

A SUMMARY OF RECENT CRITICISM OF "THE ODES OF SOLOMON."

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THE present trend of opinion among scholars concerning the character of the *Odes of Solomon* seems so far to follow the usual course adopted by them in 1910-1916, that is, each one is still endeavouring to look at them from the angle of vision which is best adapted to his own way of thinking. So Dr. M. Gaster finds that the Odes are thoroughly Jewish in origin, emanating from some Israelitish mystics of the first or second century of the Christian era. He says in effect: "With the elimination of a few passages, the whole collection has a typical Jewish aspect, and is unquestionably of Jewish origin. It is thus an important contribution to ancient Jewish Hymnology. . . . The *Psalms of Solomon* now form part of the collection in which the Odes are also included, and it is an idle attempt to separate one from the other."¹ That the Odes, however, are thoroughly Christian (or at the most Judæo-Christian) in character may now be considered as established, in spite of the isolated opinion of a few dissentient critics.

The best review that has appeared of the edition of the Odes recently published under the auspices of the John Rylands Library is undoubtedly that of the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin.² Dr. Bernard is a man who is to be reckoned with in any rôle he assumes in discussions, be it that of a protagonist or an antagonist. Whether one agrees with his views or not, one is bound to say that they always strike a note of originality, especially in the domain of Patristics and Liturgiology. So with regard to the puzzling vv. 8-9 of Ode XIX:—

¹ *The Jewish Guardian*, for September, 1920, p. 6.

² In *Theology*, 1920, pp. 288-98, and in *Church Quarterly Review*, 1920, pp. 163-67.

And she travailed and brought forth a son without incurring pain
 For it did not happen without purpose ;
 And she had not required a midwife
 For He (God) delivered her

Bernard refers us to a very appropriate saying of Origen and to its ultimate source, which is Isa. lxvi. 7, " Before she travailed, she brought forth ; before her pain came she was delivered of a man child ". The value of this prophetic sentence would have increased tenfold had Isaiah written it in English, because it might also have served to throw some light on v. 10 of the Ode, " And she brought forth, as a man, by (God's) will ". Unfortunately the words appearing in English as " man child " are a free translation of the Hebrew ZKR, meaning simply *male*. However that may be, Bernard's reference is certainly valuable. In his review Bernard has expressed in a rather strong language disapproval of some of our own views on the matter. With a few of the theories adopted by him we venture to disagree, and the reasons for our disagreement will be very succinctly exposed in the following lines for his consideration.

On ff. 288-89 Bernard quotes one of the rubrics of the morning office in the Syriac *Testamentum Domini* to the following effect : " Let them sing psalms, and four hymns of praise ; one by Moses, and of Solomon and of the other prophets," and adds that in this rubric a distinction is drawn between *psalms* and *hymns of praise* of Moses, and of Solomon and the prophets—i.e. between the Canonical psalter and the *ψδαί* of the Eastern Church, and concludes " It seems to me fairly certain that we have here a trace of the use of the Odes in public worship in the Syrian Church ". That the Odes were probably in use in the West Syrian Church we have demonstrated by a more direct evidence in our own book (p. 132), but we question Bernard's " fairly certain " opinion that the above quotation can lead us to the same conclusion.

The words used in the rites and breviaries of the Syrian Church to express psalms are *mazmōra* (very common), *tishbohta*,¹ and *Zmirta*,² and in case a distinction is drawn between psalms of David and any other psalms, the word *mazmōra* is retained exclusively for the psalter, and the word *tishbohta* (hymn of praise) is used for any

¹ See Wright's *Brit. Mus. Cat. of Syr. MSS.*, I, pp. 116, 119, etc.

² *Ibid.*, p. 132, etc.