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The Journal
of
Theological Studies

JULY, 1933

JOSEPH ARMITAGE ROBINSON

THERE is an especial reason for commemorating Dr Armitage Robinson in this JOURNAL. He was on the Committee of Direction from the beginning till his death last May, and at various times he has been a frequent and valued contributor. But what makes a commemoration particularly appropriate is that in the past he represented more than any other the sort of work that the *Journal of Theological Studies* was founded to provide a home for, viz. the scholarly working out of single literary problems connected with theology or ecclesiastical history. Such things are now gathered together in these volumes, where they can be looked for and found, and are not lost among the alien matter either of ecclesiastical intelligence or classical erudition.

After being elected to a fellowship at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1881 Robinson began working at the text of Origen. The result was seen in two papers, on the text of the *Philocalia* and on that of Origen *against Celsus*, which were published in the *Journal of Philology* for 1890. That on the *Philocalia* is practically repeated in his edition of that work (1893), but that on Celsus has never been otherwise published, and I have always been given to understand that it helped to convince Robinson that such small monographs were lost among classical papers and that Cambridge theological investigation deserved an independent series of its own.

So the *Texts and Studies* came into being. The very first number contained a notable surprise. It contained the newly found Syriac translation of the long-lost Apology of Aristides, which had been unearthed by Dr (then Mr) J. Rendel Harris in the newly discovered Syriac library on Mount Sinai. Robinson as editor read the proofs, and the Appendix (pp. 67 ff.) tells the

wonderful story of how he identified the ancient second-century Apology, not yet given to the world, with the decisive speech in 'Barlaam and Joasaph', the Christianized version of the story of Gautama the Buddha, which spread over all Christendom from the 11th century. It was a very notable achievement and added greatly to the success of the series and the fame of the Editor, which was assured by the edition of the Passion of Perpetua, that followed before 1891 was out. This work, which vindicates the Latin origin and editorship by Tertullian of the Acts of Perpetua, while shewing that the Visions themselves are in the words of the martyrs, at once took its place as the standard edition and remains one of the chief authorities for what is known of the earliest history of Christianity in Roman Africa.

The nineties of last century were a great period of archaeological discovery. The Gospel of Peter together with the first third of the Greek text of Enoch was published in 1892, the Sinai Palimpsest in 1894, and the Syriac origin of the original Armenian version was demonstrated soon after. Dr Charles was beginning his series of editions of the Jewish Apocalypses and Dr Montague James was publishing Christian Apocrypha, these last mostly in *Texts and Studies*. Moreover for several years Dr Robinson came under the inescapable influence of Robertson Smith, then a resident Fellow of Christ's. With an erudition and an ingenuity in no way inferior to Robinson's he joined a vigour and courage that were all his own, and his society and example were infectious, as indeed I gratefully remember.

In 1895 Armitage Robinson brought out a volume called *Euthaliana*, which dealt with the many problems connected with the so-called 'Euthalian' edition of the Epistles and Acts, and contained among other notable things the text of sixteen pages which no longer exist of a 6th-century MS of St Paul's Epistles!¹ But the most important chapter was that in which Robinson shewed that the existing Armenian translation of the New Testament was a mere revision of an earlier form that was translated from the Syriac and not from the Greek. This had been made probable a few years before by F. C. Conybeare, but it was Armitage Robinson who first put the matter in a scientific form.

¹ These pages were read backwards from the 'take-off' of the letters on the opposite existing pages which are still preserved.

As Editor of *Texts and Studies* Robinson was admirable, striking the right mean between negligence and dictation, between letting the contributors enunciate any crude view on the one hand and enforcing his own opinions on the other. The writer of these lines is most deeply grateful for the guidance he received when a young author with many gaps in his literary outfit. Robinson's rule was 'say what you mean and mean what you say', a rule which sounds slight and commonplace so enunciated, but in practice it often led to the rewriting or suppression of whole paragraphs, to the great improvement of the work. To justify one's statements before his careful and painstaking scrutiny and, where necessary, to emend them were lessons in accurate thinking and clear writing.

In 1899 came the great change. In that year Robinson left Cambridge to become a Canon of Westminster. Three years later he became Dean, just after the Coronation of Edward VII, the arrangements for which he superintended in the illness of Dean Bradley. The change was not altogether for the better, at least so far as Biblical and Patristic studies were concerned. The Dean of Westminster's time for such things was limited, and he was no longer able to look out for young men just through their examinations, whom a touch at the right moment might direct into a career of investigation. Above all, the influence of contemporary and senior scholars was lacking. Robinson's intellectual life retired more and more into himself, and his discretion, not to say timidity, came more and more into the foreground. As he says in his attractive Lectures called *The Study of the Gospels*, delivered in 1900 but only published in 1902, he offers them 'in the hope that it will lead others to study the Gospel history with renewed care and, in view of modern questionings, to tread where the ground is firmest.' As I once heard him say, he held the door open for others to go in.

And though it is his contribution to theological learning with which I am here concerned, some of his friends would feel that something was missing from this memoir if I did not touch on the important part he played, in his position as a prelate of the Church of England, in checking the tendency of those in authority to hasty condemnation of new views and in keeping the way open to free and unfettered enquiry on the part of ministers of that Church.

His article in this JOURNAL (xiv 196, January 1913) on 'The Resurrection Appearances', which was widely circulated in the proper quarters, is a good example of the way in which he exercised a steadying influence at a moment when the authorities of the Church were being urged to repudiate some of their leading scholars, though he himself did not agree with their conclusions.

In 1903 he brought out his admirable Commentary on Ephesians, a work planned at least seven years before, and certainly comparable with Lightfoot's Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians, and with Sanday and Headlam on Romans. It was reviewed (*J.T.S.* vi 142) by Dr Lock, who points out one or two shortcomings, including the slightness of the Introduction; but after thirty years it remains the standard English commentary. It was while preparing this commentary that Robinson brought out his Note on *πῶρωσις* (*J.T.S.* iii 81-93), in which he shews that, whatever its derivation may be, 'numbness' and not 'hardness' is the meaning.

But the work and responsibility of his Deanery claimed the major part of his time, and his leisure was occupied mainly with archaeology and what may be called archaeological history. He re-edited Flete's history of Westminster Abbey (c. 1443), interested himself in the fabric and its history, and ceased to keep in touch with contemporary New Testament and Early Christian scholarship. In 1911 he resigned Westminster and accepted the Deanery of Wells.

At Wells he restored the West Front, re-established the Rood-loft in the nave, rearranged and identified most of the ancient glass—in fact, almost his latest published work was an account of the Great West Window of the Cathedral, printed in the Journal of the British Society of Master Glass-Painters, a guild to which he had been deservedly elected and to which he was genuinely proud to belong. All this helped to detach him from Patristic study and most of his later work is concerned with the antiquities of his Cathedral and the diocese to which it belongs. He wrote an account of the Saxon Bishops of Wells, elucidated the hagiography of local saints such as Cungar and Gildas, and investigated in detail the steps by which St Oswald of Worcester substituted monks for mere clerks at Worcester during the latter half of the 10th century. All these works display the same exemplary

method and add a good deal to our knowledge of English ecclesiastical history at a little known and little studied period.

But Robinson had not altogether deserted his earlier studies and these later years exhibit three directions in which his remarkable learning was exercised on earlier fields. Dr Rendel Harris in 1923 pointed out that 'the Passion of St Catharine' was used in the composition of the speeches in Barlaam and Joasaph, and maintained that the source of St Catharine's own speeches was an early Christian Apology which used Diodorus Siculus. This theory was examined by Dr Robinson in the JOURNAL for April 1924 (xxv 246). First he shews that, besides the Metaphrast, 'Catharine' exists in three recensions, which had been published by the Abbé Viteau in 1897. The third of these has been paraphrased by the Metaphrast, which in turn (as Dr Harris had pointed out) was made use of by the adapter of Barlaam and Joasaph. But the reference to Diodorus Siculus does not come from an early lost Christian writing, as Robinson convincingly shews: it comes from Eusebius's *Praeparatio Evangelica* ii 1, taken not at first hand, but either from John Malalas or from the intermediate source from which Malalas took it. Now that the date and popularisation of Barlaam and Joasaph are once more being discussed (see P. Peeters in *Analecta Bollandiana*, xlix 276-312) this investigation of the sources of that work will repay careful study.

The second of the studies referred to above is concerned with the Armenian version of Irenaeus. As is well known, the great work of St Irenaeus is not extant in the original Greek. What is printed as the Greek in the current editions are quotations and extracts made from the original by later writers like Epiphanius and Theodoret, who do not always reproduce Irenaeus's words with accuracy, and for most of the work we have had to content ourselves with the ancient Latin version. Early this century an Armenian translation of Books IV and V was discovered, together with another treatise of Irenaeus, called the *Epideixis* or 'Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching'. The *Epideixis* was published in 1907 with a German translation, but in 1920 Robinson issued an English translation from the Armenian, which was a distinct advance on its predecessor. The Dean had not only kept up his knowledge of Armenian, but he was thoroughly familiar with

Irenaeus and his ways of thought. In the JOURNAL for 1931 (xxxii 153 ff., 370 ff.) he further published a series of Notes on the Armenian renderings in *adv. Haereses* iv and v, which will be of the utmost value to a future editor.

But there was yet another subject connected with early Christendom in which Armitage Robinson took a lively interest, in which indeed he is still in a minority, though in the opinion of the present writer his view will ultimately be endorsed by scholars. This is the question of the *Didache*, its method of composition and its historical value. The *Didache*, which describes itself as the 'Teaching of the Lord by the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles' but is in effect a sort of manual of Church discipline and worship, was discovered in 1883 and at once took a very foremost place as a picture of Church life in the earliest times. When was it written, and where? What stage of Church developement did it represent? These questions were asked again and again, and never seemed to find a wholly satisfactory answer. In 1912 Robinson attacked the question, giving a wholly new solution. Previous scholars had assumed that the picture of Church organization was drawn from life and assumed by the Didachist to be apostolic; Robinson advanced the view that the picture was constructed, partly from the Gospels and the Epistles of St Paul, as what the 'Twelve Apostles' may have been supposed to have taught.

The paper, able as it was, was not very well received. It was supposed to be 'clever' and 'perverse', and Robinson went back to his Wessex bishops and monks. But in 1920 he was delivering the Donnellan Lectures in Dublin, and he chose for his subject 'Barnabas, Hermas and the *Didache*'. In the Lectures he argued for the literary unity of the Epistle of Barnabas, and further suggested that Hermas quoted from it, and that the Didachist used both Barnabas and Hermas. The *Didache*, therefore, was thrown into the second century at the earliest, and the peculiar Church organization found in it became odder than ever, on the ordinary supposition that it really had existed somewhere and was not an artificial reconstruction.

These Lectures were duly published in 1920 and, after the custom of publishers, the unsold remainder was destroyed in due course. But in 1929 there appeared at Marburg, Germany, a Dissertation on the relations connecting Barnabas and the *Didache*

by J. S. Muilenburg,¹ which had gained a Ph.D. at Yale University in 1926. This painstaking work, which was more or less independent of Armitage Robinson's, was a complete vindication of its most important corner-stone, viz. the unity and originality of the Epistle of Barnabas and its use by the Didachist. The appearance of Muilenburg's Dissertation roused Robinson to return once more to the charge, and he had made some progress in what he hoped would be a final and definitive edition of the *Didache* when illness and death overtook him.

It is too soon yet to judge of the permanent effect of Robinson's theory, but it is at least pertinent to observe that a part of it was based on the difficulty of fitting the *Didache* into a consistent and harmonious view of early Christian life and worship.

This sketch is concerned only with Armitage Robinson as a scholar. It is as a scholar that he will be remembered, and I feel sure that it will be long before he is forgotten by those who have the cause of Christian antiquity at heart.

F. C. BURKITT.

¹ See *J.T.S.* xxxiii 25 f., 238.