Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology

https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

'This Account is strictly true, and was well known to many of the Nobility and Gentry and all the then Domestics of those two Noble Families.

'See that extraordinary Grape also mentioned in Holy Writ, Numbers, chap. 13, v. 23.

'*This Account appeared in all the Newspapers in the Month of Sept.* 1781.'

The Painter of Dreams is Roddam Spencer Stanhope, the friend of Watts. His career is sketched with a light hand, and some of his letters are quoted. 'Last Saturday,' he says, 'I went down to Brighton. What a horrid place it is for extempore preachers. The description I heard of one was, "He is not much of a *Theologian*, but the most *brilliant orator* I ever heard. It is quite an *intellectual treat* to go to hear him!" Heaven preserve me from going to church for an "intellectual treat"! I would sooner stop at home for a raspberry-jam one!'

It was a young man who said this. And this also: 'The Pre-Raphaelites give such accounts of Ruskin. He seems to be the most prejudiced, arbitrary, cantankerous fellow, and I shall keep as clear as I can of him.'

Enough. The book has rescued some personalities from oblivion. It will give its readers a few hours' pleasant reading, as pleasant as a good novel would give and quite as profitable.

The Sun Song of Iceland.

By the Rev. John Beveridge, B.D., Fossoway.

One of the most characteristic of the literary remains of the Northern Christian spirit is the Sun Song (*Solarljod*), an Icelandic poem dating from the beginning of the thirteenth century and preserved in its original form. The song is far simpler than most of the productions that have come down to us from dim antiquity. It belongs to the more obscure works of Middle Age poetry—for its skald or author shows affection for a symbolism which, at least in our day, is not easy to understand. The Sun Song is strongly personal in mood and expression, and it differs considerably from the religious historical poems which date from the same period; and a vision of heaven and of hell occupies an important part of the song.

Visions from the realms of salvation and perdition were common in the Middle Ages, but they were generally handed down in prose form. Dante's *Divina Commedia*, however, the most classic work in the wide field of vision literature, is a poem, and the Sun Song has something in common with Dante's immortal work. The poems belong to Roman Catholic Europe, even if original local images are found mingled with the original foreign. It is the new spirit, the spirit of Christianity that created and upheld them.

The Sun Song is supposed to be sung by a dead man, who appears to his son and begs him to take the song and make it known among the living. The dead man tells of his life on earth, of his death, of the journey of the soul through hell and heaven; and at last he speaks of man's 'day of gladness' when father and son will meet again. That day of eternal joy, *dies lætitiæ*, dawns after the judgment day, *dies iræ*. The father warns the son against the delusions and errors of this present world. It is not riches and it is not health that give happiness, for they are of to-day and to-morrow they are no more. Lust, which takes possession of the thought-life, clings to love like a disease, and brings sin and sorrow with it. Power and pride give no lasting joy, for they seduce one from what is good. Even friendly words are unstable ground to build on, for deceit may easily hide itself under them. God is the true riches, the true love and power, the true friend—according to the skald—and he begs his son to seek the Lord and His kingdom.

The father then proceeds to give an account of his death and of the experiences that await beyond the veil of mortality. He speaks of his fear of death, how day after day his looks turned to the sun as if it could afford some help. 'Mighty it seemed in many ways compared with that which was before.' And in his fever fantasies the sun becomes 'God Most High' before whom he bows in reverence,—evidently just the current idea of the sun as the symbol of God.

The hell which the Sun Song depicts is that with which we are familiar from the Middle Ages; that every sin has its exactly corresponding punishment. They who had gold for their god bear loads of lead in the world of woe. The hands which broke the peace of Sundays and saint days are nailed to hot stones. Adders gnaw through the breasts of the men who once drove the sword through the hearts of other men. But on the whole the picture of the tortures of the wicked pales before the riotous inventiveness of some of the contemporary vision literature of more southern lands.

But the description of the felicity of the blessed in heaven is affecting in its simplicity, quietness, and beauty. 'Next I saw men who had yielded obedience to the laws of God; pure light shone brightly round their heads. Next I saw men who had generously helped the poor; the angels read holy books and heavenly scripture over them. After that I saw men who had greatly mortified the flesh by fasting; the angels of God bowed before them, and that is the highest joy. Next I saw men who had supplied their mother's mouth with food; they rested softly on the beams of heaven.' And then, with a fervent appeal for the Creator's grace towards His creature, the section ends thus:

'Almighty Father, glorious Son, Holy Spirit of heaven, Thou who hast created us, I pray Thee for salvation for us all in our need.' And the poem closes with the dead man's farewell to his son. 'Here we two part, to meet again on men's day of gladness. My Lord, grant peace to the dead, and healing to them who live!'

The loving thought for others which appears in these passages is by no means confined to the Sun Song. The Song has background enough in the contemporary Northern literature. How full of mindfulness, for instance, is the old Church prayer which has come down to us from these early centuries:

'Let us pray, good brethren, to God our Almighty Father, that He may purge the world from all its errors, take sickness away from the sick, and hunger from the famishing. May He open the prisons and deliver them that are bound: may He grant to travellers a safe journey home, and give seafarers a good haven, and vouchsafe healing to them that are wounded.'

But the whole Sun Song is not so simple and clear. Here and there are verses influenced by European symbolism of the obscure order. Here is a verse which is symbolical. 'Now have I, your father, along with Solkatla's sons, described to you, my son, the horn of the hart which the wise Vigdvalin brought out of the barrow.' Solkatla means the sun-vessel, and personifies the heavenly Jerusalem which is filled with the light of God, the eternal sun. Solkatla's sons are the saints who dwell in God's celestial city of light. From them the dead father has learned lessons which he now sends further. He has described 'the horn of the hart' to his son. The hart, in the symbolism of the Middle Ages, was an image of Christ, and its horn was the divinity of Christ. The horn of the hart, the divinity of Christ, of which the deceased has spoken, the wise Vigdvalin brought out of the barrow. Vigdvalin means the one who fights slumbering, and is a name for Christ, whose body slumbered in the grave whilst His spirit went down to hell and fought with the devil. This battle-slumberer brought his divine power out of the barrow, the grave, when he arose from the dead. Because that is what the Song has described it is called *Solarljod*, the Song about the Sun, the true Sun, the divine.

Although *Solarljod* has not been translated into English, so far as we know, or found any interpreters among us, yet the Sun Song has a considerable literature, especially in Icelandic, Norse, and Danish. The sources from which we have drawn most freely for this article are Finnur Jónsson's *Skjaldedigtning* and Fredrik Paasche's *Kristendom og Kvad.* From these we learn that the author of the Sun Song is unknown. The number of MSS is considerable, but not one is earlier than the seventeenth century. Some of them refer in marginal notes to much earlier copies, and one at least specifies a vellum MS. The versification and style carry us back to the Edda Age. The poem is distinctly epical. Its pictorial language, its dualistic view of life, and its ethic, flow through a channel of action and a fulness of narrative that do not cease until the very last verse is reached. The Song depicts men from life; and this epic feature and its multitudinous fantasy give to *Solarljod* a characteristic stamp. The various concrete images sometimes cover deep spiritual conceptions which invade the picture and volatilize it. And the personal mood pervading the Song is indicative of a soul-peace acquired through stern struggle, and reveals a fervent longing to know the secret things of God. From the

historic point of view the Sun Song is of importance; for it testifies to the character and extent of Christian influence in the North at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The skald introduces the symbolism of the Church with freedom and aptness; and the whole Song presupposes the religious development which Iceland, as we know from other sources, had attained at that age. There is no European Vision Song which can have been the prototype of *Solarljod*.

Is the Fourth Gospel a Literary Unity?

By the Rev. R. H. Strachan, M.A., B.A., Cambridge.

II. THE CHRONOLOGICAL PLAN.

The ideal plan, outlined in the previous article, can be verified by a careful study of the Gospel. The Gospel as it stands is also set in a chronological framework, in which certain minor topographical details are also embedded. Some of these are very vague and obscure (*e.g.* Ephraim, 11^{54}). The suggestion is, that this chronological framework has been superimposed on the original Gospel with its ideal division, by the hand of an editor (R), whose main purpose is to produce a uniform movement of events. It is impossible to suppose that the Gospel could have been constructed from two different points of view—an ideal and a strictly chronological—by the same hand, unless on the hypothesis that the author had no first-hand knowledge. Of course, certain of the chronological and topographical details (*e.g.* 4^{6} 11^{18}) are evidently spontaneous and natural, and stand in no contradiction to the ideal scheme. Many, however, are irreconcilable. For example, the Cleansing of the Temple cannot possibly have taken place at a very short interval after the opening 'sign' of the ministry. In point of fact, the position which this incident occupies in the Gospel is a key, as has been pointed out, to the problem of dual authorship.

We may now proceed to the examination of certain passages that apparently belong to the chronological scheme:

2^{1}. The repeated statements—*τῇ ἐπαύριον*—in $1^{29.\ 35.\ 43}$ need not be questioned. They indicate quite naturally three days in the early friendship of the disciples with Jesus. The expression, *καὶ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ* (2^{1}) strikes us as, strange. What is the meaning of 'on the third day'? It naturally means 'three days after' the last of the three days mentioned previously (cf. Mt 20^{19}, Lk 18^{33}), and is probably intended to collect the events into one week, at the opening of the ministry. Two considerations lead to the conclusion that this chronological detail is out of place: (1) The fact that the disciples of Jesus are bidden to the wedding, and yet at the time of the invitation they could not have met Him. (2) That even three days is not sufficient save for a very hurried journey, from the rather mysterious locality mentioned in 1^{28}, where the call of the disciples took place (cf. Spitta, *Das Johannes-Evangelium*, p. 64).

2^{12}. In v.[12] an interval in Capernaum is mentioned of 'not many days.' The statement is very vague, and is evidently intended to fill up the time until the Passover mentioned in v.[13] is due. The mention of Capernaum is probably suggested by 4^{46}. The *μετὰ τοῦτο* (like the frequent *μετὰ ταῦτα*) is also extremely vague, and rather at variance with the exactness of other passages in the Gospel where time and place are mentioned. The introduction of *οἱ ἀδελφοί* is also strange, inasmuch as they play no part in the Gospel until $7^{3ff.}$.

2^{23-25}. Another passage that seems to belong to R is 2^{23-25}. It is evidently intended to introduce the story of Nicodemus, and to link it up with the preceding