

## DISCUSSION OF CHRIST'S FIRST WORD ON THE CROSS.

REMARKS OF PROF. W. B. SMITH.

[The corrected proof sheets of Professor Smith's article in reply to Professor Nestle's and Rev. Charles Caverno's communications reached us after the March number of *The Open Court* had gone to press, and we regret that they came too late for us to make the changes or insert the additions. In justice to Professor Smith, however, we deem it proper to reprint his entire discussion of Christ's First Words on the Cross. The article to which it belongs appeared in the March number, pages 177 ff.—ED.]

THE passage in question is very richly attested by very ancient authorities. It is given by great numbers of manuscripts, some uncials, and very old, reaching into the fifth or fourth century, which I need not name; they are all found cited on pp. 710, 711 of Tischendorf's New Testament, Vol. I. The passage is also found in the Fathers as early as the 2d century, being quoted by Irenaeus (A. D. 185), Origen (A. D. 245) and others. It is also found in Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian and Latin versions; also in the Clementine Homilies, etc. So that the attestation appears overwhelming. Nevertheless, it is *still an interpolation*. For it is not in the oldest Greek manuscript, the Vatican (B) dating from the fourth or early fifth century, nor in Beza's D; it was enclosed in brackets in the next oldest, the Sinaitic (Ⲙ); it is not in the oldest Syriac version, our very oldest authority; not in various other excellent manuscripts and versions. Its *presence* in any number of MSS. and other authorities is easy enough to understand, even if it were not originally in Luke's Gospel; but its *absence* from so many of the very oldest is impossible to understand, if it had been originally there.

It would seem that some copyist invented it in the second century, after the Gospel (according to Luke) had taken form and become current. It was inserted (by some copyist) in some MSS., and not inserted by others. Hence it appears in many but not in the very oldest MSS. and translations (like the Syriac translation

recently discovered on Mt. Sinai). The acute text-critic Lachmann put it in brackets [] in his edition of the New Testament, and the great English editors, Bishop Westcott and Dr. Hort, in their edition of 1881, the best thus far, put it in double brackets [[]], as being an interpolation.

But the interpolation was made in the second century, before A. D. 190, or at least the verse was invented before that time. Just when it was actually first written in a copy of Luke's Gospel, no man can say within one or two hundred years, certainly however before the ninth century, for some MSS. containing it are much older than the ninth century, when men had ceased to think such great thoughts.

The notion that the clause was first introduced into the text in the ninth century reflects perhaps Scrivener's remark that the corrector who introduced the sentence into D was "not earlier than Cent. ix." On page 68 of "Notes on Select Readings," Appendix to Westcott and Hort's edition of the New Testament, 1881, we read: "The documentary distribution suggests that text was a Western interpolation, of limited range in early times (being absent from *Dab* though read by *e* syr. vt Iren. Hom. Cl Eus. *Can*), adopted in eclectic texts, and then naturally received into general currency.

"Its omission on the hypothesis of its genuineness, cannot be explained in any reasonable manner. Wilful excision, on account of the love and forgiveness shown to the Lord's own murderers, is absolutely incredible." Then, after discussing the Constantinopolitan lection, the editors continue:

"Few verses of the Gospels bear in themselves a surer witness to the truth of what they record than this first of the Words from the Cross: but it need not therefore have belonged originally to the book in which it is now included. We can not doubt that it comes from an extraneous source."

This admission by the chief English editors is decisive and of the farthest-reaching importance. Still more recent critics entertain no doubt whatever. Says Wellhausen, it "is without any doubt interpolated." His exact words are:

"Der Spruch 'Vater vergib ihnen u. s. w.' (xxiii. 34) fehlt im Vat. Sin. und D, in der Syra und einigen Vett. Latinae; er ist ohne allen Zweifel interpolirt."

This is not absolutely accurate. The saying is in Sin. but enclosed in curved brackets put there by an early corrector (A), and afterwards deleted by a later corrector. A seems to have known

that the passage was interpolated. Tischendorf's words are: "A (ut videtur) uncos apposuit, sed rursus deleti sunt." Moreover, the verse appears in some Syriac versions, but *not* in the oldest, the Sinaitic.

Of course, one must not forget, neither wonder, that the Burgons rage (*Revision Revised*, p. 83) and the Millers imagine a vain thing (*Scrivener's Introduction*, Fourth Revised Edition, II., 356-358), but what is the *only* argument they adduce? Simply a catalog of the MSS., Versions, Fathers that attest the words in question. "And there being several thousand—but this story why pursue?" What does a whole "forest" of such testimonies avail? What signify? Merely that the sentiment pleased the prevailing Christian consciousness. Were the witnesses strewn thick as autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa, it would mean no more. If the Associated Press should send out an idle rumor, would any one seek to prove it authentic by heaping up copies of the 'Dailies' in which it appeared? Yet such is the method of the critics who "burn with indignation" against the thoroughly orthodox editors, Westcott and Hort, declaring that "the system which entails such consequences is hopelessly self-condemned."

Like the English masters, Professor Nestle recognizes that the clause is "inserted" and does "not belong to the earliest form of the Gospel of Luke." Nevertheless, like them he still *seems* to hold that the saying is *authentic*, that the verse "is a true record of what Jesus really said from a source of which the origin is no longer known," and he thinks this "assumption" "compatible" with the concession that the clause was "inserted in some copies of Luke." But how can this be? Since admittedly the sentiment was so popular that its interpolation found early and wide-spread adoption, why was it omitted and disregarded by *all* the earliest authorities, by Matthew, by Mark, by Luke, by John, by countless other "Gospels," by the Epistolists, by the Apostolic Fathers, by the Apologists, by all Christian writers down to Irenæus, for 150 years after the words were supposedly spoken? Less than a century separates us from Waterloo. Suppose that in some new edition, by some unknown reviser, of Siborne or Montholon, we should find "inserted," as pronounced by either Duke or Emperor at the crisis, some extraordinary elsewhere unmentioned saying similar to some familiar utterance, under similar conditions, of Turenne or Marlborough. Would Nestle or any other critic accept it as authentic? Would he not dismiss it as a manifest invention? Would he not regard the silence of a century, and of all who were in any position to know, as decisive? Why

then refuse to apply to the New Testament the principles followed in dealing with other documents?

Nestle asks, "Why shall we not assume that Stephen and James followed the example set by Jesus?" Certainly, in the utter absence of evidence no one would deny the *abstract possibility* that Jesus uttered these or any other words on the Cross, IF *Jesus was really a man and really crucified*. But, laying aside the fact that no shred of evidence yet produced indicates clearly his humanity, while volumes of uncontroverted evidence indicate his pure divinity and non-humanity, we must still renew the questions: How was such a saying reported from the crucifixion? How did it gain currency among the disciples? Above all else, why did it remain unheeded by all that knew it, and for well-nigh 150 years, for nearly 5 generations, and why await all this while or longer for a copyist to interpolate it? Such questions admit of no satisfactory answer.

The cases of Stephen and James, if authentic, make not for but only against the contention of Nestle. For *if* the Disciples spake so at their passing, then indeed there was strong incentive and even compelling reason to ascribe such words to Jesus also; for surely "a disciple is not above his master, nor a servant above his lord." Since it is thus so easy and natural to understand the verse as what it obviously appears to be, the pious invention of a later date, the hypothesis of Nestle must be rejected as not only unmanageable but also unnecessary.

The case of Socrates has been cited as offering the original precedent and model of imitation, not because it was unique, but because it was so famous. To be sure, some one may object that the incident was only a pious disciple's invention, to glorify his master. And who can quite deny? But fact or fiction, it had been for centuries familiar to the general mind. For the Lucan interpolator, however, the examples of James and Stephen lay nearer at hand, at least in tradition, if not in historical actuality. On their dying lips such words were appropriate and even probable, though the positive evidence therefor is too frail to be handled. On the other hand, there is no decisive counter-proof, as there is against the *authenticity* as well as the *genuineness* of the Lucan passage.