

Marius Victorinus and His Works

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I. LIFE AND TIMES

Gaius Marius Victorinus was a native of the Roman province of Africa, who achieved great eminence as a teacher of rhetoric at Rome about the middle of the fourth century A.D. A century and a half later, the great statesman and author Boethius could look back upon him as "almost the most learned orator of his time".¹

Our chief source of information about Victorinus is the eighth book of Augustine's *Confessions*, where we read how Augustine, after reading some Platonic books translated into Latin by this Victorinus, betook himself to Simplicianus (later Bishop of Milan), an older Christian who in his younger days had been intimate with Victorinus, and who told the young Augustine the story of the great rhetorician's conversion to Christianity. This narrative made a deep impression on Augustine, and led him farther along the road leading to his own conversion. The relation between the thought of Victorinus and that of Augustine has also been, and still is, a fruitful field of study. At any rate, there can be no doubt of the profound admiration which Augustine had for the memory of Victorinus, and he describes, his eminence as a scholar and philosopher in the most generous language: "ille doctissimus senex et omnium liberalium doctrinarum peritissimus quique philosophorum tam multa legerat et diiudicauerat, doctor tot nobilium senatorum, qui etiam ob insigne praeclari magisterii, quod ciues huius mundi eximium putant, statuam Romano foro meruerat et acceperat" (*Conf.* 8.2.3).

After Victorinus became a Christian, he proceeded to devote his talents to the defence of the Catholic faith, and to dedicate to the advancement of Christian learning the erudition which he had amassed in his pagan days. The value of such erudition to the Church was appreciated by Augustine, as we may see in that section of his *De Doctrina Christiana* which deals with the question, *Ab ethnicis si quid recte dictum in nostrum*

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usum est conuertendum. "Nonne aspiciamus," he asks, "quanto auro et argento et ueste suffarcinatus exierit de Aegypto Cyprianus doctor suauius et martyr beatissimus? Quanto Lactantius? Quanto Victorinus, Optatus, Hilarius, ut de uiuis taceam?" (2.40.61).

Of ancient scholars Jerome seems to have been the only one who did not appreciate the qualities of Victorinus. If Augustine considered that his classical training was an advantage to him, Jerome considered it a hindrance, because, he said, his occupation with secular learning led him to neglect the holy Scriptures (*Prologue to Commentary on Galatians*)—a totally unjustified criticism. Not only have we Augustine's testimony to Victorinus's study of the Scriptures even before his public confession of Christianity (*Conf.* 8.2.4); his own writings also bear witness to his close acquaintance with them. But even Jerome included him among

¹ "Victorinus orator sui temporis ferme doctissimus" (*In Porphyrium a Victorino translatum* i. 1). As late as the twelfth century Theodoric of Chartres in his *Heptateuchon* mentions Cicero, Quintilian and Marius Victorinus as favourite models in rhetoric.

the number of illustrious men, and devotes the hundred and first chapter of his *De Viris Illustribus* to a brief account of him, of which we shall have more to say anon.

We know neither the year when Victorinus was born nor the year of his death, but we can say with considerable probability that 300 and 370 respectively are sufficiently approximate dates. Augustine and Jerome concur in saying that he was already an old man (*senex*) at the time of his conversion, which must be dated between 353 and 359; while at the time when Simplicianus told Augustine the story of Victorinus, that is to say in 386, he seems to have been dead for several years.

We can fix with, practical certainty three dates in his life:

(a) 353, the year in which his eminence as a rhetorician was recognised by the erection of a statue to him in the Forum Romanum, according to Augustine, or the *Forum Traiani*, according to Jerome. ("Victorinus rhetor et Donatus grammaticus praeceptor meus Romae insignes habentur; e quibus Victorinus etiam statuam in foro Traiani meruit": Jerome, *Chron. ad ann.* 2370.)

(b) 359, about which date he was engaged in the composition of his work against Arius. In *Adversus Arrium* 1.28.1061C he refers to the excommunication of Valens and Ursacius in language which must mean that it had just taken place: "*et*

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nunc Valens et Vrsacius... destructi sunt: ... *et nunc* Valens et Vrsacius reliquiae Arrii." The excommunication of these two bishops occurred at the Council of Ariminum in this year.

(c) 362, the year of Julian the Apostate's educational rescript, as a result of which Victorinus was obliged to relinquish his public professorship of rhetoric at Rome: "Imperatoris Iuliani temporibus lege data prohibiti sunt christiani docere litteraturam et oratoriam, quam legem ille amplexus loquacem scholam deserere maluit quam uerbum tuum, quo linguas infantium facis disertas" (Augustine, *Conf.* 8.5.10).

Within this framework we can give the following skeleton chronological table of the life and times of Victorinus:

c. 300.	Birth of Victorinus.
313.	Edict of Milan.
325.	Council of Nicaea. ²
337.	Death of Constantine.

² The Council of Nicaea is referred to by Victorinus in *Adversus Arrium* 1.28.1061b "Vbi latuit? ubi dormiit ante XL annos, cum in Nicaea ciuitate fides confirmata per CCC et plures episcopos?" (Migne, following earlier editions, reads wrongly and, indeed, impossibly, *ante undecim annos*. See the introduction to the works of Victorinus in Migne's *Patrologia Latina* viii. 998. It is easy to see how XI could be read by mistake for XL.) But we cannot date *Adversus Arrium* so late as 365. The reference to the excommunication of Valens and Ursacius as a contemporary, event (*Ar.* 1:28.1061c) practically fixes 359 as the date of the first book at least. Besides, Constantius was still emperor, as may be seen from *Ar.* 2.9.1096a, where Victorinus, referring to the part played by the word *ofoovtos* at the Council of Nicaea, adds: "probatum autem ab imperatore imperatoris nostri patre", i.e., by Constantine, the father of Constantius. This reference, apart from the mention of Valens and Ursacius, makes it certain that *Adversus Arrium* was composed not later than 361, the year of Constantius's death. So we must apparently understand "forty" as a round number, meaning simply that Victorinus was writing in the fourth decade after the famous Council.

- c. 340. Victorinus leaves Africa for Rome.
- c. 340-355. Works on grammar, rhetoric and logic, and metaphysics.
- 341. Council of Antioch.
- 343. Council of Sardica.
- 347. Birth of Jerome.
- 353. Constantius reigns alone; statue of Victorinus erected in Forum.
- 354. Birth of Augustine.
- 355. Council of Milan.
- c. 355. Conversion of Victorinus, followed immediately by his earlier Christian works.
- 357. Sirmian manifesto.

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- 359. Council of Ariminum; excommunication of Valens and Ursacius, about the time when Victorinus was writing *Adversus Arrium*; Council of Seleucia.
- 361. Death of Constantius; accession of Julian. 362. Julian's educational rescript; Council of, Alexandria.
- 366. Death of Hilary of Poitiers.
- c. 370. Death of Victorinus.
- 386. Augustine's conversation with Simplicianus; Victorinus dead a considerable time. Conversion of Augustine.

II. WORKS

The extant works of Victorinus are as follows, in what appears to be their chronological order:

1. An *Ars Grammatica* (*AG*) in four books, to which are appended three small works, viz., *De Metris Horatianis* (*M. Hor.*), a shorter *Ars Grammatica* (*AG min.*), and *De Metris et de Hexametro Versu* (*M. Hex.*). A critical edition of these is to be found in H. Keil, *Grammatici Latini* (*GL*) vi, pp. 3-215. References to these writings are here given by page and line of Keil's edition.
2. Fragments of a translation of Porphyry's introduction to the Aristotelian categories, Εἰσαγωγή τῶν πέντε φωνῶν³ (*Isag.*), preserved in the two dialogues of Boethius *In Porphyrium a Victorino translatum*, edited by S. Brandt in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (*CSEL*) xlviii, pp. 1-132 passim.
3. A small treatise *De Definitionibus* (*Def.*), formerly ascribed to Boethius, but shown to be the work of Victorinus by H. Usener in *Anecdota Holderi* (Bonn, 1877). It has been critically edited by Th. Stangl in *Tulliana et Mario-Victoriniana* (Munich, 1888).
4. *Explanationes in Ciceronis Rhetoricam* (*Rhet.*), a commentary on Cicero's two books *De Inventionem*. The best critical edition is by C. Halm, in *Rhetores Latini Minores*, pp. 153-304.
5. *De Generatione Verbi Diuini*, a short but highly technical treatise in the Neoplatonic style, sent to his friend Candidus the Arian in reply to the latter's *Liber de Generatione Diuina*. No critical edition exists of this or any other of Victorinus's Christian

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³ The five φωναί being *genus, species, differentia, proprium, accidens*.

works. The most accessible edition is that of Galland, reprinted in Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (PL) viii, cols. 1019c-1036c.

6. Four books *Aduersus Arrium*⁴ (Ar.), also addressed to Candidus, the books described by Jerome as "very obscure". The most convenient edition, again, is in PL viii, 1039b-1138b (reprinted from Galland).

7. A synopsis of the argument of the preceding work, entitled *De ὁμοουσίῳ Recipiendo* (HR), in PL viii, 1137C-1140d (reprinted from Galland).

8. Three *Hymns on the Trinity* (Hy.), in the style of the preceding theological works, PL viii, 1139d-1146d (reprinted from Galland).

9. *In Epistulam Pauli ad Galatas libri duo* (Gal.), in PL viii, 1145d-1198b (a reprint of the text first published by Mai).

10. *In Epistulam Pauli ad Ephesios libri duo* (Eph.), in PL viii, 1235a-1294d (reprinted from Mai).

11. *In Epistulam Pauli ad Philippenses liber unicus* (Phil.), in PL viii, 1197c-1236a (reprinted from Mai). Though *Phil.* is printed before *Eph.* in Mai and Migne, a back-reference to *Eph.* in *Phil.* 1207b shows the true order of writing.

Other works attributed to him, with little or no plausibility, are the *Liber ad Iustinum Manichaeum* (IM), in PL viii, 999 ff. (reprinted from Galland); *De Verbis Scripturae: "Factum est uespere et mane dies unus"* (VS) in PL viii, 1009 ff. (reprinted from Galland); *De Maccabaeis Carmen* (Herold, *Haeresiologia*, pp. 241 f., and *Bibliotheca ueterum Patrum Lugdunensis*, pp. 297 f.); and *De Physicis* (Phys.), a charming little treatise on the Creation and Fall, and the restoration effected by Christ in the Incarnation and Passion (PL viii, 1295d-1301c, reprinted from Mai). Considerations of style, vocabulary, thought, and Biblical text forbid us to consider these as works of our Victorinus.⁵

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A full account of Victorinus and his writings from the literary point of view is given in M. Schanz, *Geschichte der römischen Litteratur* iv, part 1, pp. 149-161 (§§ 828-831), and, better still, in P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne* iii, pp. 373-422.

On one important point Monceaux disagrees with Schanz. The bulk of the larger *Ars Grammatica* is a metrical treatise, which closes with the words: "Aelii Festi Aphthonii V.P. de metris omnibus explicit liber iiiii." Keil (*GL* vi, p. xvii) concludes from these words that all

⁴ The name of the heresiarch Arius (Gk. Ἄριος) is in Latin MSS. regularly assimilated to the Roman name *Arrius*.

⁵ Gore (*Dictionary of Christian Biography* iv, p. 1130) says that the *Liber ad Iustinum Manichaeum* "may with reasonable certainty be ascribed to Victorinus"; similarly F. Bomer (*Der lateinische Neuplatonismus*, pp. 126 f.) regards it as his. But Dom G. Morin attributed it to Pacian of Barcelona (d. 39z) on the ground of similarities of language (*Revue Bénédictine* xxx [1913], pp. z86 ff.). J. Wöhler endeavoured to prove that *De herbis Scripturae* and *De Physicis* were written by Victorinus of Pettau; the latter at any rate is not his. Not only is its Latinity quite different from that of the martyr-bishop of Pettau, but it shows an African Old Latin Biblical text, whereas Marius Victorinus has a European one, and Victorinus of Pettau seems to make his own translation from the Greek. See *THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY* x (1938), pp. 352 ff.

that lies between *AG* i, p. 31, l. 17 and iv, p. 173, l. 31 (where the above note is appended) is the work of an otherwise unknown author named Aphthonius, which was adapted and incorporated by Victorinus in his own work. Keil allows that Victorinus himself was the author of *AG* as far as p. 31, l. 16 (i.e. of the section *De Orthographia* together with a few metrical notes), of *M. Hor.*, *AG min.*, and *M. Hex*.

The majority of later writers have taken Keil's view. Schanz, for example (§ 829), says of *AG*:

In this work we are not dealing with an expert and independent writer. His dependence is indicated especially by the fact that he simply took over the metrical handbook of Aelius Festus Aphthonius with some minor changes and additions; but he acted in this matter as an honest man, for, as we can conclude from the tradition, he did not publish the other man's property as his own, but introduced the borrowed part to the reader under its author's name, as Charisius also did. To Victorinus should be attributed only the grammatical introduction, and most probably also the appendix dealing with the metre of Horace. Thus the *Ars* of Marius Victorinus belongs to Aphthonius, as regards the body of the work, and we must always remember this when we look up our grammarian.⁶

Monceaux, however, warns us against following Keil and Schanz too uncritically. He suggests that, far from Victorinus mutilating the work of Aphthonius, it is more likely that Aphthonius mutilated the work of Victorinus. Here are his words (p. 389):

The MSS., like several grammarians of antiquity, attribute the whole of the work to Victorinus, and yet these same MSS. attribute the metrical treatise separately to a certain Aelius Festus Aphthonius, otherwise unknown. All this is remarkably inconsistent. It is supposed to-day that for the metrical part Victorinus was content to reproduce the manual of Aphthonius, with some changes and additions. He would thus himself be the author only of the grammatical introduction and of the statistical appendix on the metres of Horace. This

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hypothesis is far from explaining everything. In any case, this formless compilation seems to us unworthy of Victorinus, as we know him from his other works. All the evidence leads us to believe that his *Ars Grammatica* was disfigured by some grammarian, perhaps the Aphthonius of the MSS., and that it originally had quite a different appearance.

The evidence is too scanty and the question too complicated to permit of a definite pronouncement. The language alone does not help us to distinguish between two authors in 4G. Sometimes we find language in the appendix on the Horatian metres identical with that in "Aphthonius". For example, *M. Hor.* 175:30 f. ("quod metrum uocatur dimoeron epicon, ideo quod duos pedes heroos accipit, dactylum et spondeum") repeats the wording of *AG* 161.28 f. and 167.16 f., except that the *AG* passages have "accipiat" instead of "accipit"; and five lines commencing at *M. Hor.* 176.17 are almost identical with five commencing at *AG* 163.11. But *M. Hor.* is admitted by all to be the work of Victorinus. In the present state of uncertainty, the uniformity of style and language seems to justify us in treating the whole of *AG* as the work of Victorinus.

Victorinus's literary output is not exhausted by his extant works. For an account of others now lost we may refer to Monceaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 391 ff., or to E. Benz, *Marius Victorinus and*

⁶ Schanz goes on to speak of the importance of the metrical work attributed to Aphthonius: "The significance of Aphthonius's work, for the history of metre is not to be underestimated."

die Entwicklung der abendländischen Willensmetaphysik, pp. 15 ff. Evidence for the existence of these works no longer extant is to be found in remarks of Jerome, Augustine, Cassiodorus, Boethius, and Isidore of Seville. Cogent arguments that the Platonic books translated by Victorinus which made such a deep impression upon Augustine were none other than the *Enneads* of Plotinus are set forth by P. Henry in *Plotin et l' Occident*, pp. 44 ff. F. Bömer has shown reason to believe that Victorinus also translated Porphyry's work *De Regressu Animarum*, and that his translation lay before Augustine (*Der lateinische Neuplatonismus*, pp. 80 ff.).

The following table of his literary chronology is based on Monceaux. The titles of works no longer extant are italicised:

(a) Pagan Period, c. 340-355.

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|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Grammatical works. | <i>Ars Grammatica</i> , etc. |
| 2. On rhetoric and logic. | <i>Commentaries on Cicero's dialogues.</i>
<i>Commentary on Cicero's Topica.</i>
<i>Translation of Aristotle's Περὶ ἑρμηνείας.</i> |

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| | <i>Translation of Porphyry's Εἰσαγωγή.</i>
<i>De Definitionibus.</i>
<i>De syllogismis hypotheticis.</i>
Explanations in Ciceronis Rhetoricam. |
| 3. On metaphysics. | Translations of and commentaries on Neoplatonic books. |

(b) Christian Period, c. 355-370.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 355-358. | <i>Works on the Trinity, the Logos, and the Holy Spirit.</i> |
| 358 | <i>De Generatione Verbi Diuini.</i> |
| 359 | <i>Aduersus Arrium.</i> |
| 360 | <i>De ὁμοουσίῳ recipiendo.</i> |
| c. 360 | <i>Hymns on the Trinity.</i> |
| after 360 | <i>Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.</i>
<i>Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.</i>
<i>Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.</i>
<i>Commentaries on other Epistles of Paul.</i> |

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Victorinus certainly enjoyed great esteem in his own day and for many years after his death. He has now been almost entirely forgotten. Deservedly so, in the opinion of many. "Through his midway position between Paganism and Christianity, through his rhetorical and grammatical studies on the one hand and theological studies on the other hand, Victorinus acquired for a long time a reputation hardly merited by his contributions to learning, which did not rise above the mediocrity of his period" (W. S. Teuffel, *History of Roman Literature*, Eng. tr., ii, pp. 337 f.). A far cry from the estimate of Boethius! And yet surely Boethius and Cassiodorus and, above all, Augustine could not have been so seriously misled about his worth.

Of recent years, however, there has been a closer study of the work of Victorinus, and, as a result, a greater appreciation of his worth. His function as a mediator of Neoplatonic thought to the Western world has been emphasised, and in consequence his significance has been better understood.

In grammar, logic and rhetoric he was not only a prominent leader of contemporary culture, but also exercised an influence on medieval study. He treated these disciplines not merely from an objective viewpoint, but sought to place there on a

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philosophical basis and thus give a new direction to their study. He is theologically significant because of his presentation of the main doctrines of Christianity in terms of Neoplatonism, and also by reason of his influence on Augustine.⁷

In particular, his linguistic significance must not be underestimated. He is: worthy to stand alongside Cicero and Tertullian as creator of a new Latin vocabulary; for, as Cicero created a philosophical terminology for the Latin expression of Greek thought, and Tertullian was largely responsible for the vocabulary of Latin Christianity, so Victorinus was in considerable measure the author of the vocabulary of the schoolmen.

By translating and commenting on the writings of Aristotle, he provided the Middle Ages, through Boethius, with a technical vocabulary for expressing the niceties of logic. By his translations from Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, he introduced into the Latin language the terminology of a transcendental metaphysic. And by expounding Christian doctrine in this terminology, he laid the foundation of a dogmatic vocabulary, more advanced and scientific than the vocabulary of Tertullian and the Latin Bible. It is in his writings, for example, that we first 'meet the participle *ens*, in the sense 'of Gk. τὸ ὄν. (According to Priscian, the word was invented by Julius Caesar as the equivalent of ὄν.) It appears, too, that Victorinus first used *indivium* with the meaning "individual"; Cicero had used it in the sense "atom". To Victorinus we owe a multitude of abstract nouns in *-tio, -tas, -ntia, -tus, -mentum*; adjectives in *-alis, -iuus, -osus*; forms compounded with *prae-* (expressing transcendental qualities), with *omni-* (expressing perfection in qualities and activities), and with the negative *in-* (defining the divine by negation); as well as a host of words derived from Greek. According to Benz and others, these facts justify us in claiming Victorinus as the first scholastic theologian, a claim supported besides by his unique intellectual position, in which a synthesis of Aristotelian logic and dialectic with Neoplatonic metaphysics and Ciceronian rhetoric formed the foundation for the interpretation of Christian dogma.

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IV. VOCABULARY

There follows a list of words or usages which occur in the writings of Victorinus and which, so far as I am aware, are not found in Latin literature before his time.⁸

⁷ Although Victorinus's dogmatic works are chiefly concerned with Christology, and his doctrine of the Holy Spirit is markedly inadequate, it is important to note that, as Gore points out, he "is the first theologian to speak of the Spirit as the principle of unity in the Godhead, the bond or 'copula' of the eternal Trinity, completing the perfect circle of the Divine Being, the return of God upon Himself" (*Dictionary of Christian Biography* iv, p. 1134).

⁸ Other limited word-lists of Victorinus are given in the Vienna *Corpus* xlviii, pp. 354ff. (asterisked words); E. Benz, *Marius Victorinus*, pp. 432 ff.; A. Souter, *Earliest Latin Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 31

We need not suppose, of course, that Victorinus introduced all these words into the Latin language. Some of them are merely transliterations of Greek words which were previously quite well known in their original form, and the manuscripts frequently vary between the Greek and Latin spellings. (This is particularly so with metrical terms.) Others, again, are interesting words which he cites as examples in his grammatical and other works. Of the remainder, some are used by his contemporaries, and we cannot say with certainty which writer was the first to use them. We cannot even be sure of those words for which the lexicons cite Victorinus as the sole authority. For example, *realis* is quoted from him only, but Victorinus himself apparently refers to earlier unnamed authorities for the word: "alii hanc constitutionem *realemuocarunt*" (*Rhet.* 1.8) p. 180, l. 20). But after all such allowances have been made, we are left with a very large residuum of words which we certainly owe to Victorinus himself. Many of these were current coin in medieval literature, and have persisted to the present day in the languages of western Europe. Besides, to many words which had other senses before his day he gave new meanings which have remained attached to them ever since his time. Not to go outside the preceding list of words, the only meanings we attach to the words "pagan" and "scansion" are the meanings given by Victorinus to *paganus* and *scansio*. He was not the first person to use *paganus* in the sense of "pagan", of course, but he was the first, so far as we know, to raise this sense to literary status.

V. STYLE

Of the style of Victorinus many hard things have been said. Jerome set the example. "Victorinus, natione Afer", he writes,

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"Romae sub Constantio principe, rhetoricam docuit et in extrema senectute Christi se tradens fidei scripsit *Aduersus Arium* libros more dialectico ualde obscuros, qui nisi ab eruditis non intelleguntur, et commentarios in Apostolum" (*De Viris Illustribus* 101). The erudite must here mean the philosophers, and Jerome, whose own great erudition was of the linguistic and textual sort, was no doubt unable to understand and appreciate Victorinus. In this, of course, he was quite different from Augustine, whose greater genius and philosophical insight perceived and valued the worth of the man who first introduced him to the thought of Plotinus and Porphyry.

J. Sirmond (*Opera uaria*, tom. i, between cols: 344 and 345) says that he places two (alleged) works of Victorinus after others which were actually later in date because of his "obscuritas, quae primo in limine fuisset ingrator. Ceterum, obscuritatem hanc Victorinus in dogmaticis praecipue libris sectatus uidetur. In commentaries enim aliquot epistolarum S. Pauli, quos idem codex continebat, stylus planior et apertior".

Others who mention him at various times refer to this obscurity with more or less censure, and their opinions are summed up thus by Bp. Gore (*Dictionary of Christian Biography* iv, pp. 1130 f.):

All these writings of Victorinus (with the exception of the commentaries which make a nearer approach to lucidity) are intensely obscure. It is matter of astonishment that one

that this watchword of the Theology of Crisis should have been coined in the interests of a system of thought which the Theology of Crisis condemns root and branch!

who had Victorinus's reputation as a rhetorician should have been so wholly incapable of giving clear expression to his thoughts. His intense obscurity in treating theological subjects of themselves recondite, aggravated by the extremely corrupt condition of the text as hitherto edited, the barbarous mixture of Greek and bad Latin which he often writes, his prolixity and his repetitions, have been the causes of his being ignored more than is at all justified by his substantial merits. He has wearied the very few people who have tried to read him beyond their patience, and they have almost wholly missed his significance. Those who have read him have mostly done nothing but complain of him. "He wrote", says Jerome, "in a dialectical style some very obscure books, intelligible only to the learned" (*De Vir. Illustr. ci*). He condemns him, moreover, as a man so occupied in secular literature as to have ignored Holy Scripture (*Epist. ad Galat. Prologus*), a judgment reversed by Augustine (*Conf. viii. 2*) and the evidence of his works. Petavius, besides accusing him of a heretical tendency, matched him with Heraclitus as ὁ σκοτεινός and condemned him as "incommodè balbutientem" (*De Trin. i. v. §8*). Such commentators as he has had show scant patience with him (see Migne's edition p. 1179, note 3; 1245, note 3; 1265, note 4). He is "obscurissimus", "barbarus", "ferreus". Tillemont would not trouble himself to search his works (*Mém. Eccl., vol. x, p. 799, l. 4*). Ceillier (*Auteurs Sacrés*) commends him with an utter want of appreciation of his peculiar position. Dorner ignores him. But there is one notable exception to these severe judgments on Victorinus's style and matter and these ignorings of his significance. Thomassin, whose

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theological judgment is a weighty one, speaks of him as a man "inferior to none in the profundity of his insight into the inmost mysteries" of the Divine Being, and the relation of the persons of the Trinity to one another (*De Incarn. Verbi, B. ii, cap. i, §6*).

A novice might well be deterred from the study of Victorinus if he paid attention to most of these judgments. But Gore's statement that "he has wearied the very few people who have tried to read him beyond their patience" is not so true to-day as it may have been in 1887. Patience is certainly needed to read and appreciate Victorinus, but several of his readers who have exercised this virtue have found their patience amply rewarded.

But we shall do well to review one by one the extant works which are undoubtedly his. There must surely have been some very good reason why one of the foremost rhetoricians of his day should write so obscurely as to incur these reproaches. What do we find in his writings themselves? The *Ars Grammatica* and the accompanying small treatises, both in their grammatical and metrical parts, are as plain and lucid as could be desired. There is, to be sure, a fair amount of repetition here and there, but that is only what we should expect in works which were in the first instance delivered as spoken lectures.¹⁰

The little work *De Definitionibus* is perhaps somewhat prolix, but certainly not in the least obscure. As for the *Explanationes in Rhetoricam Ciceronis*, if they bring down upon the author's head the editor's withering remark, "scriptor taedii plenus" (Halm, *Rhet. lat. min., p. viii*), it is prolixity and not obscurity which is responsible. Certainly it is a wearisome and for the most part unoriginal treatise. Victorinus may have been professionally wedded to Rhetoric, but the object of his *grande passion* was Philosophy. Wherever he comes upon a philosophical reference in the course of his commentaries, he must inevitably digress. It may have been these digressions which provoked Halm's censure. At any rate, Victorinus seems to

¹⁰ Keil (*GL vi, p. xxvi*) remarks on the custom at that time for grammarians to repeat their work, writing first in a style intended for the education of the young, and then in a manner suitable for learned readers. There is some evidence of such a twofold purpose in Victorinus's grammatical work.

have grown weary of this treatise himself, as we may gather from the increasing rapidity with which he deals with the later part of the *De Inventione*. (His comments on the 55 chapters of Book I occupy over 102 pages of Halm's edition; those on the 59 chapters of Book II only 47!) But the treatise is by no means obscure. In

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all these works his style is of the type known to the ancients as ἰσχνόν or *tenue*.

Turning to the theological works, we find that the commentaries on the Pauline epistles are specifically exempted from the general charge of obscurity. Jerome complains of them, too, it is true, but not on the ground of obscurity. Sirmond, as we have just seen, speaks of their style as *planior et apertior*, and this verdict is endorsed by Koffmane, Gore, Monceaux, Souter, and others who have written on the subject. Here, too, Victorinus is very guilty of prolixity and repetition, but his sense is for the most part quite plain. "He does not altogether escape obscurity: p. 1207, 11. 25 ff. and 34 ff. are good examples of the difficulty occasionally to be experienced in following him, but on the whole what want of clearness there is may be charged to the MS. Tradition" (A. Souter, *op. cit.*, p. 28). As a matter of fact, the passages mentioned by Professor Souter are quite in the style of the other theological works and can be paralleled from these. Their obscurity is due to causes which we are just about to deal with. They occur in the course of the exposition of the well-known Christological passage in Phil. ii. 5 ff., and are to be considered in the light of the two Christological treatises *De Generatione Verbi Diuini* and *Aduersus Arrium*.

These two treatises, then, are alone responsible for bringing upon their author the charge of obscurity. It is these which cause Gore to say: "It is matter of astonishment that one who had Victorinus's reputation as a rhetorician should have been so wholly incapable of giving clear expression to his thoughts." The explanation, however, is not far to seek. Schanz (*op. cit.*, p. 150) shows us the way out of the difficulty:

People have complained of the great obscurity in his theological writings; this obscurity is illuminated only when the Neoplatonic standpoint is taken as the basis for their study.

The fact is, most of the obscure passages are almost literal translations of the language of Greek Neoplatonic writers. Victorinus's extensive borrowings from Plotinus have been recognised and noted by such authorities as L. Thomassin (*Dogmata theologica*, tom. i, p. 101), M. N. Bouillet (French translation of *Enneads*, vol. ii, pp. 554 ff.), G. Geiger (*C. Marius Victorinus Afer*, pp. 17 ff.), E. Benz (*Marius Victorinus and die Entwicklung der abendländischen Willensmetaphysik*, *passim*), and, most recently, by P. Henry (*Plotin et l'Occident*), who, after

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comparing several passages in Victorinus with the *Enneads*, states his conclusions unhesitatingly as follows (p. 60):

Not only must he have read the *Enneads*, but he assimilated them to the point of reproducing their general tone, sometimes quoting extracts from them, reproducing technical formulae in the course of the argument. In a word, the mentality of his philosophico-theological writings is purely "Plotinian".

Père Henry traces the influence of Plotinus not only in the syntax and style of Victorinus, but in his vocabulary as well, especially in his many compounds with *prae* and *super* and with the negative prefix *in*; the latter compounds being used when finite attributes are applied to God *via negationis*, the former when they are predicated of Him *sensu eminentiore*.

The obscurity of the style of the dogmatic works is largely dispelled, then, when we read them in the light of the language of the *Enneads*; and, if there are still difficulties remaining, let us remember the exceedingly abstract and recondite nature of the thoughts which Victorinus was endeavouring to express and the fact that he was probably the first to give a systematic exposition in Latin of the Neoplatonic philosophy.

Monceaux (p. 416) suggests that familiarity with the ideas of Origen as well as of Plotinus is necessary for a proper understanding of Victorinus; this is probably an overstatement, and on a par with his statement (p. 397) that Victorinus translated the writings of Origen. Benz, however (pp. 23 ff.), proves conclusively that the Victorinus mentioned by Jerome (*ep.* 84-77 and *adu. Rufin.* iii. 14) as a translator of Origen was not our author but the martyr-bishop of Pettau (died c. 303). There are, of course, several points of contact between our Victorinus and Origen, as is only to be expected when we consider the profound influence of Neoplatonism on the Alexandrian school. One very obvious instance of Victorinus's indebtedness to Origen may be seen in his insistence on the Eternal Generation of the Divine Word, a thought first worked out by Origen and accepted from him by the Catholic Church. The treatise *De Generatione Verbi Diuini* in particular develops this idea in considerable detail. Again, Victorinus's doctrine of the Trinity, like Origen's, is frankly subordinationist. But there seems to be no *general* influence of Origen on Victorinus. Benz sums up the matter thus in the closing words of his appendix on *Viktorin und Origenes* (op. cit., pp. 422 ff.):

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Thus the theology of Victorinus does not stand in the tradition of Origen's philosophy of religion, but represents an independent Christianising of the Neoplatonic metaphysic on Latin soil.¹¹

In the extract from Gore quoted above, Victorinus's obscurity of expression is said to be aggravated, among other things, by "the barbarous mixture of Greek and bad Latin which he often writes, his prolixity and his repetitions". That there is an unusually high proportion of Greek words is true, in his pre-Christian writings as well as in his theological works. The *GVD*, in particular, as Monceaux says, "bristles" (*frissonne*) with Greek words. Sometimes the words and phrases are given in the original Greek form; sometimes they are latinised. That this does not enhance the beauty of the Latin style may be granted at once; but surely it does not add to the obscurity. It is surely clearer to retain τὸ ἢ μὴ τὸ ὄν than to attempt a Latin rendering, and τὸ εἶναι is certainly better than the circumlocution *quod est esse*, so common in the writings of Victorinus. Besides, to one acquainted with the terminology of Greek philosophy and theology the sense is immediately apparent as it would not be if native Latin equivalents were attempted throughout. "Barbarous" the mixture may indeed be, but better neat and intelligible Greek on occasion than clumsy and unintelligible Latin.

There remains the charge of prolixity and repetition, and that we must freely admit. It is our author's worst fault by far, and if, his writings are wearisome, it is not because of their

¹¹ As regards another alleged influence of Origen, Professor Souter says: "The question whether Victorinus used Origen for his commentary on Ephesians is to be answered in the negative, as no certain case of borrowing can be produced" (op. cit., pp. 26 f.).

difficulty (which ought rather to serve as a stimulus to discover the intricate thoughts which so severely tax the expressive powers of the Latin tongue), but because of this excessive wordiness.

VI. TEXT

A word now on the text of those works which have not yet been critically edited. The Migne reprint is a reliable reproduction of the texts copied. These are the Galland edition for the works printed in *PL* viii, 999c-1146d, and the Mai edition (the *editio princeps*) for the rest of the theological works, viz. the Pauline commentaries and the pseudo-Victorinian *De Physicis*. A collation of the Migne text with those of Galland and Mai has revealed no serious faults in copying.

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The Latin of the Pauline commentaries being comparatively simple and non-technical, the text of these works has not suffered much in the course of transmission. Some account of their text, with several suggested emendations, is given by Professor Souter (op. cit., pp. 9-14). His verdict is; "The text itself may be said to be in a fairly good state, especially if we consider the date of the manuscript" (p. 10).¹²

The text of the more dogmatic works is not in such a happy condition. "The extremely corrupt condition of the text as hitherto edited," to quote Gore again, is largely due to the high technicality of the language of these works, and has added greatly to the difficulty of studying them. Particularly unsatisfactory is the text of *GVD*. The tradition preserved in the printed texts in J. Herold's *Orthodoxographa* (Basel,, 1555) and J. Ziegler's *Expositio in Genesim et Exodum* (Lyons, 1585) is considerably different from that found in J. Mabillon's *Analecta* (Paris, 1723). Of the two traditions the latter is the more trustworthy; the Galland text, reprinted in Migne, is a hotch-potch of the two. A list of variorum readings is given in footnotes in Migne.¹³

The four books *Against Arius* have also suffered in transmission. The Galland-Migne text has not only many errors in spelling, wording and punctuation, but also several omissions (due mainly to homoeoteleuton) which play havoc with the sense.¹⁴ For these four books, as for the *De ὁμοουσίῳ recipiendo* and the three *Hymns on the Trinity*, I have used a rotograph copy of the MS. Phillipps 1684 in the Prussian State Library, Berlin. This MS. (which may be referred to as P) has a common archetype with the Galland-Migne text, but shows a much superior text, by means of which I have corrected the Migne edition. Gore used this MS., then in the Cheltenham Library, for his article on Victorinus in *DCB*. A full account of it is given by Valentin Rose in his *Verzeichniss der lateinischen HSS der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, vol, i (1893): "Die Meerrnan-Handschriften des Sir Thomas Phillipps", No. 15, pp. 14 ff.

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¹² The MS. in question is the Vatican MS. Ottobonian 3288a, assigned by Prof. Souter to the fourteenth (by J. Haussleiter to the fifteenth) century. This was one of the three MSS. used by Mai, the other two being Ottobonian 3288b (a copy of the preceding), and Vatican 3546 (a copy of one or other of the preceding two).

¹³ See also Benz, op. cit., p. 431.

¹⁴ E.g., in *Ar.* 1. 17.1051a, two verses (Rom. viii. 10 f.) are omitted from the Scripture quotation on line 2 to Migne, but are preserved in P. In *Ar.* 4.23.1129c the context shows that the true reading is *ex ommxstntenti omniexsistentia* for *ex omniexsistentia* of both Migne and P.

Rose, who assigns it to the tenth century, calls it the oldest and most important MS. of the theological writings of Marius Victorinus.¹⁵ Even on the basis of this MS. alone, better text could be constructed than that available in Migne; and it will obviously be indispensable to any future editor of the theological works of Victorinus.

But the editing of these works will require further equipment than the best available manuscript material. The nature of this further equipment has been indicated by Pere Henry (*Plotin et l'Occident*, p. 241):

When, in obedience to the demands of present-day philology, someone thinks of re-editing the "Neoplatonic" works of Marius Victorinus (such as, for example, the *Aduersus Arium*), he will bear in mind that they have been deeply influenced not only by Plotinus's ideas, but by his style. We sometimes hear it said, as was lately said of the *Enneads*, that they are unintelligible. That is chiefly the fault of the copyists, who would have had no comprehension of what they were writing. In this case, the humble monks of the *scriptoria* might well be excused, and their corporation could invoke St. Jerome as its patron. The editor of the *Aduersus Arium* will need much courage; he must read and re-read the *Enneads* of Plotinus, without growing weary, at the same time as the work which he is editing.

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¹⁵ A full list of the MSS. of Victorinus's works is given by G. Koffmane in *De Mario Victorino philosopho christiano*, pp. 9 f.

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