

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW TESTAMENT GREEK. (Pt. 2)

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II

IT will be necessary to deal more minutely with the two classes of Semitisms which the negative evidence of the papyri may compel us to recognize provisionally in the Greek New Testament. But for the present we may be content with the general thesis that the Greek Bible is written in the common Greek vernacular, modified throughout the Old Testament and some parts of the New by conditions which are abundantly paralleled in the literal translations of the English Bible. It is time now to pass on to the description of Hellenistic Greek, apart from its special use in the Bible. But before leaving the subject I should like to mention two or three examples of the bearing of this grammatical study upon literary criticism.

In dealing with the New Testament constructions with **egeneto** in the note appended to my last paper, I had occasion to record that this notable Hebraism was in the New Testament almost confined to the writings of the Gentile Luke.¹ It does not of course stand alone. There is an instructive little point in Luke's report of the preaching of John the Baptist. In iii. 8, he has **kai mh a@chsqe legein e@ e@autoi@**. Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, p. 27, shows that in narrative "the Palestinian-Jewish literature uses the meaningless 'he began,'" a conventional locution which was evidently parallel with our Middle-English auxiliary *gan*. It is very common in the Synoptists, and occurs twice as often in Luke as in Matthew. Dalman

¹ My suggestion (p. 75) that the construction of **egeneto** with infin. was Luke's own coinage is dispensed with by two papyrus quotations which I noticed too late to include. In *Papyrus Cattaoui*, a Roman-named soldier says **a@ti e@n genhtai me a@podhmei@**; and in *B. U.* 970 we find **e@n genhtai mh e@u@tonh@sai au@ton**. They are both dated 2nd cent. A.D. I fully expect that I have overlooked other examples.

thinks that if this Aramaic $\Psi\text{ר}^{\text{י}}$ with participle had become practically meaningless, we might well find the same use in direct speech, though no example happens to be known. Now in the otherwise verbal identical verse Matt. iii. 9 we find **dochte** for **achsqe**, “do not presume to say,” which is thoroughly idiomatic Greek, and manifestly a deliberate improvement of an original preserved more exactly by Luke. It seems to follow that this original was a Greek translation of the Aramaic logia-document, used in common by both Evangelists, but with greater freedom by the first. If Luke was ignorant of Aramaic, he would be led by his keen desire for accuracy to incorporate with a minimum of change translations he was able to secure, even when they were executed by men whose Greek was not very idiomatic. But *ne staff ultra crepidam*: these things belong to the higher critics and not to the mere grammarian. I must, however, venture to hammer on their last a little longer. The grammarian necessarily claims his say on the Johannine problem. We saw above (EXPOSITOR, January, p. 71), that the author of the Apocalypse writes as a man whose Greek education was not yet complete: like many of the farmers of Egypt, he did not know the rules of concord for gender and case. If then his date is to be 95 A.D., he cannot have written the fourth Gospel only a short time after. Either, therefore, we must take the earlier date for the Apocalypse, which would allow the Apostle to improve his Greek by constant use in a city like Ephesus where his Aramaic would be useless; or we must suppose that the authors of John xxi. 24 mended his grammar for him throughout the Gospel. Otherwise, we must join the ranks of the **Xorizontej**.¹ Here, of course, I am only putting the question, leaving it to the experts to solve it.

Finally, as a transition to the next subject, let me note

¹ May I, in passing, express the malicious satisfaction which a grammarian feels in reading the words of a very cocksure critic, Prof. B. M Bacon, in the current *Hibbert Journal* (p. 345)? “Jesus ‘is

one or two suggestions by the great modern Greek scholar, Albert Thumb who has used dialectic differences in the language of to-day in a way which promises to repay further research. In an article in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 1903, p. 421, he calls attention to the prominence of **εἰς**, etc., in the fourth Gospel, as against **μου**, etc., elsewhere. [**Εἰς** occurs thirty-six times in John, once in 3 John, once in Apocalypse, and thirty-four times in the rest of the New Testament. I am bound to admit that the argument is not strengthened by the figures for **σοῦ**, **ἡτεροῦ** and **ἡτεροῦ**], which between them occur 11 times in John (Gospel and Epistles), 12 times in Luke's two books, and 21 times in the rest of the New Testament.] He tells us that **εἰς** and the rest survive: in modern Pontic-Cappadocian Greek, while the genitive has replaced them elsewhere. The inference is that the Fourth Gospel comes from Asia Minor. I might add that on the same showing Luke has his Macedonian origin encouraged, for he hardly uses **εἰς**; and the Apocalypse, which has only one occurrence between the four possessives, suits a recent immigrant very well. In the same paper Thumb shows that the infinitive still survives in Pontic, while in Greece proper it yields entirely to the periphrasis. Now the syntactical conditions under which the infinitive is still found in Pontic answer very well to those which appear in the New Testament, in uses where western Greek tended to enlarge the use of **ἴνα**. Obviously this tells us little more than that the New Testament has eastern provenance, which no one is likely to deny. But the principle will be found useful later.

We proceed to examine the nature and history of the vernacular Greek itself. It is a study which has almost come into existence in the present generation. Classical scholars have studied the Hellenistic literature for the sake

raised'—**εἰρεται**—not 'rises'—**ἁϋστησι** (*sic* !!)—from the dead" [in John xxi]. If John's grammar was equal to this, the work of the Ephesian revisers was no sinecure.

of its matter: its language was never considered worth noticing, except to chronicle contemptuously its deviations from "good Greek." There perhaps the authors were only receiving the treatment they courted, for to write Attic was the object of them all, pursued doubtless with varying degrees of zeal, but in all cases removing them far from the language they used in daily life. The study of the vernacular itself was not possible, for the Biblical Greek was interpreted on lines of its own, and the papyri were mostly reposing in the Egyptian tombs, the small collections that were published receiving but little attention. And equally unknown was the scientific study of modern Greek. To this day, even great philologists like Hatzidakis decry as a mere patois, utterly unfit for literary use, the living language upon whose history they have spent their lives. The translation of the Gospels into the Greek which descends directly from their original idiom is treated as sacrilege by the devotees of a "literary" dialect which no one ever spoke. It is left to foreign students to recognize the value of Pallis' version to those who would study the original in the light of the continuous development of the language from the age of Alexander to our own time.

As has been hinted in the preceding paragraph, the source of our present-day study of New Testament Greek are threefold :—(1) the prose literature of the post-classical period, from Polybius down through the Byzantine age; (2) the **Koinh** inscriptions, and the Egyptian non-literary papyri; (3) modern vernacular Greek, with especial reference to its dialectic variations, so far as these are at present registered. Before we discuss the part which each of these must play in our investigations, it will be necessary to ask what was the **Koinh** and how it arose.

The history, geography and ethnology of Hellas are jointly responsible for the remarkable phenomena which even the literature of the classical period presents. The very school-

boy in his first two or three years at Greek has to realize that “Greek” is anything but a unity. He has not thumbed the *Anabasis* long before the merciful pedagogue takes him on to Homer, and his painfully acquired irregular verbs demand a great extension of their limits. When he develops into a Tripos candidate he knows well that Homer, Pindar, Sappho, Herodotus and Aristotle are all of them in their own several ways defiant of the Attic grammar to which his own composition must conform. And if his studies ultimately invade the dialect inscriptions, he finds in Elis and Heraclea, Lacedaemon and Thebes, Crete and Cyprus, forms of Greek for which his literature has almost entirely failed to prepare him. And the Theban who said **Fittw Deuj** and the Athenian who said **i@tw Zeuj** lived in towns exactly as far apart as Liverpool and Manchester! The bewildering variety of dialects within that little country arises partly from racial differences. Upon the primitive “Pelasgians,” represented best by the Athenians of history, swept first from Northern Europe¹ the hordes of Homer's Achæans, and then, in post-Homeric days, the Dorian invaders. Dialectic conditions were as inevitably complex as they were in our own country a thousand years ago, when successive waves of Germanic invaders, of different races and dialects, had settled in the several parts of an island in which a Keltic population still maintained itself to greater or less extent. Had the Norman Conquest come before the Saxon, which determined the language of the country, the parallel would have been singularly complete. The conditions which in England were largely supplied by distance were supplied in Greece by the mountain barriers which so effectively cut off each little State from regular communication with its neighbours—an effect and a cause at once of the passion for

¹ I am assuming as proved the thesis of Professor Ridgeway, in his *Early Age of Greece*, which seems to me a key that will unlock many of the problems of Greek history, religion and language. Of course *adhuc sub iudice lis est*.

autonomy which made of Hellas a heptarchy of heptarchies.

Meanwhile a steady process was going on which determined finally the character of literary Greek. Sparta might win the hegemony of Greece at Aegospotami, and Thebes wrest it from them at Leuktra; but Sparta could not produce a man of letters, and Pindar, the lonely "Theban eagle," knew better than to try poetic flights in Bœotian. The intellectual supremacy of Athens was beyond challenge long before the political unification of Greece was accomplished; and Attic was firmly established as the only possible dialect for prose composition. The post-classical writers wrote Attic according to their lights, tempered generally with a plentiful admixture of grammatical and lexical elements drawn from the vernacular. Strenuous efforts were made by precisians to improve the Attic quality of this artificial literary dialect; and we still possess the works of Atticists who cry out against the "bad Greek" and "solecisms" of their contemporaries, thus incidentally providing us with information concerning a Greek which interests us more than the artificial Attic they prized so highly. All their scrupulousness did not however prevent their deviating from Attic in matters more important than vocabulary. The optative in Lucian is perpetually misused, and no Atticist successfully attempts to reproduce the ancient use of **ou** and **nh** with the participle. Those writers who are less particular in their purism write in a literary **Koinh** which admits without difficulty many features of various origin, while generally recalling Attic. No doubt the influence of Thucydides encouraged this freedom. The true Attic, as spoken by educated people in Athens, was hardly used in literature before the fourth century.¹ the Ionic dialect having large influence on the, to some extent, artificial idiom, which the older writers at Athens used. It

¹ Schwyzer, *Die Weltsprachen des Altertums*, p. 15 n., cites as the earliest extant prose monument of genuine Attic in literature the pseudo-Xenophon's *De republics Atheniensi*, which dates from before 413 B.C.

was not strange therefore that the standard for most of the post-classical writers should go back, for instance, to the **prassw** of Thucydides rather than the **prattw** of Plato and Demosthenes.

Such, then, was the “Common Greek” of literature, from which we have still to derive our illustrations for the New Testament to a very large extent. Any lexicon will show how important for our purpose is the vocabulary of the **Koinh** writers from Polybius down. And even the most rigid Atticists found themselves unable to avoid words and usages which Plato would not have recognized. But side by side with this was a fondness for obsolete words with literary associations. Take **naufj**, for example, which is freely found in Aelian, Josephus, and other **Koinh** writers. It does not appear in the indices of eight volumes of Grenfell and Hunt's papyri—except where literary fragments come in—nor in those to vol. iii. of the Berlin collection and the small volume from Chicago. (I am naming all the collections that I happen to have by me.) We turn to the New Testament, and find it once, in Luke's shipwreck narrative, in a phrase which Blass (*Philology of the Gospels*, p. 186), suspected to be a reminiscence of Homer. In style and syntax the literary Common Greek diverges more widely from the colloquial. The bearing of all this on the subject of our study will come out frequently in the course of our investigation. Here it will suffice to refer to Blass's *Grammar*, p. 5, for an interesting summary of phenomena which are practically restricted to Harnack's Priscilla, and to parts of Luke and Paul,¹ where sundry logical and grammatical elements from the literary dialect invade the colloquial style which is elsewhere universal in the New Testament.

¹ In quoting Blass here I should not like to accept too unreservedly his opinion that Luke, in Acts xx. 29, *misused* the literary word **a@icij**. The suggestion that Paul meant “after my *arrival*, home-coming,” while not without difficulty, at least deserves considering.

The writers who figure in Dr. W. Schmid's well-known book, *Der Atticismus in seinen Hauptvertretern von Dionysius von Halikarnass bis auf den zweiten Philostratus*, were not the last to found a literary language on the artificial resuscitation of the ancient Attic. Essentially the same thing is being tried to-day. The "mummy-language," as Krumbacher calls it, will not stand the test of use in poetry, but in prose literature, in newspapers, and in Biblical translation it has the dominion, which is vindicated by Athenian undergraduates, with bloodshed if need be.¹ We have nothing to do with this curious phenomenon, except to warn students that before citing modern Greek in illustration of the New Testament they must make sure whether their source is **kaqareuouosa** or **kaqomil oumenh**, book Greek or spoken Greek. The former may of course have borrowed from ancient or modern sources—for it is a medley far more mixed than we should get by compounding together Cynewulf and Kipling—the particular feature for which it is cited. But it obviously cannot stand in any line of historical development, and it is just as valuable as Volapuk to the student of linguistic evolution. The popular patois, on the other hand, is a living language, and we shall soon see that it takes a very important part in the discussions on which we are entering.

We pass on then to the spoken dialect of the first century Hellenists, its history and its peculiarities. Our sources are, in order of importance, (1) non-literary papyri, (2) inscriptions, (3) modern vernacular Greek. The literary sources are almost confined to the Biblical Greek. A few general words may be said on these sources before we examine the origin of the Greek which they embody.

¹ See Krumbacher's vigorous polemic, *Das Problem d. neugr. Schriftsprache* summarized by the present writer in *Expository Times*, 1903, p. 550. Professor Hatziclakis replies with equal energy in *Rev. des Etudes greques*, 1903, p. 210 ff.

The papyri have one very obvious disadvantage in that, with the not very important exception of Herculaneum, their provenance is limited to one country, Egypt. We shall see, however, that the disadvantage does not practically count. They date from the third century B.C. to the seventh A.D. The monuments of the earliest period are fairly abundant, and they give us specimens of the spoken **Koinh** from a time when the dialect was still a novelty.

The papyri are not of course to be treated as a unity. Those which alone concern us are simply the waste paper of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, and their style has the same degree of unity as we should see in the sacks of waste paper brought to an English paper-mill from a solicitor's office, a farm, a school, a shop, a manse, and a house in Downing Street. Each contribution has to be considered separately. Old wills, law reports, contracts, census returns, marriage settlements, receipts, and official orders largely ran along stereotyped lines and as formulæ tend to be permanent we have a degree of conservatism in the language which is not seen in documents which are free from these trammels. Petitions, contain this element in greater or less extent, but naturally show more freedom in the recitation of the particular grievances for which redress is claimed. Private letters are our most valuable sources, and are of course all the better for the immense differences that show themselves in the education of their writers. The well worn epistolary formulæ show variety mostly in their spelling, and their value for the student lies primarily in their remarkable resemblances to the conventional phraseology which even the letter-writers of the New Testament were content to use. The part of the letter which contains the point is perhaps most instructive when its grammar is weakest, for it shows which way the language was tending. Few papyri are more suggestive than the letter of the lower-schoolboy to his father (O.P. 119, second

or third century), already referred to in my papers here more than once. It would have surprised paterfamilias, when he applied the well merited cane, to learn that seventeen centuries afterwards there would be scholars who would count that audacious missive greater treasure than a new fragment of Sappho! But this is by the way. It must not be inferred from this laudation of the ungrammatical papyri that the N.T. writers are at all comparable in lack of education. The indifference to concord which we noted in the Apocalypse is almost isolated in this connexion. But the illiterates show us by their exaggerations the tendencies which the better schooled writers keep in restraint. With writings from farmers and from Emperors, and every class between, we can form a kind of "grammatometer" by which to estimate how the language stands in the development of any particular use we may wish to investigate.

Inscriptions come second to papyri mainly because their very material shows that they were meant to last. The Greek may not be of the purest, but such as it is we see it in its best clothes, while that of the papyri is in corduroys. The special value of the common Greek inscriptions lies in their corroborating the papyri, and practically showing that there was but little dialectic difference between the Greek of Egypt and Asia Minor, Italy and Syria. There would probably be varieties of pronunciation, and we have already seen that districts differed in their preferences among sundry equivalent locutions, but a speaker of Greek would be understood without the slightest difficulty wherever he went throughout the immense area over which the Greek world-speech reigned. With the caveat already implied, that inscription-Greek may contain literary elements which are absent from an unstudied private letter, we may use without misgiving the immense and ever-growing collections of later Greek epigraphy. How much may be made of

them is well seen in the *Preisschrift* of Dr. E. Schwyzer,¹ *Grammatik der Pergamenischen Inschriften*, an invaluable guide to the accident of the **Koinh**

Finally we have modern Greek to bring in. Dr. Albert Thumb's *Handbuch der neugriechischen, Volkssprache* gives us now the material for checking statements about modern Greek, which are often based upon the artificial Greek of the schools. The great work of Hatzidakis, *Einleitung in, die neugriechische Grammatik*, with its perpetual references to the New Testament, shows forcibly how many of the developments of the modern vernacular had their roots in the **Koinh** of two thousand years ago. The gulf between the ancient and the modern vernacular is bridged by the material collected and arranged by Professor Jannaris in his *Historical Greek Grammar*. It will soon be realized that the illiterate papyri of the early Christian centuries are far nearer to the common speech of Greece in our own time than to that of Attica in the fourth century B.C.² And even the educated colloquial Greek in which St. Paul wrote finds illustration constantly in the popular dialects of to-day. We may leave for the present the enforcing of this thesis, which will come out in practice at every step of our inquiry.

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¹ He was Schweizer in 1898, when this book was published, but has changed since, to our confusion. He has edited Meisterhans' *Grammar of the Attic Inscriptions*, and written the interesting lecture on *Die Weltsprache*, named above.

² Cf. Hatzidakis in *Rev. d. Et. gr.* 1903, p. 220, who says, "The language generally spoken to-day in the towns differs less from the common language of Polybius than this last differs from the language of Homer."

(To be continued.)