

THE EXPOSITOR.

TATIAN'S DIATESSARON.

THERE is an aspect in which the Eastern Question has a profound interest for scholars and divines. In proportion as the East has been opened to us, continually increasing light has been thrown upon the Scriptures, and the controversies respecting them have been elucidated. In respect to the Old Testament this is notorious, but the encouragement afforded us respecting the New Testament has not, perhaps, received equal attention. The discovery, however, by Tischendorf of the Codex Sinaiticus, in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, would alone suggest the probability that priceless manuscripts are buried, but preserved, in Eastern monasteries, and that relics of Christian literature, which would at once settle many a disputed point between believers and sceptical critics, are scattered over the regions which were once covered with flourishing Christian Churches. This belief received a striking confirmation in 1875, when Bryennius, the Metropolitan of Serræ, published for the first time the entire text of the Epistle of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, and of the so-called second Epistle, from a MS. preserved in "the Library of the most Holy Sepulchre in Fanar of Constantinople." As Dr. Lightfoot said, in the volume he published as an Appendix to his edition of these Epistles (p. 231), "When a MS. of this vast importance has been for generations unnoticed in a place so public as the official library of a great Oriental prelate, a hope of future discoveries in the

domain of early Christian literature is opened out, in which the most sanguine would not have ventured to indulge before." If sufficient intercourse and sufficient confidence could be established between the East and the West to allow of such MS. treasures being searched, the result might prove of more value to the world than any other consequences of the reunion of those long-divided regions. If the crusaders had only seized and brought safely to Europe all the manuscripts they could lay their hands on, they would probably have more than redeemed all their errors.

These reflections are suggested by another striking discovery of the same kind which has for several years been strangely overlooked, but is now beginning to attract attention. In the second volume of a collection of Armenian translations of the works of St. Ephraem the Syrian, published by the Mechitarist monks at Venice, in 1836, is a work purporting to be an exposition by St. Ephraem of a Harmony of the Gospels. In the year 1841 it was translated into Latin by one of the Fathers of the Order, J. P. Aucher, under the title *Evangelii Concordantis Expositio, facta a S. Ephraemo, Doctore Syro*, but the translation was not published. The work therefore remained the exclusive possession of those acquainted with the Armenian language and literature, and it remained in obscurity. But it came to the knowledge of Dr. George Moesinger, then *Professor Studii Biblici* at Salzburg, and since dead. Father Aucher's translation, and one of the manuscripts from which the Armenian text had been printed, were placed in Dr. Moesinger's hands by the Mechitarist Fathers, and he published the translation, revised and corrected, in the year 1876, at Venice. It proved on examination to be a commentary, or rather a series of scholia, on the famous Diatessaron of Tatian, which may be roughly described as a combination of our four Gospels, composed not long after the middle of the second century. St. Ephraem's

commentary gives us in great measure, by means of its quotations, the text of Tatian's work; and we are thus placed in possession of evidence of the most positive character as to the position held by our Gospels at that early date, and at the same time of very valuable testimony respecting the text then current. The immense importance of such a discovery is manifest. Dr. Adolf Harnack, in a notice of Dr. Moesinger's work in Brieger's *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, published last February, concludes by saying that "without doubt this publication contains the most important acquisition which our knowledge of the history of pre-catholic Christianity has received of late years; even the discovery of Bryennius must yield precedence to it." Such being the value of Ephraem's work, it is a most curious point that it should have been before the world for nearly five years in a Latin translation, and should have remained practically unnoticed by any of the laborious scholars of Germany. Attention was, indeed, called to it by a passing reference in Schürer's *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, of Dec. 7th, 1878; and, by an odd coincidence, Dr. Harnack signs another article on the very same page. One would have thought the mere announcement—"Ephraem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron!" thus given in Schürer, with a note of admiration, would have drawn all New Testament critics to follow the scent. But since that time Tatian's Diatessaron and its bearings on the authenticity of our Gospels have been often discussed, and except in a book published last year by the American divine, Dr. Ezra Abbot, on the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel, no notice seems to have been taken of Dr. Moesinger's publication until Dr. Harnack's article of February last. Such an incident might well lead us to think that our materials for criticism are beginning to overpower us, and that some of our best treasures may be hidden from us like needles in a stack of hay.

An attempt will be made in these pages to give an account of this discovery, and to exhibit some of the contributions which it offers to New Testament criticism. But it will be desirable in the first instance to illustrate its bearings on current controversy by a brief explanation of the state of the question respecting Tatian and his Diatessaron up to the present time. In this country attention was drawn to the subject by the author of *Supernatural Religion*, and by Dr. Lightfoot's reply to him in the *Contemporary Review* of May, 1877. The position maintained by the author of *Supernatural Religion*¹ is, that there cannot be found "a single distinct trace of any of the Synoptic Gospels, with the exception of the third, during the first century and a half after the death of Jesus,"—that is to say, before the year 180 A.D.; and he comes to a similar conclusion respecting the Gospel of St. John. For this purpose it was imperative for him to contend that our Gospels were not used by Justin Martyr. But Tatian was a disciple, or at least a hearer, of Justin Martyr; and if, therefore, he composed a kind of Harmony out of our four Gospels, and out of those alone, it would be incredible that they were not known to his master and were not recognized by him as authoritative. Accordingly this writer labours in his usual style to explain away the evidence that Tatian's Diatessaron was of the character hitherto generally believed. It is worth observing in passing that the last and "complete" edition of *Supernatural Religion*, published in 1879, contains a singular illustration of the manner in which the author's arguments tend to break down, and of the way in which he treats their collapse. One of the most important points in his argument was a contention that the Gospel of Marcion was not, as had hitherto been believed, a mutilated form of St. Luke's Gospel, but that more probably it was an

¹ Vol. ii. p. 246. Complete edition, 1879.

earlier work from which our Gospel might have been elaborated. In establishing this contention he expends some fifty pages; but in the "complete" edition he has to confess that Dr. Sanday's examination of Marcion's Gospel, in his work on *The Gospels in the Second Century*, "has convinced us that our earlier hypothesis is untenable, that the portions of our third Synoptic excluded from Marcion's Gospel were really written by the same pen which composed the mass of the work and, consequently, that our third Synoptic existed in his time, and was substantially in the hands of Marcion." But nevertheless nearly the whole fifty pages, with all their laborious and ingenious argumentation in support of a false conclusion, are left standing. "We leave the statement of the case," says the author, "so far, nearly in its former shape, in order that the true nature of the problem and the varying results and gradual development of critical opinion may be better understood" (vol. ii. p. 138). The confession is certainly a candid one; but it is difficult to know what to say of the state of mind which not only reproduces a mass of argument after it has been proved to be unsound, but which is in no degree shaken by such a conviction of error on an important and difficult point. The author can actually say (vol. ii. p. 247) that "the identification of Marcion's Gospel with our third Synoptic proves the existence of that work before A.D. 140, *but no evidence is thus obtained, either as to the author or the character of his work.*" It is not necessary to dwell upon the indication thus afforded respecting this writer's method of discussion.

But to turn to his argument respecting Tatian. He urges that "there is no authority for saying that Tatian's Gospel was a harmony of four Gospels at all, and the name Diatessaron was not only not given by Tatian himself to the work, but was probably the usual foregone conclusion of the Christians of the third and fourth

centuries, that everything in the shape of evangelical literature must be dependent on the Gospels adopted by the Church." No writer before the fifth century had seen the work itself; only two writers before that period mention it at all; and the natural explanation is to be found "in the conclusion that Tatian did not compose any Harmony at all, but simply made use of the same Gospel as his master Justin Martyr, namely, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, by which name his Gospel had been actually called by those best informed" (vol. ii. pp. 154-5). In short, we are told, "it is obvious that there is no evidence of any value connecting Tatian's Gospel with those in our Canon" (p. 157).

These pleas were met by Dr. Lightfoot, with his usual conclusiveness, in an article on Tatian's Diatessaron in the *Contemporary Review* for May, 1877; and it is requisite to recall the main facts he established, as our acceptance of Dr. Moesinger's publication as a commentary on the real work of Tatian depends on its correspondence to these already known facts. The first piece of evidence on the subject is a statement by Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (iv. 29)—we quote Dr. Lightfoot's translations—"Tatian composed a sort of connection and compilation, I know not how, of the Gospels, and called it the Diatessaron. This work is current in some quarters (with some persons) even to the present day." This statement, as Dr. Lightfoot says, is explicit; but in *Supernatural Religion* it is set aside on the ground that it is based upon mere hearsay, and that the writer admits his own ignorance of the contents of the Diatessaron in the words, "I know not how." But Dr. Lightfoot shows that the Greek expression—*οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως*—is constantly used by writers in speaking of books where they are perfectly acquainted with the contents, but do not understand the principles, or do not approve the method adopted. "In idiomatic English it

signifies, 'I cannot think what he was about,' and is equivalent to 'unaccountably,' 'absurdly.'" In short, it is not ignorance of the contents of Tatian's work, but disparagement of its method, which is implied in the expression of Eusebius. We know from other evidence that the Diatessaron was commonly current in the neighbouring districts; "and it would be somewhat strange if Eusebius, who took a special interest in apocryphal literature, should have remained unacquainted with it."

The next evidence we shall cite is, as Dr. Lightfoot says, more important than any. It is from the Greek Father Theodoret, who became bishop of Cyrus or Cyrrhus near the Euphrates, in the year 420 or 423, and died in 457 or 458. In his treatise on Heresies, written in 453, he makes the following statement:—

"He (Tatian) composed the Gospel which is called Diatessaron, cutting out the genealogies and such other passages as show the Lord to have been born of the seed of David after the flesh. This work was in use not only among persons belonging to his sect, but also among those who follow the Apostolic doctrine, as they did not perceive the mischief of the composition, but used the book in all simplicity on account of its brevity. And I myself found more than two hundred such copies held in respect in the churches in our parts. All these I collected and put away, and I replaced them by the Gospels of the four Evangelists." Theodoret is here reporting simple matter of fact, fully within his cognizance, and his account is perfectly clear and definite. On a third piece of evidence to which Dr. Lightfoot allows some weight we do not dwell, because it rests on a disputed reading of a Syriac text, which Dr. Moesinger regards as very improbable. Nor is it necessary to dwell on the brief statement of Epiphanius, that "The Diatessaron Gospel is said to have been composed by Tatian; it is called by some *According to the Hebrews*. Dr.

Lightfoot shews that the latter observation is probably one of the numerous and egregious blunders of Epiphanius, and the other part of the statement simply confirms Eusebius. There is a later statement on the subject by Victor of Capua, who flourished about 545 A.D. It contains, however, an obvious misquotation of Eusebius, from whom it was derived, and it need not occupy our attention at present, though we shall have to notice it afterwards. But from the two witnesses already quoted we may conclude that as late as the middle of the fifth century there was in common circulation a Diatessaron bearing the name of Tatian. In Dr. Lightfoot's words "It was a compilation of our Four Gospels, which recommended itself by its concise and convenient form, and so superseded the reading of the Evangelists themselves in some churches. . . . It was probably in the main a fairly accurate digest of the Evangelical narratives; for, otherwise, it would not have maintained its ground; but passages which offended Tatian's Encratite and Gnostic views, such as the genealogies, were excised; and this might easily be done without attracting notice under cover of his general plan."

We may now pass to another witness who at once confirms this information about Tatian himself, and brings his work into connection with Ephraem. Dionysius Bar Salibi, bishop of Amida in Armenia Major, who died according to Dr. Lightfoot in 1207, but according to Dr. Moesinger in 1171, makes the following statement in the Preface to his own Commentary on St. Mark:—

"Tatian, the disciple of Justin, the philosopher and martyr, selected and patched together from the four Gospels and constructed a Gospel, which he called *Diatessaron*, that is, *Miscellanies*. On this work Mar Ephraem wrote an exposition; and its commencement was, 'In the beginning was the Word.'" Three other Syrian writers refer to the fact that Tatian composed a Diatessaron; but they con-

found it with the Harmony of Ammonius of Alexandria. Dr. Lightfoot has shewn that their statements are all later than Bar Salibi, and can be traced to a misunderstanding of his language. In another place Bar Salibi states that "St. Ephraem explained the Gospel, following the order of the Diatessaron." Dr. Moesinger observes that we have abundant testimony to the fact of Ephraem having commented upon the Gospels, and the statement of Theodoret respecting the use of the Diatessaron among the orthodox in Syria and Mesopotamia sufficiently explains why it should have been adopted by the Syrian Father as the text for his exposition.

It remains therefore to enquire whether the treatise in the Armenian translation of Ephraem's works bears internal and external evidence of being the commentary of Ephraem in question. On this Dr. Moesinger observes that its method and style correspond closely with those by which Ephraem's commentaries on other books of Scripture are marked. In the next place the Church is described as in a condition which exactly corresponds to that of the Church of Edessa after its Catholic Bishop Barsees had been sent into exile in 364 by the Emperor Valens. There is a good deal of disputation against the Marcionites, and we know that Ephraem was a special opponent of that sect. Further, many opinions peculiar to Ephraem and found in his other commentaries on the Scriptures are found in this also. The Armenian translation, moreover, betrays its Syriac original, many Syriac constructions being introduced contrary to the genius of the Armenian language. Moreover, the Gospel narrative on which Ephraem comments corresponds to the characteristics already mentioned of Tatian's Diatessaron. That work began with the text "In the beginning was the Word," and such is the commencement of Ephraem's quotations. Theodoret tells us that the genealogies were omitted from the Diatessaron, and they are absent from

this commentary. Finally, it is an interesting point, in which Dr. Moesinger is substantially confirmed by Dr. Harnack, that the text which St. Ephraem explains in this work differs generally from that of the Peshito version, and agrees with that of the Syriac version which Cureton edited, and which he maintained to be more ancient than the Peshito.

On the whole, then, reserving one or two minor points to be noticed in the sequel, there seems no practical doubt of the justice of Dr. Moesinger's conclusion, that in this commentary of Ephraem we are placed substantially in possession of the Diatessaron of Tatian, with the qualification which Dr. Harnack adds, that we possess it as it existed in a Syriac translation in Ephraem's day. The text of the Armenian version is preserved in two manuscripts, both dating from the year 1195, one of them having been copied out by Archbishop Nerses. Dr. Moesinger says that it breathes the ancient air of Armenian literature, and in the opinion of the Mechitarist Fathers is to be referred to the fifth century. The Armenian translator has evidently followed the Syriac text with great care, word by word, even at the cost of awkward constructions and occasional obscurity. Father Aucher followed the same plan of literal translation in his Latin version; and thus, notwithstanding the repeated transference from one language to another, we may place confidence in the substantial accuracy of the representation conveyed to us of Tatian's work. But this will be the better seen from the more detailed examination which we must defer to another article. For the present it is enough to observe that the Diatessaron now proves to have been a close welding together of the four Canonical Gospels. For instance, it commences with John i. 1-5, and proceeds to Luke i. 5, John i. 14-17, Luke i. 6-79, Matt. i. 18-25, and so on. Harnack says that they are so closely interwoven, so in-

geniously spun together, that nowhere, so to say, is any seam visible. Tatian, indeed, is very far from having quoted the complete text of all four Gospels, and the work corresponds to Theodoret's account, that it was a compact and concise book. But he does use all of them, and uses no other source. The main fact, therefore, for which orthodox critics have contended appears conclusively established. Tatian is a decisive witness to the acceptance of our four Gospels in the time of Justin Martyr; and thus a vital portion of the argument of the author of *Supernatural Religion* falls at once to the ground. But although this affords a useful exposure of the value of that writer's discussions, it will be found to serve more important and more permanent purposes.

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THE REVISED VERSION OF THE NEW
TESTAMENT.

AN INTRODUCTORY PAPER.

I HAVE been asked to join with Mr. Beet in contributing to the EXPOSITOR some papers on different aspects of the Revised Version of the New Testament. But we are met by this difficulty, that while the adequate discussion of a work of such importance requires study which in the midst of other engagements cannot at once be given to it, the readers of the EXPOSITOR will yet naturally be anxious to know something about the New Version, and although the daily press has already taken up the subject with eagerness, there will still be some preliminary matter which ought to be stated if the Revision is to be approached with that sympathetic sense of its inner history which