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Anomalies of the New Testament Literature.

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THERE are several facts in regard to literary anomalies that we are apt to forget, especially if there is any bias towards forgetfulness in us. One is, that the anomaly remains, although it may be shown that it is not sufficient to discredit the writing in which it occurs. The writing remains the same in critical and popular estimate that it was before the anomaly was pointed out, and it is inferred commonly that the anomaly is removed together with the conclusion from it. It is this inference against which we should guard. For instance, the miracles in the life of our Lord are anomalous events. The answer to which is, that they fit into this particular life exactly, though not into other ordinary lives. But this does not remove the anomaly, though it shows that the miraculous in the life of our Lord is not discredited by it, since the anomaly consists in just this extraordinary nature of the miracles. They do not belong to the ordinary course of things, and finding them in the life of our Lord does not create a presumption that they may be found elsewhere. That is, miracles are anomalous events, though there may be special reasons for believing in them in certain circumstances. In the same way, different styles in the same author, or the same style in different authors, are literary anomalies. They are out of the ordinary course of things, and contrary to its law, for the reason that the style is so far, so intimately and essentially the man, so subtly mixed up with the inner quality and individuality, that even with great changes in him, nevertheless, enough of the style persists through all changes to identify it to the critical faculty. Nevertheless, this anomaly may occur in certain exceptional cases, and when it does occur, we should need only to know all the elements of the case to render it accountable. But this does not remove the anomaly, since to do this we should have to show that such a loss of individuality could easily be not exceptional, but common.

The second fact is, that possibility and probability are not the same thing. To show that a thing may be, is not to show that it is ; nor

even that it is one of the things likely to turn up at any time. A man who had never seen nor heard of Carlyle might possibly write his style; but if we should find that peculiar style anywhere, we should be justified in saying that it was either Carlyle or some close copyist of his idiosyncrasies. Nothing else would be probable; in fact, only the first supposition would be probable, though some other explanation might be possible. Somebody succeeds in hunting up a similar case, and think that this leaves us free to accept the phenomenon in the case in hand. But he has established only a possibility, not a probability. Join to this the other fact, that it is the probable, and not the possible, that we are hunting for in these matters, and we have a sufficient reason for rejecting many supposed explanations of critical difficulties.

The third fact is, that you have only to multiply the number of such supposed mere possibilities within a given space to turn them into impossibilities. You may take the letters of the alphabet at random out of a hat and have them form, in the order in which they come out, a word; but multiply the words so as to form a paragraph, or even a sentence, and your possibility has become an impossibility. So three men may give their independent accounts of the same event, and use identical language here and there. But if the accounts were to be multiplied and the identity continue, independence would be out of the question. And if anomalies of the like sort were to increase until they became rather characteristic of a literature covering only a short period, say a century, there would certainly be room and call for a free criticism of the traditional account of that literature.

The question which we are to consider is, whether there are such anomalies in the New Testament literature, and if so, how far these principles would suggest to us a revision of the traditional accounts of that literature. Of course, when we speak of the anomalies of this literature, we mean those belonging to the traditional account of it; and the modification of the traditional account would be intended to remove these anomalies. This is the general object of criticism,—to render intelligible what is under the accepted view unintelligible. The first question in the list, then, is the relation of the Synoptical accounts of the teaching of our Lord to the account of the same given us in the Fourth Gospel. Tradition makes these to be accounts of the teaching of Jesus differing from each other for the reason that the discourses and conversations were given on different occasions and to entirely different classes of hearers, with which dif-

ference they may easily reflect so many-sided a mind as we may suppose our Lord's to have been. But difficulties multiply upon us as we really consider this view. For, in the first place, our Lord discourses in the Fourth Gospel to audiences of the same kind as in the Synoptical Gospels, and the style remains that of the Fourth Gospel. The synagogue audience at Capernaum and the Samaritan woman are in no way different from the simple-minded Galileans for whose benefit Jesus is supposed to have adopted the fresh, concrete, homely style of the Synoptics. Then, secondly, there are other persons whose discourse is preserved to us in the Fourth Gospel; and they all talk in the same meditative, abstract, and metaphysical style as characterizes the teaching of Jesus in the same Gospel. And finally, we have other writings of the same author as the writer of the Fourth Gospel, and in these we have the same unmistakable style reproduced.

But there are difficulties attending, not only the style, but also the subject-matter of the discourse. In the Synoptics, Jesus does not talk about himself, but about the kingdom of God; whereas in the Fourth Gospel he talks mostly about himself. Moreover, though the writers tell us nothing about the plans and method of Jesus, they unconsciously reveal a principle involved in this reticence. Jesus does not direct attention to himself, because whatever he could have said in this direction was to the excited state of the popular mind like fire to gunpowder. Moreover, his method was evidently to create belief not by declarations about himself, but, as in nature, by self-revelation, letting his life tell its story. Especially, he does not in the Synoptics announce his Messiahship until just before the close of his ministry, and then draws it out of his disciples instead of telling it himself; while in the Fourth Gospel it is announced at the start, and forms the background of all his discourse about himself. The conclusion from all which is plain, that the traditional view presents anomalies, any one of which would go far to render it improbable, and which all together seem to make it impossible.

But there is another side to this Johannean question, and one which presents us with another anomaly. For tradition makes John to be the author not only of the Gospel and of the Epistles, but also of the Apocalypse. Now, the close resemblance between the style of Jesus' discourse in the Fourth Gospel and that of the author himself makes it reasonably sure that there is the impress of the writer upon his report. In the case of the Apocalypse, on the other hand, the difference of style creates the opposite impression of difference of author. And here, as in the other case, the difference is not only in the dress-

ing out of the thought, but in its substance and essential form. We can make some approach to an analytical statement of this difference, but no analysis will do it justice. A person accustomed to weigh these questions feels, and for that matter sees, when difference of style becomes of that degree which points to distinct personality; but only a part of the reason underlying this impression ever appears in statement. But in general, the difference is between the outwardness of the Apocalypse and the inwardness of the other Johannean writings. Instances of this are to be found in the different representations of the Parousia, and of eschatological subjects generally. And this means that the difference pervades the whole Apocalypse, because this is the subject of the book. When the Fourth Gospel looks into the future, beyond the earthly life of Jesus, it sees another Helper coming to take the place of the Lord by the side of the disciples and out in the world. And their consolation is to be, not that the world is to be overcome by the sword, or made penitent by God's judgments, but that this Spirit is to convince the world. It is in his presence principally that the disciples are to look for the return of their Lord, which will leave them not orphans. Judgment is not represented spectacularly, as a great general assize, but as the recoil of a man's own acts and states upon himself. But in the Apocalypse the answer to the cry that goes up from God's afflicted people is the promise of vengeance upon their enemies. The overthrow of a great part of the Jewish people, the frightened penitence of the rest, and the total destruction of the persecuting Roman power are the subject of the book. And these prophecies are given with specifications of the time at which and of the rulers under whom the events are to take place, and with definite statements that these things are to constitute the end of the present world, and are to be followed by a millennium. Moreover, there is not only this difference of outlook and interest, but it is a case in which entirely different things are used to accomplish the same end. Both are set forth for the same purpose of consoling Christians in the trials of that early period. Another striking difference is in the use of the Old Testament in the two writings. The Apocalypse does not quote the Old Testament directly, but there is no book of the New Testament in which the Old Testament is so woven into the entire structure; while on the other hand, there is less Old Testament, in any form, in the Epistles and Gospel than in the other books of the New Testament. There is a difference of style also, as well as of thought. In the Apocalypse it is direct, sententious, brief, concrete. In the other books it is contemplative; it

dwells on the thought and circles around it, frequently returning to its refrain and making a fresh start, after the manner of meditation. And finally, the spirit is different. There is no book of the New Testament so permeated with the spirit of the Psalms, which seeks to console itself with vengeance upon its enemies, as the Apocalypse ; while on the other hand, the keyword of the other books is love, and the whole spirit is tender and friendly. We do not say, however, that in these books two voices are heard ; but here are all the marks by which we ordinarily distinguish separate voices, and if they belong to the same person, here is another anomaly, and the question is growing on our hands how many of these we can accommodate within the limits of a literature the whole of which is comprised in a small book.

The same problem confronts us in the Epistles ascribed to St. Paul. His writings are divided from each other by two distinct periods and by three differing styles. We have the period before his imprisonment, and that of his imprisonment ; and the style of the letters of the first period, of the Pastoral Epistles, and of the other letters written during the imprisonment. Between these two periods there is an interval of only three years, which was spent in Jerusalem and Cæsarea. But the interval between the different styles is not of the kind that can ordinarily be measured by the years of a man's life, but such as belongs generally to two different men. In the epistles preceding the captivity Paul does not discourse, he reasons. In the letters belonging to his imprisonment he begins to discourse. In the former he has questions to settle with the churches to which he is writing, and he states those questions, presents his own views, and supports them by arguments. No one is ever at a loss to tell what he is driving at ; he tells us himself. But in the epistles of the captivity he begins to discourse. When we examine these epistles, we find that in them too he has an object, a question to discuss, but he proceeds after the manner of discourse, not of reasoning. The question is not stated and argued, but it is presented as by a teacher before his boys begin to ask him questions and to show that they have opinions differing from his. Evidently, there are questioners and opponents in these epistles, but the apostle ignores them for the most part. But this is not the striking difference ; that is to be found in the terseness of the one style, and the prolixity of the other. Outside of the epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians, it would be difficult to match any one of their longer sentences ; but in these epistles themselves such sentences are the rule.

And this difference is like a difference of voice as an indication generally of another person. Two voices do not commonly belong to the same person, unless one is feigned ; but neither does the habit of writing diffuse and concise sentences. But there is a further difference of substance as well as of style. For instance, St. Paul in the earlier epistles does not look out into a spiritual world in which hierarchies of spirits, good and bad, rise one above the other in long succession. There may be indications here and there that he was conversant with Jewish opinion in this matter, but it does not occupy the foreground of his thoughts nor come conspicuously into view in his writings, whereas this angelology forms a principal theme of the two epistles named. And these difficulties are increased by the fact that there is another epistle belonging to the same period, in which he returns to his familiar style. The Epistle to the Philippians is unmistakably in the apostle's earlier style, and yet it belongs to the period of Ephesians and Colossians.

Finally, we come to the third manner, that of the Pastoral Epistles, and here there is not only difference, but distinct inferiority of style. To be sure, the subject is different, being altogether of a practical kind. But, outside of these epistles, there is no part of St. Paul's writings in which there is so much beauty and elevation of style, and such nobility and strength of treatment, as this practical part, in which he discusses the duties that belong to the Christian life in its different aspects. There is nothing like the mere enumeration of duties which marks the Pastoral Epistles, but an insight into the beauties of holiness, and a discussion of ethical principles, that elevate the entire treatment. And yet St. Paul was in the very prime of his strength, only three to five years away from his Epistle to the Romans, when he wrote the Pastoral Epistles, which have, to be sure, a distinction of their own, but not by any means that of the intellectual chief of the apostles.

It has not been the object of this paper to discuss in any exhaustive way the authorship of these different writings, but to point out briefly the anomalies of the traditional view. There is much to be said on the other side, and it has been said frequently and forcibly. But if it can be shown in regard to each case taken by itself that the traditional view is correct, the anomaly remains. The view is attended with grave difficulties, which have not been removed by the showing of opposite considerations. And the question that remains upon our hands is one of total impression. If we find that the ordinary canons of style do not apply to this literature ; that the several

writers may each employ a number of distinct styles, instead of being bound down to one ; while on the other hand two persons may write or speak the same style, and that one of the most distinctly marked in the whole range of the New Testament literature, is not the impression produced that of a kind of wonderland, in which all ordinary rules may be set at nought and you may expect to find almost any strange thing turning up in any direction? And is such an impression, on the whole, favorable to the view that we wish to prevail, that there is nowhere a literature so sane, so amenable to the laws of the human mind, and so historically trustworthy, as the New Testament? Do we wish, above all, to rest the authority of the New Testament upon an opinion of the authorship of its several books that presents such anomalies and difficulties?