

CHAPTER XX.

FROM THE DIVINE ORACLES TO THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

I. THE OLDER INTERPRETATION.

THE great sacred books of the world are the most precious of human possessions. They embody the deepest searchings into the most vital problems of humanity in all its stages: the naïve guesses of the world's childhood, the opening conceptions of its youth, the more fully rounded beliefs of its maturity.

These books, no matter how unhistorical in parts and at times, are profoundly true. They mirror the evolution of man's loftiest aspirations, hopes, loves, consolations, and enthusiasms; his hates and fears; his views of his origin and destiny; his theories of his rights and duties; and these not merely in their lights but in their shadows. Therefore it is that they contain the germs of truths most necessary in the evolution of humanity, and give to these germs the environment and sustenance which best insure their growth and strength.

With wide differences in origin and character, this sacred literature has been developed and has exercised its influence in obedience to certain general laws. First of these in time, if not in importance, is that which governs its origin: in all civilizations we find that the Divine Spirit working in the mind of man shapes his sacred books first of all out of the chaos of myth and legend; and of these books, when life is thus breathed into them, the fittest survive.

So broad and dense is this atmosphere of myth and legend enveloping them that it lingers about them after they have been brought forth full-orbed; and, sometimes, from it are

even produced secondary mythical and legendary concretions—satellites about these greater orbs of early thought. Of these secondary growths one may be mentioned as showing how rich in myth-making material was the atmosphere which enveloped our own earlier sacred literature.

In the third century before Christ there began to be elaborated among the Jewish scholars of Alexandria, then the great centre of human thought, a Greek translation of the main books constituting the Old Testament. Nothing could be more natural at that place and time than such a translation; yet the growth of explanatory myth and legend around it was none the less luxuriant. There was indeed a twofold growth. Among the Jews favourable to the new version a legend rose which justified it. This legend in its first stage was to the effect that the Ptolemy then on the Egyptian throne had, at the request of his chief librarian, sent to Jerusalem for translators; that the Jewish high priest Eleazar had sent to the king a most precious copy of the Scriptures from the temple at Jerusalem, and six most venerable, devout, and learned scholars from each of the twelve tribes of Israel; that the number of translators thus corresponded with the mysterious seventy-two appellations of God; and that the combined efforts of these seventy-two men produced a marvellously perfect translation.

But in that atmosphere of myth and marvel the legend continued to grow, and soon we have it blooming forth yet more gorgeously in the statement that King Ptolemy ordered each of the seventy-two to make by himself a full translation of the entire Old Testament, and shut up each translator in a separate cell on the island of Pharos, secluding him there until the work was done; that the work of each was completed in exactly seventy-two days; and that when, at the end of the seventy-two days, the seventy-two translations were compared, each was found exactly like all the others. This showed clearly Jehovah's *approval*.

But out of all this myth and legend there was also evolved an account of a very different sort. The Jews who remained faithful to the traditions of their race regarded this Greek version as a profanation, and therefore there grew up the legend that on the completion of the work there was dark-

ness over the whole earth during three days. This showed clearly Jehovah's *disapproval*.

These well-known legends, which arose within what—as compared with any previous time—was an exceedingly enlightened period, and which were steadfastly believed by a vast multitude of Jews and Christians for ages, are but single examples among scores which show how inevitably such traditions regarding sacred books are developed in the earlier stages of civilization, when men explain everything by miracle and nothing by law.*

As the second of these laws governing the evolution of sacred literature may be mentioned that which we have constantly seen so effective in the growth of theological ideas—that to which Comte gave the name of the *Law of Wills and Causes*. Obedient to this, man attributes to the Supreme Being a physical, intellectual, and moral structure like his own; hence it is that the votary of each of the great world religions ascribes to its sacred books what he considers absolute perfection: he imagines them to be what he himself would give the world, were he himself infinitely good, wise, and powerful.

A very simple analogy might indeed show him that even a literature emanating from an all-wise, beneficent, and powerful author might not seem perfect when judged by a human standard; for he has only to look about him in the world to find that the work which he attributes to an all-wise, all-beneficent, and all-powerful Creator is by no means free from evil and wrong.

But this analogy long escapes him, and the exponent of each great religion proves to his own satisfaction, and to the edification of his fellows, that their own sacred literature is absolutely accurate in statement, infinitely profound in mean-

* For the legend regarding the Septuagint, especially as developed by the letters of Pseudo-Aristeas, and for quaint citations from the fathers regarding it, see *The History of the Seventy-two Interpreters, from the Greek of Aristeas*, translated by Mr. Lewis, London, 1715; also Clement of Alexandria, in the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Edinburgh, 1867, p. 448. For interesting summaries showing the growth of the story, see Drummond, *Philo Judæus and the Growth of the Alexandrian Philosophy*, London, 1888, vol. i, pp. 231 *et seq.*; also Renan, *Histoire du Peuple Israel*, vol. iv, chap. iv; also, for Philo Judæus's part in developing the legend, see Rev. Dr. Sanday's *Bampton Lectures for 1893, on Inspiration*, pp. 86, 87.

ing, and miraculously perfect in form. From these premises also he arrives at the conclusion that his own sacred literature is unique; that no other sacred book can have emanated from a divine source; and that all others claiming to be sacred are impostures.

Still another law governing the evolution of sacred literature in every great world religion is, that when the books which compose it are once selected and grouped they come to be regarded as a final creation from which nothing can be taken away, and of which even error in form, if sanctioned by tradition, may not be changed.

The working of this law has recently been seen on a large scale.

A few years since, a body of chosen scholars, universally acknowledged to be the most fit for the work, undertook, at the call of English-speaking Christendom, to revise the authorized English version of the Bible.

Beautiful as was that old version, there was abundant reason for a revision. The progress of biblical scholarship had revealed multitudes of imperfections and not a few gross errors in the work of the early translators, and these, if uncorrected, were sure to bring the sacred volume into discredit.

Nothing could be more reverent than the spirit of the revisers, and the nineteenth century has known few historical events of more significant and touching beauty than the participation in the holy communion by all these scholars—prelates, presbyters, ministers, and laymen of churches most widely differing in belief and observance—kneeling side by side at the little altar in Westminster Abbey.

Nor could any work have been more conservative and cautious than theirs; as far as possible they preserved the old matter and form with scrupulous care.

Yet their work was no sooner done than it was bitterly attacked and widely condemned; to this day it is largely regarded with dislike. In Great Britain, in America, in Australia, the old version, with its glaring misconceptions, mistranslations, and interpolations, is still read in preference to the new; the great body of English-speaking Christians clearly preferring the accustomed form of words given by

the seventeenth-century translators, rather than a nearer approach to the exact teaching of the Holy Ghost.

Still another law is, that when once a group of sacred books has been evolved—even though the group really be a great library of most dissimilar works, ranging in matter from the hundredth Psalm to the Song of Songs, and in manner from the sublimity of Isaiah to the offhand story-telling of Jonah—all come to be thought one inseparable mass of interpenetrating parts; every statement in each fitting exactly and miraculously into each statement in every other; and each and every one, and all together, literally true to fact, and at the same time full of hidden meanings.

The working of these and other laws governing the evolution of sacred literature is very clearly seen in the great rabbinical schools which flourished at Jerusalem, Tiberias, and elsewhere, after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, and especially as we approach the time of Christ. These schools developed a subtlety in the study of the Old Testament which seems almost preternatural. The resultant system was mainly a jugglery with words, phrases, and numbers, which finally became a "sacred science," with various recognised departments, in which interpretation was carried on sometimes by attaching a numerical value to letters; sometimes by interchange of letters from differently arranged alphabets; sometimes by the making of new texts out of the initial letters of the old; and with ever-increasing subtlety.

Such efforts as these culminated fitly in the rabbinical declaration that each passage in the law has seventy distinct meanings, and that God himself gives three hours every day to their study.

After this the Jewish world was prepared for anything, and it does not surprise us to find such discoveries in the domain of ethical culture as the doctrine that, for inflicting the forty stripes save one upon those who broke the law, the lash should be braided of ox-hide and ass-hide; and, as warrant for this construction of the lash, the text, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know"; and, as the logic connecting text and lash, the statement that Jehovah evidently intended to command

that "the men who know not shall be beaten by those animals whose knowledge shames them."

By such methods also were revealed such historical treasures as that Og, King of Bashan, escaped the deluge by wading after Noah's ark.

There were, indeed, noble exceptions to this kind of teaching. It can not be forgotten that Rabbi Hillel formulated the golden rule, which had before him been given to the extreme Orient by Confucius, and which afterward received a yet more beautiful and positive emphasis from Jesus of Nazareth; but the seven rules of interpretation laid down by Hillel were multiplied and refined by men like Rabbi Ismael and Rabbi Eleazar until they justified every absurd subtlety.*

An eminent scholar has said that while the letter of Scripture became ossified in Palestine, it became volatilized at Alexandria; and the truth of this remark was proved by the Alexandrian Jewish theologians just before the beginning of our era.

This, too, was in obedience to a law of development, which is, that when literal interpretation clashes with increasing knowledge or with progress in moral feeling, theologians take refuge in mystic meanings—a law which we see working in all great religions, from the Brahmans finding hidden senses in the Vedas, to Plato and the Stoics finding them in the Greek myths; and from the Sofi reading new meanings into the Koran, to eminent Christian divines of the nineteenth century giving a non-natural sense to some of the plainest statements in the Bible.

Nothing is more natural than all this. When naïve statements of sacred writers, in accord with the ethics of early ages, make Brahma perform atrocities which would disgrace a pirate; and Jupiter take part in adventures worthy of Don Juan; and Jahveh practise trickery, cruelty, and high-handed injustice which would bring any civilized mortal into the criminal courts, the invention of allegory is the one

* For a multitude of amusing examples of rabbinical interpretations, see an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* for November, 1882. For a more general discussion, see Archdeacon Farrar's *History of Interpretation*, lect. i and ii, and Rev. Prof. H. P. Smith's *Inspiration and Inerrancy*, Cincinnati, 1893, especially chap. iv; also Reuss, *History of the New Testament*, English translation, pp. 527, 528.

means of saving the divine authority as soon as men reach higher planes of civilization.

The great early master in this evolution of allegory, for the satisfaction of Jews and Christians, was Philo: by him its use came in as never before. The four streams of the garden of Eden thus become the four virtues; Abraham's country and kindred, from which he was commanded to depart, the human body and its members; the five cities of Sodom, the five senses; the Euphrates, correction of manners. By Philo and his compeers even the most insignificant words and phrases, and those especially, were held to conceal the most precious meanings.

A perfectly natural and logical result of this view was reached when Philo, saturated as he was with Greek culture and nourished on pious traditions of the utterances at Delphi and Dodona, spoke reverently of the Jewish Scriptures as "*oracles*." Oracles they became: as oracles they appeared in the early history of the Christian Church; and oracles they remained for centuries: eternal life or death, infinite happiness or agony, as well as ordinary justice in this world, being made to depend on shifting interpretations of a long series of dark and doubtful utterances—interpretations frequently given by men who might have been prophets and apostles, but who had become simply oracle-mongers.

Pressing these oracles into the service of science, Philo became the forerunner of that long series of theologians who, from Augustine and Cosmas to Mr. Gladstone, have attempted to extract from scriptural myth and legend profound contributions to natural science. Thus he taught that the golden candlesticks in the tabernacle symbolized the planets, the high priest's robe the universe, and the bells upon it the harmony of earth and water—whatever that may mean. So Cosmas taught, a thousand years later, that the table of shewbread in the tabernacle showed forth the form and construction of the world; and Mr. Gladstone hinted, more than a thousand years later still, that Neptune's trident had a mysterious connection with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.*

* For Philo Judæus, see Yonge's translation, Bohn's edition; see also Sanday, *Inspiration*, pp. 78-85. For admirable general remarks on this period in the his-

These methods, as applied to the Old Testament, had appeared at times in the New; in spite of the resistance of Tertullian and Irenæus, they were transmitted to the Church; and in the works of the early fathers they bloomed forth luxuriantly.

Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria vigorously extended them. Typical of Justin's method is his finding, in a very simple reference by Isaiah to Damascus, Samaria, and Assyria, a clear prophecy of the three wise men of the East who brought gifts to the infant Saviour; and in the bells on the priest's robe a prefiguration of the twelve apostles. Any difficulty arising from the fact that the number of bells is not specified in Scripture, Justin overcame by insisting that David referred to this prefiguration in the nineteenth Psalm: "Their sound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

Working in this vein, Clement of Alexandria found in the form, dimensions, and colour of the Jewish tabernacle a whole wealth of interpretation—the altar of incense representing the earth placed at the centre of the universe; the high priest's robe the visible world; the jewels on the priest's robe the zodiac; and Abraham's three days' journey to Mount Moriah the three stages of the soul in its progress toward the knowledge of God. Interpreting the New Testament, he lessened any difficulties involved in the miracle of the barley loaves and fishes by suggesting that what it really means is that Jesus gave mankind a preparatory training for the gospel by means of the law and philosophy; because, as he says, barley, like the law, ripens sooner than wheat, which

tory of exegesis, see Bartlett, *Bampton Lectures*, 1888, p. 29. For efforts in general to save the credit of myths by allegorical interpretation, and for those of Philo in particular, see Drummond, *Philo Judæus*, London, 1888, vol. i, pp. 18, 19, and notes. For interesting samples of Alexandrian exegesis and for Philo's application of the term "oracle" to the Jewish Scriptures, see Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 147 and note. For his discovery of symbols of the universe in the furniture of the tabernacle, see Drummond, as above, vol. i, pp. 269 *et seq.* For the general subject, admirably discussed from a historical point of view, see the Rev. Edwin Hatch, D. D., *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, Hibbert Lectures for 1888, chap. iii. For Cosmas, see my chapters on *Geography* and *Astronomy*. For Mr. Gladstone's view of the connection between Neptune's trident and the doctrine of the Trinity, see his *Juventus Mundi*.

represents the gospel; and because, just as fishes grow in the waves of the ocean, so philosophy grew in the waves of the Gentile world.

Out of reasonings like these, those who followed, especially Cosmas, developed, as we have seen, a complete theological science of geography and astronomy.*

But the instrument in exegesis which was used with most cogent force was the occult significance of certain numbers. The Chaldean and Egyptian researches of our own time have revealed the main source of this line of thought; the speculations of Plato upon it are well known; but among the Jews and in the early Church it grew into something far beyond the wildest imaginings of the priests of Memphis and Babylon.

Philo had found for the elucidation of Scripture especially deep meanings in the numbers four, six, and seven; but other interpreters soon surpassed him. At the very outset this occult power was used in ascertaining the canonical books of Scripture. Josephus argued that, since there were twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, there must be twenty-two sacred books in the Old Testament; other Jewish authorities thought that there should be twenty-four books, on account of the twenty-four watches in the temple. St. Jerome wavered between the argument based upon the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and that suggested by the twenty-four elders in the Apocalypse. Hilary of Poitiers argued that there must be twenty-four books, on account of the twenty-four letters in the Greek alphabet. Origen found an argument for the existence of exactly four gospels in the existence of just four elements. Irenæus insisted that there could be neither more nor fewer than four gospels, since the earth has four quarters, the air four winds, and the cherubim four faces; and he denounced those who

* For Justin, see the *Dialogue with Trypho*, chaps. xlii, lxxvi, and lxxxiii. For Clement of Alexandria, see his *Miscellanies*, book v, chaps. vi and xi, and book vii, chap. xvi, and especially Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, as above, pp. 76, 77. As to the loose views of the canon held by these two fathers and others of their time, see Ladd, *Doctrine of the Sacred Scriptures*, vol. ii, pp. 86, 88; also Diestel, *Geschichte des alten Testaments*.

declined to accept this reasoning as "vain, ignorant, and audacious." *

But during the first half of the third century came one who exercised a still stronger influence in this direction—a great man who, while rendering precious services, did more than any other to fasten upon the Church a system which has been one of its heaviest burdens for more than sixteen hundred years: this was Origen. Yet his purpose was noble and his work based on profound thought. He had to meet the leading philosophers of the pagan world, to reply to their arguments against the Old Testament, and especially to break the force of their taunts against its imputation of human form, limitations, passions, weaknesses, and even immoralities to the Almighty.

Starting with a mistaken translation of a verse in the book of Proverbs, Origen presented as a basis for his main structure the idea of a threefold sense of Scripture: the literal, the moral, and the mystic—corresponding to the Platonic conception of the threefold nature of man. As results of this we have such masterpieces as his proof, from the fifth verse of chapter xxv of Job, that the stars are living beings, and from the well-known passage in the nineteenth chapter of St. Matthew his warrant for self-mutilation. But his great triumphs were in the allegorical method. By its use the Bible was speedily made an oracle indeed, or, rather, a book of riddles. A list of kings in the Old Testament thus becomes an enumeration of sins; the waterpots of stone, "containing two or three firkins apiece," at the marriage of Cana, signify the literal, moral, and spiritual sense of Scripture; the ass upon which the Saviour rode on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem becomes the Old Testament, the foal the New Testament, and the two apostles who went to loose them the moral and mystical senses; blind Bartimeus throwing off his coat while hastening to Jesus, opens a whole treasury of oracular meanings.

* For Jerome and Origen, see notes on pages following. For Irenæus, see Irenæus, *Adversus Hæres.*, lib. iii, cap. xi, § 8. For the general subject, see Sunday, *Inspiration*, p. 115; also Farrar and H. P. Smith as above. For a recent very full and very curious statement from a Roman Catholic authority regarding views cherished in the older Church as to the symbolism of numbers, see Detzel, *Christliche Iconographie*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1894, Band i, *Einleitung*, p. 4.

The genius and power of Origen made a great impression on the strong thinkers who followed him. St. Jerome called him "the greatest master in the Church since the apostles," and Athanasius was hardly less emphatic.

The structure thus begun was continued by leading theologians during the centuries following: St. Hilary of Poitiers—"the Athanasius of Gaul"—produced some wonderful results of this method; but St. Jerome, inspired by the example of the man whom he so greatly admired, went beyond him. A triumph of his exegesis is seen in his statement that the Shunamite damsel who was selected to cherish David in his old age signified heavenly wisdom.

The great mind of St. Augustine was drawn largely into this kind of creation, and nothing marks more clearly the vast change which had come over the world than the fact that this greatest of the early Christian thinkers turned from the broader paths opened by Plato and Aristotle into that opened by Clement of Alexandria.

In the mystic power of numbers to reveal the sense of Scripture Augustine found especial delight. He tells us that there is deep meaning in sundry scriptural uses of the number forty, and especially as the number of days required for fasting. Forty, he reminds us, is four times ten. Now, four, he says, is the number especially representing time, the day and the year being each divided into four parts; while ten, being made up of three and seven, represents knowledge of the Creator and creature, three referring to the three persons in the triune Creator, and seven referring to the three elements, heart, soul, and mind, taken in connection with the four elements, fire, air, earth, and water, which go to make up the creature. Therefore this number ten, representing knowledge, being multiplied by four, representing time, admonishes us to live during time according to knowledge—that is, to fast for forty days.

Referring to such misty methods as these, which lead the reader to ask himself whether he is sleeping or waking, St. Augustine remarks that "ignorance of numbers prevents us from understanding such things in Scripture." But perhaps the most amazing example is to be seen in his notes on the hundred and fifty and three fishes which, according to St.

John's Gospel, were caught by St. Peter and the other apostles. Some points in his long development of this subject may be selected to show what the older theological method could be made to do for a great mind. He tells us that the hundred and fifty and three fishes embody a mystery; that the number ten, evidently as the number of the commandments, indicates the law; but, as the law without the spirit only kills, we must add the seven gifts of the spirit, and we thus have the number seventeen, which signifies the old and new dispensations; then, if we add together every several number which seventeen contains from one to seventeen inclusive, the result is a hundred and fifty and three—the number of the fishes.

With this sort of reasoning he finds profound meanings in the number of furlongs mentioned in the sixth chapter of St. John. Referring to the fact that the disciples had rowed about "twenty-five or thirty furlongs," he declares that "twenty-five typifies the law, because it is five times five, but the law was imperfect before the gospel came; now perfection is comprised in six, since God in six days perfected the world, hence five is multiplied by six that the law may be perfected by the gospel, and six times five is thirty."

But Augustine's exploits in exegesis were not all based on numerals; he is sometimes equally profound in other modes. Thus he tells us that the condemnation of the serpent to eat dust typifies the sin of curiosity, since in eating dust he "penetrates the obscure and shadowy"; and that Noah's ark was "pitched within and without with pitch" to show the safety of the Church from the leaking in of heresy.

Still another exploit—one at which the Church might well have stood aghast—was his statement that the drunkenness of Noah prefigured the suffering and death of Christ. It is but just to say that he was not the original author of this interpretation: it had been presented long before by St. Cyprian. But this was far from Augustine's worst. Perhaps no interpretation of Scripture has ever led to more cruel and persistent oppression, torture, and bloodshed than his reading into one of the most beautiful parables of Jesus of Naza-

reth—into the words “Compel them to come in”—a warrant for religious persecution: of all unintended blasphemies since the world began, possibly the most appalling.

Another strong man follows to fasten these methods on the Church: St. Gregory the Great. In his renowned work on the book of Job, the *Magna Moralia*, given to the world at the end of the sixth century, he lays great stress on the deep mystical meanings of the statement that Job had seven sons. He thinks the seven sons typify the twelve apostles, for “the apostles were selected through the sevenfold grace of the Spirit; moreover, twelve is produced from seven—that is, the two parts of seven, four and three, when multiplied together give twelve.” He also finds deep significance in the number of the apostles; this number being evidently determined by a multiplication of the number of persons in the Trinity by the number of quarters of the globe. Still, to do him justice, it must be said that in some parts of his exegesis the strong sense which was one of his most striking characteristics crops out in a way very refreshing. Thus, referring to a passage in the first chapter of Job, regarding the oxen which were ploughing and the asses which were feeding beside them, he tells us pithily that these typify two classes of Christians: the oxen, the energetic Christians who do the work of the Church; the asses, the lazy Christians who merely feed.*

Thus began the vast theological structure of oracular interpretation applied to the Bible. As we have seen, the men who prepared the ground for it were the rabbis of Palestine and the Hellenized Jews of Alexandria; and the

* For Origen, see the *De Principiis*, book iv, chaps. i–vii *et seq.*, Crombie’s translation; also the *Contra Celsum*, vol. vi, p. 70; vol. vii, p. 20, etc.; also various citations in Farrar. For Hilary, see his *Tractatus super Psalmos*, cap. ix, li, etc., in Migne, vol. ix, and *De Trinitate*, lib. ii, cap. ii. For Jerome’s interpretation of the text relating to the Shunamite woman, see Epist. lii, in Migne, vol. xxii, pp. 527, 528. For Augustine’s use of numbers, see the *De Doctrina Christiana*, lib. ii, cap. xvi; and for the explanation of the draught of fishes, see Augustine in, *In Johan. Evangel.*, tractat. cxxii; and on the twenty-five to thirty furlongs, *ibid.*, tract. xxv, cap. 6; and for the significance of the serpent eating dust, *De Gen.*, lib. ii, c. 18. For the view that the drunkenness of Noah prefigured the suffering of Christ, as held by SS. Cyprian and Augustine, see Farrar, as above, pp. 181, 238. For St. Gregory, see the *Magna Moralia*, lib. i, cap. xiv.

four great men who laid its foundation courses were Origen, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory.

During the ten centuries following the last of these men this structure continued to rise steadily above the plain meanings of Scripture. The Christian world rejoiced in it, and the few great thinkers who dared bring the truth to bear upon it were rejected. It did indeed seem at one period in the early Church that a better system might be developed. The School of Antioch, especially as represented by Chrysostom, appeared likely to lead in this better way, but the dominant forces were too strong; the passion for myth and marvel prevailed over the love of real knowledge, and the reasonings of Chrysostom and his compeers were neglected.*

In the ninth century came another effort to present the claims of right reason. The first man prominent in this was St. Agobard, Bishop of Lyons, whom an eminent historian has well called the clearest head of his time. With the same insight which penetrated the fallacies and follies of image worship, belief in witchcraft persecution, the ordeal, and the judicial duel, he saw the futility of this vast fabric of interpretation, protested against the idea that the Divine Spirit extended its inspiration to the mere words of Scripture, and asked a question which has resounded through every generation since: "If you once begin such a system, who can measure the absurdity which will follow?"

During the same century another opponent of this dominant system appeared: John Scotus Erigena. He contended that "reason and authority come alike from the one source of Divine Wisdom"; that the fathers, great as their authority is, often contradict each other; and that, in last resort, reason must be called in to decide between them.

But the evolution of unreason continued: Agobard was unheeded, and Erigena placed under the ban by two councils—his work being condemned by a synod as a "*Commen-tum Diaboli*." Four centuries later Honorius III ordered it

* For the work of the School of Antioch, and especially of Chrysostom, see the eloquent tribute to it by Farrar, as above.

to be burned, as "teeming with the venom of hereditary depravity"; and finally, after eight centuries, Pope Gregory XIII placed it on the Index, where, with so many other works which have done good service to humanity, it remains to this day. Nor did Abélard, who, three centuries after Agobard and Erigena, made an attempt in some respects like theirs, have any better success: his fate at the hands of St. Bernard and the Council of Sens the world knows by heart. Far more consonant with the spirit of the universal Church was the teaching in the twelfth century of the great Hugo of St. Victor, conveyed in these ominous words, "Learn first what is to be believed" (*Disce primo quod credendum est*), meaning thereby that one should first accept doctrines, and then find texts to confirm them.

These principles being dominant, the accretions to the enormous fabric of interpretation went steadily on. Typical is the fact that the Venerable Bede contributed to it the doctrine that, in the text mentioning Elkanah and his two wives, Elkanah means Christ and the two wives the Synagogue and the Church. Even such men as Alfred the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas were added to the forces at work in building above the sacred books this prodigious structure of sophistry.

Perhaps nothing shows more clearly the tenacity of the old system of interpretation than the sermons of Savonarola. During the last decade of the fifteenth century, just at the close of the mediæval period, he was engaged in a life-and-death struggle at Florence. No man ever preached more powerfully the gospel of righteousness; none ever laid more stress on conduct; even Luther was not more zealous for reform or more careless of tradition; and yet we find the great Florentine apostle and martyr absolutely tied fast to the old system of allegorical interpretation. The autograph notes of his sermons, still preserved in his cell at San Marco, show this abundantly. Thus we find him attaching to the creation of grasses and plants on the third day an allegorical connection with the "multitude of the elect" and with the "sound doctrines of the Church"; and to the creation of land animals on the sixth day a similar relation to

“the Jewish people” and to “Christians given up to things earthly.” *

The revival of learning in the fifteenth century seemed likely to undermine this older structure.

Then it was that Lorenzo Valla brought to bear on biblical research, for the first time, the spirit of modern criticism. By truly scientific methods he proved the famous “Letter of Christ to Abgarus” a forgery; the “Donation of Constantine,” one of the great foundations of the ecclesiastical power in temporal things, a fraud; and the “Apostles’ Creed” a creation which post-dated the apostles by several centuries. Of even more permanent influence was his work upon the New Testament, in which he initiated the modern method of comparing manuscripts to find what the sacred text really is. At an earlier or later period he would doubtless have paid for his temerity with his life; fortunately, just at that time the ruling pontiff and his contemporaries cared much for literature and little for orthodoxy, and from their palaces he could bid defiance to the Inquisition.

While Valla thus initiated biblical criticism south of the Alps, a much greater man began a more fruitful work in northern Europe. Erasmus, with his edition of the New Testament, stands at the source of that great stream of modern research and thought which is doing so much to undermine and dissolve away the vast fabric of patristic and scholastic interpretation.

Yet his efforts to purify the scriptural text seemed at first to encounter insurmountable difficulties, and one of these

* For Agobard, see the *Liber adversus Fredigisum*, cap. xii; also Reuter's *Relig. Aufklärung im Mittelalter*, vol. i, p. 24; also Poole, *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought*, London, 1884, pp. 38 *et seq.* For Erigena, see his *De Divisione Naturæ*, lib. iv, cap. v; also i, cap. lxvi-lxxi; and for general account, see Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy*, New York, 1871, vol. i, pp. 358 *et seq.*; and for the treatment of his work by the Church, see the edition of the *Index* under Leo XIII, 1881. For Abélard, see the *Sic et Non*, Prologue, Migne, vol. clxxviii; and on the general subject, Milman, *Latin Christianity*, vol. iii, pp. 371-377. For Hugo of St. Victor, see *Erudit. Didask.*, lib. vii, vi, 4, in Migne, clxxvi. For Savonarola's interpretations, see various references to his preaching in Villari's *Life of Savonarola*, English translation, London, 1890, and especially the exceedingly interesting table in the appendix to vol. i, chap. vii.

