

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Journal of Theological Studies* (old series) can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jts-os_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[1st page of article]

Prof. Deissmann has again put New Testament students under a deep debt of obligation by the publication of his *Licht vom Osten* (*Licht vom Osten: das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt*, von ADOLF DEISSMANN: J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1908). It is true that with many of the positions here advocated he has already made them familiar in former publications, and that in particular the present volume is avowedly founded upon his short sketch *New Light on the New Testament* (T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1907) which has already been noticed in this JOURNAL (vol. ix pp. 136, 469). But the earlier materials have been worked up with such skill and freshness, and so much that is important and illustrative has been added, that it is to all intents and purposes a new book that we have before us. And the barest outline of its contents will shew how richly it deserves careful study.

After a brief introduction in which the general character of the new texts—inscriptions, papyri, ostraca—is sketched with an amazing wealth of bibliographical reference, the writer proceeds to discuss the ‘light’, thence derived from a threefold point of view. Thus in the first place he shews on grounds both of vocabulary and grammar how close is the relation between the language of the New Testament and the *Koinḗ* or common Greek of its own time. So far from making use of a ‘Biblical’ Greek of their own, as was at one time so widely held, its writers unquestionably employed the ordinary vernacular of daily life, while the evidence of these contemporary texts enables us further to reduce the so-called *ἀπαξ λεγόμενα* of the New Testament to about fifty, or not more than one per cent. of its whole vocabulary (p. 47), and to impart fresh *nuances* of meaning to many of its familiar words and phrases. From this Dr Deissmann passes to his second conclusion that it is a misnomer to speak of the greater part of the New Testament as ‘literature’, any more than we should apply that term to a papyrus-letter from Oxyrhynchus or an inscription from Priene. The writings of St James, St Peter, or St Jude, may indeed be ‘Epistles’ in the literary sense in which that term is generally understood; but the Pauline writings can only be fully understood when they are viewed as true ‘letters’, arising out of the immediate circumstances of writer and readers, and not intended for any wider public than those to whom they were addressed. The distinction, no doubt, is valuable, and bears more closely than may at first sight appear upon many points of interpretation and exegesis; but it is just here, if I may venture to say so, that Dr Deissmann appears to press his thesis too far, and to lay an undue emphasis on what he terms the ‘Unbefangenheit’ of the Pauline letters (p. 169). This artless casual character may indeed belong to

the short Epistle to Philemon, which is little more than a private note, but surely such an Epistle, as the Epistle to the Romans, stands in a different category, and, if only by the character of its contents, is to be widely differentiated from the unstudied expression of formal feeling, that we associate with the idea of a true 'letter'. But, be this as it may, no one can question the interest attaching to the twenty-one original letters which Dr Deissmann prints here with full translation and commentary as illustrating the generally 'unliterary' surroundings out of which our New Testament writings arose. In form and style, as well as in outward appearance—and the fact is made clearer by the beautiful facsimile reproductions with which they are accompanied—these letters enable us to realize, as we have never done before, the actual genesis of a Pauline writing. It is perhaps, however, in the third section, which deals with 'the significance of the newly-discovered texts for the historical interpretation of the New Testament in matters of culture and religion', that the interest of Dr Deissmann's researches culminates. It is impossible to attempt even to summarize his results; but if, as he is never tired of reminding us, it was among the 'common' people that Christianity found its earliest adherents, then clearly everything that helps to a fuller knowledge of their environment is of capital importance for the historian of religion. And that knowledge is now communicated to us at first hand in the countless contemporary documents and inscriptions which recent exploration both in Egypt and in Asia Minor has brought within our reach. The religious, the ethical, and the legal condition of the world at the time of our Lord and of Paul, now stands out before us in an altogether new light; and in the acquaintance which we are enabled to make with living 'souls', we have before us the very class of men and women to whom their words were addressed. How suggestive the contrast, as Deissmann notes (p. 209), between the great *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, which catalogues 8,644 men and women of note during the first three centuries, but omits of set purpose 'hominum plebeiorum infinitam illam turbam'—Paul among them! Of the side-lights that here again are thrown upon New Testament phraseology it must be sufficient simply to refer by way of example to the close parallel the writer has found for the words in 2 Tim. iv 7 'I have kept the faith' (or in Ramsay's graphic rendering, 'I have observed the rules which are laid down for this race-course of faith,' *Luke the Physician*, p. 288) in an inscription in the theatre at Ephesus which St Paul may have seen (p. 224), to the important application to the Pauline phraseology regarding ransom from the bondage of sin of the Delphic inscriptions on slave-manumission (p. 231 ff), and to the manner in which the emphasis laid by St Paul on δ κύριος is shewn to stand in tacit protest

against the regular application of the title to the Caesars of his time (p. 253 ff). These are only specimens of the wealth of illustration with which Dr Deissmann's pages are filled, and a perusal of the whole leaves one at a loss whether to wonder most at the diligence with which he has ransacked even the most out-of-way sources for his materials, or at the skill with which he has brought these to bear upon many outstanding problems of New Testament interpretation.

We can only add that the whole *format* of the book with its clear printing, numerous facsimiles, and exhaustive indices, is in entire keeping with the value of its contents.¹

Two new volumes have been added to the Abbé Jacquier's useful *Histoire des Livres du Nouveau Testament* (Tomes iii, iv, Librairie Victor Lecoffre, Paris, 1908), one dealing with the Acts of the Apostles and the Catholic Epistles, the other with the Johannine writings. Both are distinguished by the writer's well-known clearness of statement, and wide acquaintance with the different problems involved. And though the general position maintained is distinctively on the conservative side, this does not result from any obscurantist or reactionary tendency. On the contrary the Abbé shews throughout that he is fully alive to the importance of the points raised by the more advanced representatives of New Testament criticism. And it is further interesting to find a lengthy Appendix in vol. iii devoted to a well-balanced statement of the bearing on the New Testament of such recent studies as are embodied in Dr Deissmann's volume reviewed above, and in various English publications with which continental scholars do not as a rule display an undue familiarity.

From Father F. Prat, S.J., comes the first part of what promises to be a very thorough-going treatise on *La Théologie de Saint Paul* (Première Partie, Beauchesne & Cie, Paris, 1908). The author, indeed, assures us in his Preface that he would have preferred the simpler title *Notes sur la théologie de Saint Paul*, and regards his work as merely a sketch, which may prove useful to other workers. In this, at least, accepting for the moment his own over-modest estimate, we do not think that he will be disappointed; for into his 600 closely-printed pages, he has succeeded in compressing a large amount of useful material with regard to the origin of the Apostle's thought, and its application to the varying circumstances and needs of the several Churches he addresses. The method followed in the present volume is strictly

¹ Since the above review was written a new second and third improved and enlarged edition of *Licht vom Osten* has appeared. An English translation is in active preparation, and may be expected before long. It will be published by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton.

historical, a systematic presentation of the Pauline doctrine being reserved for a second volume, where also a complete bibliography of the subject is promised.

The avowed object of the *Westminster New Testament* is practical. While written from the standpoint of the generally accepted results of modern critical scholarship, it is intended specially to meet the requirements of teachers, lay preachers, and others engaged in active Christian work. And this aim the two volumes before us (*Gospel of St Matthew*, by Rev. David Smith, D.D., and *Gospel of St John*, by Rev. H. W. Clark: Melrose, London, 1908) seem admirably designed to fulfil. The Introductions, if short, give all that is required for a general understanding of the Evangelists' positions, and the Notes, so far as we have been able to test them, are suggestive and scholarly. It seems unfortunate, however, that in a Series such as this, where the exact meaning of the original is of primary importance, and where it is desirable to save space as much as possible, the General Editor should have deliberately elected to use the Authorized, rather than the Revised, Version as the basis for commenting.

GEORGE MILLIGAN.

The Epistles of St John are once more beginning to attract the attention of biblical scholars, as documents which have an interest of their own, apart from their importance as evidence in the Johannine controversy. Dr Findlay's publication in expanded form of the pages which he contributed to the *Expositor* is primarily devotional in character. In Mr Law's New Lectures for 1909 (*The Tests of Life: a study of the First Epistle of St John*, by ROBERT LAW, B.D.: T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1909), we have an important contribution to the study of the teaching of the First Epistle. The first three and the last chapters are devoted to subjects generally classed under the head of introduction. Chapters iv-xvi deal with the general teaching of the Epistle, in the form of expositions of its teaching on the various subjects discussed in it. A series of short notes on the Greek text is appended. In the course of his work Mr Law gives us an interpretation of all the important passages in the Epistle. He has again attempted the difficult, and perhaps impossible task, of an analysis of the Epistle intended to trace the sequence of its thought throughout. His arrangement reminds us of Häring's attempt to find in it a threefold presentation of the main themes, the one ethical, and the other Christological, that without walking in light, especially as shewn in love of the brethren, is no knowledge of God, and that Jesus is the Christ, the pre-existent Son of God truly incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. According to Mr Law the Epistle offers three tests of fellowship with God, righteous-