

APHRAATES AND MONASTICISM.

IT seems to be pretty generally agreed that Aphraates¹ was acquainted with monasticism, in fact that there were monks of some sort in that part of the Syriac-speaking Church with which he had to deal. As far as I know also this opinion is usually based on the language used by Aphraates of a class of persons whom he styles *B'nai Q'yāmā*, which term has been translated 'Sons of the Covenant'.

A few years ago a new theory was started by Mr F. C. Burkitt², and the same has recently been maintained by him in his charming volume of lectures on *Early Eastern Christianity*³.

Mr Burkitt seems still to assume the existence of monks in the Church of Aphraates, in fact he refers to the Persian Sage himself as 'a monk and a bishop'. What is new in his theory is that the *B'nai Q'yāmā* were not the monks, but 'simply the baptized laity of the early Syriac-speaking Church, and that in the earlier stages of that Church's development no layman was accepted for baptism unless he was prepared to lead a life of strict continence and freedom from worldly cares'⁴. This theory forms an integral part of Mr Burkitt's view as to the constitution of the early Syriac Church. He writes⁵: 'He [Aphraates] only

¹ Aphraates flourished within the Persian Empire in the first half of the fourth century, and was probably a bishop. He wrote in Syriac twenty-two Discourses, or 'Demonstrations', in the form of letters to a friend, each beginning with the corresponding letter of the Semitic alphabet. The first ten were written in the year 337, the rest in 344 A.D. In 345 he added another *On the Cluster*. His writings were first edited in 1869 by Wright. In 1894 another edition, by Dom Parisot, appeared in Graffin's *Patrologia Syriaca*, accompanied by a rather unreliable Latin translation. Dr Gwynn, in vol. xiii of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, has translated eight of the Discourses into English, viz. i, v, vi, viii, x, xvii, xxi and xxii.

² *Early Christianity outside the Roman Empire*. Two Lectures delivered at Trinity College, Dublin, by F. Crawford Burkitt, M.A., Trinity College, Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1899.

³ *Early Eastern Christianity*. St. Margaret's Lectures, 1904, by F. Crawford Burkitt, Lecturer in Palaeography in the University of Cambridge. London: John Murray.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 129.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 137.

recognizes two grades in the Christian ranks, the baptized celibate (from whose ranks also the clergy are drawn) and the unbaptized penitent.' Again¹: 'The Christian Community is divided by Aphraates for practical purposes into two parts, the *B'nai Q'yâmdâ* and the Penitents.'

Mr Burkitt is here referring to the sixth and seventh Discourses of Aphraates, which treat respectively of the *B'nai Q'yâmdâ* and the *Tayyâβê* or Penitents. His view then is that these two Discourses deal, the one with the baptized laity, the other with the Catechumens, and that the conditions for admission to baptism were continence and renunciation of all worldly encumbrances (in accordance with Apher. vi).

I venture to think, however, that this explanation of the constitution of Aphraates' Church, attractive as it is at first sight, will not bear examination; for the *Tayyâβê* of Discourse vii cannot possibly, I think, have been Catechumens; while there are strong reasons to think that there was a class of baptized lay Christians distinct from the *B'nai Q'yâmdâ*.

It is the case of the latter that I wish especially to reconsider in the following pages, but it will be more satisfactory to examine first the significance of the term *Tayyâβê*.

I must premise that Aphraates' seventh Discourse deals, to all appearance, with two different classes of people: at least the distinction must be observed if the penitents spoken of in §§ 1-16 are Catechumens, for from the beginning of § 18 and onward he is certainly speaking of the *B'nai Q'yâmdâ*. I am inclined to think that the transition begins with § 17.

In order to find out who and what the *Tayyâβê* were who form the subject of §§ 1-16 it is necessary first to discover the meaning of the corresponding term *t'yâβûthâ*, which we may represent for the present by the colourless word 'repentance'.

Now if we assume that *Tayyâβê*, 'Penitents', bears a technical meaning, as denoting the members of a recognized grade in the Christian Society, viz. the Catechumens, we shall naturally expect that 'repentance' will signify the corresponding Catechumen *state*. But it is abundantly evident that the word in this Discourse denotes not merely a state in which the members of a whole grade find themselves by virtue of their standing in the Society, but some

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 133.

definite act, or course of action, in which individuals who have been guilty of actual sin are exhorted to participate for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness of their sins. I believe this will be sufficiently proved by the passages which shall presently be cited.

What then could this act be by which the Penitents (in the sense of Catechumens) were to obtain forgiveness of their sins? It could only be one thing—baptism; for this was the only (sacramental) means available for Catechumens.

It remains to examine whether the meaning 'baptism' for *ἔγδαῖσθῆ* will satisfy the requirements of Aphraates' language. This can only be done by quoting at length from Discourse vii¹.

§ 1. Aphraates begins by saying that 'of all those who have been born and clothed in a body one alone is innocent, even our Lord Jesus Christ'. Then, after quoting Scripture to prove this, he continues:

Again, there is none other of the sons of Adam that goeth down to the contest and is not wounded and buffeted; for since Adam transgressed the commandment sin hath reigned. And by many it hath been buffeted, and many it hath wounded and killed; but it no man of the many ever killed until our Saviour came and took it and nailed it to His cross. And though it be nailed to the cross, yet its sting remaineth and pricketh many, until an end be made and its sting be broken.

§ 2. There is a drug for every disease, and when a skilful physician hath found it it (the disease) is cured. And for those that are wounded in our contest there is the drug of repentance, which they may put upon their sores and be healed. O ye physicians, disciples of our wise Physician, take you this drug, and with it ye shall heal the plagues of them that are sick. They that do battle and are stricken by the hand of him that fighteth against them, when they have found them a wise physician he hath a care for their curing, that he may heal them that are wounded. And when the physician hath healed him that was stricken in the battle, he receiveth gifts and honour of the king. Even so, beloved, he that toileth in our contest, and his enemy cometh upon him and woundeth him,—it behoveth to give him repentance as a drug when the wounded man's soul is exceeding penitent. For God rejecteth not penitents, for Ezechiel the prophet saith, 'I will not the death of the dead sinner, but that he turn from his evil way and live'.

§ 3. He that is smitten in battle is not ashamed to place himself in

¹ The sections are numbered as in Parisot's edition.

the hands of a wise physician because the battle hath gone against him and he is stricken; and when he is cured the king rejecteth him not, but counteth him with his army. So should not a man whom Satan hath wounded blush to confess his sin and turn away from it and ask for the physic of repentance. For whosoever is ashamed to shew his sore is taken with the gangrene, and the infection reacheth to the whole body; but he that is not ashamed, his sore is healed, and he returneth and again goeth down to the contest. But he that hath developed the gangrene can no more be cured, nor put on again the armour which he hath laid aside. So also whosoever is overcome in our contest, this way is open to him to be cured, that he say 'I have sinned', and seek repentance. But he that is ashamed cannot be healed, because he will not make known his sore to the physician who received two dinars for which he will cure all them that are wounded¹.

§ 4. It is your duty, O ye physicians, disciples of our glorious Physician, not to withhold healing from him that hath need to be healed. Whosoever sheweth you his wound, give him the physic of repentance. And if any one is ashamed to shew his disease, counsel him that he hide it not from you. And when he hath revealed it to you, publish it not, lest on his account even the innocent be deemed guilty by (our) enemies, &c.

§ 5. But if those that have been smitten will not make known their sores, then do the physicians incur no blame that they have not healed them that are sick of their wounds. And if they that are wounded will hide their diseases they cannot again put on armour, because they have fostered the gangrene in their bodies, &c.

§ 6. But he also that hath shewn his sore and hath been cured, let him have a care of that place that was healed, that he be not smitten thereon a second time; for when one is smitten a second time his cure is hard, even to a skilful physician; for a wound received upon an (old) scar is not to be healed; and even though it should be healed he cannot again put on armour; or, should he even dare to put on armour, he will usually suffer defeat.

§ 8. You again that are wounded I counsel that ye be not ashamed to say, 'We have been worsted in the contest'. Receive for nought the drug, and be converted and live or ever ye be killed outright. You again I would put in mind, ye physicians, that it is written in the books of our wise Physician that He did not withhold repentance, &c.

§ 11. Hear, ye also who hold the keys of the gates of heaven, and open ye the gates to penitents, &c. [The sinner is not to be despised, but to be admonished as a brother.]

§ 12. To you penitents I say that ye reject not this way that is given

¹ Is this a reference to Luke x 35?

you to be healed ; for He saith in the Scriptures, ' He that confesseth his sin and leaveth it, God hath mercy on him ', &c.

§ 13. . . . The shepherd is concerned for the one sheep that is lost out of the whole flock more than for those that went not astray, &c.

§ 15. O ye that ask for repentance, ye are like to Aaron, the chief of priests . . . David also, the chief of the kings of Israel, confessed his iniquity and was forgiven. Simon too, the chief of the disciples, when he denied that he had ever seen Christ, and cursed and swore, ' I know not the man ',—yet when he repented in his heart, and multiplied the tears of his weeping, our Lord received him, and made him the foundation, and called him Cephas, the Building of the Church¹.

These lengthy extracts contain practically all Aphraates has to tell us about penitents and 'repentance' in §§ 1-16. I do not think there is anything in what I have left out that would tend to modify the meaning of the passages quoted.

I hope that what I said above—that *ἑγὼ βαπτίζω*, or 'repentance,' cannot denote the Catechumen *state*—may now appear sufficiently proved, without the need of further discussion.

To my mind it lies equally on the surface of Aphraates' language that the word cannot stand for the reception of baptism :

1. In the passages quoted Aphraates describes 'repentance' as a 'physic' or 'drug' by which sinners are restored in some measure to their former state of spiritual health, and are enabled to carry on the same spiritual contest in which they were before engaged. There is not the smallest indication that 'repentance' is regarded as the door to a higher grade of Christian life than that which was before.

2. Aphraates contemplates the possibility of a repetition of 'repentance', though he implies that this is unusual.

3. So far I have been arguing only from the language of §§ 1-16, because, as I have already hinted, there is reason to think that in the remaining sections of this Discourse Aphraates has in mind a different class of persons from those treated of in the first part. Whether this be so or not, the language used in § 17 of 'repentance' is quite incompatible with the explanation of that term as meaning either the Catechumen state or the remission of sins through baptism. The section takes the form of a direct and

¹ According to Aphraates' view Simon was already baptized, for he held that Christ baptized the Apostles when He washed their feet before the Eucharist.

personal appeal on the part of Aphraates to his friend ; and we cannot help being struck by the complete change of tone which marks it off from those preceding it. Having hitherto used all his powers of persuasion in exhorting certain persons to make use of 'repentance', he now takes up an entirely new attitude, and treats the possibility of his friend ever coming to need 'repentance' as a serious calamity. Having emphasized the fact of God's mercy, and the efficacy, nay necessity, of 'repentance' with confession of sin, he now goes to the opposite extreme in warning his friend :

I beseech thee, beloved, he writes, by the mercies of God, slacken nothing of thy diligence on account of what I have written to thee, that God rejects not penitents.

He seems to say that 'repentance' is to some extent incongruous with the state of life of such a one as his friend :

Do not thou come to need repentance . . . This hand is reached out to sinners, but the righteous require it not.

Could such language possibly be used of baptism? He goes on to say that 'repentance' is an extreme remedy; the patient will never be quite the same man after it :

Lose not that which thou hast, lest thou weary thyself to seek it, (and know not then) whether thou hast found it or no. And even if thou find it, it is not like (that which was) thine; for he that hath sinned and repented resembles not him that was far from sin. Love the more excellent (*or* higher) part, and separate thyself from all that falleth short (thereof). Strive manfully in thine armour, that thou be not stricken in the battle. Have no need to ask for physic, or to weary thyself to go to a physician. Even when thou art healed thy scars will not remain unknown. Be not confident that, lo! there is repentance, and so bring down thy good name; but be superior to repentance. He whose garment is torn must needs have it patched, yet even when it is sewn there is none that doth not detect it, &c.

Here 'repentance' is spoken of as a particular course of action to be adopted by those who have committed actual sin: it is possible, and far preferable, never to require it: it puts a slur upon a man's character which can never be quite removed. It is out of the question to apply such language to baptism. What then does *ʿyāBāthā* mean? As used in this Discourse the word clearly refers to that discipline which we know to have existed

in other parts of the Christian Church much earlier than the time of Aphraates, and which we have no *a priori* grounds for banishing from the early Syriac Church: I mean the discipline of Penance, by which those guilty of scandalous sins obtained ease in their consciences before God, and outwardly were restored to fellowship in the Christian community.

A comparison of Aphraates' penitential system with that of other churches is no part of my present subject; but one or two points may be noted:

1. Publicity is to some extent avoided (§ 4); and in accordance with this we have the emphasis laid quite as strongly on the idea of forgiveness of sins as on the readmission to Church rights.

2. A prominent part is assigned to the ministers of penance: they are the physicians: they hold the keys of the gates of heaven: they have power to refuse (rightly or wrongly) to admit a sinner to penance.

Now if *ʿyāβūthā* means penance, there is no further justification for making the *Tayyāβē* Catechumens, especially when a little further on we find Aphraates exhorting persons who are 'solitaries and *B'nai Q'yāmā* and holy' to submit to penance (§ 25).

It appears then that the Seventh Discourse has for its subject Penitents and Penance, and not Catechumens and Baptism. The penitents are not a *grade*, but only an 'accidentally' constituted class, who may belong to any grade within the baptized community.

We now come to the *B'nai Q'yāmā*; and the question as to their identity is more difficult to answer. Mr Burkitt's view—that they were simply the baptized laity of the early Syriac Church, and that continence and renunciation of worldly possessions were required of all baptized Christians—is based mainly upon the language used by Aphraates in § 20 of this Discourse.

I give the passage in his translation.

§ 20. Wherefore thus should the trumpeters, the heralds of the Church, cry and warn all the Society of God before the Baptism—them, I say, that have offered themselves for virginity and for holiness, youths and maidens holy—they shall the heralds warn. And they shall say: 'He whose heart is set to the state of matrimony, let him marry before baptism, lest he fall in the spiritual contest and be killed. And he that feareth this part of the struggle, let him turn back, lest he break his

brother's heart like his own. He also that loveth his possessions, let him turn back from the army, lest when the battle shall wax too fierce for him he remember his property and turn back, and he that turneth back then [*iii.*, from the contest] is covered with disgrace. He that hath not offered himself and hath not yet put on his armour, if he turn back he is not blamed; but every one that offereth himself and putteth on his armour, if he turn back from the contest becometh a laughing-stock¹.

The section concludes: 'He that strippeth himself is meet for the fight, for he remembereth not aught that is behind him to turn back to it.'

The passage, as it stands, does favour the view Mr Burkitt has adopted, in so far that the conditions laid down seem to be those for baptism. But Mr Burkitt himself says this view is 'amazing'; and indeed it seems almost incredible that such an idea of baptism could have been held by a writer or in a church that accepted the Acts and the Pauline Epistles as canonical Scripture. It will be worth while, therefore, to examine carefully the above passage in its context, and see whether some other more likely interpretation cannot be put upon it. I cannot help feeling that the piece is shewn in a different light when restored to its context, and that the warnings, which at first sight seem to apply directly to candidates for baptism, are in reality meant for persons aspiring to enter a grade which lies beyond that of the ordinary baptized Christian.

Let us set forth the context at length.

§ 18. O ye that have been summoned to the contest, hear the sound of the trumpet and take courage. To you also I speak who hold the trumpets, priests and scribes and sages: call, and say to all the people: 'He that is afraid, let him turn back from the contest, lest he break his brother's heart as his own heart. And he that planteth a vineyard, let him return and tend it, lest he think of it and be defeated in the battle. And he that hath betrothed a wife and wisheth to take her, let him return and rejoice with his wife. And he that buildeth a house, let him return to it, lest he remember his house and fight not with all his might². For solitaries³ is the contest fitting, because their faces are set toward that which is before them, and they remember not aught that is behind

¹ *Early Eastern Christianity* p. 125 f.

² From Deut. xx 5 ff.

³ *Ihūdāyē*.

them; for their treasure is before them, and what spoil they take cometh all to themselves, and they receive an overflowing abundance.' To you (again) I speak who blow upon the trumpets. When ye have completed your exhortation mark them that go back, and them that are left review, and bring them to the waters of probation, even them that have offered themselves for the battle: the waters will prove every one that is strenuous, and from there will they that are slothful be separated.

§ 19. Hear now, beloved, this mystery, the likeness of which Gideon foreshewed. When he had gathered the people for war the scribes warned (them with) the words of the Law and the passages which I have quoted for thee above. Then much people went back from the army. And when there were left those that were chosen for the battle, the Lord said to Gideon: 'Bring them down to the water and prove them there. He that lappeth the water with his tongue is impatient and eager to go to the battle; but he that lieth on his belly to drink the water is too slack and feeble for the battle.' Great is this mystery, beloved, which Gideon wrought long ago, shewing a type of Baptism, and a mystery of the Contest, and an example of the Solitaries; for he first of all warned the people by the trial of the water; again, when he had proved them by the water, from ten thousand there were chosen but three hundred men to undertake the contest. Now this agrees with the word which our Lord spoke, that the called are many and the chosen few.

§ 20. [See above.]

§ 21. And when they have preached to and instructed and warned all the Society of God, let them bring to the waters of baptism them that have been chosen for the contest, and prove them. And after the baptism let them observe those that are strenuous and those that are feeble: the strenuous they must encourage, and those that are slack and feeble let them send back again from the contest openly, lest when war is come upon them they steal away their armour and flee and be defeated. For He said to Gideon: 'Bring down to the water them that have offered themselves.' And when the people was come down to the water, the Lord said to Gideon: 'All they that lap the water as a dog lappeth with his tongue, these shall go with thee to the battle, and all they that lie down to drink the water, they shall not go with thee to the battle,' &c. [Aphraates proceeds to shew that those ultimately chosen were fittingly compared to dogs: for the dog is the most faithful of all animals, keeping watch for its master day and night. 'So are those strenuous ones who are separated at the water': they are ready to die for their Master: keep watch for Him day and night, and bark when they meditate in His law.]

§ 22. Again the Lord said to Gideon: 'They that lie down to drink

the water shall not go with thee to the battle, lest they be defeated and fall in the battle'; for they had already by a mystery foreshewed (their) fall, in that they drank the water slothfully. Wherefore, beloved, they that go down to the contest ought not to be like those slothful ones, lest they turn back from the fight and become a disgrace to their companions.

§ 25. All these things I have written to thee, beloved, because there are in our generation some who offer themselves to be solitaries and *B'nai Q'yâmâ* and holy; and we are carrying on a contest against our enemy, and our enemy is fighting against us to turn us back to the state from which we have freely separated ourselves. And some of us are defeated and stricken, and whereas they are guilty they justify themselves; and although we know their sin they persevere in this mind and will not draw near to repentance, &c.

On reading these passages the impression we get at the outset is that Aphraates is wishing to enforce strict discipline on a point in which practice has grown lax. This impression is certainly correct: in the ranks of a certain grade of the Society scandals had occurred (see § 25) which plainly shewed the necessity for greater care in the selection of its members. And so in § 18 the priests and others responsible are told to warn 'all the people', with words taken from Deut. xx 5 ff, to the effect that any one who is afraid, or has his heart set upon worldly possessions, or has betrothed a wife must turn back, for 'for solitaries (only) is the contest fitting'. We notice here that the state of life undertaken by the grade in question is referred to as the 'contest', and the persons who undertake the 'contest' are called 'solitaries' (*šhîdâye*). To this terminology Aphraates carefully adheres in what follows. It remains to be seen whether he will afford any information which may help us to discover what grade in the community it was to which these 'solitaries' belonged.

Aphraates closes § 18 by saying that they (the priests, &c.) are to observe those that depart after the warning, and to review those that remain, and 'bring them down to the waters of probation', for 'the waters will prove every one that is strenuous, and those that are slothful will from there be separated'.

What he means by this appears immediately.

He opens § 19 by saying that Gideon of old enacted a scene which was symbolical of the present situation. He then recites from Judges vii 5 ff the story of how Gideon selected an army

for a particular battle. In quoting the instructions given by God to Gideon he sharply distinguishes three classes of persons: (1) those who depart after the warning¹; (2) and (3) those who are rejected and those who are chosen *after* the trial by water².

Then he tells us what all this signifies: 'Great is this mystery, beloved, which Gideon did long ago, shewing a type of Baptism, and a mystery of the Contest, and a likeness of the Solitaries.' Evidently baptism is the water test, the 'contest' is the battle, and the 'solitaries' are the men chosen for the battle. Then Gideon carries out his instructions: 'for he first of all warned the people by the trial of the water³; again, when he had proved them by the water, from ten thousand there were chosen but three hundred men to undertake the contest.' Here it can scarcely be questioned that Aphraates regards the distinction into two classes *after* the trial by water as a vital point in his illustration.

Having thoroughly propounded his parable he proceeds, in §§ 20-22, to apply it in detail to the case in hand. What should be carefully noted is that in § 20 (which contains the reference to marriage 'before baptism') he gets no farther in the explanation of his parable than the warning before the trial by water (corresponding to the admonition before baptism). Now if baptism were the ultimate goal to be reached by Aphraates' people, it is evident that when the warning had been delivered and a number had departed no further division of the people would remain to be made; for baptism would merely put the seal upon that already effected, and the people would remain distinguished into only two classes. Aphraates would consequently be obliged to cut short at this point the application of his story, and the remaining points which he had been at such pains to emphasize—that the water itself was merely a test, albeit the chief test, and that the final selection for the battle came after the trial of the water—these prominent points would be simply wasted, the story itself would be rendered absolutely pointless, and we should be left to wonder at the extraordinary

¹ He makes Gideon warn the people in the language of Deut. xx 5 ff.

² Aphraates has already told us by anticipation (§ 18) that there are three classes in the Christian Society corresponding to these.

³ This seems to be a condensed way of saying 'he first warned the people and then tried them by the water'.

irrelevancy of the supposed parable. But no such bewildering situation confronts us; for Aphraates goes straight on in §§ 21-22 to work out the full application of his parable, just as we should have expected of him. He says that, after the exhortation, those who have been (so far) approved 'for the contest' are to be brought 'to the waters of baptism'—which can only mean that they are to be baptized; and 'after the baptism' they (i. e. the priests, &c., see § 18) are to observe those that are strenuous and those that are feeble: the strenuous they must encourage, and those that are slack and feeble they are to 'send back from the contest openly'.

Here we find definitely stated, what we have already been given to understand plainly enough in §§ 18 and 19, that the final selection for the 'contest' is made *after* baptism. This selection of members for a particular grade in the Community is the leading idea of the context as a whole (§§ 18-22), and the conditions laid down in §§ 18 and 20 are primarily conditions for membership of this grade. It is the one sentence in § 20, to the effect that those bent on matrimony should (or, might) marry before baptism, that has lent colour to the view that the call spoken of is a call to baptism; but this view stultifies the plain language of the surrounding context. Read in its context the sentence about marriage *need* mean no more than that those who have already set their heart on matrimony are, by that very fact, disqualified for membership of the higher grade of baptized Christians, and are free to marry at once without the necessity of proceeding to the real test (baptism)¹. It is as though Gideon had been instructed to say: 'Let him that hath betrothed a wife

¹ It is a misconception to suppose such language implies any disparagement of marriage, or that there is anything new (or rather, characteristically old) in such recognition of the marriage of Catechumens as an honourable and binding contract, in fact as real marriage (see St Augustine's *Confessions*, bk. ii ch. 3, where he blames his mother for not wishing to have him honestly married long before his conversion). In xviii § 8 Aphraates speaks of matrimony as a thing in itself good: 'Upon matrimony, which was given to the world by God, we cast no slur, God forbid!' In xviii § 12 he says of virginity: 'A great reward is in store for this state, because we observe it of our free will, and not through subjection to the restraint of a commandment, and we are bound therein under no law.' In xiv § 43 he enumerates the evil effects of jealousy: amongst other things 'jealousy has separated wives from their husbands, and by it children rise up against their parents.'

return and rejoice with his wife before the trial of the water.' This of course would only mean that it was needless for such a one to take any further step with a view to being included in the army: it would have no bearing one way or the other on the question as to whether he might or might not go down to drink the water for other reasons.

It is probable, however, that we have here an incidental reference to a particular discipline connected with baptism, and that persons who had already decided upon matrimony may have been required to marry before baptism¹. Considering the corrupt influence of Persian morals to which the Christians of that region must have been exposed, the existence of such a practice would cause us no surprise. But in any case the reference to it is merely incidental; and moreover the language does not seem to imply that people living the married life were disqualified for baptism, rather the contrary: 'let them marry *before* baptism'.

The rest of § 21 is taken up with shewing how appositely the Solitaries are compared to dogs. Having enumerated some of the good qualities of the dog, Aphraates notes that those who are 'separated at the water' resemble the dog in this, amongst other things, that they keep watch for their Master day and night, and 'bark when they meditate in His Law'.

In § 22 he has just a word on those who were rejected from the 'contest' after baptism. He speaks of them in terms of the story, for the application is so obvious that there is no need to point it: 'they [i.e. the majority of Gideon's ten thousand] had', he says, 'already by a mystery foreshewed their fall [i.e. that they would have fallen had they gone on to the battle] in that they drank the water slothfully.'

I think the evidence so far fairly warrants the following summary of Aphraates' argument.

1. Persons wishing to undertake that state of life which he calls figuratively 'the contest', wishing, that is, to become 'solitaries', were to be carefully warned of their obligations beforehand. This applied especially to those who were young and not yet baptized, 'youths and maidens holy'.

¹ An analogy may be found in the present practice of some portions of the Eastern Church, which, though it forbids priests to marry, does not deny them the use of marriage contracted before ordination.

2. These last, if they persevered after the warning, were then to be baptized.

3. After baptism they were to be kept under observation for a time, in other words to be subjected to a sort of novitiate. Finally, some would be dismissed openly, and apparently without censure, and would remain simply baptized lay Christians¹; others would be chosen to become 'solitaries'. Now these 'solitaries' are none other than the *B'nai Q'yâmâ*. This is quite certain: in the Discourse on the *B'nai Q'yâmâ* (vi) the two terms are synonymous (see vi § 8; cf. § 4); in viii § 23 Aphraates actually refers to the Discourse on the *B'nai Q'yâmâ* as that on the 'solitaries'. That the identification holds good in the Discourse under consideration (vii) we see from § 25, where Aphraates tells us that his reason for writing as he has done is that some who have undertaken the 'contest', offering themselves to be 'solitaries and *B'nai Q'yâmâ* and holy', have fallen from their high ideal.

All then that has been said about the Solitaries applies to the *B'nai Q'yâmâ*, and they formed therefore in the Church of Aphraates a class apart from the ordinary baptized laity. I admit that when all has been said some things remain obscure. Although it is clear that the ultimate choice of members for the ascetical state is made *after* baptism, still words in §§ 18, 19 and 21 do seem to imply that all who approach baptism are in reality aspirants to that state. But on the other hand the alternative contemplated in § 20 appears to be either a provisional promise of celibacy or marriage *before* baptism, and not the denial of baptism to married people. My own solution of the difficulty lies in the twofold consideration that, (1) Aphraates, in Discourse vii, is directly dealing not with baptism but penance, and, in the latter part, with the recruiting of members for the *B'nai Q'yâmâ* or higher grade of the baptized, and (2) his exposition is cloaked in an allegorical exegesis of Scripture, and so it is unsafe to draw strict conclusions in matters of practice from what may be mere rhetorical allusion.

¹ Aphraates' title for the baptized laity seems to have been simply 'the Faithful'; cf. *Disc. x* (fin.), 'read and learn, thou and the brethren, the *B'nai Q'yâmâ*, and the *B'nai Haimânûthan*' (i. e. 'Sons of our Faith').

If my contention holds good I can see no further objection to calling the *B'nai Q'yâmâ* 'monks', for:

1. Their manner of life was characteristically monastic, requiring celibacy, poverty, constant vigils and fasting, and the dwelling apart of the sexes.

2. These are the only sort of monks with whom Aphraates shews any acquaintance. Dom Parisot, in the Introduction to his edition of Aphraates' *Homilies*, considers that the term *B'nai Q'yâmâ* is used by him to denote monks in general, especially coenobites; so too M. Labourt¹. Wright² thought that Aphraates was himself 'probably a bishop of the convent of Mâr Matthew near Mosul'.

But was the monastery at Mosul in existence at this time? Or is there any evidence that coenobite monasticism had yet travelled so far East? The first monastery in Mesopotamia is said to have been founded at Nisibis by an Egyptian, Mâr Awgîn by name, *circa* 325 A.D.³; but according to the same authority there was no widespread propagation of coenobite monasticism within the Persian Empire until after 363 A.D., when Nisibis was occupied by Sapor II. That monarch is said to have then permitted the monks to build churches and monasteries within his dominions. Again, the words 'coenobite' and 'monastery' do not occur in Aphraates' writings; but, considering his insistence on the characteristically monastic virtues, it would be a marvel indeed that he, a monk and bishop, and writing to one who was evidently of the same class as himself, should speak of those virtues as the distinguishing mark of a different class of people, whilst passing over his own monks without a single word.

3. The title *B'nai Q'yâmâ* itself was in use not so very long after Aphraates' time as a well-established technical term to denote a class of persons who lived under rule and were distinct from the ordinary laity. Moreover other words which are found

¹ J. Labourt *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, Paris, 1904, p. 29.

² *Syriac Literature* p. 33.

³ See Dr Budge's Introduction to *The Book of Governors* p. cxxv ff, where he gives an abstract of the Life of Mâr Awgîn; for the Life see Bedjan *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* vol. iii p. 376 ff. Labourt, *op. cit.* pp. 302 ff, shews that little reliance can be placed on the Life of Awgîn as representing a genuine tradition; any kernel of fact which it contains belongs to a much later date.

in use later as technical terms in connexion with monasticism are freely applied to the *B'nai Q'yāmā*. Such are 'solitary', 'the solitary state' (ܩܘܝܡܐܢܐ), and 'holy' or 'chaste' (ܩܘܝܡܐܢܐ). One or two more also are, I have no doubt, used by Aphraates with reference to the *B'nai Q'yāmā*, since these are the only persons mentioned by him to whom they could well be applied, and the words themselves have not a more distinctively monastic application than those certainly used of this class. Such words are ܩܘܝܡܐܢܐ 'sadness' or 'asceticism'¹; the verb ܩܘܝܡܐܢܐ 'to practise asceticism'²; and the verb ܩܘܝܡܐܢܐ 'to be as a Nazirite', 'to vow abstinence (from)'³. Evidently the word *thēdāyā*, 'solitary', had not in Aphraates' time acquired the special sense of 'hermit', but simply described the *B'nai Q'yāmā* as men living a life of celibacy and renunciation of worldly possessions. The other words just mentioned seem never to have been used of one class of monks more than another, and they cannot be taken, in the absence of positive evidence, as indications that Aphraates had dealings with any monks other than the *B'nai Q'yāmā*. The nucleus of the technical monastic vocabulary in Syriac seems to have been formed in connexion with them. They were, I believe, the first ascetics of the Syriac-speaking Church. 'The earliest practice of asceticism in the Christian Church', says Dom Butler, speaking of early Christian asceticism generally, 'did not lead its votaries to withdraw from the world; they carried on the ascetical life in the midst of their families, keeping fasts, abstaining from marriage, and devoting themselves to prayer and good works.'⁴

The *B'nai Q'yāmā* answer almost exactly to this description; consequently they should not be treated as though they were practically identical with the coenobites, or monks proper. Rabbūla⁵, writing a couple of generations after Aphraates, clearly distinguishes the two classes. Coenobitism almost certainly came to Mesopotamia from Egypt or Syria, though it is more than doubtful whether there were any monasteries within the

¹ Aphraates i 4.

² *Ibid.* iii 1.

³ *Ibid.* iii 1.

⁴ *The Lausiac History* vol. i p. 230.

⁵ Bishop of Edessa from 411 till 435 A. D. See Overbeck *S. Ephraemi Syri Aliorumque Opera Selecta* pp. 210-220. Rabbūla as clearly distinguishes the *B. Q.* from the laity.

Persian Empire in the fourth century; the *B'nai Q'yâmâ* on the other hand probably represent a native growth of asceticism.

If they cannot quite strictly be styled 'monks' it will be a difficult task to prove that there were yet any monks at all in that part of the Syriac-speaking Church for which Aphraates wrote.

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Since the above has been in type I have noticed the following interesting parallel to Aphraates' treatment of the passage in Judges. Origen's *Hom. ix in Jud.* (extant only in Rufinus's translation) deals with the same story of Gideon. Origen also understood the trial by water of baptism: he interprets the twenty-two thousand who depart after Gideon's admonition as those catechumens who refused to approach baptism through pusillanimity; the remaining ten thousand 'ad aquam veniunt ut ibi probentur'. The 'proof' consists in this: 'quia ii qui descendunt ad aquam, id est, qui ad baptismi gratiam veniunt, non debent procidere in terram, nec flectere genua sua, et cedere tentationibus venturis, sed stare firmiter et constanter, sicut et Propheta dicebat: *Demissas manus, et dissoluta genua erigite*¹, et, *gressum rectum facite semitis vestris*². Venisti ad aquam baptismi, istud est certaminis et pugnae spiritalis initium, hinc tibi adversum Zabulum nascitur pugnae principium. Si remissior fueris, si flecti facile potueris, quomodo pugnabis? Quomodo stabis adversus astutias Zabuli? Propterea et Apostolus clamat: *State ergo: et nolite iterum iugo servitutis haerere*³. Et iterum dicit: *State in Domino*⁴. Et tertio dicit: *Quoniam tunc vivimus, si vos statis in Domino*⁵. Ille igitur probabilis, ille electus est, qui posteaquam ad aquas baptismi ventum est, flecti ad necessitates terrenas et corporeas nescit, qui vitiis non indulget, neque ob peccati sitim sternitur pronus. Sed et quod dicit eos manu, vel lingua aquam lambere, non absque sacramenti quadam significantia hoc mihi videtur scriptum, scilicet quod et manu et lingua operari debent milites Christi, hoc est, opere et verbo: quia *qui docet et facit, hic magnus vocabitur in regno caelorum*⁶. Quod autem etiam similitudinem canis lambentis scriptura posuit, videtur mihi istud animal hoc in loco propterea nominatum, quod super omnia caetera animalia amorem dicitur proprii domini servare, nec tempore nec iniuriis obliterari in eo fertur affectus. Trecenti ergo soli, qui sacramenti huius imaginem praeformabant, isti electi, isti probati, isti ad victoriam consecrati, qui ex ipso numeri sacramento obtinere adversarios possunt. Trecenti

¹ Isa. xxxv 3.

⁴ Phil. iv 1.

² Heb. xii 13.

⁵ 1 Thess. iii 8.

³ Gal. v 1.

⁶ Matth. v 19.

etenim sunt, qui tertio centena multiplicant, et perfectae trinitatis numerum ferunt, sub quo numero omnis Christi censetur exercitus. In quo optamus ut etiam nos mereamur adscribi.'

Thus Origen's exegesis is as follows :

1. The twenty-two thousand are those who remain catechumens.
2. The ten thousand are the baptized.
3. Of these only three hundred are *electi, probati, ad victoriam consecrati*—'among whom may we (who are of the baptized) be worthy to be numbered'.

It seems that Origen's exegesis runs parallel with that of Aphraates, except that the latter interprets the three hundred of the *B'nai Q'yâmâ*, Origen of zealous whole-hearted Christians.

The language in which Aphraates introduces his remarks on the dog almost suggests dependence on Origen. He writes: 'Great is this mystery, beloved, the sign of which (God) shewed beforetime to Gideon . . . for of all the animals which were created with man there is none that loveth its master like the dog, and keepeth his watch day and night; and even when his master beateth him he leaveth him not.'

If a dependence could be established it would throw an interesting light on the question as to the extent of Aphraates' isolation from the influences of Greek thought. Mr Burkitt has already thrown out a hint that the Sage may have been acquainted with the Epistle of Clement of Rome (see his review of Dr Barnes's *Syriac Psalter* in this JOURNAL, Jan. 1905).

R. H. C.