

THE EARLY CULTUS OF THE RESERVED EUCHARIST.

IN re-editing last year the *History of the Holy Eucharist in Great Britain* by the late Fr Bridgett, I ventured, perhaps a little rashly, to commit myself in a footnote to the following statement: 'The strange thing is that in all the Christian literature of the first thousand years no one has apparently yet found a single clear and definite statement that any person visited a church in order to pray before the body of Christ, which was kept upon the altar; while, on the other hand, we do begin to find such statements by degrees more and more explicitly made from the twelfth and thirteenth century onwards.' In a notice of this work which appears in *The Church Quarterly Review* of October 1909, the writer quotes the first part of this sentence and expresses his dissent. 'Is not,' he asks (p. 203), 'the passage in the *Orations* of St Gregory of Nazianzus, in which he describes how in her illness his sister Gorgonia by night "betook herself to the Physician of all, and fell down before the altar in faith, calling on Him who is honoured thereon" such an instance?'

This passage (*Orat.* viii 18) is of course a very well-known one. Both by Corblet (*Histoire de l'Eucharistie*) and by Raible (*Der Tabernakel einst und jetzt*), to which books I had referred in the same note, it is quoted as evidence of an early practice of visiting the Blessed Sacrament.¹ The latter writer indeed calls it 'ein klassisches Beispiel der Besuchung oder Visitatio SS. Sacramenti'. I should be glad enough to be able to interpret the passage in the same sense as the reviewer and Messrs Raible and Corblet; but surely it offers some serious difficulties. As the question of the cultus of the reserved Eucharist in the early Christian centuries is one of importance in its bearing upon modern practice, I am encouraged to ask for space to discuss these difficulties here.

The text of the passage runs as follows:—

Τί σὺν ἡ μεγάλη καὶ τῶν μεγίστων ἀξία ψυχῆ, καὶ τίς ἡ ἰατρεία τοῦ πάθους; ἐνταῦθα γὰρ ἦδη καὶ τὸ ἀπόρητον. Πάντων ἀπογοῦσα τῶν ἄλλων, ἐπὶ τὸν πάντων ἰατρὸν καταφεύγει, καὶ νυκτὸς ἄωριαν τηρήσασα, μικρὸν ἐνδούσης αὐτῇ τῆς νόσου, τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ προσπίπτει μετὰ τῆς πίστεως, καὶ τὸν ἐπ' αὐτῷ τιμώμενον ἀνακαλουμένη μεγάλη τῇ βοῇ καὶ πάσαις ταῖς κλήσεσι, καὶ

¹ The passage is also constantly referred to by Bossuet and his opponents in the controversy upon the question of Communion under two kinds. See Bossuet *Œuvres*, ed. 1827, vol. xl pp. 48 and 374.

πασῶν αὐτὸν τῶν πρόποτε δυνάμεων ὑπομνήσασα, σοφὴ γὰρ ἐκείνη καὶ τὰ παλαιὰ καὶ τὰ νέα, τέλος εὐσεβῆ τινα καὶ καλὴν ἀναισχυντίαν ἀναισχυντεῖ μιμείται τὴν τοῖς κρασπέδοις Χριστοῦ ξηράνασαν πηγὴν αἵματος. Καὶ τί ποιεῖ; Τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἑαυτῆς προσθείσα μετὰ τῆς ἰσῆς βοῆς, καὶ δάκρυσι τοῦτο πλουσίοις, ὡσπέρ τις πάλαι τοὺς πόδας Χριστοῦ, καταβρέχουσα, καὶ μὴ πρότερον ἀνήσειν, ἢ τῆς ὑγιείας τυχεῖν ἀπειλοῦσα· εἶτα τῷ παρ' ἑαυτῆς φαρμάκῳ τοῦτ' τὸ σῶμα πᾶν ἐπαλείφουσα, καὶ εἴ ποῦ τι τῶν ἀντιτύπων τοῦ τιμίου σώματος ἢ τοῦ αἵματος ἢ χεῖρ ἐθησαύρισην, τοῦτο καταμιγνύσα τοῖς δάκρυσιν, ὧ τοῦ θαύματος, ἀπῆλθεν εἰθὺς αἰσθημένη τῆς σωτηρίας, κούφη καὶ σῶμα καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ διάνοιαν, μισθὸν ἐλπίδος λαβοῦσα τὸ ἐπιζόμενον, καὶ τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς εὐρωστία κομισαμένη τὴν τοῦ σώματος. Ταῦτα μεγάλα μὲν, οὐ ψευδῆ δέ.

Now, of course, if we start with the conviction that by the words 'Him who is honoured thereon' (τὸν ἐπ' αὐτῷ τιμώμενον) is meant Christ who is continually present upon the altar, the question is at an end. But have we any reason to assume that the arrangement which we commonly see in churches at the present day, and according to which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved upon the high altar, was practised in the days of St Gregory? I know of none, except such reason as is furnished by what we find in the remainder of this extract. Taken by itself it seems to me that when we read in any early document of a person visiting a church to pray to 'Him who is honoured upon' the altar,¹ we cannot legitimately infer more than that the devotee wished to pray to God who is honoured and present 'upon' that altar every time the holy Liturgy is celebrated there. In other words, as I conceive, the early Christians visited a church, not as the place in which Christ constantly dwelt, but as a place which He frequented. If there were evidence forthcoming *aliunde* that at this period the reserved Eucharist was permanently kept upon the altar, the case would be different; but is there any evidence sufficient to prove this? The passage of Optatus of Milevis which is often appealed to in this connexion (*de schis. Don.* vi 1; Migne *P. L.* xi c. 1066) seems distinctly to tell the other way. The altar is there no doubt called *sedes et corporis et sanguinis Christi*, and it is even referred to as the place *ubi corpus Christi habitabat*; but on the other hand all this must be interpreted according to the words which describe the altar in the same context as the place 'where Christ's body and blood dwelt for a certain brief space' ('Quid vos offenderat Christus cuius illic per certa momenta corpus et sanguis habitabant?')

None the less, I may possibly be told, it is precisely what follows in the present extract which puts the matter beyond dispute. Did not

¹ It has been suggested to me that ἐπ' αὐτῷ need mean no more than 'at it.'

Gorgonia put forth her hand, take from the altar the Body and Blood of Christ, and anoint herself therewith ?

The passage is by no means clear, and I am not even sure what is the precise interpretation adopted by my critic ; but there seem at any rate to be three main possibilities.

(a) Gorgonia brought with her in her hand, or fetched from her chamber, a portion of 'the antitypes of the precious body *or* blood'.

This is clearly the interpretation followed by Bossuet and Corblet, and is perhaps the most common.

(b) Gorgonia took from a receptacle upon the altar 'the antitypes of the body or blood' which she mingled with her tears.

This I imagine to be the interpretation preferred by my critic, because otherwise he has no reason to suppose a visit to the Blessed Sacrament to be meant, or to assume that the Eucharist was reserved in the church. As already observed, the prayer 'to Him who is honoured upon the altar' by itself does not prove this.

This also appears to be the interpretation implied in Dr Darwell Stone's translation of the passage in his *History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*.¹

'Placing her head on the altar, with another great cry and with a wealth of tears like one who of old bedewed the feet of Christ, and declaring that she would not let go until she was made well, she then applied to her whole body this medicine which she had, even such a portion of the antitypes of the honourable body and (*sic*) blood as she treasured in her hand and mingled with this act her tears.'

(c) Gorgonia visited the altar as God's resting-place, and then put out her hand in the hope of finding some few crumbs or traces of the sacred species, such as would hardly fail to be left where the liturgy was frequently celebrated.

This, though not free from difficulty, is the explanation which seems to me the most satisfactory.

And first, the puzzle obviously created by interpretation (a) is this. Why, if Gorgonia already had the Blessed Eucharist in her possession, did she consider it necessary to go to the church and throw herself before the altar? Still more, why should she do this at the dead of night, waiting until there was some temporary amelioration in her illness? If she had wished to 'anoint' herself with the sacred species, as of course we know from St Cyril of Jerusalem that Christians did in a partial way when receiving the chalice, it would have been easy for her to do this in her chamber when her illness was at its worst. Even if we assume that the Eucharist was reserved upon the altar, the

¹ Vol. i pp. 106 f.

description given by St Gregory, and especially the oratorical effect as of a climax of pious audacity—a sudden inspiration—which is conspicuous in the passage, does not seem to me to fit the case of one who had deliberately brought the Holy Eucharist down with her in her hand knowing quite well what she was going to do.

With regard to interpretation (*b*), it has been pointed out to me that the aorist ἐθησαύρισεν implies a momentary act of appropriation. It is not, as Dr Stone's rendering implies, that Gorgonia 'treasured' something she already possessed, but that she then and there 'made' something 'her treasure', 'took possession of' it. And the whole indefinite form of the statement and especially the conjunction ἢ, instead of καί (εἰ πού τι τῶν ἀντιτύπων τοῦ τιμίον σώματος ἢ τοῦ αἵματος ἢ χεῖρ ἐθησαύρισεν), which Dr Stone ignores in his translation, seems ill to describe the act of one who deliberately opens a receptacle and takes out what is contained there. Besides, it is, to say the least, doubtful, whether the Eucharist was so commonly reserved under the species of wine as to make it likely that St Gregory would suggest such an alternative.

I am inclined then to regard (*c*) as offering the most probable solution. Gorgonia, after protracted suffering, awaits an opportunity when she can throw herself unobserved before the altar of God. Moved with the spirit of the woman with the issue of blood, she clings to the altar and tells Him she will not let go until she be made well. She bedews her body not with 'this already mentioned remedy she had', but with 'this remedy which came from herself' (τῷ παρ' ἐαυτῆς φαρμάκῳ τούτῳ), i. e. her tears—tears of faith like those of the woman who was a sinner—mingling with these tears whatever crumbs or traces of the species of the sacred body or blood her (moist) hand had enriched itself with. Dr Darwell Stone seems to understand 'this medicine which she had' as the Blessed Sacrament itself, and he makes the following καί explanatory, 'even such a portion of the antitypes', &c.; but I do not clearly see the need for this violence.

There is one more difficulty, a historical one. Had Gorgonia received baptism at the time this incident occurred? When she died, it is Gregory himself tells us so, she had only *recently* been baptized (*Orat.* viii 14 and 20). But this sickness from which she recovered by miracle was not her last sickness. Moreover, Gregory speaks with admiration of her keeping the miracle concealed, and he implies (*cap.* 16) that he and Faustinus, bishop of Iconium, who alone shared the secret, had known it and kept silence for some time. If we may suppose that Gorgonia was still unbaptized when this miraculous cure took place, her pious audacity in clasping the altar and watering it with her tears is thrown into higher relief; moreover, we can conceive that one unbaptized might adopt this course, seeing that to receive, touch,

or even look upon the Holy Eucharist in the ordinary way with the rest of the initiated was necessarily denied her. Like the Canaanitish woman she may have bethought herself that the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

In any case—and that is the only point for which I am contending—this story of the miraculous cure of Gorgonia offers too many points of ambiguity to allow us to appeal to it for proof that the Christians of the fourth century were accustomed to visit the churches in order to pray before the Blessed Eucharist reserved there. I should be glad enough to meet with evidence which would establish satisfactorily the high antiquity of such a practice; but I do not think that we can find it in the passage before us.

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THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT.

I

THE BENEVENTO MS.

IN a review of the Monte Cassino edition of the *Regula S. Benedicti*, 1900, in *J. T. S.* of April 1902,¹ I sketched in outline the broad facts of the MS tradition of St Benedict's Rule, and indicated the chief problems that an editor has to face. As I now have in hand myself, not a scientific edition (for this is in course of preparation by Dr. H. Plenkens for the Vienna Corpus), but an 'editio critico-practica', aiming at providing a good text in a form suitable for everyday use in Benedictine houses, I wish to clear up a point of great critical importance left open on the former occasion; in order that I may be able in my edition to use the result without more discussion than a reference to this Note.

The point at issue is one raised by the late Prof. Traube in his admirable *Textgeschichte der Regula S. Benedicti*.² Not to repeat what was said in the former article, it will suffice to state that at Monte Cassino in the eighth century was a copy of the Rule believed to be St Benedict's autograph. Whether really the autograph or not (and eminent critics, as Traube, hold that it was), it certainly contained the best text of the Rule known to us, and an editor's duty is to get back to it as closely as the extant materials will allow. A copy of it was made for Charles the Great, and of the offspring of this copy several members still exist. A Cassinese MS (Cassinese by origin) of the early part of the tenth century contains a text of the Rule manifestly derived from the 'autograph'; and the question at issue is: Is it one of

¹ Vol. iii p. 458.

² München, 1898, pp. 107-109.