

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

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It is not without significance that the chapter on Holy Scripture stands

**The Vital
Question for
Bible Students.**

first in the Westminster Symbols. Its position indicates the fundamental relation existing between one's doctrine of Scripture and the other articles of his faith. Perhaps the most vital question at present confronting the student of the Bible is—What think you of the Scriptures themselves? Our attitude towards the Book can hardly fail decisively to affect our attitude towards its several statements. Unquestionably one who regards it as a *revelation of the mind of man* concerning himself, the world, its author, its origin, and its destiny, may still find the Bible an interesting, and even a very important book. But, obviously, he will, in the very nature of things, take up towards it an attitude wholly different from one who esteems it to be a *revelation of the mind of God* upon these several points. Even as a record of what men have believed concerning God, and what duties they have conceived themselves as owing to God, the Bible will always occupy a conspicuous place in the history of the development of the human mind, and partic-

ularly of the so-called religious instincts of man.

Viewed in this light, however, the Bible at once takes its place alongside of other similar

**An Effect to be
Considered.**

records. Its statements are at once stripped of the element of finality—except for those who think that in religious matters the human mind reached the acme of its development some two thousand years ago. Further, its statements will have only a relative value, and command only a qualified assent and reverence. A stream cannot rise higher than its source. If the Bible be a revelation of the minds of its various authors, it will command assent and reverence only in proportion as we may esteem its several authors to have been qualified to deal with the large and intricate problems that they have assumed to handle. We may at our pleasure, add to, subtract from, modify, or even wholly set aside what they have to say. We would, of course, do this with that courtesy of phrase that is characteristic of our advanced and cultured age; but to expect us to refrain from doing it, would be to require us to lay aside that intellect-

the same way in which he was led to append the whole discourse to his report of Christ's teaching about John.

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE TRANSFIGURATION.

PROFESSOR R. L. STEWART, D. D., LINCOLN UNIVERSITY, PENN.

There are three mountains which have been hallowed, and made forever memorable in the history of Redemption, by super-eminent manifestations of the Divine glory.

One is Mount Sinai upon which the glory of the Lord rested for many days, "and the sight of this glory was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel:" another is Mount Zion, "the mountain of the heights of Israel"—"the holy mountain of God,"—on which the Shekinah rested as the visible manifestation of the abiding presence of Jehovah: the third is "the high mountain," which Peter designates as "the holy mount," where Jesus was transfigured before his chosen disciples, "and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."

The mountain of the Transfiguration is not mentioned by name in the narrative of the Evangelists, and the only clue to its location is in the incidental notices which connect it with our Lord's brief sojourn in the neighborhood of Cæsarea Philippi. A monastic tradition as old as the fourth century, in apparent disregard of these incidental notices, has located the scene of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor in Galilee. During the sixth century three churches were built upon the summit of Tabor to commemorate this event, and from that date until the beginning of the latter half of the present century this traditional assumption was generally accepted by biblical scholars. Mount Tabor is a conspicuous elevation of rare beauty and symmetry in its outlines and proportions, and has been aptly styled the Righi of this mountain region. There is no intimation, however, in the sacred narrative which in anywise connects it with the scene of this great Epiphany. It has frequent mention in the Old Testament as a famous landmark and rallying point in Israel, but there is not a single allusion to it, either by name or association, in the New

Testament. Apart from this negative evidence there are two good reasons for the rejection of the tradition which locates the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

(1). At the date of this occurrence Tabor was in the midst of a dense population. A great highway from the plateau above led past its base, and a fortified city occupied permanently by a Roman garrison, crowned its summit. Amid such surroundings it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to find a quiet retreat for uninterrupted communion and prayer, such as the narrative implies.

(2). In this narrative the Transfiguration is closely associated with a group of events which unquestionably took place on or about the southern slope of Mount Hermon. The most notable of these are the confession of Peter and the prophetic declaration of Jesus, immediately following it, concerning his approaching sufferings and death. "After these sayings"—as Luke puts it—"Jesus took Peter and John and James, and went *up into the mountain* (to 'oros) to pray." Of the six full days which followed "these sayings" there is no record, but it is in keeping with the purport of the entire narrative to assume that they were spent in meditation and retirement. The Transfiguration is the answer to the doubts and questionings of the dismayed disciples, and there is no intimation that the Master passed the momentous hours of this transition period in travel, or that he sought another place, amid the thickly settled population of Galilee, for this crowning manifestation of his Divinity and Messiahship: on the contrary, it is asserted in Mark's gospel (9:30) that Christ passed through Galilee *after* he had healed the spirit-possessed child at the foot of the mountain. This is the mountain on which he was transfigured, and the language certainly implies that it was outside the Galilean bounds. This would be literally true of the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, which were a part of the district of Gaulanitis, governed by Herod Philip.

The argument in favor of Mount Hermon has been happily set forth by John Ruskin in his famous essay on "Mountains." "All the immediately preceding ministries of Christ"—he says—"had been at Cæsarea Philippi. There is no mention of travel southward in the six days that intervened between the warning given to His disciples, and the going up into the hill. What

other hill could it be than the southward slope of that goodly mountain, Hermon, which is indeed the centre of all the Promised Land, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt; the mount of fruitfulness, from which the springs of Jordan descended to the valleys of Israel. Along its mighty forest avenues, until the grass grew fair with the mountain lilies, His feet dashed in the dew of Hermon, He must have gone to pray His first recorded prayer about death; and from the steep of it, before He knelt, could see to the south all the dwelling-places of the people that had sat in darkness, and seen the great light, the land of Zabulon and of Naphtali, Galilee of the nations;—could see, even with His human sight, the gleam of the lake by Capernaum and Chorazin, and many a place loved by Him, and vainly ministered to, whose house was now left unto them desolate; and, chief of all, far in the utmost blue, the hills above Nazareth, sloping down to His old home: hills on which yet the stones lay loose, that had been taken up to cast at Him, when He left them for ever.”

Mount Hermon trends farther to the west than the main ridge of the Anti-Lebanon range. It is almost separated from it and towers high above it. Its elevation above the level of the sea is 9,383 feet. It is buttressed by ridges of lesser elevation, so compactly grouped around it that it seems to rise as one gigantic mass, almost directly from the plains or lower levels that skirt its base. The noble contour of its glittering dome may be seen from the lowest reaches of the Jordan valley; from the shores of the Sea of Galilee; from the Huleh basin; and from almost every elevated plain, and mountain in Eastern and Western Palestine. As seen from the south Hermon stands, with snowy summit reaching to the clouds, apparently at the head of the great cleft between the mountain ranges. From the east the view is more comprehensive and scarcely less imposing and majestic. As ordinarily seen by travellers to the East, the lofty heights of Mount Hermon are covered with a glittering mantle of ice and snow. On the twentieth of March we found snowdrifts so deep as to be almost impassable, on the road to Damascus over the shoulder of Hermon, at an elevation of less than 5,000 feet. The crystal streams which issue from this mass of slowly-melting snow pour out from the base of the mountain from the

south and west, going down by the valleys, and through each successive level of the descending course of the Jordan to the deep basin of the Dead Sea. The fountain of Baniyas, the most picturesque source of the Jordan, springs directly from the southern base of Mount Hermon. There is no place in Palestine—and there are but few places perhaps in all the world—where so many elements of grandeur and beauty are grouped together in happy combination.

The prominent features of this Syrian Tivoli,—as Dean Stanley terms it—are a broad terrace clothed with luxurious vegetation “all alive with streams of water and cascades;” a precipitous cliff at the mountain’s foot something more than 100 feet high; the remains of ruined temples; and, at the bottom of the cliff a cave whose mouth is partly closed with loose stones which have fallen from the roof, or from the summit of the cliff. Out of this mass of boulders and debris, and apparently from crevices between the strata of the rock alongside, a foam-crested stream bursts forth, “a full born river, along a line of thirty feet.” A short distance from its source this flood of seething waters is collected together in a large pool, and thence becomes a swift torrent, roaring and dashing over the rocks, and gliding amid dense thickets of oleander, hawthorn and cane, until it is lost to view in the depths of a dark ravine.

The site of the ancient city which grew up around this “sanctuary of waters” can still be traced by its ruins, most of which belong to the Roman period. Near the fountain Herod the Great built a temple of white marble in honor of Augustus. At a later period, the city was rebuilt and adorned with palaces, temples, and villas by Philip the Tetrarch, who named it Cæsarea Philippi. The modern name Baniyas is the equivalent of the old Greek name Paneas—the abode of the sylvan god Pan.

Into this restful region abounding in quiet nooks and unbroken solitudes,—the border land between Jew and Gentile—the Master came with his disciples for a definite purpose. The burden of every wayside conversation, of every prophetic utterance, of every Divine manifestation on this eventful journey was the Decease, or Exodus, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. With this thought pressing heavily upon Him, as the crisis drew near, Jesus dismissed the multitudes which thronged Him in Galilee, crossed

over the lake to the eastern side, and thence journeyed northward some thirty miles to the place within the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi—not definitely mentioned by the Evangelists—where the events preceding the Transfiguration took place. Here, as we have seen, Jesus unfolded the nature of his redemptive work; prepared the minds of the disciples for the sore disappointments and fiery trials which were awaiting them; elicited the brief, but all-comprehensive confession of Simon Peter; and gave assurance, in language of unmistakable import, of the permanence and ultimate triumph of his Church, amid all its dangers and over all its adversaries.

After these things Jesus took the three chosen disciples and went up into the mountain to pray; “and as he prayed the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” “He was transfigured,” says Mark, “before them, and his garments became exceeding white as no fuller on earth can white them.” “His face did shine as the sun,” says Matthew, “and his raiment was white as the light.” Here the radiant form, the shining garments, the attendant representatives of the Law and the Prophets from the unseen world, the bright overshadowing cloud, and the voice out of the cloud—each in turn testified of Him whom God the Father had sent into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. The light which shone upon this Holy Mount—a light such as “never was on sea or land”—was a glimpse of the glory which shineth evermore in the home-land of Jesus, where they need no candle neither light of the sun; a foregleam of the glory which should attend the Exodus, not of our Lord only, but of all those who have passed from death unto life through faith in His name. Long after these events the apostle Peter makes use of this mountain vision to inspire the hope and strengthen the confidence of his fellow Christians. “We have not followed cunningly devised fables,”—he writes—“when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well

pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."

THE HERODS.

PROFESSOR A. C. ZENOS, D. D., CHICAGO, ILL.

I.

THE FOUNDING OF THE HOUSE OF HEROD.

The history of Israel furnishes some striking illustrations of the rise and fall of dynasties. Besides the house of David with its nearly four centuries of uninterrupted rule in Judea, it brings into view the houses of Omri and Jehu in Israel and the Hasmoneans in the inter-Testamental period. All of these seem to follow closely the law of the development, ascendancy and decline of dynasties, so familiar to the student of secular history. But more remarkable than any of them is the instance of the house of Herod.

EARLIEST BEGINNINGS.

Of the earliest known head and representative of this family there are contradictory reports. One historian, Nicholas of Damascus (*Jos. Ant.* xiv., i. 3), who lived at the court of Herod the Great and was undoubtedly anxious to place his master in the best possible light before the Jewish people, asserted that "Herod's ancestors were of the stock of the Jews that came back from Babylon." On the other hand, Justin Martyr alleges (*Dial.* c. 52) that they were Philistines living in the city of Ashkelon, and another Christian historian, Julius Africanus (quoted by Eusebius *H. E.* I., viii., 11), embellishes the account by the addition of details to the effect that Herod's great-grand-father was a temple slave in the Philistine temple at Ashkelon, and that certain robbers from Idumea, having attacked the temple, carried off his little son Antipater (Herod's grand-father), and as the temple authorities were not able to ransom the child, he was brought up as an Idumean. The truth probably lies between these two reports, one of which was invented to glorify Herod, and the other to discredit him. In other words, the family was most likely an Idumean family of respectable standing. In any case Josephus,