

THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS.

RELICS OF THE OLD COVENANT.

A few days ago the remark was made in these columns that evidences for the Christian religion were multiplying as the attacks on it were rendered more severe; and the scientific researches that apparently supply grounds of assault also furnish material for strengthening the position. There is a strong probability that this fact will receive additional proof by future researches. Indications are that from the ancient depositories of countries hitherto almost unknown will arise historic witnesses for the truth, decisive and unimpeachable.

According to Scientific Bittings quoted in the *Millennial Star*, we may look to Abyssinia for some valuable discoveries bearing on questions now in dispute among critics of the Bible. The Negus Menelik is said to have given his consent in the opening of the archives of the kingdom to a commission of European scientists, as soon as peace shall be restored to his country. The probable importance of this may be gathered from the following:

A widespread tradition of the Moslem world asserts that it is within the ancient vaults of this structure that the Ark of the Covenant is preserved, along with the tables of stone containing the Ten Commandments, and which Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. The seven-branched candlestick of gold, which figured in the Holy of Holies of the Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem, is said to be immured in these vaults, which are also known to contain a mass of ancient papyri and other manuscripts that are in an excellent state of preservation, but have never been translated or annotated.

It is no mere vague tradition handed down from father to son which has transmitted to generations of Abyssinians the story of how these priceless treasures came to repose in the cathedral of Axum. The story of their procurement by the rulers of the country and of their being deposited within these sacred vaults is specific, particular and detailed. It is told how they were brought from Jerusalem to Abyssinia by the founder of the present reigning dynasty, the first of the emperors, Menelik, who was the son of King Solomon of Israel and of that biblical Queen of Sheba. This original Menelik is by some thought to be referred to in the Song of Solomon. Although, as authentic history teaches, born after the return of his mother to her own dominion, he was brought up at the court of his father at Jerusalem. He remained there until the first destruction and sacking of Jerusalem, and the pillage of the Temple of Solomon by Sishak, king of Egypt. Immediately before the destruction of the temple Menelik fled back to Abyssinia. He carried with him for safe-keeping the treasures of that structure, which were threatened with seizure and desilement. It is positively asserted by Abyssinian tradition that he carried back with him the tables of stone, the Ark of the Covenant, and the seven-branched candlestick. There he deposited in the interior of the huge granite pile which constitutes the pedestal of the ancient Abyssinian temple of Axum, long ante-dating the Christian era, and where the rulers of Ethiopia have been crowned from the earliest times. The present cathedral of

Axum is built on the summit of a species of granite pyramid, the remnant of a heathen temple that formerly occupied this site. It is within the interior of this pyramid that the vaults are situated which King Menelik has now promised to throw open.

The cathedral of Axum is but one of the depositories of biblical treasures which Menelik offers to open up to the modern scientific world for investigation. It is believed that he will open up for the first time the priceless treasures that have for thousands of years been jealously preserved on the holy island of Debra Suan, located near the center of the great inland sea or lake of Zuni, in the southern portion of the kingdom of Shoa. This island is reputed sacred not only among the Abyssinians themselves, but also throughout the Moslem world, and it is to this probably that must be attributed the fact that, notwithstanding the innumerable wars that have raged in Abyssinia for at least 1,800 years past, the sanctity of the island never has been violated by either Christian or infidel. This land of Debra Suan, the Abyssinian rendering of Mount Sinai, is inhabited and guarded entirely by monks as ignorant and fanatic as are all the Abyssinian clergy, but who, when once they take up their residence on the island, are never permitted to leave it again. In fact, the soil of the island had never been trodden by the foot of any layman until two years ago, when Emperor Menelik himself, attended by a few of his principal ras or generals, and escorted by a strongly armed bodyguard, crossed the waters of the lake and landed on its shores, the bodyguard remaining in the boats ready for emergency. According to the dusky monarch's own account the vaults of the monastery, which is of enormous size and built upon rock, are filled with papyri and parchments and books of every description. The books are believed to have been sent thither at the time of the Mohammedan invasion of Abyssinia, in the sixteenth century, but the parchments are declared to hail from the world-famed library of Alexandria, which was dispersed in the seventh century by the Mohammedan caliph, Omar. The papyri evidently date from a much earlier era, and probably relate to that period when the emperors of Ethiopia ruled not only over Abyssinia, but also over Egypt, their domination of the latter country being pictured by many a sculpture and painting on the pyramids and temples in the land of the Nile.

It is more than possible that the opening of the old archives of Abyssinia may not bring to light all the treasures indicated by tradition; still, enough is known to center interest in the contents of those vaults. The author of the second book of the Maccabees states that he had "found in the records" that the Prophet Jeremiah concealed the Tabernacle, or large tent that served for religious worship during the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness; and also the ark and the altar of incense. These sacred relics were taken to a mountain cave and carefully hidden shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. Later, however, Jeremiah and Baruch went to Egypt, where the history of the Prophet is lost except for the tradition that he there suffered death at the hands of his own people. The question is whether he carried the sacred implements of worship with

him to Egypt, in which case they might have found their way to the edifice of the Ethiopian king. At all events, the record referred to by the author of the book of Maccabees states that the Prophet Jeremiah had left a prediction to the effect that the place of their concealment should be unknown, "until the time that God gather His people again together, and receive them unto mercy. Then shall the Lord show them these things, and the glory of the Lord shall appear, and the cloud also, as it was showed unto Moses, and as when Solomon desired that the place might be honorably sanctified." (2 Mac. 2: 7, 8.)

In view of this ancient tradition, the coming researches in Abyssinia are of the greatest possible interest.

SCIPIO'S DIPHTHERIA.

Making full allowance for excitement on the part of a physician who realizes the dangerous nature of diphtheria, the report of Dr. J. S. Witcher still is of a most alarming character, to the extent that an investigation should be made at once as to the conditions he describes. He says that at Scipio, Millard county, there are thirty-six cases of diphtheria of a malignant form, and that it is spreading so rapidly that nine new cases were reported during his three days' stay in the town. He also says that "there is at present no restriction whatever that would tend to prevent the spread of the disease;" and alleges as the cause of the epidemic "the disgustingly filthy condition of a reservoir from which the people of Scipio secure water."

While there may be no question as to the prevalence of diphtheria in the town named, we fear it is not safe to say that there is no restriction whatever to prevent the spread of the disease. Scipio is situated in a fertile and beautiful valley, and its people are intelligent and enterprising. It is hardly credible that intelligent people, having the affection of parents for children, would observe the condition described without endeavoring to prevent the spread of the disease. Even if the city officials are so culpable as not to enforce quarantine regulations, parents can surely not be so neglectful as the report would indicate. It is equally difficult to imagine that the people could have been informed of the "disgustingly filthy condition" of the reservoir spoken of. Perhaps they have been careless of their reservoir, but the present condition of the water supply cannot be changed so radically from what it has been for years as to cause all the trouble. If there has been or is culpability it ought to be pointed out; but we should be careful not to be too severe at a time when people are suffering from a dread malady. Wherein there has been neglect, there should be immediate reformation, and other places should be carefully guarded by quarantine regulations against the spread of the disease. Action upon this line should be prompt and effective. But it does not always do to attribute diphtheria to exterior uncleanness or carelessness. The facts will not sustain the claim. Diphtheria