

A SUMMARY OF RECENT CRITICISM OF "THE ODES OF SOLOMON."

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THE present trend of opinion among scholars concerning the character of the *Odes of Solomon* seems so far to follow the usual course adopted by them in 1910-1916, that is, each one is still endeavouring to look at them from the angle of vision which is best adapted to his own way of thinking. So Dr. M. Gaster finds that the Odes are thoroughly Jewish in origin, emanating from some Israelitish mystics of the first or second century of the Christian era. He says in effect: "With the elimination of a few passages, the whole collection has a typical Jewish aspect, and is unquestionably of Jewish origin. It is thus an important contribution to ancient Jewish Hymnology. . . . The *Psalms of Solomon* now form part of the collection in which the Odes are also included, and it is an idle attempt to separate one from the other."¹ That the Odes, however, are thoroughly Christian (or at the most Judæo-Christian) in character may now be considered as established, in spite of the isolated opinion of a few dissentient critics.

The best review that has appeared of the edition of the Odes recently published under the auspices of the John Rylands Library is undoubtedly that of the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin.² Dr. Bernard is a man who is to be reckoned with in any rôle he assumes in discussions, be it that of a protagonist or an antagonist. Whether one agrees with his views or not, one is bound to say that they always strike a note of originality, especially in the domain of Patristics and Liturgiology. So with regard to the puzzling vv. 8-9 of Ode XIX:—

¹ *The Jewish Guardian*, for September, 1920, p. 6.

² In *Theology*, 1920, pp. 288-98, and in *Church Quarterly Review*, 1920, pp. 163-67.

And she travailed and brought forth a son without incurring pain
 For it did not happen without purpose ;
 And she had not required a midwife
 For He (God) delivered her

Bernard refers us to a very appropriate saying of Origen and to its ultimate source, which is Isa. lxvi. 7, " Before she travailed, she brought forth ; before her pain came she was delivered of a man child ". The value of this prophetic sentence would have increased tenfold had Isaiah written it in English, because it might also have served to throw some light on v. 10 of the Ode, " And she brought forth, as a man, by (God's) will ". Unfortunately the words appearing in English as " man child " are a free translation of the Hebrew ZKR, meaning simply *male*. However that may be, Bernard's reference is certainly valuable. In his review Bernard has expressed in a rather strong language disapproval of some of our own views on the matter. With a few of the theories adopted by him we venture to disagree, and the reasons for our disagreement will be very succinctly exposed in the following lines for his consideration.

On ff. 288-89 Bernard quotes one of the rubrics of the morning office in the Syriac *Testamentum Domini* to the following effect : " Let them sing psalms, and four hymns of praise ; one by Moses, and of Solomon and of the other prophets," and adds that in this rubric a distinction is drawn between *psalms* and *hymns of praise* of Moses, and of Solomon and the prophets—i.e. between the Canonical psalter and the *ψδαί* of the Eastern Church, and concludes " It seems to me fairly certain that we have here a trace of the use of the Odes in public worship in the Syrian Church ". That the Odes were probably in use in the West Syrian Church we have demonstrated by a more direct evidence in our own book (p. 132), but we question Bernard's " fairly certain " opinion that the above quotation can lead us to the same conclusion.

The words used in the rites and breviaries of the Syrian Church to express psalms are *mazmōra* (very common), *tishbohta*,¹ and *Zmirta*,² and in case a distinction is drawn between psalms of David and any other psalms, the word *mazmōra* is retained exclusively for the psalter, and the word *tishbohta* (hymn of praise) is used for any

¹ See Wright's *Brit. Mus. Cat. of Syr. MSS.*, I, pp. 116, 119, etc.

² *Ibid.*, p. 132, etc.

other hymn ; now every psalter of the Syrian Church contains the 150 psalms of David, and from 1 to 12 *hymns of praise* among which is always one by Moses (Exod. xv. 1-21, and Deut. xxxii. 1-43), and very often one by Isaiah (xxvi. 9-19, and xliii. 10-13).¹ In the public libraries of East and West we have Syriac psalters written about a century before the date of the translation of the Syriac *Testamentum* and none of them ascribes any of the twelve *hymns of praise* that it contains to Solomon.

Further, the word used to express Odes in both the Syriac manuscripts of the Odes and Psalms of Solomon is *Zmirta*, which is never used in the terminology of the Syrian Church to express "hymn of praise" in the contrast established with the Davidic psalms. The word used in the *Testamentum Domini* to render "hymn of praise" is *tishbohta* and not *Zmirta*, and this word cannot refer to any Odes of Solomon. It is, therefore, technically improbable that the *hymns of praise* spoken of in the Syriac *Testamentum* should refer to our Odes of Solomon.

What is, then, the precise meaning of the words "and of Solomon" used in the *Testamentum*? Cooper and Maclean² have conjectured that they refer to the "Song of Songs". In favour of their opinion we may state that the book of the Salomonic "Song of Songs" is appended sometimes to the four Gospels for use in Church services,³ but against their view may be urged the fact that, to our knowledge, no extant Syriac psalter couples any pericope of the Salomonic canticles with the hymns of praise spoken of in the preceding lines. In our edition of the Odes we followed Mgr. I. E. Rahmani,⁴ the editor of the *Testamentum*, who believes that the words "and of Solomon" refer to Psalm 71, which is generally ascribed to Solomon, even in Hebrew. In carefully examining the Syriac text of the *Testamentum*⁵ I became convinced that one may say more in refutation of Bernard's interpretation, but the matter is really a digression from our present subject. A point, however, that Bernard will bear in mind is that the *Testamentum* is speaking here of "Laudatio

¹ See Wright's *Brit. Mus. Cat. of Syr. MSS.*, I, pp. 119-21, etc.

² *The Testament of Our Lord*, 1902, p. 180.

³ See Wright and Cook, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts* (of Cambridge), I, p. 5.

⁴ *Testamentum Domini Nostri*, 1899, p. 208.

⁵ P. 54 (Rahm. edit.).

Aurorae" and not of "Praecepta et canones circa ordinem baptizandorum".

If there was any strong probability that the rubric found in the *Testamentum* referred to our Odes, we should gladly have availed ourselves of it to corroborate some of the views that we have expressed on liturgical points dealing with the history and interpretation of the Salomonic Odes, but the technical reasons given above militated against such a probability, and, much to our regret, we were obliged to abandon the theory now repeated by Bernard.

On p. 295 Bernard objects to our using the Romanized Syrian offices instead of Denzinger's *Ritus Orientalium* in our search for illustrations to the Odes. This, we beg to say, is a great inadvertence on the part of the Provost of Trinity College. We were speaking in our book (p. 132) of the *Breviaries* and not of the *Rites* of the Syrian Church, and surely Bernard is aware of the immense difference existing between the two. So far as the Oriental rites are concerned we read them all in their original texts, and Bernard may find traces of our reading in some pages of our book, but for special reasons of our own we preferred to read them in their original languages rather than in the translation recommended by Bernard. It will interest him to learn that from 1902-1910 I edited all the Oriental rites of one of the most important branches of the Syrian Church; surely, then, Bernard will be prepared to give me the credit of some knowledge of the Oriental rites. As to the *Breviaries* of the Syrian Churches, they are so insufficiently known in Europe that we venture to state that no Western scholar has ever attempted to read them in their totality. We had right, therefore, to expect a word of appreciation from Dr. Bernard for having perused such cumbrous but highly instructive books in order to find possible parallels illustrating the Salomonic Odes.

On p. 295 Bernard is finding fault with us for having translated the v. 3 of Ode XXXVI as follows: (The Spirit) "brought me forth before the face of the Lord; and although a Son of man, I was named the Luminary, the Son of God". Bernard prefers a translation to the effect: "I was named the illuminated one" in order to refer the sentence to the new birth of the baptized (*illuminati*). We would have been very glad to adopt Bernard's translation if the Syriac text had allowed such an interpretation; but unhappily it did

not, and so we must reject his saying: "I submit that this is a case where the old translation, which places the Ode in the mouth of the *illuminatus*, must stand". As a rule Bernard may take it for granted that, unless there are explicit indications to the contrary, the translation which we have adopted for a given verse is the only probable one that may safely be adopted without doing violence to the text.

It is not merely the translation which Bernard prefers that is at fault. His interpretation is, on his own showing, improbable. For if the Odes are not to be taxed with unorthodoxy (and he challenges us for actually doing so) (p. 295) what are we to say of an interpreter who makes a baptized Christian speak of himself in a single breath as

- (a) Son of Man,
- (b) The Luminary,
- (c) Son of God,

all of which we have shown to be proper terms for Jesus Christ to use of himself?

And again, with regard to the orthodoxy of the Odes, which Dr. Bernard wishes to safeguard (a point on which we do not take a dogmatic position), what are we to say of the orthodoxy of a baptized Christian who is made, on Bernard's theory, to declare that the *Lord possessed me from the beginning* (p. 292), that is, "I (the speaker) am the Divine Sophia"? All this certainly points to pre-Nicene theology, but did any early Christian, baptized or not, ever say such a thing?

One word more in this connection: Bernard challenges our translation of the words which we render:—

I was the most glorified among the glorious ones
And the greatest among the great ones.

For the translation we will abide by the judgment of competent Syriac scholars (and if I know any Syriac at all I can assert that the translation adopted by Bernard is improbable); for the interpretation, Bernard tells us that it relates to the spiritual rebirth of "notable Christians," i.e. of a "notable Christian," who recites the Ode in the singular, and is so convinced of his own "notability" that he equates himself with the greatness of the Most High.

We come now to the more important question of the character of the Odes and of the approximate date of their composition. Ber-

nard still clings to his old opinion that the forty-two Odes are baptismal in character, or written with an eye fixed on the sacrament of baptism, and asks us again to reconsider the simple theory that the Odes are hymns of the Catholic Church having special reference to the hopes and rejoicings of the catechumens or the newly baptized. This theory has, he adds, "the advantage of interpreting all the Odes in the same way".¹

In our edition we have conceded the possibility of some baptismal references in the Odes, but found ourselves unable to subscribe to Bernard's opinion that they were baptismal on any extended scale. We examined the whole theory *de novo*, and endeavoured to state both sides of the case without prejudice. A controversialist might imagine that we were giving our case away, and even Bernard has misunderstood our attempt at impartiality. Few scholars will deny that Ode XXIV contains allusions to baptism, and we fully agree that the dove which flew over the head of our Lord the Messiah, and the terror which overtook the abysses and all the creeping things, do refer to our Lord's presence in the waters of the Jordan. We agree also that Ode VI, which has the verse, "and they lived by the water an eternal life" is probably venerated at the close with a baptismal reference, but we cannot accept that the mysterious letter and wheel of Ode XXIII have anything to do with aspersion immersion or affusion, nor can we believe that the cosmographical Ode XVI has many things in common with the catechumens or the newly baptized. It is precisely the discontinuity of thought in the Odes that impedes us from holding that they are all directed to a single and undivided aim, and in our judgment it would be as difficult to assign a single aim to the forty-two Odes as it would be arduous to refer the first 42 Canonical psalms to a single object. The task is hopeless and would overburden the shoulders even of a Bernard. We are proud to say that we shall be the first champions of Bernard's baptismal theory if, in a contingent future, he shows himself able to interpret "all the Odes in the same way," whatever that way may be. In the meantime, we shall wait and see.

A final word must be said about the date of the composition of the Odes. It is admitted on all hands that the Odes, because of their

¹ *Church Quarterly*, p. 167.

being quoted in the *Pistis Sophia*, cannot be later than A.D. 210, and, because of their exclusively Christian colouring, cannot be ascribed to a date preceding A.D. 70 ; but to fix on a precise date within these two limits is strictly speaking impossible. If we exclude the two temple-verses of Odes IV and VI (if taken literally), the Odes are devotional hymns devoid of any historical landmarks, and the question of their date depends almost entirely on internal evidence. By a long process of investigation we came to ascribe them to a period not remote from the borders of the first century. To arrive at this conclusion we were at some pains not to omit any essential factors : we tried the argument of the style, we explored the evidence of the Biblical semi-quotations, we adduced the new factor of the Targums, and we examined in detail the somewhat archaic savour of many of the Odists' beliefs. Bernard in his review has neglected all these factors (with the exception of some words that he writes on Wisdom—Christology), and has assigned to the Odes the somewhat narrow limits of 150-170. He has not given us a shred of evidence why he thinks so. On our part we did not feel justified to be dogmatic in our conclusions, and we did not even discard the possibility that Bardaisan might have had something to do with the Odes. Would it be asking too much to beg the Provost of Trinity College always to set forth the reasons for his patronization of one opinion rather than another ?

Having set aside all the internal factors that we investigated for the fixing of an approximate date to the composition of the Odes, Bernard took for the line of his offensive the ground of the external evidence that we adduced, and this seemed to him to be totally inadequate for he writes "I hold that the attempt to place them on the borders of the first century has failed" (p. 297). In this juncture we wish to draw attention to the fact that the texts of the Fathers on which we drew for our conclusions in connection with the Odes are considered by us as illustrations to the thought of the Odist, and not necessarily as direct quotations, except one or two passages of Ephrem, which seem to be more in the domain of direct quotations. Had we believed them to be direct quotations we would have printed them in the first volume, alongside of the passages of Lactantius and *Pistis Sophia*. In our researches we did not want to leave any stone unturned in connection with the time, the approximate date, and the country of the Odist. We thought that if many uncommon ideas of

the Odes could be paralleled in the writings of a Father of the second century living, say, in Edessa or in Antioch, there would be in these two localities a somewhat firm ground on which the Odist might have walked, if not physically at least morally and intellectually. We cannot here repeat and bring under review all the evidence that is found in the last edition of the Odes, but there are two passages from Bardaisan which need some explanation, because, in our judgment, Bernard has not attached to them the importance that they deserve. The first is the queer belief attributed by Ephrem to Manichaeans and to Bardaisan (whom he calls teacher of Mani) to the effect that the sun and the moon "receive from each other".

The passages are worded in the following terms: Ode XVI, 17, "Their reception (sun and night) one from the other". Bardaisan: "They (sun and moon) receive one from the other".

In the original Syriac the above words are in every respect identical. Now the idea that the sun and the moon or the sun and the night receive from each other is not very common, and I have not come across anything like it in books written in any language, either Oriental or Occidental, that I have perused, not even in the domain of folk-lore. The existence, therefore, of such an idea in two distinct works referring to astronomical beliefs of the second century of our era is certainly remarkable, and I think we were fully justified in calling attention to it. Bernard, however, would have nothing of it because, as he says, "it is quite untrustworthy to build on so slight a verbal parallel" (p. 290). With the kind of evidence that Bernard requires we are not here concerned, but when he writes that we cannot get the above meaning without altering the text of the Odes, we will reply that this meaning is precisely the one we can get without altering the text of the Odes.

The second passage quoted in illustration of the belief of Bardaisan in relation to the Odes bears on v. 8 of Ode XXV:—

And I was covered with the covering of the Spirit,
And I removed¹ from me the raiments of skins.

It is obvious that Bernard would immediately think of the coats of skin of Gen. iii. 21, which some Fathers interpreted mystically as referring to *νέκρωσις* or liability to death which the human nature

¹ Or, thou hast removed.

incurred at the Fall, and which the baptized were supposed to lay aside at baptism. It is possible that Gen. iii. 21, might be the ultimate source of the Odist's inspiration ; we say nothing either for or against this view, except that in the mind of the writer or the translator of the Odes there was no indebtedness to any known version of the Bible (certainly not the Peshitta), where the word for *coats* is utterly different from that used in the Odes for *raiment*. Let us now examine the question with reference to some other passages of the Odes.

Ode XXI, 3, has :—

And I put off darkness
And clothed myself with light.

Ode XXIII, 12 has :—

And they who have put me on (the perfect virgin)
Shall not be injured.

The idea, therefore, of putting on light and a virgin is in harmony with the Odist's way of thinking, however strange we may consider the notion of putting on a virgin to be. Gen. iii. 21 is obviously of no avail here. To square v. 8 of Ode XXV with the above and with some other passages of the Odes we appealed to other quarters. In the doctrine of Bardaisan, as exposed by Ephrem, we found many allusions to the putting on of "raiment of skin," side by side with putting on of light and putting off of darkness, both reinforced by putting on and off of a virgin. The identity of ideas and even of phraseology between the Odist and Bardaisan was so striking that we deemed it more than useful to refer to the latter's theory on the subject of raiment of skin. Why Bernard takes objection to our reference to Bardaisan is a mystery to me ; still more inexplicable is to me his reproach in this connection that we did not quote anything to show that Bardaisan or the Manichaeans made use of the phrase "coats of skin" from Gen. iii. 21, which to him is the real point at issue (p. 296). Does he mean to say that as long as Bardaisan is not explicitly naming Gen. iii. 21 as the source of his doctrine concerning the raiment of skin, the virgin-light, the putting on and off of light and darkness, and of the virgin, his testimony is of no value in the matter ?

The above are some specimens of Bernard's recent investigations in the field of the Odes. I think that if he had started to study the subject afresh, not in the light of his ancient views on the matter, but independently, and if he had made use of the new translation, and

especially of the concordance placed at the end of our second volume, he would have been convinced that everything in the Odes does not refer to baptism. His ancient comparative apparatus of the Odes and Ephrem's baptismal hymns seems also to me to be in some places overfledged and arbitrary, and it will certainly so appear to all those who have learned Ephrem's baptismal hymns by heart from their school days. If Bernard has the courage to waive the absolutely inadmissible claim that *everything* in the Odes refers to baptism, and if he limits it to its right dimensions, viz. that the Odes contain *some* baptismal allusions, we will be able to meet him half-way, and then a great step towards the right understanding of the Odes will have been made. Will Bernard have that courage ?

In a future number of the BULLETIN we propose to continue our discussion of the current criticism of the Odes by other scholars.