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The Bible at Work.

BY THE REV. W. FISHER, M.A.

“THE disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.” Among Gentile Churches there is no more direct and unbroken link between modern and early Christianity than the Syrian Church in Mesopotamia. Through a line of 143 predecessors the present Patriarch professes to trace his succession from Apostolic times. East and West, ancient and modern, met happily at the Bible House when in February Bishop Mar Gregorius, the Patriarch, visited the Society’s headquarters. A grant of 400 Scriptures in Syriac and Arabic was made by the committee for use in the native schools, in which he is so deeply interested.



The Government official and the missionary must often, naturally, view from opposite standpoints and arrive at opposite judgments, yet it is impossible not to regret that, seemingly, the Government cannot include the Scriptures in the curriculum of the Governmental schools in India. In the meantime there is a strategic distribution of the Scriptures by the Bible Society among University students. Each student at his entrance receives a gift of the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles; on passing his first arts examination he receives a New Testament, and when taking his B.A. degree a copy of the entire Bible. With a population of nearly 300,000,000 this is but an incident, yet “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” and it is an incident not to be despised.



Many years ago a dead woman in New Guinea was being buried, and with her was to have been buried her living child. Mrs. Bromilow, the wife of the missionary, rescued the baby, taking it actually from the breast of the mother. It found a home in the Mission-house. That child is now acting as assistant translator to Mr. Bromilow, who is translating and revising the Dobu New Testament. This incident brings to memory the story of the bundle picked up on a doorstep in Bristol. It was a castaway child, and found hospitality at the workhouse. Later it found that highest hospitality in the kingdom of heaven, and, as a missionary, Thomas Bridges had the great honour of translating the New Testament into Yabgan. “All things serve Him,” and in the choice of His workmen God shows there is no exclusion from service in any lot, condition, or circumstance.



Uganda maintains its remarkable attachment to the Bible. In 1908, at various C.M.S. centres in the Protectorate, 467 Bibles, 2,014 Testaments, and 3,189 portions, making a total of 5,670 volumes, were put into circulation. There is not the rush of the old days, when Mr. Baskerville could write: “Talk about sieges, if ever there was a siege it was yesterday, and this morning it seems likely to be renewed tenfold. . . . I was roused up before it was light by the roar of voices. Close to my house is a slight shed, used for the cows to stand in during the heat of the day. This was barricaded,

keeping the people out. The barricades were useless; in came the door, and we thought the whole place would have fallen. In ten minutes all the hundred Gospels were sold." But it continues its spiritual agency. Whatever it may yet do, its influence in the abolition of slavery, as told by Bishop Tucker in "Eighteen Years in Uganda," is in itself a great triumph.



The Bishop was asked by a deputation of chiefs what were his views about the question of slavery. "Meet me in the church," he said, "and I will tell you what is the teaching of Scripture about the subject." Some five-and-twenty or thirty chiefs came. "It was not difficult for me, with the open Bible in our hands, to show them what the law of God required. 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' It was easy to show them who their neighbour was." They parted with prayer, and later, of their own free will, they drew up and signed the following declaration abolishing slavery: "All we the Protestant chiefs desire to adopt these good customs of freedom. We hereby agree to untie and to free completely all our slaves. Here are our names as chiefs." No compensation was given, no compensation was asked for, and, as Mr. Ashe is wont to say, a nobler act was never done.



After a period of quiescence, Biblical archæology has at present many sources of interest. In addition to the wonderful ruins that are being uncovered in Babylonia, Professor Ernst Sellin, as representative of the German Orient Society, is busy at Jericho. Already he has laid bare some wonderful structures which have deeply impressed him. Whatever their date, they are of no mean workmanship, and whoever were their builders, the German Professor says: "They were past masters in the art of broken stone construction." Military methods in the future may make even modern fortifications appear puny, but for their time the walls of Jericho seem fully to justify the description given in the Book of Judges. It is, at least, remarkable that every archæological unveiling of the past not only offers no undeniable contradiction to the Old Testament, but again and again there is a most striking and suggestive confirmation. We rejoice in the good fortune the Germans are enjoying, but is it not strange that England as a nation takes so little part in the extremely interesting work of recovering the ancient past?



In addition to Jericho comes the Sudan, where Professor Sayce has met with extreme good fortune in discovering the site of Meroe, the capital of Ethiopia, and the home of Candace (Acts viii. 27). This appears to be the key to many possibilities, as the sites of other cities may now be discovered. Well may Mr. John Ward say: "The discovery furnishes a new and most promising theme for archæological research. Diggers, such as Petrie or Naville, may discover inscriptions from Candace's day down to the period of the extinction of its Christianity. Another Grenfell or Hunt may yet find manuscripts hidden away in the thirty or forty pyramids."

