

Taylor's recent great work on the origin of the alphabet indicates the present extent of our knowledge when, after showing that the Egyptians accompanied their hieroglyphic writing with a certain number of alphabetic characters, it says: "The immensely early date at which such symbols are found is a fact of the highest importance, and establishes the literal truth of the assertion that the letters of the alphabet are older than the Pyramids—older, in fact, than any other existing monument of civilization."

In fact, we find that the Egyptians, as far back as the age of their most ancient surviving monuments, had in use letters adequate to the formation of a sufficient alphabet. But they did not dare to trust themselves to these letters alone; they accompanied them with a needless multiplicity of other signs. The departure from this complicated system, by discarding these unnecessary signs, was an achievement reserved to the genius of the Semitic races.

For hundreds of years in which this hieratic writing, with its admixture of hieroglyphs, was in use, a Semitic people was sojourning in Egypt. From among the countless books in the land during the residence of the Israelites there, a single volume has come down to our hands. It is a papyrus which was found in a tomb in Thebes, "one of the strangest waifs that have floated down to us from the childhood of the world." Chabas terms it the most ancient book of the world. "The manuscript at Paris which contains it," says Renouf, "was written centuries before the Hebrew lawgiver was born." Indeed, this venerable relic of antiquity is probably older than the times of Abraham. This priceless manuscript enabled De Rouge to argue the direct derivation of some letters in the Semitic alphabet from the oldest form of the hieratic writing, as it appears here, actually inscribed long before the birth of Moses. He found on these faded and almost illegible pages, letters which are the unmistakable originals of some in the Semitic alphabet.

The ancient tradition that the Phœnicians derived their art of writing, at least partly, from Egyptian originals, is thus confirmed by the latest paleographic investigations, and is true of them alike with the Hebrews. We have no remains of the Phœnician literature. Most of what we can learn of its alphabet is derived from a few monumental inscriptions. The single remaining representative of its forms is found in the Samaritan, "the sacred script of the few families who still keep alive the old life of Israel on the site of Shechem, and still worship, as of old, on Mount Gerizim." But the Phœnician letters were substantially the same as the Hebrew. Whether the Phœnicians conveyed their letters from their trading posts in Egypt to their own ports, or gained their knowledge of them from the Hebrews, is entirely unknown. But there is no longer any doubt that their common alphabet with the Hebrews, in some of its original forms, was used in Egypt before the time of the Hebrew exodus. The suggestion of Rawlinson that they probably took their alphabet from the Hebrews is in exact line with what historic evidence there is on the subject.

If we are to go farther back and ask after the primary origin of alphabetic writing, we get no historic answer. All that we know is that it was first the property of peoples occupying what are called the lands of the Bible, the regions lying between the Euphrates and the Nile.

We have seen that, in the earliest forms of the Egyptian writing, there was a curious conjoining of picture-characters with alphabetic signs. This was needless; but those using it had no adequate sense of the true value of letters. Although they seem to have had some perception of the use of letters, yet they preferred to trust chiefly to the more crude and complicated hieroglyphs. We do not know how the Egyptians came to attach these alphabetic forms, the use of which they seem never to have fully appreciated, to their picture-signs. But it is proved in history that only the Semites had such a sense of the full value of letters as to make real practical use of them. Is it extravagant to imagine that they first originated them? We know that Chaldæa was in very early communication with Egypt. Possibly the germinal idea of an alphabet, which the Egyptians got somewhere but were never able to work out came to them originally from the valley of the Euphrates where once bloomed the gar-

den of Eden. Let us turn our thoughts thither.

The illustration at the head of this article of a Babylonian brick, stamped, when the clay was soft, with the ancient cuneiform or arrow-headed characters, indicates that on the banks of the Euphrates writing was in use from a very early period. We have specimens of this Babylonian writing which are over four thousand years old, dating back three hundred years before the time of Abraham. But even then these letters had ceased to be symbolic and already represented sounds. Thus we know that in Chaldæa the art of writing had already reached the stage which immediately precedes a strict alphabetic system. And we know, by as good evidence as is thought to be sufficient to establish the antiquity of other documents, that one of Abraham's descendants wrote in alphabetic letters. There are, therefore, no adequate considerations to invalidate the view of Rawlinson that Abraham may have brought an alphabetic system from Ur or Chaldæa, and that this may have been modified in Egypt and Canaan and assumed a settled form in the writings of Moses.

All the lines of evidence now in our possession converge to the conclusion that, so far from its being improbable that Moses could write alphabetically, it is certain that Moses had access to the forms of the Semitic letters, whether they came originally from the valley of the Nile or from that of the Euphrates. To use the words of Prof. Robertson Smith in speaking of the literary development of the Hebrew, we are justified in concluding that "the Semitic peoples possessed the art of writing and an alphabetic character from a date so remote as to be lost in the mists of antiquity. This character was formerly known as Phœnician, its invention being ascribed to that people. In reality it was the common property of all Semitic nations between Assyria and Egypt—an alphabetic character in contact on the east and on the west with more complicated syllabic or hieroglyphic systems; from one or other of which it may possibly have been derived."—*Illustrated Christian Weekly*.

LIVING LUNCH BASKETS.

BY JOHN R. CORYELL.

Of course it is not at all surprising that you should carry your lunch with you when you are going to be away from home all day, but think of an animal doing such a thing!

There is the camel, for instance. Everybody knows that it carries its drinking water with it, but it does more; it carries its lunch too. That hump on the camel's back is not a curvature of the spine, as it may seem, but a mass of fatty material. That hump, in fact, is the camel's lunch basket.

When a well-fed, healthy camel starts out on a journey across the desert, its water pouch is full, and its hump is big. When water fails, the camel has only to draw on its reservoir, and when food is wanting the hump is called upon.

Not that the camel helps itself to bites of its hump. That would be a decidedly uncomfortable way of getting a meal, and very likely the camel would rather go hungry than do that. In some way the hump is gradually absorbed, and for a long time after the camel has been unable to find anything to eat, it can get along very comfortably on what its hump supplies it with. By-and-by, of course, the hump is used up, and then the camel will starve as quickly as any other animal.

A great deal more like a genuine lunch basket is the bag the pelican carries its food in. The pelican is about as ungainly and odd a bird as can be found, and yet is a very interesting one. It has great webbed feet, short legs, big body, huge wings, and an enormous head.

Its head is mostly bill, and on the under part of the bill is a flabby bag made of tough skin. That bag can stretch and stretch until it can hold an incredible quantity of fish, for it is in that bag that the pelican puts the fish it catches for its food. When the bag is full, the pelican rises heavily from the sea, and with broad sweeps of its great wings flaps slowly to the shore, where it alights and prepares to enjoy the meal it has earned. One by one the still living fish are tossed into the air, and come down head first into the wide-opened mouth of the hungry bird.

Then there are some of the South American monkeys which have curious little

lunch baskets in their cheeks. Everybody must have seen monkeys stuffing and stuffing food into their mouths until their cheeks were bulged quite out of shape.

It looks as if the greedy little fellows were merely cramming their mouths full. The truth is, many of the monkeys have queer little pockets in their cheeks into which they can stow enough food for a meal. Nor do the full cheeks interfere at all with the chewing of the monkeys any more than if the pockets were outside instead of inside of the mouth.

The cow and deer and sheep and other similar animals have still another way of laying in a supply of food. They bite off grass and leaves and swallow them without chewing at all. That food goes into a special stomach, there to stay until it is wanted. When the animal is ready for it, a ball of the food is made up in that first stomach, and sent up into the animal's mouth. That ball is just a mouthful, and the animal can chew it comfortably. After it is chewed and swallowed it goes into the proper stomach, and is digested. Eating in that way is called ruminating.—*Harper's Young People*.

SCHOLARS' NOTES.

(From International Question Book.)

LESSON X.—SEPTEMBER 5.

JESUS THE TRUE VINE.—John 15: 1-16.

COMMIT VERSES 4-6.

GOLDEN TEXT.

I am the vine, ye are the branches.—John 15: 5.

CENTRAL TRUTH.

Abiding in Christ is the source of the Christian life, its fruits and blessings.

DAILY READINGS

M. John 15: 1-16.
T. John 15: 17-27.
W. Psalm 80: 1-19.
Th. Isa. 5: 1-7.
F. 1 John 2: 1-14.
Sa. 1 John 4: 1-21.
Su. 1 John 5: 1-15.

TIME.—Thursday evening, April 6, ten or eleven o'clock, immediately after the last lesson.

PLACE.—An upper room in Jerusalem.

CIRCUMSTANCES.—At the close of the last chapter, the whole company arose and prepared to leave the room; but Jesus had more to say, and while they were standing, He spoke chaps. 15 and 16, and uttered the prayer in chap. 17.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.

1. TRUE VINE: the source of life to all His disciples. HUSBANDMAN: the founder and owner of the vine, who cares for it, and whose is the fruit. 2. EVERY BRANCH: each individual Christian, each church, is a branch. PURGETH IT: cleanseth it, by pruning; by taking away any insects or fungus that hinders it, by culture, by new life. So Jesus does with His disciples. He gives new life, trains and teaches, and removes whatever hinders fruit-bearing. 3. ABIDE IN ME: by believing; by loving; by communion; by obedience; by studying His Word. 4. MUCH FRUIT: the fruits are a holy character, good life, noble deeds, the conversion of others, the world made better. 5. ASK WHAT YE WILL, etc.: this promise is to those who abide in Jesus and live according to His Word, for such will ask what is right and wise. 6. CONTINUE YE IN MY LOVE: by obedience (v. 10). 7. MY JOY: joy of doing good, of loving, of free, healthy activity, of communion with God, of faith and submission, of heaven and all its delights. 8. HENCEFORTH I CALL YOU NOT SERVANTS: they were to do His will; but not in a servile manner, because they must, or merely from a sense of duty. I HAVE CALLED YOU FRIENDS: He tells them His plans; He works with them as friends, and they serve Him because they love Him.

QUESTIONS.

Give the time and place of this lesson. How is it connected with the last lesson?

SUBJECT: ABIDING IN CHRIST.

AN ILLUSTRATION (vs. 1-4).—To what is Christ compared? Who is the husbandman? Who are the branches? What was done to the branches that did not bear fruit? What to those which bore fruit? What is meant by "purgeth it"? In what way does he do it? What is it to abide in Christ?

I. FIRST EFFECT OF ABIDING IN CHRIST.—FRUIT (vs. 4-6).—What is the fruit the branches are expected to bear? Why cannot they bear fruit unless they abide in Christ? What becomes of those who will not abide in Him?

II. SECOND EFFECT.—ANSWER TO PRAYER (v. 7).—What promise is made to them? What must they do to claim it? Why can only those who abide in Him have the certainty that their prayers will be answered?

III. THIRD EFFECT.—A PROOF OF DISCIPLESHIP (v. 8).—How is the Father glorified in His children? What would prove them the true disciples of Jesus? Why?

IV. FOURTH EFFECT.—ABIDING IN THE LOVE OF JESUS (vs. 9, 10).—How much does Jesus love us? What comfort and help in this? How may we continue in His love? How does He show this by His own experience?

V. FIFTH EFFECT.—FULNESS OF JOY (v. 11).—What was one reason He had spoken these things to them? What is Christ's joy? Is this the highest and truest joy? How much joy may we have? Does religion make us happy?

VI. SIXTH EFFECT.—LOVE TO ONE ANOTHER (vs. 12-14).—What is the great commandment of Jesus? When did we study about this before? (ch. 13: 34.) How much should we love one another? What is it to lay down our life for others?

VII. SEVENTH EFFECT.—TRUE SERVICE (vs. 14-16).—Is it our duty to serve Christ? What is the difference between serving Him as a bond-

servant and as a friend? How may we know whether we are His friends? (v. 14.) How has He chosen us? What for?

LESSON XI.—SEPTEMBER 12.

THE MISSION OF THE SPIRIT.—John 16: 5-20.

COMMIT VERSES 8-11.

GOLDEN TEXT.

He will guide you into all truth.—John 16: 13.

CENTRAL TRUTH.

The mission of the Holy Spirit is to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and to guide disciples into all truth.

DAILY READINGS.

M. John 16: 1-20.
T. John 16: 22-33.
W. Acts 2: 1-21.
Th. Acts 2: 22-43.
F. Acts 24: 10-27.
Sa. 1 Cor. 15: 1-20.
Su. John 14: 15-31.

TIME.—Thursday evening, April 6, A. D. 30. The night before the crucifixion, immediately after our last lesson.

PLACE.—An upper room in Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION.—This lesson is a continuation of the discourse in our last lesson.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.

7. IT IS EXPEDIENT FOR YOU THAT I GO AWAY: why? (1) Because only when glorified in heaven could they see Him as He is in His divine nature. (2) In bodily presence He could be with but few at a time; now He can be with all alike at all times. (3) By His going away the Comforter came. (4) Because they needed to be trained to live by faith, not by sight. (5) Only by going away (by the cross) could He make atonement for sin. THE COMFORTER: the ADVOCATE. One who pleads, convinces, instructs, as well as comforts. I WILL SEND HIM: first on Pentecost, two weeks later, and ever after. 8. REPROVE: convince, convict. 9. OF SIN, etc.: (1) Rejecting Christ is rejecting all goodness, for He is the sum of all. (2) It is rejecting God. (3) Only a very sinful heart could resist His love. (4) Christ is a perfect standard, and, by seeing Him, we are convicted of our own short-comings. (5) Unbelief shows great ingratitude. 10. OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: of God's goodness, and what we ought to be. (1) Jesus, going to His Father, made men see His goodness in its true light. (2) By dying on the cross He showed perfect obedience. (3) By His death for us He showed how much He valued our becoming good. (4) By His going the convincing Spirit came. 11. OF JUDGMENT: their false views and standards, and God's true and just judgment, and that God will judge us for all the deeds done in the body. THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD: SATAN. IS JUDGED: condemned; the mark of disapproval put upon him; his plans thwarted and defeated. 13. GUIDE YOU INTO ALL TRUTH: so that they would be inspired in their writings, and in their plans for the new Church. NOT SPEAK OF HIMSELF: the Father, Son, and Spirit are all in harmony. The Spirit unfolds the THINGS TO COME: the book of Revelation, and new developments of truth through all the history of the Church, unsearchable riches of Christ. 16. A LITTLE WHILE, etc.: they would behold Him no more in bodily form, but they would see Him after His resurrection, and then in His Spirit at Pentecost, and His working all through the ages.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—Give the time and place of this lesson. Its connection with the last lesson. The circumstances.

SUBJECT: THE MISSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

I. THE PROMISE OF THE COMFORTER (vs. 5-7).—Why were the disciples filled with sorrow? What did Christ promise them for their comfort? Give reasons why it was expedient for Him to go away? Who is meant by the Comforter? Why is He so called? When was this promise fulfilled? Why would not the Comforter come unless Christ went away? Explain more fully the reasons why it was expedient for Jesus to go away.

II. THE WORK OF THE COMFORTER ON THE WORLD (vs. 8-11).—What three things does the Spirit do for the world? What is meant by "the world"? Meaning of "reprove" here? How does the Holy Spirit convince of sin? What is the need of being convinced of sin? Is unbelief so great a sin? Why? What is it to convince of righteousness? What is the need of this? What is it to convince of judgment? How does the Spirit convince of sin "because they believe not on me"? What is the connection between His going to the Father and the Spirit convincing of righteousness? What judgment is referred to? Meaning of "because the prince of this world is judged"?

III. THE WORK OF THE COMFORTER FOR THE DISCIPLES (vs. 12-20).—Why did not Jesus tell His disciples all they needed to know? (v. 12.) Who would guide them to all truth? How does this teach us the inspiration of the New Testament? What would the Spirit teach them? How is this a test of influences whether they are from the Holy Spirit? May we have this guidance? What must we do to receive it? What did Jesus by "a little while and they should behold Him no more"? When should they see Him again? In what ways? (1 Cor. 15: 5-8; Acts 2: 32, 33; Comp. John 14: 16-18; Acts 1: 11.) How many texts can you find showing the work of the Holy Spirit?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I. Sorrow comes at some time to all.

II. But the sorrows God sends are expedient for us, for only through them can come the fullness and perfectness of joy.

III. One great need of the world is to be convinced that they are sinners and need salvation.

IV. Then they need to be convinced that there is real goodness, and that it is possible for them to have it.

V. They need to be convinced that judgment will come upon them unless they forsake sin and become righteous.

VI. The greatest sin, the source of many sins, is refusing to believe in Jesus Christ.

VII. Those who wholly commit themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit will be guided into all truth.

VIII. We can test whether we are guided by the Spirit, because what the Spirit teaches always agrees with the teachings of Christ.