

MARCH 9, 1914

DR. GINSBURG.

DEATH OF THE GREAT HEBREW SCHOLAR.

We regret to announce that Dr. Christian David Ginsburg, the famous Hebrew scholar, died at his residence at Palmer's Green, on Saturday morning, in his eighty-fourth year, having been born at Warsaw, in 1830. The education he received at the Rabbinic College there may be said to have tinctured his whole life, as may be seen by anyone who consults the long list of his books in the catalogue of the British Museum. Few figures have ever been more familiar than Dr. Ginsburg's under the dome of the great circular reading-room at Bloomsbury; indeed, there must have been times when the greater part of his waking hours was spent in the Museum.

Dr. Ginsburg became a Christian in 1846, and his unremitting industry and remarkable learning led to his appointment as an original member of the Commission appointed by Convocation for the revision of the English version of the Old Testament. His erudition was seen at its best in "The Massorah," which was published in four imperial folio volumes from 1880 to 1886. Those volumes were the fruit of incessant study and research occupying fully thirty years. His vast knowledge of Biblical matters led to his being involved in many controversies, among those who took part in the discussions that ensued being personages so diverse as Mr. Gladstone and Bradlaugh and numerous other famous controversialists of the day.

Speaking to an intimate friend a couple of years ago about an edition of the Bible on which he was then at work, Dr Ginsburg said: "It is no easy task to decipher these manuscripts, but I do not mind the difficulty. I feel privileged that my life has been spared to do this work, for the

more I study the manuscripts the more I am amazed at the contents of the Bible. Whatever our theological views, it is the dominant part of our life. If I am spared for two more years I hope to complete my task."

Among the large number of works dealing with the history of the Jews which stand to his credit as author may be mentioned "An Historical and Critical Commentary on the Song of Songs," and on "Ecclesiastes," which came out in 1857; "The Kariates, their History and Literature," published in 1862; "The Essenes," 1864; "The Kabbalah, its Doctrines, Development, and Literature," 1865; "The Massoreth-ha-Massoreth of Elias Levita," in Hebrew, with translation and commentary, 1867; "Jacob ben Chajin's Introduction to the Rabbinic Bible," Hebrew and English, 1867; "The Moabite Stone," 1871; "A Commentary on Leviticus," 1882. Dr. Ginsburg was also a valued and voluminous contributor to Kitto's "Encyclopædia of Biblical Literature," Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," and the "Encyclopædia Britannica." In 1897 he published "Fac-similes of the Manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible," and an "Introduction to the Massoretico-critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible." Dr. Ginsburg was a man of profound scholarship of a type that tends to become rarer every day.

The Late Dr. Ginsburg and Mr. Gladstone.

Dr. C. D. Ginsburg, whose death we announce with regret to-day, was the lifelong friend of Mr. Gladstone and one of the greatest of recent Oriental scholars. His scholarship is proved by the European fame he enjoyed, and by the long list of works which he has written. It was his keen eye which saw through the ungenuine Shapira MSS. It was because of his intense interest in the Scriptures that Dr. Ginsburg first came into friendly relations with Mr. Gladstone, and their pleasant friendship continued until the great statesman's death. The scholar was a keen Liberal, and took much interest in the Gladstone Library at the National Liberal Club.

"The Massorah."

Dr. Ginsburg's greatest work is "The Massorah," and thereby hangs a tale. "You cannot imagine," he said on one occasion, "how I was chaffed by my friends when first I began to work at the Massorah. I remember one occasion when two very eminent

men of letters said to me after we had dined together, 'Now, Ginsburg, why waste your time on Biblical research? Why not take up the Greek and Latin instead of the Hebrew classics? You will find them a more satisfactory study in every way.' And I said to them, 'Let us make a bargain. If you will show me a single passage in the Greek or Roman classics, or, indeed, in any Oriental classics whatever, which can beat the Twenty-third or the Hundred and Thirty-ninth Psalm, I promise you to leave the Bible alone, and turn to Sophocles and Aeschylus.' This was agreed, and they were honest enough to confess, after a while, that they had not found such a passage. Since then they chaffed no more, and I went on with my Massorah."

What "The Massorah" Is.

Many people may not know what "The Massorah" is. It is a marginal directory, indicating on almost every line in the margin of the MS. Bibles how the letters, words, forms, and phrases are to be written, according to the most ancient rules laid down by those who compiled, preserved, and transmitted the canon of the Old Testament Scriptures. Every spurious letter or redundant word, every variation in the repetition of a phrase, and every peculiarity of construction over which the copyists are likely to blunder, and which have been a great source of the various readings, are most carefully noted, and those who are engaged in multiplying the codices are warned that "there is a peculiar phenomenon here" which is not to be made conformable to the ordinary readings. This invaluable key to the text of the Old Testament is called Massorah (tradition) because it was traditionally handed down by the authorised and professional scribes, who afterwards committed it to writing.

The Adventures of a Manuscript Hunter.

Dr. Ginsburg had many romantic stories to tell about his work. "It was necessary, in order to be quite certain that the text was correct," he said on one occasion, "that the words and the very letters of the Old Testament should be counted. You can imagine what a piece of work it would be. However, it had to be done, and I meant to do it. A Hebrew Bible was prepared with a system of lines to facilitate the counting, and I had, in fact, begun to count. Then there was an auction of old books at Sotheby's. I had no idea what the books were, but went from curiosity, and thinking that perhaps I might by chance pick up something interesting. A Hebrew Bible was among the books. I was not in the least anxious to get it, but as no other bids were made for it, I got it. And what do you think I found when I opened it? The very thing I had commenced doing, for there, before me, was a MS. Hebrew Bible, beautifully clear, and with every letter counted and tabulated."