

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

If a fortieth-century critic should wish to ascertain when the English Authorized Version was made, he could easily learn the latest date by noting that the word "its" nowhere occurs in the book; "his" or "thereof" takes its place. But by the end of the eighteenth century the use of "its" was almost universal. He might, therefore, legitimately infer that the Authorized Version was made before that time.

Is not a twentieth-century critic equally justified in inferring from the use in the Pentateuch of the masculine gender for the feminine, which occurs in none of the other books of the Bible, and in no later Hebrew literature, that the Pentateuch dates from a time preceding all the other books?



Ancient Greek Popyri and Inscriptions.

BY THE REV. I. P. BARNES, B.A.

STRANGE as are the changes which the whirligig of time brings with it, none surely are stranger than that one which places in our hands to-day the trade receipts, leases, marriage contracts, and private correspondence of men and women who lived two thousand years ago. And yet this is what the recent discoveries of the Egyptian explorer have done for us. He has gone to the mounds which mark the site of departed cities, and by patient and watchful digging has brought to light from the rubbish-heaps of ancient towns the refuse documents on which were written long centuries ago the business transaction of the trader, or the inmost thoughts of the parent or lover. This is due to two causes—the dryness of the Egyptian climate, and the nature of the material used by the ancient Egyptians for writing purposes. For a period of about a thousand years, extending long before the Christian era, and for some two or three hundred years after it, the writing-paper of the civilized world was made from the papyrus plant; and, indeed, in a still more distant period papyrus was used in Egypt,

where it probably was found to be a welcome substitute for shells or clay tablets.

The papyrus plant is a graceful reed with long, green, jointless stems, surmounted by a tuft of leaves. It can be grown from seed in a greenhouse quite easily. The pith of this plant afforded the material for the paper of the ancients. Pliny describes the process of manufacture, which was as follows: Thin strips of the papyrus pith, about ten inches long, were laid side by side on a table; these were washed over with Nile water, and a second layer of strips was laid over them, crosswise, so that the fibre in one layer ran in a vertical direction, in the other in a horizontal. The two sides were next pressed together, dried, and polished, and were then ready for the pen. The sheets thus made were used singly for brief business documents; for literary purposes they were joined together into a roll, which might be of great length, but was seldom more than thirty feet long. The pen used was cut from a reed, and the ink was made of thin liquid glue and soot. It was therefore very black, but could be easily washed out. The writing generally followed the grain of the pith, and so was parallel to the length of the roll. But if this side (*recto*) were filled up, sometimes the other side (*verso*) was used. This is probably the explanation of Ezekiel's roll, "written within and without" (chap. ii., ver. 10). The multitude of calamities is indicated by the description of them filling one side of the roll, and overflowing on to the other side. It is now about 150 years ago since the first ancient papyri were brought to light. At the excavation of Herculaneum, in the year 1756, a room was found which had evidently been a library. In recesses in its walls lay a number of brown dust-covered rolls, and these proved to be papyri copies of Greek philosophical works.

It was many years before any more such treasures were brought to light, but a traveller in Egypt not very long ago rescued from some Arabs a few of a number of odd-looking rolls which they were burning for the sake of their aromatic smell. These proved to be papyri of an early date, and their

discovery suggested the possibility of finding more. But it was not until the members of the Egyptian Exploration Society commenced their skilful and patient digging at the sites of ancient cities that further additions were secured. Now Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt have brought to light so many thousands of papyri that there is material enough to furnish scholars with transcription work for years to come. Few of the papyri thus found are literary documents; by far the greater number of them are non-literary, such as receipts, law-forms, charms, etc. But they are of no less value than literary documents; they help to give us an effective picture of the social life of the times of our Lord, and they throw light upon a great number of passages in the New Testament. As we read these papers, penned by hands that have turned to dust it may be 2,000 years ago, not literary documents written in the hope that they would be read by posterity, but private communications, telling of plans and hopes as real as those which form the subject of our own correspondence with members of our families, it is impossible not to be filled with the thought of the greatness of Him to "whom all hearts are open, and all desires known."

Here is a letter written in the lifetime of St. John, in which the writer asks a friend to match some wool for him of which he encloses a sample. He sends the key his friend wants, and is sorry he was so long about it, but the blacksmith lives a long way off. He is put out at not having got from his friend something he wanted very much, and all the more so as there is a festival coming on; but he is much obliged for the cheese: it was, however, a small cheese that he wanted, not a large one. And he winds up his letter just as any one of ourselves would do: "Let me know if you want anything, and please send me a pennyworth of cake for my little nephew."

Here are two delightful letters—one to a good little boy, the other from a naughty boy, who has evidently been spoiled. The first is only a fragment, but there is enough of it to charm: "We have got as far as Lampsacus safe and sound, and there

we met Themistas quite well, and other friends. I hope you are a good boy, and are getting along all right, and always do what papa and mamma and Matronis tell you, just as you used to do. For you know that's why I and the others like you so much, because you always do what you are told." The Greek of this letter is given in Deissmann's "Bible Studies": in translating it I have endeavoured to reproduce the style of the original. It is from the pen of the philosopher Epicurus. Evidently a collection of his letters had been made, just as we collect those of eminent men; this copy dates from the second century. The other letter speaks for itself. We owe the English version of it to Dr. Moulton, who gives it in the July number of the *Interpreter*, 1906. It shows child-nature the same thousands of years ago as now. This particular little boy must have been very much spoiled. Here is the letter: "Theon to his father Theon, greeting. I don't call it very nice of you not to take me to town with you. If you won't take me with you to Alexandria, I won't write you a letter, nor speak to you, nor wish you good morning. That's what is going to happen, if you don't take me. And do you know, mother said to Archelaus, 'He quite upsets me—away with him!' I don't call it very good of you to send me big beans" (cheap food) "for a present. Send for me, do; if you don't, I won't drink—so there! I pray you may be well." The word used in this letter for "Away with him!" is the same as that used by the Jews before Pilate's judgment-seat; and the word for "upsets me" is the unusual one translated in the Acts, *turned the world upside down*, which Bishop Lightfoot says is unknown to profane authors.

From childhood to womanhood is an easy transition. We are accustomed to think of the emancipation of woman as the product of later civilization; but Egyptian ladies must have had a considerable amount of liberty 2,000 years ago, as may be seen from the evidence of the papyri. As an illustration of this, let me refer to a papyrus published by Professor Mahaffy in "Hermathena," No. 21, and dating from about 215 B.C. It

is a petition addressed to the superior courts by two ladies, who state that they have property in the district of Pathouros, consisting of a vineyard and garden, with tanks, sheepfolds, office houses, and slaves. A certain Aristion had unlawfully entered on their land and planted vines in it, trusting to the fact that the owners were ladies, living on the opposite side of the river, and not well able to defend themselves. The owners request that the trespasser may be dispossessed and made to pay damages. Evidently these lone ladies were not to be sat upon. But it was not single ladies only who were able to assert themselves; married women seem to have commanded the situation then as much as they do now, if we may judge by the letter of a lonely husband, who writes begging his wife to put an end to a long visit which she was paying, and to return to him. He declares that since the 14th of the month, the day on which she left him, until the 12th of the next month, the date of his letter, he had not anointed or washed himself. Here we notice that washing the body was looked upon as a luxury, much as we look upon the use of eau-de-Cologne or Scrubb's ammonia in a bath. But, further, mark how such outward expression of feeling, distasteful to us, comes quite naturally to an Oriental. We are at once reminded of our Lord's words, "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face." In this connexion let me refer to St. Paul's words about sitting at meat in the idol's temple (1 Cor. viii. 10), and I think we shall see that light is thrown on what he says by the following letter of invitation to a dinner-party: "Charemon invites you to dine at the table of our Lord Serapis in the Serapeum to-morrow, the 15th, at three o'clock." The dinner-party, we observe, is not to be held in Charemon's house, but in the temple of Serapis; and when ordinary social engagements were mixed up with practices essentially heathen, we can see how penetrating was the division between Christian and heathen, and how much sacrifice was involved in the acceptance of Christianity.

Let me next bring to notice a letter of the second century, given in Deissmann's "Bible Studies"—an illuminating com-

mentary on St. Paul's words, "that ye sorrow not, as them that are without hope": "Eirene to Taonnophris and Philon. Good health! I was as much grieved and shed as many tears over Eumoiros as I shed for Didymas; and I did everything that was fitting, and so did my whole family. But, still, there is nothing one can do in the face of such trouble, so I leave you to comfort yourselves. Good-bye!" What a note of helpless despair sounds through these words! But it is not only from the rich store of papyri that we get such illuminating commentaries on New Testament times, but also from inscriptions on monuments and tablets. A very remarkable *find* mentioned by Professor Mahaffy is worth referring to here, because it shows how a discovery that at first seems valueless may turn out to be most serviceable. A friend in Egypt sent the learned Professor a copy of an inscription on a broken stone found in the Fayyum. The stone was broken off from the top to the bottom, so that one half of each line was lost. Dr. Mahaffy told a German friend about this, and he sent him a copy of an inscription on a stone similarly broken which had been lying in the library at Gottingen. When the two copies were put together they were found to belong to the same stone. Dr. Mahaffy was then able to decipher the whole inscription, which was a record of the making of a road in the fulfilment of a vow, by Dionysius and his wife and children, for the convenience of worshippers at the shrines of Isis and Harpokrates, and to enable them to go from one temple to the other over the intervening canals. Surely religion must have had a deep influence on people who made such sacrifices for it; and, if so, is not this evidence that the "fullness of time was now come"?

Another inscription belonging to approximately the same period throws light upon an incident in the life of our Lord. It will be remembered that in His charge to the twelve Apostles, when forbidding them to make provision for their journey, the word He uses, which the Authorized Version translates *scrip* and the Revised Version *wallet*, is *pera*, and there has been some uncertainty as to what the word meant. A Greek inscrip-

tion, belonging to the Roman period, found in Syria tells us the meaning. There we learn that a devotee of the Syrian goddess had been on a begging tour for the shrine of the "lady," as he calls her, and that his journey brought him seventy bags of money. The word used for bags is *pera*. The man had a collecting-bag like the nuns that occasionally go begging from door to door in Irish towns; and our Lord would not have His Apostles act like him, and so says in effect, "You are not to earn money, and you are not to beg."

Yet another inscription clears up a well-known grammatical difficulty in St. John's Gospel: "We beheld His glory . . . full of grace and truth." The word used for *full* is *pleres* (the nominative case), and it ought, grammatically speaking, to be *plerous*, the genitive case. But in the inscription we find exactly the same word in similar circumstances, making it plain that the word *pleres* had come to be indeclinable, and so did not change. And thus the accuracy of the text of the Gospel is substantiated.

It need hardly be said that, since the source from which the papyri come to us are the rubbish-heaps of great cities, by far the larger number of the documents will be torn or defaced, and letters such as are here quoted will be the exception, not the rule. Yet even from this accumulation of documents, fragmentary or entire, private papers, public forms, pages of torn books, a rich store of information has been drawn. The patient labour of English and German scholars has indexed the words found in these documents, and compared them with the places where they occur in the New Testament, with what happy results a little study will make plain. When St. Paul was speaking about the collection for the saints (1 Cor. xvi. 1) he uses the word *logia*, and it has been said that this word occurs nowhere else except in some of the Fathers. Indeed, the assertion has been made that the Apostle coined the word. But from some papyri of the second century we learn that there was in Egypt a guild which performed some ceremonies required in the process of embalming the dead, and this guild was authorized to make collections for the charitable work in which

they were engaged. The word they used for *collection* was the same word as St. Paul used, and is shown to have been one of common occurrence. This brings up the recollection of the peculiar word used by St. Paul referring to the collection which he had already made on behalf of the saints at Jerusalem: "When I have sealed to them this fruit, I shall travel to Spain." We gather from some of the recently-found papyri that it was usual to seal bags of fruit or corn prior to delivery as a proof of correctness of the contents. The Apostle has this practice, doubtless, in his mind when he uses the word quoted. He intends to carry out this matter in a businesslike way, as a careful merchant would, before he proceeds to Spain.

Let us now turn to a subject often discussed, the mark of the beast. In Rev. xiii. 11 we read "that no man should buy or sell, unless he had the mark of the beast." This passage appears to receive no less elucidation than others from the priceless records now under consideration: for we learn from them that there was a mark used in the days of Imperial Rome, consisting of the Emperor's name, and probably his effigy. Like a modern receipt stamp, it was necessary for documents relating to buying and selling, and was technically known as *Charagma*. In fact, there are in the Berlin Museum papyri with faint traces of such a stamp upon them. One is a marriage settlement, another an agreement about lodgings, another a shop account. On one the date is legible, "the 35th year of Cæsar"; and, further, one of the stamps for sealing such documents has been found, and a facsimile of it is given in Deissmann's "Bible Studies."

In the Epistle to Titus St. Paul desires that the young women be taught to love their husbands, to love their children. Both expressions, we are told by commentators, are found here only. But the words must have been usual in this connexion; for they are found on an epitaph at Pergamos, belonging to the time of Hadrian, and which for its touching simplicity deserves quotation: "Julian Bessus lived for eleven years with his sweet

wife Otakilia, who was fond of her husband and fond of her children." And, lastly, to mention one of many such, St. James says, "the trying of your faith worketh patience." Grammarians have had a difficulty about the Greek word *dokimion*, translated *trial*, the form of which is a puzzle. The popyri solve the puzzle. The adjective here used meaning *genuine* is frequently found. It occurs in a pawn-ticket for a pair of gold buckles which an impecunious dandy had pledged, and which weighed $7\frac{1}{2}$ minæ of pure gold; and it occurs in marriage settlements, in specifying the bride's dowry. The passage might then be translated thus: "Whatsoever is genuine in your faith."

It would be easy to quote other instances where unusual and perplexing words have received clear explanations from their use in Greek popyri. The exclusively New Testament word for *purify*, *e.g.*, is found in regulations about heathen temples. The word used for Lord's Day, Lord's Supper, occurs with reference to Imperial taxes. The words from the parable of the Prodigal Son, "the portion that falleth to me," are shown to be a technical form in connexion with inheritance. The expression "received by tradition from your fathers," nowhere else found in the New Testament, has a parallel in a reference to a statue brought to Pergamos. Until recently students of the New Testament were taught that its Greek stood alone; it was a class of itself; it was full of solecisms, of words and phrases occurring nowhere else. It was said that this condition of things was due to the influence of Hebrew upon the language, or to the fact that some of the sacred books were translations from that language. The study of the popyri completely overthrows all this, and shows that the language of the New Testament was the vernacular of the men and women of the day; and so the sacred text stands in a stronger position than ever, and we are armed with irrefutable proof that the Gospels and Epistles belong to the time to which they profess to belong, and are not the product of later ages. In the good providence of God this proof is brought to us from what might well have been thought the most unlikely of all possible sources for the

preservation of documentary evidence. But God has ever chosen the weak things of the world to confound the wise, and so out of the refuse-heaps of departed cities have come to us "records that defy the tooth of time."



The Passing of the School.

By MISS B. J. BLACK.

THE fiat has gone forth, and we in Greenhoe are building a new Council school—*schools* rather, for the three departments are to be under one roof. I was taken to see and admire the new buildings the other day, and most sumptuous they are, with the latest ideas in ventilation and stoves, with cloak-rooms, meal-room, elaborate arrangements for hand-washing after meals—all complete. But in spite of the "central position" of the new schools, their ample provision for growth of population, and general "up-to-dateness," my thoughts turned with loving, lingering regret to the old school we have out-grown, with its history of nearly seventy years. To thousands of Greenhoe folk scattered about the world that picturesque old building, the "top school" of their early days, must be an abiding memory.

Its proud title of "top school" distinguished it from the older infant school further down the winding street. It also fairly described its position, for the Church Green, close to which the "top school" stood, crowns the long slope of the village street. It was reached from the green by a quaint archway, above which were the windows of a tiny cottage. A few steps beyond the arch you turned to the left, and a broad gravel sweep, bordered by fine laurels and ending in a garden gay with flower-beds, was before you. The master's house, with its little green lawn before the windows, faced the gravel sweep, and to the right stood the school, built for sixty children in 1837, when the population of the village was under 600.