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DR. MOFFATT ON THE LITERATURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

I. General.

Dr. Moffatt is a figure of considerable interest and importance in the world of New Testament scholarship. He has read very widely in the modern literature of the subject. He has some remarkable literary gifts. He possesses an exceptional faculty for detecting analogies between different classes of literature, in cases where the analogies are hidden by the concomitants and surroundings. His series of articles called *Opera Foris* in the Expositor contained many noteworthy and often really brilliant illustrations of this kind, which attested the wide range of his reading, his true and broad sympathy, and his wonderful power of combination. His *Historical New Testament* might fairly be described as the work of a very clever young student, with an astonishing power of assimilating and reproducing in new combinations the opinions or "results" of older scholars. That is a stage which the young scholar has to go through. It is best to go through it quickly, and not to publish anything until it has been safely traversed. That book, however, was at least pardonable as the work of a young man transported with the enthusiasm of reading, who had not as yet had the leisure to do much real thinking, because the acquisitive process had for the time absorbed his energy and starved and withered the independence of his intellect.

The *Historical New Testament* possessed at any rate the interest that belongs to an early stage in the growth of a personality, which was capable of becoming independent and even great, provided that circumstances proved favourable to its development. For my own part I had the opinion, and

several times expressed it to others, that the writer of that book would within twenty years do some really good work, and would then partly smile at, and partly regret, his youthful enthusiasm for the ingenious vagaries of forgotten theorists, after his powers had grown stronger and his judgment had matured through experience of life. On one occasion later, when I read in the *British Weekly* a really beautiful leader to which his signature was attached, I claimed credit for having detected under the surface of that early book signs of the fine true quality and the sympathetic feeling which were clearly shown in that subsequent article in a weekly newspaper.

The present work, however, has gone back to the standard of the *Historical New Testament*. I can detect no broadening of the outlook, no deepening of the sympathy, little sign of growing independence of thought. The book is antiquated, as if it belonged to the nineteenth century. I do not mean that the author has failed to pay attention to more recent studies on the subject. Quite the contrary. Dr. Moffatt has allowed little or nothing in recent work to escape him. He has been reading the last products of scholarship with the same carefulness and voracity as before, when he wrote the *Historical New Testament*. But his method is much the same as formerly. He takes up the more recent theories with the same earnestness and—I will not say enthusiasm, but rather the same perfectly confident assumption that the right way of study lies in sifting and weighing these theories and thus discovering "here a little and there a little," which is correct and valuable, and also with the same antecedent conviction that truth is to be found somewhere amid the mass of writing. This method he would doubtless defend on the ground that it is moving with the times and keeping in the van of modern research; but, if the initial principle is wrong, it is as useless

when applied to the critics, whether "orthodox" or "progressive," of the period 1900–1910 as when applied to those of the preceding fifty years.

To us the result appears to be that Dr. Moffatt has grown more learned, but that his individuality is as deeply buried as ever; and it is more difficult to force one's way out into spiritual independence after ten more years spent in tabulating the results and opinions of other men. He is fit for far higher work than this; but the time is shortened.

In literary criticism it is not uncommon to assume that, because a book shows great learning and ingenuity and ability, therefore there must be a certain amount of truth and value in it; and Dr. Moffatt seeks for this residuum of truth after riddling out all the rubbish; but that is not good scientific method. Many a writer starts his investigation on a false principle, and deduces a series of perfectly logical and wonderfully ingenious conclusions, which share in the weakness of the initial assumption; the sole value of the book, then, is to demonstrate the falsity of the first principle. There are many works of modern literary criticism which assume the whole contents and issues in the opening pages.

Specific examples one shrinks from giving; it is an invidious thing to do; but I shall give only one, which I take from a friend of my own, an excellent scholar, who did some excellent work, the late Dr. W. G. Rutherford, so that no one can charge me with censorious motives. Dr. Moffatt quotes a sentence on p. 36 note from Dr. Rutherford's edition of *The Fourth Book of Thucydides*, p. xxxi.: "Nothing could have prevented the importation into the text of an author of a great deal of what was properly comment." That principle was quite fashionable for a time among recent scholars. It sounds very plausible: one readily sees the process by which the gloss written on the margin

of a page of a manuscript was mistaken by a subsequent copyist for a part of the text that had been forgotten by the writer of the manuscript; the copyist, making this mistake, puts the gloss into the text of his copy at the point to which it seems to belong. Start with Dr. Rutherford's principle that this *must* have frequently happened; sit in your study month after month and year after year working at your author; add the magnificent ingenuity and erudition of that great scholar. The result is—his edition of *Thucydides Book IV*, the main value of which, and of some other modern works on similar lines, simply is to prove that the initial principle is false. The general agreement of recent scholars has condemned the principle; and the discoveries in Egypt of many fragments of very early manuscripts on papyrus have gone far in the way of justifying the manuscript text.

It is quite true that those glosses might have crept through a series of errors into the text, and also that they did in a few cases creep in; but, as a whole, that did not often happen, and glosses generally were recognised as such and vanished from subsequent copies. The scare raised by Dr. Rutherford and by others before him was not more reasonable than the alarm of a merchant, to whom the thought suddenly occurred that all his clerks might be frequently making mistakes in entering figures in account books. Mistakes of that kind are quite possible, and are in some cases made by clerks; but, on the whole, it is safe to say that they need not be taken into account.

It is therefore not right to quote an exploded *dictum* of Dr. Rutherford's as if it were quite trustworthy. Dr. Moffatt's pages 37–38 giving examples of glosses and interpolations contain some that are not correctly stated, and many that are not really analogous to the phenomena which he seeks to establish for the text of the New Testament.

II. Literary Illustrations in the Book.

If I attempt to justify my inability to praise this book in the way that I should like, and in the way that, as I have already mentioned, I at one time anticipated, I do so with much reluctance and diffidence, yielding only to the urgent pressure put on me by the Editor of this journal and to the wish expressed by several other friends. To put my reason in a sentence, I should say that the author never reaches the historical point of view; he never shows any comprehension of the way in which great events work themselves out. It may be said, of course, that he is writing an *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, and not a study of early Christian history; but in a surpassing degree the literature of the New Testament is the expression of the life of the Church, and can never be rightly understood if it is regarded simply as literature. Dr. Moffatt knows that well, and shows his knowledge by constantly referring the literature to the development of the Church, as he conceives it; [1] but he looks at history with a certain literary quality of mind, and not with the understanding and sympathy of practical knowledge. His many brilliant literary gifts, and especially his wonderful gift of seeing literary analogies, tend to warp his historical judgment, and require sometimes to be sternly controlled by him.

The author brings his wide reading in modern literature to bear on the illustration of his subject by profuse quotations and elaborate comparisons or similes. Sometimes these "purple patches" lighten up rather quaintly the laborious collection of opinions and references. On p. 594, "The Homeric hymns, it has been said, are neither hymns

[1] He will not dissent from this opinion that right study of the literature of the New Testament is impossible without keeping the eye constantly turned towards historical method: as he says in the *Historical New Testament*, p. 56: "True criticism of the New Testament is like science, it becomes 'a precious visitant' only when it has been trained in the methods of historical evolution."

nor Homer's. The so-called 'first epistle of John' is neither an epistle nor is it John's, if by John is meant the son of Zebedee." Then a few lines down the page, "Lord Hailes once pointed out to Boswell his additions to a legal paper originally drawn up by Dr. Johnson. The editor of 'First John' had, in all likelihood, some share in the editorial process through which the Fourth Gospel reached its final form." There would have been more point in the allusion to Lord Hailes, if, like him, the editor of "First John" had pointed out to some one the additions that he made to the Gospel; but these unfortunately remain uncertain. The allusion to the Homeric hymns is a piece of smart writing, but savours too much of flippant journalism. There is no real analogy, nothing but the forced and purely verbal analogy of an epigrammatic balance.

Much better in taste, and much more apt and illuminative as an illustration, is the comparison on p. 148 between *Romans* and Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.[1] In both cases what was begun as a letter grew beyond the character of a letter, and yet retained the outward form of one.

Not so illuminative, but still quite pertinent and in good taste, is the quotation from Theocritus and the elaborate application of it on p. 597. It is purely ornamental, it is only a "purple patch"; but it is ingenious, clever, and interesting.

On page 171 we have a very favourable specimen of Dr. Moffatt's comparisons. As Baur and Manen judged of Philippians, "so did Johnson judge of Gray." This well brings out by a brief touch the utter incompatibility of Baur and Manen to sympathise with, and therefore to judge, Paul. But why not extend the comparison? It is just because

[1] This illustration, which is a good one, helping to make the author's view more distinct and at the same time constituting a justifiable argument in favour of his view, because it shows by analogy that the process supposed can really occur, was used already in the Author's *Historical New Testament* (as I observe later).

Dr. Moffatt quotes such a portentous number of unsympathising and therefore incapable and unprofitable Baurs and Manens, that I blame his book. Moreover, he in the comparison subtly suggests that in all these cases one great man judges another. In truth Manen or Baur on Paul is a mole attempting to estimate the size of a colossus or the strength of a lion, or the swiftness of an eagle.

Again on p. 204, in the extremely hypothetical sketch of the "fortunes of Q," we are told that "it suffered a sea-change, when it was employed by Matthew." Shakespeare is dragged in here, without any special appropriateness, unless Dr. Moffatt's intention is to suggest very delicately that Q is a thing "that doth fade." The writing here is smart, the veiled allusion to a familiar passage of *The Tempest* is clever and lights up the rather arid page, and I quote it as typical, as probably likely to please the reader and to carry on his interest in the book, and certainly not as a blemish, since it does not injuriously affect the train of reasoning, while it has literary quality.

In Dr. Moffatt's former book this kind of illustration by quotations from literature was much more sparingly used, and always, so far as I have observed, for the purpose of making his meaning clearer. The habit has grown upon him, however, until he has come to use his quotations sometimes almost as an ornament, and to let his judgment sometimes be influenced by a purely fanciful analogy which he has employed; and I allude to this subject only for the sake of leading on from the good or the harmless examples to those which seem to me to be injurious.[1]

[1] These literary and purely ornamental illustrations even obtain sometimes a place in the Index A of Subjects and References, where they take up space that might be usefully employed. It seems odd to find Shakespeare mentioned three times, Jane Austen once, Byron twice, and so on, in the Index, while Georgios Hamartolos does not occur in any of the Indices, though he is referred to in the text as an authority of consequence, in fact as the chief support of the Author's belief in the very early death of St. John, a critical point in his whole opinions.

It is not my intention to enumerate these examples of Dr. Moffatt's custom as if they were faults. They are mentioned as instances of the Author's character; and from them we may gather what is a tendency of his mind, and estimate his "personal equation." They are an interesting feature; and they are indicative of the literary rather than the historical temperament. That is what seems to me the fundamental truth. Our Author shows in a fashion extremely interesting to the student of human nature the course which the literary temperament may follow when it is allowed to run riot in historical investigation. It is in danger of essaying the problem in a misleading fashion. This I shall try to exemplify by taking some others of those ornate passages, in which the misleading influence that the habit may exercise is more conspicuous.

III. Literature and History: a Difference of Method.

On p. 8 Dr. Moffatt, in discussing "The Method of New Testament Introduction," illustrates the correct procedure for the historian in surveying the literature of a period by the following analogy. "In a note to the first chapter of *The Fair Maid of Perth*, discussing the magnificent view of the Tay valley which may be gained from the Wicks of Baiglie, Scott quotes what a local guide said, on reaching a bold projecting rock on Craig Vinean, 'Ah, sirs, this is the decisive point.' One of the first objects of the literary historian, in attempting the survey of any period, is to secure the decisive point from which he may command the lie of the country, and see it as fully as possible in its natural proportions. Such a vantage ground lies usually at some distance from the particular literature. That is one reason why the decisive point of elevation from which to scan the primitive Christian literature is to be found in the traditions which begin to rise by the second half of the second century."

I confess that I was aghast when I read these sentences.

It would be hard to find a falser way of looking at the historical problem, and yet it is so ingenious and plausible, that the unwary reader may for the moment be tempted on with it. There is no analogy, except a verbal one, between the contemplation of scenery from a high point, and the survey of a period in literature. In order to contemplate a scene, it is necessary to reach a point from which the eye can see it; hence one contemplates it best from a higher point at a little distance. In order to survey a literature, one gets into the most intimate sympathy with it. There is the most profound difference; and yet Dr. Moffatt cannot see the difference. He labours to emphasise the analogy by verbal touches. The "decisive point" for the Christian literature is where "the traditions begin to rise," just as the "decisive point" for that part of the Tay valley is where the "bold projecting rock on Craig Vivean rises"; but this is purely verbal trifling. If one is going to study the Elizabethan period of literature, one does not "secure the decisive point" in the period of Queen Anne or George I. One saturates oneself with the Elizabethan work, and grows into sympathy with it by close communion. The second half of the second century was a period quite as alien to the Apostolic period as that of A.D. 1702–1730 was to the Elizabethan period. One cannot ascend a "decisive point" in a later period. Nor can one judge the older period better, or survey it more comprehensively, or appreciate it more sympathetically, by attempting to place oneself amid a later and uncomprehending group of writers. The whole idea is a verbal conceit.

It is true that one often feels, in appraising the work of some contemporary author, that it is necessary to wait and to look back on him from some point in the future, before one can determine with confidence his rank in the literature of the world. One is too near him to judge rightly his comparative rank. But this is because one is afraid lest

familiarity may warp the judgment when the comparison is with writers from whom one is further removed; and it gives no reason to think that in trying to understand and sympathise with the literature of a remote period one should look at it from "a vantage point" in a later and utterly uncomprehending time.

The truth is that Dr. Moffatt is trying to snatch some justification for his false historical method from any side; and, to his literary way of judging, this very clever verbal analogy presented itself as a real analogy and a powerful argument. It is his method throughout this book to put himself among "the traditions which begin to rise by the second half of the second century," and to regard the New Testament as similar, and as most easily seen and understood through the analogy. He is everywhere trying to do what he plans out for himself in these sentences which have just been quoted, and the result is—this book, utterly unsympathetic, absolutely external, and wholly unappreciative of the finest side of the literature that it treats.

IV. The First and the Late Second Century.

An extreme example of Dr. Moffatt's want of sensitiveness to the real nature of the New Testament literature may be quoted from p. 315 f., where he speaks "of the perplexing differences between the Christian literature of the first and that of the second century. The latter reveals a series of striking personalities, while the New Testament literature, which is practically synonymous with the literature of the Church during the first century, has only one writer whose personality is well marked, i.e. the Apostle Paul. Luke, the historian, is known to us mainly from his writings, and these, from their very nature, are objective rather than subjective. The John of Asia Minor, whom we can detect behind the Johannine literature, must have been a commanding figure, but we cannot feel him breathe and move

as we can feel Paul. On the other hand, the second century and its literature reveal strong and versatile personalities from Ignatius to Irenaeus, from Polycarp to Tertullian, from Marcion and even Papias and Hegesippus to Justin, Tatian and Clement of Alexandria."

What do we know about the personality of Papias or Hegesippus or of their life? Nothing at all. What do we know of their works? Nothing but two or three fragments and a lot of riddles. They are not human beings to us. We know not one single action of their lives, and absolutely nothing about their character; and we can only speculate about the nature of their influence on contemporary society and even about the method and quality of their literary work. Yet these are the names which Dr. Moffatt transforms into personalities, and for whom he throws overboard Peter and James and John and Andrew and Philip and the rest.

V. The Personality of Papias and Polycarp.

There are, I must confess, in the figure of Papias no riddles for Dr. Moffatt. Papias is his pet child. For Papias he has constructed out of his own fancy a character, and almost a personality, without any basis in ancient record, purely on the ground of his unhesitating penetration to the soul of those allusions which to most of us are riddles. He sees him, with Marcion and Hegesippus, stand forth as "strong and versatile personalities" in the brilliant light of the later second century, where we can only see them like shadows of "men as trees walking" in the dimness of that obscure period. It is just because Dr. Moffatt has pondered over that misty figure until he has re-invested Papias with his own conceptions of history that he loves and admires him so much. But that ought to be reserved for his own private meditations. The portrait of Papias ought to hang in his study, not to adorn his book. It belongs to himself, not to the world.

Polycarp is a gracious, attractive and even dignified figure, as we see him amid the darkling twilight; but "versatile" is the least applicable epithet that could have been selected for him. We know him in his personality very well: he is a real human being for us: so far Dr. Moffatt is right. He enjoyed the unbounded veneration of the Asian Christians, and he deserved it. He was regarded by the pagans as "the father of the Christians," and as the most dangerous enemy of the old gods. But "versatile"! Hear what Lightfoot, his devoted admirer, says of him. "Polycarp's mind was essentially unoriginative. It had, so far as we can discover, no creative power. His epistle is largely made up of quotations and imitations. . . . He himself never rises above mere commonplace. A steadfast stubborn adherence to the lessons of his youth and early manhood—an unrelaxing, unwavering hold of 'the word that was delivered to him from the beginning'—this, so far as we can read the man from his own utterances or from the notices of others, was the characteristic of Polycarp."[1] A noble and dignified figure in his life, a pathetic and still more dignified figure in his death. But what is he or any of the others in Dr. Moffatt's list in comparison with John or Peter or even James, as they stand before us in the literature of the New Testament?

Of course, when Dr. Moffatt has ejected most of the New Testament out of the realm of authenticity, then "the literature of the New Testament" becomes scanty and the period to which it belongs is left in mist. There remains, according to him, only Paul (who, however, loses Ephesians and 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus); and Paul, though considerably annotated and enlarged in parts, still throws, as Dr. Moffatt admits, a bright light on the period between 50 and 60 or 62 A.D.; but after Paul the darkness sets in, and Luke and Mark fail to lighten it. Mark has been edited

[1] Lightfoot, *Ignatius and Polycarp*, i. p. 458.

until he is no longer recognisable; Luke is far from thoroughly trustworthy; and hence, I suppose, Dr. Moffatt fails to find any individuality or personality in Peter, who to us old-fashioned people is such a vivid, powerful, real and human figure. One who set any store by the testimony of Luke in the Acts and in the Gospel could never find Peter or John so faint and unsatisfying. But it is quite natural that Dr. Moffatt should emerge from his study of Ephesians, the Pastorals, the Catholic Epistles of James, Peter and John, the Revelation, and the Fourth Gospel, "with a sense of baffled curiosity, which almost deepens into despair at some points." He has smashed up to his own complete and undoubting satisfaction the greatest epoch of literature, and he finds that there remains in it only the lay figure of a man of the province Asia named John, "whose breathing he cannot hear and whose motion he cannot see."

But those men of the later second century! they are Dr. Moffatt's heroes. He knows them: he feels really interested in them: he finds none of the difficulties which we find in comprehending them. Take one example of the way that he handles the evidence about them.

W. M. RAMSAY.

(*To be continued.*)

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT.

THE day of atonement was celebrated on the 10th of Tishri and was one of the most impressive feasts of the Israelitic calendar, by reason of the severe earnest of its rites and the deep humiliation of Israelitic believers before their Creator. It is the only day on which fasting is obligatory during all the twenty-four hours of the day. On other fast days it was forbidden to eat or drink from sunrise until sunset, but on this day it was not allowed to eat or drink from sunset until sunset.