

A NEW VIEW ABOUT "AMBROSIASTER."

THE question as to the personality of the author of the Latin commentaries on thirteen epistles of St. Paul, commonly attributed in manuscripts to St. Ambrose, and of the pseudo-Augustinian work, *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti CXXVII.*, is one which has taxed the ingenuity of many scholars since Erasmus showed that St. Ambrose could not have been the author. Name after name has been put forward only to be rejected as insufficiently supported, and one name alone has been brought forward, that has been widely accepted amongst those best capable of judging, that of Isaac, a converted Jew, who flourished during the pontificate of Damasus (366-384 A.D.).

The author of this last suggestion is the well-known Dom Germain Morin, O.S.B., of the Abbey, Maredsous, Belgium, one of the greatest patristic scholars now living. This "suggestion"—for he explicitly stated that he did not intend it to be anything else¹—was clearly expounded to readers of the EXPOSITOR, with the reasons given in support of it, by the Rev. A. E. Burn, in November, 1899. The present writer was disposed, and even undertook, to support the view in a work at present in the press, but has gradually moved farther and farther from the position.

The chief pillar in the argument, that *Isaac ex Iudaeo* might be the author, consisted in linguistic parallels between the commentaries and *Quaestiones*, on the one hand, and two fragments of the undoubted work of Isaac, on the other. A growing acquaintance with the style of the author, fostered by the experience of collating seven manuscripts of the *Quaestiones*, in which ear and eye were made to aid each other, has convinced me that these parallels, cogent as they (especially in the use of the words *nascibilitas*

¹ Though Zimmer, in his valuable work, *Pelagius in Irland* (Berlin, 1901), p. 120 n, has represented Morin as making a categorical statement,

and *renascibilitas*) may appear, are quite insufficient to prove common authorship, and only show that the authors lived at the same time (which is otherwise certain), and were perhaps also of the same school of theology, if we may use the expression.

It was hard to have to give up a view which had obtained such wide support. It had been pleasant, after being dashed hither and thither by the waves of opinion or fancy, to settle down in rest and believe that the real author had been discovered. I do not agree with some who have considered that as we know the date of the author, his identity is of little importance. It is the fate of anonymous, or wrongly ascribed works, to be neglected, but it is a fact, as Prof. Jülicher has said,¹ that *this commentary is the best on St. Paul's epistles prior to the Reformation*. It claims therefore the attention of every educated student of St. Paul, who desires either to get help towards reaching the Apostle's meaning, or to understand the estimation in which his writings were held at the great age in the world's history, when paganism was fighting its last battle for existence, when the words of St. Hilary of Poitiers were still ringing in the ears of the western world, and when the new voices of St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine were beginning to claim a hearing. Nor can the *Quaestiones* be safely neglected by any student of that period. When the text has been properly edited, it will be found that a most interesting personality has been revealed to the world, as well as a new witness to the Old Latin version or versions of the Bible, an interpreter of Holy Scripture of sane and independent judgment, and an important authority for the history of his period.² For these reasons, it was right to persevere and seek fresh light in every quarter for the

¹ In the article *Ambrosiaster* in Pauly-Wissowa's *Real-Encyclopädie*.

² There is no reference to him in Dill's excellent book, *Roman Society in the Western Empire*.

solution of the question. This is what Dom Morin has done, and with characteristic courage he now puts forward as the result of four years' careful study, a new view with which I willingly agree.¹

Side by side with the tradition that Ambrose was author of the commentaries, there run two other streams of tradition. The oldest MS. of the commentaries, that of Monte Cassino (written in the sixth century), and it alone, to the best of my knowledge, gives no author's name to the commentaries in the subscriptions thereto. But the other tradition attributes the work to Hilarius. No MS. of any commentary or any set of the commentaries attaches this name to the work, but quotations from the commentaries (in reality from the commentary on *Romans* only, a point of some importance, which has not been emphasized) in different Irish-Latin MSS., are given as words of Hilarius. For the discovery of these references we are beholden to the lamented Dr. Samuel Berger² and Prof. Heinrich Zimmer, of Berlin, the distinguished exponent of Keltic origins.³ They are contained in the celebrated *Book of Armagh* and an entirely independent MS. of Würzburg, both Irish-Latin manuscripts of the ninth century. This important discovery gives new meaning to a reference in St. Augustine which has been long known. The great bishop, in one of his controversial treatises against the Pelagian heresy,⁴ quotes a portion of our commentary (on *Romans* v. 12), headed by the words *nam et sic sanctus Hilarius intellexit quod scriptum est*. Augustine therefore, in the early fifth century, and the Irish Church, in the early ninth century, were acquainted with copies, at least of the

¹ See *Revue Bénédictine*, xx. (1903), pp. 113-131. I owe my copy of the article to the author's kindness.

² In a posthumous work, *Les Préfaces Jointes aux Livres de la Bible dans les Manuscrits de la Vulgate* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1902), p. 26.

³ *Pelagius in Irland* (Berlin, 1901), pp. 117-120.

⁴ *Contra duas epist. Pelagian.*, lib. iv. No. 7 (of date about 420 A.D.).

commentary on Romans, bearing the title *Hilarius*. It is almost certain that Augustine believed he was quoting a work by the greatest Hilary of all, him of Poitiers. He probably never thought of any other Hilary, when he saw that name in the title. Nothing in the work would (or shall we say? could) seem to him un-Hilarian. To us who are well removed from those days and can look with a critical eye on all those ancient writings, questions of language and the like become decisive in settling the question of authorship one way or another. Contemporaries, however, are greatly blind to such. How many, who ought to have known better, attributed *Supernatural Religion* to Bishop Thirlwall? Have we not heard also of persons of mature and exquisite literary taste, who were unable to tell in the case of a composite work what was written by each author? Are all agreed as to the parts of plays written by Shakespeare and Fletcher in collaboration? Let no one therefore blame Augustine if he made a mistake in this matter. The mistake was much more venial in his time, when the important thing was not so much who made a statement or wrote a book, as what the statement or writing was, and what it was worth. This attitude of the ancients has an important bearing also on the higher criticism of the New Testament.

There has long been an opinion that some one named Hilary wrote the work. People searched dictionaries of biography for possible candidates, and with considerable rashness selected Hilary, a deacon of Rome, for the author. Even Dr. Hort followed that opinion.¹ But, other reasons apart, no deacon of Rome could have written the violent diatribe, Question 101, "On the Boastfulness of the Roman Deacons." I had joined in the search for a suitable Hilary, but could find no one important enough. Dom

¹ In the posthumous work, *Notes Introductory to the Study of the Clementine Recognitions* (Macmillan, 1901), p. 90.

Morin has now found one, whose full name was *Decimius Hilarianus Hilarius*,¹ and who satisfies all the conditions of the problem.

Decimius Hilarianus Hilarius was a Christian layman, who flourished in the latter part of the fourth and the early years of the fifth century. He was proconsul of Africa in 377; a law was addressed to him by the emperors Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius on February 19, 383,² in 396 he was *praefectus praetorio* and had four laws of the Theodosian code addressed to him during his tenure of that office,³ and finally he was in 408 prefect of Rome. Five letters in the huge collection of his contemporary Symmachus, the doughty champion of dying paganism, are addressed to him.⁴ These letters belong probably to the year 397.⁵

In connexion with his family, Prof. Seeck, perhaps the greatest living authority on the history of that period, has made what I regard as a certain conjecture. St. Jerome in his 54th letter, section 6, addressing a Roman lady of the name of Furia, uses the following words: *Pater tuus, quem ego honoris causa (i.e. with all respect) nomino, non quia consularis et patricius, sed quia christianus est, IMPLEAT NOMEN SVVM: LAETETVR filiam genuisse Christo, non saeculo.* Furia's father, then, must have had a name connected etymologically with the idea of rejoicing. The name cannot be Gaudentius, as Jerome would then have used *gaudeat*, such plays upon words being in perfect taste in ancient literature. Again, no important person of the

¹ Known from an inscription discovered at Bedja (ancient Vaga), in ancient Africa, which was roughly equivalent to modern Tunis (*Corp. Inscr. Lat.* viii. 1219).

² *Codex Theodosianus*, v. 1, 3.

³ See *Cod. Theod.* xiii. 11, 6; vii. 4, 22; xi. 21, 2; vii. 4, 23.

⁴ *Lib.* iii. 38-42.

⁵ To save misapprehension, I ought perhaps to mention that the aristocrats of the day did not break friendship with their peers because of differences on religious questions.

name of Laetus, living at that time, is known to us, though, thanks to Symmachus, and his best editor, Seeck, the personalities of no period of Roman history, with the exception of that of the last twenty years of the Republic, are so thoroughly known. The word *hilarescat* is not quite so rare as Morin, placing too much reliance on our lexicons, which have no authority in the Latinity of the fourth century, fancies,¹ and might have been used, were it not that it appears to be confined to Old Latin and the Latin of Africa,² which, like modern America, preserved for long many features of the ancient language. Everything points to the name *Hilarius*. His rank, his age,³ and his religion suit the situation perfectly. If this identification be accepted, we know further that the wife of Hilarius had been Titiana, deceased at the time. She was the daughter or sister of Furius Maecius Gracchus, who, when prefect of Rome in 376-377, showed his zeal for Christianity in a very striking manner by destroying a *speleum* or cave devoted to the worship of the god Mithras. The three references in our author to the *speleum*,⁴ twice by name, acquire new meaning in this light. Other particulars of the family are also known.

The works themselves are of a character entirely in harmony with this theory. The author was certainly a Christian, and also a married man. The latter conclusion can be safely drawn, I think, from remarks which bespeak an experience of married life. He gives (qu. 117) as the reason why Abraham kept the secret of Isaac's sacrifice from Sarah, that he knew "*circa adfectum filiorum pro-*

¹ He says "*hilarescat* n'allait guère, ou même point du tout" (p. 123, n. 1).

² It occurs in Augustine at least five times, also in Primasius, another African (Benoist-Goelzer's *Dictionnaire*, and my own collections).

³ His career would put his birth about 330 at latest, and he would thus be old in 394, the probable date of the letter.

⁴ In I *Cor.* xiv. 24-25; qu. 114, and once elsewhere. I write *speleum* intentionally following the MSS. and some inscriptions (Dessau, *Inscr. Lat. Sel. II.* (Berl. 1902), 4224 4226, etc.).

cliviores in amore esse matres." He had made the same remark before in qu. 109: "*non ignarus fragiliores esse circa filios feminas, et posse huic devotioni lacrimarum miseratione impedimentum adferre.*" Again (qu. 118) the serpent-devil, casting about for means to entrap Job, remembers that he had deceived Adam through Eve, and resolves to try the same means with Job. The author gives the reason: "one is easiest cheated by a member of one's household." These remarks may be considered merely as the result of close observation, but every one will admit that they come most naturally from a husband and father.

The author was also a layman. It is no wonder that this "will o' the wisp" personality eluded capture for so long. It is probable that laymen who wrote on religious questions were much less numerous and less sensible in ancient times even than they are now. The idea that the author of these commentaries and *Quaestiones* could be a layman was therefore never conceived till Dom Morin pointed out the reasons for such an opinion. Close study only confirms us in the belief. If the author were a clergyman, he must have been a bishop, a priest, or a deacon. A bishop he almost certainly was not, as he affirms, once in each work, the original identity of bishop and presbyter, an identity of which a bishop, one may say, would be apt to lose sight.¹ A layman, however, who had discovered this interesting historical fact, would feel a temptation to remind the bishops that their position in origin was not really any higher than that of the presbyters. Neither was the author a presbyter. He speaks habitually of the priests by the phrase *sacerdotes nostri*. The reason given by him for the celibacy of priests is such as no clergyman would give, but such as a lay lawyer or administrator might give. "Everything has its own law. There is that which is permissible

¹ The passages are referred to in Prof. V. Bartlet's article in the *Contemporary Review* for April, 1902, p. 540 f.

to no one at all; there is that which is permitted to some, but not to others; there is that which is sometimes permitted, but not allowed at other times" (qu. 127). There is one difficulty in this connexion which Dom Morin has skilfully removed. *Quaestiones* cxvi.-cxxi. are of a homiletical nature, being addressed to "dear brethren." *Quaest.* cxx. even begins with the words: "*consonum est, fratres carissimi, deuotissime dei sacerdotem et praepositum plebis Christi exhortari populum, sub cura sua positum, in doctrina sana.*" His explanation is that these are merely notes of sermons, and this certainly suits their length. The sermons of St. Augustine would on the average take ten minutes apiece to deliver. The documents under consideration are much shorter, and are rather collections of "heads" than actual sermons. If they be thought, however, to have been delivered by the author, is there anything to prevent our wealthy aristocrat, so learned in the Scriptures, from having occasionally delivered sermons to his household, which would include many slaves? I think not, but rather believe the temptation must have been very great. If the author was married, this was another bar to the priesthood (qu. 127). Nor was our author a deacon. The bitterness of the attack on the deacons of Rome (qu. 101) makes this impossible. The author mentions that he does not wish to hurt their feelings, as he was on terms of friendship with some of them. It is known that the deacons of Rome were seven in number only, according to the original constitution of the diaconate (Acts vi.), and were in consequence very important and influential persons. The higher order, that of priests, contained about seventy members in Rome, and a priest was in consequence a much less important person than a deacon. Is it likely that such persons would admit any to their friendship except those of highest station?

This brings us to the question of the author's position in life. Do the works show any signs of a writer of high

station? The answer must be in the affirmative, now that Dom Morin has shown the true import of many references to the Emperor, Government, and Law, which are found in both works. These references strike the careful reader of Latin Christian literature as characteristic of this author. St. Augustine, for example, never, or hardly ever, draws any illustrations from this source. The passages are enumerated by Dom Morin on pages 119 to 121, and more fully by the present writer,¹ but cannot be repeated here. Let me quote Dom Morin's summary of the evidence (p. 119): "Les passages . . . révèlent clairement chez notre auteur ce qu'on pourrait appeler la science expérimentale et habituelle des hautes dignités, un sens impeccable de l'étiquette, des convenances du rôle exact correspondant à la naissance ou aux fonctions des divers individus. Il connaît et signale les moindres nuances de la hiérarchie, depuis l'empereur jusqu'au dernier des officiers subalternes." He knows all about such officials as *praefecti*, *vicarii*, *legati*, about senators, their dress, what they may and may not do. The whole multitude of details comes naturally from one who lived in the midst of them. The language of the author, too, is full of legal terms, and yet these are not such as the lawyer, pure and simple, like Tertullian, would employ. They are less severely technical than those of Tertullian. They are, in fact, exactly such as an administrator, who was not actually a lawyer, but had long experience in and about law-courts, would employ. One could fill pages with examples of such terms. There are two allusions to the venality of judges, which were always a difficulty to me, on the supposition that the author was an ecclesiastic, who could perhaps be punished for such a statement, but are natural in the mouth of a man who, having held high administrative posts, and given judges their orders again

¹ *A Study of Ambrosiaster*, pp. 23-31 (in the press). They were collected by me for a different purpose.

and again, had nothing to fear from them, even if the veil of his anonymity were penetrated. Another point is that the author speaks as a travelled man.¹ He is acquainted with the customs of all the churches (qu. 101). His references to Egypt in both works, the rights of a presbyter there in the absence of a bishop, and the library of Ptolemy in Alexandria, etc., have always seemed to me to be a proof that the author had visited that country. Dom Morin's theory explains this also. The author had been governor or on a governor's staff in Egypt. A papyrus will perhaps be found, has perhaps been already found, containing his name. He must have had a long official career before he attained to the proconsulship of Africa in 377, as this position was one of the highest prizes open to the administrator under the Empire, and very possibly a post in Egypt was part of that career. We might infer from references to the customs of Moors, etc., that he had visited their countries.² It is extremely likely that, as excavation and research proceed, much more of the history of this interesting man will be revealed.

If it be asked how the identity of the author was lost sight of, there are several reasons ready to hand. The existence of another Hilary helped to obscure his identity.³ Also, most of the copies of his works must have been issued anonymously. It must have been quite the exception for a layman to write religious works, and a high official might expose himself to ridicule by publishing such books under his own name. In Italy at least, this might have been so, in spite of the fact that for two generations Christianity had been the official religion of the Empire.⁴ To compare small

¹ Dom Morin has not actually referred to this.

² Customs of Garamantes and other Africans, Persians, etc., are referred to (qu. 115, col. 2350). The predominance of Africa is very significant in view of the inscription referred to above.

³ Dom Morin has given other instances of this phenomenon (pp. 115, 116).

⁴ Except of course during Julian's reign (355-363).

things with great, the present writer, a layman, trained in classics, but not in theology, has been pitied by more than one Cambridge man for showing an interest in Latin Christian authors. My own belief is that the commentary on *Romans* was issued separately in Africa, when the author was governor there, and, being practically a king, had no one to fear. This explains how Augustine had a copy there. It is well known that the Irish Church was practically separate from the rest of the Western Church from the fifth century onwards, and retained the theological literature of the early centuries, and the early customs of the whole Western Church, to an extent which it is difficult to realize. One copy of the commentary on *Romans*, bearing Hilary's name,¹ would be sufficient to cause the phenomena already detailed. I would say that the entire commentary was published anonymously in Rome, and that the Monte Cassino copy, which, as we have seen, is anonymous, may be taken from an original copy of the edition.² Cassiodorus, in a well known passage,³ mentions a rumour that there was a commentary on St. Paul's epistles by St. Ambrose in existence, but that he had been unable to find it, in spite of careful search. It is probable that he had our commentary in his possession all the time, but as an anonymous work.⁴ I believe the ascription to St. Ambrose to have been made in good faith by the learned editors either of the fifth or sixth centuries. They were doubtless helped to this conclusion by the fact that the author not only shows the same, or an almost identical biblical text with Ambrose, but uses many expressions,

¹ In this connexion it is pertinent to observe that an old catalogue of Bobbio, the Irish monastery in N. Italy, mentions a copy of Hilary *on the Romans* (Becker, *Catalogi Bibliothecarum Antiqui*, No. 32, p. 65).

² Probably with some contamination of text, but this does not affect the present discussion. ³ *De Inst. Div. Litt.* c. 8.

⁴ So think H. Zimmer (*Pelagius in Irland*, p. 200 ff.) and C. H. Turner (*Journ. Theol. Studies*, iv. [1902] 132-141, a lucid and excellent account of some Latin commentaries on the Pauline epistles).

such as *non otiose*, which are characteristic of that father. The *Quaestiones* must also have been published anonymously at first, for reasons already stated, and also because qu. 109, on Melchisedech, had been published apart and sent to Jerome as an anonymous work.¹ The ascription to St. Augustine (in the best MSS. *Agustinus*, which in itself suggests Italian origin)² is due to the same men of learning, who, in spite of the fact that the treatise is pre-Augustinian in character, and is not mentioned in the *Retractions*, had a certain show of reason for attributing the work to him in the fact that he actually wrote four works, in the titles of which the word *quaestiones* forms a part.

One personal contribution to the question.³ The character of the biblical text employed by the author appears, in the light of study of the manuscripts, to be closely akin in the Gospels to that of the Old Latin Codex Veronensis (*b*), and in the Epistles to that of St. Ambrose himself. Dr. Berger, in a sentence which seems to have escaped general notice,⁴ styles the text of St. Paul's epistles used by Ambrosiaster the Milanese text *par excellence*. This seems to me to point to the fact that the author was brought up, and lived throughout the most impressionable period of his life in North Italy. It would not be fanciful to trace his great love and knowledge of the Bible to a Christian mother. It is the Bible on which one is brought up that one readily quotes and comments on in after life, not that of the city in which one may happen to live.⁵ In the inscriptions of North Italy, if anywhere, I should look with

¹ Hier. Ep. 73, 1.

² Other considerations exclude any idea of Spanish origin.

³ I have made throughout this paper many small personal contributions, which Dom Morin will readily distinguish, but I have not thought it desirable to label each sentence or clause.

⁴ *Histoire de la Vulgate*, p. 139.

⁵ It is perhaps necessary to remind the reader that there were a very large number of texts of the Bible, varying more or less.

confidence for the names of relatives of our Hilary. To anticipate possible objections: I ought to say that it is well known that Milan was in no way "provincial" in the fourth century, but was in many ways at least as important as Rome itself. As a place of education, it was very notable even before Christ. The author's style shows that he had had a very good education. In his language there is very little to cavil at. I may perhaps be permitted to mention that Father Brewer, S.J., the Austrian expert, has told me that in his opinion the vocabulary of Ambrosiaster indicates North Italian origin. Dr. Berger, Father Brewer, and I have thus arrived by different roads at the same destination. It will not be, in future, all the truth to call "Ambrosiaster" *Roman*. Roman he was by residence and position, but by education, religious and secular, a *North Italian*.

There remains one point more. I have often thought it probable that some other work or works by this hitherto enigmatical person might be lurking in some of our libraries. Such turns out, in Dom Morin's opinion, to be the case. In a manuscript of the sixth century in the Imperial Library of Vienna (No. 2160*) there has been found a fragment of a treatise against the Arians, following on the *De Trinitate* of St. Hilary of Poitiers. This Prof. Sedlmayer had been prepared to publish as a part of the works of St. Hilary, but has now changed his opinion and published it in the *Sitzungsberichte* of the Vienna Academy of Sciences.¹ Dom Morin, in an appendix to his article,² has essayed to prove that this fragment and the second portion of a sermon falsely attributed to St. Augustine,³ are both parts of a work by our author.⁴ In favour of this possibility there are three considerations. First, it is not impossible that

¹ Vol. cxlvi. 2 Abh. (with appendix by Dom Morin, who kindly sent me a copy).

² Pp. 125-131.

³ No. 216 of the Appendix in the Benedictine edition.

⁴ I have long thought that the *Carmen contra paganos* (Riese, *Anthol. lat.* I^a. p. 24) may be by this author.

the addition of the *Contra Arrianos* to the *De Trinitate* arises from a confusion between two authors of the same name. Second, "Ambrosiaster" had written a treatise against the Arians, as he himself tells us at the end of Question 125 (col. 2376) :—

"Hic finis sit. Iam enim in *libello aduersus Arrianam impietatem* digesto reliqua *plene*¹ tractata sunt, quae trinitatis complexa sunt indiscretam unitatem."

Most of us had naturally supposed that this was a reference back to Question 97, entitled *Aduersus Arrium*. Against this supposition we have to recognize that the author in no other case calls a *Quaestio* a *libellus*, that he does not refer to other passages in this manner, but uses phrases such as *sicut supra ostendimus*, and that *digesto* is rather a grand word to use of a short document. But if the reference be to the work of which we have recovered fragments, it is quite natural. The reading *plene*, which I now restore from the old manuscripts, strengthens Dom Morin's argument. The author would hardly say that he had given a *full* treatment of the question in No. 97, but might use this language of a longer work. The reading *plenius* is clearly the conscious alteration of some editor, who was aware that *Quaestio* 97 was not a complete discussion of the subject. Third, the coincidences in thought and language between the *Contra Arrianos* and the *Quaestiones* and commentaries are most striking. On this point, I must reserve my final judgment for my forthcoming book. At present I see nothing against it, and can even add to Dom Morin's arguments in support of it.² Probably this paper will be judged quite long enough already. Meantime let me express my hearty thanks to Dom Morin for the brilliant discovery which he has made.

ALEX. SOUTER.

¹ So six 9th century and two 10th century MSS. read: Migne has *plenius*.

² On p. 130 the two lines on *piaculum* are due to the printed text. The correct text in qu. 114 is *turpia* (not in printed edition).