

*MEMORIALS OF THE PREACHING OF ST.
JEROME.*

THERE is a widespread but mistaken idea that no sermons of St. Jerome have come down to us. In the course of his researches, Dom. G. Morin, O.S.B., of the Abbey of Maredsous, in Belgium, has come across two collections of such sermons and some fragments, which he proposes shortly to publish. In the meantime, he has published a learned and convincing article on the subject, which will interest all students of Church History who have learnt what a debt we owe to St. Jerome as a student and commentator.¹

In the first place, is it likely that St. Jerome, a priest and head of a monastic Church, would abstain from the office of preaching? We may gather from his own words² that he expounded the Septuagint daily to his brethren. Were not these extemporary utterances handed down? St. Augustine, in a letter³ written some years before St. Jerome's death, quotes words on Psalm xciii. which are not to be found in any edition of St. Jerome's works, but occur word for word in one of the new fragments discovered by Dom. Morin.

The sermons, which are now to be restored to their true author, are of three kinds: (1) Homilies on the Psalms, (2) on the Gospel of St. Mark, (3) on different subjects.

The first series is the most important. Its history is connected with a document known as "The Breviary of St. Jerome on the Psalms," which is an old compilation containing many genuine fragments mixed up with colourless and inferior glosses. The genuine passages are some of

¹ *Les Monuments de la Prédication de Saint Jérôme*, par Dom. Germain Morin. (Extrait de la *Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuses*, i., 1896.)

² *C. Ruf.*, ii. 24.

³ *Ep.*, 148.

them expository,¹ others homiletic. The authentic collection from which the latter were taken is represented by MSS. of more modest contents, which do not profess to give a running commentary on the whole Psalter, but only St. Jerome's expositions of fifty-nine Psalms. Such MSS. are referred to in several mediæval catalogues, *e.g.* the catalogue of the Abbey library at Reichenau in 822.² Modern editors have neglected this second family of MSS. The Maurist editor, Dom. Martiniay, appears to have known of two, one from Corbey (identified by Dom. Morin as Paris B.N. Nat. 12152), but he was not equal to his task, and did not know how to use them.

The homilies on St. Mark have been edited among the works of St. Chrysostom. Erasmus was clever enough to note the extraordinary resemblance to St. Jerome's style; but, as he states in his notes, he had not the means to undertake a critical edition. It was reserved for Dom. Morin to convert Erasmus' suspicion into certainty by two proofs. First, the fact that the discourse on St. Mark xiii. 32-xiv. 9 ends with the words, "The xivth Psalm has been read opportunely, and we must speak of the Psalm," words which are found in the sermon on Psalm xiv. of the series of fifty-nine Psalms quoted in class 1. This sermon was preached at Quadragesima for those who came to baptism, and it begins, "The xivth Psalm has been read opportunely." Plainly, St. Jerome preached the two sermons consecutively. Secondly, Cassiodorus, in his edition of the Psalter, when he deals with the influence of the Holy Spirit on the prophets, mentions St. Jerome's exposition of the passage in which St. Mark says of John, "He saw the heavens opened." Critics had agreed that the work was lost, but the very words cited by Cassio-

¹ Dom. Morin has printed the expository notes (*Commentarioli*) from a series of MSS. hitherto neglected. *Anecd. Mareds.*, iii. 1.

² *De opp. B. Hieronymi . . . in psalmos quorundam explan.*, vol. ii.

dorus are found in one of the sermons of this Ps. Chrysostom.

Having studied carefully the traits of style in these collections of sermons on the Psalms and St. Mark, Dom. Morin searched diligently among the many apocryphal writings in the MSS. and early editions of St. Chrysostom for other sermons of St. Jerome. But he could only find four, and among Ps. Augustinian and (as was supposed) Ps. Hieronymian writings some twelve others.

From the whole collection thus laboriously made, certain general conclusions may be drawn which confirm Dom. Morin's opinion of the authorship. (1) They were preached in a church. On Psalm cxxxii. the preacher exclaims: "We are in a church; how many saints are in the desert?" and he speaks of the services, how they had come to read or sing, sometimes with Alleluia, the very Psalm which he wished to expound. (2) Many were preached on Sunday, but the delivery of that on Psalm vi. was postponed till Wednesday, though the Psalm had been read on Sunday, through the indisposition of the preacher. There are sermons for Christmas Day, the feast of Dedication, the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and a series for Lent. (3) From first to last it is plain that the preacher was a monk and his hearers were monks, to whom he spoke plainly of their faults: "We are called monks, and though we are not what we ought to be, let us keep to the name. We pray at the third hour, we pray at the sixth hour, at the ninth hour; we say the office at the lamp-lighting; we rise at midnight, then we pray at cock-crowing. . . . We have left property, we have left home, we have left the world, and we quarrel in the monastery about a pen."

There are interesting indications of date in reference to the apostate Emperor Julian († 363), and the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria, *c.* 339; in allusions to the Origenist controversy, *c.* 394, and the error of the Anthro-

pomorphites, which was denounced by Theophilus of Alexandria in his Paschal letter of 399. The extreme limit is given by St. Augustine's quotation of a discourse on Psalm xciii. in a letter written c. 413. The following reference is less precise: "The Church does not consist in walls, but in the truth of her doctrines. The Church is where there is true faith. But fifteen or twenty years ago the heretics possessed all the walls of the churches. . . . But the true Church was where there was the true faith." This is probably a reference to the edict of Theodosius ordering the anti-Nicenes of the whole empire to restore churches to Catholics, on the 10th of January, 381, from which we may calculate that the sermon was preached in 401. These sermons were certainly written in Palestine. In one passage it is spoken of as a part of Phœnicia in which the Apocalypse was excluded from the Canon, though received in the West and other Phœnician provinces and in Egypt. Again, in a homily on St. Mark the preacher refers to the enormous crowds who used to assemble for the Feast of the Passover "here in Jerusalem." And he speaks of his hearers having under their eyes the ruins of the Temple at Jerusalem, for when he comes to Psalms of degrees he invites them to count the steps and verify his statement that there were fifteen.

There are interesting allusions to the office of *sanctus presbyter*, the priest who had charge of pilgrims coming to the Holy City. The title has often bewildered copyists of MSS. and the editor of the Breviary, for they have frequently substituted *quidam presbyter*, *sanctus propheta*, *sanctus spiritus*. J. F. Gamurrini's discovery of the journal of a Gallican pilgrim explained at once the history of the title.

In that journal the pilgrim observes that it was the custom at Bethlehem that as many of the priests as wished should preach in turn, and finally the Bishop, and that the

services were terribly long. An amusing comment on this is found in the sermon on Psalm cxlvi., where the preacher says he had promised to be brief, but found that he had lied in so doing. "Surely it was a very useful lie . . . The hour constrains me to keep silence, the greatness of the mysteries constrains me to speak."

We find that the preacher's chief enthusiasm is for Bethlehem, though he does not speak as a native of Palestine, and uses sometimes Greek, sometimes Latin. "Indeed, all holy places are venerable both where He was born, and where He was crucified, and where He rose again, where He ascended as conqueror into heaven. But this place has a special sanctity. See how great is the pity of God. Here He was born as an infant, as a baby was laid in the stall." Hé longs to see the historical wooden cradle for which pious people have substituted one of silver and gold. "Silver and gold are good enough for heathendom; the Christian Faith deserves that wooden manger."

Can we fail to conclude that this preacher of the monastery at Bethlehem in the 5th century was St. Jerome, as the MSS. assert, supported by the testimony of St. Augustine and Cassiodorus? Dom. Morin is prepared to confirm the conclusion by an argument based on the characteristics of St. Jerome's style found in the sermons. Such an argument however is difficult to trace out, and appeals very differently to different minds. Only those can fully appreciate it which are to some extent prepared by the possession of corresponding intellectual gifts, and by assiduous study. The following are the more marked characteristics:—

1. The writer's knowledge of the Hebrew text and the Greek versions preserved in the Hexapla of Origen, which he quotes times without number. In particular the quotations from the Hebrew Psalter agree in a remarkable way

with the text of the *Psalterium iuxta Hebræos* left to us by St. Jerome.

2. His enthusiasm for the Holy Scriptures. He implores his hearers to read them without ceasing, and on nearly every page expresses his insatiable desire to sound their depths. Thus on Psalm lxxvii. he exclaims: "O how great are these mysteries, what flowers are here! I do not say a day, a whole month would not suffice for the understanding of this Psalm. There are meanings in every word. We have also a treasure in these earthen vessels . . . that is to say in the homely words of the Scriptures."

3. His indignation against heretics, and his contempt for pagan philosophers. With vigorous apostrophes he attacks Tatian, Marcion, Manichæus, Novatian, Arius, and all whom he suspects of having "an Arian spirit" (on S. Mark xi. 1-10). As to representatives of pagan philosophy, Aristotle, Plato, Zeno, Epicurus, he sarcastically compares with their failure the marvellous success of Christ's fishermen from Galilee.

4. The general similarity of ideas and even identity of a great many phrases with those found in the known works of St. Jerome. Dom. Morin has reproduced as many as possible of the most characteristic in his footnotes, to be a continual guarantee of the authenticity of his statements.

No doubt there are a certain number of difficulties to be encountered by this theory of authorship. Dom. Morin meets them stoutly, but they are for the most part too technical to reproduce for the general reader. Some of a more general kind had been raised by the Maurist editor of the Breviary, Martiniay. He objected to the exaggerated use of allegorical interpretations, to the semi-Pelagian teaching of some passages, and the tone of others in which the preacher speaks coolly of ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries, and uses almost Socialist language about the origin of money, not to add mistakes in quotation, a faulty taste,

and general inferiority of style. Dom. Morin will only admit that two of these objections have been made good—loss of memory and a colloquial style of language. As to the first he asks, Are not mistakes found in the most careful works of the most learned men? Is not loss of memory excusable in an old man? As to the second, he makes a very interesting point that St. Jerome preached in Greek as well as in Latin. The sermon on Psalm cxliii. begins with the words: “Although we have spoken at length on the Gospel, we must say something on the Psalter for those who are ignorant of Latin, that while some are satisfied others may not return starving.” The natural explanation of this passage is that he then preached in Greek, and this would explain the recurrence of a large number of Græcisms, *e.g.*, *ex secundo* (Gr. *ἐκ δευτέρου*), the ablative and genitive absolute in the same sentence.

Gamurrini’s pilgrim speaks of an analogous service rendered to the Latin-speaking brethren present at the catechising by the Bishop of Jerusalem. They were told not to be down-hearted because they knew neither Syriac nor Greek; all should be expounded to them in Latin.

Moreover, some of the mistakes in the Latinity of these sermons may certainly be attributed to the preacher’s hearers, who wrote out his extemporary addresses.

In conclusion, Dom. Morin has grouped together a series of passages, which reach a high level of eloquence, and show the force of a strong mind. The following is a good specimen:—

On Psalm xcvi. : “*Quæris, et dicis: Quare vel quare? Quomodo sit, nescio, et tamen credo quod sit. Miraris si ignorem de divinitatis mysterio, cum meipsum nesciam? Interrogas me quomodo et divinitas et incarnatio unum sit, cum ego nesciam quomodo vivam? Deum intellexisse, credidisse est: Deum nosse, honorare est. Sufficit mihi scire quod scriptum est, sufficit mihi scire quod credo:*

plus autem nec volo nec cupio. Si enim plus scire voluero, et hoc incipio perdere quod credo. Fideles dicimur non rationales."

In a letter to St. Augustine (*Ep.* 112, n. 22) St. Jerome writes: "I am content to whisper with a mean hearer and reader in the corner of a monastery." "It seems as if posterity had taken the old man at his word." Think of the way in which St. Augustine's sermons, often retouched by his own hand, have been transcribed with loving care by hundreds of admirers, while the fragmentary notes taken by St. Jerome's hearers, often misconstrued by ignorant copyists, have survived in a pile almost unrecognisable, on which the modern critic scarcely deigns to look. "I have tried to rescue from unmerited oblivion these venerable echoes of a great voice. Shall I succeed in interesting in their favour the present generation, so disposed at times to repair the injustice of the past. I know not, but in any case I shall not have utterly lost my labour. I shall have my reward in the happiness, which I have myself experienced in taking so often, in the course of these last years, the place of 'the mean hearer,' with whom the man of God in the depth of his retreat at Bethlehem was content."

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