Stanzas Against Bardaisan

Ephrem the Syrian (c. AD 306–373)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan. Transcribed from the Palimpsest B.M. Add. 14623 by the late C. W. MITCHELL, M.A., C.F., volume 2 (1921). Against Bardaisan

AGAINST BARDAISAN.

A DISCOURSE AGAINST BAKDAISAN. [P. 143.] I. BARDAISAN, lo, declares--that even without the sin of Adam--the Body would turn to its dust,--that Flesh does not cleave to Spirit,--that the dregs run downward--and the fine material upward,--and . . .--the one its height and the other its depth. II. His opinion is diseased, similar--to the infirmity of Bardaisan,--his whole mythology is sickly.--"For if," says he, "[it is] by Adam--we die the Death of here below,--it would have been right that He who came--should have given Life here below--that he might render recompense for the usury paid." III. But our judges are judged--before that Truth which is from judgement;--they are being judged, the judges--of all [P. 144.] judgements that [are] judged in error.--The truth of it judges the judges,--for Verity [cometh] in judgement;--by its truth it is the victor--of the wickedness hidden in the judges. IV. When by artifice Error judges--that it may conquer the truth,--it is judged secretly--by the knowledge of the truth. --Wherefore not again has Verity [come]--if open audacities have changed it,--for its victory in truth--holds the crown over it.

V. To the word of truth . . . the healthy ear [is a test :] . . . --the healthy mouth also is a test--to fruit sweet [and bitter]--the mouth teaches the taste--to the eye that has erred by the sight. VI. For that inexperience--of the eye which sees [all forms]--is obedient to the mouth which tries [all] tastes--[that thou] mayest learn [thereby the wholesomeness] of fruits ; [so] also the inexperience -- of the ear that hears all words -- (is obedient) to the heart that tries all words -- that thou mayest learn thereby the force of the words. VII. Let us be like to the ordinary (physical) body -- whose [P. 145.] organs are equal in love, -- for the sound organ that has stumbled -- its fellow that is skilful admonishes it. -- Let the lover[s] of truth also become -- one Body against Error -- that [our] lack may be filled -- . . .

VIII. A true decision bears witness -- that the transgression of Adam -- turned the Body to a principle -- that looses the fixing of its life, -- for if we have seen that our Lord also -- fixed the mortal Body -- with life that cannot be loosed -- His truth has borne away the crown. IX. Our disputation has entered a contest -- that from two sides, lo, is approached, -- that on

two sides it may be crowned, -- for in that one involves the other -- in the common contest they are alike. -- For if our Lord put on the Body -- with the life of Paradise He rewarded it, -- because it lost its life there. X. Compare, then, and let us take the [trial]s -- of our Lord that thou mayest know, if they are like -- to bodily and mortal ones, -- whether He put on the Body, or not. -- Begin then with the Birth -- and go on to finish with the Death -- and include in the middle -- His human mode of life.

XI. For they are bound one to the other -- His truths that bound Error ; -- in that His Death persuades us about His [P. 146.] Birth -- that He put on a mortal Body ; -- His Resurrection bears witness to His Death -- that the Body which died was raised. -- For His Birth is bound up with His Death, -- and His Death is bound up with His Resurrection. XII. For our Lord has fixed the traditions -- of His truth like the bodily organs, -- [which] He has fixed in one another, -- that when contention and Error -- wish to cut off an organ -- the Body all of it wails -- and the organs [from all] sides -- are crying out about that one which is cut off. XIII. The Truth is living and life-giving to all, -- lo, the tastes of it bear witness to it.--For lo, by a myriad trials-- the affair of our Lord is learnt,--that in the Body He died and was raised,--and His Birth and His Death have become a test --for the very Body which He put on,--that not in appearance and fraud did He put it on.

XIV. [When] He confessed His [mys]tery to Thomas,--who by touch wished to examine Him,--He gave His Body to the touch of the hand,--that the sense of touch also should be a [P. 147.] test to Him ;--there came to him the word of Truth,--that will cast out all contention,--"For a spirit hath not bones" ; -- in truth He put on His bodily organs. XV. For even if ... --proclaims that our Lord was clothed with a Body,--Contention stops up its ears--and in perversity proclaims something else,--that our Saviour did not put on the Flesh.--And if its perversity in truth justifies us--how much more will His correctness justify us ? XVI. But I think that Truth--thus conquers Error--not when . . . --the eloquent ... to run,--but . . . with Him--his running surpasses their running,--as . . -- . . and is crowned. XVII. * * * * * * * for what reason and wherefore--the Body cannot for ever--be accompanied for ever by the soul.

XVIII. [For] if we say that it is a House-- . . . [P. 148.] XIX. For a snare, lo, is spread-- . . . XX. And if . . . XXI. These things that [are] supposed --to be strange to one another,--[and also] are not acceptable to one another--are one, and are from one, and in one,--for they exist in one creation --and from one Air are nourished--and by one Death are cut off --and to one Working are obedient. XXII. But see the seed, that as ... . . . -- that in the bosom of its mother it may take refuge, -- and [P. 149.] leaven out of all bosom[s] -- in the mass of dough takes refuge alone. -- The bosom of the earth is the opposite of the [seed], -- and when aforetime it was growing up in it -- in the mode of [its species] it grew up.

XXIII. * * * * * * * XXIV. * * * * * * * -- whether the Will [of] the Creator -- begat the wealth of diversities -- that are regarded as opposites, -- or that there are Entities, strangers -- and not related to one another -- and . . . XXV. That Error much distresses me -- . . . ... in the Beginning, -- that what they say about the end -- [P. 150.] we may say to them about

the beginning. XXVI. I know that if . . . XXVII. * * * * * * * XXVIII. * * * * * * * XXIX. * * * * * * * XXX. What good therefore [has] death, -- if when life abounds -- . . . XXXI. Now let us turn for a little -- to a question . which [P. 151.] is before this, -- that she may not be bereaved by having been left -- let Truth then run to meet her -- holding fast the victory of her sister -- and announcing to her about Error, -- that it had become a mark for the arrows -- that she also may begin to mock at it.

XXXII. Body and Soul have been invited -- to Paradise, and in Paradise -- they were honoured and returned in disgrace, -- they were disgraced and have returned in honour ; -- Body and Soul entered together, -- Body and Soul went out together, -- by death they were separated one from the other, -- and in resurrection again they are joined. XXXIII. The death that God decreed--for Adam after he sinned,--it is not the wicked killing--whereby men kill their fellow-men ;--the killing of Abel the righteous--was from the Free-will that wronged him,--and the death of Adam the sinner--was from the justice that requited him. XXXIV. It was not the case then because--the killing of Abel the righteous was previous--to the death of Adam the sinner --that Abel died first--by that death that is from God : [P. 152.] --Free-will in its audacity--made an assault on Abel in its envy,--and brought in lulling before death.

XXXV. By that sentence from the Judge--Adam died first,--by that killing from Man--Abel was killed first; --they stand in the domain--of Justice and of Free-will,--Justice is not wronged--and Free-will is not constrained. XXXVI. And lo, there go down from the beginning--the two ways of death,--one of sentence and one of killing.--For as Free-will brought in--killing before death in the Beginning,--so Justice brought in--death after sin. XXXVII. He Who knew beforehand that the killed-- would be killed by the killers--by the lulling set a bound to their life--though He be far from the blame--of the killers who have dared to kill,--and is far also from (the blame for) the accident-- of the killed man who is killed by sudden death. XXXVIII. If therefore one who is killed--goes not in sentenced time it is an accident,--and if he goes in his time it [P. 153.] is a scandal--for it justifies the one who killed him,--yet God is high--above accident and also above scandal;--it is not an accident, in that the sentenced time drew nigh--and it is not a scandal, in that there is about to be a judgement.

XXXIX. But however much, lo, they are explained--these things have need of explanation,--for it is hard (to explain) how--there should chance in the one hour--the hidden sentenced time of him who is killed--and also the will of the killer,--that the man killed should go in his sentenced time--and the killer with his weapon be held guilty. XL. Let us turn aside now from these things--for it was not these things we are concerned with ;--an investigation against those in error--we have been concerned with to conquer therein.--For not a little loss is it--that has entered through Bardaisan,--that inexperienced folk who have heard have suffered loss--of the merchandise of their lives. XLI. And that ignorant folk may not go astray,--saying that "Abel, he died first,"--and disturb the comparison--that is struck between our Lord and Adam :--let them know that killing is of man--but the sentenced time

is from God;--for as regards Abel wickedness killed him,--but as regards Adam the [P. 154.] Just One made him die.

XLII. But not even for this will there be--an opportunity for thee to hinder the inexperienced--in that as regards our Lord it was men who killed Him--and as regards Adam the Just One made him die :--Adam that sinned against Justice-- God in the sentenced time made him die,--but our Lord that killed wickedness--by wicked men was the killing of Him. XLIII. If the Body depends upon the Soul,--lo, the Soul also like the Body--upon another Power depends wholly-- namely, on that Power which gives life to everything.--And as (in the case of) the Soul if it lets go--of the Body, it (the Body) is undone and falls to pieces,--the Power also that gives life to the Soul--if it lets it go, it (the Soul) is undone. XLIV. If the Body, that is mixed with--the Soul and is its companion,--they say cannot cleave to it,--the light one, because of the weight of it (the Body),--how can they cleave,-- Entities corporeal and heavy,--to that Power which is above everything subtle--to live in it for ever and ever ?

XLV. Well, then, let us also say--that if the Body because of its weight--breaks away from the limpid Soul,--that limpid [P. 155.] substance is also separated--from the Power that is more limpid than it,--[and as] in the case of the Body--the same retribution comes to it (the Soul)--from that Power which took hold of it. XLVI. For to both of them it (the Soul) is strange--to that limpid one and to the turbid one ;--to the turbid one because of the impurities,--[to] the limpid one because of its refinement.-- If the one is for ever in it--the Body would be ever beside it ;--it does cleave to that which is more limpid than [it],--and that which is more [turbid] than it cleaves to it. XLVII. For it is not the Power of its nature-- . . . * * * * * * * XLVIII. As for the Entities that Bardaisan brought in-- he is to be accused because he taught--that one is heavier than its fellow--and one is lighter than its fellow ;--he put the evil ones as the lower,--he put the good ones as the upper,--he put Light and Wind as fine,--Fire and Water as heavy.

XLIX. If the lower one . . . --does not adhere to the one higher than it,--neither does Water that is corporeal-- [P. 156][cleave] to Fire that is lighter,--nor Fire to limpid Wind--nor does Wind cleave to Light,--nor any of them to God--Who is higher than all of them and more refined. L. But if they are acceptable as friends,--all these Entities to one another,--those that are heavy and those that are light,-- and possess and are possessed by one another,--that Highest One who gave them their level--does not treat the lowest one as alien ;--and if He treat the lowest one as alien--He cannot treat the middle one as akin. LI. For on one side of the two is with him--weakness or wickedness ;--but if He be Evil, how is He the Good One ?-- and if He be weak, how is He the Creator ?--and if as the Good One He humiliated Himself--unto the middle (Entities) which were at strife,--all of them with all He would have reconciled--that His kindness might not suffer loss.

LII. But look upon Man--and see that all of them are reconciled :--his heat is from Fire,--his cold from Wind,--his dampness from Water,--his dryness from the Dust;--in the midst of him dwells Life,--creative power holds him firm. LIII. And even if these (theories) were so,--that things [P. 157.] should be so would be difficult,--as, if there were Entities,--it would

be difficult that they should be made (into anything).--an Entity cannot be destroyed,--an Entity cannot be arranged ;--in that it is an Entity it is indestructible,--in that it is an Entity it is unarrangeable. LIV. That Creator Who is unable--to destroy the Entities that exist--by the same analogy again is unable--to arrange the Entities that exist;--for He did not create the existence-- therefore He cannot destroy it,--He did not moreover arrange its fixing--therefore He cannot undo it. LV and LVI. And if He cannot undo--the existence of other Entities,--(an existence) which is bound by its Nature,-- the Maker also is unable--to make anything and arrange (it).-- But let Him make the trial,--the very Maker from Himself,-- that as He cannot be arranged--the Entities cannot be made ;--by this moreover we shall understand as--the Body consists by the Soul,--the heavy by the power of the light,--the Soul also is similar to the Body--in regard to the Power that is more subtle than all.

LVII and LVIII. Against them let us say their words,-- [P. 158.] who say that the Stranger--blew His Life into the Entities and girded them ;--how to strange Life--are the Entities akin so that they lived ?--If indeed the Stranger blew His Life--into the Entities so that they became alive,--the Soul makes itself akin to the Body,--as He made His Life akin to the Entities--that had been strangers to His Life.--But if by the Master the servants lived,--how much more does the Body live--by the life of the Soul its colleague ? LIX. "Reason," as they say,--"is the strange Leaven that is hidden--in the Soul," which is without knowledge ;--to the Body and Reason it is strange !--If so be then the Body cannot--cleave to the Soul, being earthy,--neither can it (the Soul) cleave--to the Reason which is Divine. LX. We have therefore no contest--to expla[in] and persuade them--that are thrown into the contest;--and when struggling on their behalf--their struggle will be on our behalf,--for them the labour and for us the crown,--that when arguing on behalf of the Soul--their argument becomes (one) on behalf of the Body.

[P. 169.] LXI. Let us demonstrate therefore all the more--from the created things that are before us :--for lo, Fire is subtle--in comparison with Water that is corporeal,--[and] Wind [also in comparison with] Light--it also is denser than Light;--the Soul also in comparison with the Body--as their saying goes is "subtle"--and in comparison with Reason it is "corporeal." LXII. Let us demonstrate therefore that all--Natures are devoured by one another,--substances' both corporeal and spiritual.--For oil is devoured by Flame,--and Flame is devoured by Wind ;--and the oil is not perceptible in Flame--and Flame is not [perceptible] in Wind,--for everything is easy to the Possessor of all things. LXIII. Water again is placed in the middle--between Winter and Summer,--so that if the cold be fierce--it makes it a bodily substance--that embodies it in a hard form,--and if the heat be fierce--it makes it a spiritual substance--that absorbs it in a subtle way.

LXIV. * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * [P.160] LXV. [And if so be] that Bardaisan says--that because of its weight it (the Body) remains therein,--from the fine [substance] of the Soul;--lo, when the heavy one de[parts]--[there departs] also the light part,--like a vapour [and a puff of air (?) it becomes] --and like a breath it is for a while--and flies away lightly. LXVI. Lo, . . . --of the Entities that Bardaisan brought in,--corporeal ones as he says,--in all Folds

and Limbos-- If there be any corporeal it is refined--, . . . created all according to His Will. LXVII. * * * * * * * LXVIII. When the resurrection comes to pass--this comes to pass as the result of it;--and if every one had been raised . . . -- [p. 161.] * * * * * * *

LXIX. . . . in Adam . . . all . . . were dying--though as yet they were not born,--from the womb . . . * * * * * * * LXX. * * * * * * * LXXI. The Second Adam also-- . . . and was raised up in Sheol,--He brings all that are [there],--in Him they were living secretly,--and when their resurrection drew nigh--there sprang upon them the voice of .... --in that as a dead man made the living die--the voice of resurrection makes them alive. LXXII. For that first Thousand --is the type of that last [P. 162.] Thousand,--in that as the death of Adam put to death--all those that that Thousand [had brought to life] . . . delivered--one that flew away and one that was rescued. LXXIII. Our Lord also in the last Thousand--raises the Dead by His resurrection--in that all the Dead are found in His Thousand,--and there comes the Deluge of Fire--in the midst of which the Wicked sink--and the Righteous in it are delivered ;--like Enoch the living [are] snatched away,--in the manner of Noah the Dead are rescued.

LXXIV. But Bardaisan in this has erred--and wishes to make us also err therein,--in this [he has greatly gone astray ;]--he has died, and caused all [his comrades] to die.--" Our Lord also, (says he) Who was raised,--(why) did He not raise all Bodies,--that as their undoing was in Adam--their reconstruction should be by our Lord ? " [P. 163.] LXXV. Lo, Adam not at the moment -- when he died and fell did he cast down everything. -- but he died in his sin -- and the world died in the sentence on him ; -- our Lord also not at the moment -- when He was raised did He raise everything. -- but He lived by His glorious acts -- and the world lived in the pledge He gave. LXXVI. In the hour that Adam died and fell -- the earth was full of living beings, -- and on his account only did Death reign ; -- our Lord also gave life now -- when Sheol was full of the dead -- on His account only does Resurrection reign. -- Death spread from one on all, -- from [one also] spread Resurrection.

LXXVII. It did not suffice Bardaisan to look -- upon [the matter from both (?)] sides ; -- on the one side he looked only -- and not even on that as it is, -- for his eye did not [see] clearly, -- that when he was declaring about Adam, -- he that has slipped in one thing -- has slipped in everything. LXXVIIL But he does not know that that Body -- which died in Adam the Messiah has made alive. -- The Nails bear witness to His dying. -- the Watchers bear witness to His Resurrection, -- and the Nails that came out of the furnace -- have become furnaces (i.e. tests) for our Truth ; -- the fixing of them admonished [P. 164.] Thomas that He was not -- raised with [?] His Soul by Himself. LXXIX. Bardaisan insists that if so be -- that these Bodies died in Adam -- it was right for our Lord Who came -- that He should raise up the Bodies from the grave ; -- but if the Bodies He did not raise, -- it is clear that the death of the Soul -- Adam brought in by his sins, -- for the Souls which he brought down to Sheol -- our Lord brought up with Him.

LXXX. He [finis]hes his word with another, -- "for lo," says he, " our Lord says -- 'Every one that keepeth My word -- death for ever he shall not taste,' -- and lo, all those who kept it have died -- [. . .]" -- For he has confused and dissolved words -- to the confusion of the

inexperienced ear. LXXXI. And [the] word the argument of which is something else--he makes into stuff for his argument,--for he considered about this same death--that the Souls which are hindered in every place--in all depths and Limbos --and that "have kept the word of our Lord,"-- . . . from within the Body,-- are exalted to the Bridal chamber of Light! LXXXII. According to the doctrine of Bardaisan--the Death that Adam brought in--was a hindrance to Souls--in [P. 165] that they were hindered at the Crossing-place--because the sin of Adam hindered them,--"and the Life," he [says], "that our Lord brought in--is that He taught verity and ascended,--and [brought] them across into the Kingdom."

LXXXIII. "Therefore," he says, "our Lord taught us-- that 'every one that keepeth My Word--death for ever he shall not taste,'--that his Soul is not hindered--when it crosses at the Crossing-place--like the hindrance of old--wherewith the Souls were hindered--before our Saviour had come. LXXXIV. He is caught in one of two things :--in that every one that kept the Word of our Lord--(and) died before our Lord ; . . . --but if he is hindered at the Crossing-place--his soul has tasted Death,--and if he had crossed the Crossing-place--what is that which he said about our Lord.--that He had crossed it first of all ? LXXXV. For if Lazarus when he died--had gone up to the Bridal-chamber of Light--an injury our Lord did him--in that He turned him back to his body the Prison-house ; --and that which our Lord was saying--to Martha, that "Thy Brother shall rise," --from whence then did He say he [P.166] should rise--from the height, or from the deep ?

LXXXVI. As a Physician He did justly--in that sin the bringer of pains--He was rooting out from mankind ;--for that Primal Serpent--had bitten the Primal Adam--not with teeth but with advice,--He too healed the wound--with commands and not with drugs. LXXXVIL If the Soul it was He came to teach--according to their word it would be right--that the Souls in Sheol He should teach--that they should not steal nor commit adultery ;--and if in Sheol it is not for Souls--to lend or be in debt, then--to Body-and-Soul in its contest--He comes to conquer and to crown. LXXXVIII. An example He depicted--and a likeness He impressed--and a mirror He fixed by His Body,--that was victorious and tasted suffering--and was raised and put on glory ;-- and He taught that every one who thus--conducts himself is [P. 167.] thus glorified--and he that fights thus conquers--and he that conquers thus is crowned. LXXXIX. Adam, too, by him He depicted--an example for every one to look at,--that he sinned and was sorry and brought to confusion--and was cursed and went forth and was brought low--and departed and was undone and destroyed,-- and He taught that every one whose support is wickedness --even his profit is loss.

XC. In both worlds he is mocked at,--in both worlds he carries disgrace :--by the steps that Adam went down,--by them it was our Lord brought him up.--In the beginning He gave him verity--instead of the falsehood that the Serpent gave him,-- in the end He gave him Life--instead of Death that the Tree gave;--He conjoined with him his life,--the equilibrium of which Death had divided. XCI. Seeing that of all Bodies that die--the Body of our Lord rose only--Bardaisan erred and supposed--that it was the Souls that our Lord raised up,--and he did not consider that the death also of Adam--had reigned in Adam first,-- and thus after

nine hundred years--the leaven of it had spread in all generations. XCII. Our Lord also when He was raised up--in Him Life [P. 168.] reigned first,--like the Death that reigned in Adam ;--and as with Adam after a period--his Death reigned over all,--our Lord also after a time--His Resurrection was reigning over all,-- that the usuries paid might be like to one another.

XCIII. His Leaven that makes all alive spread--in all the lump of the Dead--that, lo, is kneaded in the bosom of Sheol,-- so that if after nine hundred years--the Leaven of Death reigned in us,--lo, after a little--His living Leaven will conquer mortality. XCIV. And now if so be this suffices,--as also it does suffice,--this argument of ours has been spoken--about the Body and about its Resurrection ;--the rest of the discourse of it which remains,--the matter of it shall be ours for another day,--that we may gain by our disputation--discoveries about our Faith. XCV. Where he has fallen we have risen,--and where he has slipped we have been strengthened,--and where he failed we seem--to have acquired the fortunes of Adam,--in that wickedness ruled over Him in the beginning,--Death ruled over [P. 169] him in the end,--in that his Body and his Soul sinned together--Death divided his equilibrium. XCVI. I give thanks to Thee, my Lord,--that Thou hast not stinted me, nor hast Thou filled me :--Thou hast not stinted me that I may grow,--and Thou hast not filled me, so that I may ask.--Satiety knows not how to ask,--and hunger ceases not to beg ;--Thou hast satisfied me to abate my hunger,--Thou hast made me hungry to awake my supplication.

END OF DISCOURSE AGAINST BARDAISAN. Note from Vol. 1 Introduction, p. (10): [Short lacunae are indicated in the translation by dots, and longer gaps by asterisks, but in neither case is the number of the dots or asterisks intended to bear any exact relation to the number of the missing words. In respect to this an approximately correct inference may be drawn by consulting the Syriac text. Double inverted commas mark quotations where the original has [Syriac] Single inverted commas are used in numerous cases where the words seem to be quotations or to belong to a special terminology. Words in italics inside square brackets are to be regarded as conjectural translations or paraphrases. In a few passages, where the text has suffered great mutilation, italics indicate an attempt to summarise the argument from suggestions in the fragments.] [P.101] indicates page 101 of the accompanying Syriac. [l.2] means line 2 of the current page of the accompanying Syriac. [RP]

FOOTNOTES I have moved the footnotes to the end. Those consisting of "Read [syriac] for [syriac]" or similar have been omitted, as it has not been possible to transcribe the fragments of Syriac. The pages are numbered with Roman numerals. Arabic numbers and line numbers relate to the Syriac text printed at the back of the paper volume. Greek text is rendered using the Scholars Press SPIonic font, free from here.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and

Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.