

origin of circumcision on Rom. ii 26 Pelagius suggests that it was instituted either 'ut cognosceretur dei populus inter gentes', or 'ut corpora eorum agnoscerentur in bello'. A parallel from Origen-Rufinus was mentioned in Article III, 14: compare also Tac. *Hist.* v 5 'circumcidere genitalia instituerunt (Iudaei), ut diuersitate noscantur'.

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BYRHTFERTH AND THE LIFE OF ST OSWALD

BYRHTFERTH, monk of Ramsey, represents the highest point of scientific learning in England at the opening of the eleventh century. He had been the pupil of Abbo of Fleury, who had taught at Ramsey for two years, 985-7. Besides his mathematical and astronomical knowledge Byrhtferth had a wide acquaintance with ancient authors, and he wrote fluently not only in his native language but also in the florid Latin of his day, which was a travesty of the more elegant though redundant and Greek-bespattered diction of St Aldhelm. I remember asking Edmund Bishop to guide me to the modern sources of information about his works, and he told me it was a disgrace to our English scholarship that he could only refer me to Richard Wülker's *Grundriss z. Gesch. d. angelsächsischen Litteratur* (1885). Since that date, I am told, there has been a good dissertation on him, but again in German, by Classen: *Über d. Leben und d. Schriften Byrhtferth's* (Dresden, 1896). The neglect of Byrhtferth in our own country is painfully illustrated by the meagre account of him in the *Dictionary of English Biography* (1886) by that very careful scholar Henry Bradley. At last, it would seem, justice is to be done to his memory in his native land.

In the latest issue of the *Early English Text Society* there has just appeared the first volume of Byrhtferth's *Manual*, now edited in full for the first time by Mr S. J. Crawford of University College, Southampton; and a second volume containing the Introduction, notes, &c., is to follow shortly. This *Manual*, together with other writings attributed to him, gives him in the editor's opinion 'a place second only to that of the Venerable Bede in the history of Anglo-Saxon science'. Its composition is of the strangest: it seems to represent materials for lectures and is illustrated by a series of diagrams. It begins in Latin, but almost at once the author repeats himself in his own tongue; and the two languages alternate, with a considerable and ever-increasing preponderance of the Old English, until in the last section Latin holds the field. The main subject is what was known as the 'Computus', and

the treatment of it is based on Bede (*de temporum ratione*) and other writers ; but it is highly flavoured with theological remarks, and interspersed with appeals to his pupils and illustrations calculated to hold their attention. An excellent translation by the editor on alternate pages makes it easy and amusing reading. Where Byrhtferth is following his authorities his Latin is sober enough ; but in his interjected paragraphs and in his *Preface* to Bede's work on the same subject (printed as an appendix in this book)¹ we are given excellent examples of the efflorescent rhetoric which he delighted to employ ; and it is with this exaggerated style that we are here more directly concerned.

Few in England even knew of Byrhtferth's name before Stubbs in his *Memorials of St Dunstan* elaborately discussed and set aside Mabillon's conjecture that he was the 'B. presbyter' who, about the year 1000, wrote the earliest *Life of St Dunstan*. The present editor of the *Manual*, while noting Stubbs's verdict, has surprised us by attributing to Byrhtferth the authorship of what is known as the 'Anonymous Life of St Oswald'. This more secure title to fame is proposed and skilfully defended in a separate essay, published simultaneously with the first volume of the *Manual*.² The argument runs thus : Byrhtferth was a monk of Oswald's most famous foundation : born about 960, he would have been a young man of twenty-five when he was a pupil of Abbo : he must have been well acquainted with Oswald, who lived till 992 : he wrote his *Manual* in 1011, and in it the saint's name is mentioned with the deepest reverence. But again, the author of the *Life of St Oswald* is obviously a Ramsey monk, 'intimately acquainted with St Dunstan, St Oswald, Eadnoth and Abbo, and schooled in the Fleury tradition' : he writes while Ælfric († 1005) is still archbishop of Canterbury, indeed before Abbo's death in 1004. Place and date therefore are in favour of the suggested identification.

But the strength of the argument lies in the extraordinary parallels of style and vocabulary which Mr Crawford has collected from the *Life of St Oswald* and the authenticated works of Byrhtferth. Even when account has been taken of the immense influence of St Aldhelm († 709) on the writers of the tenth century, we cannot fail to be impressed by the list of resemblances ; especially since a number of them point to the fact that the author of the *Life* 'shews a considerable knowledge of science and the liberal arts'. I cannot do more here than comment on a few items of special interest.

¹ See also an article on Byrhtferth's *Preface*, which includes a discussion of the authenticity of works attributed to him, by Prof. G. F. Forsey in *Speculum* (Oct. 1928).

² Reprinted from '*Speculum Religionis*, presented to Claude G. Montefiore' (Oxford).

(1) On p. 172 of the *Manual* mention is made of 'those works which are called *Ilias* and *Odissia Omeri* and *Eneidos Virgilii*'. Now the very first words of the *Life* are: 'Cum solleter *Ilias* et *Odysssia* atque *Aeneidos Virgilii* sint exarata . . .'. The passage in the *Manual*, as Mr Crawford shews, is derived from Bede *de arte metrica* (Giles, vi 78): 'ut sunt scripta et *Ilias* et *Odyssea* *Homeri* et *Aeneis Virgilii*'. But it is worth while further to note the ungrammatical genitive which twice takes the place of 'Aeneis': so strange an aberration would seem hardly possible in two independent authors, did we not read in Aldhelm *de metris* 83, 4: 'veluti est *Ilias* *Homeri* et *Aeneidos* *Vergilii*'.

Now the context in Aldhelm is quite different: he is illustrating the 'heroic' kind of hexameter. And, strange to say, the aberrant genitive does not originate with him. He has borrowed the whole passage from the 'Excerpta' of Audax, who has taken it from Victorinus (*de metris*): Aldhelm read 'Aeneidos' in his copy of Audax, but Victorinus wrote 'Aeneis'.¹

It is indeed surprising that Aldhelm should have written 'Aeneidos' for 'Aeneis', even though he found it in the manuscript from which he was copying. But write it he did, and the fact makes it less surprising that the same error should appear two centuries later in a writer (or writers) with whom he was so great an authority.

(2) A corrupt passage in the *Life* (p. 430) illustrates the author's interest in the calendar, and also his tiresome parade of ecclesiastical learning, which confused the text when it came to be copied by a scribe who could not follow him. What he wants to tell us is that on 29 August St Oswald came to visit the temporary buildings of the new settlement at Ramsey.

Postquam grati autumni tempus mortalibus advenit, et Aeternos (*sic*) septimanas perfecit, venit iustitiae amator ad locum sibi valde carum, qua die colebatur festivitas de qua poeta cecinit ita, '*Bis binis*'. Satis apte evenit ut in illius die ad eremum veniret, quem semper dilexisse eremum novit, sicut canit sancta ecclesia.

If for 'et Aeternos' we read 'et ternas', we shall be able to recover the meaning. Autumn begins on VII Id. Aug. (= 7 Aug.), as we may learn from Byrhtferth's *Manual* (cf. Bede *de temp. rat.* xxxv: Giles, vi 218). If we add three weeks we come to 28 August. It was at the end of this period that Oswald came to Ramsey. To put it another way, it was on the feast of which the poet sang, *Bis binis* [*passus colitur baptista Ioannes*]²—if we may complete the verse from the *Martyrologium*

¹ Keil *Grammatici Latini* vi 209, vii 327: see Ehwald's great edition of St Aldhelm (pp. xix and 83) in *Monum. Germ. Histor.* (*Auct. Antiq.* xv), published in 1919.

Poeticum (Giles, i 52)¹—that is 29 August, the Beheadal of St John Baptist. It was meet that he should come to the *eremus* on the day of that saint who loved the *eremus*, as Holy Church sings. The reference may be to the hymn at Lauds on the feast of the Nativity of the Baptist (24 June), where we find the words :

Praepotens martyr eremique cultor,

though the Roman breviary, preferring metre to meaning, now reads 'nemorumque cultor'.

It is curious to note that two pages further on the scribe of the *Life* has again fallen a victim to the pedantry of his author :

Erat enim, ut praefati sumus, autumnno tempore ter ternae exactae ebdomadae cum ad praefatum sanctus vir cum sociis venit locum, in quo sollicito curavit autumare cuncta bona, replendo horreum triticeo frumento aliisque seminibus.

Here we should probably read 'Erant' for 'Erat', and certainly cancel 'ter' before 'ternae'. With 'autumare' we may compare the *Manual* p. 92 : 'Autumnus, propter autumationem', and Bede *de temp. rat.* xxxv (Giles, vi 219) : 'Autumnus, de autumatione fructuum qui in eo colliguntur'.

(3) In describing Oswald's character when he was first made a bishop, his biographer writes (p. 421) : 'Erat enim, ut egregius ait agonista Paulus, *irreprehensibilis*', &c. Already he had said (p. 404), in speaking of Archbishop Oda's youth : 'Sicut celeberrimus agonista Paulus ait : *Quae sursum sunt, filii, quaerite, non quae super terram*' ; and we may note that here he has used the word 'egregius' already in the preceding sentence.² Now the phrase 'egregius agonista' occurs as a description of St Paul in a long series of Anglo-Saxon charters, of which something will be said presently. Meanwhile it concerns us to note that the rare word 'agonista' is also used of St Paul by Byrhtferth towards the end of his *Manual* (p. 228) : 'Quindecim diebus mansit Paulus agonista praecipuus cum apostolorum principe Petro.'

The phrase has doubtless come from Aldhelm (*de Virgin.* 230) : 'De quibus egregius agonista et divini sermonis dogmatista *Omnes inquit currunt, unus tamen accipit bravium.*' When we look further back for the word 'agonista', it is not easy to find it. In the Benedictine edition of St Augustine (v 1329) we read towards the end of *Serm.* 343 :

Adiuvat certamen qui certamen indixit. Non enim sic te deus expectat certantem, ut populus aurigam : clamare novit, adiuvarum non

¹ Ascribed to Bede, but shewn by Dom Quentin to be a production of the school of York, probably when Alcuin was a school-boy there : see *Les Martyrologes Historiques* (Paris, 1908) pp. 121-130, and E. Bishop *Bosworth Psalter* p. 147.

² He uses 'agonista providus' of Oswald himself on p. 415.

novit. Non sic te deus expectat certantem, ut agonista expectat athletam; coronam foeneam parat, vires subministrare laboranti non novit; nec enim potest, homo enim est, non deus.

Here, however, 'agonista' is used in contrast to 'athleta', where we should have expected the common word 'agonitheta'. Others may perhaps be able to add to these references from writers upon whom Aldhelm may have been in a position to draw, but his careful editor gives us no help at all.

It is therefore of special interest to read in the Latin translation of Irenaeus (iv 37, 7: Harv. ii, p. 290 f):

Propter hoc autem et Paulus apostolus ait Corinthiis: *Nescitis quoniam hi qui in studio currunt, omnes quidem currunt, sed unus accipit bravium? Sic currite ut apprehendatis. Omnis enim qui agonisatur in omnibus continens est . . . ipse reprobus efficiar.* Bonus igitur agonista ad incorruptelae agonem adhortatur nos . . .

This certainly looks like the fountain-head of the phrase 'egregius agonista': at any rate it makes perfectly plain the sense in which it was applied to St Paul.¹ Can we venture to suppose that Aldhelm drew it directly from the Latin translation of Irenaeus? In view of the extraordinary range of his learning the supposition is not outside the bounds of possibility. The Latin Irenaeus, which is now thought to be a North-African work of the latter part of the fourth century, had become so rare a book that 'in the time of Gregory the Great (about 600) no copy could be found either at Lyons or at Rome'.² But even if Hadrian could not have brought it from Italy in 670, it might have reached England through Ireland or Spain. Moreover, the latest researches divide the chief MSS into two groups, of which the more important is said to come from an ancestor written in England or North France before the time of Charlemagne. We must leave it at that, and proceed, for the sake of the few who are concerned with the investigation of Anglo-Saxon charters, to trace the occurrence of the phrase and its counterparts in this strange welter of genuine and spurious documents.

In Birch's *Cartularium Saxonicum* there are eight charters in which the proem begins with 'Egregius agonista', and which claim dates between 938 and 975. One of these (no. 734), a Winchester grant of 939, was accepted by the late W. H. Stevenson as an original charter of King Athelstan. Its Latinity is characteristic of the charter language of the day:

Aegregius agonista sermocinatus est in scripturis divinis *Omnia quae videntur temporalia sunt, quae autem non videntur aeterna.* Idcirco superflue utentibus divinus sermo, ut supra taxati sumus,

¹ The editor's translation of Byrhtferth (p. 229) calls for correction accordingly.

² *Novum Testamentum S. Irenaei* (Oxf. 1923) p. lxxvii.

terribiliter praemonet ut huius saeculi caduca contempnentes spiritaliaque imitantes caelestia properemus ad regna.

Two other charters (nos. 728, 730) are dated in the preceding year, but are of less certain authenticity. The next is an absurd forgery made up from an Athelstan charter, and pretending to be a charter of King Alfred, attested by his son Edward, but by an oversight keeping the date 939. Then three are ascribed to King Edmund (nos. 752, 798, 814), probably all forgeries. Lastly, we have one (no. 1312) from King Edgar in 975. Here, however, only the first seven words of the poem have been used, and the quotation is changed from 2 Cor. iv 18 to Heb. iv 13. This is preserved in the British Museum, and is perhaps genuine.

One other charter has 'Egregius agonista'; but it is followed by 'sancte predicationis hortatur' (for 'hortator') with text Heb. iv 13. This (no. 955) is an Abingdon charter, claiming to come from King Edwy in 956. Then, without the epithet 'egregius', we have 'Agonista sanctae predicationis hortator' and the same text in four others (nos. 830, 866, 867, 901): they come from various chartularies, and we cannot be sure that they are genuine.

Finally, we have in one charter (no. 784) 'idem ipse agonista'. But there are also two charters in which 'agonista' has been displaced: no. 803 'egregius predicator Paulus et apostolici certaminis conluctor'; and no. 986 'egregius symphonista sanctae predicationis hortator'. And what are we to make of 'egregius praedicator et sapiens Trichelaus' (followed by 'quamdiu sumus in corpore peregrinamur a domino') in no. 642, which seems to be a genuine charter of King Athelstan in 925?

An apology is due for this disquisition. If the phrase were not so strange and rare, it would indeed be absurd to spend time on it. But it is a literary curiosity, not without significance; and it serves to illustrate the influence of Aldhelm on the Latin style of centuries after his death.

It would be premature to come to a conclusion in regard to Mr Crawford's attractive suggestion as to the authorship of the *Life of St Oswald*, until the publication of his second volume enables us to study the *Manual* more closely by the help of his Introduction, notes, and index. Meanwhile a word or two of caution will not be out of place. The abundance of coincidences in phrase and material to which he has pointed must not lead us to forget that among the pupils of Abbo at Ramsey there may have been contemporaries of Byrhtferth who had the same training in the older literature as himself, one of whom might have had no less capacity of commemorating the virtues and achievements of the saintly founder.

Again, it is important to bear in mind—what is too often overlooked—that a judgement based on style must take account of other elements than vocabulary and phraseology. It is in the construction of sentences and the use of connecting particles that the surest tests are to be found. One example of this may be useful here.

The use in the *Life* of the relative pronoun *qui* is so abnormally loose that many a sentence has to be read twice before we get at the author's meaning. Thus on p. 449, in the description of the treacherous murder of King Edward, we read :

Erat doctus divina lege, docente episcopo Sidemanno, qui et robustus erat corpore et durus. Namque cum insidiatores . . .

It is the king's robustness, not the bishop's, that is referred to. Then on the next page the final stage of the struggle is thus vividly described :

At ille prout potuit voce perstrepuit, 'Quid facitis frangentes dexteram meam?' et subito prosiluit de equo, qui et mortuus est.

It was the king, not the horse, that was dead. These are extreme examples of a looseness of construction of which I have counted more than forty instances in the seventy-six pages of the *Life*. On the other hand, in the Latin portions of the *Manual* and in the *Preface* of Byrhtferth to Bede's *de temporibus* I have not found a single instance of strained or ambiguous use of the relative pronoun. It is true that here we have no extent of continuous narrative to offer material for comparison : but yet the contrast cannot lightly be dismissed.

As curiosities of construction we may note the inversion 'quo in', which comes twice in the *Life* (pp. 426, 435) ; and the very frequent use of the passive infinitive instead of the active, as on p. 420 'coepit eum amplexibus foveri'. It occurs too often to be explained away on palaeographical grounds : at any rate we cannot so account for 'quis roboratus ingenio Homeri potest exprimi?' Once again, the recurrence of the adjectival form strikes the reader in the phrases 'privilegio honore' (p. 410), 'privilegio affectu' (p. 421), 'privilegio amore' (p. 477).

A few of the author's repeated phrases may be added here, without intention of drawing any argument from them :

Aeterni denarii palmam, 424, perpetui denarii palman, 422 (cf. 470) : cum Aquatico dignissimo, 1, sub eximio Aquatico, 411 (= Moses) : liliolo . . . radio, 403, liliolo nitore, 409 : dux Niliaci regni, 413, regem . . . Niliaci regni, 431, Niliaci regis, 451 : Jordanico flumine, 400, 422 (= Baptism) : non reminiscens cygneam canitiem sui capitis, 456, oblitus cygneam capitis sui canitiem, 471 : in arvis . . . in astris, 420 (422 in terris), 441-442, 448, 471, 472.

This much by way of precaution at this stage of the enquiry. If the

reader will look at Mr Crawford's table of parallels, he will see how much there is to be set in the balance against these tentative objections. It is quite possible, as indeed it is to be hoped, that the decision will go in his favour. Be that as it may, he has earned our gratitude by calling fresh attention to a biography which deserves to be carefully re-edited and minutely criticized on account of its exceptional importance, literary, ecclesiastical and historical, to every serious student of the obscure but fascinating tenth century.

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'MY FATHER' IN JEWISH THOUGHT OF THE FIRST CENTURY

MR C. G. MONTEFIORE says: 'The divine fatherhood was realized by Jesus with the utmost clearness and intimacy. He would have wished that all his disciples should have realized that fatherhood as closely and fully as he. . . . We certainly do not get in the Hebrew Bible any teacher speaking of God and to God as "Father", "my Father", "your Father", and "our Father", like the Jesus of Matthew. We do not get so habitual and concentrated a use from any Rabbi in the Talmud. And this habitual and concentrated use rightly produces upon us an impression. By it we are led to believe all the more in the truth of the doctrine on which it rests. We are moved by it to wish that we, too, could feel that doctrine, even as Jesus teaches that we ought to feel it; and that we, too, could order our lives in its light and by its strength.'¹ Again, 'The historic Jesus of the first three Gospels can hardly be said to put forth mysticism. But if there is not much mysticism, there is a great deal of intimacy. And one charm, one attraction, one power of this intimacy is that it is so human. Except in a very few, and historically very doubtful, passages, Jesus never implies that his own intimacy and intimate relation with God is not possible for others.'²

Again, 'Jesus felt and realized God to be his Father, himself to be His son, with vivid intensity. And if God was the father of Jesus, so was He, so did He desire Himself to be felt, the father of other men. He was the father of the unjust and the sinner, as He was the father of the righteous and the just. . . . The fatherhood of God implies, then, to Jesus that God cares for man, and is always near him, even as a father

¹ *The Old Testament and After*, 1923, pp. 204-206.

² *Ibid.*, p. 284.