

THE 'THREE WEEKS' ADVENT' OF *LIBER  
OFFICIORUM S. HILARII*.

I WOULD endeavour to throw a little light upon the passage from *Liber officiorum S. Hilarii* by Berno of Reichenau, referred to by Dr Mercati in his notes in *J.T.S.* of April 1907 (vol. viii, p. 429), by a consideration of the baptismal customs of the Spanish and the Gallican Churches.

In the Spanish Church the period of preparation of the Competents for baptism at Easter lasted three weeks,<sup>1</sup> and was styled 'in traditione symboli' (*Concil. Bracarense* ii A.D. 572, canons ix, xlix). In the oldest Mozarabic service-book (the *Orationale Gothicum*) the series of services of instruction for the Competents (*Missae Catechumenorum*) is confined to three weeks, and not, as in the Ximenean printed service-books, extended to six weeks. And even in these latter services, when we examine them, we find clear indications that the whole series of *missae catechumenorum*, which extends throughout the six weeks of Lent, consists of two distinct parts, one for the first three weeks in Lent, and the other for the last three—'in traditione symboli'. It appears to me that the first series of services is generally later than the second, but that the series of lessons originally belonging to the second series has been transferred to the first, and a new series added for the second half of Lent.

It is also well known that the Epiphany was in Spain and Gaul the second great day for public baptisms—an imitation, doubtless, of the Palestinian custom of baptism on that day in the Jordan: and the Fourth Canon of the first Council of Saragossa, A.D. 381, seems to refer to a period of three weeks' preparation for the Epiphany baptism, although it mentions only the continuous devotion of the people. 'Item legit: Viginti et uno die quo a XVI Kalendas Ianuarias usque in diem Epiphaniae, qui est VIII Idus Ianuarias, continuis diebus nulli liceat de ecclesia absentare' (Bruns *Canones* ii p. 13). Just as in the case of Lent the period of preparation of the candidates for Baptism would easily develop into a period of solemn preparation of the faithful for the festival.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I would suggest also that it is to this Western custom that Socrates refers (*H. E.* v 22), when he alleges the custom of a three weeks' fast before Easter at Rome. Socrates was not personally well acquainted with Western customs, and may easily have supposed that an established Western custom was the custom at Rome.

<sup>2</sup> After the adoption of the feast of the Nativity on December 25, this feast appears to have become (in both Gaul and Spain) a baptismal day, although the

It seems quite possible that the passage ascribed to St Hilary refers to such a time of solemn preparation of three weeks before the Epiphany. The writer is speaking, not of any season of Advent, but of the coming of Christ, which was celebrated at the Epiphany before the Nativity was separated off as a separate commemoration of the birth of Christ; and he gives a reason why the Church annually arouses herself to celebrate the coming of Christ by a preparatory period of three weeks—'sanctamater Ecclesia Salvatoris adventum annuo recurso per trium septimanarum secretum spatium sibi (*lege sese*) incitavit'.<sup>1</sup>

I do not know whether Dr Mercati has other reasons for rejecting the alleged authorship of St Hilary for this fragment, but I would submit that the interpretation suggested above is a legitimate one, and that it would fit in with the circumstances of St Hilary's time.

The period of three weeks mentioned in the Canon above is expressly stated to begin on XVI Kalendas Januarias, i.e. on December 17: it would be interesting to discover whether this fact has any connexion with the (later) commemoration of the Annunciation on December 18, and the use of the Advent antiphons from December 17, first evensong of the Annunciation, up till Christmas.<sup>2</sup>

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fact has left no traces in the existing service-books, such as we find in the services for the Epiphany. Still it is possible that (at least in some places) the three weeks' preparation before the Epiphany may have been transformed into three weeks before Christmas, and that the fragment refers to this custom and not that suggested above. In the lack of evidence this possibility, however, is hardly worth considering.

<sup>1</sup> May not *ad vocationem gentium* (l. 11 of the fragment) be accepted as equivalent to *ad vocandas gentes*?

<sup>2</sup> In some of the French diocesan sequences of colours, white is found for the last week of Advent. Can this be a reminiscence?