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THE PASSING OF USSHER'S CHRONOLOGY.

BY PROF. W. W. MOORE, D. D., LL. D.

JAMES USSHER (1581-1656), Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, will always be held in honor for his high character, his great learning, and his decided Calvinism. He was twice appointed by the Long Parliament a member of the celebrated Westminster Assembly of Divines, but, on account of the opposition of the King, never took part in the proceedings. Cromwell respected him, though he was a steadfast royalist, and, at his death, honored him with a splendid funeral, his remains being interred at Westminster Abbey. Ussher's name, however, would never have become a household word but for his scheme of Biblical chronology, which, though only one of a hundred and eight different views of the same Biblical data (some of which differ from others by no less than two thousand years), had the extraordinary good fortune to be printed in the margin of the Common English Version of the Bible. It thus became fastened upon the popular mind, and was gradually invested with a reverence akin to that with which the people regarded the sacred text itself. For these dates were first placed in the margin in 1701, and the custom of printing them along with the text has continued to the present time, so that for fully two hundred years the people have been drilled in the habit of regarding them as authoritative. Being familiar and convenient, the scheme has been generally adopted by historians also, and has thus gained still wider currency. But its inaccuracy has been fully established, and the scheme is now obsolete. This has been generally recognized for some years as to certain parts, such as

THE LATIN THESIS.

BY REV. WALTER L. LINGLE.

I HAVE recently received a letter from the editor of the MAGAZINE asking me to put on paper my opinion of the Latin thesis which is required as a trial part for licensure. In a word, I may say that I have a very poor opinion of the Latin thesis. This is not simply prejudice on my part. I have just grounds for complaint. Ever since I have been in the ministry it has fallen to my lot to examine the Latin thesis, and I have never yet seen one that was half way respectable. More than that, I have inquired diligently of a great many of my older brethren, and I have never yet found anybody who has ever seen a respectable one. This is why I have a poor opinion of the Latin thesis. In fact, I have come to believe that it is a farce, a delusion, a snare, and a weariness to the flesh.

Surely many of our ministers, as year after year they have examined these theses, with their copious quotations from Turretin and the Vulgate, bound together with a few sentences of dog Latin, have asked themselves in despair, is there not a more excellent way? For my part, I believe there is, and it is a very simple way. It is found by turning to paragraph 132 of our Book of Church Order and striking out the word *Latin* and putting in its stead the word *English*. In short, my suggestion is that we should require an English thesis (a real thesis) of the candidate, instead of a Latin thesis, which has come to be no thesis at all.

Let us see if there are any reasons for such a change. For the purpose of clearness I will number these reasons after the manner of many sermons.

First. What is the real purpose of the Latin thesis? Is it intended to test the candidate's knowledge of Latin or his ability to discuss theological themes? Obviously the latter. This same paragraph 132 has made ample provision for testing the candidate's knowledge of the Latin before the thesis is ever mentioned. Read it and see. But granting that it was intended to test his knowledge of Latin: everybody who has ever written a Latin thesis, or examined one, knows that it is no test at all of the candidate's knowledge of the Latin. As an actual fact, it has

become a test of his skill in quoting from Turretin and the Vulgate, and in weaving these quotations together with the very smallest possible amount of jargon, which by way of courtesy we call Latin. So, then, we may say without fear of contradiction that the thesis is no sort of a test of the candidate's knowledge of Latin. It was intended as a test of his ability to discuss theological questions. Does it in reality serve as such a test? I hope not, for if it does there are a great many of our young ministers hopelessly deficient in this ability. For who has ever yet seen a Latin thesis which gave any sort of a satisfactory discussion of the subject assigned? The subject is generally a very large one, while the regulation length of a thesis is about six pages of note paper, composed largely of quotations. The power of condensation is something to be desired. But, honestly, does it lie within the reach of man to write an adequate discussion of a great theological question in so short a compass, whether he uses the Latin or any other language that was ever known to man? Whatever may be the possibilities of the Latin thesis, we know as an actual fact that it seldom or never contains a satisfactory discussion of the subject assigned. It has become a mere form, a dead letter, as dead as the language in which it is written. The Latin thesis, then, is not a test either of the candidate's Latin or of his theology.

A second reason for changing the Latin thesis to English is that our young men no longer study their theology in the Latin. In the days of the fathers, Turretin was the great text-book. For three solid years they studied this book, and when they emerged from the seminary some were proficient in theological Latin, while the majority had a working knowledge of it. But conditions have changed. Latin theologies are no longer taught in our seminaries, and our young men know only the Latin of the classics, and some not much of that. When they begin to write that thesis they find themselves in hopeless confusion and embarrassment, for the classical Latin does not help them a great deal. They are not acquainted with a single word of the terminology of Latin theology. They have never read a page of Turretin or the Schoolmen. If we want to make the Latin thesis a success we must put the Latin theologies back into the seminary course. Shall we do this? Shall we go back and live the middle ages over again? That would certainly be absurd enough when we have such masters in the English as Dabney, Thornwell, Shedd,

the two Hodges. So then two courses lie before us. One is to compel our seminaries to teach theology from Latin text-books, so that we may make the *Latin* of the thesis a success; the other is to compel our candidates to write in English, so that we may make the *thesis* a success.

A third reason, then, for requiring an English thesis is that it would give the student an opportunity to show his ability to discuss theological questions. To be sure, we examine all candidates on their knowledge of theology, but the questions are only of a general character, and the candidate is usually so confused that he is not able to do himself justice in his answers. He ought to be given more leisure to write out fully his best thoughts on some great theme. Some Presbyteries have recognized this, and have adopted written examinations throughout; but these have never proved satisfactory. The English thesis would supply this need of a test.

The English thesis would also cultivate theological scholarship. Let the Presbytery assign the candidate one of the great theological subjects that are now before the church, and require him to put his very best effort on it. The subjects assigned for the Latin thesis are usually very ancient questions, which were settled centuries ago, for the simple reason that the committee appointed to assign questions find them already formulated by Turretin, and they find themselves unable to state a modern question in good Latin. This is no charge of ignorance against our ministers. It simply means that Latin is not so much studied and so much used as it formerly was.

The other day, at the Yale bi-centennial, a Swedish scholar presented the congratulations of King Oscar in Latin. President Hadley was ready with an impromptu response in Latin. It surprised everybody, and the New York *Independent* remarks, "We are glad we have *one* university president who could do it." There is a mild intimation here that the president of Yale has a kind of monopoly on the ready use of Latin, and there is no doubt a large element of truth in this suggestion. At any rate, the younger ministers in our church would be no formidable rivals of President Hadley's along this line. That being true, let us adopt the English, and assign as a subject some question that is now a burning question in the theological world. If the candidate will devote all his energies to the discussion of such a theme it will add vastly to his store of theological knowledge

and will be of value to him all the days of his life. It will make him master of that one subject. The thesis would form a kind of nucleus around which he might gather a great deal of his theological knowledge. Thus we would be developing in the church a set of young theological students who have grappled with the problems of the new theology, and with the various heresies that now confront the church. As it is, very few of our ministers have gone thoroughly into these subjects.

Those to whose lot it falls to examine these English theses would also be edified. If you want to make a man's life a burden, assign him the task of examining the Latin theses. I speak with genuine feeling on this subject. Not long ago one of the distinguished ministers in our church, who has been in the ministry thirty years, told me that for years his Presbytery appointed him to examine the Latin theses, until he finally rebelled and made an absolute declaration of independence, simply because the whole thing was a farce and a burden.

A fourth reason for this change is that I believe the great majority of our ministers want it. The Southern Church is noted for her conservatism. Let us be thankful for that. But there are some things that even conservatives see the need of changing and actually want changed. I have spoken to a great many of our ministers on this subject, and I have not seen one yet who did not favor it. I know one Presbytery that recently overtured the next General Assembly to make the change, and there was not a dissenting voice, though there were in the Presbytery two of the fathers who are Latin scholars of rare ability.

I wish there was some one in every Presbytery who would take enough interest in this subject to bring it up before the spring meeting of his Presbytery, so that a regular avalanche of overtures might come down upon the next Assembly. It means a great deal for the cultivation of theological scholarship in our church. The question resolves itself into this. If we retain the Latin thesis we keep the letter of the law of our book, but violate its spirit, for everybody knows that the Latin thesis no longer serves the purpose for which it was intended. If we adopt the English thesis, we make a slight change in the letter of the law in order that we may keep its spirit, for under the changed conditions the English thesis would serve the very purpose for which the Latin thesis was originally intended.