

DISCOVERED NEW WRITINGS OF CHRIST

London, July 30.—The following article has been written by the bishop of Ripon:

It will be remembered that some years ago public interest and curiosity were aroused by the announcement that there had been discovered in Egypt a manuscript containing what claimed to be some sayings of our Lord. The discovery was made on the site of Oxyrhynchus, a chief city of ancient Egypt. The discoverers were Mr. Grenfell and Dr. Hunt, who have devoted so much time and patience to the noble task of enriching the present with the spoils of the past.

This interesting discovery was soon given to the public, and within a year one large quarto volume was issued, containing facsimiles not only of the precious manuscript of the sayings of Christ, but upward of 150 texts selected from 1200 or 1300 documents. In the following year (1899) a second volume appeared, containing 193 selected texts. The documents were theological and classical, and belonged to various dates. It was, however, to the manuscript containing the sayings or logia of Jesus Christ that popular attention was chiefly directed; and perhaps the interest in this manuscript was not lessened when two editors, in their introduction, expressed their opinion that similar interesting finds were not very probable. "It is not very likely that we shall find another poem of Sappho, still less that we shall come across another page of the logia."

returned in February last to their old haunt at Oxyrhynchus, and there, by what they call a "curious stroke of good fortune," came upon a manuscript which contained some further sayings of Jesus. These, together with a "fragment of a lost gospel," they have now given to the world in a popular form abridged from the publication of the texts in the Oxyrhynchus papyri, part 4; thus we are once more indebted to the editors both for their untiring labors and for the way in which they enable so many to share the difficulty attending their work at Oxyrhynchus may be formed from the statement which tells us that the mounds which need to be cleared are scattered over a site more than a mile in length. The ground to be explored in thus large an area and rich in treasure.

The newly discovered manuscript of the sayings of Jesus differs in form from the earlier one. The earlier manuscript consisted of a leaf belonging, so it was thought, to a well-written volume. The recently discovered manuscript has a less worthy setting, and the new sayings are written on the back of another manuscript.

The fragment, for it is but a fragment, though a very precious one, consists of forty-two incomplete lines. They were found written on the back of what proves to be a land survey list. The survey list, according to the opinion of the editors was probably written at the end of the second or early part of the third century. But it is the manuscript on the other side which will interest us; this the discoverers are inclined to assign to the middle or end of the third century; a

later date than A. D. 300 is, in their view, most unlikely. If these conclusions should prove correct, the present sayings of Jesus are about the same date as the logia, or sayings, discovered in 1837. The final settlement of the question of date and of authorities must be left to experts.

One is tempted to quote some—indeed—of these "sayings." They may be authentic, or they may not; but they are charged with a spirit which is in harmony with the spirit of our Master; they are like his sayings, in being simple, and, as Wordsworth would say, inevitable; they provoke a sympathetic acquiescence; they challenge obedience; they instruct and they inspire; they possess a happy power of paradox; for they are of us, and yet above us. We know them to be true, and yet they shame us because they convince us that we are not true to what is so obviously true.

One of the Sayings.

We are tempted to illustrate by wholesale quotation from this precious fragment; but it would not be fair to do so. We must confine ourselves to one—perhaps the most beautiful of them all. It is fresh with the freshness of the sky and the earth; it sounds new, and yet, as we read it, we know that the old spirit is in it.

It echoes the deep spiritual teaching which is familiar to us, and it leads us into the field of nature as the Lord was wont to lead his hearers. The sentences are incomplete in the fragment, but I give them as restored by the editors. This is the saying:

"Jesus saith (Ye all? who are those) that draw us (to the kingdom, if) the kingdom is in heaven? * * * the fowls of the air, and all beasts that are under the earth or upon the earth, and the fishes of the sea (these are they which draw) you, and the kingdom of heaven is within you; and whoever shall know himself shall find it. (Strive therefore?) to know yourselves, and ye shall be aware that ye are the sons of the (almighty) Father; (and?) ye shall know that ye are in (the city of God) and ye are (the city?)"

It will be seen by the numbers of

brackets and queries which are here introduced that the task of restoring the saying to completeness is difficult, and the result by no means certain; but the editors have not made their conjectural restoration without authority; they have worked their way to it by the application of a principle of parallelism; they have been led to the reconstruction by the hints which the perfect portion gives, aided by the analogy of other authentic sayings of our Lord.

The Witness of Nature.

The general idea of the whole saying "seems to be that the divine element in the world begins in the lower stages of animal creation, and rises to a higher stage in man, who has within his the kingdom of heaven." Or shall we not rather say that because man comes from God, and has come also to his manhood through the lower stages he has within himself the capacity of response to all that bears the touch or dwells in the care of his Heavenly Father's hand?

For man therefore the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, the fishes of the sea have a voice, and the voice witnesses of God and his loving care; but the divine voice is not there only; for when man penetrates into the depths of his own being and questions his own soul, there, too, will an answer meet him, and in knowing himself he will find the kingdom of heaven—in finding himself he will find God. To know all of any one thing is to know all things. To know the flower in the cranny of the wall is to catch a glimpse of God; but to know our own nature, in its wide significance, its complexity, and its capacity, is to know something more of God who not only gave beauty to the earth, but moral and spiritual power, reflections of himself, to man, made in his own image.

Here I must stop. The reader who would read this stimulating and suggestive little fragment must consult the work edited by Doctors Grenfell and Hunt. It will repay him by its contents, and it will arouse his curiosity and gratitude—for he will realize that there are plenty of unexplored mounds and undeciphered manuscripts, and he will be grateful to men who, in a somewhat mercenary age, are devoting their time and their rare gifts to the discovery of treasures more precious than gold.

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