ARISTOTLE AND TERTULLIAN.

HAS any one noticed a curious affinity between Tertullian's famous paradox and a passage in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*?

In arguing against the docetism of Marcion, Tertullian (*de Carne Christi* 5) flashes out into the following epigrams: 'Natus est Dei Filius: non pudet quia pudendum est; et mortuus est Dei Filius: prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est; et sepultus resurrexit: certum est, quia impossibile.' This is one of the most defiant paradoxes in Tertullian, one of the quick, telling sentences in which he does not hesitate to wreck the sense of words in order to make his point. He deliberately exaggerates, in order to call attention to the truth he has to convey. The phrase is often misquoted, and more often it is supposed to crystallize an irrational prejudice in his mind, as if he scorned and spurned the intelligence in religion—a supposition which will not survive any first-hand acquaintance with the writings of the African father. The odd thing is, however, that consciously or unconsciously he was following in the footsteps of that cool philosopher Aristotle. In the second book of the *Rhetoric* (23. 22) we find the following sentences in a discussion of the various kinds of demonstrative proof: ἄλλος ἐκ τῶν δοκούντων μὲν γίγνεσθαι ἀπίστων δέ, ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ἔδοξαν, εἰ μὴ ἦν ἢ ἐγγὺς ἦν. καὶ ὅτι μᾶλλον· ἢ γὰρ τὰ ὄντα ἢ τὰ εἰκότα ὑπολαμβάνουσιν· εἰ οὖν ἄπιστον καὶ μὴ εἰκός, ἀληθὲς ἂν εἴη· οὐ γὰρ διά γε τὸ εἰκὸς καὶ πιθανὸν δοκεῖ οὕτως. It is not difficult to see how this line of argument would justify Tertullian's 'credibile quia ineptum, certum quia impossibile'.

Aristotle's point is that, with regard to incredible events which are supposed and asserted to have taken place, you may argue that they would never have been believed at all, unless they had actually occurred; such statements must be true or almost true (εἰ μὴ ἦν ἢ ἐγγὺς ἦν). Still further. You may argue that such incredible events are all the more likely to be true, on the ground that men believe either in (*a*) actual facts or in (*b*) probabilities; hence, if a certain statement cannot be classified under (*b*), i. e. if it is incredible and not probable, it must represent an actual fact. The assumption is that all objects of belief are either facts or probabilities, and this disjunctive judgement involves the paradoxical conclusion that if a given assertion is ἄπιστον καὶ μὴ εἰκός, or, as Tertullian would say, *impossibile*, it is all the more likely to belong to the class of τὰ ὄντα.

We demur, especially in these days of war-rumours, to Aristotle's argument about this class of demonstrative enthymemes. Common

sense suggests that if a given statement is extremely improbable, it need not therefore be true. But Aristotle ignores the fact that the sheer incredibility of a thing is not the best proof of its reality, and the result is what Gomperz calls a disconcerting piece of dialectical audacity. We are invited to believe that if some statement is wildly improbable (ἄπιστον, *incredibile*), it is more improbable still that any one should have invented it ; in other words, that it would never have been made or credited, unless there had been some evidence for it, and consequently that such evidence must be strong !

Tertullian knew his Aristotle, but he was perfectly capable of striking out a similar paradox on his own account. The passage from the *Rhetoric* may be no more than a parallel; possibly the argument it conveys may have been current among rhetoricians. Still, I think it is not uninteresting to note how Aristotle, in a sober discussion of the topics proper to forensic debate, could for the moment take a line which the jurist Tertullian took in the glow of theological controversy. Even if it is only a curious coincidence, it serves to modify some of the sweeping inferences drawn from the *De Carne Christi* by some modern critics who tend to exaggerate the psychological idiosyncrasies of the author. The paradox of the *certum quia impossibile* remains as pointed as ever, but it should be read in the light of the fact that this African father of the Church was not the first to defy what seems to us to be an obvious axiom of historical proof.

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A LITURGICAL FRAGMENT FROM THEBES.

IT may be worth while to put on record the following liturgical fragment inscribed upon an ostracon purchased a few years since at Thebes. Ostraca of the Coptic period with liturgical texts are often of considerable size : our fragment, which measures 12 × 9·5 cm., is from the bottom of the ostracon and may be only one half or even one quarter of the original. The right edge is intact but for some small damages; a narrow triangular piece has been broken away from the left side.

The character of the script suggests that the fragment was written in the early seventh century : the hand is a thick, heavy, and informal semi-uncial, generally well-rounded; and is of a papyrus rather than a vellum type. Ligatures and cursive features occur, and abbreviations are common. The text of the *recto* is remarkably bright and clear, but

the porous surface of the *verso* has caused the ink to run, making reading very difficult.

At intervals in the text the symbol // is introduced indicating some sort of division, and once on the *recto* and twice on the *verso* the beginning of a line is under- and over-scored. Mr Brightman has suggested that the latter feature at any rate probably marks the beginning of a new piece,[1] and that the former may have the same value. If this is so, the fragment is no more than a list of *incipits*. It is possible that a new piece begins at l. 11 of the *recto*; and what remains of the text on the *verso* looks very like 'first lines'; but I think ll. 1–10 of the *recto* may be regarded as continuous, since // is well established as a symbol indicating verse-endings where, from motives of economy, the verses are written continuously.[2]

There are some points of resemblance between the text of the fragment and the 'Abendhymnen' Nos. 2 and 3 of Maas's *Frühbyzantinische Kirchenpoesie*,[3] and these are remarked in the notes following our text.

A copy of the whole is first given without resolution of abbreviations or corrections of provincial orthography; but I have added a text of the *recto* in ordinary type in which the verses are distinguished. The scansion-accents *alone* are marked.

Recto.   . . .]ω . [. . .

⟦ΑΙΝΟΥ[CEIN]⟧

] ΧΕΡΟΥΒΕΙΝ // ΟΝ ΑΙΝ[ΟΥCEIN
CEΡΑΦΕΙ]Ν // ΟΝ ΕΚ ΤΟΝ ΟῩΝΟΝ Θ̄C̄ ΧΑΡ[Ι]Ζ-
[ΕΙ // ΚΑΥΧ]ΗCΟΝΤΑΙ ΟΙ ΟCΙΟΙ ΕΝ ΔΟΖΑ
5   ΕΙC Α]ΓΩΝΑ // ΑΓΓΕΛΙΚΗ ΥΜΝΩΔΙΑ
ΑΛΗ]ΘΙΝΟΝ ΥΜΝΟΝ ϛ ΛΟΓΙΚ/ ΛΑΤΡΙ/
Κ]ΑΥΧΗCΟΝΤ̣ ΟΙ ΟCΙ/ ΕΝ ΔΟΖ/ ΚΑΙ
ΑΓΑΛΛΙΑC̣ // ΑΙΝΟΥCEIN CE Η ΔΟΖ/
ΤΩΝ ΑΓΙ/ // ΑΙ ΔΥΝΑΜΕΙC ΤΩΝ
10   ΟΥΝΩΝ ΑΙΝΟΥCEIN CE ΧΕ //
Θ̄ΑΥΜΑCΤ̣ Ο Θ̄C̄ ΕΝ ΤΟΙC ΕΡ/
ΑΝΕCΤΗ ΕΚ ΤΩΝ ΝΕ-
ΚΡΩΝ Χ̄C̄ Ο ΒΑ-
CΙΛΕΥC

Verso.   Π̣ΑΝΤΑ ΤΑ ΕΡΓΑ ΤΟΥ Θ̣Ε[ΟΥ . . .
Λ̄ΟΓ̣Λ̄ ΚΑΤΗΛΘΛ̄ // ΪΑ[. . .   . . . Η-]
ΜΑC ΕΛ/ ῙΝ̄ ΧΕ Κ̄Ε̄[. . .
Ο̲ ΤΑ ΠΛΟΥCΙΑ ΔΩΡ̣Α[. . .
5   Τ̲Ο̲Ν ΠΟΙΜΕΝΑ ΤΟΝ Κ[ΑΛΟΝ ? . . .
Ι̣ . Ω ΧΡ . . . . . Χ̄Ῡ //

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[1] Cp. Crum *Coptic Ostraca* No. 519.

[2] So in the metrical portion of the stela of Alchis from Erment: cp. *Bulletin of the Metrop. Mus. of Art*, New York (forthcoming).

[3] In the *Kleine Texte* Series.

The text of the *recto* should probably stand as follows :—

ὃν δοξάζουσιν] Χερουβίν, ὃν αἰν[οῦσιν Σεραφί]ν·
ὃν ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν θεὸς χαρ[ί]ζ[ει.]
[καυχ]ήσονται οἱ ὅσιοι ἐν δόξᾳ [εἰς α]ἰῶνα.
ἀγγελικῇ ὑμνῳδίᾳ [ἀλη]θινῶν ὕμνων καὶ λογικῇ λατρείᾳ
καυχήσονται οἱ ὅσιοι ἐν δόξᾳ καὶ ἀγαλλιάσονται.
αἰνοῦσίν σε ἡ δόξα τῶν ἁγίων
αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν αἰνοῦσίν σε, Χριστέ.
θαυμαστὸς ὁ θεὸς ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις ⟨αὐτοῦ⟩·
ἀνέστη ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν Χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεύς.

Notes.

Recto. l. 2. [ΑΙΝΟΥ[ϹΕΙΝ]] is suprascript and cancelled. Compare generally with this line Maas *Frühbyz. Kirchenpoesie* 'Abendhymnen' iii 7 ὃν ὕμνοις δοξάζουσιν Χερουβίμ τὰ ἔνδοξα.

l. 3. ΤΟΝ ΟΥ(ΡΑ)ΝΟΝ : for the genitive plural. The letters following θ are fragmentary.

l. 4. Cp. Ps. cxlix 5.

l. 5. ΕΙϹ Α]ΓωΝΑ : the Γ might equally well be Τ; but either is clearly a blunder for Ι. ΥΜΝωΔΙΑ is apparently dative with a dependent genitive ΥΜΝΟΝ (= ΥΜΝωΝ), dependent upon the verbs in ll. 7–8.

l. 6. ΛΟΓΙΚ/ ΛΑΤΡΙ/ : the case is probably the dative and the noun is parallel to ΥΜΝωΔΙΑ. Cp. Rom. xii 1 ; see also Pleyte and Boeser *Manuscr. Coptes du Musée de Leide* 138 ; Brightman *Liturgies E. and W.* p. 48 *b*, l. 1.

ll. 9–10. Compare Maas *op. cit.* 'Abendhymnen' iii 2–3 ὃν ὑμνοῦσιν ἄγγελοι καὶ ἀρχάγγελοι, | δυνάμεις οὐράνιαι.

l. 11. ΕΡ(ΓΟΙϹ) is certain and neither ΟϹ(ΙΟΙϹ) nor ΑΓ(ΙΟΙϹ) can be read.

· ll. 11–13 seem to indicate that Easter was the festival for which the hymn was intended, unless indeed a new piece begins here.

Verso. l. 1 : adapted from the *Song of the Three Children*, fragments of which are not rare at Thebes.

l. 3. ΙΝ : apparently for ΙϹ.

HUGH G. EVELYN WHITE.