

A SPECULATION IN TEXTUAL CRITICISM.

IN the following pages I propose to discuss afresh the text of a passage in the Gospel of Luke which has given me personally a great degree of annoyance, on account of the extraordinary complexity of its attestation ; I have returned to it again and again, in the hope of getting some clearer light upon it, by distrusting the rules that are drawn up for our guidance in such matters, and (though this must be said with bated breath and whispering humbleness) the rulers as well as the rules. But so far my despair has been chronic ; nor has time helped to abate the disease by the discovery of any fresh factors in the evidence which may co-ordinate the divergent testimony and render that lucid which has hitherto been obscure.

I am alluding to the famous passage in Luke xiv. 5, where the critics have to decide whether they will read " a son or an ox " or " an ass or an ox," or some other of the many combinations of children, asses and oxen which occur in the MSS. and versions of the New Testament, representing the possible combinations of animated beings which are capable of falling into wells, and so of becoming the material for the establishment of the Christian doctrine of the Sabbath. Now, in order to avoid the dullness which naturally creeps over the subject of Textual Criticism when we confine ourselves to signs and symbols, numbers and letters of the alphabet, and do not look beneath them into the meaning of readings and combinations of readings, we propose to treat the subject something differently from what would be normal in works on the New Testament text, and without making what might be considered an orderly progress through the tangled wood of the conflicting

readings. Suppose we state the matter in its simplest possible form.

The Authorized Version of the Bible presents us in Luke xiv. 5 with the question :—

“ Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day ? ”

The Revised Version, however, puts the matter a little differently : it retains substantially the Authorized rendering, with slight modifications of the English, but intimates on the margin the existence of a variant in the following words :—

Many ancient authorities read *a son*. See chap. xiii. 15. The suggested variant is to read *a son* for *an ass*, and the reference to Luke xiii. 15 is for a parallel passage in which the owner of an ox or an ass leads the animal to water on the Sabbath day. So that we may read between the lines and say that some Revisers would have liked to read *son* for *ass*, and intimated that the conjunction of *ox* and *ass* was a reflection from the previous chapter of the Gospel. Now, this is the problem in its simplest form, and as it stands, it is merely the habitual question in New Testament criticism, “ What are your working rules of criticism, and how do they apply in the present case ? ” Only the problem does not happen to be nearly as simple as it looks. There are other variant readings in existence, and there is also the difficulty of editing according to rules, when the rules appear to lead one into absurdities. For example, Scrivener, in his *Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, ed. iii. vol. ii. p. 305, opens the discussion of the passage as follows :—

“ Luke xiv. 5. Here again we have a strong conviction that **N**, though now in the minority, is more correct than **B**, supported as the latter is by a dense array of witnesses

of every age and country. In the clause *τίνος ὑμῶν ὄνος ἢ βοῦς* of the Received Text all the critical editors substitute *υἱός* for *ὄνος*, which introduces a bathos so tasteless as to be almost ludicrous." Then he adds a footnote against those who would get rid of the bathos by free translation, to the effect that

"To enable us to translate, 'a son, nay even an ox,' would require *ἢ καὶ*, which none read. The argument, moreover, is one *a minori ad majus*. Compare Exod. xxi. 33 with Exod. xxiii. 4; ch. xiii. 15."

The question at once arises in our minds, is the bathos real, and may we avoid a bathos by deserting a "dense array of witnesses of every age and country," including the famous Vatican Codex (B), and nearly all the other copies? I can quite imagine that, in face of such a combination, almost all critics would either deny the bathos and follow the critical text, or allow the bathos and still follow the consensus of the critical editors. In passing we may remark that in all probability the bathos is over-estimated; it is not "as deep as a grave." The conjunction of sons with oxen is not so impossible in Biblical times as it might be thought to-day: when children were chattels, they might fall into wells with cattle, and not outrage the canons of literary taste. However, let the bathos stand for what it is worth (for it is clear that all the MSS. in the world would not outweigh the aesthetic instincts of the Revisers in the matter), and then the problem for us is the textual one: ought we to follow the Sinaitic text with a handful of supporting authorities against the Vatican text and the main body of the witnesses? That is a pretty situation; very different from what we sometimes have to face, viz., B with Dr. Hort against all the rest of the world; this time it is B with nearly all the MSS. and all the editors against the Revisers.

But the textual problem is not as simple as it looks, for these are not all the variations, and as a right solution explains the aberrant readings as well as establishes the correct reading (for when the cause of the variant is known, the variant itself disappears), we must ask for at least an informal statement as to what other variations exist in the critical apparatus. Accordingly we have

- (1) A son or an ox.
- (2) An ass or an ox.
- (3) An ox or an ass.
- (4) A mountain or an ox.
- (5) A son or an ox or an ass.
- (6) A sheep or an ox.

Of these, No. 4 is only a scribe's blunder, writing *ὄρος* (a mountain) for *ὄνος* (an ass). No. 5 is an obvious conflation. No. 3 is an equally obvious inversion; and when these three are removed, we have three readings left, viz.,

- (1) A son or an ox (B).
- (2) An ass or an ox (N).
- (3) A sheep or an ox (D).

We have added the leading attesting witness in each case, and the third one acquires especial importance because it is the reading of the Codex Bezae (D), which has *πρόβατον* in the Greek and *ovis* in the Latin. On the theory of the bathos or, if you prefer it, the softening of the harder reading, we should have to assume that the Sinaitic or Bezan readings are independent attempts to get rid of the troublesome *son*. And it is usual to call Synoptic criticism and the parallel passages elsewhere into court in order to explain the sources from which the second and third readings are derived. Thus, the Sinaitic reading is supposed to have been assimilated to Luke xiii. 15, and the Bezan reading to Matthew xii. 11. In the latter case we are told of a man who has a single sheep, which falls

into a pit on the Sabbath day ; and it is inferred that this is the sheep which, according to the Bezan text, fell into the pit on the Sabbath day. The explanations given are possible, but not satisfactory. They have not satisfied the critics, who have tried to deduce the variants (or at least one of them) more immediately from what they have taken to be the true text. Thus Mill, to whom we must presently refer, thought that "sheep" was a textual corruption of *son*, or rather, conversely, "son" was a corruption of "sheep"; and I believe I was once responsible for a reduction of *ovis* from *bovis*, with a Latin reaction on the Greek text of the Codex Bezae, thus making the "sheep" a corruption of the "ox." As Mill's argument, though brief, is critically important, I proceed to examine it. It will be found in the *Prolegomena* to his New Testament (col. xlv.) as follows:—

"Τίνος ὑμῶν ὄς ἢ βοῦς. *Cant*, ut liquet ex ejus Latinis : *cujus ex vobis ovis aut bovis*. Verum diu est, cum originaria ista Graeca perierunt. Ex ὄς factum a scribis posterioribus *υῖος* quod in Codices multos transiit. Tandem vero a quopiam, cui haud congruum visum erat, ut *filius* et *bos* hic conjungerentur, parique quasi passu incederent, mutatum *υῖος* in *ὄνος* maxime quod alias in hoc Evangelio conjunctim legantur, c. 13. v. 15."

Mill's theory is that the *sheep* was the original animal of the text, but the sheep in a Homeric form (*ὄς*), not the *πρόβατον* of Codex Bezae.

It certainly required some hardihood to introduce a Homeric and poetical form into the text of the New Testament. And to get rid of *πρόβατον* and insert its archaic form was a triumph of ingenuity. It will be observed in passing that Mill felt, with Scrivener and others, the apparent incongruity of yoking *a son* and *an ox* together ! The merit of Mill's conjecture lay in its paleography : it

is well known that, in early MSS., there is a confusion between the transcription of **OI** and **Y** when **OI** is a diphthong ; and since it is common in MSS. of an early type to abbreviate **YIOC** into **YC**, the transition from **OIC** to **YIOC** became a possibility, if only the scribes would make the mistakes that they were wanted to. If Mill were right, the Codex Bezae (in its Latin and not in its Greek) becomes the primary authority for the determination of the text.

It is to this statement of Mill that Scrivener, as I suppose, refers, when he remarks that “**YC** or **OIC** mistaken for the contraction for **YIOC** is a mere guess, and we are safest here in clinging to common sense against a preponderance of outward evidence.” We agree that it is a mere guess, and believe that in the solution of the problem, common sense may have the last word, but not perhaps to the extent of throwing so much evidence overboard as the MSS. furnish for the reading *son*.

Moreover, if common sense is to be invoked, the appeal might be made higher up. For it might be asked whether it is not as easy to employ that faculty to explain all the readings, as to establish a preference for one reading against the rest.

Suppose, then, we ask whether a reason can be imagined in the nature of things why so many animated beings should be tumbling into wells ; can we devise a situation from which the accident can be evolved for them all, either in a single event, as in the “one sheep” of Matthew, or in a dual manner, the ox being one of the members of the combination in the latter case ? If we have the animals grouped in pairs disjunctively, why should one member of the combination be fixed and the other variable ? Obviously, the natural suggestion is that the other member of the combination was objected to. The theory of literary erasure of a bathos is insufficient, as we have already seen.

What animal can have occupied the first place in the combination? We suggest that the original reading was *pig*, and that, for obvious reasons, it was felt that the pig was out of place in the saying of Jesus, and was removed by various substitutions. Such a supposition would at once explain why we have the variants *ass or ox* and *sheep or ox*. But the remaining case, *son or ox*, requires a more careful examination. In the first place, the two words ὕC and ὕΙΟC are very nearly isophonous (*hys* and *hyios*); in the next place, they are almost exact paleographical equivalents. For example, there is a story told of Herod the Great by Macrobius in his *Saturnalia*,¹ that when Augustus had heard that amongst the children of two years old and under, whom Herod had commanded to be slain, his own son was included, he (Augustus) remarked that it was better to be Herod's pig than his son. Here Macrobius has mixed up the account of the Massacre of the Innocents with the general barbarity of Herod, of which his own family were so often the victims. There is no reason why we should accept Macrobius' suggestion that there was any connexion between the murder, say, of Antipater or any other of the royal household, and the legend in Matthew. But the jest about the *ûs* and the *viôs* must be original; it came from the Greek, and must have been Augustus' own. From this it is sufficiently clear that if *swine* and *son* are near enough to make puns on in Greek, they are near enough for one to be the correction of the other in a written document.

But suppose we come to actual MSS. evidence, and examine what paleography has to say on the subject.

There is a famous passage in one of the Psalms which appears in our English text as follows:—

¹ Macrobius, *l.c.* ii. 4.

Psalm xvii. 14. "They are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes."

Now, let us see how the editors of the Septuagint present this passage. They print it as follows:—

ἐχορτάσθησαν υἰών
καὶ ἀφήκαν τὰ κατάλοιπα τοῖς νηπίοις αὐτῶν.

The form *υἰών* is startling; it is the reading of both the Sinaitic and Vatican Codices; it tells us that the wicked are "full of *pig-meats*," instead of "satisfied with children," which the Hebrew shows to be the correct meaning. The Alexandrian MS. has the correct *υἰῶν* (*sons*), but another important MS. actually reads *ῥών* (*pigs*). It is surprising that editors should present a text which they know cannot be that of the original Septuagint, but with that we are not concerned. What is clear from the passage in the Psalm is that the forms *ῥς* and *υἰός* readily pass into one another. The case will be even stronger when we reflect that in the early uncial MSS. it is common to abbreviate the word *υἰός*, and write it in the **Υ̅** form, with a bar over the word to intimate the abbreviation. When the word is written in this way, the difference between *son* and *pig* is nil, except for the mark of abbreviation. Neglect that, and you can read which you please, with a preference for *pig*.

We have now shown that from the side of literature and from that of the science of diplomatics, the confusion between *son* and *pig* is in the nature of things. It hardly requires a deliberate intention to exchange one for the other. And we have now found a common sense origin for the conflicting variants. They are due to the existence of the reading *pig* or *ox* in the early history or antecedents of the Gospel of Luke. But it may still be maintained that *son* is the original, for the hypothesis merely asserts

that two words are nearly equivalent. We have not yet finally settled which has the priority. Shall we then say that it was a scribal error to write *pig* for *son*, and that then two independent corrections have been made, which we find in the Sinaitic and Bezan MSS. respectively? At first sight this looks a possible hypothesis, but it will not bear scrutiny. One single reason will perhaps suffice. The Codex Bezae says, Write *sheep* for *pig*, and let the sheep fall into the well. But this is what happens in the related passage in Matthew, which shows the saying of Christ about the treatment of animals on the Sabbath in a variant form, which has also to be accounted for. The natural conclusion is that the *pig* stood in the sources both of Matthew and of Luke. And we may give the priority to the *pig* because it will explain both the textual and Synoptic phenomena.

And now we begin to find ourselves in difficulties outside the region of textual criticism. How could Jesus have spoken of an Israelite as owning a pig? The pig is taboo, apparently from the earliest times. Would it have been assumed, even in conversation, that the hostile critic was a law-breaker of the first order, and that he had forgotten the animal which practically stood at the head of the list of taboos, which declares that these are they that shall be unclean unto you.

Moreover, we know from Luke himself in another passage that our Lord regarded the feeding of swine as a degradation, and represented the Prodigal Son of his discourse as falling into that degradation in a far country. Is it not involved in this parable that the pig is not a home animal, nor the care of him a worthy occupation?

And, last of all, when Luke speaks of pigs, he does not use the word *ἄσ*, but the alternative *χοίρος*. And the word *ἄσ* is only found in the New Testament in the pro-

verbial passage in 2 Peter, where the pig goes to the bath first and to the mire afterwards.

Now, of these objections, the last can most readily be disposed of. It is not necessary to suppose that it is Luke's own word; nor is there any reason to suppose that the word *ῥ* was not current at this period. The jest of Augustus has already come before us. In Egypt we find an official tax on pigs which is called *ῥική*.

But the difficulty as to the possession of a pig by a pious or, at all events, a respectable Israelite, is more difficult to meet.

But what do we know as to the actual prevalence of the swine taboo in our Lord's time? Was it universal? We know what it is to-day, the most beneficent of all Moslem superstitions, only broken by a few German immigrants at Haifa, who leave the sacred animal to wander about their filthy streets, to the great discomfort of the tourist. But it is certain that no such systematic taboo existed in our Lord's time as prevails under Islam. The Gadarenes are in evidence for that. And not only are they in evidence for the existence of swine in the north of Palestine; the number in the herd shows that they must have been a marketable commodity, and the markets must have been found where the people were found, that is, in the cities bordering on the lake of Galilee. Gadara also disposes of the suggestion that if a man wanted, or was forced against his liking, to feed swine, he must go into a far country to do it. The prodigal went into a far country for pleasure and freedom; if the action had turned merely on swine-herding, he need not have gone very far afield. Moreover, it is clearly impossible to assume that the single herd of swine mentioned in the Gospels was the only one in the country. If the numbers attributed to the herd seem large enough to suggest a syndicate, we must remember that we are

before the days of trusts, and that one syndicate will not control the industry. There must have been many small holders for one syndicate. So the natural and legitimate conclusion is that we have underestimated the extent to which swine and swine-feeding prevailed in Galilee in our Lord's time. And this practically removes the objection to the reading which we have tried to restore, and leaves common sense, to which Dr. Scrivener appealed, master of the situation.

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