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## *PROFESSOR ZAHN ON TATIAN'S DIATESSARON.*

AT the very time last year when we were discussing the practical recovery of Tatian's Diatessaron in the commentary upon it written by Ephraem the Syrian, an elaborate investigation of the subject by one of the ablest and soundest of German scholars, Professor Zahn of Erlangen, was on the point of publication. The work appeared in the latter part of last year, and has had the effect of bringing into due prominence in Germany the very important results which, notwithstanding many difficulties that still remain, are unquestionably established by the recent discovery. It is an admirable example of German learning and scientific thoroughness, and, considering Dr. Zahn's other occupations, the labour he must have bestowed on its production is amazing. Out of 386 large octavo pages more than a hundred are devoted to a reconstruction in detail of the text of the Diatessaron by means of Ephraem's quotations, with the assistance of some secondary sources, and this reconstruction is vindicated, verse by verse, in an elaborate commentary which discusses the minutest details of the text. An index, at the close of the volume, to the passages of the four Gospels thus shewn to have been incorporated in the Harmony enables the reader readily to examine the evidence which the Diatessaron may afford respecting any particular verse. As a storehouse of materials, this part of the work must remain of very great value for future investigations, independently of the other points of interest which it offers. The text of Ephraem's Diatessaron is compared

throughout with the text of the Peshito, with the Syriac version published by Cureton, with quotations in Ephraem's other works, as well as with other authorities; and some of Zahn's chief conclusions rest upon a detailed comparison of Ephraem's text with these various sources. It may perhaps be doubted whether even this immense labour has sufficed to afford a sufficiently solid basis for all the conclusions in question, but it is none the less admirable and valuable in itself. Professor Overbeck of Basle has criticised severely many of Dr. Zahn's contentions in *Schürer's* Journal for the 11th of March last; but he fully recognizes the value of this "extremely laborious task" and says that he "does not see how, with our existing materials, it could on the whole have been better discharged than has been done by the industry of the author." It is not the least part of its excellence that, as will be understood from what we have said, the reader is placed in a position to judge for himself, verse by verse, of the validity of each step of the reconstruction.

But the greater part of Professor Zahn's volume is occupied with discussions of the highest interest respecting the origin and character of the Diatessaron thus reconstructed, and it is to these discussions that the main attention of scholars has been directed. We observe with satisfaction that Dr. Zahn's inquiries confirm the conclusions previously published in these pages[1] respecting the close relation which subsists between Ephraem's Diatessaron and the Latin Harmony of Victor of Capua preserved in the *Codex Fuldensis*; and we do not observe that any material exception has been taken to his views and our own on this point. It is indeed curious, as Dr. Zahn observes at the outset of his work, that we are still in the same position as Victor in our lack of any direct information respecting the Diatessaron in the Greek and Latin

[1] EXPOSITOR, 1881, vol. ii. p. 128 *seq.*

literature previous to his time, beyond the scanty notices to which he refers. In the literature of the Western church up to the middle of the sixth century there is "no testimony, or as good as no testimony, to the existence of any such work." The absence of definite notices of the work in the Eastern church is still more strange; Clement of Alexandria, for instance, several times quotes Tatian and cites his exegetical observations on passages of the Gospels, but never intimates that Tatian composed a work of the character of the Diatessaron. It is at least doubtful whether Eusebius's brief reference to the book implies that he had himself seen it. His well known words are that Tatian "composed a sort of connection and compilation, I know not how, (*οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως*) of the Gospels, and called it the Diatessaron. This work is current with some persons even to the present day." Dr. Lightfoot has shewn in the *Contemporary Review* (May 1877) that the Greek phrase "I know not how" by no means implies necessarily that the writer was himself unacquainted with the matter in question, but might simply express disparagement of its plan. Dr. Zahn, however, (pp. 14, 15) adduces strong reasons for believing that the expression is at all events open to the former interpretation; and considering Eusebius's interest not only, as Dr. Lightfoot observes, "in apocryphal literature" but also in questions relating to the harmony of the Gospels, it is at least strange that he nowhere gives us more particular information about Tatian's work. At all events Eusebius is the only Greek or Latin writer for the first four centuries who gives us any information on the subject; and what he tells us is extremely slight.

How are we to account for this disregard of a work of such great interest during the most active period of early Christian literature? It is no sufficient answer that Tatian was stigmatized as a heretic; for this did not prevent his reputed work being, as Eusebius testifies, current in some quarters at his

day; and we have further the explicit testimony of Theodoret of Cyrrhus in the year 453 that the book was then in use in his diocese among orthodox communities, and that he himself found more than two hundred such copies held in respect in the churches of his district. Dr. Zahn suggests an explanation of these singular circumstances which seems to us strongly recommended, at once by its simplicity and by the completeness with which it fits into all the known facts of the case. This suggestion is that Tatian, who describes himself as born in the country of the Assyrians, and who spent the latter part of his life in Syria and the neighbouring countries, wrote the Diatessaron in Syriac, for the benefit of the Syrian church in Mesopotamia, and that its use was thus confined to the churches in which Syriac was the native tongue. "If," says Dr. Zahn, "the circles from which the information of Eusebius was derived belonged to the Syriac-speaking church, and if the Diatessaron, which was ascribed to Tatian the Syrian, was a Syrian book, and during several centuries existed only in Syriac," it is easy to understand its being unnoticed in Alexandria and Rome, while its language would at least be an obstacle to its being known to Greek-speaking churches, even in Asia. It cannot, indeed, be assumed that Eusebius was unacquainted with Syriac; but there is no evidence that he was sufficiently well versed in it to study a Syriac work with ease, and the supposition at least explains his comparative disregard of Tatian's book. The suggestion offers also what seems a singularly happy explanation of a statement of Epiphanius which has occasioned great perplexity. He says that the Diatessaron was by some persons called "the Gospel according to the Hebrews." No one who knew anything of the Diatessaron could have supposed that, in substance, it in any degree resembled the document specially known as the Gospel according to the Hebrews; and, as Dr. Lightfoot says in the *Con-*

*temporary Review*, the statement is "a simple blunder, not more egregious than scores of other blunders which deface the pages of Epiphanius." But Dr. Zahn's suggestion enables us partly to explain the blunder. "Epiphanius," says Dr. Lightfoot, "had heard that the Diatessaron was in circulation in certain parts of Syria, and he knew also that the Gospel of the Hebrews was current in the same regions, there or thereabouts. Hence he jumped at the identification." But it would evidently give a strong colour to such an identification if the Diatessaron and the supposed Gospel were in kindred dialects. Or, as Dr. Zahn puts it (p. 25):—"If it were reported that a Syrian book of the Gospels, called the Diatessaron, was current in some catholic communities of Syria, so as, for instance, to be much used in the diocese of Cyrrhus; and if on the other hand a Gospel written in the same or a nearly allied dialect was known to be in use among the half heretical Nazareans about Berœa (Aleppo), and thus in the immediate neighbourhood of Cyrrhus, it was not unnatural that persons at a distance should suppose that the two books were allied, or should even jump to the conclusion that they were identical."

The conjecture is, in the next place, strongly confirmed by the important and definite evidence of Theodoret. Whereas, as we have seen, the Diatessaron was practically unknown in the chief churches of the East, Theodoret tells us that two hundred copies were in use in his diocese, which contained eight hundred parishes. Such a proportion of copies for use in churches indicates a very large circulation in those parts. How came it that copies were so numerous in this region, and so apparently rare in the neighbouring Greek churches? If, as has been commonly supposed, Theodoret referred to a Greek book, the contrast would be inexplicable. But the fact is that Syriac was the predominant language in Theodoret's diocese. Dr. Zahn

observes that, without reference to the question of the Diatessaron, it is stated by Garnier, in a dissertation attached to the works of Theodoret, that in the neighbourhood of Cyrrhus "almost all persons used the Syrian language; but few, even in the city, were acquainted with Greek." In the whole district, says Dr. Zahn, eastward from Antioch to far beyond the Tigris, Syriac was the native language. There is abundant evidence that it was the language of the common people at the very gates of Antioch, and Theodoret's own statements shew that Greek was rarely spoken in Cyrrhus itself. He tells us, for instance, of a man from that neighbourhood, afterwards Bishop of Carrhae, who was so ignorant of Greek that when he visited Constantinople at the desire of the Emperor, the princesses could only shew their respect for him by dumb signs. It is scarcely conceivable, therefore, that a book which was so much used in his diocese as the Diatessaron should not have been written in Syriac. Consequently, as Dr. Zahn urges, the first information we encounter respecting the Diatessaron which unquestionably rests on more than hearsay, and in which it appears as possessing real importance in the life of the Church, points to its being a Syriac book. Of this Syriac book being a translation from a Greek original there is no hint whatever either in Theodoret or in any other writer. In a word, we hear practically nothing of the book in Greek churches; but the moment we pass into the diocese of a learned bishop of the Syrian church we find two hundred copies of it in use. Up to this point, a stronger chain of circumstantial evidence in support of Dr. Zahn's supposition could hardly have been supplied by such fragmentary materials. All the circumstances are in favour of the supposition, and there are none against it.

But the testimony of Theodoret, who wrote in 453, points to the use of this Syriac Diatessaron before his

time ; and we are thus led back by Dr. Zahn to Ephraem, who died in 378. It will be unnecessary to follow our author through the evidence we stated last year, by which it has been established to the general satisfaction of critics that the work of which Dr. Moesinger published a Latin translation is the commentary which Ephraem is known to have written on the Diatessaron, and that we can therefore in great measure recover the text of the Diatessaron from Ephraem's citations. But Dr. Zahn's investigations point to some other very interesting conclusions respecting this commentary. He points out (p. 50) several striking indications that the commentary was originally delivered as a series of discourses or homilies. In addition to one passage (Moesinger, p. 83)[1] in which Ephraem seems to say that he has been carried away by his subject to speak at greater length than he intended, the exposition appears to be in many places homiletic alike in form and substance, sometimes interrupted by ejaculatory prayers. What is still more characteristic, it seems continually presupposed that the passages explained had been brought before the mind of the persons addressed, as though they had been read in church as lessons. An exposition will sometimes start from a phrase in the middle or end of a long passage, and then go back to the commencement. As a rule, Dr. Zahn thinks the lessons or portions thus commented on can be distinguished with sufficient clearness, and their order defined, while within each of the limits thus fixed the exposition passes irregularly from point to point. In fact, while the commentary enables us to fix the order in which the narratives of the Gospels were arranged, section by section, we could not fix the order of the texts within each section unless we

[1] "At nunc nostrum esset, oratione nostra pro verbis prolatis gratias agere et silere; non ac si nos hunc sermonem compossuissemus, sed ipsa hæc verba propter suam cognationem alia excitârunt, ut simul cum ipsis effluerent. Sermo igitur a nobis institutus de his verbis tractavit: 'Quis tetigit me? Ego scio virtutem magnam a me exiisse.'"

had the Gospels themselves to consult. At the same time the Commentary is not a collection of formal sermons, or even an extract from them. The expositions want the unity of thought and purpose which such discourses would require. Dr. Zahn is disposed to regard them rather as lectures to theological students. Edessa was famous for its schools, and we know that, as the present Dean of Canterbury says,[1] disciples gathered round Ephraem, "of whom many rose to eminence as teachers." "For future clergy," says Dr. Zahn (p. 54), "there would be something very suitable in the theological polemic against old and new heretics, and in the occasional comparison of the text on which the exposition is based with other texts . . . while the not unfrequent hortatory tone is quite in harmony with such a purpose."

This comparison of various texts forms a very interesting feature of the commentary, and occupies a large space in Dr. Zahn's investigations. Ephraem refers not unfrequently, and in various forms, to some other text of the Gospels than that on which he is commenting. He never speaks of that work as the Diatessaron, but refers to it usually as *Scriptura*. We doubt whether, as Dr. Zahn thinks, he also appeals not unfrequently to the Evangelists themselves, and assigns particular statements to one or other of them. But in correcting the readings of the Diatessaron, he quotes *lectiones* which appear to correspond as a rule with those of the Peshito version; and in addition, in some few cases, he cites "Graecus"; as for example on p. 29 (Moesinger) he says "*Graecus clare dicit.*" Ephraem's knowledge of Greek is a much disputed point. It is possible, as Dr. Zahn says, that, while unable to speak Greek, he may have understood it sufficiently well to refer to it for general critical purposes; or other Syrian scholars may have noted the variations of the current version from the Greek text. This point is a

[1] "Dictionary of Christian Biography," vol. ii. p. 138.

very obscure one. But on the whole it may be acknowledged that Dr. Zahn establishes a considerable probability in favour of the conclusions which he states in the following words (p. 69) :—

"Ephraem's Commentary shews that the church of Edessa about the years 364–373 was in a state of transition in reference to the Gospel portion of the New Testament. The Harmony, which Ephraem expounded by word of mouth and in his writings, was regarded as *Scripture*. It must have been still used in the public service of the church; otherwise it would neither have been so called, nor made by Ephraem the basis of exegetical lectures. By the side of it the Peshito version of the Gospels was known, and was read at all events by men of Ephraem's education, while there prevailed only a sporadic and in every respect imperfect knowledge of the Greek Gospels." Men like Ephraem, he adds, appreciated the advantages of the Peshito, which was used in other districts, as compared with the Diatessaron. The greater completeness of the former version, its agreement with the general form of "the Gospel" in the great Catholic Church where the Greek tongue was spoken, and its greater correctness as compared with the Greek text, must have combined to recommend it; and it would thus tend gradually to supersede the Harmony. From this point of view, Theodoret's suppression of the copies of the Diatessaron in his diocese appears as though it were one of the final steps in this gradual process.

These conclusions are further supported by the evidence afforded in another series of Syriac discourses which have been preserved to us. These are "The Homilies of Aphraates," the Persian sage, who was bishop and abbot of the convent of St. Matthew, east of Mosul. They were written between 336 and 345, and the Syriac text was published in this country in 1869. Dr. Zahn had five years ago made the observation that Aphraates cited as

the Gospel of Christ the Harmony on which Ephraem commented, and suggested that his peculiar citations from the Gospels might be explained by reference to that Harmony. The knowledge we have since obtained of Ephraem's commentary now places the truth of this conjecture beyond doubt. A careful comparison of the quotations of Aphraates with the text of Ephraem proves that he used that text and that alone, and there appear no such signs as in Ephraem's work of his use of other texts. Dr. Zahn comes to the conclusion that the only Gospel which was in ecclesiastical use among the Syrian Christians in the neighbourhood of Nineveh about the years 330–350 was a Syrian Harmony, and no other than that on which Ephraem commented. There is nothing, as he says, surprising in this fact, after what we have learned from Theodoret and Ephraem. But there is also some reason to believe, from some expressions in *The Doctrine of Addai*, that at least a hundred years before Aphraates a similar Harmony of the Gospels was in exclusive use for the public purposes of the church in Edessa.

In a word, it would seem as though the early Syrian church had received its knowledge of the Gospels mainly, if not entirely, from the Diatessaron, and had for some two centuries drawn its spiritual nourishment from thence; but that full translations of the Gospels themselves gradually made their way, until the Diatessaron disappeared from the region in which it had played so large a part. As Dr. Zahn observes, we have a close parallel to this course of events in the history of the early German church. The Diatessaron there played over again precisely the same part. Through the modified translation of Victor of Capua it was transferred to the old German language, and became one of the first books through which the Germans were made acquainted with the Gospel in their own tongue. Has any other book in church history played so strange a part

as thus to be the pioneer of evangelization in two churches so completely divided from each other as the early Syrian and the early German churches? The more we learn about this early Harmony of the Gospels the more romantic does its history appear.

We must reserve for another article a discussion of the further critical investigations which Dr. Zahn bases upon these facts; but this story, which occupies the first portion of his work, appeared sufficiently interesting to be presented to the reader by itself.

HENRY WACE.

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## ON THE CLEARING OF COMMENTARIES.

THIS Age, however numerous may be its other drawbacks and shortcomings, has certainly been signalized by marked progress in the science of Exegesis. It would be quite possible, for any one who was gifted with the requisite knowledge, to draw up a list of conclusions which must now be regarded as finally established. Some writers of course, whose convictions were stereotyped fifty years ago, would be still found to maintain exegetical opinions which have long been consigned to oblivion by advancing knowledge. Dead theories have a knack of going on fighting long after they are dead, like the poor warrior in Ariosto,—

> "Il pover uom che non sen era accorto,
> Andava combattendo, ed era morto."

But the polemics which emanate from the shadow-land of exploded inferences may be passed over in silence; and the anathemas of ghost-like combatants who still love to regard ruins as their strongest fortresses have ceased to awake even an echo of the thunder. Any scholar who would undertake the task of provisionally recording what may now be fairly regarded as ascertained facts would