

ATHANASIUS AND THE BOOK OF TESTIMONIES.

At various times, during recent years, I have drawn attention, in the pages of the *EXPOSITOR*,¹ to the evidence which exists for the belief that the early Christians made use of a manual of controversy in their disputes with the Jews which was composed of passages from the Old Testament, arranged under appropriate headings, with brief introductory statements or accompanying comments.

Although I made the discovery, without the knowledge that other scholars had expressed similar suspicions, and had argued for the antiquity of the book, it was not the less pleasing to find that the late Dr. Hatch and Professor Drummond had anticipated or endorsed me; for it furnished at once a confirmation and a check; it was a confirmation where we agreed, and suggested suspense of judgment and a revision of the argument where we differed. Recently the hypothesis has met with the support of Professor Burkitt, who has ventured the very bold conjecture that the primitive collection of Testimonies to which we are led was nothing more nor less than the lost book of *Dominical Oracles* of Papias. The matter, then, is certainly important enough to the critic, and the subject will require, before long, an exhaustive treatment. For this treatment I am not yet quite ready, as a wide area of patristic literature is involved in the investigation, with probably some publication or collation of fresh documents, and, perhaps, a re-collation of documents already known.

Meanwhile I have been assiduously following the traces of the lost book in the Fathers; it was natural that one

¹ E.g. "Spoken by Jeremy the Prophet," *EXPOSITOR*, 1905. "The Use of Testimonies in the Early Church," *EXPOSITOR*, 1906. "Irenæus on the Apostolical Preaching," *EXPOSITOR*, 1907.

should do this, in view of the fact that the first suspicions on the subject were provoked by the existence of curious coincidences in the texts of Justin and Irenæus, both of whom can be now proved to have been intimately acquainted with the method of the Testimony Book, which, in one of its early forms, they had at their finger-ends.

From Justin and Irenæus it was easy to work backwards, in search of the missing planet. Their coincidence in the treatment of prophetic matter could only be reasonably explained by allowing antiquity to the composition. But this brought one to the borders of New Testament times and necessitated an inquiry, which turned out to be very fruitful, into the influence of the early forms of the book upon Evangelists and Apostles. That the investigation has not been fruitless nor the arguments unconvincing may be inferred from the following sentences in Professor Gwatkin's recently published Church History :

Vol. i. p. 199. "If they [the early Christian writers] were all borrowing from some very early manual of proof texts [Rendel Harris and Burkitt have this theory] which must be at least earlier than the First Gospel, we may safely say that few books have so influenced Christian thought."

We shall, I think, be able to show that Professor Gwatkin's statement does not over-estimate either the antiquity or the importance of the writing in question.

But what, to me at least, is as surprising as the demonstrable antiquity of the book, is its remarkable persistence, often with comparatively slight modifications, in the writings of later fathers than Irenæus and Justin, from whom our inquiry started.

In the present article I am going to show that the *Testimony Book* was a part of the intellectual apparatus of no less a person than Athanasius, and that he drew upon it

freely in his controversial works and in the public disputes into which he threw himself.

That something of the kind had affected him might have been suspected from the fact that he supported the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship, in his conflict with Arius, on a text from the 110th Psalm: "Before the day-star I begat thee." This argument did not originate with Athanasius; it is in Justin¹ and elsewhere, and a study of the sequences in which it occurs will prove that it came from the Testimony Book. It is, in fact, actually extant in Cyprian's *Testimonies*,² in Gregory of Nyssa's *Testimonies against the Jews*,³ and in Bar Ṣalibi's tract on the same subject. So the suggestion arises as to whether Athanasius may not have been brought up on the same religious handbook as so many fathers of the second century.

If we turn to Athanasius' treatise *On the Incarnation*, we shall find that eight chapters (33-40) are occupied with a refutation of the unbelief of the Jews by means of arguments from the Prophets. Almost the first passage that he quotes is the prophecy of the Star in the Blessing of Jacob, which he introduces in the name of Moses:

"And Moses also, who was really great and was accredited amongst the Jews as a true man, esteemed what was said of the incarnation of the Saviour as of great weight, and having recognised its truth, he set it down, saying, 'There shall arise a star out of Jacob, and a man out of Israel, and he shall break the princes of Moab.'"

The point to notice is the intrusion of Moses into the argument, where he is awkwardly apologised for as not being the actual author but only the one who gave the passage its imprimatur: that this reference is not a mere

¹ *Dial.* 63.

² *Testim.* i. 18.

³ *l.c.* p. 292.

accident, may be seen by turning to a contemporary writer, Lactantius, who also quotes the prophecy :

De Div. Inst. iv. 13. "And Moses also, in Numbers, thus speaks : There shall arise a star out of Jacob : and a man shall spring forth from Israel. . . ."

Athanasius and Lactantius agree, then, in the odd ascription of the prophecy to Moses.

It is easy to show (see EXPOSITOR for 1906¹) that this passage, together with a companion text from Isaiah, stood in the Testimony Book, as known to Irenæus and Justin ; the primitive form was something like this :

Moses first prophesied : There shall come a star out of Jacob, etc.

And Isaiah : A flower shall spring out of the root of Jesse.

This passage suffered a displacement of title, and the whole of it was covered by the name of Isaiah, as in Irenæus and Justin. But the original form with Moses persisted in other quarters, as we see in Athanasius and Lactantius.

In the next place we find a second case of the reference of prophecies in the Old Testament to Moses in the case of the Messianic prediction in the blessing of Jacob. For in the 40th chapter of Athanasius' treatise we have, in the ordinary texts, the following statement ;

"And Jacob prophesies that the kingdom of the Jews should stand until this day, saying :

"A ruler shall not fail from Judah."

Examination of the authorities for the text shows that, according to the best MS. in the Bodleian library, we ought to read :

"And *Moses* prophesied, etc."

So here is another case of the direct ascription of an Old Testament prophecy to Moses. Is that a blunder on the part of Athanasius, or of some one who preceded him ?

¹ Pt. ii. p. 397.

Let us examine how Justin and Irenaeus quote the passage.

When we turn to Justin's *Apology*, c. 32, we find the following statement :

“ And Moses also, who was the first of the prophets, says expressly as follows : A ruler shall not fail from Judah, etc.”

Moreover we can see if this is a blunder on the part of Justin, it is a deliberate one ; for, as we read his text a little further, we come to this :

“ It is your part, then, to examine accurately and to learn until whom the Jews had a ruler and a king of their own : it was until the manifestation of Jesus Christ, our teacher and the interpreter of the recognised prophecies, as was said aforetime by the holy and divine and *prophetical spirit through Moses.*”

So it is clear that Justin was speaking deliberately when he put the famous Messianic prophecy into the mouth of Moses.

Let us see, in the next place, whether other people can be found making the same mistake. Irenaeus, for example, has a whole chapter in which he shows that Moses foretold the advent of Christ.¹ In the course of his argument he says that “ Moses had already foretold his advent, saying, A ruler shall not fail, etc.,” and ends up, in language very like that of Justin, by saying, “ Let those look into the matter who are said to investigate everything, and let them tell us, etc.” Clearly Irenaeus has made the same mistake as Justin and had the matter in a somewhat similar setting. So Athanasius has simply repeated a blunder which was earlier than Justin and Irenaeus, and was probably found in the original book of proof-texts.

For further cases of the occurrence of the same mistake in Justin Martyr, we may take the following :

¹ *Iren.* lib. iv. c. 20.

1 *Ap.* c. 54. "Moses, then, the prophet, as we said before, was senior to all the chroniclers, and by him, as we previously intimated, the following prophecy was uttered, A ruler shall not fail, etc."

In the *Dialogue with Trypho* he has found out the mistake, and tries to get rid of it, much as Athanasius does :

Dial. c. 54. "By Jacob the patriarch it was foretold, etc. That which was recorded by Moses, but prophesied by the patriarch Jacob, etc."

l.c. 76 : "Concerning whose blood also Moses spake figuratively, that he should wash his robe in the blood of the grape," where Moses still stands uncorrected : a similar statement will be found in c. 63.

We will now test Athanasius by seeing how he quotes the prophecies in Isaiah xxxv. It will be remembered that these passages in reference to the "lame man leaping like an hart" were the starting point for my inquiry, because it was found that both Irenaeus and Justin had agreed in prefixing to the quoted prophecy the words "At his coming," *ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ*, the motive for which was implicit in the previous verse :

"Your God shall come with vengeance, even God with a recompense : He will come and save you.

"Then [sc. at His coming] shall the lame man leap like an hart, etc."

Let us see, then, whether Athanasius knows anything of the introductory words which Justin and Irenaeus took from their Testimony Book. In c. 38 Athanasius quotes against the Jews the words of Isaiah, beginning with "Be strong, ye relaxed hands and paralysed knees," and continues the quotation down to "the tongue of the stammerers shall be plain." Here there is no sign of the introductory comment, but as we read on, we find him saying as follows :

"What then can the Jews say even on this point ? and

how can they dare even to face this statement? For the prophecy intimates the arrival of God, and makes known the signs and the time of *His coming*: for they say that, when *the Divine coming* takes place, the blind will see, etc." Here the words which we based an argument on in the comparison of Justin and Irenæus, are found lurking in the context of Athanasius. So we say again, in view of the quotation and the involved comment, that Athanasius was using the *Book of Testimonies*.

It would be easy to point out further agreements in the order and matter of prophecies quoted, but probably what has been said will suffice. The case of Athanasius was important in view of his central position in the Teaching and Life of the Church: he was evidently little disposed to original treatment of Christian questions and much disposed to rearrange and slightly to modify teaching which he had received in early life. And one is disposed to wonder whether this question of the Prophecies may not have been the principal factor in early Christian education; for we are gradually finding out that almost all the early Fathers have been learning out of the same book, and repeating the same arguments. Professor Gwatkin must be right in his statement as to the extraordinary influence of the text-book in question upon the development of the Christian religion.

In conclusion it may not be out of place to add a few remarks in reference to Professor Burkitt's suggestion that we should identify the *Book of Testimonies* with the missing *Dominical Oracles* (λόγια κυριακά) of Papias. Assuming that the case has been made out for the influence of Testimonies on Athanasius' famous treatise on the Incarnation, let us see how he introduces the section in which he proposes to deal with the Jews, and in what terms he describes his material.

The opening section (c. 33) does not go beyond the statement that the Jews who disbelieve are confuted from their own scriptures. When, however, in c. 38, Athanasius brings forward a fresh batch of prophecies, he does so in the following terms :

“ If what has been said is not sufficient, let the Jews be persuaded from other oracles (*λόγια*) which are in their possession.”

Here the very term is used which Papias has transmitted to us : and the language might be regarded as a direct confirmation of Professor Burkitt's hypothesis.

There is, however, one consideration which should be allowed weight on the other side. The very same prophecies which Athanasius proceeds to quote in c. 38 from the *Book of Testimonies*, occur also in Justin's *Apology*,¹ and we can compare the formula with which Justin introduces them : he says that “ it has been foretold by Isaiah . . . that the Jews who have always been expecting Christ have failed to recognise Him when He came. And the sayings (*λόγοι*) were spoken as in the person of Christ Himself. They are as follows : ‘ I was manifest to them that seek not after me, etc.’ ” Here the very same prophecies which Athanasius calls *Logia* are called *Logoi* by Justin. So it will not do to hastily assign *Logia* to the prophecies of the Old Testament, and *Logoi* to the sayings of Jesus. The terms are more nearly equivalent than has been generally supposed ; and the final decision on Professor Burkitt's hypothesis must be sought in other considerations. For the present we leave the matter in suspense.

RENDEL HARRIS.

¹ 1 Ap. 49.