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Diatessarica

PART IX

LIGHT ON THE GOSPEL

FROM AN ANCIENT POET

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LIGHT ON THE GOSPEL

FROM AN ANCIENT POET

BY

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Honorary Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge

"*There was seen...the Son of Truth, from the Father the Most High, and He inherited everything soever and took possession.*"
Odes of Solomon xxiii. 16—17.

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TO LOVERS OF TRUE FREEDOM

IS DEDICATED

THIS STUDY OF THE VISIONS OF A POET

WHO SAW "THE SON OF TRUTH"

AND HEARD HIM PROCLAIM

OVER THE SONS OF MAN IN SHEOL

"THEY ARE FREE MEN AND THEY ARE MINE"

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PRELIMINARY

THESE preliminary observations began originally with the statements about MSS and Versions now to be found on p. xviii. Revising them finally for press, many months after they had been in type, I felt that there should have been in the first place some expression of gratitude to the "ancient poet" mentioned in the title of this volume, for opening my eyes to new and nobler views of ancient Jewish thought as a preparation for Christianity. These Odes of Solomon—better perhaps called Songs—appear to me to constitute a series of what might be entitled, like some of our Psalms in the Bible, "Songs of Degrees, or Ascents," in which the thought ascends, without any serious breaks or interpolations, from that first and imperfect son of David, who failed to deserve his prophet-given name of Jedidiah, "the beloved," to that second and perfect Son of David who was hailed from heaven as the Beloved indeed. The first Ode mentions the Crown, apparently the Bridegroom's Crown, with allusion to the espousals of the first son of David, the husband of Pharaoh's daughter. This prepares us for the wedding of the second Son of David, the one Husband of the Church. And further—in one of the paradoxes characteristic of this strange poet—we are

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led on from the thought of Solomon's crown of gold to the thought of the Tree, or Cross of Christ, implying "the crown of thorns."

In the next place, I felt that, in the desire to be impersonal, I had made no adequate confession of my difficulties in attempting to interpret this "ancient poet." Some apology seemed needed for the attempt. Perhaps also, by acknowledging long labour, under great disadvantages yet resulting in some final fruit, I might encourage others (so it seemed to me) to labour with much less disadvantage and with much more fruit. What now follows is my acknowledgment.

In the autumn of 1910—when on the point of preparing for the press a work on the fourfold gospel—I took up Dr Rendel Harris' smooth and elegant English version of the Syriac hymns by the discovery of which he has made Christendom indebted to him, and which he has entitled Odes of Solomon. Thinking they might bear on the work on which I was engaged, I resolved to turn aside from it, for ten whole days of study to be devoted to this new poet. The ten days led me to three conclusions, 1st, that Dr Harris was probably right in assigning to the hymns (in their original language) a very early date indeed, possibly even before 100 A.D.; 2nd, that there was much, very much, well worth understanding in them; 3rd, that what I understood about them on the tenth day—in comparison with what I ought to understand—was practically nothing at all.

Beginning my task over again I took up the Syriac. And now I found that Dr Harris' translation, though

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possessing obvious attractions, was not adapted for a beginner in Syriac, like myself, who desired to follow the poet in his plays on words and repetitions of the same word, or slightly different forms of the same word—sometimes with obviously deliberate iteration. So I began to make word-for-word translations—not worthy, perhaps, to be called translations, but helpful to a beginner in search of the thoughts at the bottom of the words. Of Syriac I know nothing except through the Syriac versions of Biblical books. But this I soon found to be no fatal obstacle. For there is no extant Syriac literature of the first two centuries except some of those versions; and the Odes, so I gathered from experts, had no pretensions to the flowing and ornate style of fourth-century Syriac. By degrees, I ascertained for myself, from Payne Smith's Syriac *Thesaurus*, that practically all the words in the Odes—and perhaps one might add all the idioms—are to be found in the Syriac Bible.

The Syriac Old Testament is said by experts to have been translated not from Greek but from Hebrew[1]. The similarity between the Syriac of the Old Testament and the Syriac of the Odes suggested (as also did other considerations presently to be mentioned) that the Odes, too, might have proceeded from a Hebrew original. But this suggestion (as being contrary to Dr Harris' views) I put aside for the time. The first

[1] See *Syriac Forms of New Testament Proper Names*, by Prof. F. C. Burkitt, p. 3, "The Canonical Books of the Old Testament were translated originally direct from the Hebrew, probably by Jews rather than Christians; but certain books, notably that of Isaiah, seem to have been revised from the Greek Bible."

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object was to ascertain, not what language the poet wrote in, but what he expressed in any language, or, if the exact expression could not be ascertained, then *what he meant*—including *what he assumed without expressing, what traditions were at the bottom of his thoughts*.

In my attempts to discover this, the *Thesaurus* was of the greatest service, shewing how a Syriac word, or even a Syriac phrase, used in the Odes, was also used, not only in the Syriac Bible generally, but also sometimes in particular passages of the Old Testament to which the poet appeared to be alluding. Following up clues of this kind by referring to Jewish Haggadic traditions about those particular passages, I often discovered allusions that I had not previously suspected, which threw quite a new light on the poet's meaning. This meaning seemed so full of original thought, and so well worthy of further study, that I began to group in order his different sayings about subjects of special importance, such as faith, grace, love, joy, rest, light, and life. For this purpose an alphabetical Index of subjects was desirable, and I made some progress in constructing one.

But at this juncture Professor Harnack's indexed edition came into my hands. This, besides editorial notes and comments, contained a German translation of the text by Dr Flemming, which seemed in general more accurate than that of Dr Harris, who in a second edition (1911)—as I subsequently found—adopted many of Dr Flemming's renderings. But what I found specially useful was the Index, which, though far from

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being complete, fulfilled my utmost expectations in enabling me to explain the poet by the poet himself, and to discern consistent originality in many cases where I had previously been unable to find anything but inconsistent eccentricity[1].

Professor Harnack, like Dr Harris, claimed a very early date for the body of the Odes in their original form. But he rejected many passages as being inconsistent with that early date, and as being interpolations in the interests of later-developed Christian dogma. Other critics (I found) accepting these passages as genuine, were led by their acceptance of them to deny the early date.

Balancing deference to the learned critics who maintained the former view, against deference to the equally learned critics who maintained the latter, I was led on, step by step, to the conclusion that both were wrong. A reference, for example, to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, might imply (so I began to see) not interpolation or lateness of date, but a first-century Christian Jewish poet, tinged by nationality, steeped in a new religion, but still a poet for the world. This seemed the first need—to postulate a real poet—if we were to solve the problem of these poems. He seemed a poet of high order in respect of thought, but not so high in respect of style. Perhaps he might have been a recluse, naturally obscure in expression, and made specially obscure to those who came after him because

[1] My references to these two works are so numerous that, for brevity, that of Dr Rendel Harris is indicated by "R.H." and that of Professor Harnack and Dr Flemming by "H."

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he, a Christian, breathed an atmosphere of mystical Jewish Christian poetry that was soon to vanish away, not understood by Gentiles, and disliked and discouraged by Jews. So, too, even the apostle of the Gentiles—no recluse but a man at home with all men throughout the Roman empire—did not escape, on one occasion, the charge from a man in high position, "Thou art mad, Paul; thy much book-learning doth turn thee to madness." And indeed, even to his friends, even to some of his Corinthian converts, Paul may well have seemed obscure when they heard, read out to them for the first time, that letter which associated, in one sentence, "Moses," and "baptism," and "the Rock" in the wilderness, and "Christ."

From neither of the Talmuds (I believe) has any authority been hitherto alleged for this poetic association of Moses with baptism at the Red Sea. But extant poetic traditions about Moses suffice to shew that Paul could not have been startling the Corinthian Church with entirely new inventions of his own. Moses, for Jewish Christian poets, could not but be a type of Christ. And our poet is no exception to this statement. For him, as for John the Divine, the Song of Moses is the prelude to the Song of the Lamb. For him, the Deliverance of Israel, under the leadership of Moses at the Red Sea, means the Deliverance of Man, the spiritual Israel, under the leadership of the Messiah, the Son of Truth, from the waters of Sheol. From the beginning to the end of the Odes there is not a single proper name, not even that of Adam or Israel. Yet the poet is continually superimposing, so

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to speak, in a kind of poetic photography, person upon person, deliverer upon deliverer, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Hezekiah, in order to approximate to the fulness of the form of the greatest Deliverer of all, the Lord Messiah. Such at least is the view that I was ultimately and laboriously led to adopt.

The labour was too great to allow me to complete my task with the fulness I had desired. I had prepared notes on all the Odes and translations of more than half of them. But even now, when my proposed "ten days" have become nearly seventy times that number, I find myself only in a position to lay before the public the translations of about a dozen Odes. It has seemed better to revise with thoroughness what had been already completed, submitting to the correction of a Syriac expert a good many doubtful points, and, in particular, the continuous translations placed in Appendix III. This having been done, and many corrections having been adopted, I have felt justified in publishing the results of my labour—a translation of Syriac, and a commentary on Syriac, by one who professes to know no Syriac except that for which he can give chapter and verse or definite authority.

Most gladly would I have studied all the recent works on the Odes, amounting, small and great, to nearly eighty, as enumerated in R.H. 2nd ed. pp. ix—xii. But after reading a few of them I felt, not only that want of time made the task impossible, but also that such time as I could spare would be better spent (1) in consulting and verifying ancient authorities bearing on the Syriac text, so as to make my limited

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work as accurate as possible; (2) in a closer study of the text of a few of the Odes; (3) in ascertaining and collecting what Philo said about the subjects of which the Odes directly treat, or to which they apparently allude; (4) in ascertaining and collecting what is said about those same subjects by Jewish tradition (the Targums, the Talmuds, and the Midrash, not excluding the late evidence of Rashi where it points to earlier authorities). Sometimes, though not often, Philo was found to agree with Jewish tradition, thereby proving the antiquity of the latter. Even where there was no such agreement, it often appeared—through the name of the Rabbi quoted, or through the inherent stamp of antiquity—that a Jewish tradition recorded in writing at a late date must have existed orally some centuries earlier. These labours have taken up all the time at my disposal.

The differences between the versions of R.H. 1st ed., 2nd ed., and that of H., are numerous, and in some cases, of great importance. This fact might seem to imply a condemnation of any non-experts in Syriac who attempt versions of their own. My plea must be, 1st, that, where R.H. and H. are in agreement, even a non-expert will generally be right in following them, 2nd, that, even where they disagree, Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus* will generally give the word, as used in the Syriac translations of the whole of the Bible and other literature, with such fulness as to enable even a non-expert to obtain a correct view, though may be not a solution, of the linguistic difficulty in question.

My third plea is that I do not aim at translating

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Syriac idiom into English idiom, as Dr Harris has doubtless done. To do that, one must have a knowledge of Syriac idiom and literature, which I do not possess. A good idiomatic translation always renders idiom for idiom, not word for word. But a translation, bad from a literary point of view, rendering word for word, may often help students (as distinct from readers for literary pleasure) to make out the thought of an obscure writer. Then, when it is made out, they may be better able to understand a good translation. I am not sure that the time has come as yet for a good translation of this profound and difficult poet[1]. At all events I have deliberately preferred what may be called a bad translation, always, as far as possible, rendering word for word and rendering the various forms of one Syriac word by corresponding various forms of one English word. This Dr Flemming also has done to a very great degree (to a much greater degree than Dr Rendel Harris) but he has done it without sacrifice of style, which, in his version, is seldom or never harsh, and is generally rhythmical and attractive. Mine, I must confess, is so literal and bald that some may find it repellent.

The repulsiveness is at all events not adopted through mere eccentricity or pedantry, but through a conviction that the poet, *like the author of the Fourth Gospel*,

[1] See *The Times*, *Literary Supplement*, Apr. 7, 1910, which comments on "the editor's failure to print the text and the translation of the Odes as verse," and points out that "some Odes combine stanzas of different lengths" and that "the discovery of this fact illumines many a dark passage." On this I am not competent to express an opinion. H., like R.H., prints the poems as prose.

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chose his words, repeated his words, and varied different forms of the same word, in accordance with a spiritually artistic, or artistically spiritual, sense, conscious or subconscious. Throughout the Odes there appears to me something like the Johannine reiteration—very different indeed from that which occasionally occurs in the Pauline Epistles—combined with something like the Johannine variation. Whoever realises this will realise plays on the same word, allusions to a past word, preparations for the next word—all of which, or many of which, are lost in a free translation into elegant English that does not reproduce these peculiarities.

I may be wrong. Some may allege that the writer may use words at hap-hazard. Others, that he may be guided simply by his ear. Others, that the Syriac is a translation from the Greek—possibly the Greek, too, from Hebrew—and may be a loose translation. Others may quote, from the Prayer Book Version, "The *king* sent and *delivered* him, the *prince of the people let* him *go free*," and may ask whether such "hetero-tautology"—to coin a word—is not "the regular thing" in Hebrew poetry.

My reply to such arguers would be "Read for yourselves and judge for yourselves. Read only half a dozen Odes closely and carefully, and then decide for yourselves whether the poems that depict such spiritual scenes in such close sequence, and compress such spiritual thoughts in such small compass, are of the same poetic substance as the sentence extracted from the above-quoted simple and historical Psalm. And similarly, to the argument that the Syriac may be a

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rendering of Greek, and not a faithful one, I should make the same reply, "Read first, and then repeat the argument, if you can. Even the existence of a Greek original is doubtful. But, if there was one, read first, before you accuse the translator of varying words—where his original did not vary them—for variety's sake."

For my part, I was disposed *a priori* to argue in the way that I am now deprecating. But, having "read first," I cannot repeat that argument. The Syriac text appears to me to be consistent, as a remarkably faithful medium, in revealing an author who used his words under the influence of an artistic as well as a spiritual inspiration, and who, if our Syriac is a translation, has been translated with singular fidelity. At all events, among the many attempts that will be made to illustrate these poems, it seems that one may well be made to give the poet the chance of shewing that he may have said precisely what he meant. This I have tried to do by rendering what he said precisely as he said it. If he really wrote—or was translated—ornately and variously for the mere purpose of ornate variety, then a close and literal rendering will shew up the fault, whether of writer or of translator, and we shall be on our guard against it. But if he wrote simply and straightforwardly for the purpose of expressing just the thought, or the vision, or the allusion, that came before his mind, then on the other hand our close and literal rendering will reveal his merits, and we shall admire them and learn from them.

Doubtless, I shall be found guilty of many errors

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and of still more exaggerations. But these (I confidently believe) will not prevent a small circle of readers from finding in the following pages, studying this Jewish poet through Jewish poetry, some thoughts, here and there, that will take them a long way back toward that epoch in the history of the Church when the stream of believers broadened itself out through the inclusion of the Gentiles, gaining new depth with its new breadth, and still flowing as strongly as when it first issued from its fountain-head, the Spirit of the newly risen Saviour.

The "ancient poet" mentioned in the title of this work is the unknown author of some poems extant in a Syriac MS, for the discovery of which we are indebted to Dr Rendel Harris. The age of it, he tells us, "may be between three and four hundred years." Dr Harris has printed a title as part of his Syriac text, but he himself informs us that the MS "is imperfect both at the beginning and ending," so that "we cannot tell how it was described by the person who made the copy[1]."

After the last of the newly discovered poems—*i.e.* Ode xlii—comes, without any distinctive title, a collection of poems which have been known for some time as "Psalms of Solomon." These have been hitherto extant only in a Greek version, which, however, is believed by its recent editors to have been translated

[1] *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, now first published from the Syriac Version by J. Rendel Harris, M.A. &c. (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1909), Introduction, pp. 2—3.

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from Hebrew. The Psalms were probably written in their original language between B.C. 70 and B.C. 40[1]. But the newly discovered poems—with which alone we shall deal—are altogether different in tone and subject-matter, and, taken as a whole, are extant only in Syriac, in this recently discovered volume[2].

In December 1911 Professor F. C. Burkitt informed me that he had discovered a tenth-century MS in the British Museum, catalogued for forty years, though without the name of Solomon, and containing the latter and greater part of the newly discovered poems. It did not contain those which I have translated. But it had many various readings in passages bearing on them. Some of these, thanks to Professor Burkitt's kindness in sending me early information, I was enabled to utilise, while revising the body of the work. Others I have placed later on (adopting the name that the finder has given to the MS) in "Appendix IV, Readings of Codex N[3]."

[1] *Psalms of Solomon*, ed. Ryle and James, Cambridge, 1891, p. xliv.

[2] Dr Harris has printed "*Psalm* 1 (= *Psalm* 43 of MS)" after "*Ode* 42" in his Syriac text. But the photograph of Dr Harris' MS in the British Museum has (so I am informed by the Rev. G. Margoliouth) "*Psalm* 42," not "*Ode* 42." And this applies to all the preceding poems, "*Psalm* 41 &c." The Syriac for "*psalm*" corresponds to the Hebrew word generally rendered by LXX "psalm" but by Symmachus "*ode*." Dr Harris has printed, at the beginning of his Syriac text, a title in Syriac mentioning "*Psalms*" and "*Odes*"; but, as has been noted above, it has no existence in the extant MS, which is "imperfect both at the beginning and ending." We shall find, later on, that such a distinction, if it had existed in the MS, would have been justified by the distinctive tone of the two collections of poems. But it has no existence either in title or in numbering. See **3636**.

[3] Codex N (= Nitriensis) is imperfect at the beginning and end, so

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The translations, commentaries, and notes in my volume cover only a few of the Odes taken consecutively. But the notes extend beyond the passages annotated, so as to give the reader a view of what the poet says in the whole of his work about some of his most frequently mentioned subjects:—"love," "joy," "faith," "life," and "knowledge." These are familiar to us in the New Testament. Very much less familiar is "truth," and also "rest" in the sense of "peace." We shall also note "grace" (with many synonyms or homonyms) and "glorify" with the constantly recurring "song-of-glorifying." Not less noteworthy will be the emphasis laid by the poet on the spiritual necessity of "fruit," and on "the Way of the Lord," and on God's "Design" or "Thought," that is to say, His foreordained Plan for the Redemption of mankind.

But before taking the trouble to study pseudonymous poetry in such detail, readers may ask, as a preliminary, whether the poet is likely to repay them. And, first, "Is it certain that he is so very 'ancient'? If so, give us the evidence of date."

A second question may rise out of the nature of the version: "The poems, 'as a whole,' are 'extant only in Syriac.' But were they written in Syriac? If they were not, and if the thoughts come to us filtered

that it does not include a title. Nor does it reveal any distinctive separation between the recently-discovered poems (called by Dr Harris "Odes") and the others (called "Psalms"). The former precede the latter in N, as in Dr Harris' MS, consecutively numbered. But the poems in N contain no separate titles such as "Psalm" or "Ode." The omission of these in N, the more ancient of the two MSS, points to their unauthoritativeness in the less ancient one.

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through a translation, are we sure that we have before us the poet's thoughts and not the translator's?"

More important still is a third question: "Has this pseudonymous poet anything of his own to say? Is he really a poet, or only a quoter of poetry? Justin Martyr, for example, quotes poetry by the yard, but is no poet; Clement of Rome and Ignatius quote comparatively little, but have something of the passion of poetry; Barnabas quotes almost as abundantly as inaccurately, and has some original fancies and conceits, but no poetry. Is this poet like any of these, or altogether unlike? Even if he does not quote, he must *imply*. Few poets spin poetry entirely out of their own consciousness, without a particle of indebtedness to some predecessors. What does this poet *imply*? The Old Testament, or the New? If the Old, then what books most of all? If the New, what gospels? Or what epistles, if any? If neither Old nor New, then what writers, Greek, or Jewish, or both?"

Detailed answers to the first two of these questions may be found by recourse to the Index, under the headings "Date" and "Translation." To the third, though a little help is given under the heading "Originality of thought," the answer is not one that can be satisfactorily indexed. For it is scattered through the volume in comments on the poet's general independence of almost every literary source except Hebrew Scripture. Even when he agrees, as he often does, with Paul, or John, or Philo, he does not seem to be borrowing from any of them. But he does seem to be borrowing from Scripture, and from that

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kind of Jewish poetic or legendary tradition about Scripture which is called the Haggada, and which, though for the most part not committed to writing till long after Christ's time, goes back, in some cases, to the first century of our era, or even earlier.

While however the inquirer for details must necessarily be referred elsewhere, an outline may be placed here of the answers that may be given to the three questions set forth above as to (1) date, (2) original language, (3) originality of thought.

(1) First, as to date. Some of the Odes are quoted in a Gnostic work called Pistis Sophia, generally believed to be not later than the third century. The Pistis quotes a few of the Odes at great length, and appears to repute them as on a level with the canonical gospels. It would seem, therefore, that the Odes had been current long before the writing of the Pistis. Else they would hardly have had time enough to acquire so great a reputation. An early date is also indicated, if the author is a Christian, by the fact that the Odes—and this is practically true about the New Testament Epistles, the Johannine Revelation, and (probably) Barnabas—never quote the Gospels. Also, from internal evidence, it is inferred, as a provisional hypothesis, in the Concluding Remarks toward the end of this volume, that one of the Odes was written about the beginning of the second century.

But the Odes, like the prophecies of Ezekiel, may have been written at different times. Even if revised at one and the same time, they may have been, for the most part, written earlier. Their thought points

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to a period in the first century when Christian Jews might compose "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"—such as the Epistle to the Ephesians mentions—without dreaming of any need of fortifying their utterances by quotations from any written or oral "gospels," and without sufficient familiarity with any such "gospels" to make it natural for them to express themselves in what we may call "gospel-language."

(2) Next, as to the original language. Dr Harris says (p. 35) "we will also enquire as to the language in which the book was originally circulated." But he passes at once to a comparison of our Odes with those quoted in the Coptic Pistis Sophia—which obviously may have been quoted from a version very much later than our Syriac—and that version not necessarily Greek[1]. Later on (pp. 46—7) he takes up the internal evidence bearing on the original language with the marginal heading "The Syriac text of the Odes taken from the Greek." But to this difficult

[1] The Coptic *Pistis Sophia*, it is true, quotes the Odes with an intermixture of Greek words. But that proves nothing about the Odes, for the whole of the *Pistis* is written "with an intermixture of Greek words." The language is hybrid. *Dict. Christ. Biogr.* ("Pistis Sophia") even ventures to say of the whole of the *Pistis* that it "must have been originally written in Greek. The Coptic (Thebaic) text is a translation. This is proved by the numerous Greek words which it contains." Dr Harris himself says (p. 35) "A little caution is necessary, for it will be remembered that Greek words are often used in the Coptic to redeem the language from its linguistic poverty...." A glance at *Pistis* (p. 114) will shew that, for example, in the two sentences introducing Ode V, and in the single sentence following it, there are, severally, six and four Greek words, while the whole of the Ode, as quoted in *Pistis*, contains but five (Dr Harris (p. 23) has omitted one (κακῶς) by error). The Coptic writer (so far as Greek words are concerned) may have been quoting the Odes from any language whatever, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Hebrew, or even Coptic.

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subject only a page and a half at most is devoted, so that Professor Harnack (p. 11) remarks "Harris hat die Frage nicht erörtert (trotz der Ankündigung auf p. 35)." This comment is on Dr Harris' first edition, but it also applies to the second. The very few passages there alleged by Dr Harris in favour of a Greek original, with others not there alleged, will be found discussed in this volume. The conclusion I have arrived at—though only provisionally—is that *there is no proof that our Syriac comes to us as a translation of a Greek original*[1].

(3) As to the third point, the poet's originality, it might seem at first sight sufficient to say that he probably never quotes from any book of the New Testament, and never three or four words consecutively from any work of the Old Testament except the Song of Songs. But this would convey a wrong impression. For it would be suppressing the fact that he

[1] In the *Expositor* for Feb. 1912, p. 119, Dr Harris, while still assuming a Greek version as the original from which the Syriac is a translation, says, "For example, had Ephrem our Syriac translation, or is it possible that he may have had an earlier form antedating even the Greek: for *it is not Greek Odes that he is using*?" My own impression is that the words I have italicised point to a correct conclusion. It appears to me probable that the Odes, like the Psalms of Solomon, were originally composed in Hebrew of which there may have been versions in several languages (**3819** b_6, and see Index "Translation.").

I have been recently confirmed in this view by the fact that the only marginal variation in the Odes (1) "*attacked*," (2) "*cast lots*" (Codex N "*cast lots*") may be illustrated by a precisely similar variation in renderings of the Hebrew of Job, where the Hebrew has "*cast lots*," but the Greek and the Latin have "*fell on*" or "*attacked*," and also by other explanations, afforded by the hypothesis of translation from Hebrew, bearing on passages where the Syriac style has been noted by experts as curiously rough or unusual (see Index "Translation," and **3999** (ii) 17 *d—s* on "The Style of the Odes").

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is continually reproducing, not indeed words, but *pictures*, from the Hebrew Bible as interpreted by Jewish tradition. Somewhat similarly, Paul uses his own words when he tells the Corinthians that Israel was "baptized" in the cloud and in the sea; he does not here quote Exodus, but he assumes that his readers knew all about Exodus. The assumption may afford an interesting testimony to the fact that the Synagogue, throughout the Empire and not only in Corinth, prepared the way for the Church, and that the "opening" of the old "scriptures" accompanied the writing of the new. Paul at all events assumes that when he used those words of his own, most of his readers would see what he saw—the picture of Israel passing through the divided waters of the Red Sea, and under the protection of the divine Cloud. Again, Paul does not quote Numbers ("Spring up, O Well"), nor any later Hebrew tradition about the "Well" that went up and down with Israel in the wilderness to quench their thirst; but, when he speaks of "the spiritual rock" that "followed" Israel, he almost certainly assumed a knowledge of the legend, even though he (very probably) did not take it as literally true.

In the same way, our poet is perpetually making assumptions. He assumes, for example, in the first two extant Odes, that we can see, with him, the two pictures taken from the Song of Songs, first, of Solomon's Crown "in the day of his espousals," and then of the Bride "running" toward the "Beloved." And so it is throughout the Odes that follow. The titles given to some of them in the Table of Contents in this volume, if found

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by the reader to be fairly representative of their purport, will shew him that they constitute a kind of picture-gallery, setting forth, in various aspects, the Thought of Redemption. Some of them shew a Pilgrim's Progress. The Pilgrim is Israel, or the Redeemed Soul, passing through the Sea, or across "great rivers," to "the Holy Place of God," which God Himself has prepared. Or else it is the Wanderer in the wilderness, seeking "the Way to God." Or it is the aspiring Worshipper lifting up his heart to "the Secret of the Lord." Or the Lord's Warrior is seen first gaining "the Victory of the Lord," and then "leading Captivity captive," that he may pass "through Victory to Paradise." The last Ode, not included as a whole (though largely quoted) in this volume[1], presents a climax, the figure of the Great Son of Adam, recognised at last by the captive sons of Adam in Sheol as being also Son of God, and acclaimed as their Deliverer while He triumphantly draws up His brethren from the prison-house to which Adam's sin had dragged them down.

Some, however, while admitting the poet's originality, may condemn it as occasionally passing into what they may deem bad taste and even grotesqueness. Celsus would probably have agreed with them. Celsus says that the Christian Gospel was at first a production of "drunkenness," but that, later on, the Christians "roused themselves from drunkenness, and reshaped it in threefold, fourfold, and manifold fashion[2]." Some of the Odes

[1] See Index p. 573 for passages quoted from Ode xlii.

[2] See *Enc. Bibl.* ("Gospels") p. 1766 which comments on this passage.

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would certainly have been characterized by Celsus as belonging to this early period of "drunkenness," which Celsus apparently believed to have preceded the Three Gospels, and to have been only partially shaken off, "later on," in the Three, and still later, in the Fourth. Indeed the poet himself says, in the eleventh Ode, "I drank and became drunken." But he adds "with the living water that dieth not." The point for us, at this moment, is not whether Celsus would be right if he charged our poet with "drunkenness," but whether the very characteristic to which the poet himself confesses in this way does not make him all the more worth studying, as being likely to be of an Eastern originality and of an early date, before Western influences toned down the perfervid utterances of the first Christian psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Akin to this objection of Celsus, is another, arising out of a prejudice (to which I must myself plead guilty) against the Song of Songs. To some the poet's undoubted indebtedness to such a poem may seem fatal, if not to his originality, at all events to his power of originating anything of pure and spiritual beauty. This prejudice, natural, but modern, and misleading, will be dealt with in the first chapter of this work. Suffice it to say here that one of the greatest and most original of the early Rabbis, the martyr Akiba, declared that, whereas the other books of Scripture were "holy," Solomon's Song was "the holy of holies." It should not be needful to add that he interpreted it allegorically, of the Bridegroom of Israel. So, no doubt, did Paul, having it in view when he spoke of Christ and His

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Body, the Church. So also must every pious Jew have done in the first century—not being a Sadducee. And this affirmation does not exclude our Lord Himself.

The writer of these poems is a man—if he is indeed one man, and not two, a writer and an interpolator—peculiarly difficult to label as "merely" this or that. His close resemblance to Clement of Alexandria, in passages where the latter seems to be influenced by the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, suggests that he was profoundly influenced by the recognition of what Clement calls "the youth of humanity in Christ[1]," whom our poet, like Clement, appears to regard as at one and the same time the eternal Babe looking to the "breasts" of the Father and the Eternal Man looking toward men His brethren. His language about "life" and "fruit" and "growth" and "trees," blended with his language about the Babe or the Son, indicates that he may have been influenced by mystical thoughts of religions outside Judaism, such as Plutarch has preserved in his treatise on Isis and Osiris—names well known in the first century throughout the Roman empire. While accepting with all his heart the Christian teaching about the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, our poet may have combined it with ancient thoughts about a divine nature in the Life of the Tree, and in the self-sacrificing Seed, which descends into the regions of darkness and death in order to rise up again into light and life with an accompanying multitude.

[1] See 3817 *b*, and the passages referred to in the Index under "Trismegistus."

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All this is very unlike what might be expected from a Jew. Yet a Jew he probably is. He is also a Christian and, as has been repeatedly said above, probably of the first century. He is a composer of songs that probably allude to baptism in its spiritual aspect. He is probably acquainted with Alexandrian allegory, and, in particular, with that of Philo. He is probably, nay, certainly, a borrower from the Song of Songs and from the thoughts and pictures of Hebrew Scripture as a whole. But he will not be found to be any one of these things—or all these things—"merely."

If we were absolutely bound to label him, we should (I think) be safest in labelling him thus: "A Jewish Christian, writing in the first century, under the influence of Palestinian poetry, Alexandrian allegory, Egyptian mysticism, and—most powerful of all—the influence of the Spirit of Love and Sonship, freshly working in the Christian Church, at a time when Jesus was passionately felt to be the Son revealing the Father through such a Love as the world had never yet known; but before the doctrine of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit had begun to be hardened by controversial iteration into a dogma accepted by the lips of almost all Christians, including many that did not feel the beauty and necessity of the doctrine in their hearts."

If this is so, we have in this poet what some would call a half-way house—not to be found anywhere else in extant literature—between Judaism and Christianity. In that case, it will be very dangerous to cut out this or that—alleging discrepancy, not of style nor of

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vocabulary, but merely of doctrine—on the plea, "This must be Jewish and early; that must be Christian and late." Paul wrote several things that sounded by no means Jewish, nay, indeed anti-Jewish. Yet (according to the Acts) he publicly declared himself "a Pharisee and the son of Pharisees," implying that the rulers of the Jews had nothing against him except "the hope and resurrection of the dead[1]." And what could be more patriotically Jewish (according to the Acts) than his defence before Agrippa: "And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made by God unto our fathers, unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly worshipping night and day, hope to attain[2]"? Without accepting these as *verbatim* reports, we cannot safely reject them as deliberate falsifications. They at all events attest the probable existence of "a half-way house" in the minds of many Jews inclining at that time to Christianity. Paul, no doubt, was unique in the versatility with which he "became all things to all men." But a poet, too, has a poet's versatility and may become different things in the moments of different passions.

Take one instance of what seems—at least to the present writer—a blending of Christian and Jewish thought, in which a Biblical Hebrew phrase referring originally to the first Passover, that of Israel, appears to have been adopted in one of the Odes as referring to the second Passover, the Paschal feast of the Christians, with allusion to the admission of the

[1] Acts xxiii. 6. [2] Acts xxvi. 6—7.

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