

DISCUSSION OF CHRIST'S FIRST WORD ON
THE CROSS.

BY EB. NESTLE, CHARLES CAVERNO AND W. B. SMITH.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.

THE first word of Christ on the cross recorded in Luke xxiii. 34 is decidedly the most beautiful and noble utterance of the dying Saviour, and yet it is not genuine and must have been super-added to the text in later editions. It is absent in all the oldest manuscripts, and if it had been in the original completed version of St. Luke it would certainly not have been omitted by any copyist. This omission is ominous, yet we can understand that Christians feel dissatisfied to let it go. Mr. Kampmeier made a comment on this question in our February issue, and we have also received communications from Prof. Eberhard Nestle and the Rev. Charles Caverno in which they argue in favor of the genuineness of the passage. At first sight their position seems well grounded, but on reading the arguments of Prof. William Benjamin Smith which here follow their comments, we feel its untenableness. We present the statements side by side, and leave the final judgment to the reader.

DR. EB. NESTLE ON "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM."

On page 45 of *The Open Court* for January it is said, "that the grand words of Christ at the cross, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do' do not appear in the New Testament before the *ninth* century"* and it is suggested "that they were inserted by some thoughtful scribe who did not want to let Christ be surpassed in nobility by Socrates who died without any animosity against his enemies."

If "ninth" century be not a misprint, the statement is quite

*The quoted passage should read: "not much before 190 A.D." or "not before the end of the second century."
P. C.

wrong. The words are found among Greek manuscripts, to name but one, in the Codex *Sinaiticus*, which is generally ascribed to the fourth century, by the first hand. A second hand bracketed them, a third one removed the brackets.

Among *Versions*, at least seven MSS. of the *Old Latin Version* contain them, among them the codex *Palatinus* at Vienna, which is ascribed to the fourth, fifth, or at the latest, sixth century; further all the MSS. of the Latin Vulgate, among which the codex *Fuldensis* was used by bishop Victor of Capua between 541 and 546. The origin of the Latin Versions might be sought in the third, if not in the second century.

They are further contained in the Curetonian MS. of the *Syriac Version*; the origin of this version is certainly not later than the fourth century. They are missing on the other hand in the Sinaitic manuscript of the Syriac Version, which gives another recension of this Version.

The earliest Father of the Church, who is believed to quote them, is *Irenaeus* of Lyons, who died after 190.

The verdict must be, as it seems, that they do not belong to the earliest form of the Gospel of Luke, but were inserted in some copies in a very early time, not later than the second century. And certainly it was not parallelism with Socrates which led to their insertion; but if they are not a true record of what Jesus really said, a nearer parallelism than Socrates is the first martyr Stephen (Acts vii. 60: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge") or the very brother of Jesus, James, who, according to Hegesippus (a writer of the second century, preserved by Eusebius, Hist. eccl. II, 23) prayed when he was being stoned: Παρακαλῶ κύριε θεὸς πάτερ ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασι τί ποιῶσι ("I beseech thee, Lord, God, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"). But why shall we not assume that Stephen as well as James followed the example set by Jesus? The acknowledgment that the passage does not originally belong to the book in which it is now included, is compatible with the assumption that it is a true record of what Jesus really said from a source of which the origin is no longer known. EB. NESTLE.

MR. CAVERNO IN RE CRITICAL STANDING OF LUKE XXIII, 34.

In an editorial article on "The Significance of the Christ Ideal" in the January *Open Court*, I notice on p. 45 the following sentence: "The grand words of Christ on the cross, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do,' do not appear in the New Testament before the ninth century." I have not much in the line of critical

material under my hand. But if I take Alford's Greek Testament *in loc.*, I find that the words are inserted in some uncial MSS.; that they appear in the Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic versions, and in the Canon of Eusebius and the Homilies of Clement; and that they are cited by Irenaeus. That would seem to show that they were of record from five to seven hundred years before the date assigned in the passage quoted. In fact the citation by Irenaeus shows that they were recognized as words of Jesus at a time separated by only one life—that of Polycarp—from the days of the apostles. Irenaeus was a pupil of Polycarp, and the latter was a disciple of the Apostle John.

REMARKS OF PROF. W. B. SMITH.

The passage in question is very richly attested by very ancient authorities. It is given by great numbers of manuscripts, some uncials, and very old, reaching into the fifth or sixth century, which I need not name; they are all found cited on pp. 710, 711 of Tischendorf's New Testament, Vol. I. The passage is also found in the Fathers as early as the 2d century, being quoted by Irenaeus (A. D. 185), Origen (A. D. 245) and others. It is also found in Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian and Latin versions; also in the Clementine Homilies, etc. So that the attestation appears overwhelming. Nevertheless, it is *still an interpolation*. For it is not in the oldest Greek manuscript, the Vatican (called B and dating from the fourth or early fifth century; not in D; it is enclosed in brackets in the next oldest, the Sinaitic (Σ)); it is not in the oldest Syriac version, our very oldest authority; not in various other excellent manuscripts and versions. Its *presence* in any number of MSS. and other authorities is easy enough to understand, even if it were not originally in Luke's Gospel; but its *absence* from so many of the very oldest is impossible to understand if it had been originally there.

Some person, perhaps some copyist, invented it in the second century, after the Gospel (according to Luke) had taken form and become current. It was inserted (by some copyist) in some MSS., and not inserted by others. Hence it appears in many MSS. but not in the very oldest MSS. and translations (like the Syriac translation recently discovered on Mt. Sinai). The great text-critic Lachmann put it in brackets [] in his edition of the New Testament, and the great English editors, Bishop Westcott and Dr. Hort, in their edition of 1881, the best thus far, put it in double brackets [[]], as being an interpolation. Recent critics entertain no doubt on the point. Wellhausen, for instance, says it "is without any doubt interpolated."

But the interpolation was made in the second century, before A. D. 190, or at least the verse was invented before that time. Just when it was actually first written in a copy of Luke's Gospel, no man can say within one or two hundred years, certainly however before the ninth century, for some MSS. containing it are much older than the ninth century when men had ceased to think such great thoughts.

In my article in the *American Encyclopedia* it is merely said to be interpolated, which is correct and enough.

The notion that the verse was first introduced into the text in the ninth century is perhaps due to Scrivener's remark that the corrector who introduced the sentence into D was earlier than the ninth century. On p. 68 of "Notes on Select Readings," Appendix to Westcott and Hort's edition of the New Testament, 1881, we read: "The documentary distribution suggests that text was a Western interpolation, of limited range in early times (being absent from *D a b* though read by *e syr. vt., Iren., Hom., Cl., Eus., Can.*), adopted in eclectic texts, and then naturally received into general currency.

"Its omission on the hypothesis of its genuineness, cannot be explained in any reasonable manner. 'Wilful excision, on account of the love and forgiveness shown to the Lord's own murderers,' is absolutely incredible." Then, after discussing the Constantinopolitan lection, the editor continues:

"Few verses of the Gospels bear in themselves a surer witness to the truth of what they record than this first of the Words from the Cross; but it need not therefore have belonged originally to the book in which it is now included. We can not doubt that it comes from an extraneous source."

This admission by the chief English editors is decisive and of the farthest-reaching importance. Still more recent critics entertain no doubt whatever. Says Wellhausen, it "is without any doubt interpolated." The great importance of this fact is clearly brought out in *Eccc Deus* (recently published in Germany and almost ready for the market in an English version). The ravings of Miller in the new edition of "Scrivener's Introduction" (Vol. II, pp. 356-358) are natural but migratory.

Wellhausen's exact words on the subject are:

"Der Spruch 'Vater vergib ihnen u. s. w.' (xxiii. 34) fehlt im Vat. Sin. und D. in der Syra und einigen Vett. Latinae; er ist ohne allen Zweifel interpolirt."

This is not absolutely accurate. The verse is in Sin. but en-

closed in curved brackets put there by an early corrector (A), and afterwards deleted by a later corrector. A seems to have known that the verse was an interpolation. Tischendorf's words are: "A (ut videtur) uncos apposuit, sed rursus deleti sunt. Moreover, the verse appears in some Syriac versions, but *not* in the oldest, the Sinaitic."