

The Æthiopic Version of the Old Testament.¹

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THE ancient versions of the Old Testament occupy a different place in biblical criticism from those of the New Testament. The MSS. of the latter afford, in most cases, sufficient evidence for the revision of the text. The substantial agreement of a large number of copies, many of them of great antiquity, is not to be disturbed by the secondary evidence of versions; though the witness of ancient versions is of very great value in cases of doubt, and in supplying materials for constructing the history of the sacred text. But for the Old Testament, versions occupy a place of primary importance, on account of the inferior character of the manuscript evidence for the original Hebrew.

No copy of the Hebrew Scriptures possesses an antiquity comparable to that of the earliest copies of the Greek Testament; and the MSS. which are available appear to represent one tradition only. To get behind this "Massoretic" text, we must have recourse to the versions which were made before the extant MSS. were copied. There are several; but most suffer from a defect, from which those of the New Testament are free. The LXX. of course, like the Latin and Syriac of the New Testament, was made directly from the original; so also, to some extent, was Jerome's Vulgate. But even Jerome was not free from the influence of the Greek, and all other translators seem to

¹ *Dekapropheton Æthiopicum*, von Dr. Johannes Bachmann. Heft I., Obadia. D. Nutt.

have made their versions directly from it, although perhaps there was, in some cases, a subsequent revision by the Hebrew. It follows that the LXX. is a most important instrument of Old Testament text criticism, and a settlement of its text demands a first place in critical undertakings, in order that the Greek may be effectively employed towards the correction of the Hebrew; for, as Dr. Bachmann justly points out, the emendation of the Massoretic text is a prime want at the present day.

Materials have been collected by many writers with a view to the ultimate reconstruction of the current LXX. text. Dr. Bachmann adds his contribution in the work of which the first part is before us, containing the Book of Obadiah. He argues that the Æthiopic version of the Old Testament, in its oldest form, was made from the I.XX. and not, as some have held, from the Arabic or the Coptic. He takes his Æthiopic text from the *Cod. Bibl. Bodl. Hunt.* 625, and gives a collation of another Oxford copy, and of one at Frankfort, at the foot of each page. Notes are added, especially on the relation of the text to the Arabic and Coptic. The underlying Greek is set forth as a contribution towards LXX. criticism, and a Glossary of Greek words with the Æthiopic renderings is appended. This Hest is full of promise for the success of those which are to follow, and we hope the learned doctor will suffer no hindrance in the completion of his work on the Twelve Minor Prophets.

Exposition of the First Epistle of St. John.

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CHAPTER III. 1-3.

"Behold how great a love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knoweth Him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know, however, that, when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

VER. 1. This verse is closely connected with ii. 29. Seeing that Christ, of whom we are born anew, is the Son of God, the expression "born of Him (Christ)" very naturally leads John to the notion

of the divine sonship of the Christian (John i. 12, 13). In this sonship he finds a new motive to earnestness and zeal as regards the doing of righteousness or sanctification. He develops this

motive in vers. 1-3. In the greatness of God's love towards us, which manifests itself so exceeding abundantly, that it has lifted us up to the incomparable dignity of children of God, there lies a powerful incentive to holiness. The exceeding greatness of this love of God towards us must stir us up to holiness in virtue of the grateful love towards Him which it awakens within our heart. There is no greater incentive to holiness conceivable. And this is a matter in regard to which we must take ourselves to task: which motive to holiness is strongest with us? Is it fear or hope? Moreover, this, the strongest of all motives, is also that which makes us most blessed. How happy is he who has no other! In the case of such a man the work of sanctification would be a continuous enjoyment of blessedness. It is, therefore, in our own interest that our Christianity should become ever purer. It is sad that John must call the attention of Christians to the greatness of this love of God.

"That we should be *called* children of God" is by no means synonymous with "that we should *be* children of God." We should have the name, *i.e.* the appropriate character, the lofty, honourable, appropriate dignity. For "child of God" is the peculiar and appropriate Christian dignity. John appeals, as it were, to his readers' consciousness of nobility—they should learn to feel how high God has placed them, and should measure the greatness of His love by the greatness of the honour He has conferred upon them. In the mere dignity of divine sonship John finds an exceeding great love of God towards us; he finds in it the climax of His love.

From the words, "for this cause the world knoweth us not," John now proceeds to set forth the greatness of the dignity and glory of Christian divine sonship, in order to make us feel the force of the motive we have just considered in its full strength. He shows the greatness of this dignity, first of all, in the circumstance that it surpasses the ability of the world to conceive it. Because our quality is the lofty one of children of God, the world knows us not. In this greatness of our dignity lies the ground and the explanation of the disregard which we so frequently experience from the world, and which, consequently, should not discourage us, but must rather lift us up. Because our dignity and worth is that of God's children, the world knows and honours us not; and this again

has no other ground than this, that *the world knows not God*. That being the case, the children of God must necessarily be also incomprehensible to it (John xv. 18 f., xvi. 1 ff.). It is a common experience that the want of recognition, which Christians find in the world, frequently surprises them more than the want of recognition which God Himself finds in it, and that they feel more practical difficulty in overcoming the temptation lying in this attitude of the world towards them. There is also this danger, that the Christian may easily deceive himself as to what is world and what is not. For we must not imagine that, inasmuch as any one expresses himself disrespectfully regarding our faith, this is of itself a testimony that our Christianity is a real and genuine divine sonship. We are not justified in simply regarding these others as belonging to the world. Even a true Christian may often come to have doubts as to the Christianity of others, however decidedly it may give itself out as real. In John's days, however, that was not the case.

Ver. 2. John goes on to set forth the greatness of the dignity and glory which is implied in the divine sonship of the Christian. It embraces far more than what the Christian child of God even already sees of it and directly possesses. *Now*, he says, we *are really* children of God, and still it is not yet made manifest what we shall be in the future. Our future condition as children of God (which will simply be the full realisation of the idea of divine sonship) is not yet openly manifested; we know, however, that when He is manifested, etc. The subject, which will be manifested, is not our future condition, but, as in the similar clause in ii. 28, Christ Himself. This is plain from what follows. "We shall be like *Him*." Who is it that is spoken of here? Many think of God, and also explain the "on Him," ver. 3, of God, while making the "He" of the latter part of ver. 3 refer to Christ. But ver. 3, on the contrary, strongly confirms us in our assumption that Christ is meant here. For, if He, whom we shall see as He is, is not Christ, then the link connecting ver. 3 with ver. 2 is not half so close as it is on the assumption that it is the Redeemer. It is said, indeed, that the New Testament elsewhere represents the seeing of God as the final goal of the children of God (Matt. v. 8; 1 Cor. xiii. 12). But, apart from such passages as John i. 18, vi. 46, xiv. 9, 1 Tim. vi. 16, Matt. xi. 27, which assert the

invisibility of the Father in an absolute manner; apart even from the fact that what is spoken of here is not a mere seeing of God in a general kind of way, but a seeing of God *as He is* (and it is upon this that the stress is laid),—apart from these considerations, what is asserted here is not merely that we shall see Him, but also, and indeed principally, that we shall be *like* Him. But Scripture nowhere declares that we shall be like *God*. The likeness to God, which it demands of us, cannot be meant here; for, in demanding that of us, it regards such God-likeness as something that we are not first to acquire in the future. On the other hand, it declares, in the plainest terms, that we are to become like Christ (as regards condition; Rom. viii. 16, 17, 29 f.; Col. iii. 3, 4; 2 Cor. iii. 18; John xvii. 24). The assumption, however, that we shall one day become like Christ rests upon the further assumption that we shall see Him as He is; and our guarantee for the latter is His own promise (John xvii. 24, xii. 26, xiv. 3).

That, therefore, which John impresses so urgently upon his beloved readers is to reflect on the fact that as yet they possess their divine sonship only in a very imperfect manner, and not to forget that in all its fulness it still lies in the future. They must, therefore, continually turn their eyes towards the future. It is certainly of the utmost importance for us that we confidently regard our present condition as that of an already real divine sonship. For without this our relation to God cannot be one that is intimate and joyous. But it would be equally dangerous for the Christian to believe that he already possessed divine sonship in all its completeness; for in that case he would not esteem divine sonship so highly as he ought. Meanwhile he only tastes the first-fruits. Upon the vivid comprehension, by means of Christian hope, of this contrast between fulness of life in the present and the life in the future depends the peculiar and characteristic Christian note, to which our life must be attuned. Upon this also depends the combination, so unintelligible to the world, of the deepest humility and the most daring exaltation, of sorrow and joy, in the life of the Christian. The future heavenly condition of the Christian is already actually in existence; only it has not yet been apprehended by him. How certain the Christian is of his future possession. It is an object of knowledge, and not merely of faith and hope; and that in virtue of his indissoluble vital

connexion with Christ. For in virtue of this connexion he is certain that, when he has reached the goal of his development, he will share in the condition of his Redeemer. It is a genuine and characteristic Christian mood, to which expression is given here. The Christian walks in the visible order of things with the distinct consciousness of belonging to an invisible order. He is aware that only the covering upon his eyes prevents him from apprehending this higher order of things. The fact, however, that he does not see it occasions in him no doubt as to its reality; but he derives the darkness, which is over him, from the veiling of his own eye by his sensuous nature.

The Christian, however, cannot conceive of a real blessedness without the perfect vision of his Redeemer, with which every riddle is solved for him. And such a perfect, not merely approximate, but absolutely real (“as He is”), *i.e.* immediate, beholding of Christ is, from the nature of the case, only possible to those who participate with Him in His condition. Standing outside His glory (John xvii. 24; 2 Cor. iii. 18) the Christian could only have an approximate, because not an experimental, notion of it. From the fact that we shall be like Christ, the thought of our divine sonship obtains a literalness, a strength and fulness, whereby alone it can have its full practical force. It is a *literal* expression, like all other Christian expressions. We are God’s children in the same sense as Christ is; we really inherit with Him, so surely as we are His brethren. His glory, and consequently ours also, we cannot conceive too highly. But, of course, it is only if the glory of Christ stands vividly before our soul that the thought of our divine sonship can have so elevating an effect upon us.

Ver. 3. From the greatness of God’s love toward us unfolded in vers. 1 and 2, love manifested in the divine sonship bestowed upon us, John now expressly derives the summons to earnestness in the work of sanctification. Such an expectation and hope, he says, *must*, wherever it really exists, become a strong impulse to holiness. This inner necessity is implied in the expression “every one.” Purification is to be understood here in the sense of a specially high degree of purity; for while “to be pure” denotes the same moral condition as “to be righteous,” it does so from the point of view of perfect freedom from the stain of sin, complete separation from fellowship with it (i. 5;

1 Pet. i. 25); whereas "being righteous" is conformity to the demands of the law in virtue of one's conduct corresponding to it. The main stress lies upon the clause, "even as He is pure." Every one, says John, who has such a hope, purifies himself, and, that too, not merely superficially, but in the same absolute manner as Christ is pure. The cogency of this assertion depends upon the premiss, which is here taken for granted, that conformity in respect of moral condition is the necessary presupposition of conformity in respect of state of existence (Matt. v. 8; Heb. xii. 14). John apprehends this demand more strictly than is usually done. He admits as really Christian only that which aims at the absolute perfection of purity, and which is satisfied with no

other purity than that which is like the purity of the Redeemer Himself. From the nature of the case, any moral strictness that is more indulgent is incompatible with Christian sanctification. The latter proceeds entirely from our being laid hold of by the ethical image of the Redeemer. That in this image, which makes such a peculiarly strong impression upon us, is just this stainless purity. Elsewhere we meet ethical phenomena which command our reverence; but there is always some shadow or other along with their light. In none of them do we discover perfect human virtue; and only *perfect* virtue can lay hold of and inspire a noble human heart. The Christian, accordingly, in working out his sanctification can only set before himself that perfect goal.

The Gospels and Modern Criticism.

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II.

MR. BUSSELL, going straight to the root of the matter, points out that the views which I have ventured to put forward with regard to the structure and interrelation of the Gospels, really resolve themselves into the question of the correctness or incorrectness of a definition. After quoting the following definition: "Documents I. and II. (John and Matthew) represent a complete history in two volumes. Document III. (Mark) is a fresh and expanded edition of selected portions of Document II. (Matthew). Document IV. cannot be better described than in terms suggested by the preface of the writer (Luke), as a supplemental and explanatory treatise" (*Historic Relation of the Gospels*, p. 54). Mr. Bussell says: "Such is, briefly and clearly expressed, the whole sum and substance of Mr. Halcombe's several treatises on this subject, the result of his twelve years' labours, and of his patient analysis. Nothing can be added to the statement save by way of comment, explanation, or illustration" (THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, April 1892, p. 352).

This definition, then, is what I have to establish.

Of the numerous proofs of its correctness which might be adduced, I will deal with the three which

are at once the most comprehensive, the most easily stated in a few words, and the most easily verified.

I.

This definition applies with equal exactness (a) to the Gospels considered in their entirety; (b) to as many component fourfold sections (or periods common to four writers) as the Gospels can be divided into; (c) to every one of the fourfold narratives; (d) to every fourfold statement. Thus, whereas the construction indicated by the definition is so remarkable that no reasonable person would expect that it could occur twice by accident, it does, as a matter of fact, occur in every one of forty available instances. (See Table annexed.)

Between all these areas of observation there is virtually no difference save from one cause. Where subject-matter suitable to St. John's avowed object in writing predominates, there his record is the longest. Where more distinctly historical matter predominates, there the Synoptic records are the longest. It is to this latter cause that the section embracing the Galilean ministry mainly owes its exceptional character. But the actual