

## THE THIRD BOOK OF ESDRAS AND THE TRIDENTINE CANON.

THE question why the Church of Rome does not consider the Third Book of Esdras to be canonical has recently attracted fresh attention. Sir Henry Howorth in the April number in the last volume of this JOURNAL has presented one view of the question. But it is possible that there is another, as I shall endeavour to shew.<sup>1</sup>

His article was entitled 'The Modern Roman Canon and the Book of Esdras A', and in it he drew certain conclusions adverse to the Fathers of Trent and Florence. Before, however, examining his statements and the conclusions at which he arrives, we must be clear as to what is meant by Esdras A.

In the LXX MSS Alexandrinus and Vaticanus we find two books entitled respectively Esdras A and Esdras B. The latter, Esdras B, is the Esdras and Nehemias of the Vulgate and Douay versions, the Ezra and Nehemiah of the Authorized and Revised versions. The former, Esdras A, often called the Greek Esdras, is not found in the Douay Bibles, but is the book known as 'Esdrae Tertius Liber', and printed in the Clementine Vulgate as an appendix, together with 'Esdrae Quartus Liber' and 'Oratio Manassae'. In order to avoid confusion we may give the nomenclature as follows:—

Esdras A in the Greek Bibles is III Esdras of the Clementine Vulgate, and is known as the Greek Esdras.

Esdras B in the Greek Bibles is the I and II Esdras of the Vulgate, the Ezra and Nehemiah of the English versions.

IV Esdras does not occur in the Greek Bibles and does not concern us here.

Sir Henry Howorth claims to have shewn some twenty years ago in the pages of the *Academy* and in the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* that the Greek text of Chronicles

<sup>1</sup> When I wrote an article on the subject in the July issue of *Deuterocanonica* (1906) I had not seen Sir Henry Howorth's article in the JOURNAL.

and Esdras and Nehemias now found in Greek Bibles is not really due to the original translators of the Alexandrine or Septuagint version, but is made from the Massoretic text as existing in the second century A.D. He moreover maintains that the real LXX translation of the original Hebrew Ezra is that known as Esdras A or the Greek Esdras, and he urges that the editors of the Cambridge Septuagint should give full consideration to this view. If his opinion is correct it will follow that a really canonical book, viz. Esdras A, the only vestige of the original Hebrew Ezra, has been unlawfully excluded from the Canon, while the books which in our canon are known as Ezra and Nehemiah, or I and II Esdras, have no right to be there, since, on Sir Henry Howorth's hypothesis, they do not represent the old Hebrew Ezra of which no trace is to be found except in Esdras A.

It might be contended that the question was decided by the same Holy Spirit who spoke both by the Prophets and by the Councils. But such an argument would be out of place here. Sir Henry Howorth indeed maintains, as we shall see later on, that the Councils are contradictory. 'The fact', he says, 'is peculiarly interesting and important in regard to the Roman position in the matter, and I purpose in the following pages to examine how it has come about that a Church with whom the theory of continuous tradition is so dominant should have in fact departed so completely from its own early tradition in regard to this book, and to shew that this departure has been entirely due to a mistake, a very pardonable mistake, and in no sense to prejudice or predetermination.'

Modern scholarship is a thing of which we are justly proud, but some of the scholars of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance period do not always receive the recognition that is due to them. If any one needs proof of the really marvellous scholarship possessed by the Fathers who sat on the Tridentine commissions, let him read the introductory pages to the Sixtine edition of the Septuagint. He will rise up from their perusal with very little faith in the capacity of those Fathers to make 'a mistake, a very pardonable mistake' on so serious a question as the relative merits of two such books as Esdras A and B.

In order to explain how the 'mistake' arose, Sir Henry Howorth

sketches the history of the Canon of the Old Testament in the Roman Church. After pointing out that the Vatican decrees regarding the Canon merely reiterate those of Trent, he proceeds to examine these latter. As is well known, the Tridentine Fathers did not merely draw up a list of the canonical books—it was a repetition of that of Florence—but they declared the Vulgate authentic. These are two patently distinct points. The former was necessitated by the keen discussion respecting the relative value of the Proto-canonical and the Deutero-canonical books, a discussion which the Fathers settled by reiterating the decree of Florence and making no distinction between the two classes of books; the latter point arose from the conflicting Latin versions with which the new scholarship, combined with the facilities afforded by the printing-press, was flooding the world. Sir Henry Howorth has confused these two points.

For, after giving the Decree containing the list of canonical books, he says that this decree 'is followed by certain words defining the actual text to be appealed to', and he evidently supposes that these appeals refer to questions regarding the canonicity or non-canonicity of certain books, for he adds that these words 'are very important for our purpose'. It is in fact provided that the text alone authorized as the *ultima lex* of all appeals is the Vulgate. The following are the actual words used in the 'Decretum de editione et usu sacrorum librorum':—

'Insuper eadem sacrosancta synodus considerans non parum utilitatis accedere posse ecclesiae Dei, si ex omnibus latinis editionibus, quae circumferuntur, sacrorum librorum, quatenam pro authentica habenda sit, innotescat; statuit et declarat ut haec ipsa vetus et vulgata editio quae longo tot saeculorum usu in ipsa ecclesia probata est, in publicis lectionibus . . . pro authentica habeatur. . . .' I translate the decree as it is important.

'Moreover the Holy Synod, feeling convinced that no small gain will accrue to the Church of God if it be made clear which of all the current Latin editions of the Sacred books is to be considered authentic, decrees and declares that the self-same old and common (vetus et vulgata) edition which has been approved by such long usage in the Church is to be considered authentic in all lectures, discussions, sermons and commentaries,' and that no one is, under any pretext, to dare to reject it.

Sir Henry Howorth has not noticed the clause 'si ex omnibus *latinis* editionibus'. On the face of it the decree merely means that the Church prefers that *Latin* translation which is known as the Vulgate to all other *Latin* translations. I say 'on the face of it', because the Acts of the Council and subsequent declarations on the subject would, even if the text itself were not perfectly clear, make this absolutely certain.

But Sir Henry Howorth has read together the two decrees, the one on the canon and the other on the authentic text, and he has regarded the latter as the key to the former. But the key will not fit the lock. Consequently he says: 'It cannot fail to be noticed that in these pronouncements there is a palpable contradiction. If the books enumerated are alone to be deemed canonical, it seems difficult to understand how the Vulgate edition of the Bible as then received was to be treated as the conclusive authority in all disputes and controversies, since it contained, in very many if not in most existing copies, at least two additional works which were treated in them as of equal and co-ordinate authority with the remaining books, namely those which in the Latin Bibles were called Esdras III (that is 'Εσδρας Α) and Esdras IV. . . .'

Moreover, not noticing the fact that the Vulgate was only declared to be the authentic *text* and that no reference was made in this part of the decree to the *canon*, Sir Henry Howorth seems to think that the Fathers meant that those books were canonical which were to be found in a majority of MSS of the Vulgate. He adds: 'This contradiction . . . was apparently ignored by the Fathers at Trent.'

Nor is this all; he supposes that by the words 'haec ipsa vetus et vulgata editio' was simply meant the Latin version of the Bible whether before or after St Jerome's time. It is true that the Old Latin and the LXX were known in St Jerome's time as the 'Vulgata editio' or the *Kowή*, but a little more extended examination of the Acts of Trent shews what the Fathers actually referred to. They appointed a commission which on March 17th, 1546, indicated, among others, two special abuses as calling for immediate remedy. The first was that there were current various Latin translations of Holy Scripture, all of them claiming to be authentic; the second was the corruption of the copies of the

Vulgate edition in use. The suggested remedy was twofold, viz. (a) that only one Latin version, the Vulgate, should be declared authentic, and (b) that a corrected edition of this should be prepared as soon as possible. The ultimate result of this was of course the Sixtine and Clementine editions of St Jerome's Vulgate, which latter the Fathers did not wish to correct, but endeavoured to bring out in a form as nearly as possible approaching what it was when it left St Jerome's hands.

Having proved, as he thinks, the contradictory character of the Tridentine decrees, Sir Henry then endeavours to shew how unfairly the Fathers treated Esdras A, or the Greek Esdras. Neither Esdras A, nor Esdras IV, nor the prayer of Manasses, appeared in the list of canonical books drawn up at Trent and Florence, and this for the simple reason that they were not to be found in St Jerome's Vulgate; but Sir Henry Howorth, forgetting that it is only a question of the Vulgate and not of the pre-Hieronymian Latin Bibles, nor of copies of the former which had suffered additions, convicts the editors of inconsistency, since whereas the Sixtine Vulgate omitted them altogether but explained the omission in the Preface, the Clementine Vulgate placed them in an appendix 'ne prorsus interirent, quippe qui a nonnullis sanctis patribus interdum citantur et in aliquibus Bibliis latinis tam manuscriptis quam impressis reperiuntur.' This appears to him a case of adding insult to injury; still he feels that he cannot accuse the Tridentine Fathers of any mistake in drawing up the canon, for he finds that in so doing they simply followed the Fathers of Florence in 1439. He can find no other authoritative canon between that period and the famous African Councils of Carthage 419, 397 and Hippo 393, and he explains this 'by the fact that questions as to the Canon had not disturbed men's minds in the Middle Ages'. He seems to have forgotten John of Salisbury.

Turning, however, to the list furnished by the African Councils and comparing it with that of Florence and Trent he finds that 'there is a superficial and misleading equation with regard to the books of Esdras which we are discussing, that accounts for what was really a mistake made by the latter councils'. 'In the Canon last quoted (Hippo, can. 36) we have the phrase *Hesdrae libri duo*. In the Decree of the Council of Florence we have *Esdra*,

*Nehemia.* In that of Trent we have *Esdrae primus et secundus qui dicitur Nehemias.*

'The fact is that the phrase *Hesdrae libri duo* in the decree of the earlier Councils does not mean the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah in the Septuagint and in the early Latin pre-Hieronymian translation of the Bible which followed the Septuagint, and was alone regarded as canonical in the Latin Church at the end of the fourth century, formed a single book, which in the early Greek MSS was entitled Ἐσδρας B, and which in the early Latin version was entitled Esdras II. . . .

'When the Fathers at Florence discussed and decided upon their list of authorized and canonical books, finding, no doubt, that the African Councils had only recognized two books of Esdras, they jumped to the conclusion that these two books must be those called Esdras I and Esdras II in their Bibles, namely, Ezra and Nehemiah; which in fact they were not. Hence this mistake, a great but a natural mistake, which is perpetuated in the Roman Canon.

'The two books of Esdras recognized by the African Councils, and by all the Fathers who escaped the influence of Jerome, were the books labelled Ἐσδρας A and Ἐσδρας B in the Greek Bibles, that is to say, the first book of Esdras, which was remitted to the Apocrypha by the Reformers, and the joint work Ezra-Nehemiah.'

But is it possible that the Fathers at Florence made a *mistake* and really did fail to understand what books the earlier canonical lists, viz. those of the African Councils, those of Gelasius, of Innocent I in his letter to Exuperius, of Melito, of St Gregory Nazianzen, of St Augustine, &c., referred to when they spoke of the two books of Esdras?

In the first place, can we conceive that the Fathers of Florence should not be aware that the Esdras A of the Septuagint was different from the Esdras I of the Vulgate, or that the canonical Ezra and Nehemiah were joined together as Esdras B in the Greek Bibles? The part played by Cardinal Bessarion at Florence is well known. He was a profound scholar and a great patron of Biblical study. The number of MSS brought to Europe by him was very great. It is probable that at least the

MSS of the Septuagint numbered by Holmes and Parsons 52, 74, and 134, and now preserved at Florence, were his gift; possibly also Nos. 120 and 121, preserved at St Mark's, Venice. Certainly the famous Codex Venetus belonged to him. Now all these contain in whole or in part Esdras A and B. Is it possible that there was no single scholar at Florence to raise a dissentient voice and shew the Fathers that they were on the verge of a pitfall?

Again, the Fathers must have known that Esdras IV was apocryphal, and they must have known St Jerome's strong condemnation of both Esdras III and IV even though they found these books in many copies of their Bibles. Were they not scholars enough to know that though occurring in many MSS of the Vulgate they were there only as the result of concomitant use of the Vulgate and the Old Latin, so that familiar portions of the latter which had been eliminated by St Jerome were yet afterwards copied into his Bible?

Moreover they knew that only one Father, St Ambrose, could be said to have quoted largely or frequently from either Esdras III or IV, and he of course found them in his pre-Hieronymian Latin Bible. St Augustine quoted it once, St Cyprian several times, Clement of Alexandria once or twice, and a few other stray citations were to be found. And when these Fathers did quote the book it was generally only to refer to the striking passage 'magna est veritas et praeualet', which occurs in the only section, iii 1-v 6, peculiar to Esdras III, all the rest being found in Chronicles or in the canonical Ezra and Nehemiah.

It seems impossible, then, to explain the action of the Fathers as arising from ignorance. There is only one way out of the difficulty, and that is to deny Sir Henry Howorth's premise, viz. that the African Councils meant by 'Hesdrae duo libri' the two books known as Ἐσδρας A and B. This may sound a bold undertaking, but I think I can shew good ground for it.

Sir Henry Howorth lays all the blame for the confusion in nomenclature and for the resulting 'mistake' at Florence on the shoulders of St Jerome: 'It was Jerome who altered the nomenclature of these books as he altered many other things. . . . It was he who, having accepted the Jewish Canon and tradition, also accepted the Jewish division of the book hitherto known as

\**Εσδρας Β*, which in the old Latin Bibles was called *Esdras II*, and gave the two sections of it the new titles of *Esdras I* and *Esdras II*, equivalent to our *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*; and from him the titles passed into the revised Vulgate of which he was the author. . . . It was he who poured scorn on two other books of *Ezra* contained in the earlier Latin Bibles, and refused to have anything to do with them, or to translate them, and gave them an entirely inferior status by numbering them *Esdras III* and *IV*, names by which they have since been styled in the Vulgate; and it was his violent and depreciatory language about them which made many doubt their value and authority.'

Now if this were true it would be difficult to resist the impression that there really was some such conflict between the views of the Fathers of the early Councils and those of Florence and Trent. But an examination of the passages in which St Jerome treats of these various books will throw some light on the question.

In his preface to his translation of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* he says to Domnio and Rogatian: 'For three years you have been writing and writing, begging me to translate the book of *Ezra* from the Hebrew, as though you had not got the Greek and Latin renderings already.' Then, after referring to the difficulties incident to the work, he adds: 'Let no one be disturbed at the fact that I have only translated one book, and let no one amuse himself with the dreams of the apocryphal third and fourth books, for in the Hebrew Scriptures the words of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are contained in one volume, and what is not to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures nor among the four and twenty elders (viz. the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Canon) is to be wholly rejected. And if anybody insists on the authority of the Septuagint—the very confusion of the copies of which shews how mangled and upset they are—then refer him to the Gospels.' He goes on to explain that the fact that several quotations of the Old Testament in the New are not to be verified from the Greek text of the Old Testament affords proof of the incorrectness of the latter. The word I have rendered 'upset' 'eversa' may possibly, as Martianay suggested, be really 'inversa', and it would thus perhaps refer to the inverted order to be found in the Septuagint where, as we have seen, III *Esdras* comes first.



It is noteworthy that St Jerome does not say that *he* has made this change, but seems to suppose it well known.

Again, he says to Vigilantius: 'You quote against me an apocryphal book which you and your fellows read under the name of Esdras. . . I have never read the book, for what is the good of busying oneself with a book which the Church does not receive?' He is referring to IV Esdras. Does it look as though it was St Jerome who first rejected it?

In two other places he insists that in the Hebrew text Ezra and Nehemiah only form one volume. Thus he writes to Paulinus (*Ep.* liii): 'Ezra and Nehemiah are contained in one volume.' But the most noticeable passage, and the one most instructive in the present discussion, occurs in the famous *Prologus Galeatus*, which he prefixed to his translation of the Books of Kings and Chronicles. He there enumerates the books which are placed in the third class or Hagiographa and says: 'The eighth is Ezra which *likewise amongst the Greeks and Latins* (i. e. in their respective versions) *is divided into two books.*' How can Sir Henry Howorth maintain that the division is due to St Jerome? The truth is we are apt to forget that though our famous Codices  $\aleph$  A and B are very old, yet at the very earliest they were written just about the time St Jerome was born. He used MSS immeasurably older than ours, and the words just quoted shew that though Esdras B (*viz.* Ezra and Nehemiah) is undivided in our present MSS of the Septuagint, yet this was not the case in those St Jerome used. We have, then, at least, negative proof that the present nomenclature which identifies Ezra and Nehemiah with I and II Esdras is much older than St Jerome. But positive proof of this can be brought. As already stated, all the Conciliar and Papal lists of canonical books give either 'Esdras' or 'Esdrae duo libri', and it has been maintained, as we have seen, that this expression is to be explained in the light of the nomenclature in use in our oldest MSS of the LXX where, to repeat, Esdras A means our III Esdras, and Esdras B means our Ezra and Nehemiah or our Esdras I and II. Now Origen who died in 254 A.D. yields to none as an authority on the MSS of the Septuagint. If the view I am combating is correct we should expect to find in his pages the same nomenclature as in our MSS of the Septuagint; thus if

he refers to the first book of Esdras he ought, on Sir Henry Howorth's theory, to be referring to Esdras A or III Esdras; similarly if he quotes the second book of Esdras we should expect to find that he was referring to Esdras B of our Septuagint MSS, and consequently to our Ezra and Nehemiah. Yet what are the facts?

Origen once quotes the Greek Esdras and three times our book of Nehemiah; he nowhere, as far as I know, quotes our canonical Ezra. At first sight this might seem to shew that Esdras I and II were in his eyes the Esdras A and B of the Greek Bibles. But an examination of the passages will perhaps lead to a different conclusion.

The quotation of the Greek Esdras occurs in his ninth Homily on Joshua, 'And so let us also say, as it is written in Esdras: "from Thee, O Lord, cometh the victory and I am Thy servant, blessed art Thou O God of truth,"' a passage which he quotes rather differently from the present Greek text. Another reference to Esdras A is generally noted in his commentary on St John, tom. x, but he is only talking of Esdras's restoration of the Temple, and the passage may equally well refer to the book of Nehemiah as to Esdras A. He has, however, three references to our book of Nehemiah, and it is interesting to note how he quotes it. In his commentary on St Matthew (tom. xv 5) he says, in reference to our Lord's teaching on chastity, that there are two classes of eunuchs, and after referring to the eunuch who was Joseph's master, he continues: 'An instance of the other class is furnished us in the eunuch of whom mention is made in the second book of Esdras and who says: "I was a eunuch before the King . . . and it came to pass in the month Nisan in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the King" and the words which follow down to "and it pleased the King and he sent for me".' This is a quotation of our book of Nehemiah i 11, ii 1, 6. Again, in Book iv of his commentary on Canticles he says: 'and yet again in the second book of Esdras . . . Tobias the Ammonite says "shall they (viz. the Jews) offer sacrifices and eat the sacrificial victims in this place? Will not the foxes come up and destroy the walls which they are building of stone?"' This is clearly a reminiscence of Neh. iv 2-3. Lastly, in his Letter to Africanus he says: 'Moreover in Esdras, too, Nehemias the

King's cupbearer and his eunuch, a Hebrew by birth, sought leave to rebuild the temple, and obtained permission for himself and others to depart in order to restore it.' This is clearly to be referred to Neh. i.

Examining these references we note that Origen twice quotes from what he calls the second book of Esdras, on the third occasion he calls it simply Esdras. The first two references might merely indicate that he was quoting from Esdras B, though it is noteworthy that both are taken from what the Roman Canon has always called the second book of Esdras, viz. Nehemiah, as distinguished from the Roman first book of Esdras. The third quotation from Nehemiah is simply said to be from Esdras just as the citation given above from the Greek Esdras.

Now these passages taken by themselves will not decide whether Origen's canon contained the Greek Esdras, though they might at first sight lead us to think that it did so.

A reference, however, to Origen's list of the canonical books as given in his Commentary on the first Psalm puts the question beyond doubt. 'There are', he says, 'twenty-two books in the Hebrew Canon . . . the eleventh, Esdras first and second, which are contained in one volume according to the Hebrews and which they call Ezra.' Now by no possibility could Origen here mean by Esdras first and second the Esdras A and B of our Greek Bibles, since Esdras A, the Greek Esdras, never had a place in the Hebrew Bible. When, then, he refers to 'the second book of Esdras', as noted above, he clearly refers to our Nehemiah, as we have seen, and if he had quoted the first book of Esdras we should undoubtedly have found his quotations were taken from our I Esdras and not from Esdras A.

Origen's exact words are: *Ἐσδρας πρῶτος καὶ δεύτερος ἐν ἐνί, Ἐζρά, ὃ ἔστιν βοηθός.* In this list he gives first the Septuagint title of the book, then the Hebrew title, consequently he means that the two books of Esdras which are canonical are the equivalent of the Hebrew Ezra, which is, of course, our Esdras I and II. It is hard to agree with Dr Swete when he says in his Introduction to the O. T. in Greek, p. 222: 'The Books included in it (Origen's list) are expressly said to be the twenty-two of the Hebrew Canon. Yet among them are the first book of Esdras . . . which the Jews

never recognised.' He adds a note which is still more startling : 'Origen, it should be added, regards I, II Esdras as a single volume.' I understand this note, taken in conjunction with the previous passage, to mean that Origen regarded Esdras A and B, namely our first, second and third books of Esdras, as one volume. This is surely doing violence to the text, and certainly makes Origen say what was palpably false, viz. that Esdras I and II (meaning our Esdras I, II, and III, or Esdras A and B, or the Greek Esdras and the Canonical Ezra and Nehemiah) were the equivalent of the Hebrew book known as Ezra. But it is worth noting that Origen *does* say that in the Hebrew MSS known to him the Epistle of Jeremiah formed one volume with the prophecy of Jeremiah and Lamentations. We have no Hebrew MSS containing the Epistle, but are we therefore to say that Origen was mistaken? After all it is at least doubtful whether any Hebrew MSS in our possession date earlier than 916 A.D. Presumably the reason why Dr Swete and others maintain that Origen's 'Esdras primus et secundus' meant our I, II, and III Esdras is because, as we have seen, he once quotes III Esdras.<sup>1</sup> But how slight a basis Origen's citations afford for any argument touching his views on the Canon is evident from the way in which he quotes the *Pastor* of Hermas. At least five times (*tom. xiv in Matt., Tract. xxx in Matt., Hom. viii in Num., Hom. i<sup>a</sup> in Ps. 37, De Princip. lib. iv*) he quotes the *Pastor* with a reservation as to its acceptance in the Church, but on at least another five occasions he quotes it with no reservation, and twice in conjunction with other books now rejected, viz. Enoch and the Epistle of Barnabas (cp. *Comm. in Oseam, Tract. xxxi in Matt., Hom. x in Iesu Nave, De Princip. lib. iii and lib. i*).

I feel justified, then, in maintaining that by 'Esdras primus et secundus, Ezra' Origen means our canonical Ezra and Nehemiah, and does not include Esdras A or the Greek Esdras. Consequently the division of Esdras B of the Greek Bibles into Esdras I and II or Ezra and Nehemiah is not due to St Jerome, but was known and acted on by Origen long before him.

But if this view of Origen's position is correct, we cannot admit Sir Henry Howorth's contention that the African Councils and other lists of canonical books meant the Esdras A and B of our

<sup>1</sup> *Hom. ix in Iesu Nave.*

Greek MSS when they declared that among the canonical books were 'Hesdrae libri duo', or his assertion that St Jerome first made this division of the Esdras B of the present Septuagint MSS into Esdras I and II.

That the Fathers 'who were uninfluenced by Jerome' were also uninfluenced by Origen will hardly be maintained. St Hilary, for instance, in his Prologue to his commentary on the Psalms gives exactly the same canon, and it is hard to believe that he did not derive it from Origen. Eusebius (*H. E.* vi 25) quotes Origen's canon *in extenso*. Are we to suppose that the Fathers of the African Synods were ignorant of it? Moreover if, as is highly probable, the African canon was drawn up as a set-off against St Jerome, who had rejected the Deutero-canonical books, and if, as Sir Henry Howorth says, their phrase 'Hesdrae libri duo' was meant to counteract St Jerome's depreciation of Esdras III and IV, how came it that their statement of this was so very vague? They are perfectly clear about the Deutero-canonical books, but no one could, on the hypothesis, say that they were clear and precise regarding the involved nomenclature of the books attributed to Esdras. If by the words 'Esdrae, libri duo' they meant Esdras A and B as supposed, they ought to have made this clear, since St Jerome had termed Esdras B 'Esdras libri duo'.

In brief then, there is but one positive argument alleged for identifying Esdras I and II of the African Councils with Esdras A and B of the LXX, and that is the witness of the oldest LXX MSS which we possess. But, as we have seen:—

(a) These latter only came into existence a few years before the African Councils.

(b) They do not agree with St Jerome's account of the LXX MSS to which he had access, for, as already stated, he says that in the Greek and Latin versions the Hebrew Ezra was divided into two books, which is certainly not the case in the existing MSS of the LXX.

(c) Neither do these MSS agree with Origen's MSS of the LXX, if we may judge by the list he gives in his commentary on Ps. i as given above, for he seems not to have found Baruch in the LXX, yet it has a place in the Codices Vaticanus, Alexandrinus and Venetus.

On the other hand, the arguments for not identifying Esdras I and II of the African Councils with Esdras A and B of the present LXX MSS are very strong.

(a) St Jerome clearly knew Esdras I and II as distinct books and he certainly did not identify them with Esdras A and B. Nor, as we have shewn above, was he the first to so distinguish them.

(b) Origen, nearly two hundred years before the African Councils, clearly understood by Esdras I and II the Ezra of the Hebrew Bible, viz. Ezra and Nehemiah. If then we find the same nomenclature, viz. Esdras I and II, used by the African Fathers, we can see no valid reason for saying that they meant by those numbers Esdras A and B.

(c) If we turn to Mansi iii, 1039-1041, we find a letter from Innocent I to Exuperius, bishop of Toulouse. The letter was written in the year 405, and is an answer to certain questions put by the bishop. Amongst other things he asks which books are to be considered canonical. Now Exuperius was a friend of Jerome who not only mentions him in two of his letters (123 § 16 and 125 § 20), but had in that year 405 dedicated to Exuperius his commentaries on the prophet Zechariah. We are probably justified in concluding that the bishop was perturbed at his friend's loudly proclaimed views regarding the Deutero-canonical books, and that he in consequence sought the pope's guidance in the matter. Innocent replies by giving him a list of canonical books which exactly tallies with the lists furnished by the African and Tridentine Fathers. 'Esdrae duo' we read. Do they stand for Esdras A and B, or are they the divisions of Esdras B, viz. Esdras I and II, with which we are now so familiar? It seems impossible to doubt that the latter is the true interpretation of the phrase 'Esdrae duo', for, be it remembered, this was precisely St Jerome's nomenclature. If, however, the Pope intended to correct St Jerome, he certainly did not make it clear to Exuperius who, on Sir Henry Howorth's view that St Jerome was the first to make the distinction, must naturally have been as anxious for a decision on this point as he was regarding the Deutero-canonical books which St Jerome rejected.

Sir Henry Howorth, moreover, as we have seen, holds the Roman Church to be inconsistent in first of all rejecting

III and IV Esdras from the Sixtine Vulgate and then placing them in an appendix to the Clementine Vulgate. Yet all in fact is perfectly consistent. Excepting the section iii 1-v 6, III Esdras contains nothing which is not to be found in either Chronicles or Ezra and Nehemiah. This section, as already indicated, contains the 'contentio veritatis', whence issued the famous apophthegm 'magna est veritas et praeualet'. But however interesting and popular this passage may have been, the book as a whole had never been recognized as canonical, and it had been expressly excluded by St Jerome from his Vulgate. Hence when the labours of Trent were at length crowned by the appearance of what the scholars of that age held to be the nearest possible approach to the Vulgate as translated or corrected by St Jerome, it would have been, to say the least, incongruous to insert in it III and IV Esdras.

When, however, the Clementine Vulgate appeared a few years afterwards, it seemed fitting that these two books which certain Fathers had apparently quoted as canonical should be preserved in an appendix prefaced by the words: '*hoc in loco, extra scilicet seriem canonicorum librorum . . . sepositi sunt ne prorsus interirent, quippe qui a nonnullis sanctis patribus interdum citantur et in aliquibus Bibliis latinis tam manuscriptis quam impressis reperiuntur.*'

One further remark may be permitted about the citations of Esdras A which are found here and there among the Fathers. They possessed in their Bibles Esdras A and our I Esdras. The differences between them were slight and the two Greek books may well have been regarded as two versions of the original, especially when we remember that few of the Fathers were capable of comparing them with the original. In those days there were current two Greek versions of Daniel and, as is well known, the Septuagint version was finally rejected by the Church in favour of that of Theodotion. Why should not the two versions of Ezra have been regarded in the same light?

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