

tians allegorizing and spiritualizing were indulged in almost without limit or rule, so that the statements of Scripture were made to mean anything or nothing according to the ingenuity of the interpreter. Origen had his threefold sense, and regarded the natural meaning of the words as being in many cases nothing but the shell that concealed the kernel within. Augustine, Gregory the Great, the Venerable Bede and others followed in the same track until at length Bonaventura was able to distinguish seven different senses in many passages, each more recondite than another, and the grammatical one the least interesting or important of them all. In Lyra's time a fourfold sense had come to be a sort of understood thing in the Latin church, about as well settled as any dogma of the faith. In view of such extravagances one hardly wonders that the authority of Scripture should decline and that the screws of church authority were put on to keep commentators within the four corners of the creed, so as to secure, if possible, that they should not teach heretical doctrine, even if they did give erroneous exegesis. In the Greek church matters were somewhat better, for there they were mainly under the influence of such writers as Chrysostome and Theophylact, whose exegesis, even when mistaken, is always characterized by sobriety and good sense. But in the West almost nobody read Greek, and there-

fore their example was wholly lost upon the theologians of the Latin church, who by their senseless handling of Scripture simply turned it into a convenient quarry from which to obtain arguments for doctrines that had already been determined on other grounds altogether.

Now, Lyra is not entitled to the credit of combating these erroneous methods. So far from that, he more than once gravely contends for a fourfold sense as legitimate. He even has the honour of stating the distinction between the four senses in a neater way than any of his predecessors had done. But his good common sense commonly prevented him from looking beyond the grammatical meaning except in passages that are clearly tropical. His whole example is a silent protest against the prevailing method. It would seem, however, that it was almost wholly an unconscious protest. He nowhere betrays any suspicion that he differs from his predecessors on this point, and apparently has no objection to letting his readers do as much spiritualizing as they please on the basis of his grammatical interpretation. Only he does not see fit to help them in the process. A little more logical consistency would have been desirable, but it would hardly have increased the value of his annotations.

A similar inconsistency between theory and practice appears in another and more important direction. For the most