

THE OLDEST BOOK IN THE WORLD.

IT IS NOT THE BIBLE, AS MANY MAY THINK, ACCORDING TO A WRITER.

Baltimore *American*: J. H. Mitchner, in *Knowledge for June*, gives an interesting account of the oldest book in the world. Many will suppose that the Bible is meant, but the most orthodox have never claimed that the earlier books of the Bible were written prior to the exodus from Egypt, while the "Papyrus Prisse" was written at least 1,500 years before Moses was born, and many years before the occurrence of the Noachian deluge. The book was discovered by a Frenchman named Prisse at Thebes, and presented at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. It was taken from a tomb in which was found the mummy of one of the Entews of the eleventh, or first Theban, dynasty, which would prove that the manuscript was written at least prior to 2,500 B. C.; but the book itself furnishes internal evidence of the date of its composition, and contains extracts from a work that was much older. It was compiled by the Prefect Ptah-hotep during the reign of King Assa. This potentate was the last but one of the fifth dynasty, so that the book must have been written about 3,350 B. C., or considerably more than 5,000 years ago.

The precepts of Ptah-hotep, which give the title to the book, are preceded by passages from an earlier work written by Kakimna, Prefect to King Seneferu, of the third dynasty, which ruled before the Pyramids were built, about 3760 B. C., which would make it if in existence now 5,650 years old, antedating, according to the old chronologists, and as some still believe, the creation of Adam in the Garden of Eden, or at least his fall from grace. The book is written in Hieratic and has been translated into French by M. Virey and into English by Prof. Osgood. Its main value is not as a literary curiosity, but for the insight it gives into the education and culture which had been reached by man at that early period in the history of the human race. Its writer, Ptah-hotep, was a Prefect—a place of great dignity and responsibility under the ancient Egyptian Kings. It was second only to that of the king—the same office which was held by Joseph, the son of Jacob, during the latter portion of his career, as told in the Bible. The Prefect was a sort of Pooh-Bah, or Treasurer, Secretary of State, and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court rolled into one, so that what is said in the book must be accepted as authoritative, so far as it goes.

The book upsets some theories concerning the origin of a number of philosophic reflections for they are found here, divested of all rubbish, several thousands of years before the advent of the Greeks, who were thought to have originated them. Its whole tone is lofty, not relatively but actually, and would be creditable to a moral writer in the nineteenth century. It deals with individual conduct and the government of the State. Persons holding public positions are urged "to labor at all times to be true gentlemen, lest from their own defects of character they suffer the authority given them by favor of the Supreme Being to be weakened." Numerous allusions are made to the Supreme Being, and they are always [in the singular number, proving, what has been claimed by archaeologists, that the religion of the Egyptians was monotheistic, and that only among the ignorant classes were birds and beasts and

images—which were intended by the religion as types of certain of God's attributes—worshiped as gods. Moses, who was really a Prince in Egypt so far as his social standing went, was educated by the priests, and, of course, well understood the monotheistic character of the Egyptian religion; but he saw that the masses of the people had so prostituted their religion that he was anxious to get the Hebrews as far away from their pernicious example as possible. But it is reasonable to suppose that in the age of Ptah-hotep, the writer of this book, nearly 2,000 years before Moses was born, there had been no such perversion of their religion by the Egyptians as disgusted the great lawgiver of the Israelites.

This book, it must be borne in mind, was not an isolated example of culture and scholarship. It was the perfectly natural outcome of a civilization which was scarcely inferior to that of a century ago, and which could boast of magnificent libraries, "a people highly instructed in all the arts of peace, a state carefully organized, a hierarchy firmly founded, minutely divided and organized, even to the smallest external matters, a universally diffused system of writing and the common use of papyrus—in short, a civilization which in all essential points has already attained its full maturity, and only by close investigation is further development in some directions discovered." And all this was many hundreds of years before Abram, under the guidance of the Lord, became an exile from his country and settled in the plain of Mamre.

The editor of the *BROAD AX* and family were attendants at the Unitarian Church on last Sunday a. m. There was a very large congregation present, the music and singing were excellent. The Rev. A. L. Hudson, the new Pastor, is an eloquent speaker and a very affable gentleman to meet, and we take great pleasure in commending him to our many readers. Services Sunday a. m. at 11 o'clock, 44 Main Street. Subject: "The Soul's Judgment against itself."

Owing to courtesy extended by the *Salt Lake Herald*, we are enabled to present our many readers with a portrait of the Hon. Thomas Maloney, candidate for Justice of the Supreme Court.

The ensuing city election will be one of unusual interest and importance. The metropolis of the new state must keep pace with the times, and we need an honest, progressive and judicious man at the head of municipal affairs. The Democrats have plenty of first class material from which to select a mayor. First the true and well tried R. N. Baskin; then we have such noble men as Heber J. Grant, Frank Armstrong, F. W. Jennings, W. B. Preston and others, all of whom would reflect credit to our city to place at the head of our city government.

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