore the background of the New Testament scenes, and to enable us to obtain vivid pictures of the local and historical

surroundings in the great Roman Empire of the first century.

For as the powerful telescopes of modern astronomers bring distant planets seemingly near to our earth by enabling us to distinguish details unseen by the naked eye, so the researches of archæologists and historians have brought a distant past within the range of our mental vision, and have made it possible for us to gaze intelligently on many scenes, and to distinguish fresh details hitherto invisible.

The mass of information which has been accumulated during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the opening years of the twentieth, has made the Gospel narratives more lifelike ; it has helped us to picture the events represented in the Acts of the Apostles ; to realize the circumstances of both the writers and the earliest readers of the Epistles ; and even to understand better the last words of the glorified Saviour as He spake from heaven to His beloved disciple on the Island of Patmos.

For not only have modern discoveries enabled us to fill in many details, but they have helped us to interpret expressions and to understand indirect allusions.

Light has been thrown on geographical questions, on historical personages, on manners and customs, and on linguistic difficulties. We might therefore consider the contributions of archæological and historical research under these four divisions ; but as many of the discoveries have a bearing on several branches of the study, it is more convenient to look at the explorations one by one, noting the results in the various fields of study, or arranging them according to their connection with the different portions of the New Testament.

Many geographical facts have been discovered relating to the Palestine of the Gospels ; and to the Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy of the remaining books of the New Testament.

Archæology during the past century has done much to restore to us these countries.

When “Conybeare and Howson attempted in a most scholarly way to set forth a picture of the situation in which St. Paul found himself placed in the cities of Asia and Galatia . . . the necessary materials for their purpose did not exist, the country was unknown, the maps were either a blank or positively wrong in regard to all but a very few points.”¹ Although these words refer to the hitherto little-known countries of Eastern Europe, they are also true, to a large extent, of Palestine itself. A century ago it would not have been possible to fill in the background of the Gospel narrative as now it has been done.

¹ Sir W. M. Ramsay in *St. Paul in Asia Minor*, p. 12.

II

PALESTINE AND JERUSALEM

CHAPTER II

PALESTINE AND JERUSALEM

FROM the days of Constantine and Constantine's mother a stream of pilgrims visited the Holy Land, but they depended for their information concerning sacred sites, and places of interest, upon the stories of monks and priests, and upon the traditions that were handed down from one generation to another. The whole question of New Testament geography had been much confused by this "traditional topography," to which Greeks and Latins, Saracens and Crusaders, alike contributed.

It was not till the middle of the last century that Palestine began to be surveyed scientifically, when in 1865 the Palestine Exploration Fund was founded. More than

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twenty years before this the pioneers of Palestinian research, Edward Robinson, as early as 1838, and Titus Tobler in 1845, took their first journeys with a view to obtaining accurate information; and as a result interest began to be stirred in the subject and the Society was formed.

Its first great work was the excavation of underground Jerusalem; and subsequently a complete survey of the whole land was undertaken.

It would be impossible to mention all the distinguished names that figure in the list of the explorers who shared in this great enterprise: but some of them, such as Sir Charles Wilson, Sir Charles Warren, and Colonel Conder have become specially noted for their successful work. Lord Kitchener, in the early days of the Society, took part in the excavations.

Very little was known of ancient Jerusalem until the systematic and accurate researches of the Palestine Exploration Fund restored to us a faithful representation of the magnificence

of the city. Shortly before the explorations were commenced two books appeared which aroused great interest. One was Robinson's *Holy Land* and the other Ferguson's *Jerusalem*, and they both gave an entirely wrong impression of the city as it had been. Sir Walter Besant, in a lecture upon the general work of the Society and his twenty-five years' connection with it, compared their report with looking through the wrong end of a telescope, for they both "saw the city many times smaller than it was." The authors fell into the mistake of judging the Jerusalem of the past by the Jerusalem of the present. They saw the poor little city of the beginning of the nineteenth century, and imagined that it had been no greater in the days of Christ. They did not realize that at the time of its splendour it had been partly surrounded with deep valleys and sheer precipices, that these valleys had long since been filled up, and that the city now visited had been built upon the ruins of several sieges.

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Jerusalem was almost completely destroyed in A.D. 70, and what had been left of the old city, with the exception of a few walls, finally disappeared in the short "war of extermination." The modern city is built upon the ruins. It must be remembered, therefore, that the tourist of to-day does not tread the actual streets that were pressed by the feet of the Man of Sorrows, for these now lie far below the present surface.

The researches of the Palestine Exploration Fund have proved that the descriptions of Josephus and others were no exaggeration, but that Jerusalem was once a magnificent city; and they have helped us to picture what it must have been when the great walls rose above the ravines on three sides of the city. The long façade was crowned with many pillars and porticoes, and beyond these was the Temple itself with its vast walls, its gleaming white marble and glittering gold, "the grandest enclosure of the finest building in the world."¹ The ex-

¹ Sir Walter Besant.

plorations proved that one of the valleys was bridged with arches and pierced by subterranean passages ; that the city had a magnificent water-supply, a citadel and palaces, gardens and villas. Much laborious work had to be done before these results were achieved and the ancient city was restored to us.

It is not possible to speak with certainty about the greater number of the sacred sites, especially those in and around Jerusalem. There has been much difference of opinion as to the chief of these, which all would like to identify ; and though amateurs and tourists may speak with certainty, skilled explorers express themselves with greater caution.

While, for instance, many affirm that the Skull Hill and Garden Tomb are the actual spots where the Lord Jesus was crucified and buried, several of the explorers believe that these cannot be accepted, and even think that the traditional sites on which are erected Latin church, Saracen dome, or

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Turkish mosque are quite as likely to be authentic. Sir Charles Wilson wrote : "There is no decisive reason, historical, traditional, or topographical, for placing Golgotha and the tomb where they are now shown. At the same time there is no direct evidence that they were not so situated." ¹

He believed that with regard to the traditional sites the opportunities for correct information were greater in the days of Constantine, when the stream of pilgrimage first began, than they are now, or than they can ever become. Probably the places where the Lord was crucified and buried were purposely hidden, and it might be said of Him, as of the great prophet to whom He was likened : "No man knoweth His sepulchre unto this day."

For as Colonel Conder has well said : "The first Christians turned their eyes up to heaven, not down to earth. They thought

¹ *Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre*, p. 120.

of the return of their Master, not of the Way of Sorrow, the Place of the Skull, or the empty tomb. They knew where these were, but to us they have left no indication. . . . It is well that we should not know; and that we should not localize at any footprint or on any rock that which was meant to be for all the world.”¹

The discussion, therefore, concerning the sites, though full of interest, has no essential bearing on the study of the New Testament. The importance centres around the stupendous facts themselves, not around the places where the events occurred.

One of the most interesting suggestions, however, that has been made during the controversy, is the view propounded first by Dr. Schick concerning the identity of the skull from which Golgotha, “the Place of a Skull,” took its name. He suggested that it was that of Goliath, which, as we know from 1 Sam. xvii. 54, was carried by

¹ *The City of Jerusalem*, p. 140.

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David to Jerusalem. This trophy, typical of the crushed head of Gen. iii. 15, would be buried there, and the heap of stones raised over it would be called "Galgoliath, and known as the place of Goliath's skull."¹ This might speedily be corrupted into Golgotha. The typical significance at once suggests itself if over the very place where David buried the head of Israel's vanquished enemy, the great Son of David vanquished a still mightier giant (Heb. ii. 14).

The greatest achievement of the Palestine Exploration Fund was the survey of the Holy Land which restored the country to the Bible student, discovered the highways of commerce, provided an accurate and complete map, filled in the names and places, the rivers and streams, the cisterns and wells, and noted every mound and hill and ruin. Many of the places mentioned in the Bible were thus identified. -Sir Walter Besant

¹ *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly*, April, 1907. Rev. W. F. Birch, M.A., in *Golgotha on Mount Zion*.

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states that Colonel Conder “recovered more ancient names than all previous scholars put together.”¹

The result of this laborious survey was to prove the absolute accuracy of geographical references in the Old and New Testaments, and to show that each account must have been given by one familiar with all the local details of the scene. And not only do the researches prove that the events *could* have taken place where they are described, but in many cases show that they could have happened *nowhere else* in the vicinity. For instance, this intimate knowledge of the country proves why certain routes were taken, why journeys led through particular districts, and it explains many other points of interest.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the important information thus supplied by the great survey. But examples of the most interesting identifications may be mentioned

¹ *The General Work of the Society in The City and the Land.*

to illustrate how they have corrected wrong impressions and settled old controversies. When Dr. Robinson examined the supposed ruins of the city of Tiberias, he came to the conclusion that the ancient town was quite unimportant, and that it extended over a very small area. But the excavations of the Palestine Exploration Fund proved that this estimate was very far from correct; and that it was a great city, with a lofty acropolis, a strong fortress, many towers and vast buildings, surrounded by a wall three miles in length. And a similar result has been achieved amid the ruins of other important cities.

There has been a good deal of controversy about the identity of Bethabara (John i. 28), and as it was used to dispute the accuracy of the Fourth Gospel, the identification by Colonel Conder is of special importance. It was thought that the place must lie somewhere in the neighbourhood of the traditional site on the Jordan known as the "Pilgrims' Bathing Place," where, it is supposed, the

multitudes went out to John the Baptist from "Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan." But this did not agree with the narrative which tells how the Lord Jesus spent two days in the vicinity and on the third day arrived at Cana in Galilee; for Cana must have been about eighty miles from this part of the Jordan. Colonel Conder made an important discovery which gives a thoroughly satisfactory identification.¹ He found that one of the main fords of the Jordan, situated where the River Jalud falls into it from the Valley of Jezreel, still bears the name Abarah. This would correspond with the Beth-barah mentioned in Judges vii. 24, and was only about twenty-two miles from Cana. The alternative reading of John i. 28 is "Bethany beyond Jordan," and Colonel Conder shows that the double reading is correct. The Abarah Ford leads to the province of Batanea, and

¹ Rev. T. Nicholls, D.D., in *Recent Archæology and the Bible*, pp. 284, 285.

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the village of Bethabara must have been situated near the ford in this province.

Mention might also be made of the identification of the ruins of Kersa, in which the name Gerasenes probably survives, as the one place where the Lord's miracle of casting out the legion of demons could have happened ; for it is the only spot on the Lake of Galilee where the swine could have run "violently down a steep place into the sea." Dr. Sanday writes : "Not only are there tombs near at hand, but here alone is there a cliff that falls almost sheer into the lake. Elsewhere there is a strip of some breadth between the cliffs and the sea." ¹

Many other places in the Holy Land, rendered for ever sacred to us by the Gospel narrative, have been found and explored—such as the Pool of Bethesda and Jacob's Well ; and important sites have been identified and interesting remains have been brought to light in such places as Bethany and Bethlehem, Capernaum and Nazareth.

¹ *Sacred Sites*, p. 25.

III

LUKE THE HISTORIAN

CHAPTER III

LUKE THE HISTORIAN

THE key to several portions of the New Testament has been provided by the careful study of history. And the more diligent the research the fuller the testimony to the accuracy of the Scriptures. Besides this, interesting allusions have been discovered. The Roman Emperors and many of the officials mentioned in the New Testament are historical characters who have long been known. But in some cases there are facts in their career which add interest to passages of Scripture. For instance, there is evidently a reference in the parable of the pounds (Luke xix.) to the history of Archelaus, who succeeded his

father Herod. He could not govern until his accession had been sanctioned by Cæsar, and he went to Rome for this purpose. He literally "went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom and to return." He had made himself disliked, and the citizens therefore "sent an ambassage after him" to Cæsar, saying, "We will not that this man reign over us." Cæsar listened to them and curtailed the power of Archelaus by making him only an ethnarch ; and when he returned he took his revenge on those who had opposed him. The Lord's parable must have been spoken near to the walls of the palace which Archelaus had built for himself in Jericho ; and though these events had occurred thirty years before, the Jews must have thought of them as they listened to His words.

The accuracy of Luke as an historian has often been challenged on account of his double statement in the opening words of the second chapter of his Gospel, firstly

respecting the enrolment, and secondly as to Quirinius being “governor” of Syria. Scholars doubted the first statement because they had not found any record of such an event ; but recent discoveries have proved that periodic enrolments took place throughout the Roman Empire, various inscriptions testifying to those in Syria and Egypt. In the province of Syria, probably in order to make the census more popular to the Jews, and to disguise the fact that it was the requirement of a foreign administration, the family was obliged to go up to its tribal centre. Records have been discovered in Egypt of the first, second, and fourth of these periodic enrolments ; and the technical word used in the papyri is the very same as that in Luke ii. 2. It is now generally acknowledged that this system originated under Augustus Cæsar.

The other point has been still more vigorously attacked. It was known that Quirinius had been governor of Syria, but his famous administration was from about

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A.D. 6-9¹ and did not coincide with the date of the birth of Christ. Therefore it was affirmed that Luke had blundered. It is now proved that this was the second administration of Quirinius. The fragment of an inscribed marble slab was found in A.D. 1764 at Tivoli. It records the brilliant career of a great general who had been rewarded with many honours. It mentions that he twice governed Syria as the *legatus* of Augustus. This inscription is preserved in the Museum of Christian Antiquities at Rome as one that has an important bearing on the Bible, for it is considered almost certain that Quirinius is the general whose fame it commemorates. If his governorship of Syria A.D. 6-9 was his second administration, it is quite possible that the birth of Christ took place during his first term of office. Sir William Ramsay deals

¹ The great census mentioned in Acts v. 37 is believed to have taken place during that time.

fully with the whole question,¹ and believes that he had been appointed to a military command in order to quell a rising among the mountain tribes of the Taurus, while Varus was the civil governor. The word Luke used for "governor" does not specify the exact Roman office which Quirinius held. It was applicable to any high Roman official.

Further evidence is afforded by an inscription recording the career of a Roman officer, Q. Æmilius Secundus, who served under Quirinius. It was thought to be a forgery until the missing half of the stone was rediscovered in Venice. Upon this monument Quirinius is called "legatus" of Cæsar in Syria, and it mentions that Æmilius Secundus by his orders "made 'the census' of the population of Apameia."²

The historical accuracy of Luke is abundantly proved by a careful study of his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, in

¹ See *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?*

² *Ibid.* pp. 250, 251.

the light of modern discoveries. We are greatly indebted to recent research, for it has restored to us the correct setting of the historical record by adding to our knowledge of the Roman Empire of the first century, especially in connection with its administration of the provinces of Asia Minor.

The more clearly we see this Roman background to the picture, the more correct will be our understanding of the book. It was addressed to a Roman official, and one of high rank ; the historian, the only writer in the New Testament who was not a Jew, was an educated Greek ; and it is largely taken up with the record of the journeyings of a Roman citizen through a great portion of the Roman Empire.

It is probable that Theophilus himself lived at Rome. From the way in which Luke explains allusions to Semitic names, and adds facts about the towns and villages of Judæa and Galilee, it is clear that Theophilus was not familiar with Palestine.

He needs to be told the distance between Emmaus and Jerusalem, but is well acquainted with the environs of Rome, and with the road leading out of the city, and the "Three Taverns" is a familiar landmark.

Recognizing the Imperial colouring of the picture we need not be surprised to find that a number of Roman officials are mentioned. We read of centurions and of captains of the cohort, of lictors and prætors, of proconsuls, of politarchs and of Asiarchs. Many inscriptions concerning Roman officials show that Luke thoroughly understood the different methods of administration in the various provinces, and that the picture he paints so vividly is truthful in its minutest details. The accuracy of these designations, which had before been challenged, has now been abundantly corroborated.

For instance, the rulers of the city of Thessalonica are called *Politarchs* by Luke in Acts xvii. 6, 8. This title was, until recently, quite unknown in Greek literature, and it was therefore set down by the critics

as an error. Discoveries in Thessalonica have, however, proved that it was actually the title accorded to the city magnates. In the vestibule of the British Museum there stands a large stone taken from an archway at the western entrance of the city. The inscription upon this stone mentions the politarchs, and since it was discovered other inscriptions have been found which also make use of this official title.

The historian gives to the governor of Cyprus (Acts xiii. 7) the Greek title corresponding with *proconsul*. This also is now proved to be correct.¹ Sir William Ramsay mentions a Greek inscription of Soloi on the north coast of Cyprus, which is dated in the proconsulship of Paulus ; and believes that he may be the very governor who called for Barnabas and Saul.

The same title is correctly applied to the governor of Achaia. The proconsulship of

¹ *St. Paul, the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, p. 74.

Gallio (Acts xviii. 12) is a link with Roman history, for Gallio was a brother of the famous Seneca and is often mentioned as sharing his fortunes. It is known that "Achaia was governed by a proconsul from 27 B.C. to A.D. 15 and from A.D. 44 onwards, . . . and the statement of Luke is corroborated by the fact which Seneca mentions, that Gallio caught fever in Achaia and took a voyage for change of air."¹ The title of *prætor*, though not absolutely correct, was often used "as a courtesy title for the supreme magistrates of a Roman colony."² The *Asiarchs*³ mentioned in Acts xix. 31 are said to have been the high priests of Asia, the heads of the worship of Rome and its Emperors. In after-days this "imperial political-religious organization" was the chief enemy of Christianity, but at this early date we find some of its representatives befriending the Apostle.

¹ *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, p. 257.

² *Ibid.* p. 218.

³ *Ibid.* p. 281.

According to Acts x. Cornelius was the centurion of an *Italic cohort*. This was thought by many critics to be an anachronism, for it was not believed that such a cohort could have been stationed in Syria till much later. But an inscription found at Carnuntum, not far from Vienna, proves that there was an Italic cohort in Syria in A.D. 69 ; and Sir William Ramsay argues¹ from this that there is no reason why it should not have been stationed there at an earlier date. The stone bears an epitaph to a soldier named Proculus, who served in the second Italic cohort stationed in Syria, whence he had been despatched on special service.

The reference to Julius, the leader of the "Augustan cohort," presents some difficulties, but Sir William Ramsay shows that he must have been "a legionary centurion on detached service for communication be-

¹ *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?*
pp. 262-4.

tween the Emperor and his armies in the provinces,” and concludes that “the ‘troop of the Emperor’” was a popular name for “the corps of officer couriers.” Julius, upon reaching Rome, hands his prisoner Paul to his superior officer, who bears the title of Chief of the Camp (*Stratopedarch*). This Greek word, translated “captain of the guard,” was thought to refer to the “Prefect of the Prætorian Guard.” It has now been shown that this officer was the commander of the “soldiers from abroad” or “peregrini,” and that their camp was on the Cælian Hill and was called “*Castra Peregrinorum*.”¹

The same writer, whose travels and investigations have done so much to throw light upon the study of the Acts, also shows that the word “region,” used so often by Luke, had a technical meaning far larger than that which is commonly attached to it. By many inscriptions it is proved that

¹ *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, pp. 315, 348.

36 *Luke the Historian*

Luke's phrase "the whole region" "indicates some distinct and recognized circle of territories." An inscription of Antioch was discovered by Professor Sterrett, of Amherst, Massachusetts, mentioning a "'regional centurion,' evidently a military official charged with certain duties (probably in the maintenance of peace and order) within a certain *Regio* of which Antioch was the centre"; and Sir William Ramsay adds: "It is remarkable how the expression embodies the very soul of history."¹ He has also shown that Galatia was a great Imperial province where the Roman element in Central Asia Minor was strongest; and that Southern Galatia especially included certain separate *Regiones*. There was a Region or Roman portion of Lycaonia of which Luke speaks three times, the remainder being governed by the King Antiochus. Another Region mentioned

¹ *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, pp. 103, 104.

is the "Phrygian Region of Galatia" (Acts xvi. 6). In all his allusions to these geographical and political divisions of the Roman provinces in Asia Minor, Luke shows his personal and accurate knowledge of first-century conditions. In the second century many of the boundaries had changed. The evidence which is supplied by this comparatively new view of Asia Minor and its politics proves that the Apostle Paul in his missionary journeys chose the Roman centres of influence, rather than the places which still retained their more barbaric and uncivilized character.

IV

*ATHENS, EPHESUS, AND THE
CHURCHES OF “ASIA”*

CHAPTER IV

ATHENS, EPHESUS, AND THE CHURCHES OF "ASIA"

THERE are two collections of archæological treasures, now exhibited in the British Museum,¹ which have helped to make scenes recorded in the Book of the Acts intensely real, for we are now able to gaze on the very stones upon which the Apostle Paul gazed on these occasions.

In the opening years of the nineteenth century Lord Elgin secured for his assistants

¹ These are more fully described in *The Bible and the British Museum*, chapters ii. and iii.

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free access to the Acropolis at Athens, and they were allowed to build scaffolding, to take casts, and afterwards to remove the sculptured stones from the Parthenon. These beautiful examples of the art of Pheidias now stand in our national Museum, and we can look at the remains of the very temples to which Paul must have pointed when, standing on Mars' Hill, he said : "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands" ; and, "We ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts xvii. 24, 29).

The echo of these words reached Ephesus and made Demetrius and his companion silversmiths fear for their craft, "and also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth" (Acts xix. 23-41). The discovery of this magnificent edifice,

The Temple of Diana 43

the Artemision, is one of the most imposing of those which have a bearing on New Testament scenes. Until the middle of last century all traces of the temple had been lost. The ruins had sunk in the marshy soil, and were buried with mud by the River Cayster or its tributary the Selinus, and even the exact locality was doubtful.

In the year 1863 J. T. Wood began to search on behalf of the Trustees of the British Museum, and after some time discovered in the theatre an inscription mentioning the gate through which the processions wended their way out of the city to the temple. He was able by locating this gateway to follow the route; and after many attempts, on the last day of 1869 he came upon the pavement itself. The next five years were busily occupied with the excavations, the results of which now stand in the British Museum. Demetrius was right : the great temple has been ruined, but the other Temple, to which the Apostle Paul referred in his letter to Ephesus, still

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stands : "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone ; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

Our interest in Asia Minor centres in a very special way round that portion of it which formed the Roman province of "Asia" ; for to seven of its chief cities were addressed the seven epistles in the opening chapters of the Book of Revelation : letters not merely indited by an inspired Apostle but the actual words of the ascended Lord, and dictated by Himself from the glory. This province is mentioned many times in the Acts and in the Pauline Epistles. "All they which dwell in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xix. 10) ; "The churches of Asia salute" the church at Corinth (1 Cor. xvi. 19) ; but at the close of his life the Apostle had to mourn because "all they that are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. i. 15). This last reference probably explains why the churches in this one province were

selected to be the recipients of these wonderful Epistles.

It is interesting to hear of recent discoveries which prove that the Emperor himself often addressed letters to the cities of the empire ; for numerous Imperial documents have actually been found, some of which were addressed to these very cities in the Roman province of Asia. It was customary upon receipt of the letter to form it into an inscription that it might be seen by all. Several such inscriptions are known, including fragments of six Imperial letters to Ephesus, three to Smyrna, at least seven to Pergamos, and one that is possibly addressed to Sardis.

In the epistles to the seven churches we find many links with the discoveries of archæology and history which add a special meaning to the words.¹ The first of the seven was *Ephesus*, to which reference has already been made.

¹ See Sir William Ramsay in *Letters to the Seven Churches*.

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The promise addressed to the overcomers in the church at *Smyrna* was strikingly appropriate : " Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." It would have a special meaning to all the citizens, for there was one feature of the city in which they took the utmost pride. The " Crown of Smyrna " was a wonderful street encircling the hill of Pagos, and containing a ring of magnificent buildings. Apollonius, one of their philosophers, refers to it, and advises them to think more highly of a crown of men than of a mere crown of buildings. The Lord Jesus, in His comforting words to the persecuted believers, promises them a crown more enduring than either—" a crown of life."

In the year 1878 important excavations were commenced among the ancient ruins of *Pergamos* by Karl Humann. He had lived in Asia Minor for many years, and had already found some sculptured stones which excited great interest. In the following year, 1879, he discovered the great altar of

Æsculapius. Many slabs were recovered, on which were represented in high relief combats between gods and giants, between huge serpents and colossal figures. The remains have been set up on a restored altar in Berlin. In the Ephesus Room of the British Museum a cast of one of the reliefs was formerly shown, on which the curves of a great serpent outlined the steps of the staircase leading up to the summit of the altar. Here the serpent god, which is such a prominent object in the decorative scheme, was worshipped; and there is probably a reference to this great altar in the words addressed to the church in Pergamos: "I know . . . where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." But there is doubtless an allusion also to the historical fact that Pergamos was for several centuries the official capital of the province, and the chief seat of the Imperial cult. It had been the headquarters of paganism, and here Attalus II. handed over to Rome, in the person of Julius Cæsar, the title of Pontifex

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Maximus, which is still claimed by the Papal Pontiff.

Explorations in *Thyatira* have shown that it was a place celebrated for the number of its trade guilds. In the inscriptions which have been found, no less than ten of these guilds are mentioned—more than have been discovered in any other city in Asia Minor. It was a centre of commercial industry, and membership in one of these guilds conferred many privileges on masters and men. It may be that there is an allusion to this in the words of warning addressed to the church at Thyatira ; for if Christian merchants or Christian artisans joined themselves in these pagan brotherhoods, they must have been in constant danger of being obliged to participate in idolatrous customs.

The history of *Sardis* adds great force to the words of the Epistle. It was the scene of the defeat and final overthrow of Crœsus, the great Lydian king, in the year 546 B.C. Crœsus thought himself abso-

The Capture of Sardis 49

lutely safe in his citadel. So strong was it and so inaccessible, that he and his people had become overconfident, and had neglected to set a watch, though Cyrus was marching against him. The upper city was built on a lofty hill and could only be approached, as they thought, by a well-fortified road. But there was one weak point on the north side. The rain had gradually washed away a cleft in the soft rock, and, discovering this, the Persians were able, one by one, to climb up the perpendicular cliff which had been left unguarded at this point ; and, gaining the summit, they captured the city. The Lydian Empire, which had been the greatest power on earth before this time, was suddenly overthrown, through one night of carelessness.

When the warning voice of the ascended Lord came from the glory, bidding the church in Sardis "be watchful," their thoughts would at once go back to this well-known fact in the history of their city. No one in Sardis could fail to understand the

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allusion : "If therefore thou shalt not watch I will come on thee as a thief" (as Cyrus came upon Cræsus); "and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. iii. 3). At the time that the letter was written the glory of Sardis had passed away. It had once proudly borne a great name—"The First Metropolis of Asia, of Lydia, and of the Greeks"; now, though it had "a name to live," it was in reality "dead." Another event which had contributed to the downfall of Sardis was the great earthquake in A.D. 17. With eleven other cities it fell, and Tacitus tells how the Emperor Tiberius remitted its taxes for five years, and contributed ten million sesterces for its rebuilding, but it never regained its pre-eminence.

The geographical position of *Philadelphia*, upon one of the greatest trade routes in the country, may be referred to in the words : "I have set before thee an open door." It was situated at the end of a long valley, leading from the sea-coast ; while

beyond there stretched out the great plateau of central Asia Minor. The severe earthquake in A.D. 17 which destroyed Sardis was equally disastrous to Philadelphia; and Strabo tells how the inhabitants were for a long time so terrified that they preferred to live outside the walls in the open country, in huts and booths. Those who remained in the city took all the precautions they could against further shocks of earthquake, and did their best to strengthen and support the tottering walls. The promise to the overcomers in Philadelphia has a fresh meaning when we link it with this terrifying memory. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God" (in a building which will never be shaken by an earthquake) "and he shall go no more out"—he will never need to fly, for it stands for ever.

The Philadelphians were always in fear of earthquakes, for that of A.D. 17 was not the only one by which they had suffered. There is a great earthquake of tribulation

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coming to this world, but the promise is given to the faithful in Philadelphia: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. iii. 10).

After the great earthquake Philadelphia was rebuilt by the bounty of the Emperor, and probably it was in commemoration of this that the city was honoured by being allowed to assume the name *Neokaisareia*. It is not certain whether the new Cæsar, after whom it took this name, was Tiberius or Germanicus, but the city's "new name" has been found on coins of the period. Its adoption meant that the city was consecrated in a special way to the service and worship of the Emperor. It wrote upon itself the name of the Cæsar, to whom it ascribed divine honours.

At first the old name continued to appear, but after a time the new name was used alone, but not for long: the old

gradually came into use again, and at about A.D. 42-50 the new had been entirely dropped. It was only a memory when the letters to the seven churches were written, and the Philadelphians were not proud of it. What a contrast was afforded in the promise : "I will write upon him the Name of My God, and the Name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God : and I will write upon him My new Name"—a Name of which he will never be ashamed.

Laodicea was a wealthy and prosperous city. At the time of another great earthquake (A.D. 60), when others required assistance from the Imperial treasury, it was able to recover itself without any assistance. It was, as regards Imperial help, "rich" and had "need of nothing." The city was celebrated for the manufacture of a soft black wool and for costly garments which were made from it. It was famous throughout the whole Roman Empire for its school

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of medicine ; and the " Phrygian powder " mentioned by Aristotle and Galen, from which the celebrated eye-salve was made, came from Laodicea. Galen also mentions an ointment, prepared specially in this city, which was used for strengthening the ears.

In all these particulars, therefore, the characteristic features of Laodicea, and its history, had a definite bearing upon the solemn words addressed to the Laodicean church. Instead of the wealth that made them independent of the Imperial treasury, the Lord counselled them to seek the divine gold ; instead of the luxurious garments which they manufactured for themselves, He would give them white robes ; instead of the eye-salve which their famous oculists prescribed, and which could never remove their blindness, His eye-salve would make them see ; and finally, the ears anointed by Himself would be able to hear the voice of Him who had been left outside.

V

*THE LANGUAGE OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT*

CHAPTER V

THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

SOME of the most important archæological discoveries of modern times are those which bear upon the language of the New Testament. During the last century the views of scholars upon the whole question of reading and writing in Bible lands have been completely revolutionized. It is difficult to realize how little was known a few years ago concerning the high culture of the ancient inhabitants of Palestine and the neighbouring countries. An amusing example of this is given in the autobiography of Mrs. Delany, where we find a letter written by a clergyman in 1764 to her husband, Dr. Delany,

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the Dean of Down, in which the question is gravely discussed as to whether the art of writing was known previous to the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

The Tell el-Amarna tablets present to us with dramatic clearness the picture of civilization in ancient Palestine, and show that the art of writing was far more highly developed than had hitherto been supposed ; and what this discovery has done for our conceptions of the culture in Old Testament lands, a series of discoveries in very different fields has accomplished for those which form the background of the New Testament.

The inscriptions which contribute to our knowledge of writing in Old Testament days were graven in stone and inscribed upon clay ; but many of those which have given such valuable assistance in the study of the New Testament Scriptures are of a more perishable nature. Some were written on fragile and crumbling papyri, others on brittle ostraca. They do not come from palaces and royal libraries, but have been

chiefly found in the sand-banks and dust-heaps of Egypt. But both papyri and ostraca have thrown great light upon the literary condition of the people, and especially upon the language in which Evangelists and Apostles wrote.

About sixty years ago little or nothing was known of Greek papyri. In 1752 some charred fragments were discovered at Herculaneum, but so little was thought of the importance of such inscriptions that when, in 1778, the first real discovery was made at Gizeh, and about fifty papyri were offered for sale by the fellaheen, no purchasers could be found, and the precious fragments were all burned, with the exception of one which is now in the Museum at Naples. From time to time specimens fell into the hands of collectors, but a hundred years after this, in 1877, several thousands of papyri were discovered in the Fayûm amongst the ruins of Arsinoë, and since that time many more have been unearthed. In 1889-90 Professor Flinders

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Petrie came upon a number of fragments amongst the wrappings of mummy coffins.

But the richest collections were secured by Dr. Grenfell and Dr. Hunt in 1896-7 when, in excavating for the Egypt Exploration Fund at Behnesa (Oxyrhynchus), they discovered masses of papyri, many of them in excellent condition, fragments of important and unimportant manuscripts, rolls of non-literary works, and the papyri which profess to be the "Logia" or "Sayings" of our Lord.

The ostraca are mere fragments of broken pottery or flakes of white limestone, on which were written in ink, as in the case of the more costly papyri, all kinds of communications, both private and official, notes and notices, letters, receipts, and certificates. But they prove that the art of writing was common amongst the people, and that men and women, old and young, peasants and soldiers, sent letters to their absent friends.

The form in which the New Testament

Epistles was written is illustrated by these letters from the dust-heaps of Egypt. The address and the greeting, the postscript in the sender's own hand after the scribe has done his work, all remind us of the same characteristics in the Epistles of Paul.

The importance of non-literary inscriptions was for a long time unrecognized, but during the last few years much valuable information has been gleaned from them.

When the Gospels and Epistles were written, the Greek of the ancient classics was no longer the language of Greece; it had been adapted and popularized. The literature of the time was shaped largely on the model of the classics, and the popular language was avoided; but it was not so in the New Testament writings. What has long been supposed to be almost a language of its own, and has been even called "New Testament Greek" on account of its many differences from the Greek of the classics, is proved by ostraca and papyri to have been the language of the people.

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In these fragmentary inscriptions men and women wrote just as they spoke, with no thought of their words meeting the eyes of any save those to whom they were addressed; and because of this they give us a faithful representation of the language of everyday life—a language standing, as Professor Milligan has said, “mid-way between classical and modern Greek.”¹

This “colloquial Greek” was used by many of the writers of the New Testament. In the ostraca, papyri, and other inscriptions many words have been found which were hitherto only known in the New Testament writings; and the number of words and expressions at present known exclusively from that source has been greatly reduced.

While it is abundantly plain that many Greek words have received a Christian meaning by their use in the New Testa-

¹ *Autographs of the New Testament in the light of Recent Discovery.*

ment—the words of earth having been purified as silver is purified in a furnace (Psa. xii. 6)—some of the New Testament words, with which we have long been familiar, acquire a new meaning as we understand the way in which they were used in everyday life by the peasants of Egypt. In other cases the interpretation which was necessarily given from a consideration of the context, although it could not be borne out by ordinary profane literature, is now proved to be quite in keeping with the common usage of the day. And still further, a richer doctrinal significance is given to some familiar passages.

Many might be quoted to illustrate the value of the discoveries under these four aspects :—

1. Words and expressions hitherto found only in the New Testament.
2. Expressions that were not thoroughly understood.
3. Interpretations that are verified.

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4. Doctrinal meanings which are enriched.

Two striking examples, that illustrate the way in which these humble writings help us to understand New Testament words, may be taken from the papyri described by Professor Milligan in his deeply interesting lecture before the Victoria Institute.¹ The one throws light on the expression in Gal. iii. 1, "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?"

Bishop Lightfoot translated it "*posted up* or *placarded*," and this is proved by a papyrus to be the correct meaning. On account of the conduct of their son, the parents desire that he should be *placarded* in order to prevent any one from lending him money.

Another papyrus shows that the "disorderly" behaviour about which the Apostle Paul speaks to the Thessalonians² is very

¹ *The Greek Papyri*, pp. 9, 10.

² 2 *Thess.* iii. 7, and the similar word in 1 *Thess.* v. 14, and 2 *Thess.* iii. 6.

different conduct. It is not the riotous living of the prodigal mentioned above (and in Luke xv.), but the "playing truant" of the idle apprentice; for the word is so used in two contracts for the apprenticeship of Egyptian lads. To neglect our work because we are expecting the Lord's return would be to behave "disorderly."

The following are some of the most interesting sidelights from the inscriptions, culled from the writings of Dr. Deissmann and of Dr. Milligan.

The title of "chief Shepherd" which is given to the Lord by the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. v. 4) is shown to be, not a unique title, but one in common use; for on a wooden tablet of the Roman Period, that hung round the neck of a mummy, there is a Greek inscription giving the man's name, followed by the same word: "Plenis the younger, chief shepherd's." ¹

The scrip mentioned in several passages

¹ Dr. Adolph Deissmann in *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 98.

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in the Gospels (Matt. x. 10 ; Mark vi. 8 ; Luke ix. 3) is shown to be the beggar's wallet. Upon a monument erected at Kefr-Hauar in Syria during the same period, one who calls himself "a slave" of the Syrian goddess tells of his various begging journeys in her service, and he uses the identical word for his collecting-bag that is found in the Gospels. He boasts triumphantly that "each journey brought in seventy bags."¹ As we read of this custom amongst the servants of heathen deities, the contrast between these beggar-priests and the followers of the lowly Son of Man becomes more marked. His disciples were neither to earn nor to beg, they were neither to carry purse nor wallet as they went forth with speed to herald His coming.

Many of the newly found inscriptions are a great help in understanding the references to redemption in the New Testament.

The manumission of a slave could take

¹ *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 109, 110.

place in various ways ; but it is most interesting to learn that one of the customs provided by ancient law, was a solemn rite by which the slave, though providing his own purchase-money out of his savings, was supposed to be redeemed by the deity. The owner and the slave came together to the temple, and the owner sold him to the god, receiving the purchase-money from the temple treasury. Henceforth the slave was the property of the god, not to be looked upon as a temple slave, but as a protégé of the one in whose name he had been bought. The ceremony took place before witnesses, and was recorded with care, sometimes even in stone. An inscription as old as 200—199 B.C. on the wall at Delphi speaks of a female slave named Nicæa, who was bought by Apollo “with a price.” “The price he (her master) hath received. The purchase, however, Nicæa hath committed unto Apollo for freedom.”¹ Many records have been found of such transactions.

¹ *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 326 ff.

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In several manumission inscriptions there is a special clause forbidding that the enfranchised person shall be again enslaved, severe penalties being provided ; and the redeemed slave by his newly obtained liberty is to be allowed henceforth to “do the things that he will.”

To the people of Corinth and Galatia, and especially to the slaves in the Christian congregations, how full of meaning were the Apostle's words referring to “ransom,” “redemption,” being “bought with a price,” or “bought for freedom,” and the warnings against liberated ones allowing themselves to be again enslaved!¹ His words would at once bring to their mind the customs with which they were so familiar. “The Christian slave of Corinth,” writes Dr. Deissmann, “going up the path to the Acrocorinthus about Eastertide, when St. Paul's letter arrived, would see towards the north-west the snowy peak of Parnassus

¹ 1 *Cor.* vi. 20 ; vii. 22, 23 ; *Gal.* v. 1, 13.

rising clearer and clearer before him ; and every one knew that within the circuit of that commanding summit lay the shrines at which Apollo, or Serapis, or Asclepius the Healer bought slaves with a price, for freedom.”¹

The Epistle would teach them that they too had been “bought with a price”—a price not provided by their own earnings, but by the precious blood of Him who had laid down His life to redeem them.

Amongst the commercial laws of the Emperor Diocletian, one called “the maximum tariff” gives lists of various kinds of articles of commerce, with the highest price which may be charged for them. A new fragment discovered in 1899² mentions two interesting facts, viz., that sparrows were the cheapest of all birds sold for food, and that they were commonly sold by tens, reminding us of the “five sparrows,” or half

¹ *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 333.

² *Ibid.* p. 271.

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decade, “sold for two farthings ” to which the Lord Jesus referred (Luke xii. 6).

It does not seem as though the selling of a cow could have much to do with the interpretation of Scripture, but a fragment of papyrus relating to a transaction of this kind mentions that the owner received “ 1,000 drachmas of the price agreed upon by way of ‘earnest,’ ” or part given in advance. The same word is used in Eph. i. 14, &c. ; and thus the simple record of an everyday occurrence verifies the spiritual interpretation already given to the New Testament word.¹

The expression “they have received their reward,” applied by the Lord to those who do their alms in public, in order to win the praise of men, is shown to have a still stronger meaning, for the word translated “have received” is that commonly used for a “receipt.” They have given their receipt

¹ Professor Milligan in *Autographs of the New Testament in the Light of Recent Discovery*, p. 18.

and can therefore claim nothing further. Also the word in Mark xvi. 20, concerning signs "following," means more than we had supposed, for it is used in papyri for "checking" an account : "The signs did not merely accompany or follow, they acted as a kind of authenticating signature to the word."¹

The frequent references found in the new texts to the "parousia" of the sovereign, or of the royal representative, throw much light on the usage of the word in the New Testament, and have a very important bearing on the study of prophecy. The "parousia" was not the mere arrival, as we might have supposed from the word being translated the "coming." It denoted the whole of the official residence in the place, and many inscriptions refer to the special taxes which had to be levied to meet the necessary expenses. "Parousia" coins were sometimes struck to commemorate an

¹ *Autographs of the New Testament in the Light of Recent Discovery*, p. 19.

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unusually important occasion. Amongst the papyri found by Professor Flinders Petrie, there is one belonging to the third century B.C. which refers, it is thought, to contributions for providing a crown of gold for the king, "for another (crown) on the occasion of the parousia."

Dr. Deissmann points out the striking contrast between this and the words of the Apostle Paul, who also links together a crown and the parousia (1 Thess. ii. 19). "While the sovereigns of this world expect at their parousia a costly crown for themselves, at the parousia of the Lord Jesus the apostle will wear a crown . . . which the Lord will give to him and to all who have been faithful, and to all them that have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. iv. 8).¹

The same writer also mentions a petition found among the wrappings of the mummy of a sacred crocodile. It is dated about 113 B.C. and relates to a parousia of King

¹ *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 372 ff.

Ptolemy Soter. In expectation of his arrival a large quantity of corn has been levied, and "the village headmen and the elders of the peasants" speak thus : "Applying ourselves diligently, both night and day, unto fulfilling that which was set before us, and the provision of 80 artabæ which was imposed for the parousia of the king. . . ."

In the light of these new texts we see that the parousia of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ denotes not merely the moment of His coming for His people, but embraces the whole period immediately associated with it. His parousia includes not only the bright and blessed Hope, for which we look, but the series of events which will be ushered in when He comes.

An important historical fact pointed out by Dr. Deissmann adds great force to many passages in the Epistles. It had long been known that in Rome itself the Emperors, from the time of Domitian onwards, had assumed the title of "Lord" or "our Lord,"

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but he shows that the title was applied to them much earlier than this in the East ; and that “in the time of St. Paul, ‘Lord’ was throughout the whole Eastern world a universally understood religious conception.”¹ He states that “from papyri, inscriptions, and allied sources ” (from which he has collected evidence on the subject), “it is clear that in Egypt and, for example, in Greece, it must have been quite usual to call the Emperor Nero, ‘Lord.’ ” (See Acts xxv. 26.) In many of his utterances, such as Phil. ii. 11 and 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6, the Apostle Paul claims for the Lord Jesus Christ the only Lordship, while at the same time protesting against the profane custom of ascribing Divine honours either to Cæsar or to the gods. In the early days of the Church’s history this meant no small thing, for the refusal to call Cæsar “Lord ” led many to martyrdom ; and to “call Jesus

¹ *New Light on the New Testament*, pp. 80 ff.

Lord" was to deny Cæsar's claim. At Smyrna, in A.D. 155, at the trial of Polycarp, this very question was made the test, for he was asked by his judge "What is the harm in saying 'Lord Cæsar'?" And at Carthage in A.D. 180, at a similar trial, the Christian Speratus was commanded by the Roman Proconsul: "Swear by the genius of our Lord the Emperor!" and he replied: "I know no imperium of this world. . . . I know my Lord the King of kings, the Emperor of all nations."¹ The worship of the Cæsar was part of the Roman tradition. This fact explains to a large extent why it was that some of the Roman Emperors who seemed in other respects to be humane and just men,

¹ *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 353 ff. It is a noteworthy fact, pointed out by Dr. Deissmann, that in the papyri towards the end of the third century, the title *Despotēs* was applied to the "Christian" Emperors, as though to keep the other word *Kurios* exclusively for the Lord of glory.

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and the makers of righteous laws, were relentless persecutors of Christianity. Their very patriotism, their love of the Roman tradition, made them determined that they would tolerate no rival.

VI

THE CATACOMBS

CHAPTER VI

THE CATACOMBS

THE vast subterranean city of the dead called the Catacombs, lying beneath the suburbs of Rome, supplies another very important field for research ; and the bearing upon the New Testament of the discoveries there made is full of pathetic interest, for they reveal much concerning the history of the early Christians, and the “fiery trial” which they had to meet. The simple inscriptions over the martyred remains speak to us of the bright faith of early days, before the pure doctrines of apostolic teaching had been contaminated by contact with pagan influences.

Before the close of New Testament times

the more wealthy Christians in Rome arranged for the burial of their poorer brethren and sisters in the faith, beneath the gardens of their villas ; and this was probably the origin of the Catacombs, and dates back to the second half of the first century. For about two and a half centuries they were in use, till they stretched out into several hundred miles of tomb-streets containing, it is computed, three or more millions of the dead. In 1578 some workmen accidentally discovered one of the subterranean galleries ; paintings and inscriptions were seen on the walls, and the long-forgotten stories of the Catacombs were recalled and excavations were soon commenced.

Bosio, the pioneer of Catacomb explorers, worked from A.D. 1593 to 1629, but after that time, during about two hundred years, the chief object for which they were excavated and visited was in order to obtain relics. Thus much harm was done. The work was not scientifically undertaken till the middle of last century, when De Rossi

began patiently to excavate and study the vast area of tombs. By searching on the surface for ruined basilicas, which he believed invariably indicated the presence beneath them of some historical crypt of famous martyr, he was successful in locating a considerable number of these. He noticed also the remains of air- or light-shafts, and staircases leading below which also indicated important crypts. The basilica, or oratory, must have been built long after the martyrdom, in days when Christians were no longer persecuted, but when pilgrimages were made to the graves of the martyrs; and most of the openings or shafts are supposed to have been the work of Pope Damasus about the close of the fourth century.

As a result of De Rossi's forty years' researches more than fifteen of the historic crypts have been discovered, whereas only two or three of the most important were known before.

The chief of the martyrs of New

Testament times, whose resting-places in Rome are now thought to be known, are the Apostles Peter and Paul, Linus, Pudens, Aquila and Priscilla, and Amplias.

The first of these do not lie in the Catacombs. The Emperor Constantine, A.D. 324-5, having found the coffins which contained, as it was believed, the remains of the Apostles Peter and Paul, enclosed each in a bronze sarcophagus. Over each he erected a "memoria," or small chapel. During the persecutions in A.D. 258 the two had been carried for safety to the Platonian crypt, but afterwards had been restored to their former resting-places where they were found by Constantine. When the basilica of St. Paul was rebuilt after the fire of 1813 a marble slab was discovered on which were engraved the simple words PAVLO APOSTOLO MART.¹ The inscription was supposed to date from the time of

¹ The Dean of Gloucester in *Early Christians in Rome*, pp. 236, 237.

Constantine and to have formed part of the vaulted roof of the original chamber. No further search was permitted, but it is supposed that the body of the Apostle still lies underneath the solid masonry upon which the slab rests.

The high altar of St. Peter's now stands over the little chapel which was built above the Apostle Peter's tomb. It is believed that he was buried close to the spot where he suffered martyrdom. About the year 1626 it was determined to remove the canopy over the tomb and in its place to erect the massive bronze structure which is there to-day. During the extensive excavations which were necessary, in order to strengthen the foundations, some interesting discoveries were made ; but the careful records, kept at the time by Ubaldi, a canon of St. Peter's, were hidden away among the Vatican archives and have only recently been brought to light. Ubaldi tells how, as they began to dig, they soon came upon coffins, on one of which they discovered the

solitary word "LINUS." All around, at various depths, they found ancient coffins and fragments of coffins, containing ashes, burnt bones, and pieces of charred wood, which were carefully re-interred ; and finally they came upon "a large coffin made of great slabs of marble. Within were ashes with many bones all adhering together and half burned." ¹

There is little doubt that these are the remains of the Christians who were burned by the command of Nero, on that terrible night when a multitude of martyrs were bound to stakes in the Vatican Gardens. With many additional tortures they were burned to death, and we can picture those who had escaped a similar fate creeping forth in the early morning hours, and with loving hands collecting these precious ashes which now lie beneath the great Cathedral waiting for the coming of the Lord. Many of the friends of the Apostle Paul must have been

¹ *Early Christians in Rome*, p. 285.

among the victims ; some of those to whom he sent greetings in Rom. xvi., and many of those who visited him during his long imprisonment.

It is supposed that the great Stoic, Seneca, Nero's tutor and minister, was an eye-witness of the terrible scenes ; for in a letter to his friend Lucilius he refers to " the fire, the chains, the worrying of wild beasts, the prison horrors, the cross, the tunic steeped in pitch, the rack, the red-hot irons placed in the quivering flesh. . . . And yet, he adds, his eyes had seen these things endured ; from the sufferer no groan was heard—no cry for mercy—nay, in the midst of all he had seen the bravely patient victim smile ! " ¹

The Catacombs are a silent witness to " the noble army of martyrs " who suffered during the first three centuries. The cemeteries of Priscilla and of Domitilla are among the most interesting of the dis-

¹ *Early Christians in Rome*, p. 29.

coveries, for they take us back to the first century and to the days of the Apostles.

The remains of what is believed to have been the most ancient church in Rome were discovered in the cemetery of St. Priscilla, and according to tradition it was supposed to have been associated with the ministry of the Apostle Peter. It was a church in the house of a senator named Pudens, and became a recognized place of meeting for the Christians. Aquila and Priscilla are supposed to be buried here. The Priscilla after whom the Catacomb is named was the mother of Pudens, and it has been thought probable "that Aquila was a freedman or client of Pudens, that he and his wife Priscilla were intimately connected with the noble family . . . Priscilla, St. Paul's friend, being named after the older Priscilla."¹ The cemetery of Domitilla was the burying-place of several Christian members of the house of Vespasian and his sons Titus and Domitian, the chief of whom were the

¹ *Early Christians in Rome*, p. 265.

two princesses who bore the name of Domitilla, and the Consul Flavius Clemens. All these were relatives of the Emperor, and were martyred during the reign of Domitian. There are many inscriptions in the Catacomb to prove that during the early days of Christianity, in the Christian congregations that met in Rome, there were many of high rank. We know how Paul in the Epistle to the Philippians spoke of the saints who belonged to "Cæsar's household."

In Rom. xvi. 8 he mentions "Amplias, my beloved in the Lord." De Rossi believed that a tomb upon which was inscribed the name Ampliatus in letters of a very early period contained the remains of this friend of the Apostle. It is in one of the decorated crypts belonging to the Flavian family. There is a tradition that the tomb of St. Petronilla marks the resting-place of a daughter of the Apostle Peter.

But the value of the discoveries in the Catacombs is not merely that they restore to us the resting-places of many of the

honoured martyrs of the first centuries, some of whom were mentioned in the New Testament Scriptures, but that they tell us so much of the character and of the faith of the early Christians. The inscriptions, carved sometimes in rude letters over the shelf in the Catacomb gallery in which the loved remains were laid ; the pictures engraved or painted on the tombs or on the vaulted roofs of crypt and corridor ; the gilded pictures in the ornamental glasses which have been found in the Catacombs—all tell us on what their hopes rested, and speak to us of the One upon whom their eyes were fixed. For as the Dean of Gloucester has so strikingly said : “The Catacombs are full of Christ.”

The favourite symbol, found in countless places and forms, was that of the Good Shepherd with the lamb or sheep upon His shoulders. As Dean Stanley has so beautifully expressed it, the religion of the first Christians was “the religion of the ‘Good Shepherd.’”

VII

PAGANIZED CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER VII

PAGANIZED CHRISTIANITY

IT was not long before the “religion of the Good Shepherd” lost its purity.

That part of subterranean Rome which represents the Christianity of the first century forms a very striking contrast to the Rome that is built above it, that tells so clearly the story of corrupted faith and paganized worship.

The change did not take place all at once. The Apostles had foretold the time when the first brightness would be dimmed, and even in their days error had commenced to leaven the churches. It is interesting to trace, by the help of archæology, some of the steps that led to these results. The very tombs of the martyrs, not only in the Catacombs them-

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selves, but especially, amongst the martyr-shrines of Northern Africa, give us one indication of how the evil spread. When the days of persecution had passed away, after the so-called conversion of Constantine, pilgrimages became fashionable; and the worship of relics, which would have been so repugnant to the martyrs themselves, filled the minds of professing Christians. Among the Early Christian Antiquities in the British Museum, we see many of the lamps that belonged to the pilgrims; and the little bottles in which they carried their oil or took away from the shrine some that was considered peculiarly holy.

Some fragments of embroidered linen in the third Egyptian Room of the British Museum, taken from mummy shirts of the Coptic period, prove the origin of the sign of the cross. The old Egyptian sign for life, the cross with a loop at the top, is used on one specimen; while another, almost identical, has the sign of the cross, showing how the pagan sign was adapted.

The study of early Christian art as shown in the decorations of the Catacombs is eloquent by its omissions as well as by its symbolic pictures. In the earliest crypts and corridors there is no representation of cross or crucifix, and no suggestion of the worship of the Madonna. All these things crept in later, when the persecutions had ceased and Christianity began to be paganized.

The worship of the Woman and Child, or of the Madonna alone, was evidently taken from pagan religions, where it was so prevalent. We have many examples of this, as in the worship of Isis and of Artemis. In the galleries of the British Museum we may find several statuettes representing a pagan goddess which might easily be mistaken for Romish images of the Virgin and Child. Sir William Ramsay shows how Mariolatry has flourished in a very special way at Ephesus, that most famous centre of the worship of Artemis, "where the virgin mother was worshipped thousands of years before the Christian

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Era.”¹ It is possible to trace the pagan origin of many of the so-called Christian sacred places in the neighbourhood. A striking example of this was afforded by the supposed discovery of Mary’s house in 1891 near Ephesus. The ruins evidently represent a sacred place, but one belonging originally to pagan worship.

In many such ways archæology helps us to trace how pagan temples were speedily adapted for Christian use ; and pagan customs were incorporated with the religion of Christendom. By copying the heathen—the very thing which was forbidden to Israel—Christian truth became mixed with mythology, “till the whole was leavened.” And thus the antiquities show how the prophecies of our Lord and His revelations to His Apostles were fulfilled.

¹ *Pauline and Other Studies*, pp. 125 ff.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

IN the preceding pages a few samples have been gleaned from various fields of archæological and historical research—fields which are rich with treasures for the Bible student.

In no period of the history of the Bible has there been such a persistent and many-sided attack upon its Divine Authorship and its unerring truthfulness, as in the last century. But on the other hand, and probably because of this systematic attack, there never was a century when so much evidence was forthcoming to confirm the verbal accuracy of the God-breathed Book. We hear much about “the good old times,” but in this respect at least we are far more highly favoured than our forefathers. To

those who look out for such things, it seems that scarcely a month passes without some new beauty being discovered by means of microscopic search or telescopic survey, as these methods of study are applied to the Bible. And in not a few cases the exquisite details, the new marvels, are brought to notice or verified by some archæological or historical discovery amid the records of the past.

Each new contribution adds to the ever-accumulating testimony that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, and that the writers were “men who spake from God being moved by the Holy Spirit.”

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