

## On Pseudonymity.

### II.—SOME PARTICULAR CONSIDERATIONS.

THE preceding paper attempted to examine the grounds for the view now commonly held as to the standards of literary honesty which prevailed in the early Christian centuries, and especially to consider the objections to that view on general moral principles. On the present occasion the two alternatives will be examined a little more in particular. We closed last time with the question, What is the alternative to a theory so startling as the one now commonly held? The answer to that must come first.

1. *There is a very good alternative.*

We have taken 2 Peter as a leading case. Dr. Plummer himself, though he holds the common view in general, puts the case for the authenticity of 2 Peter with admirable force on other grounds in Bishop Ellicott's Commentary. That is a work so easy of access that it would be quite superfluous, even if it were possible, to go over the ground here. After reading the argument in his Introduction one is disposed to ask, Why need anything else be supposed? Just because of a few problems of external and internal evidence—touching matters of which, at our great distance of time, we can at best be very imperfect judges—why are we called upon to accept what (to use one point of the last paper) we feel it would almost need a Divine revelation to prove? Who cares whether he is in a critical fashion or not? The sole question is, Can this very good argument for authenticity be answered?

It certainly cannot be answered by saying that Bishop Ellicott's Commentary is out of date. And here it seems right to enter a protest against that commonly expressed slur upon one of the most distinguished of Biblical scholars, who lived within the easy remembrance of most people. Moreover, Dr. Plummer is still with us.

If his case, as worked out in that Commentary, is to be

answered, it must be answered by argument. And while, of course, it is recognized that arguments are forthcoming, they appear to be tainted by three common critical failings. There is a tendency to purely subjective reasoning. There is a great deal of assumption. And over large areas of the discussion one scarcely finds a note of an opposing view. One example may be permitted. On 2 Pet. iii. 4, "The Expositor's Greek Testament" says: "'The fathers' must mean those of the preceding generation, in whose lifetime the *παρουσία* was expected." As a matter of fact, it need not mean anything of the kind; but no other view is even mentioned! Is this fair in a Commentary which one would expect to be exhaustive? Referring to the same passage in the Introduction,<sup>1</sup> the author again gives the same explanation, and uses it as an argument for a later date without the least qualification. It is not put forward even as a probable hypothesis, but as an indubitable assertion. Mr. Grensted, in the special letter before mentioned, most candidly and fairly admits that such a date does not follow even from this interpretation of the passage. It is, he says (somewhat in critical style!) "ostensibly at least, a prediction. If St. Peter wrote it, he foresaw that he and his fellows would come to be known as the *πατέρες*." And he admits this is possible. Such candour—which, by the way, is the more welcome because the suggestion was entirely voluntary—might well be copied in other quarters. But this is not the only possible interpretation, and it is too bad for comprehensive commentaries altogether to ignore the existence of conservative expositions.

But though the arguments illustrate the common critical failings named above, they include several significant admissions—and this is something. A good deal has been made of the dissimilarity in style between this Epistle and 1 Peter. But Weiss said that "no document in the N.T. is so like 2 Peter as 1 Peter."<sup>2</sup> Strachan, in "The Expositor's Greek Testament," quotes this as part of an argument that 2 Peter

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. v., pp. 102-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 100.

probably embodies reminiscences of Petrine teaching, and that such evidences guarantee the good faith of the writer. But why does he not suggest that they require caution in denying positively the Petrine authorship? Such a question again becomes pressing later. He gives quite a list of detailed resemblances, which, he says, are "remarkable as extending to the uses of the same words or ideas in similar connexions." Turning from words and ideas to style, he says, as against an estimate by Chase, "it may be questioned whether the two Epistles are so far apart in style as it is usual to say they are," and proceeds to quote Mayor: "There can be no doubt that the style of 1 Peter is, on the whole, clearer and simpler than that of 2 Peter, but there is not that chasm between them which some would try to make out." This is again illustrated in detail (quoted from Mayor), and we are told that "it is incumbent on scholars to give every weight to these utterances."<sup>1</sup>

It is not to be disputed that the difference between the two Epistles has always been a subject of comment. Jerome, who accepted the authenticity of both, mentions the difficulty: "Secunda a plerisque ejus esse negatur, propter stili cum priore dissonantiam."<sup>2</sup> But Jerome took a line which might with advantage be followed by many modern scholars, in declining to attach too much weight to this. In spite of certain extremists, we are not reduced to a general denial of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and the Pastorals because of "dissonantia stili." Think how that Apostle's style differs in different Epistles. The "style" argument is always a treacherous one, as modern illustrations prove. And in this case we have the opinions of the modern authorities above quoted—Weiss, Mayor, and Strachan—that the "dissonantia" is not so great after all! If no two New Testament documents are so alike, why does Mr. Strachan still write as if the pseudonymous authorship were to be taken for granted? He gives other reasons; but it is difficult to say what is impossible under different sets of circumstances; and subjective conclusions on

<sup>1</sup> "Expos. G. T.," vol. v., pp. 106-108.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. v., pp. 83, 106.

the ground of subject-matter will convince nobody who has just as much right to his own ideas, even if they are subjective too.

2. Finally, we must press the question, *What is implied in the alternative of pseudonymity?*

The facts must not be shirked. In reality, this Epistle is not a mere case of pseudonymity, if it be one at all. The author is not content with beginning, "Simon Peter, a servant and Apostle of Jesus Christ . . ." and then merely going forward with doctrine which he conscientiously believes to be Petrine. That would be more than enough for some of us! But—under the theory—he wilily frames the whole Epistle to support the idea. For example, it is taken that he writes after Jude (this question cannot be discussed now), and he realizes that he must change Jude's present tenses to futures if people are to think he is Peter. How extraordinarily anxious he must have been to pass himself off as the Apostle! Whether it mattered to the Church or not who wrote the Epistle, we may judge that it mattered very much to the writer that the Church should *think* it was Peter. Yet, with all this effort to make sure of things, he is so foolish as to leave a few present tenses, after all! "The pretence" (to use Mr. Grensted's expressive phrase of dubious reverence) "breaks down" in certain verses.<sup>1</sup> Was not this strangely negligent in so subtle a writer?<sup>2</sup> Again, he says (iii. 1) it is his second Epistle, clearly referring to St. Peter's first. He declares, still in the character of Peter (i. 14), that the Lord Jesus Christ had revealed His early decease. But perhaps the climax of incredible assumption (or presumption?) is supposed to occur in i. 16, 18. *He claims to have shared in an experience which had been reserved for only three even of the chosen Twelve.* Who is this man, who dares to say he witnessed the Transfiguration and heard the very voice of

<sup>1</sup> "Introduction to the Books of the New Testament," p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> The theory is, in fact, *unnatural*, whereas Dr. Plummer's explanation is *natural*. He says the evils were already present in germ, and that the prophetic present is very commonly used for the future in prophecies—the future being so confidently realized that it is spoken of as present—e. g., 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 8, where the tenses are similarly mixed. Bishop Ellicott's Commentary, vol. viii., p. 439.

God from heaven? If this can be lawfully done, and is easily explicable by different standards of literary honesty, surely it is the most amazing example conceivable!<sup>1</sup>

We must beg leave to press this aspect of the case. Critics are apt to deceive us with fair speeches. True, they are sometimes amazingly outspoken. But perhaps it is oftener otherwise. When we read of varying standards of literary honesty, it sounds all right. But when we see that what is involved is deliberate deception—and must we not say *artful* deception?—it looks different. Frankly, does not the theory presuppose (though it conceals or even denies the fact) the deliberate weaving of a complicated web of fabrications and the daring assumption of most sacredly limited experiences to back a pseudonymous claim? At the very least, the supposed standard of character must be admitted to be most imperfect *ideally*; and it is very serious to suppose that one who adopted it was made the instrument of the Spirit of Truth,<sup>2</sup> merely on the ground of disputed details that can satisfactorily be explained even with our imperfect materials. Should not all doubtful details of style and contents, about which we have not the materials for more than discussion and questioning and dubious theory, be far outweighed by such considerations of eternal principle and by the fact that the Church has been guided to accept the book as a channel of Divine revelation?

The case of Ecclesiastes has been mentioned as a parallel. But it is quite different, and at this point we are able to estimate why. Even if it were proved that this Old Testament writing is what has been called “a dramatic fiction,” it would not be intended that anybody should think otherwise. Nobody would be meant to think Solomon was the author. But, as we have seen, the author of 2 Peter, if he was not the Apostle, was desperately in earnest that he should be thought so. The

<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that no intention to deceive was in the writer's mind, and Mr. Grensted apparently shares this view, in spite of his language just quoted. But is this seriously possible?

<sup>2</sup> It is remarkable that the very Epistle of which these things are supposed is the one that gives us the notable declaration of 2 Pet. i. 21.

question of intention cuts at the root of the supposed comparison. If, as the critics assume, pseudonymous composition was a recognized form of writing, it would be open and avowed in Ecclesiastes, but deliberately concealed in 2 Peter. As Dr. Salmon said, in pleading for liberty as to views of the authorship of Ecclesiastes: "The case would be different if the alternative were that we should be obliged to impute deception to a book which we accept as canonical, and to suppose that the writer, who knew himself not to be Solomon, falsely tried to make his readers believe that he was."<sup>1</sup> But is not this "different case" (in spite of all efforts to deny the conclusion) *precisely what would be implied as to 2 Peter?*

Mr. Strachan gives a most interesting quotation from Bishop Westcott ("Canon," pp. 352 *et seq.*), which will form a fitting conclusion to this part of our subject.<sup>2</sup> It is too long to quote fully, but this is the specially incisive sentence: "The Second Epistle of St. Peter is either an authentic work of the Apostle, or a forgery; for in this case there can be no mean." Mr. Strachan gives the quotation as illustrating the "most uncompromising position" which is "characteristic of the older criticism." Is this a hint that Westcott, like Ellicott (perhaps it will be Lightfoot next!), is to be, with all outward deference, consigned to an obscure and unenlightened school of criticism if his conclusions happen to run counter to a modern fashion? Many in the present time, shocked by the extravagances of this latter-day development, cling to the belief that it is but a temporary fashion—finding its origin and support largely in a quarter discredited by the course of recent history—and will prefer to abide by the weighty utterances of a greater generation of Bible interpreters "until this tyranny be overpast." And while many of the critical school strive hard to reconcile their theories with the requirements of a reverent spirit and of eternal moral principles, those who feel that, in a case like

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Ellicott's Commentary, vol. iv., p. 362.

<sup>2</sup> "Expos. G. T.," vol. v., p. 98.

the present, such labour is vain, are encouraged by the support of a mighty intellect such as that of Bishop Westcott.

We began, in the first paper, with a brief reference to an Old Testament book which would, if the critical theory were correct, present a closer parallel to 2 Peter than Ecclesiastes does. On the subject of Deuteronomy, Professor Orr quotes Cornill in these plain terms: "We must recognize the fact that we have here a pseudograph, and that this was known to the persons interested. . . . The excuse for them must be that they saw no other means of carrying through their work, planned in the spirit of Moses and for the honour of Jahve."<sup>1</sup> So, then, presuming the accuracy of the translation, such a device needs "excuse" after all! It is therefore granted that it cannot be regarded as a wholly commendable means of securing acceptance for a message from God.<sup>2</sup>

In truth, one doubts whether anybody can really believe such an explanation. The fact that it is generally wrapped up in evasive phraseology suggests the doubt. Critics nearly always speak as if the method needed *excuse*, and thus practically confess it is not above reprobation. Sometimes the excuse is high motive, sometimes the low standard of the age.

And what must be the effect of such a mental attitude? One with whom I have corresponded on these subjects has gone so far as to say he would not feel much sense of personal loss if 2 Peter had not been included in the Canon. Is not such a case typical? If we are reduced to making excuses for the methods adopted by sacred writers to secure a hearing, how can our reverent appreciation of the Divine revelation which is embodied in their writings fail to be lowered? Such views must alter a man's estimate of the value of Scripture. Does the Bible really mean as much to members of the modern school as it did to their fathers, or to themselves in childhood?

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<sup>1</sup> See "The Problem of the Old Testament," p. 513.

<sup>2</sup> It must be made clear that Dr. Plummer, unlike some, never suggests pseudonymity would be excusable, or (strictly) unimportant.