

Ephrem Syrus.

BY CAMARDEEN.

Up to the present time the state of study of the Syriac language and literature has remained rather discouraging than otherwise. The student who passes from his Greek and Hebrew to the beautiful, flexible, and not essentially difficult Syriac, finds himself at a loss for lack of compendious helps. He finds not even a first-class lexicon in existence, except Bernstein's, and that was cut off by the compiler's death when not half through the alphabet. He can get along with his Peshitto New Testament so far as to find out the general sense, and to detect any startling divergencies from the received reading; but to be able to appreciate the finer shades of the language he finds no resource except (a good one, to be sure, but fearfully laborious) to read, read, read. Then, too, the demand upon his purse for the price of the costly books is a serious drawback. Nor can he be sure that in purchasing such a Syriac New Testament as the market affords he is getting the real ancient text; he may make mistake after mistake in his textual criticism, until he has advanced far enough to read a deal of extraneous matter, and thus comes to learn what is the ancient text, and what has been added or altered by editors of mistaken zeal.

However, as he pushes on, and discovers what the beauties of the language are, what treasures of history and poetry its literature contains, embracing the whole period from the time of Christ to the end of the Crusades; and as he further begins to see that it is in the power of a very moderate and humble student to bring out some old thing that is new to the present age and of value in Christian lore, his discouragement gives way to surprise. Nay, he is doubly surprised: first, that the vast army of biblical students fail to acquaint themselves with this tongue, since the reading of the Peshitto alone would repay the labor; and secondly, that better and cheaper materials are not at hand for its study.

He knows well enough that at Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria, the disciples were first called Christians; but it is new to him that the Syriac speaking Christians were the first to develop a sweet and serviceable hymnology. He learns that the grand Latin hymns, in substance and melody certainly, in meter probably, are in large measure importations from the Syriac; and he wonders that modern hymnologists stop in their researches with the Latin and Greek rivulets of sacred song, and do not ascend to the Syriac fountain.

The greatest name among the ancient Syriac hymn-writers, if not among the Syrian fathers, is Ephrem; Ephrem or Ephraem Syrus, as we commonly see it printed; the Syriac form being kept in preference to the familiar Ephraim. But who was he? Ask almost any clergyman in these times of Bible revision and New Testament critical study, and you will probably be told that a collection of his works is extant in the famous "Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus," a palimpsest of great value in the National Library at Paris; which codex, however, is chiefly valuable for its older writing, consisting of portions of the Septuagint and of the New Testament, whose deciphering and publishing was the beginning of unusual fame to the great Tischendorf. But not to mention the fact that the writings of Ephrem found in this codex are in Greek, they probably contain less of him than appears in the excerpts from Vatican and other (Syriac) manuscripts collected by Assemani, a Maronite monk of the last century, in his "Bibliotheca Orientalia," which is a mine of wealth to a student of Syriac.

Of the life of Ephrem but little is

known; and the early accounts are much mixed with fable. He was born of well-to-do parents at Nisibis, during the reign of Constantine; was baptized by a well-known Syrian father named Jacob, after whose death he entered upon the life of a monk at Edessa, where he also, conducted a religious school. He wrote almost innumerable hymns, some long poems, as "The Repentance of Nineveh," many metrical homilies, and some prose works; all of which were intended for popular use and teaching, and all apparently drawn from the Peshitto Bible as his sole library and mental furniture; and he died during the reign of Valens, about A. D. 372. The following translated extracts from two Syriac manuscripts tell us about all the details we know, except some that relate to his literary work. The first extract is from a Vatican manuscript about seven hundred years old:

"The holy Ephrem was a Syrian by birth; his father was an idolatrous priest from the neighborhood of Nisibis, his mother from Amida; and they lived in the time of the invincible Constantine. As he would not fall in with the godless views of his father, the latter drove him from home. But he betook himself to Mar Jacob, bishop of Nisibis, by whom he was instructed in the godly religion until the time of Jovinianus. [An anachronism, probably. Jovinianus was condemned for heresy A. D. 390.] Thence he went to Edessa, where, stirred with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he served the church in exhortation and teaching. Afterwards he traveled to the Egyptian desert, and thence to Caesarea in Cappadocia to Basil, who consecrated him as deacon by the laying on of hands. Soon thereafter he came back to Edessa, and died there on the ninth of Heziran (June) in the year 684 [of the Seleucid era], which is the year 372 after the birth of Christ. It is related that before his conversion an angel from heaven appeared by night to a certain anchorite on the mountains near Edessa, with a book (roll) written within and without, and asked him to whom the book should be given. He said for answer, 'The anchorite, Origen and Julian.' But the angel said, 'No one but Ephrem the Syrian deserves it.'—For his sake God forgives us our sins! Amen."

The other extract is from a Nitrian manuscript:

"The holy Mar Ephrem was by birth a Syrian. His father was a priest of the god Abnii, who afterwards caused Jovinianus to apostatize. His mother was from Amida. He saw the light of the world under the orthodox Constantine. God, whose goodness chose him, was with him, so that he did not attend his father's offerings and worship. But when his father saw him once talking with a Christian outside of the city, he was so angry with him that he beat him without mercy and cast him off; however, he sought forgiveness of his false god for his son's doing. To that intent he was once offering to his divinity, when Satan appeared to him and said, 'We know very well that thou dost reverence us for a long time, and in every possible way; but as to thy son, who continually fights us, no offering can atone for him. If thou wilt have us favorable to thee, then cast thy son out from thine house, and let him not come near thy offerings; for he is our worst enemy.' His father therefore bade him go whither he would, and forbade him his house forever, since he was his god's enemy. This had long been Ephrem's wish: with joy therefore he fled from his father's house, taking nothing with him. Not knowing whither he should go, God's grace led him to the Christian church, and to the then bishop of Nisibis, Mar Jacob, who instructed him in godly lore, and received him among the catechumens. Here Ephrem won the love of his

eloquent teacher Jacob, and of all the people, by his steadfastness in virtue, continence, and religion."

The manuscript goes on to relate a temptation of Satan very much like one said to have befallen St. Anthony, of Padua, of which he was freed in like manner, namely, by causing an infant miraculously to speak, and thus putting an end to an unjust calumny before the whole congregation. Then follows a relation of his going with Mar Jacob to the Council of Nicea; and it proceeds:

"After the death of the great Constantine, the Persian King Sapor sought to take Nisibis. Seventy days had he lain encamped about the city, when Ephrem obtained permission from the bishop to curse the Persians; and he prayed from God for flies and other insects; which also came to pass."

This miracle is also recorded of him by Theodoret, and by Gregory Abulpharag. The latter adds that the flies "chased away the Persians' elephants and horses."

The manuscript goes on to relate that Mar Jacob soon thereafter died, and that Ephrem buried him, and remained in Nisibis till the Persians took that city. Then he removed to the Roman territory and dwelt for a long time thereafter at Amida. Thence he went to Edessa, and was employed about the baths. There a monk of the neighborhood heard him disputing with the heathen, and persuaded him to become a monk; whereupon "he betook himself to a cave, and devoted himself wholly to prayer, fasting, and the Holy Scriptures. This was that same monk who had the vision above related of the angel with the book." The manuscript here adds another wonder: "When he was very small, and indeed unborn, a branch appeared to sprout from his tongue, and bore many clusters and more grapes; the clusters signified his discourses, and the grapes his hymns."

This monk just mentioned, surprised at Ephrem's wonderful progress in divine things, spoke of him to all the people of learning and rank, and showed them the first product of Ephrem's retirement: an exposition of the books of Moses. Ephrem was sought on all hands, but he fled away to a cave, in the thick woods, and refused to come forth till an angel commanded him. Then he came forth, publicly declaring his commission from God to root out all heresies and purify the church. For the heretics and the heathen stoned him, so that he went back to his solitude, whence he sent forth discourses and epistles, and thus brought many back to the truth, and many of his disciples thus made became well known fathers in the Syrian Church after him.

Hearing of Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, he greatly desired to see him, and God led him thither, guiding him with a pillar of fire until he was taught the way. During the journey miracles were performed, and many heretics brought to renounce their errors. His mission to Basil was accomplished in teaching the latter the correct form in speaking of the Trinity; and also the correct form of doxology. Returning, he performed more miracles and set right innumerable heretics. After some years Basil wished to make him a bishop, but he seems to have escaped that; and it is uncertain whether he ever consented to be more than deacon. However, he filled the land with his teaching, meeting with a success whose detail, as given in the manuscripts, is almost incredible. With high and low alike, and with multitudes, the effect of his preaching and writings was little short of miraculous. After he had fully overcome heresy in Edessa, he retired to his solitude, only coming forth to relieve famine in the city.

At last the end of this holy man drew nigh. His pupils wrote out his will for him and prayed with him before he passed away; while at the

news of his approaching death, the greater part of the city came out to him and lamented their bereavement. But he prayed for them, and made them swear to bury him among the common people and the strangers. "When he was dead, with hymns and holy psalms the angels, the bishops, priests, deacons, and all clergy followed him to his burial; and with them came still the choir, the hermits, stylites [a mistake: there were no pillar-monks in Ephrem's time], and monks, and they buried him with all solemnities in the churchyard. But afterwards he was removed from his grave and placed in the church, when his bones were perceived to have a sweet odor."

In thus tracing Ephrem's life in the ancient manuscripts, it has seemed best to take them with their fable. It is not difficult to separate the legendary from the true; and yet much about him is uncertain. The year of his death, is not precisely known, but the date above given in the manuscript cannot be far from the truth. He was certainly dead before A. D. 378. His usefulness, and its peculiar sort, are not misstated in these accounts, as a variety of records abundantly tell. And his own works speak unmistakably of the richness of his spirit, the warmth of his zeal, the wisdom of his judgment, and the store of his scriptural learning.

The pioneer in Syriac hymn writing was Bardesanes the Gnostic. His works gave Ephrem great grief, and at the same time spurred him to fight their doctrine with weapons of like fashion, of which he had a limitless arsenal. Besides Ephrem's treatises and metrical homilies, the number of his hymns is probably twelve hundred. The Wesleys themselves were not more prolific.

He wrote in a variety of meter, of which it would not be a very good description to give a catalogue of the Syriac names—as far as they have names. Their prosody has not been entirely elaborated by modern grammarians. They speak with power and beauty even in an English dress, as any one may see by reading a translation of selections made by the Rev. Henry Burgess, who has done much to increase our knowledge of the character of Ephrem and the structure of his hymns. Ephrem was the father of much that remains in hymnology to the present day. Ambrose, of Milan, one of the early and great names in Latin hymnology, was a notorious borrower from him, bringing both his meters and melodies into service of the western church. To this day the church has reason of thankfulness that Ephrem Syrus was moved in all wisdom to teach and admonish in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. At least we can all echo his own words of humble gratitude:

"And since it is not profitable for us
To be silent and restrained,
Let our infirmity render to thee
The song of thanksgiving.
Thou Good! who dost not exact
More than our ability,
How will thy servant be condemned
Both in principal and interest,
Should he not give what he is able,
But hold back what he owes!
O thou Sea of glory,
Who needest not be glorified,
Receive in thy goodness
The drop of thanksgiving—
Thou, who hast by thy gift
Harmonized my tongue for thy praise!"
—S. S. Times.

—There is no portion of our time that is our time, and the rest God's; there is no portion of our money that is our money, and the rest God's money. It is all his; he made it all, and he has simply trusted it to us for his service. A servant has two purses, the master's and his own; but we have only one. —*Monod.*

—It cost the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions only about 4 per cent, to receive and expend its annual income of some \$450,000.

Newspaper Reading.

"I have not read an account of a murder or other crime in a newspaper for two years. By way of curiosity I counted the number of such things in a single issue of a paper of last week and found it to be thirteen." The above remark was made by a lady who reads the newspaper, but more for the purpose of learning important news and cultivating her mind than to gratify a vitiated taste, and fill her thoughts with details of current tragedy and brutality. She had grown so far in intelligence and virtue as to have a proper disgust for the recitals of crime with which the columns of most of the journals are filled, being strong enough also in will and determination to refuse what she would neither enjoy nor profit by. She and all like her ought to be congratulated. They have made an important advance towards what must be the practice of the more discriminating future.

It is the dream of enthusiastic journalists—perhaps it is only a dream—that newspaper editing and writing will ere long be conducted upon a plan of dignity and refinement of which at present we have no example. When the people forsake their craving for stories of crime, wishing to read only the instructive and helpful, and when the highest art in journalistic training has been reached, then, they think, the newspaper will be as healthy in its intellectual tone as a passage from the histories of Froude or Macaulay. It is possible that such a time may come. There is not, however, at the present much sign of it. The current newspaper enterprise is devoted to providing "news" and what is this but to give an account of current transactions? If there be murders, thefts, and suicides, why shall not the public be told of it, and thus be informed of the state of society, and the signs of the times? And indulging in this reasoning and acting upon the principle editors and proprietors of the public prints fill up their columns with matter the entire influence of which is pernicious. Whoever, therefore, subscribes for a newspaper because he wishes to know the news of the day, must understand that a large portion of what he pays will be stories of revolting crime and exaggerated descriptions of whatever is loathsome in society. To say he will not have a paper furnishing such details, is equivalent to declaring he will do without news, and shut himself off from communication with the outside world.

There is nothing left, therefore, for people to whom such things are offensive but the elective plan of reading. They must agree to school themselves to the practice of choosing the good and refusing the bad. If they can do this, the blemishes and deformities which come in their way will do them no other harm than that of offending their tastes and exciting their indignation. But it is upon this class of elective readers that we must depend for the reform of the future. If it grow until at length it can wield a proper influence, it will provide for itself a clean and healthy kind of journalism, and leave the unclean and degrading to the vicious classes, to be used along with other garbage from which they have their subsistence. —*United Presbyterian.*

Though Shaking Like an Aspen Leaf

With the chills and fever, the victim of malaria may still recover by using the celebrated, Hostetter's Stomach Bitters, which not only breaks up the most aggravated attacks, but prevents their recurrence. It is infinitely preferable to quinine, not only because it does the business far more thoroughly, but also on account of its perfect wholesomeness and invigorating action upon the entire system. Testimony is concurrent, positive and ample showing the decided nature of its effects, and that it is no mere palliative. Physicians concede its excellence, and there is a constant influx of communications from persons in every class of society vouching its merit and bearing witness to its superiority over other remedies for malarial disease. It is especially popular throughout the West, wherever fever and ague prevails, as it does in many of the fairest and most fertile portions of that vast region.