

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS OF ABAILARD

THAT the problem of Universals was one of the most discussed topics of the twelfth century is an undeniable fact. But to regard it as the keynote of that age, reducing all its activities to a mere concern about that old dispute, as for quite a long time has been the fashion, is as unfair as it is untrue. Recent research has shown beyond dispute that the twelfth century was, on the contrary, an age of extraordinary and comprehensive vigour and witnessed exceptional achievements in all branches of learning. It was indeed the beginning of a new era in the history of Europe and prepared the way, to a large extent, for the "golden age" of the thirteenth century; it was a true "renaissance." The School of Chartres and John of Salisbury are only two of the striking instances of the general culture of the time.

The most typical figure of the twelfth century, and assuredly the most remarkable one, is Peter Abailard. He is the personification of the genius of that age of quickening and restlessness, with all its virtues and all its defects. Born in 1079 in Brittany at Palais, or Le Pallet, a village near Nantes, from his ancestors he inherited an excellent and prompt disposition to learning. Eager to learn and as quick to assimilate all he had learnt, he excelled in all branches of knowledge, from music to theology, leaving his contemporaries far behind. Mathematics, it seems, was the only science to which he did not feel any inclination: "*Ea quoque scientia cuius nefarium est exercitium, quae mathematica appellatur; . . . quia eius artis [arithmeticæ] ignarum omnino me cognosco*" (*Dialect*, ed. Cousin, 435, 182). Vain, presumptuous, thinking of himself as the only learned man of his time, of fighting spirit and bitter in criticism of all and sundry, he passed from one school to the other, from Roscelin to William of Champeaux, to Anselm of Laon, only to attack his masters and scorn them to ridicule. He opened schools of his own successively at Melun, Corbeil, and in Paris, both at Notre Dame and at Mont St. Gèneviève, taught first logic, then theology, and was followed every-

## BLACKFRIARS

where by hundreds of pupils who flocked around him, according to the testimony of Fulk de Deuil and Peter the Venerable, not only from every part of France, but even from England, Germany, Italy and from all over Europe. The *Tractatus de Unitate et Trinitate Divina*, his first theological work, aroused much opposition, and he was condemned in 1121 at the Council of Soissons. Later he came into conflict with St. Bernard, who accused him of teaching heretical doctrine on the Trinity, and he was again condemned by the Council of Sens in 1141; in the next year he died at Cluny.

His works cover a vast field: poetry, philosophy, theology, commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, controversy. Recent researches have done much to reveal his versatility, to show that he was indeed one of the most brilliant and dominating figures in the intellectual movement of the twelfth century, and how much the fulness of the thirteenth century is indebted to him. R. Stölze published in 1891 the *Tractatus de Unitate et Trinitate Divina*, and quite recently P. Ruf and Prof. Grabmann gave to students the newly discovered fragments of his *Apologia*, which throw fresh light on his theological teaching. The more his works are known and studied, the more he gains in our esteem and the more his greatness is apparent. Ligeard, Martin, Cottiaux, Motte, Rivière and other scholars have endeavoured to justify his far-reaching principles, if not always all his applications of them. However faulty he may have been, nobody can question the sincerity of his protestation of faith: *Nolo esse Aristotelis, ut secluder a Christo*.

Curiously enough, while his theological writings have attracted so many scholars, Abailard's philosophical works, though published as long ago as 1836 by Victor Cousin, have fallen into oblivion. However, these do not do full justice to him, as they reveal but one side of his achievements, to wit, the position he took with regard to the controversy of universals, and even this quite inadequately. It is only after the publication, by Dr. B. Geyer, of the hitherto unedited logical works that Abailard's contribution to the development of philosophy begins to be duly appreciated.

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS OF ABAILARD

This publication, begun in 1919, has now been happily completed.<sup>1</sup> No one is better qualified than Prof. Geyer to undertake a critical edition of this sort, and there is little need for us to presume to offer approval or praise, for his name is indeed a guarantee of thorough and reliable scholarship. He gives us two philosophical writings of Abailard: the *Logica Ingredientibus* and the *Logica Nostrorum petitioni sociorum*—the original title not being preserved, these treatises are so called from their *Incipits*.

The first one, the *Logica Ingredientibus*, is published from a MS. in the Ambrosian Library of Milan. It attracted long ago the attention of the famous philosopher A. Rosmini-Serbati, who extracted from it some passages for his *Aristotile esposto ed esaminato* (Torino, 1857), and even formed the design of editing it entirely. It comprises a commentary on Porphyry and on the *Categories* and the *Peri Hermeneias* of Aristotle. The *Logica Nostrorum petitioni sociorum* is a later work and contains a second interpretation of Porphyry; it is edited from the only extant MS. preserved in the library of Lunel, Hérault, France.

This MS. was first discovered by Ravaisson and its existence was at once communicated to Charles de Rémusat, then in course of preparing his great work on Abailard. De Rémusat calls it "Un fragment précieux pour l'histoire de la philosophie," and gives a précis of it in French. Cousin and Hauréau contemplated the publication of the whole Latin text but, unfortunately, Ravaisson, having lost his notes, could not remember where he had seen it. Later researches undertaken by J. Reiners for his *History of Nominalism* amongst the early Scholastics again proved unsuccessful, until Dr. Geyer luckily rediscovered it in the library of Lunel. Yet, being unable to obtain photographs, he was compelled to rely on the transcription he had made in 1911. It wanted all the skill of Prof. Geyer to edit such a difficult text, for, besides being the only extant MS., it is

---

<sup>1</sup> Geyer Bernhard, *Peter Abaelards Philosophische Schriften*. (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters. Band XXI.) Münster i. W., Aschendorff, 1919-1933, pp. xii-648. RM. 25.40.

## BLACKFRIARS

moreover patently very corrupt; he had not any other means of verifying or correcting it than by resorting to likely parallels and conjectures.

In addition, the editor publishes two sections from the *Glossae super Porphyrium secundum vocales*, "Quos antiquitus" (*Cod. Ambros.*, 64 sup., Milan), of which he intended at one time to publish the whole text. The *Glossae* appeared, almost at the same time, in the *Testi Medioevali inediti* of the Ambrosian Library, edited by Dr. C. Ottaviano, who is convinced of their authenticity, whereas Prof Geyer considers them as the work of an anonymous disciple of Abailard. The arguments put forward from both sides do not seem to me entirely convincing, and perhaps there is still room for further discussion for and against, although Dr. Geyer's contention has on the whole more to be adduced in its favour.

Again, Dr. Geyer rightly rejects the two treatises *De Intellectibus* and *De Generibus et Speciebus*, edited by Cousin and wrongly attributed by him to Abailard. The *De Intellectibus* shows evident marks of Abailard's influence, and probably is the work of one of his many disciples. On the other hand, he ascribes to him the *Glossae* extant in the MS. *Nat. Lat.* 13368 of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris containing the *De Interpretatione* and the *De Divisionibus*, which still await an editor, and the *Super Porphyrium*, published partly by Cousin. Another commentary on Porphyry, composed between the two logics *Ingredientibus* and *Nostrorum*, has not yet been identified.

To fix the dating of his various works is not an easy task, for Abailard dealt with the same topics more than once. Prof. Geyer classifies them in three groups according to the three different stages of their composition: we have then a trilogy of theological writings and a trilogy of philosophical treatises. The first group embraces the *Introductiones Parvulorum*, that is the unpublished *Glossae*, a literal commentary, his earliest work, written before 1120. The two Logics edited by Geyer come next. The former, *Ingredientibus*, belongs to the period 1113-1120, while the latter, *Nostrorum petitioni sociorum*, presupposing the *De Unitate*

*et Trinitate Divina*, must be placed after 1120, but certainly before 1125, because it is mentioned in the *Theologia* written about that time. In the third group we have the *Dialectica* published by Cousin. This, unlike the other logical treatises, is not in the form of a commentary, but rather handled in a more personal and systematic way. According to Sikes, the writings upon logic were certainly composed before the year 1120: but he recognizes that "there is the slight, but improbable, possibility that a portion of one book—the *Dialectica*—may have been written after 1128" (*Peter Abailard*, Cambridge, 1932, p. 27). Geyer without hesitation ascribes this work to a later period of Abailard's life, during his stay in Paris, between 1133 and 1136-7.

Abailard's position in the history of Logic is far more important than has hitherto been realized. He was the first to find out a pertinent answer to the question introduced by Porphyry but left without a reply, *dicere recusabo*, which gave origin to the controversy of universals and troubled and divided the schools for two centuries. His solution was decisive and settled the problem once and for all; it was at first not fully understood, but his successors had very little to add to it.

Yet, however momentous his contribution to this problem, his outstanding merit does not reside only in finding a happy solution to an old quarrel, but rather in the farseeing principles he formulated, in the new way of approaching to it, in the method he introduced in dealing with logical topics. Abailard's outlook on logic was quite different from that of his contemporaries. For him the question of the whole logic was involved. By his theory of the *significatio vocis*, or *sermo*, so often misrepresented or misunderstood, he advanced logic far beyond the narrowness of the dialecticians and prepared the way for the reception of the *Novum Organon*. Further, by introducing into theology the dialectical method of the *quaestio* and *interrogatio*, and the *disputatio*—although his influence on this point must not be exaggerated—he is to be regarded as one of the most influential forerunners of the scholastic method.

DANIEL A. CALLUS, O.P.