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BENJAMIN MOSBY SMITH AS A SEMINARY PROFESSOR—THE LATER YEARS

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This is the concluding article on the life of Dr. B. M. Smith, Professor in Union Theological Seminary in Virginia from 1854 to 1889, the preceding articles having been published in THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW for November, 1943; November, 1944; August, 1945; February, 1946, and May, 1946.* The last of these covers the years from 1866 to 1872. Certain of Dr. Smith's activities during that period, however, especially those relating to public education, it has been thought best to include in the present article. This course has been followed because of the intrinsic importance of the activities in question and because a comparatively small amount of space is needed for the narrative of the last twenty years of Dr. Smith's life as a result of the lack of source material

*Reprints of these articles will be bound in book form in a limited number of copies soon after the issuance of the August REVIEW. When this is done, the biographies of the four men who have figured most prominently in the history of Union Seminary will have been completed: John Holt Rice, the founder of the Seminary, by William Maxwell; Moses Hoge, the scholastic founder of the Seminary, by John Blair Hoge, (in manuscript but soon to be printed); Benjamin Mosby Smith, the savior of the Seminary in the days following the War Between the States, by Francis R. Flournoy; and Walter W. Moore, the second founder and first president of the Seminary, by J. Gray McAllister.

“HE DESCENDED INTO HELL”

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We are not told in Holy Scripture where our Lord spent the time between the Friday afternoon of the crucifixion and the Sunday morning of the resurrection. He told the women at the tomb that He had not yet ascended to the Father, and so had not spent it in Heaven. We assert in the Larger Catechism that He continued in the state of the dead and under the power of death, which is otherwise expressed in the Apostles' Creed by the term, “He descended into Hell.”

The interest of Heaven in the decease He was to accomplish at Jerusalem was manifested in the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. Hell also had an interest therein, or at least the early Church so thought. From about 130 A. D. tradition gave Him a definite mission to the Old Testament world, in especial to the ante-diluvians and to Satan and the fallen angels in Sheol. To the former He proclaimed the completion of His redemptive work foreshadowed in the promise to Eve and the deliverance of those that were bound in that prison-house; to the latter He declared the utter uselessness of their strife with the Almighty and the day of vengeance of our God.

Cheer and gladness came to the Old Testament saints, whom He released from their bonds and had transported to the bliss of Heaven. But He harried Hell. Before Him Satan, Death and Hell and all their minions shrank in abject terror as the King of Glory came through the ironbound, securely barred, impassable gates of that dread prison (Be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors!). Satan He chained and hurled down into the bottomless pit. Medieval literature, particularly Old English from the days of King Alfred and Abbot Aelfric, in both prose and verse, depicts in detail the triumph of Messiah over the forces of evil in their mightiest stronghold.

I. NEW TESTAMENT STATEMENTS

Two New Testament statements, both obscure and hard of interpretation, appear to form the Scriptural basis for this full-flowered medieval confidence. Paul in Ephesians 4:9 affirms that when our Lord ascended from the lowest parts of the earth (assumed to be Sheol) He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men, including, it would seem, the formal organization of the Christian Church; which I, for one, believe to be a post-resurrection revelation of our Lord, worked out in detail by Paul under Spirit-guided experience. Paul certainly claimed to have gotten his gospel by direct revelation; why not also his form of church government?

First Peter 3:18 to 20 reads in the American Standard Version: "Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also (*en o kai*) he went and preached to the spirits in prison, that aforetime were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing wherein a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water."

Moffatt translates the passage: "Christ himself died for sins, once for all, a just man for unjust men, that he might bring us near unto God; in the flesh he was put to death, but he came to life in the Spirit. It was in the Spirit that Enoch also (*en o kai Enoch*) went and preached to the imprisoned spirits who had disobeyed at the time when God's patience held out during the construction of the ark in the days of Noah."

Goodspeed translates, in part: "Christ was physically put to death, but he was made alive in the Spirit. In it Enoch (*en o Enoch*) went and preached to those spirits that were in prison, who had once been disobedient," etc.

II. OBSERVATIONS

But now note:

1. There is neither "man" nor "men" in the Greek, and the New Testament is very careful how and when the word "man" is used of our Lord. The old translators believed in the divinity

of our Lord and would not risk an inference which militated against their faith.

2. There is nothing in the Greek or early versions to warrant the capitalization of spirit twice, except that one cursive manuscript does read *pneumati* with the article; but what is one against so many better witnesses? If the capitalization is to indicate a reference to the third person of the blessed Trinity, then it may be said that our Lord claimed the right and power to lay down His own life and to take it again, and, secondly, reverent scholars would remember that in the days of Noah the Holy Spirit was not yet given. The comparison is between our Lord's material pre-crucifixion existence and His immaterial existence afterwards, in which immaterial existence He could have intercourse with the immaterial existences in Sheol. Moreover, if Enoch preached to the antediluvians, he did it when he and they were material existences in the upper world. I think that not even the fantastic Book of Enoch maintains that a live Enoch preached to disembodied spirits bound in the prison-house of Sheol.

Lucian of Samosata fables much about that nether world, and tradition affirmed that Æneas, the founder of the Italian race, went down thither to consult his father, Anchises, and that Orpheus, the potent musician, went down to bring back his wife, Eurydice, to the astonishment of Hell that a mortal would venture his life on so foolish a mission. But such an idea the Hebrew did not foster; he believed that disembodied spirits might be brought back (as witness the appearance of Samuel to Saul before the battle of Gilboa), but not that a live man could go down and come back.

3. But why drag in Enoch at all? Why credit that ignorant fisherman Peter with a knowledge of the bizarre obfuscations of the apocalyptic Book of Enoch? Why not credit the chief apostle of Jewish Christianity with sense enough to eschew the deep things of Satan when he saw them? Why drag in Enoch at all? The word has no manuscript or versional attestation, and, according to Souter, no patristic support. It rests on a conjecture of the German scholar, Schulz, that a careless scribe wrote *en o kai* instead of Enoch, and on the further conjecture of the "brilliant" English scholar that Enoch had fallen out of the text after *en o kai*.

Moffatt adopts one conjecture, Goodspeed the other. Moffatt warns that he follows a conjecture by a footnote. Goodspeed issues no warning; with him Enoch is one of the assured results of modern Biblical criticism and Apochryphal literature a good place to hunt in for the sources of New Testament ideas. Nevertheless the solid fact remains that Enoch in his text is nothing but a pure conjecture without any manner of attestation. Conjecture may be allowable in a text based on a single, time-worn manuscript. It is surely out of place in a text witnessed by hundreds of manuscripts, ancient versions, patristic references and allusions. And a man who takes liberties with a text you know about will surely take liberties elsewhere. Fortunately, these modern so-called versions have their day and vogue and die.

But just that seems to be the method of much that now passes for Biblical scholarship. I speak as one who has been more or less familiar with it for more than fifty years. Some "brilliant" scholar makes a conjecture; another walks Indian-file in his footsteps. With the third man the conjecture becomes one of the assured results of modern Biblical scholarship. Very much, if not most, of the current criticism of the Old and New Testaments as regards date and authorship has been built up in just that way. One can hardly read Pfeiffer's *Introduction to the Old Testament* with pleasure because of the multiplicity of the citations of the authors from which he seems to have gotten his ideas. The whole fabric of modern criticism rests, in the first instance, on mere conjecture, on circumstantial inference which would not be allowed in a court of justice except as mere hearsay.

The introduction of Enoch does remove difficulties in interpretation but it destroys the text as a witness for the doctrine of the descent of our Lord into Hell which the early Church believed, which it wrote into the Apostles Creed and on which, as noted above, it based its ideas as to what our Lord did between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning after His crucifixion. It also, when critically examined, makes worse the defect it was intended to cure.

This is not to enter into any discussion of the realm of the dead nor the theological implications of an obscure text, but to

warn you, gentle reader, that in the use of these modern versions you have to do, not with a plain reproduction of the words which stand written, the synthetic work of many minds, but with paraphrases biased by the individual prejudices and idiosyncrasies of individuals whose theological ideas warp their work and whose cocksureness commensurates their egotism when they say in effect, "This is how I would have written that passage had I been in Peter's place."

Another word, gentle reader. When this writer listens to a sermon, he follows it along with the familiar words of the text stored in his mind. A word of the preacher may lead him to pursue a parallel line of ideas for the moment, only to return again to the ideas the preacher expresses; and he does not wish his enjoyment of the sermon marred by the obligation on his mind to deal with unfamiliar words. He fancies that he is only an average hearer and that the minds of other men and women work like his, especially those whose brain-cells are stored with passages from versions approved, appointed or authorized to be read in churches. The men and women he knows well very much prefer that the preacher leave Weymouth, and Moffatt, and Goodspeed at home, and read to them from the book they can recognize as Scripture.

A third word, gentle reader. A Methodist student from Union Theological Seminary, New York, not so long ago conducted the mid-week services in our small union church. He read the Scripture from the version of his "beloved teacher, James Moffatt," and then prayed with the verbiage of the version at the back of his mind. Afterwards the audience expressed to each other the hope that God would understand his prayer but agreed that they did not. To them it was only sounding brass, a show of knowledge but not according to wisdom.