

THE OLDEST BIBLICAL MANUSCRIPTS

In the summer of 1947 a sheer coincidence led to the discovery of the oldest manuscripts of the Bible so far known. Among a collection of writings on leather and papyrus which Bedouin shepherds came across in a cave in Wadi Qumran on the north side of the Dead Sea was a 23-foot leather scroll containing the complete text of the book of Isaiah in Hebrew. Expert examination of the document revealed beyond doubt that the Isaiah text dated from 100 B.C. It is an original prophetic scroll of the type that Jesus held in his hands when he read the lesson in Nazareth on the Sabbath (Luke 4). This copy of Isaiah, over 2,000 years old, is a unique proof of the reliability of the holy scriptures that have been handed down to us, for the text agrees exactly with what we have in our present day Bible.

The oldest and most complete texts of the Old and New Testaments were, until recently, the famous Codex Vaticanus and Codex

Sinaiticus dating from the 4th century A.D., supplemented in 1931 by the Chester Beatty papyri dating from the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Besides these, there were some fragments of the Old Testament from pre-Christian times (Fuad and Rylands Fragments). But all of these documents are in Greek, that is to say translations as far as the Old Testament is concerned. The oldest and fullest MS. in Hebrew was the Codex Petropolitanus, dating from A.D. 916. By the discovery of the leather scroll of Isaiah at the Dead Sea the Hebrew text has been carried back to almost exactly 1,000 years before. In 1935 a part of St. John's Gospel in Greek - the famous Bodmer papyrus - dating from the time of Trajan (98-117) was discovered. These old MSS. are the most convincing answer to all doubts as to the genuineness and reliability of the text that we have in our Bibles today.