

*THE RELATION OF THE TESTAMENTS OF THE
TWELVE PATRIARCHS TO THE BOOKS OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT.*

IN his Introduction to the edition of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, with which Dr. Charles has again laid all students of apocalyptic and apocryphal literature under an immense obligation, he has tabulated a large number of parallels—some of them very striking—between passages in the Testaments and passages in the New Testament. They amount to about ninety in all; and they might be increased in number, especially as regards parallels between the Testaments and the First Gospel. In the International Critical Commentary on St. Luke (pp. lxxviii. f.) seventeen parallels between that Gospel and the Testaments are tabulated, not all of which are included in Dr. Charles's tables, and it would be safe to say that his ninety examples might be increased to a figure considerably over a hundred. In his notes he himself calls attention to a few parallels which are not included in the tables. But the large majority of the additional examples will be found to come from the First Gospel.

What explanation is to be given of these 130 or 140 cases in which there is resemblance in thought, or language, or both, between the Testaments and the writings of the New Testament? Accidental coincidence may explain a few, and independent employment of ideas and words which were part of the intellectual material of the time may explain others. But the number of parallels is too great, and the closeness of some of them is too great, to allow these two

explanations to suffice for all of them. The only reasonable hypothesis is that, in a large number of cases, the writings of the New Testament have influenced the Testaments, or *vice versâ*. The two cannot be independent, and the main question is as to which is dependent on the other.

Dr. Charles unhesitatingly decides for the priority of the Testaments. He places at the head of this part of his Introduction (§ 26) "Influence of the Testaments on the New Testament." He is persuaded that the moral teaching and the words of the Testaments have penetrated to the very Source of the Christian religion—that they have influenced at least the form, if not the substance, of the moral teaching and sayings of Jesus Christ. And, after discussing illustrations of the resemblances between the Testaments and the Gospels, with a few from Acts, he goes on to say that, "from the evidence presently to be adduced, it will be clear that St. Paul was thoroughly familiar with the Greek translation of the Testaments."

There is nothing incredible in this hypothesis, taken by itself. It is not impossible that our Lord sometimes reproduces Ecclesiasticus in His teaching: comp. Ecclesiasticus vii. 14, xxiii. 9–11, xxviii. 2, xxix. 12 with Matthew vi. 7, v. 33, 34, vi. 14, vi. 20 and xix. 21, which are only a few of the resemblances. And it is certain that Jewish writings which are not in the Canon are quoted or alluded to by St. Paul, St. Jude, and the writer of 2 Peter. Therefore, it need not startle us if these writers, or even our Lord Himself, studied the high moral teaching which is found in some of the Testaments so frequently, that their own utterances were influenced by what they found there. Yet there is another hypothesis which certainly deserves to be considered; and no doubt Dr. Charles has considered it. But he has summarily and decidedly rejected it, as if there were quite conclusive objections to

it. Possibly with him it is a question of date pure and simple. He believes that he has proved that the Hebrew original of the Testaments was written B.C. 109-107, or at any rate very near that time. No book of the New Testament was written until nearly a century and a half later than this; therefore, if there is dependence (and there must be), it is the writers of the New Testament that are dependent upon the Testaments.

One whose knowledge of the Testaments is only superficial dissents with great diffidence from a scholar whose life has been spent in studying literature of this kind, and who has spent many years upon the investigation of this particular book. There may be some conclusive answer to what is now about to be urged, and, if so, Dr. Charles will be competent to give it. This most interesting product of later Judaism has long been a perplexity in various respects. Some of the doubts about it have now been cleared away, a happy result to which Dr. Charles has greatly contributed; and something will be gained if he can demonstrate that the objections which may be brought against his confident view that the New Testament is dependent upon the Testaments are untenable or of little weight.

It is very significant that the passages in the Testaments which resemble passages in the Gospels, in the very large majority of cases, resemble passages in Matthew. There are about twice as many parallels with Matthew as with all the other three Gospels. And Dr. Charles remarks that the parallels with Matthew "are almost exclusively those which give the sayings and discourses of our Lord" (p. lxxviii.). There are plenty of exceptions, but the proportion is very large. How is this fact to be explained? Dr. Charles says that our Lord knew the Testaments and adopted some of their excellent ideas and

words. But that does not explain why, in the large majority of cases, these adaptations of the Testaments are found in the First Gospel. In Dr. Charles's tables there are fifteen parallels between Christ's words and the Testaments, all taken from Matthew, but one of them common to Matthew and Luke. From Luke there are six such parallels; from John there are two, one of which is slight, while the other should be assigned to 1 John rather than to the Gospel; from Mark not one. The fifteen from the First Gospel may be more than doubled. In his notes Dr. Charles adds four more (Matt. v. 6, vi. 24, xv. 14, xix. 28), and twelve others might be added to these, making over thirty in all. And a good many might be added to the five examples which he has tabulated of parallels between the Testaments and the *narrative* portion of Matthew.

Now if our Lord so frequently reproduced the thoughts and words of the Testaments, we should expect to find these reproductions in all four Gospels, or, at any rate, in all three Synoptics, and in Luke almost as often as in Matthew. Why is the proportion so overwhelming in the First Gospel? And why is much the same proportion found in the parallels between the Testaments and the Gospel narratives?

Let us try the converse hypothesis, and assume that it is the Gospels which have influenced the Testaments. Then at once we see why the First Gospel should have influenced the Testaments far more than the other three. As soon as the Gospel according to St. Matthew was published it became immensely popular. It almost drove that according to St. Mark into obscurity; and that according to Luke, similar as it is in its contents and in its abundant record of Christ's sayings, never overtook the Gospel according to St. Matthew in the affections of Christians. It was, and still is, from the First Gospel that Christians learn most of what they know about Jesus Christ, and it is for this reason that

Renan rightly calls it "the most important book that ever was written." If, therefore, it is the Gospels that have influenced the Testaments, and not *vice versa*, we have a very obvious explanation of the fact that the parallels with the First Gospel, both in discourses and in narratives, are so very much more frequent than parallels with the other three.

But it may be urged that the Testaments were written long before the Gospels. It is therefore impossible that the writer has borrowed from them, while it is quite possible that the Evangelists have borrowed from him. The Testaments were written before Christ was born. It is therefore impossible that the writer has adopted Christ's teaching, whereas it is quite possible that Christ may have adopted his.

The date of the Testaments in the original Hebrew is by no means certain yet. Dr. Charles may be right in assigning it to about B.C. 109, and he has shown that it cannot be earlier than that; but Harnack is perhaps nearer the mark in saying that the date cannot well be placed earlier than the beginning of the Christian era, and may be later than that. Let us, however, assume that the Book of Jubilees is dependent upon the Testaments, and not the other way about, although Schürer prefers the latter hypothesis; and let us assume that the Hebrew original of the Testaments was written some decades before the Birth of Christ; that does not prove that the remarkable parallels between the Testaments and the New Testament, and especially between the Testaments and the First Gospel, and between the Testaments and the Pauline Epistles, have been produced through the use of the Testaments by our Lord and the Evangelists and St. Paul.

Thanks to a number of labourers in this field, of whom Dr. Charles is one of the chief, it is now ascertained beyond question that the author of the Testaments was a Jew who

wrote in Hebrew ; that the Greek texts which have come down to us represent early translations from the Hebrew ; and that from the Greek version other versions which have come down to us were made. It has also been thoroughly established that the numerous Christian features which are found in the Testaments are the result of insertions and changes of wording which have been made by Christian hands. This has been done more than once, for the insertions are not all of the same date ; and it is possible that this Christianizing of the Testaments, in order to make them more edifying to believers, was a process which went on for a century or two before the text reached the condition (by no means harmonious) in which we find it in its existing representatives.

Is it not probable that the people who Christianized the Testaments introduced most of the remarkable resemblances between them and the New Testament ? This hypothesis accounts for the immense preponderance of the parallels between the Testaments and the First Gospel, and between them and the Epistles of St. Paul, which were well known still earlier than the First Gospel. The one Pauline passage which appears *verbatim* in the Testaments comes from the earliest Epistle of all, and perhaps the earliest writing in the New Testament (1 Thess. ii. 16 ; *Levi* vi. 11) : ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡ ὁργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰς τέλος, where the insertion of τοῦ Θεοῦ in harmony with DE, Latt. Goth. is to be noticed. It is shown by Dr. Charles himself that these Christian scribes inserted words of their own into their copies in order to make the Testaments more Christian in tone. Would they not be still more ready to introduce words from the New Testament, or to modify the wording of the Testaments so as to bring them more into harmony with the words of our Lord or of His Apostle ?

The hypothesis that the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, in the Greek version, is dependent upon the New Testament, and especially upon the First Gospel and the Epistles of St. Paul, has a further advantage. It explains, what would be really amazing if the converse hypothesis were correct, that "the Testaments have not left much trace on Patristic literature" (p. lxxv.). It would be a pardonable exaggeration to say that they have left none. A single mention by Origen, in a work written near the end of his life, and therefore about A.D. 250, is the earliest reference on which we can depend with certainty. In his Homilies on the Book of Joshua (xv. 6) he speaks of a certain book with this title, which however is not canonical; *in aliquo quodam libello, qui appellatur Testamentum Duodecim Patriarcharum, quamvis non habeatur in canone, etc.* There is a fragment attributed (erroneously, as Harnack is inclined to think) to Irenæus (No. xvii. in Stieren and in Hervey), in which there is an *apparent* reference to the Testaments: but the double uncertainty makes the evidence rather weak. And Dr. Charles cites seven passages from the Shepherd of Hermas, to which he gives parallels from the Testaments. He regards them as conclusive that Hermas knew and used the Testaments. Most of them are very unconvincing, either because the expressions common to both writings are not unusual, or because Hermas is more likely to quote Scripture than the Testaments. The combination of ἀπλότης with ἀκακία is not remarkable; nor the combination of καρδιά καθαρὰ with ἀμίαντος. Τὰ κτίσματα τοῦ Θεοῦ . . . μεταδίδοτε καὶ τοῖς ὑστερουμένοις, if it needs a source, may come as easily from Luke iii. 11, or Job xxxi. 17, or Proverbs xxii. 9, or Ezekiel xviii. 7, 16, or Epistle of Jeremy 28, as from πτωχῷ μετέδωκα ἄρτον μου (*Issachar* vii. 5). Giving without partiality is a subject that may easily occur independently to two writers whose

aim is to give moral exhortation to their readers ; and, if they are to express their ideas in Greek, they would be likely to use *διακρίνω* in some form or other ; that Hermas has *μηδέν διακρίνων τίνι δῶ*, while in *Zebulon* vii. 2 we read *ἀδιακρίτως πάντας ἐλεᾶτε*, is but slight evidence of dependence. And surely, *μηδενὸς καταλάλει* (*Mand.* ii. 2) is more likely to come from *μὴ καταλαλεῖτε* (*Jas.* iv. 11) or *μὴ ἀγάπα καταλαλεῖν* (*Προν.* xii. 13) than from *οὐ κατελάλησά τινος πώποτε* (*Issachar* iii. 4).

There is one parallel, however, which is of interest and at first sight striking. The Shepherd (*Mand.* III. ix. 2) says, "There are two angels with man, one of righteousness and one of wickedness." In the Testaments (*Judah* xx. 1), "Two spirits wait upon man, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." One passage may be dependent upon the other ; or both may come from Barnabas xviii. 1 ; or Hermas may be following Barnabas, while the Testament of Judah may be inspired by 1 John iv. 6. Origen (*De Prin.* III. ii. 4) appears to think that Hermas and Barnabas are associated, for he quotes first one and then the other. The passage in Barnabas runs thus : "There are two ways of teaching and of power, the one of light and the other of darkness. . . . On the one are stationed the light-giving angels of God, on the other the angels of Satan." In 1 John iv. 6, "the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" is identical with *Judah* xx. 1. It will be observed that while the Epistle and the Testaments both have "spirits," Barnabas and Hermas both have "angels." These similarities and differences render it uncertain whether there is dependence between Hermas and the Testaments. If there is, the priority may be with Hermas. The Shepherd, like the First Gospel, quickly became very popular, although, unlike the Gospel, it afterwards entirely lost its popularity. For a time some books of the New Testament were not nearly

so well known as the Shepherd of Hermas, and one of the Christianizing copyists may have introduced this passage from the Shepherd into the Testaments. Yet the derivation from Barnabas or from 1 John is more probable.

But let us allow that it is not impossible that both Hermas and Irenæus knew the Testaments. That is a very small portion of the Christian writers of a century and a half (A.D. 95-250). Here we have a book which is thought to have had a very powerful effect upon the First Gospel and upon the Epistles of St. Paul, and to have had a considerable effect upon most of the writings of the New Testament. Ought we not to find manifest evidence of its influence upon the Apostolic Fathers, especially Clement, Ignatius, and Barnabas, upon the Didaché, Aristides, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, or at least upon some of them. Why should the marvellous influence exercised upon Canonical Scriptures cease directly the line (as yet undefined) between Canonical and uncanonical writings is passed? Does not the absence of influence upon the early Fathers indicate that the supposed influence upon our Lord and His Apostles and Evangelists is imagined? This sudden cessation of influence upon Christian thought and literature seems to be inexplicable. Let us take the summary of the facts as given by Dr. Charles himself.

“After the first century of our era the fortunes of the Testaments speedily declined in Christendom. Though they are referred to occasionally in the next three centuries, they came to be discredited as an Apocryphal writing and fell under the ban of the Church. Unhappily, further, in the course of these centuries of their waning popularity, they underwent interpolation at the hands of Christian scribes, but happily many of these interpolations had not

been made when the book was done into Armenian" (p. xvii.).

"*Waning* popularity" does not seem to be quite the right expression: there was no *waning*. According to the theory adopted by Dr. Charles, the popularity ceased suddenly. We do not find that in the first half of the second century the influence of the book was still considerable, that in the second half of that century the evidence of influence becomes less, and then gradually ceases. On the contrary, there is no evidence of the existence of the book till the second half of the first century, and then it is only the very inconclusive evidence mentioned above as to its having possibly been known to Hermas and Irenæus. Not till we reach the middle of the third century is the book mentioned, and then only once in all his voluminous writings, by Origen. The Clementines, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Arnobius, and Lactantius, not to mention other writers, yield no traces. Is it not reasonable to call in this evidence of almost total absence of influence in the second and third centuries to guide us in our interpretation of the parallels between our texts of the Testaments and the writings of the New Testament in the first century? The hypothesis that the Testaments had a very powerful effect on the New Testament would seem to be excluded. And, as has been already shown, the parallels (so numerous, and sometimes so close) can be explained in a way that raises no such difficulty.

Some of them are probably accidental. Some of them may be the result of the influence of Jewish writings (whether inside or outside of the Old Testament) and Jewish traditions upon both the writer of the Testaments and the writers of the New Testament. But most of them are due to the work of Christian scribes, who in other ways did not scruple to tamper with the text of the Testaments in order to make the book more edifying. It will be observed that, in urging

this explanation, we are not introducing a new cause in order to account for the facts; we are using a cause, the operation of which upon the Testaments is already fully admitted. Over and over again Dr. Charles calls attention to its effects. That the Testaments were Christianized by Christian scribes, and probably by several at different periods, is now an accepted result of criticism. Is there any improbability in the supposition that part of the Christianizing process consisted in making the wording of the Testaments approximate to the wording of the New Testament, and especially to the teaching of our Lord and of His Apostle St. Paul?

The precise date of the original Hebrew Testaments is not of great moment for the argument. Perhaps it is not as early as Dr. Charles believes. Allusions to John Hyrcanus, if they exist, prove that the book cannot have been written before his time, but they do not tell us how long after his time it may have been written. Let us take any time between B.C. 100 and A.D. 50 for the Hebrew original. Translation into Greek may have taken place in the first century of our era, and even the Christianizing process may have begun before A.D. 100. All we can say is that it was probably a Christianized copy that was known to Origen, for he thinks it worth while to mention its not being included in the Canon. Perhaps, with the help of the magnificent edition and critical text which Dr. Charles has now supplied, some sure conclusions as to this perplexing product of late Judaism and early Christianity, in addition to those already reached, may become possible.

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