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J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON & J. H. BERNARD

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THE ODES OF SOLOMON

EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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PREFACE

THE remains of the Christian literature of the second century which have come down to us are scanty, and are, for the most part, devoid of merit as literature, while deeply interesting and valuable to the student of Christian origins. The *Odes of Solomon*, the most recent addition to our collection of early Christian books, are specially welcome, not only for the light which they throw upon primitive beliefs, but because of their literary excellence. Whoever the author may have been, he had something of the poetical *afflatus*; nor would it be easy to find Christian poems of any age which strike a higher spiritual note. 'Solomon' is the first Christian poet in order of time, and not the least in order of inspiration.

The *Odes* have attracted many editors since their publication, but no editor has done fuller justice to their poetry and their spirituality than Dr Rendel Harris, who discovered them. It has not been my purpose to dwell upon the many beauties of thought and expression which the *Odes* reveal to the student; for Dr Harris has illustrated these with such sympathy and appreciation that no other edition than his is needed, from the point of view of a lover of sacred poetry.

My task has been a more prosaic one, namely to examine the *Odes* with the view of discovering the habits of religious life and thought which they presuppose. In order to explain their phraseology, I have quoted freely from the early theological writers of

the Eastern Church; and I believe that the parallelisms in thought and language which they present are so numerous and precise as to make it certain that the *Odes* are built up on a substructure of baptismal ritual and doctrine. I have ventured to suggest that they actually were Hymns of the Catechumens, or Hymns of the newly baptized taught to Catechumens as part of their instruction. Whatever may be thought of the arguments which have been marshalled in support of this opinion, it cannot be doubted, I think, that the Odist has in his mind the distinctive beliefs which the early Church entertained as to baptism and its privileges.

It may seem to some that such an interpretation of the *Odes* robs them of their peculiar interest and beauty. They are thus no longer private songs of a devout spirit, rejoicing in "the joy of the Lord," untrammelled by any fetters of dogma, but they are the hymns of the Christian community, fully developed and organised, their phrases deliberately chosen so as to illustrate the doctrines of baptism. But the truth is that it is difficult for later generations of the Church to whom baptism does not constitute the *conscious* crisis of the Christian life to appreciate the heights which these *Odes* reach. Overpowering as are the gains of Infant Baptism, we learn here something of what is lost by it to the Christian experience. We can understand the lofty spirituality of the *Odes*, but we find it hard to associate this with the joy of the newly baptized. Yet nothing is clearer in the records of the early Eastern Church than the exalted place which was assigned to baptism as the great crisis in the history of the soul. The *Odes* do not differ in this respect from Ephraim's baptismal hymns; their distinctiveness is not in their doctrinal implications, but rather in the beauty and dignity of the language which the singer employs to express his hope and his rejoicing.

And if, as I believe may be said, these *Odes* were primarily intended for the edification of the Catechumens, we can understand how valuable they would be, as bringing out the spiritual

aspects of the new life to which baptism admitted the neophyte. The risk of superstition and of interpretations of the baptismal act which reduce it to a magical performance, has always been a real danger among simple people; and hymns such as these would serve to turn their thoughts to the higher and more spiritual side of the Christian initiation. Where books were not available for the generality, this poetical form of instruction, learnt by heart, would be of great value—a permanent gift of spiritual help stored in the memory.

JOHN OSSORY.

THE PALACE, KILKENNY.
Easter-tide, 1912.

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INTRODUCTION

§ 1. *Previous Editions.*

THE "Odes of Solomon" have nothing in common with the "Psalms of Solomon," except the name of the supposed author. The "Psalms of Solomon" are a collection of 18 Psalms of the Pharisees, originally written in the middle of the last century before Christ. They have been edited more than once in a Greek version, extant in several manuscripts, and provide valuable information as to the hopes and aspirations of later Judaism.

Up to the year 1909 all that was known of *Odes* as distinct from *Psalms* bearing the name of Solomon was that they were mentioned in two catalogues of extra canonical books, that five of them were cited in a Gnostic treatise entitled *Pistis Sophia*, and that Lactantius makes a single quotation from them.

In 1909 Dr Rendel Harris published the text of the "Odes and Psalms of Solomon" from a Syriac manuscript in his possession which was probably written in the sixteenth century (H). The manuscript contained originally 42 Odes followed by 18 Psalms; but, as both beginning and end are lost, it supplies no title for the collection, and the text of Odes i and ii, and of Psalm xviii, is missing. Harris at once identified the later pieces with the "Psalms of Solomon" which were already well known to scholars in Greek; and he was not slow to discover that the earlier pieces included the five "Odes" which are extant in the Coptic *Pistis Sophia*. It was thus apparent that he had recovered the collection, almost in its entirety, of the long-lost "Odes of Solomon"; and the publication of their text aroused the keenest interest among scholars. A German edition (without the Syriac text) was published in 1910 in the *Texte und Untersuchungen*, consisting of a translation by J. Flemming and a commentary by Harnack; and