

ARTICLE II.

NOTE ON GALATIANS III. 16.

οὐ λέγει, καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐφ' ἑνὸς, καὶ τῷ σπέρματι σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός.

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THE argument in this passage has generally been considered difficult. Among those commentators who have not regarded it as altogether rabbinical and inconsequential, there has been no little variety of explanation.

It is admitted by all that *σπέρμα*, like the Hebrew *שׂרָף*, or the English *seed*, is a collective noun, and that the promise would still have been expressed in the singular if it had been intended to embrace all the individuals of the posterity of Abraham. It is frequently so used of the Israelites, e.g. Gen. xii. 7; xiii. 15; xv. 5, 13, 18, etc. In all such cases it is rendered in the LXX by *σπέρμα* in the singular, and in fact, this is the usual rendering of *שׂרָף*, nor is this ever translated by any plural form. The same thing is true of the same word in Chaldee, and of its translation in the LXX, although the Chaldee word is twice used in a different sense in the plural (Dan. i. 12, 16), and is then correspondingly translated by the Greek plural.

Several instances (Gen. x. 18; Josh. vii. 14; Jer. xxiii. 24) have been cited in which the Chaldee word is used in the plural in the Targum in a somewhat similar sense; but the sense is not the same (as asserted by Lightfoot), and in all these cases the Hebrew word is *עוֹרָפָה*¹ = *family*, variously rendered in the Greek. A single instance of the use of the Greek plural is frequently referred to in 4 Macc. xviii. 1: ὁ

¹ The Hebrew *שׂרָף* is also used in the singular in this sense (2 Kings xi. 1; xv. 25; Jer. xli. 1; Dan. i. 3; ix. 1), but always in construction with some explanatory word.

τῶν Ἀβραμιαίων σπερμάτων ἀπόγονοι παῖδες Ἰσραηλῖται, πείθεσθε τῷ νόμῳ τούτῳ. Both Meyer and Lightfoot consider this an instance of the exact sense required; but it may be doubted whether the σπέρματα here has not rather the sense of the Chaldee plural just mentioned of *families*. At most, it is but a solitary and obscure example.

It may be assumed, therefore, that the σπέρμασιν of the text is justified neither by Hebrew, Chaldee, nor Greek usage. What then led St. Paul to employ it here in such marked contrast to the singular, and does he really intend to found an argument upon the use in the original promise of the singular rather than the plural? If so, the argument is certainly fallacious, for it is evident that the plural was excluded by linguistic usage. It is not to be supposed, however, without proof, that he so intended.

St. Jerome will have it that the apostle, who was accustomed to become all things to all men if by any means he might save some, here became a fool in his argument to adapt himself to the "foolish Galatians"!¹ St. Augustine understands Χριστός to mean the body of Christian believers, and the distinction to be made between the singular and plural of σπέρμα "quia et una est fides, et non possunt similiter justificari qui vivunt ex operibus carnaliter, cum his qui vivunt ex fide spiritualiter." Irenæus (v. 32) apparently took a similar view, and is followed by Olshausen and Alford. Although none of these notice the fact, yet there is a confirmation of this view in the Chaldee use of the plural and of the Greek example from Maccabees. The contrast, according to these expositors, is between the spiritual posterity of Abraham, the *family* of Christians, and the other families descended from him after the flesh. Olshausen urges and Alford insists still more earnestly that Χριστός, without the Ἰησοῦς, must include the whole body of believers of which Christ is head. Without delaying upon this point, it is evi-

¹ Apostolus qui omnibus omnia factus est, ut omnes lucrifaceret, debitor Græcis ac barbaris, sapientibus et insipientibus, Galatis quoque, quos paulo ante stultos dixerat, factus est stultus.

ident that this interpretation still makes the apostle argue from the use of the singular rather than the plural in the original promise, and by whatever refined subtilty this may be explained, it can hardly be considered as an honest and valid argument.

Meyer boldly says "that this inference is purely rabbinical (Surenhusius, *καταλλ.* p. 84 f.; Schoettgen, *Hor.* p. 736; Döpke, *Hermeneut.* I. p. 176 ff.), and without objective force as a proof, is evident from the fact." And again, "to discover this reference in the *singular* *καὶ τῷ σπέρματι σου* was a mere feat of the rabbinical subtilty, which was still retained by the apostle from his youthful culture as a characteristic element of his national training," etc. Ellicott, on the other hand, takes refuge in a mystical meaning of *סֵדֶה*, which St. Paul was enabled to discover by his inspiration. Thus, while taking extreme opposite views, neither of these commentators allow any force to the argument in the ordinary acceptation of that word.

Lightfoot has recognized that the argument of the Apostle does not depend on the distinction between *σπέρμασι* and *σπέρματι*; and that the original promise had reference to Christ as "the true seed of Abraham." Yet even he scarcely brings into sufficient prominence the reason for this. He says the Apostle "is not laying stress on the particular word used, but on the fact that a singular noun of some kind, a collective term, is employed, where *τὰ τέκνα* or *οἱ ἀπόγονοι*, for instance, might have been substituted. Avoiding the technical terms of grammar, he could not express his meaning more simply than by the opposition, 'not to thy *seeds*, but to thy *seed*.' A plural substantive would be inconsistent with the interpretation given; the singular collective noun, if it admits of plurality (as it is interpreted by St. Paul himself, Rom. iv. 18; ix. 7), at the same time involves the idea of unity." He then goes on to show that the interpretation of 'the seed of Abraham' of Christ, together with those who are in him, is a legitimate sense of the words.

This last point needs to be more fully developed: and in its

development it is believed that a solution of the difficulty may be found. The Paradisaical promise, given immediately upon the fall, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, was from the first understood of some Deliverer that should arise to break from man the thralldom of the yoke of evil. So it was understood when Cain was named as the expected Restorer (Gen. iv. 1); so again it was regarded when, ages after this first disappointment, Noah was expected to be the one that "shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed" (Gen. v. 29). During all the long ages when man was but falling more deeply and hopelessly under the power of evil this promise must have been the hope and stay of every devout and God-fearing soul. It survived the terrible judgment of the flood. It passed into the expectation of the better part of every nation. Trench has well said, "No thoughtful student of the past records of mankind can refuse to acknowledge that through all its history there has run the hope of a redemption from the evil which oppresses it; nor of this only, but that this hope has continually linked itself on to some single man. The help that is coming to the world, it has ever seen incorporated in a person."¹ This expectation surely was not wanting in the family of Shem, nor in the race of Eber; and when Abraham was called out of the world to be the father of a chosen nation, and it was promised him that "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," he must have understood by it that the long expected Redeemer of mankind, the Seed of the woman, was to be born of his posterity. So the promise was certainly understood in after ages, as with ever increasing fulness of explanation it was localized successively in the tribe of Judah and in the family of David. The prophets of later times are continually bringing out fresh features of the character of the redemption, but never waver in the idea that it is to be accomplished by a *Person* whose birth-place at Bethlehem is distinctly announced by Micah.

¹ Hulsean Lectures, 1846; Lecture ii. p. 177.

Now the promise having thus been understood before it was confined to the seed of Abraham, having of necessity been so received by him, having been so explained by the Divine oracles again and again in the long ages that followed, St. Paul was certainly justified in saying that the promise of blessing was through ONE, and that One was Christ. We take this to be his argument: The promise given to Abraham was a promise of blessing to mankind through the Redeemer foretold in Paradise; a promise spread abroad in the expectation of the nations, and especially defined in Israel as the prophecy of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, of the King upon the throne of David. He was an individual and not a multitude. To express this in English we should say, "it was not to *seeds*, as of many; but as of One, and to thy *seed*, which is Christ," without any reference to the intrinsic etymological value of the singular and plural of that word. Similarly St. Paul uses *σπέρμασιν* and *σπέρματι*, not arguing from the force of the singular term in the promise, but from the whole idea and understanding of that promise, which he simply explains by the singular and plural in Greek as we now do the same in English. His argument is from the nature of the promise; he uses the singular and plural merely as a convenience to explain his meaning.