

*Mar Isaaci Ninivita De Perfectione Religiosa*; quam edidit PAULUS BEDJAN, P.C.M. (Lazarista). (Parisiis et Lipsiae, 1909.)

FEW Syriac writings have enjoyed such a wide popularity as the ascetical works of Isaac of Nineveh. In the middle ages they were translated from Syriac into Greek and Arabic; and thence into Latin and Ethiopic. For a full account of these versions see Chabot *De S. Isaaci Ninivita vita, scriptis et doctrina* (pp. 54 ff). As Father Bedjan observes in his Preface (p. iii), 'on a beaucoup parlé d'Isaac de Ninive; bien des erreurs ont été commises à son sujet'. He is usually (e. g. by Wright *Syr. Lit.* p. 110) classed as a Monophysite. The evidence for this is a short biography, prefixed to the Arabic version of his writings in the Karshuni MS Vat. 198, which is given with a Latin translation by Assemani in *B. O.* i 444-5. According to this document Isaac was first a monk of the Monophysite monastery of Mar Matthew at Mosul, and then bishop of that city. Resigning this office he retired to the desert of Skete in Egypt, where he remained till his death. Wright (*ibid.*) also follows Assemani in the matter of dates: 'His date is fixed, as Assemani points out, by the facts of his citing Jacob of Sêrûgh [† 521] and his corresponding with Simeon Stylites the Younger or Thaumastorites, who died in 593.' But Chabot (*op. cit.* pp. 11-17) has shewn (1) that the supposed letter to the Stylite is really by Philoxenus of Mabbôgh, and (2) that although in the Arabic version cited by Assemani there may be quotations from Jacob of Sêrûgh, these do not appear in the Syriac or in the Greek version at the places indicated. Chabot himself contended for an earlier date (fifth century), but without conclusive evidence; and since his book was written (1892) two fresh pieces of evidence (independent, it would seem, but in substantial agreement with each other) have been published which shew him to have been mistaken. The first of these is a notice in the *Historia Fundatorum Monasteriorum*, otherwise known as *The Book of Chastity*, of Ishô'dênah, a writer of (probably) the early ninth century (cf. Wright *op. cit.* p. 195). This may be read in Chabot's *Livre de la Chasteté* (1896) p. 63 (text), p. 53 (transl.), or in Bedjan's *Liber Superiorum* &c. (1901) p. 508. The second is a notice published by Rahmani in his *Studia Syriaca* (1904), taken from a fifteenth-century MS in the library of the Jacobite patriarch at Mardin. Both of these documents state that Isaac was a native of Bêth Kaṭrâyê (on the Persian Gulf); that he was ordained bishop of Nineveh by, or at least in the days of, the Nestorian catholicus George (c. 660-680) in the monastery of Bêth 'Abhê; and that he abdicated this office and became a recluse. The former adds that he died and was buried in the monastery of Rabban Sapor, and that he said 'three things which by many were not (well) received'. It gives also a further indication of time by

stating that Isaac's successor in the see of Nineveh also resigned 'and became an anchorite in the days of Hĕnānīshō' the catholicus' (c. 681-701: cf. Wright *op. cit.* p. 181). Both these notices, as Rahmani observes (p. 64), appear to have been drawn independently from an earlier Nestorian source: neither, it will be noticed, makes any mention of Isaac's sojourn in Egypt, a tradition which may have originated in that country, whence the Arabic MS embodying it was obtained (cf. Chabot *op. cit.* p. 12 note 2). It appears then that Isaac belonged not to the fifth or sixth, but to the seventh century; and further that he was a Nestorian. That this was the case is, I think, established independently by Bedjan on the evidence of the MSS. Isaac was claimed by both Monophysites and Nestorians, and his works were largely used by both sects. Consequently when we find passages attributed in some MSS to Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, and in others to writers less obnoxious to the Monophysites, or merely left anonymous, or when we find textual variations with a doctrinal import, it is not at first sight obvious which party has been guilty of tampering with the original. But the evidence collected by Bedjan (pp. viii-xi) would appear to prove that the Monophysites are the culprits. It is possible that the Nestorians also supplied names (especially that of 'the Interpreter') here and there where none were given by the author; but when we find in the margin of a MS the words 'Paul of Tarsus' opposite a quotation which is certainly not from St Paul, and which the text gives to 'Diodore of Tarsus' (cf. Preface p. xi), the probability is that the offensive name was authentic. On p. 24 of the text there is a passage, not cited by Bedjan, which seems incompatible with Monophysitism. The writer says that Scripture often speaks tropically in assigning to God bodily attributes; but that the discreet reader will allow for this *modus loquendi*. He then goes on to say that some have 'stumbled a stumbling past rising up' on seeing that the Scripture sometimes speaks loftily concerning the manhood of Christ, attributing to it things 'unsuitable to human nature'. He appears to mean that these persons erred in taking the passages literally.

I have so far said nothing as to the quality of the edition under review, or of the character of the treatise itself. But it seemed worth while to bring together the evidence relating to the personality of the author and the *milieu* in which his work was produced. A treatise on mystical theology emanating from Egypt would be no novelty; but it is interesting to know that the Nestorian Church also had something to teach the Christian world on the subject of the higher spiritual life. A full abstract of Isaac's ascetical system will be found in the work of M. Chabot (pp. 73 ff) already cited. His book shews considerable

power of psychological analysis. The difficulty of the style arises partly from the nature of the subject and the endeavour to express abstract ideas through the somewhat clumsy medium of the Syriac tongue; it is however comparatively free from Greek and other foreign words, and has a rich Syriac vocabulary which will repay the study of lexicographers. There are numerous quotations from other writers, particularly from Theodore of Mopsuestia and Evagrius.

As regards the edition: Fr. Bedjan has had at his disposal, besides the best known Western MSS, several brought from Eastern libraries and hitherto out of reach of European scholars. He does not give all the variants of his MSS: but this shortcoming is partly counterbalanced by the fact that he bases his text on the Mardin MS, the one which of all shews least signs of having been interpolated or otherwise tampered with.

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*The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, translated into English with an Introduction by Dom R. H. CONNOLLY, M.A.; with an Appendix by EDMUND BISHOP. Texts and Studies, vol. viii, no. i. (Cambridge, 1909.)

A DESCRIPTION of Church services which is of known date is of great value; we have it as the author left it, whereas a liturgy which has continued in use is subject to constant additions and alterations, even though it may retain its original framework and many ancient features. On the other hand we must be cautious in trusting to rhetorical phrases, like those of the homilies before us, for exact details, especially for the wording of formulas. Dom Connolly successfully establishes the authorship of the present homily on the Eucharist. There seems to be no good reason to deny that it, together with the other three here translated, was the work of Narsai in the latter half of the fifth century. The four are taken from a volume of Narsai's homilies and poems published in Syriac at Mosul in 1905; they deal with the Eucharist, Baptism, and the Church and Priesthood.

The Homily on the Eucharist appears to have as its basis the original of the present Nestorian or East Syrian *Liturgy of Addai and Mari*; but for the portion between the Sursum Corda and the end of the Epiclesis, it is probably founded on an Anaphora by Narsai himself. This portion contains many interesting points. We note the insertion of our Lord's words at the Last Supper, which are not found in *Addai and Mari* at all; but Narsai expressly says that 'the chosen