

AMBROSE

AMBROSE

Table of Contents

<u>AMBROSE</u>	1
<u>AMBROSE</u>	1

AMBROSE

AMBROSE

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

A MEMORIAL[2] a which Ambrose, a chief man of Greece, wrote: who became a Christian, and all his fellow-senators raised an outcry against him; and he fled from them, and wrote and pointed out to them all their foolishness.

Beginning his discourse,[3] he answered and said:

Think not, men of Greece, that my separation from your customs has been made without a just and proper reason. For I acquainted myself with all your wisdom, consisting of poetry, of oratory, of philosophy; and when I found not there anything agreeable to what is right, or that is worthy of the divine nature, I resolved to make myself acquainted with the wisdom of the Christians also, and to learn and see who they are, and when they took their rise, and what is the nature of this new and strange wisdom of theirs,[4] or on what good hopes those who are imbued with it rely, that they speak only that which is true.

Men of Greece, when I came to examine the Christian writings, I found not any folly sin them, as I had found not any folly[5] in them, as I had found in the celebrated Homer, who has said concerning the wars of the two trials:[6] "Because of Helen, many of the Greeks perished at Troy, away from their beloved home." [7] For, first of all, we are told[8] concerning Agamemnon their king, that by reason of the foolishness of his brother Menelaus, and the violence of his

madness, and the uncontrollable nature of his passion, he resolved to go and rescue Helen from the hands of a certain leprous[9] shepherd; and afterwards, when the Greeks had become victorious in the war, and burnt cities, and taken women and children captive, and the land was filled with blood, and the rivers with corpses, Agamemnon himself also was found to be taken captive by his passion for Briseis. Patroclus, again, we are told, was slain, and Achilles, the son of the goddess Thetis, mourned over him; Hector was dragged along the ground, and Priam and Hecuba together were weeping over the loss of their children; Astyanax, the son of Hector, was thrown down from the walls of Ilion, and his mother Andromache the mighty Ajax bore away into captivity; and that which was taken as booty was after a little while, all squandered in sensual indulgence.

Of the wiles of Odysseus the son of Laertes, and of his murders, who shall tell the tale? For of a hundred and ten suitors did his house in one day become the grave, and it was filled with corpses and blood. He, too, it was that by his wickedness gained the praises of men, because through his pre-eminence in craft he escaped detection; he, too, it was who, you say, sailed upon the sea, and heard not the voice of the Sirens only because he stopped his ears with wax.[10]

The famous Achilles, again, the son of Peleus, who bounded across the river, and routed[11] the Trojans, and slew Hector, this said hero of yours became the slave of Philoxena, and was overcome by an Amazon as she lay dead and stretched upon her bier; and he put off his armour, and arrayed himself in nuptial garments, and finally fell a sacrifice to love. Thus much concerning your great "men;"[1] and thou, Homer, hadst deserved forgiveness, if thy silly story-telling had gone so far only as to prate about men, and not about the gods. As for what he says about the gods, I am ashamed even to speak of it: for the stories that have been invented about them are very wicked and shocking; passing stranger too, and not to be believed; and, if the truth must be told,[3] fit only to be laughed at.

AMBROSE

For a person will be compelled to laugh when he meets with them, and will not believe them when he hears them. For think of gods who did not one of them observe the laws of rectitude, or of purity, or of modesty, but were adulterers, and spent their time in debauchery, and yet were not condemned to death, as they ought to have been!

Why, the sovereign of the gods, the very "father of gods and men," not only, as ye say, was an adulterer (this was but a light thing), but even slew his own father, and was a paederast. I will first of all speak of his adultery, though I blush to do so: for he appeared to Antiope as a satyr, and descended upon Danae as a shower of gold, and became a bull for Europa, and a swan for Leda; whilst the love of Semele, the mother of Dionysus, exposed both his own ardency of passion and the jealousy of the chaste Hera. Ganymede the Phrygian, too, he carried off disguised as an eagle, that the fair and comely boy, forsooth, might serve as cup-bearer to him. This said sovereign of the gods, moreover killed his father Kronos, that he might seize upon his kingdom.

Oh! to how many charges is the sovereign of the gods amenable,[4] and how many deaths does he deserve to die, as an adulterer, and as a sorcerer,[5] and as a paederast! Read to the sovereign of the gods, O men of Greece, the law concerning parricide, and the condemnation pronounced on adultery, and about the shame that attaches to the vile sin of paederasty. How many adulterers has the sovereign of the gods indoctrinated in sin! Nay, how many paederasts, and sorcerers, and murderers! So that, if a man be found indulging his passions, he must not be put to death: because he has done this that he may become like the sovereign of the gods; and, if he be found a murderer, he has an excuse in the sovereign of the gods; and, if a man be a sorcerer, he has learned it from the sovereign of the gods; and, if he be a paederast, the sovereign of the gods is his apologist. Then, again,

if one should speak of courage, Achilles was more valiant than this said sovereign of the gods: for he slew the man that slew his friend; but the sovereign of the gods wept over Sarpedon his son when he was dying, being distressed for him.

Pluto, again, who is a god, carried off Kora,[6] and the mother of Kora was hurrying hither and thither searching for her daughter in all desert places; and, although Alexander Paris, when he had carried off Helen, paid the penalty of vengeance, as having made himself her lover by force, yet Pluto, who is a god, when he carried off Kora, remained without rebuke; and, although Menelaus, who is a man, knew how to search for Helen his wife, yet Demeter, who is a goddess, knew not where to search for Kora her daughter.

Let Hephaestus put away jealousy from him, and not indulge resentment.[7] For he was hated,[8] because he was old and lame; while Ares was loved, because he was a youth and beautiful in form. There was, however, a reproof administered in respect of the adultery. Hephaestus was not, indeed, at first aware of the love existing between Venus[9] his wife and Ares; but, when he did become acquainted with it, Hephaestus said: "Come, see a ridiculous and senseless piece of behaviour how to me, who am her own, Venus, the daughter of the sovereign of the gods, is offering insult to me, I say, who am her own, and is paying honour to Ares, who is a stranger to her." But to the sovereign of the gods it was not displeasing: for he loved such as were like these. Penelope, moreover, remained a widow twenty years, because she was expecting the return of her husband Odysseus, and busied herself with cunning tasks,[10] and persevered in works of skill, while all those suitors kept pressing her to marry them; but Venus, who is a goddess, when Hephaestus her husband was close to her, deserted him, because she was overcome by love for Ares. Harken, men of Greece: which of you would have dared to do this, or would even have endured to see it? And, if any one "should" dare to act so, what torture would be in store for him, or what scourgings!

Kronos, again, who is a god, who devoured all those children of his, was not even brought before a court of justice. They further tell us that the sovereign of the gods, his son, was the only one that escaped from him; and that the madness of Kronos his father was cheated of its purpose because Rhea his wife, the mother of the sovereign of the gods, offered him a stone in the place of the said sovereign of the gods, his son, to prevent him from devouring him. Harken, men of Greece, and reflect upon this madness! Why, even the dumb animal that grazes in the field knows its proper food, and does not touch strange food; the wild beast, too, and the reptile, and

AMBROSE

the bird, know their food. As for men, I need not say anything about them: ye yourselves are acquainted with their food, and understand it well. But Kronos, who is a god, not knowing his proper food, ate up a stone!

Therefore, O men of Greece, if ye will have such gods as these, do not find fault with one another when ye do such-like things. Be not angry with thy son when he forms the design to kill thee: because he thus resembles the sovereign of the gods. And, if a man commit adultery with thy wife, why dost thou think of him as an enemy, and yet to the sovereign of the gods, who is like him, doest worship and service? Why, too, dost thou find fault with thy wife when she has committed adultery and leads a dissolute life,[1] and yet payest honour to Venus, and placest her images in shrines? Persuade your Solon to repeal his laws; Lycurgus, also, to make no laws; let the Areopagus repeal[2] theirs, and judge no more; and let the Athenians have councils no longer. Let the Athenians discharge Socrates from his office: for no one like Kronos has ever come before him. Let them not put to death Orestes, who killed his mother: for, lo! the sovereign of the gods did worse things than these to his father. OEdipus also too hastily inflicted mischief on himself, in depriving his eyes of sight, because he had killed his mother unwittingly: for he did not think about[3] the sovereign of the gods, who killed his father and yet remained without punishment. Medea, again, who killed her children, the Corinthians banish from their country; and yet they do service and honour to Kronos, who devoured his children. Then, too, as regards Alexander Paris he was fight in carrying off Helen: for he did it that he might become like Pluto, who carded off Kora. Let your men be set free from law, and let your cities be the abode of wanton women, and a dwelling-place for sorcerers.

Wherefore, O men of Greece, seeing that your gods are grovelling like yourselves, and your heroes destitute of courage,[4] as your dramas tell

and your stories declare then, again, what shall be said of the tribulations of Orestes; and the couch of Thyestes; and the foul taint in the family of Pelops; and concerning Danaus, who through jealousy killed his sons-in-law, and deprived them of offspring; the banquet of Thyestes, too, feeding upon the corpse set before him by way of vengeance for her whom he had wronged; about Procne also, to this hour screaming as she flies; her sister too, warbling, with her tongue cut out?[5] What, moreover, is it fitting to say about the murder committed by OEdipus, who took his own mother to wife, and whose brothers killed one another, they being at the same time his sons?

Your festivals, too, I hate; for there is no moderation where they are; the sweet flutes also, dispellers of care, which play as an incitement to dancing:[6] and the preparation of ointments, wherewith ye anoint yourselves; and the chaplets which ye put on. In the abundance of your wickedness, too, ye have forgotten shame, and your understandings have become blinded, and ye have been infuriated[7] by the heat of passion, and have loved the adulterous bed.[8]

Had these things been said by another, perhaps our adversaries would have brought an accusation against him, an the plea that they were untrue. But your own poets say them, and your own hymns and dramas declare them.

Come, therefore, and be instructed in the word of God, and in the wisdom which is fraught with comfort. Rejoice, and become partakers of it. Acquaint yourselves with the King Immortal, and acknowledge His servants. For not in arms do they make their boast, nor do they commit murders: because our Commander has no delight in abundance of strength, nor yet in horsemen and their gallant array, nor yet in illustrious descent; but He delights in the pure soul, fenced round by a rampart of righteousness. The word of God, moreover, and the promises of our good King, and the works of God, are ever teaching us. Oh the blessedness of the soul that is redeemed by the power of the word! Oh the blessedness of the trumpet of peace without war! Oh the blessedness of the teaching which quenches the fire of appetite! which, though it makes not poets, nor fits men to be philosophers, nor has among its votaries the orators of the crowd; yet instructs men, and makes the dead not to die, and lifts men from the earth as gods up to the region which is above the firmament. Come, be instructed, and be like me: for I too was once as ye are. ELUCIDATIONS

I.

(Mara, son of Scrapion, p. 735.)

I CANNOT withhold from the student the valuable hints concerning "the dialect of Edessa" by which Professor Noldke[1] corrects the loose ideas of Mommsen, more especially because the fresh work of Mommsen will soon be in our hands, and general credit will be attached to specious representations which are sure to have a bearing on his ulterior treatment of Christianity and the Roman Empire.

Of the Syriac language Professor Noldke says:

" It was the living language of Syria which here appears as the language of writing. In Syria it had long ago been compelled to yield to the Greek as the official language, but private writings were certainly yet to a great extent written in Aramaic. We cannot lay much stress upon the fact that the respectable citizen in the Orient would have the schoolmaster of the village compose a Greek inscription for his tomb, of which he undoubtedly understood but little himself. And what a Greek this often was! That no books written by Aramaic Gentiles have been preserved for us, does not decide against the existence of the Aramaic as the language of literature in that day; for how could such Gentile works have been preserved for us? TO this must be added, that that particular dialect which afterward became the common literary language of Aramaic Christendom namely, that of Edessa certainly had in the Gentile period already been used for literary purposes. The official report of the great flood in the year 201, which is prefixed to the Edessa Chronicles, is written by a Gentile. To the same time must be ascribed the letter, written in good Edessan language by the finely educated Mart bar Serapion, from the neighbouring Samosata, who, notwithstanding his good-will toward youthful Christianity, was no Christian, but represented rather the ethical stand-point of the Stoicism so popular at that time. The fixed settling of Syriac orthography must have taken place at a much earlier period than the hymns of Bardesanes and his school, which are for us very old specimens of that language, since these hymns represent a versification much younger than the stage of development which is presupposed in this orthography. In general, it must be granted that the dialect of Edessa had been thoroughly developed already in pre-Christian times; otherwise, it could not have been so fixed and firm in writing and forms of expression. And the Syriac Dialogue on Fate, which presupposes throughout the third century, treats of scientific questions, according to Greek models, with such precision that we again see that this was not the beginning, but rather the close, of a scientific Syriac literature, which flourished already when there were but few or possibly no Christians there. Of course I recognise, with Mommsen, that Edessa offered a better protection to the national language and literature than did the cities of Syria proper; but circumstances were not altogether of a different nature in this regard in Haleb, Hems, and Damascus than they were in Edessa and Jerusalem. If, as is known, the common mass spoke Aramaic in the metropolitan city of Antiochia, it cannot safely be accepted that in the inland districts the Greek was not the language of the 'educated,' but only of those who had specially learned it. The Macedonion and Greek colonists have certainly only in a very small part retained this language in those districts down to the Roman period. In most cases they have been in a minority from the beginning over against the natives. Further. as the descendants of old soldiers, they can scarcely be regarded as the called watchmen of Greek custom and language."

II.

(No verb is found in the lexicons, etc., note 3, P. 737.)

The study of Syriac is just beginning to be regarded as only less important to the theologian than that of the Hebrew. The twain will be found a help, each to the other, if one pursues the study of the cognate languages together. In fact, the Book of Daniel demands such a preparation for its enjoyment and adequate comprehension.[2] Let me commend to every reader the admirable example of Beveridge, who at eighteen years of age produced a grammar of the Syriac language, and also a Latin essay on the importance of cultivating this study, as that of the vernacular of our Lord Himself. This little treatise is worthy of careful reading; and right

AMBROSE

worthy of note is the motto which he prefixed to it, " Estote imitatores mei, sicut et ego sum Christi" (1 Cor. xi. 1).

When one thinks of the difficulties even yet to be overcome in mastering the language, the want of a complete lexicon, etc.,(1) it is surprising to think of Beveridge's pioneer labours in extreme youth. Gutbir's Lexicon Syriacum had not yet appeared, nor his edition of the Peshito, which preceded it, though Brian Walton's great name and labours were his noble stimulants. Nobody can read the touching account which Gutbir(2) gives of his own enthusiastic and self-sacrificing work, without feeling ashamed of the slow progress of Oriental studies in the course of two centuries since the illustrious Pocock gave his grand example to English scholarship. All honour to our countryman Dr. Murdock, who late in life entered upon this charming pursuit, and called on others to follow him.(3) May I not venture to hope that even these specimens of what may be reaped from the field of Aramaic literature may inspire my young countrymen to take the lead in elucidating the Holy Scriptures from this almost unopened storehouse of "treasures new and old"?