

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

III.—EXEGESIS.

LET us place in the forefront of this paper a passage in which the strong side of patristic exegesis is estimated by one well qualified to appreciate it. "To all the more recent modes of Scriptural exposition, whether in the Middle Ages or in more modern times, they (*i.e.*, the Fathers generally, and Chrysostom and Augustine in particular) present a contrast which must strike every reader. It is the contrast between an analytical examination of the language and arguments of Scripture from the outside, and the outpouring of mind and thoughts which have been animated, informed, and kindled by the substance, the purpose, and the spirit of the sacred books. There is in these writers a kind of living contact of their whole being with the inspired words, which is almost peculiar to their age of the Church; they seem instinctively and without effort, to regard passages of Scripture as we do the language which meets us with power and interest, from real and present life. Their whole soul is stirred and penetrated with words which to them are manifestly full of the things and the spirit of God; their reading leaves them aflame with the enthusiasm of admiration, delight, awe, hope—analogous, in a higher degree, to the feeling which a glorious prospect or a magnificent passage of poetry or oratory leaves on the mind which takes it in, and is alive to its complete meaning and effect. This is the secret of their excellence and value as commentators."¹

¹ The Dean of St. Paul's, in an Introductory Notice to a *Commentary on the Epistles and Gospels*. (Parker, 1877.)

This eloquent eulogy, true as it is in the main, may yet perhaps in one respect be open to some misunderstanding. If the early commentators seem to enter more fully into the "substance, purpose, and spirit of the sacred books," this is rather in the way of a more vivid realization of Christian faith and practice in general than to a deeper insight into the meaning of the sacred writers. Place, for instance, side by side Canon Westcott's treatment of the Prologue to St. John's Gospel with Chrysostom's comments on the same portion of Scripture, and it will be seen at a glance that the older commentary is by far the thinner of the two. And wherever there is needed a certain self-projection of the commentator into a different order of ideas, where it is necessary to trace sympathetically the growth of an idea to its primal germ, and thence downwards into its later developments and wider ramifications, there, as a rule, the ancients are surpassed by the moderns. It is on the general standpoint of Christianity and human nature that the former are strong. Grant them their dogmatic system, and they enforce it with great power and eloquence. The universal and elemental characteristics of man as a religious being, the constantly recurring vicissitudes of human fortunes, the passions and motives that were the same yesterday as they are to-day, are touched often with a master hand. In these two spheres the ancients had many advantages. The conditions of life were simpler. The atmosphere they breathed was less highly intellectualized. Among Christians there was an intense belief in their own faith which external controversies had no power to chill. The contrast with heathenism and heathen morals was still vividly pre-

sent. In opposition to these, the commonplaces of Christianity did not seem commonplace. They were lighted up with a genuine enthusiasm. They were impressed with all the freshness and energy of a new creed. The general tendencies of the age told in the same direction. A similar set of causes were at work to those which made the Elizabethan drama so much more forcible than that of our own day. Passions were more vehement, or, at least, more undisguised and uncontrolled. The levelling and smoothing influences of modern times were comparatively wanting. Conventionalities had less hold. The characters and actions of men stood out in bolder relief. Such was the society which Chrysostom and Augustine addressed and from which they took their subjects. Their commentaries on Scripture were not written like those of modern times—by some quiet professor in the studious seclusion of a university. For the most part—though not, of course, entirely—they took the form of homilies, delivered from the pulpit to crowded audiences. In any case the great majority of them were intended for immediate application to men and to practical life. It is a significant fact that most of the great commentators of antiquity—Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, the Cyrils, Chrysostom, Augustine—were bishops engaged in the active duties of their sees. Of the most eminent only two—Origen and Jerome—could be described as literary men. When to all these favourable circumstances is added the commanding genius of teachers like Chrysostom and Augustine themselves, we cannot be surprised if they spoke to their contemporaries in “thoughts that breathe and words that burn” to an extent that does not seem possible in this *blasé* age.

It is not, however, to this side of the patristic commentaries that I wish at the present moment more especially to call attention. This has been done in other ways, and by other and abler pens. The object of the present series of papers has been rather to deal with the critical aspect of the patristic writings, and to consider how far they deserve the unceremonious dismissal that they sometimes receive. From this point of view there is one objection that meets us at the outset, and that certainly does very largely detract from the value of the ancient commentaries—the prevalence in them to so large an extent of *allegory*.

The allegorical method of interpretation was no new invention of the Christian commentators. It is common to trace it up to Philo, but its true origin goes back some way further than Philo. Allegory is, indeed, the method constantly employed to bridge over the gap caused by time between the ideas embodied in some ancient and venerable book and those current at a later stage of civilization and intellectual development. Whenever the difficulty has arisen of reconciling old beliefs to new philosophies, the simplest and most obvious course has been to affirm that the ancient documents did not mean what they said, but that they really meant the same thing as the philosophers; in other words, to explain them allegorically. Both the Vedas and the Koran seem to have been subjected to this treatment, and it is precisely the same in principle as that which a recent school has sought to apply to the Bible under the name of "ideology." "An example of the critical ideology carried to excess is that of Strauss, which resolves into an ideal the whole of the historical and doctrinal person of Jesus; so, again,

much of the allegorizing of Philo and Origen is an exegetical ideology, exaggerated and wild. But it by no means follows, because Strauss has substituted a mere shadow for the Jesus of the Evangelists, and has frequently descended to a minute captiousness in details, that there are not traits in the Scriptural person of Jesus which are better explained by referring them to an ideal than an historical origin : and, without falling into fanciful exegetics, there are parts of Scripture more usefully applied ideologically than in any other manner—as, for instance, the history of the temptation of Jesus by Satan, and accounts of demoniacal possession." And again : " The spiritual significance is the same of the transfiguration, of opening blind eyes, of causing the tongue of the stammerer to speak plainly, of feeding multitudes with bread in the wilderness, of cleansing leprosy, whatever links may be deficient in the traditional record of particular events." ¹

The allegories of Philo and the Alexandrians were only an instance of the use of a method thus widely diffused and deeply rooted in the natural tendencies of the human mind. Philo found the method already largely employed. His immediate predecessors were the Greeks. They, too, had a book which, if not exactly regarded as sacred in the strict sense of the term, was at least an object of great veneration. They extracted their divinity from the poems of Homer. Even to an enlightened culture these poems still seemed to contain the evidence of their own authority. There were many places in which they spoke of the gods in a manner that was truly worthy of them. But the difficulty was to harmonize with these passages

¹ Rev. H. B. Wilson in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 200, 202 (6th ed.)

others that seemed to do just the opposite. Taken literally, they were "sacrilegious stories, full of god-defying madness" (*θεομάχου ἀπονοίας*). Thus Apollo punished the Greeks and even the innocent beasts much more severely than Agamemnon, the real originator of all the mischief; Zeus was described as being bound, the gods as receiving wounds, and so on.¹ What was to be made out of utterances such as these? The only way to escape the difficulties raised by them—the true "antidote for impiety"—was allegory.

The great key to the allegoristic interpretation is etymology. Apollo is the sun; Athene, contemplation, or wisdom; Hermes, the interpreter; Aphrodite, folly; Ares, destruction or war; Poseidon, water. The arrows of Apollo are the rays of sun, his wrath the poisoned air caused by its heat, which, for physiological reasons, affects beasts more than men; the battles of the gods represent the strife of the elements; the binding and release of Zeus are the compression and freeing of the upper air.²

Philo had thus an instrument made ready to his hand; and he too had a motive for using it. The period in which he lived—the "fulness of time" chosen for the giving of the Christian revelation—was characterized all through the then known world by an earnest movement towards higher and purer views of the nature of the Godhead. We have just seen the evidences of it in Greek philosophy. It was equally present, though the necessity for it was less pressing, in Judaism. The earliest of the Targums, which there can be little doubt represents very nearly the form of

¹ See the references in Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria*, p. 10. (Jena, 1875.)

² *Ibid.* pp. 11, 12.

paraphrase current in the synagogues at the Christian era, is marked by an "aversion to anthropopathies and anthropomorphisms; in fact, to any term which could, in the eye of the multitude, lower the idea of the Highest Being." Its treatment of these is, it is true, somewhat inconsistent. Only those are removed or explained away which seem to be derogatory to God's honour. But along with this there is noticeable a "repugnance to bring the Divine Being into too close contact, as it were, with man. It (the Targum) erects a kind of reverential barrier, a sort of invisible medium of awful reverence, between the Creator and the creature. Thus terms like 'the Word' (Logos = Sans. Om), 'the Shechinah' (Holy presence of God's Majesty, 'the Glory'), further, human beings talking not *to* but 'before' God, are frequent."¹

Thus the two streams of thought, the one Greek, the other Jewish, at the intersection of which Philo stood, were both setting in the same direction. The Jewish development indeed, for the most part, stopped short of allegory, but it supplied the motive from which allegory sprang. It is easy to understand with what eagerness the Alexandrine Jews would catch at the solution offered them in the Greek philosophical literature with which in their new home they became familiar. The difficulties which their Greek culture led them to feel still more keenly readily yielded to it. If the Septuagint Version, begun under Ptolemy Philadelphus in B.C. 284-247, shews an avoidance of anthropomorphisms very similar to that in the Targums, if the Sapiential books in the Apocrypha more especially shew the influence of Greek philosophy, both

¹ Deutsch, *Literary Remains*, p. 346.

these tendencies are carried yet a step further in the fragments that have come down to us of the writings of Aristobulus, the so-called Peripatetic¹ (*circa* 181–145 B.C.) and in the Letter of Aristeas, which probably belongs to the end of the same century. In this latter composition we find full-fledged allegory. The writer interprets the Mosaic legislation relating to food in such a way as to give it a spiritual meaning. If the lawgiver condescends to mention such creatures as mice and weasels, it is not for their own sake, but for the sake of men (*cf.* 1 Cor. ix. 9, 10). Birds of prey are forbidden in order to shew that the Law condemns violence and rapacity. The dividing of the hoof and chewing the cud denote respectively turning from evil to good and devout meditation upon God and his laws. Mice are forbidden on account of their destructiveness; weasels because they “conceive through the ear and bring forth through the mouth,” the physiological counterpart of slander and calumny, which takes in reports through the ear and gives them form with the mouth.²

The allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament is, however, first reduced to a system by Philo. This eminent leader of Alexandrine Judaism lays down a series of rules, both negative and positive, for the regulation of his favourite method. The negative rules appear to have been borrowed directly from the Stoics. According to them the literal sense was inadmissible (1) wherever unworthy actions are attributed to God, *i.e.*, by the use of anthropomorphic expressions; (2) wherever the literal sense involved con-

¹ See Lipsius in Schenkel's *Bibel-Lexikon*, i. p. 89.

² Merx, *Eine Rede vom Auslegen, ins besondere des Alten Testaments*, p. 51. (Halle, 1879.)

traditions or was otherwise objectionable; (3) where the Scripture itself suggested allegory. Positively Philo maintained that an allegorical meaning was indicated in a number of ways, *e.g.*, by repetitions, by apparent tautology, by the use of synonyms, by paronomasia, by the number and tense of verbs, by the use of certain particles, by peculiarities of position, expression, and the like; but above all, by numbers, by the recurrent mention of certain common objects, and by the symbolism of names. Most of these rules seem to have parallels in the Jewish Midrash. The symbolical values assigned to numbers appear to have been borrowed from the Pythagoreans and Stoics.¹

The voluminous writings of Philo at once expressed conspicuously the tendencies of his own age and did much to determine the course of Biblical interpretation in succeeding ages. His influence can be traced throughout the second century. In the Epistle of Barnabas the rules of allegory are frequently exemplified. Thus the stone mentioned in Isaiah viii. 14 must mean Christ; the six days of creation, taken in connection with Psalm xc. 4, prove that the world will last 6000 years; the "land flowing with milk and honey" stands for the regenerate man nourished by faith on God's promise and his word; the scapegoat is Christ; the boys who burn the ash and sprinkle water are the Apostles; the wood wound round with wool is a type of the Cross, which is also symbolized by the brazen serpent; the true circumcision is that of the heart; the prohibitions of different kinds of food all relate to so many classes of men with whom it is forbidden to associate.²

* See Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria*, pp. 165-197.

* *Ibid.* pp. 330-332.

Still more numerous are the examples in the writings of the Early Greek Apologists, especially Justin. The oblation of fine flour was a figure of the Eucharist; the bells on the priest's robe represented the Apostles; the two goats on the Day of Atonement denote the double advent of Christ; the eight persons saved from the Flood, his resurrection on the eighth day. Jacob's speckled sheep are the various kinds of men for whom Christ died; that Noah was saved by wood and water typifies the rescue of the Christian from sin by the cross and by baptism; the paschal lamb, the extended arms of Moses, the rods of Moses and Aaron and Jacob, Elisha's log, the trees and wells of Elim, all point to the cross.¹

But what tended most to perpetuate and diffuse the influence of Philo in the Church was the fact that the two great teachers of the end of the second and early part of the third centuries, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, both belonged to his own city, and derived their mental training from the school of which he had been, if not the founder, at least the chief exponent. Both seem not only to have drunk deep of Philo's spirit, but also to have appropriated many of his ideas. There are many coincidences between the writings of Clement and those of Philo. Clement, too, maintains that an allegorical sense runs through the whole of Scripture, the prophetic portions as well as the legal. To keep to the bare letter is a heretical misuse. The deeper significance should be studied. Nothing unworthy of the Deity is to be admitted. The symbolism of numbers is followed out much as by Philo. So, too, that of natural objects. The horse is a symbol of the

¹ See Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria*, pp. 332-339.

passions ; the serpent of pleasure. The four colours in the curtain of the tabernacle represent the four elements. The dress of the high priest and the furniture of the tabernacle are explained as Philo explained them. There is the same play upon words ; the same symbolical significance is attributed to proper names. There are also many points of resemblance in doctrine.¹

With the name of Origen the system of allegorical interpretation is still more closely identified. The air was indeed full of allegory, but Origen had special reasons for adopting it which, within certain limits, were not without a certain validity. On the one hand, he saw that the Jews by keeping to the literal sense of their own prophecies were led to reject Christ. On the other hand, he saw that the Gnostic heretics inferred from the contradictions involved in the same literal sense that the God of the Old Testament could not be the same with the God of the New. And at the same time his own critical judgment told him that there was much in the Old Testament that, taken strictly according to the letter, gave impossible results. Thus it was impossible that the world should exist for three days without sun or moon, and for one day even without a heaven ; that God should plant trees in Paradise like any common husbandman ; that He should " walk in the cool of the day ;" that Cain should seek to hide himself from the face of God, and so on.² Reasons like these determined Origen to have recourse to allegory. Nor did he rest here. He sought to give to the allegorical interpretation a greater method. He

¹ See Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria*, pp. 343-351.

² Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der Christlichen Kirche*, pp. 36, 37. (Jena, 1869.)

laid down rules for it, and distinguished between its different forms.

Origen found in Scripture a triple sense, the literal, psychical, and spiritual, corresponding to the body, soul, and spirit in man. The literal sense was not altogether to be despised. There were some for whom it was sufficient, but for others it was as milk compared with strong meat. The psychical sense consisted in the moral applications with which the Scriptures abounded; as, for instance, when St. Paul drew a lesson from the prohibition to muzzle the ox; when Christ, by expelling the buyers and sellers from the temple, along with their sheep, oxen, and doves, taught the duty of expelling from the heart all foolish, frivolous, and brutal passions; or when Peter, by withdrawing the stater from the fish's mouth, signified the effect of Christianity in purging the soul from ambition. The highest mystical sense Origen does not seem to have consciously divided, as it became afterwards the custom to do, into the allegorical and the anagogical—the latter meaning the transference of earthly types to their heavenly counterparts—though both methods were constantly used by him.¹

In the actual interpretation of Scripture Origen shewed himself at once devout and modest in spite of his highflown views. He fully recognizes the difficulty of the task. He insists on the necessity of prayerful study; and, while maintaining against opponents the right to allegorize, is very ready to admit that his own particular mode of allegorizing may be wrong.²

It does not need to be said that the predominant use of allegory deeply injured Origen's exegesis. Indeed,

¹ Redepenning, *Origenes*, i. pp. 296-316.

² *Ibid.* pp. 316-322.

so far as the allegory extended, it ceased to be exegesis at all. The very name implies that instead of seeking to discover what the sacred text *did* mean, something was imported into it which, as the words stood, they did *not* mean. No doubt fine thoughts were introduced now and then, but they were thoughts that might just as well have been introduced *apropos* of something else. The result was a collection of commonplaces which, though they might be shuffled dexterously backwards and forwards, remained commonplaces all the same.

The allegorical method destroys in particular one great idea which is essential to a right conception of the course of religious history, and which has led more than any other to a deepened insight into the facts of religion. Allegory takes the place of the conception Growth. It refuses to acknowledge the existence of anything rudimentary in the earlier stages of religious history. It transfers the end to the beginning. It ignores the steps of a gradual development. It flattens out the surface of history to one dead and uniform level. It empties the older period of all that is most characteristic in it. It obliterates the traces of that Divine guidance which has led the human race gently onwards from crude beginnings to glorious conclusions. While it seeks, in all good faith, to justify the ways of God to men, it really substitutes for them something which is not "God's way" at all. Such Scriptures as the parables of the "seed growing secretly" or "the leaven" become a dead letter.

Nor by falsifying the earlier stages of the history does the allegorical method succeed in enhancing the dignity of the later. Christianity gains nothing by

being cut off from its antecedents. It is only in the light of these antecedents that it is possible to apprehend its full meaning. The history of mankind is continuous, and the purposes of God are progressive. Even the culminating points in those purposes stand out most clearly when they are seen in connection with the winding track that leads up to them. The mountain top seems all the loftier and the grander to one who has toiled laboriously up its side. Origen, though he was the last to be accused of sparing himself labour, failed to realize these truths. With the best possible intentions he tried to read Christianity into everything; and the consequence was that he both lost much of its full import and struck away the pedestal on which it stands.

As we should naturally expect, the defects of the allegorical method were most conspicuous in dealing with the Old Testament. Out of all the volumes that Origen wrote on this subject—it seems that there were only three books, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, of which he did not treat either in scholia, commentaries, or homilies¹—the residuum of positive value is but very small. It is true that only a fraction of all his expository work has come down to us; but to judge from that which has been preserved, there would not seem to be very much reason to regret (at least from an exegetical point of view) the remainder that is lost. On the book of Genesis seventeen Homilies are extant in the Latin version of Ruffinus, besides fragments of the larger Commentaries; yet of these Delitzsch—an unprejudiced critic—says that they do not contain “anything of use (*nichts Erspriessliches*), not even relating to

¹ Redepenning, *Origenes*, ii. p. 193 *ad fin.*

Egypt.”¹ Not much more is to be gained from the fragments on the Psalms. Jerome tells us² that Origen wrote a short treatise on Hosea confined to a discussion of the sense to be assigned to “Ephraim” in the writings of that prophet. This, he maintains, had reference to the heretics such as those living in his own day. On the prophecy of Zechariah both Origen and Didymus, a later representative of the Alexandrine school, wrote commentaries; but “their whole method of exposition was allegorical, and they barely touched a few points of the history.”³ The three volumes which Origen wrote upon Malachi went even farther than this: “He did not touch the history at all, and after his manner, was wholly occupied in the interpretation of allegory.”⁴

A farther drawback to the successful treatment of the Old Testament was the commentator’s very imperfect knowledge of Hebrew. It is true that in that knowledge he stood second only to Jerome among the Fathers. But that is not saying a great deal. We must remember again in his case the difficulties with which he had to contend. Such acquaintance with the language as he possessed had to be picked up by oral inquiry from the Jews, who themselves probably had no very thorough understanding of what was to them a dead language. Under the circumstances we cannot be surprised if Origen’s knowledge did not extend farther than an external acquaintance with the meaning of words. Of the genius and grammar of Hebrew he knew little. He appears to have been quite conscious

¹ *Commentar über die Genesis*, p. 62 (4th ed.)

² *Prefat. Comm. in Osee Proph.*

³ *Tota eorum ἐξηγησις allegorica fuit, et historię vix pauca tetigerunt.—Prefat. Comm. in Zachariam Proph.*

⁴ *Historiam omnino non tetigit, et more suo totus in allegorię interpretatione versatus est.—Prefat. Comm. in Malachiam Proph.*

of his own weakness, and seldom ventures beyond the Greek text, except to repeat some traditional criticism.¹

Of these two main drawbacks—excessive fondness for allegory and imperfect acquaintance with Hebrew—the one was of less and the other of comparatively slight importance for the study of the New Testament, and here it is that Origen has laid the most substantial foundation for his fame.² If he was inclined to disparage the study of the letter as compared with that of the spiritual and mystical signification, he did not therefore think that the former could safely be neglected. On the contrary, he looked upon an exact grammatical and logical investigation of the text as a necessary preliminary to the higher exposition and as the true safeguard against heretical perversions. His immense Biblical knowledge, though on the one hand it is a snare to him, constantly tempting him to run off from the subject in pursuit of parallels more or less remote and so leading to a tiresome prolixity, on the other hand does much to supply the place of modern critical aids. When we think that Origen wrote in the very infancy of the art of commenting—at least in that very special field, commenting upon the Bible—it is quite remarkable how much he has achieved. He needed no concordance; for his memory in itself was a concordance. He tracks out the use of words, heaping examples together with the utmost freedom. Not, of

¹ Redepenning, *Origenes*, i. pp. 366–369; Diestel, *Gesch. d. A. T.* p. 38; Rev. C. J. Elliott in Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, art. "Hebrew Learning."

² There can be little doubt that the verdict of modern times will in this respect reverse that of antiquity. Compare the saying of Ambrose, quoted by Huet (*Origeniana*, i. p. 239): "Etsi sciam, quod nihil difficilius sit, quam de Apostoli lectione disserere cum ipse Origenes longe minor sit in Novo, quam in Veteri Testamento." For what follows see especially Redepenning, *Origenes*, ii. pp. 197–212.

course, that these examples are always very relevant or profitable, for they are often made in the interests of allegory. But still, even though the idea with which they are applied may be a mistaken one, they represent a great step on the line of an inductive investigation of Scriptural usage. Thus he is able to correct mistakes current among his contemporaries. He can prove that "the world" is not always used in a bad sense in Scripture. He can prove that there is a "desire" for good as well as a "desire" for evil. He is aware that "heart" is used of the understanding as well as of the affections. He asserts roundly that there is only once an assertion of the "hardening of the spirit" (in Deut. ii. 30, LXX.) He begins his commentary upon St. John, after a lengthy preface, with an elaborate investigation into the uses of the word "beginning." Then he considers the different applications of "the Word," of "life" and "light," and so on. One of his best examinations is that into the use of the word "harvest" in John iv. 35, where five different senses are distinguished. The same close study is extended to prepositions. For instance, there is an excellent comment on the use of *διά* in John i. 3, which contains the gist of all that has been said upon the subject by the most accomplished of modern scholars. A quite tenable paraphrase is given of the idiomatic *ἐκ* in John i. 24. The causal connections, which are often so difficult to follow in the fourth gospel¹ are carefully discussed. For instance, on John i. 26, Heracleon, the Gnostic, had complained that the answer of John to the Pharisees was not an answer to their question, but merely followed his own

¹ There is nothing more striking in Dr. Westcott's masterly commentary on this Gospel (see EXPOSITOR, No. Lxiii. pp. 237, 238) than the skill and exactness with which these are traced.

fancy. In opposition to this Origen maintains that it is entirely to the point. The Pharisees had asked, *Why baptizest thou them if thou art not the Christ?* To this the Baptist gives the proper answer, shewing that his own baptism was comparatively material (*σωματικώτερον*) in its nature [and therefore not Messianic, but preparatory for] the true Messiah who stood undetected in their midst.¹ The discussion of the difficult verse, John iv. 44 (*For Jesus himself testified that a prophet hath no honour in his own country*), is so good that I shall be tempted to give it at some length. Origen remarks that there seems to be great inconsequence in the argument: "for what has the saying, *Jesus himself, &c.*, to do with the fact that after two days he left the Samaritans, with whom he had been staying, and departed into Galilee? For if Samaria had been his *own country*, and he had been disrespectfully treated there, and on that ground had only stayed with them two days, it would have been consequent enough to say, *For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country.* Again, if it had been written, *After two days he went into Galilee* [and did not go to his own country, or home]; *for Jesus Himself testified, &c.*, that too would have been in place, and perhaps it is really the meaning of the context; but John, as unskilled in speech, expressed his meaning obscurely." Origen goes on, however, to argue that the true "country" or "home" of Jesus was Judæa, and that the reason for the migration to Samaria goes back to the beginning of the Chapter, the events that happened in Samaria coming in parenthetically;² a

¹ *Comm. in Joh.* (ed. Huet) ii. pp. 120-122.

² *Ibid.* pp. 248, 249.

view which is now endorsed by the very great authority of Dr. Westcott.

This passage is a good example of the boldness which Origen shewed in stating and facing difficulties. Frequently where we cannot accept his own solution as final, we yet cannot but admire the clearness and logical force with which the question is presented. I must abstain from further illustration of this at present, but an opportunity may sometime be afforded me of supplementing what has been here said by further specimens of Origen's work as a commentator. In the meantime I will conclude these remarks upon the founder of Christian exegesis by quoting three opinions from writers who, both by general and special studies, are most competent to give them. The first is that of the author of an excellent biography of Origen, of which considerable use has been made in the preceding pages: "It is, speaking generally, quite true that the purely exegetical contents of his expositions bear a very small proportion to the whole. Even in the Scholia, which are chiefly concerned with explaining the literal sense, there is contained a large amount of practical and speculative matter; and in the first of those upon the Psalms Origen himself says that on the Tree of Life, Christ, dogmas are the fruits, the phrases and words only leaves. So it happens that in his own writings, even in the Scholia, the dogmatic element so often greatly preponderates. But as the first beginnings of grammatical interpretation, the results though small are of great importance. His predecessors in exegesis — of whom Origen found among Christians very few, and those, if we except his relations to Heracleon, he seldom mentions—had done

hardly anything for grammatical exposition. The later Greek and Latin Fathers only in exceptional cases went beyond what Origen left them. Jerome alone surpassed him as an exegete. Thus on this side, too, he may be small when judged by the standard of the present, but in his own time he is great, an originator of altogether new lines of thought which lay outside the range of his contemporaries in the Church, and were but partially understood by them." ¹ If this, perhaps, slightly exaggerates the interval between the relative and the absolute value of Origen's labours, the impression will be corrected by the two quotations which follow. Dr. Westcott ² thus describes the Commentary on St. John: "The work has Origen's faults and excellences in full measure. It is lengthy, discursive, fanciful, speculative; but it abounds with noble thoughts and intuitions of the truth. As a commentator Origen created a new form of theological literature." With this verdict that of Bishop Lightfoot well agrees. "Of this vast apparatus" (Origen's comments on the Epistle to the Galatians) "not a single fragment remains in the original, and only two or three have been preserved in a Latin dress, either in the translation of Pamphilus's *Apology* or in Jerome's *Commentary*. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that all subsequent writers are directly or indirectly indebted to him to a very large extent. Jerome especially avows his obligations to this father of Biblical criticism. In my notes I have had occasion to mention Origen's name chiefly in connection with fanciful speculations or positive errors, because his opinion has rarely

¹ Redepenning, *Origenes*, ii. pp. 211, 212.

² *Speaker's Commentary, New Testament*, vol. ii. p. xciv.

been recorded by later writers, except where his authority was needed to sanction some false or questionable interpretation; but the impression thus produced is most unjust to his reputation. In spite of his very patent faults, which it costs nothing to denounce, a very considerable part of what is valuable in subsequent commentaries, whether ancient or modern, is due to him. A deep thinker, an accurate grammarian, a most laborious worker, and a most earnest Christian, he not only laid the foundation, but to a very great extent built up the fabric of Biblical interpretation." ¹

W. SANDAY.

*THE GREEK AORIST, AS USED IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT.*

THIRD PAPER.

IN former papers I have attempted to state and to illustrate the sense, and the New Testament use, of the aorist and perfect tenses of the Greek language. I shall now discuss the rendering and exposition of these tenses by some of the best known English commentators.

Of these, Dr. Ellicott merits our first attention. It is hardly too much to say that his commentaries have created an era in English theology. By directing our attention to the consecutive study of Holy Scripture and to the study of its grammatical details as the only safe stepping-stones to "the difficult heights of exegetical and dogmatical theology," by limiting our attention for a time to one short portion of Scripture, and by discussing carefully the meaning, inflexion, and

¹ *Galatians*, p. 223 (2nd ed.)