

*THE VALUE OF THE PATRISTIC WRITINGS FOR
THE CRITICISM AND EXEGESIS OF THE BIBLE.*

I.—THE HIGHER CRITICISM (*continued*).

WHEN we pass from the unconscious data supplied to criticism by the writings of the Fathers to their own conscious handling of critical subjects, the relative importance of the two Testaments is in some degree inverted. The books of the Old Testament, as we have said, were too remote from the period of the Fathers in point of time for them to be the bearers of a necessarily valid tradition; but just for this very reason we should have supposed that they would be driven to the exercise of an independent critical judgment upon them. This is, however, much less the case than might have been anticipated. The principle which finally determined the formation of the Canon was the general usage of the Churches. Books which were received by the majority of the most important Churches were included within the Canon; books which were not received by these Churches were excluded. The process of acceptance or elimination was gradual, and seems to have been more the result of a popular verdict than of set debate carried on by the leaders of the Church. To judge from what has come down to us, it would appear that the leading minds were chiefly occupied in formulating the usage which they found existing, or in deciding between different lines of tradition. The

great question in regard to the Old Testament was whether the Jewish tradition should be followed or the Alexandrine. The Jews reckoned twenty-two (later twenty-four) canonical books corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is practically this Canon which is now accepted by the Reformed Churches, certain books (*e. g.*, the Minor Prophets) being divided which the Jews regarded as one. On the other hand, the Septuagint Version, representing the opinion of the Hellenistic community at Alexandria where it was made, admitted, in addition to our present Canon, the books known as the Apocrypha. The balance of authority was really on the side of the Palestinian tradition. It counted among its advocates not only Melito of Sardis (who took a journey to the East specially to inquire into this subject), Athanasius, Amphilochius, Hilary of Poitiers, and Ruffinus, but also the commanding names of Origen and Jerome. Most of these writers expressly placed the books of the Apocrypha upon a lower grade, as such as (in the words of the sixth Article of the Church of England, taken from Jerome) were read by the Church for "example of life and instruction of manners," but were not to be applied to "establish any doctrine." But, broadly speaking, it may be said that these writers, so far as they employed the critical faculty, employed it rather to distinguish between traditions than to examine and test the tradition itself.

With this general suspension of critical inquiry, it must not be inferred at once that because a writer makes use of an Apocryphal book, even though he quotes it in the same manner as Canonical Scripture, he therefore held a deliberate view as to its authorship.

For instance, Origen quotes the Book of Tobit as Scripture, and he even makes a qualified use of it in controversy, on the ground that "the Churches use it," and yet he is clearly well aware that its authenticity is very doubtful. He notes the fact that the Jews rejected it even from their Apocrypha, and that they also rejected the Book of Judith.¹ In like manner Jerome frequently quotes the Apocryphal books as Scripture, though he distinctly draws the line at the Reformed Canon (for which he is, indeed, the great authority), and though he questions the admission of the Book of Wisdom even among the Apocrypha, because it was pseudepigraphal and had no Hebrew original.²

This reservation, however, only need be made for a select few. The great mass of the Church Fathers seem to have followed blindly in each other's steps. They not only accept the current usage, but they are deceived by it. It is enough that a book has got established under a certain name; by that name they will quote it and take its authorship for granted.³ The Book of Judith is quoted by Clement of Rome to all appearance quite as sober history. It is appealed to as "Scripture" by his namesake of Alexandria, by Hippolytus, Hilary of Poitiers, and Lucifer of Cagliari. The Book of Tobit is distinctly recognized by Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Hilary, and Lucifer. The Book of Wisdom met with very general acceptance. From the time of Clement of Alexandria passages from it are frequently quoted as utterances of "Solomon" or of "the Divine Wisdom." The Book of

¹ *Ep. ad Afric.* c. 13.

² *Pref. in Libr. Salom.*

³ See for what follows, Diestel, *Geschichte d. A. T. in d. christl. Kirche*, pp. 22, 23; Reusch, *Einführung in d. A. T.*; and especially the articles on the several books by Dr. Westcott in *Dictionary of the Bible*.

Baruch is another book that many writers treat as Scripture. Irenæus has a long quotation from it, which he attributes expressly to its reputed author, Jeremiah. Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian also quote it as Jeremiah's. The same Clement (who seems to be peculiarly prolific in such mistakes) assigns the so-called 2 Esdras to the "prophet" Ezra. Even the grotesque story of Bel and the Dragon is gravely attributed, both by him and by Irenæus, to Daniel.

But perhaps the culminating instance of an uncritical acceptance of spurious works is to be found in Tertullian. He has occasion to quote the book of Enoch, and with characteristic boldness he undertakes to defend its genuineness. His argument has been thus succinctly summarized: "I am quite aware that some reject the book, and that it is not in the Jewish canon. I suppose people think that it could not have survived the deluge. But might not Noah have heard and remembered it all? or have been inspired to repeat it, just as Ezra is believed to have restored the Jewish literature lost in the destruction of Jerusalem? Nothing must be rejected which really concerns us; and we read that every Scripture suitable for edification is divinely inspired.¹ The Jews reject it, as they reject other things, because it tells of Christ."²

I know of nothing equal to this unless it is, perhaps, Augustine's wonderful vindication of the Davidic authorship of the *whole* Psalter. He thinks that David really wrote all the hundred-and-fifty Psalms, but that he prefixed other names to some as indicating something

¹ Note the fallacy. St. Paul had said (or at least the Greek will bear the meaning), "All inspired Scripture is profitable for edification." Tertullian infers from this that "all that is profitable for edification is inspired"—obviously a very different position.

² *De Cult. Fem.* i. 3; comp. Bishop Ellicott's *Commentary*, vol. iii. p. 517.

appropriate in their contents, while some he purposely left without any name "as the Lord inspired this various arrangement—intricate, but not unmeaning."¹

After such wholesale and extravagant blundering, smaller errors, such as that of Origen, Hilary, and Jerome—that the anonymous Psalms belong to the author last named in a heading²—sink into insignificance; though a little careful observation would have shewn that any such view is untenable.

With so many instances of the very opposite of all that is meant by competent criticism arrayed before us, the question will naturally be asked, how it came about that the Canon is after all so sound as it is. Ultimately, no doubt, it is due to that overruling Providence which so often and in such manifold ways has educated excellent results out of very imperfect elements. But, humanly speaking, three causes may be said to have been at work. (1) The form which the Canon finally assumed was, as we have seen, determined less by critical debate than by the actual usage of the Churches; and that usage in its turn was determined by a sort of pious instinct which is frequently right where the elaborate conclusions of reasoning are wrong. (2) So far as the present Canon of the Reformed Churches is concerned, it is due chiefly to the authority of a single mind—and that mind the one which, as well by native robustness as by acquired learning, was, perhaps, in all antiquity, the best fitted for the task—the masculine and vigorous intellect of Jerome. (3) In the gradual process of the formation of the Canon there was, perhaps, after all a stronger element of

¹ Quoted by Trench, *St. Augustine on the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 56, n.

² Reusch, *Einleitung*, &c., p. 55.

criticism than such facts as we have already noticed might lead us to suppose.

It would be a mistake to imagine that the ancients were not awake to strictly critical considerations. They were well aware of differences of style. "Each of the [minor] prophets has his own peculiarities." "Hosea is broken up into clauses (*commaticus*) and, as it were, speaks by [single] sentences; Joel is clear at the beginning, more obscure at the end." "Jeremiah is ruder (*rusticior*) in style than Isaiah and Hosea and some other prophets." Ezekiel "is neither very finished nor very rude, but something between the two." The style of Isaiah is "finished, as might be expected in one of noble rank and cultured (*urbane*) eloquence."¹

But there are traces of finer observation than this. When Clement of Alexandria notes² that there is the same "complexion of style" in the Greek of the Epistle to the Hebrews and in that of the Acts, this is not by any means an obvious remark, and yet it receives considerable confirmation on closer inquiry. Dr. Delitzsch has quoted no less than eighty-seven distinct words and phrases³ (many of them, of course, in numerous examples) as at once common to and characteristic of the two writings. And though this list may have to be a good deal cut down in any argument as to the authorship of the Epistle, still there will remain amply sufficient to justify an observation not made by laboriously consulting a Concordance, but from a delicate appreciation of the characteristics of diction. Resemblances of language—up to a certain point—do not necessarily prove identity of authorship. So far Clement's in-

¹ See the *Prefaces* collected by Tischendorf in *Biblia Sacra Latina V. T.*, &c.

² Ap. Euseb. *H. E.* vi. 14; compare the last number of this Magazine, p. 14.

³ Given in full by Lünemann, *Hebräerbrief*, pp. 24-31.

ference may be wrong, but this must not detract from his credit in perceiving that the resemblances exist.

Origen has kept to a safer proposition. He will not commit himself to name the actual author, but he does not hesitate to assert negatively on the evidence of style that the Epistle is not by St. Paul. "Every one," he says,¹ "who is competent to judge of differences of diction (*φράσεων*) would acknowledge that the style (*χαρακτήρ τῆς λέξεως*) of the Epistle entitled to the Hebrews does not exhibit the Apostle's rudeness and simplicity in speech (*τὸ ἐν λόγῳ ἰδιωτικόν*), though he acknowledged himself to be but *simple in his speech*, that is, in his diction (*τῇ φράσει*), but it is more truly Greek in its composition (*συνθέσει τῆς λέξεως*)." Origen's own opinion is that the thoughts of the Epistle are those of St. Paul, but "the diction and composition that of some one who recorded from memory the Apostle's teaching, and, as it were, illustrated with a brief commentary (*σχολιογραφήσαντος*) the sayings of his master." Whatever we may think of this, it represents in any case a refined critical scholarship.

Still finer and even more masterly is the well-known criticism of Dionysius of Alexandria on the Apocalypse. Some, he says,² are inclined to disparage the book and to say that it could not be written by the Apostle, but that its gross conception of the millennium is much more in character with Cerinthus. But he (Dionysius) will not venture to set the book aside, as there were many who valued it highly. He would rather believe that there was some deeper meaning in it more than he himself could understand. The author called himself

¹ Ap. Euseb. *II. E.* vi. 25; compare Westcott *On the Canon*, p. 327 (Third Edition).

² Ap. Euseb. *II. E.* vii. 25.

John, and it was not to be denied that such was really his name. It was further to be admitted that he was a holy and inspired man ; but it was not so easy to admit that he was the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, who wrote the Gospel and the Catholic Epistle. Rather the character of both and the form of the language, as well as the general execution (*διεξαγωγή*—a technical term) of the book, pointed to the conclusion that the author was not the same. Dionysius goes on to urge that the author of the Gospel conceals his personality, while the author of the Apocalypse places his in the forefront—“John to the seven Churches which are in Asia.” “I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” There may have been other Johns of the same name ; and tradition indeed said that there were two tombs at Ephesus each bearing the name of John. The Gospel and the Epistle hang together. Both begin very similarly. In both we find the same phrases constantly recurring—“life,” “light,” “darkness,” “grace,” “joy,” “flesh and blood of the Lord,” “forgiveness of sins,” “the love of God for us,” the commandment to “love one another,” the duty of keeping all the commandments, the “conviction” of the world, the devil, Antichrist, the promise of the Holy Ghost, the adoption of God, the faith required of us throughout ; a constant reference to “the Father” and “the Son.” The Gospel and the Epistle have one character, the Apocalypse another, totally distinct, and without any kind of cross reference to connect them. Further, it is possible to prove from the style and diction that the Apocalypse is by another hand than that which wrote the

Gospel and Epistle. These last are in elegant and finished Greek. There is not a trace of barbarism or solecism about them. Evidently their author had the gift both of knowledge and of expression. The author of the Apocalypse, on the contrary, had the gift of knowledge, but not that of expression. His Greek is not good. He employs barbarous idioms and sometimes even solecisms. These might be quoted, but that I would not have any one suppose that I am saying these things in a spirit of levity and disparagement.

Such is the criticism of Dionysius. Could anything be more modern? It really anticipates the essence of all that modern writers have been able to say upon the subject. Something has been said bearing upon it in the last paper, and a hypothesis has been stated under which the reasons given by Dionysius do not seem to be conclusive. Still they are certainly valid as far as they go. The three main points—(1) difference in the author's manner of self-presentation; (2) difference in ideas and terminology; (3) difference in style and grammatical structure—are all clearly brought out. Whatever it may add in the way of detail, negative criticism can only run upon these lines.

There is, however, something more in this passage than its intrinsic value. The name of Dionysius of Alexandria probably bears a less place in the perspective of Church history than it really held in his own time. Eusebius speaks of him as "the great bishop." And yet his fame has been eclipsed in the eyes of later ages by that of men like Tertullian or Cyprian, his superiors in polemical energy, or in administrative capacity, but his inferiors by far in all the

qualities that make for the ascertaining and definition of truth. Men like Dionysius have very often made a comparatively small figure upon the surface of things. Their work is, as it were, underground. But a mighty work it is for all that. Dionysius, and others like him, doubtless exercised a much greater influence in forming the Canon of Scripture than Tertullian or Cyprian ever did. Alexandria was the workshop of opinion—especially of critical opinion—for the first three centuries of Christian history. The Catechetical School gave the lead to Alexandria; and Dionysius, a pupil of Origen, was first head of the Catechetical School, and then bishop. Athanasius was a bishop of the same see. If Dionysius did not himself give laws to the Church, he was one of a chain of men who taught and trained those who gave the laws. Trace back the lives of the men of action some few degrees, and it may be found that the current and direction was given to them out of some quiet study. Plato need hardly have made his philosophers kings, for the world is governed by philosophers who wear no crown.

The names of many of those who coöperated in the unobtrusive but most important work of determining the limits of the Bible have perished; but one has survived who deserves to be ranked alongside even of Dionysius and of Origen. Like Dionysius, only known to us by a few fragments, Julius Africanus is, nevertheless, a weighty name in the history of the Old Testament Canon. His controversy with Origen about the Story of Susanna gives a remarkable glimpse into the working of the critical process in the best scholarship of the age. It seems that Origen had been engaged in a discussion with a certain Bassus,

at which Africanus was present. In the course of this the Story of Susanna was appealed to as historical, and this appeal Africanus had passed over in silence at the time, but afterwards wrote to Origen to challenge it. Africanus was somewhat the elder of the two, and he calls Origen his "son."

"Greeting, my lord and son, most honoured Origen, from Africanus. When you held your sacred discourse with that stupid fellow (*τὸν ἄγνώμονα*), you alluded to the prophecy of Daniel in his youth; and in this, as was proper, I acquiesced at the time. But I am surprised how it came to escape you that this part of the book is spurious. For this section, though it is indeed, in other respects, an elegant composition, yet is shewn and proved in many ways to be of later date, and a forgery. When Susanna is condemned to death, the prophet, seized by the Spirit, cried out that the sentence was unjust. Now, in the first place, it is in another way that Daniel prophesies—always by means of visions and dreams, and sometimes he obtains the visitation of an angel, but never by the prophetic *afflatus*. In the next place, after he has uttered this remarkable cry, he convicts them in a most extraordinary manner, such as would not be found even in Philistion's play.¹ For, not content with rebuking them through the Spirit, he places them apart, and asks them where they saw her commit adultery. And when one said, *Under an ilex* (*πρῖνος*), he answered that an angel would *saw him asunder* (*πρίσσειν*); and in like manner when the other said, *Under a mastick tree* (*σχίνος*), he threatened him with being *cleft asunder* (*σχισθῆναι*). In Greek, indeed, there is just this simi-

¹ See Routh, *adnot. ad loc.*

larity of sound between *πρῖνον* and *πρίσαι*, and between *σχῖνον* and *σχίσαι*; but in Hebrew the words are altogether different. But all the books that belong to the Old Testament were translated from Hebrew into Greek."

"Again, how came it that a set of captives among the Chaldæans in Babylon, who were constantly being strangled¹ and cast out unburied in the streets, as we are told was the case in the former captivity of Israel, their sons being carried off to be made eunuchs and their daughters for concubines, as had been prophesied—how came it that they could pass sentence of death, and that upon the wife of their king Joakim, whom the king of Babylon had made partner of his throne? Or if it was not he, but another Joakim from among the people, where did he, a captive, get his mansion and spacious garden? But before coming to details like these, this section and the two others at the end are not included in the Book of Daniel received among the Jews. And besides, of all the prophets who had gone before, not one has made use of a thought expressed by another; for their words being true, they had no poverty of them. But here Daniel, in threatening one of the elders, reminds him how the Lord said: *Thou shalt not slay the innocent and righteous person.* For all these reasons the section seems to me to have been added. The character of the diction is also different."

"There is my stroke. And now I beg you to give me the echo, and instruct me by your reply. Salute

¹ I adopt here the conjectural reading, *ἰστραγαλωμένοι*. The MSS. have *ἀστραγαλωμένοι*, for which Delarue prints *ἡστραγαλωμένοι*—"lost and won at play." It seems, however, highly probable that Africanus had in his mind *Tobit* ii. 3: εἷς ἐκ τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν ἰστραγαλωμένος ἔρριπται ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ. See Routh, *anot.* ad loc.

all my masters. All your acquaintance salute you. I pray God from my heart to grant health both to you and your party." ¹

This letter of Africanus is really in many ways a model of vigorous, shrewd, and trenchant criticism. It is, indeed, hasty in some places (notably where he asserts that the prophets did not copy each other's writings), and it does not shew quite a profound study and knowledge. But his points are, on the whole, well chosen and tersely put; on some he has overwhelming reason on his side; and where the ultimate verdict has been so completely ratified, a few exaggerations may well be pardoned; the more so that many a modern critic of high reputation has used precisely similar arguments and pressed them to far more extravagant lengths. Africanus is the type and forerunner not of the extreme, but of the moderate school of criticism.

Origen's reply is much more lengthy. He is a little piqued by the tone of the letter, and he rather takes Africanus to task for his flippancy. His superior learning on Biblical subjects gives him an advantage which he is not slow to use. Himself fresh from the composition of his Hexapla, he at once lets Africanus know that if he made use of the history of Susanna, it was not from ignorance that it was not found in the Hebrew Daniel. He pours out instance after instance of similar interpolation. There were numbers of places which he himself had marked with an asterisk to shew that they were wanting in the Hebrew. But would Africanus have the Christian Church go and humbly beg the Jews to give them uncorrupted copies of their own Scriptures? It would be strange if Providence

¹ Routh, *Reliq. Sacr.* vol. ii. pp. 225-228.

had so neglected those for whom Christ died. He himself will carefully study the Hebrew readings, but he will not surrender all that is not found in them.

On the difficulty as to the play upon the names of the ilex and the mastick tree, Origen speaks with some reserve. He, too, had observed the difficulty, and he had consulted several Jews about it. He had tried to ascertain whether there might not be in Hebrew a similar play on words. But the Jews to whom he applied had not been able to give him any positive answer. They could tell him the words in their own modern Aramaic, but they did not like to make any affirmation about the ancient Hebrew, unless he could produce a passage in which the Greek and Hebrew were precisely parallel. This he could not do, and therefore he was obliged to leave the question as to whether there might not be a similar play on words in the Hebrew an open one.

The "sawing" and the "cleaving," no doubt, had reference to the future world, and not to any temporal punishment (like St. Luke xii. 45, 46). Other traditions were told about these same elders. But these, like the traditional story of the death of Isaiah, alluded to in Hebrews xi. 37, and the slaughter of Zechariah, the son of Barachiah, mentioned in Matthew xxiii. 35, seemed to have been purposely removed by the Jews from their scriptures.

It was said that Daniel prophesied not by the *afflatus*, but by dreams and visions. But this is too much to restrict the Divine operation. God spoke to Jacob in dreams, and by theophanies, but he, too, had the prophetic inspiration, as appeared from the blessings of his sons.

The mocking way in which Africanus spoke of Daniel's judgment might just as well be applied to the judgment which Solomon passed upon the two harlots. As to the paronomasia (*πρῖνος—πρίσκειν*, &c.), Origen had forgotten to remark that the translation might not be literal, but analogous; he had found other instances of a like kind.

Where did Africanus get his "strangled and cast out in the streets"? Apparently from the Book of Tobit. But Tobit also was not in the Jewish Canon. Besides, the same book shewed that, in spite of their captivity, some of the Jews enjoyed considerable wealth. If Nehemiah could obtain permission to rebuild the temple, much more might Joakim obtain a house and garden. That Joakim was a king there was no reason to suppose, beyond the name. And that the Jews should use their own laws and courts of justice was no more than the powers still allowed by the Romans to the ethnarch. That the prophets never borrowed from each other, Origen, of course, denies and disproves amply. He could have done so still more if he had had time. The difference of style he does not see.

Certainly this is a piece of apologetics, and of rather one-sided apologetics; but how able and scholarly it is! Origen, of all men, did not need to be told that there were differences between the LXX. text and the Hebrew. No man, either before or since, has ever worked at that particular subject with so much exactness. There is not a weak place in Africanus' argument that he does not seize. The rash assertion about the prophets not borrowing from each other was easy to demolish. The difficulties raised—and very justly

raised — from the historical situation are met by parallels that are sound so far as they go. And the acute, but not altogether warrantable generalization as to the different modes of prophesying receives its due qualifications. Even the treatment of the great stumbling-block, the play on the Greek words, shews, at least, an admirable thoroughness and caution.

It is to be noticed, however, that Origen is not really quite candid. He nowhere commits himself positively to the assertion that the impugned chapters were really written by Daniel. Many of his arguments seem to tend that way, but he evades the logical conclusion from them. He seems to try to escape putting the question even to himself. It is enough for him that the book is ecclesiastical and suited for edification. And that being so, he even descends to the claptrap argument, that to doubt it is to suppose that the Jews are better off than Christians.

Still, when all has been said for him, Origen was fighting for a lost cause. He was fighting for it—as we can see from other parts of his writings—with only half a heart, and the opponent, whom for the time he was to overwhelm beneath the torrent of his learning, was to triumph in the end. At any rate, the controversy will be sufficient to shew that the nineteenth century has not a monopoly of critical acumen, and that the leaders of thought in that important period when the Church was gradually forming its standards of belief, were checked and controlled by a vigorous external opinion.

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