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A Hebrew Manuscript.¹

BY PROF. H. G. MITCHELL, PH.D.

A FEW days ago I was told that a gentleman of Boston had in his possession a Hebrew Bible twenty-five hundred years old. I could not, of course, accept these figures, but my curiosity was so excited by the report that I at once took steps to obtain access to the book. The gentleman in question proved to be Mr. David Pulsifer, a well-known antiquarian, who received me with the utmost cordiality, and showed me his treasure without hesitation. I found it a manuscript of the Hebrew Pentateuch, apparently old, but by no means as old as I had heard. From Mr. Pulsifer and others I gathered all that I could concerning its history, and finally took the pains to collate it with the text found in Kennicott's Bible.

The manuscript was brought to America in 1865 by the Rev. J. W. Massie, D.D., LL.D., an English Congregationalist, who was a delegate to the National Conference of Congregational Churches held in that year. This gentleman, however, was merely the agent of an English lady to whom the manuscript then belonged. There accompanied it a letter, not now accessible, which is doubtless the one from which an extract is given in an editorial in the *Congregationalist* of Jan. 5, 1866. I take the liberty of copying this extract entire:—

“During a journey through Holland in quest of literary varieties and curiosities, particularly of the biblical and classical description, I accidentally heard, while traveling in the *treckschuyt* from Leyden to Harlem, in conversation with a French gentleman, that there was in Amsterdam a very ancient and curious MS. in the Hebrew language, written on leather prior to the invention of vellum or parchment. He could give me no information as to where it was, further than its being in the possession of a Jew in Amsterdam, who was not a dealer in books, but was willing to sell it to a liberal purchaser. On my return to Amsterdam I took the following method of discovering it, being fearful of advertising for it lest the possessor should insist on an exorbitant price. I employed two itinerant Jews and a Jewess, who got their living by selling lace to travelers, to inquire among the Jews of Amsterdam if they had any curious Hebrew Bibles or antiquities of any kind, and promised a liberal reward if they found any great curiosities. The next day came the important news from the Jewess that she had

¹ Read in June, 1885.

found the greatest curiosity in the world, viz., a beautiful MS. of the whole Law, on one roll, above two thousand years old. She took me into the Jews' quarter, where, in the house of Mynheer Metz, one of the first houses in the silk trade in Amsterdam, I found this MS. It had been most religiously kept, even with superstitious veneration, in an antique wood case made for this one roll. He gave me the following account of it: 'Some time back one of the oldest and most respectable Jewish families from Hungary came through Amsterdam on their way to England. They had been very rich, but were now very much reduced, and were going to England to endeavor to restore their fortune. When they arrived in this city their cash failed, and they offered to leave this roll if I would advance them sufficient money to prosecute their journey to England, stating that it had been in their family from time immemorial; but they could trace their possession of it more than eight hundred years; that it had regularly descended from father to son; and that they had no doubt of its having been in their possession from the time it was written, which must have been about eighteen hundred years, as they were never written on leather after the invention of vellum or parchment. They hoped to redeem it in two years at farthest, but as they did not do so, it leaves me at full liberty to dispose of it.'

Dr. Dexter says further, probably on the authority of Dr. Massie:—

"This was about 1815. The English gentleman purchased the roll, and in 1821 offered it to Oxford, which at last decided not to purchase, because they had a MS. Pentateuch, which seemed to be nearly identical. Subsequently the Bodleian Library and the British Museum declined it only on the same ground. Fifty years ago a clergyman who married the daughter of Dr. Edward Williams, author of *A Defense of Modern Calvinism, etc.*, and who died at the head of Rotherham College in Yorkshire, purchased it for £120. It is now the property of his widow, who is far advanced in years, and desires to realize from it."

The manuscript was for some time in the hands of Dr. Anderson of the American Board, who finally, after Yale and perhaps other institutions had declined to purchase it, sold it to Mr. D. C. Colesworthy of this city for \$100 in gold, or \$140 in currency. This gentleman afterward sold it to Mr. W. H. Piper and Mr. W. E. Woodward for \$300. Mr. Woodward offered it in his catalogue, *Bibliotheca Americana*, 1869, for not less than \$500, but it was later purchased of Mr. Piper by Mr. Pulsifer for \$165. This is all that I can at present say about the past of the manuscript.

I have made as careful an examination of it as one could who had little or no experience in such matters, with the following result:—

It is in the form of a roll a hundred and forty-eight feet and four inches long, and about two feet wide. To form this roll no fewer than seventy-one skins—Indian goat or sheep, says an expert in leather—were used. The shortest of these skins is eighteen, the longest thirty-three, inches in length. There are three, four, or five columns

on each of the skins. These columns are eighteen inches long, and from four and five-eighths to seven and three-eighths inches wide. The usual width is about five inches. The widest of the columns is found at the fifteenth chapter of Exodus. The columns are separated by a space about an inch and a half in width. The lower margin is about three and a half, the upper about two and a half, inches wide. The number of columns in the manuscript is two hundred and sixty-six.

The skins are very carefully ruled. There are forty-two lines in a column, distant from one another about seven-sixteenths of an inch. There is quite frequently a letter outside of the perpendicular forming the edge of a column, but it is very seldom that a line is not filled, as it may be by the aid of dilatables. In fact I think that the only place is in Ex. 29, 24. At Ex. 16, 4 a part of a letter has been effaced.

The characters are suspended from the lines. They are almost always finely formed and regularly spaced. Their length is regularly about a fourth of an inch, but **ל** is three-eighths, while **ק** is half an inch long. In the first line of a page or section **ל** may be as long as **ק**. Seven of the letters of the alphabet have the required *taggin*, — three fine strokes slightly curved and terminating above in as many dots. These are **ג, י, ט, נ, ע, צ, ש**. Five others, **ב, ד, ה, ו, ק**, regularly have a single stroke over them. The letter **ח** has a sort of horn rising from its left edge. The rest of the letters are without ornamentation. There are two skins, written by a less skilful hand than the rest, in which some of the letters have peculiar forms. These contain columns 155–158, and 198–201. The **ב** on these skins has a horn like **ח**, while **ח**, in addition to its horn, has a single stroke behind the usual ornament. On these skins, also, the number and breadth of the dilatables is noticeable. Plate I. will give an idea of the work of the original copyist, Plate II. of that of his less expert fellow.

There are but two letters missing. At Lev. 8, 24, the leather has a small hole in it where **ידין** originally began. All the rest is easily legible. The faintest portions are in the two odd skins already mentioned.

There are a few slight errors and omissions in the manuscript, which, though they can hardly mislead the intelligent reader, suggest how the text of the Old Testament may have been corrupted. They are all confined to the appendages of certain letters. Thus:

PLATE I. LEV. XXIII. 4 f.

אלהמו ער ליהוה מקראי קדש אשר תקראו
אתם במו ערס בחרש הר אשון בארבעה עשר
לארשבין הערבים מסח ליהוה ובחמש עשר

PLATE II. LEV. XXIII. 39 f.

וביום השמיני שבתון ולקחתם לכם
ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר כפתתמרים
וענף עץ עבת וערבי נחלו ושמתם לפני

(23)

In one case, **מבין**, Deut. 28, 57, the ך wants the *taggin*. In the same verse, in the word **רגליה**, the ג is also without ornamentation.

There are two cases, **לבטח**, Lev. 25, 19, and **ההייתי**, Num. 22, 33, where ה, though it has both of the above-mentioned ornaments in the context, is provided only with the projection from the left corner.

The mistakes are most frequent with those letters which are distinguished from one another as they have or have not an ornament. There is, for example, so slight a difference between ב and כ in this manuscript that, but for the stroke over ב, they might easily be mistaken for each other. The scribe, indeed, when he came to add the ornaments, as he evidently did after the word was otherwise complete, made this mistake. In one case, **לבבכם**, Deut. 32, 46, he omitted to add the stroke to the ב, and in two cases, **כמהו**, Num. 23, 10, and **תשפכנו**, Deut. 12, 16, he put a stroke over a כ as if it were a ב.

But the two letters most frequently confounded are ך and ך. One can see a difference between them if one subjects them to a careful comparison, but they are at first sight, when unornamented, apparently alike. I noticed no fewer than twenty-four instances in which the stroke which distinguishes it was omitted from ך. They are in **הוליד**, Gen. 11, 27; **ןדו**, Ex. 18, 11; **ירכם**, Ex. 32, 2; **החסידה**, Lev. 11, 19; **בעדו**, Lev. 16, 11; **הבד**, Lev. 16, 23; **יצוד**, Lev. 17, 13; **די**, Lev. 25, 28; **לשד**, Num. 11, 8; **מגדף**, Num. 15, 30; **מקדם**, Num. 34, 11; **ידבר**, Deut. 5, 21; **וארד**, Deut. 9, 15; **הגדגדה**, Deut. 10, 7; **יזיד**, Deut. 23, 14; **ובשדפון**, Deut. 28, 22; **עד**, Deut. 28, 24; **ועבדת**, Deut. 28, 36; **השדה**, Deut. 28, 38; **מצד**, Deut. 31, 26; **בידך**, Deut. 33, 3; **יהד**, Deut. 33, 5; **השמד**, Deut. 33, 27; **עד**, Deut. 34, 3.

Kennicott has, in his note on Deut. 33, 27, **השמר** as the reading of a certain manuscript for **השמד**. It is possible that the collator mistook a ך for a ך owing to the omission of the proper mark of distinction. If 674 really has **השמר**, it must of course have arisen through such a mistake.

I did not notice any case in which a ך was improperly provided with the stroke belonging to ך, unless such a case is found in **דר** for **רר**, Lev. 15, 3, which Kennicott also found in the codex which he numbers 17.

The main object of the examination of the manuscript was to discover whether there were in it any important variations from the standard editions, and thence, perhaps, to come at its age. For this purpose, as I have already said, I compared it with Kennicott's text. The results are not remarkable. The manuscript has לשתות for לשתת, Gen. 24, 22; וההרש for וההריש, Gen. 34, 5; תימן for תומן, Gen. 36, 15; האסורם for האסירם, Gen. 39, 22; וטבת for וטבות, Gen. 41, 5; טפנו for טפניו, Gen. 43, 8; הבכר for הבכור, Gen. 43, 33; משאת for משאות, and ממשאת for ממשאות, Gen. 43, 34; ויורדו for ויורידו, Gen. 44, 11; ובוקננו for ובוקנינו, Gen. 46, 5; נשהם for נשיהם, Ex. 10, 9; ובאך for יבאך, Ex. 13, 11; האפה for האיפה, Ex. 16, 36; גביעים for גבעים, Ex. 25, 34; דר for דרר, Lev. 15, 3; בעונת for בעונות, Lev. 26, 39; רגום for רגם, Num. 15, 35; ואשימם for ואשימו, Deut. 1, 13; היטבו for הטיבו, Deut. 5, 25; לעשותם for לעשותם, Deut. 7, 11; ויצהריך for ויצהרך, Deut. 7, 13; בעול for בעל, Deut. 21, 3.

There are thus in all twenty-three variations; but, of these, eighteen are variations between *scriptio plena* and *defectiva*. In three cases the *keri* has been adopted, and in one the singular instead of the plural is given, as in all the later editions. There remains but one, the reading דר for דרר, which, I think, after a careful examination of the letters, is clearly intended. How the scribe would have explained this word I do not know. Perhaps he would have derived it from דרר and made it mean *discharge* (compare Ges. Lex.).

In this connection I might, perhaps, mention the fact that I found one important error in Kennicott's text. In Num. 15, 39, he has omitted ולא, thus giving to the sentence precisely the opposite meaning from that which was intended: "lest ye go after your own bent and your own eyes," etc. In Deut. 32, 18, also, תשי wants the י.

A noticeable feature of this manuscript is the neglect of the extraordinary letters. There are some in it, but several of those found in Kennicott's text and some other editions of the Hebrew Bible are

omitted. Thus the *majuscula* is not found in **וּבְהַעֲטִיף**, Gen. 30, 42; in **הַכֹּזְנֵה**, Gen. 34, 31; in **אֲדָרָךְ**, Ex. 34, 14; in **וַיִּדְהֶם**, Num. 13, 30; in **תַּמִּים**, Deut. 18, 13; or in **הַצֹּרֶר**, Deut. 32, 4. The *minuscula* is wanting in **כִּמְרִים**, Deut. 9, 24.

I noticed the extraordinary points over **אֱלֹהִים**, Gen. 18, 9; and **וַיִּשְׁקְרוּ**, Gen. 33, 4, but not elsewhere, perhaps because in other cases they were too faint to attract attention.

The variations of this manuscript from the standard taken were originally more numerous and important, for it has been corrected by several different hands in many places, and always so as to agree with Kennicott. The largest erasure is that of almost an entire verse, Lev. 23, 41, which is in one of the odd skins. The number of corrections is greater toward the end than toward the beginning, and in general the first is better than the last part of the work.

I took great pains to discover whether or not this was one of the manuscripts collated by Kennicott. I found that it agreed with none of those which he described in his Bible, *i.e.* that none of them had all the variations which it contains.

I make no attempt to fix the age of this manuscript. I merely submit what I have been able to learn about it with photographs of the work of the different hands which seem to have been employed upon it, hoping later to be able to find some clue to its age. The statements of the letter above quoted are of course wide of the mark.

NOTE. The letter **ך** wants its distinctive mark also in Lev. 23, 4, the first of the passages photographed.