

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW TESTAMENT GREEK. (Pt. 3)

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III.

WE proceed to examine the history of the vernacular Common Greek. Some features of its development are undoubted, and may be noted first. The impulse which produced it is, beyond question, the work of Alexander the Great. The unification of Hellas was a necessary first step in the accomplishment of his dream of Hellenizing the world which he had marked out for conquest. To achieve unity of speech throughout the little country which his father's diplomatic and military triumphs had virtually conquered for him, was a task too serious for Alexander himself to face. But unconsciously he achieved it, as a by-result of his colossal schemes, and the next generation found that not only had a common language emerged from the chaos of Hellenic dialects, but a new and nearly homogeneous world-speech had been created, in which Persian and Egyptian might do business together, and Roman proconsuls issue their commands to the subjects of a mightier empire than Alexander's own. His army was in itself a powerful agent in the levelling process which ultimately destroyed nearly all the Greek dialects. The Anabasis of the Ten Thousand Greeks, seventy years before, had doubtless done something of the same kind on a small scale. Clearchus the Lacedaemonian, Menon the Thessalian, Socrates the Arcadian, Proxenus the Boeotian, and the rest, would find it difficult to preserve their native brogue very long free from the solvent influences of perpetual association during their march; and when Cheirisophus of Sparta and Xenophon of Athens had safely brought the host home, it is not strange that the historian himself had suffered in the purity of his Attic, which has some peculiarities distinctly foreshadowing

the **Κοινή**.¹ The assimilating process would, of course, go much further in the camp of Alexander, where, during prolonged campaigns, men from all parts of Greece were tent-fellows and messmates, with no choice but to accommodate their dialect in its more individual characteristics to the average Greek which was gradually being evolved among their comrades. In this process naturally those features which were peculiar to a single dialect would have the smallest chance of surviving, and those which most successfully combined the characteristics of many dialects would be surest of a place in the resultant “common speech.” The process was of course only begun in the army. As Hellenism swept victoriously into Asia, and established itself on all the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, the mixture of nationalities in the new-rising communities demanded a common language as the medium of intercourse, and the Greek of the victorious armies of Alexander was ready for the purpose. In the country districts of Greece itself, the dialects lived on for generations; but Greece mattered comparatively little by this time for the great Hellenising movement to which the world was to owe so much, nor were the dialects which strikingly differed from the new **Κοινή** those spoken by races that counted for anything in the movement. History gives an almost pathetic interest to an inscription like that from Larissa, engraved at the end of the third century B.C., where the citizens record a rescript from King Philip V., and their own consequent resolutions:—²

Ταγευόντων Ἀναγκίπποι Πετθαλείοι κ.τ.λ. , Φιλίπποι τοῖ

¹ Cf. Rutherford, *New Phrynichus*, 160-174. The same may be said of the language of the lower classes in Athens herself in the fifth century B.C., consisting as they did of immigrants from all parts. So [Xenophon] *Constitution of Athens* 11. 3:—“The Greeks have an individual dialect, and manner of life and fashion of their own, but the Athenians have what is compounded from all the Greeks and barbarians.” The vase-inscriptions abundantly evidence this. (Kretschmer, *Entstehung d. Κοινή*, p. 34.)

² See Michel, *Recueil d'Inscriptions Grecques*, no. 41, or other collections.

βασιλείος ἐπιστολὰν ἀπυστέλλαντος πρὸς τοὺς ταγοὺς καὶ τὰν πόλιν τὰν ὑπογεγραμμένην·

Βασιλεὺς Φίλιππος Λαρισαίων τοῖς ταγοῖς καὶ τῇ πόλει χαίρειν (and so on in normal Κοινή).

The old and the new survived thus side by side into the imperial age, but Christianity had only a brief opportunity of speaking in the old dialects of Greece. In one corner alone did the dialect live on. To-day scholars recognize but one modern idiom, the Zaconian, which does not directly descend from the Κοινή. As we might expect, this is nothing but the ancient Laconian, whose broad \bar{a} holds its ground still in the speech of a race impervious to literature and proudly conservative of a dialect that was always abnormal to an extreme. Apart from this the dialects died out entirely. They contributed their share to the resultant common Greek, but it is an assured result of Modern Greek philology that there are no elements whatever now existing, due to the ancient dialects, which did not find their way into the stream of development through the channel of the Common Dialect of more than two thousand years ago.

So far we may go without difference of opinion. The only serious discussion arises when we ask what were the relative magnitudes of the contributions of the several dialects to the new resultant speech. That the literary Κοινή was predominantly Attic has been already stated, and is of course beyond doubt. But was Attic more than one among many elements assimilated in the new vernacular? It has always been taken for granted that the intellectual queen of Greece was the predominant partner in the business of establishing a new dialect based on compromise between the old ones. This conclusion has recently been challenged by Dr. Paul Kretschmer, a brilliant comparative philologist, previously distinguished for his studies on the language of the Greek vase-inscriptions and on the dialects

of the Greeks' nearest neighbours.¹ In his tractate entitled *Die Entstehung der Κοινή*, published in the Transactions of the Vienna Academy for 1900, he undertook to show that the oral Κοινή contained elements from Boeotian, Ionic and even North-west Greek to a larger extent than from Attic. His argument affects pronunciation mainly. That Boeotian monophthongizing of the diphthongs, Doric softening of β, δ and γ, and Ionic deaspiration of words beginning with *h*, affected the spoken language more than any Attic influence, might perhaps be allowed. But if we restrict ourselves to features which had to be represented in writing, as contrasted with mere variant pronunciations of the same written word, the case becomes less striking. Boeotian may have supplied 3 plur. forms in -σαν for imperfect and optative, but they do not appear to any considerable extent outside the LXX.: the New Testament probably knows them not, and they are surprisingly rare in the papyri.² North-west Greek has the accusative plural in -ες, found freely in papyri and (in the word τέσσαρες) in MSS. of the New Testament also the middle conjugation of εἶμι, and the confusion of forms from -άω and -έω.) verbs. Doric gives us some guttural forms from verbs in -ζω, and a few lexical items. Ionic supplies a fair number of isolated forms, and may be responsible for many -ω or -ῶ flexions from -μι verbs, and some uncontracted noun-forms like ὀστέων or χρυσέω. But the one peculiarly Attic feature which Kretschmer does allow, the treatment of original *ā* as contrasted with Ionic on one side and the rest of Greek dialects on the other, is so far-reaching in its effects that we cannot but give it more weight than any of the rest. And while the accident of Attic may bequeath to the vernacular much matter which it shared with other dialects, one may ques-

¹ *Die griech. Vasenschriften*, 1894; *Einleitung in die Geschichte der griech. Sprache*, 1896.

² See *Class. Rev.* xv. 36, and the addenda in xviii. 110 (March 1904).

tion whether the accident of any single dialect would present anything like the same similarity to that of the **Κοινή** as the Attic does. We can hardly resist the conclusion of the experts that Kretschmer has failed to prove his point. At the same time we may allow that the influence of the other dialects on pronunciation may well have been generally underestimated. Kretschmer of course declares that Attic supplied the orthography, except for those uneducated persons to whom we are so much indebted for evidence of pronunciation. Consequently, he says, when the Hellenist wrote **χαίρει** and pronounced it *chéri*, his language was really Boeotian and not Attic.¹ It is obvious that the question does not seriously concern us, since we are dealing with a language which for all its vernacular character comes to us in a written and therefore largely Atticized form. For our purpose we may assume that we have a Greek which includes important contributions from various dialects, but with Attic as the principal factors although we have hardly anything in it in which Attic showed a marked idiosyncrasy.

At this point it should be observed that pronunciation is not to be passed over as a matter of no practical importance for the modern student of Hellenistic. The undeniable fact that phonetic spelling—which during the reign of the old dialects was a blessing common to all—was entirely abandoned by the educated generations before the Christian era, has some very obvious results for our grammar and textual criticism. That **αι** and **ε, ει (η)** and **ι, οι** and **υ** were identities for the scribes of our MSS. is certain.² The scribe made his choice according to the grammar and the

¹ Against this emphasizing of Boeotian, see Thumb, *Hellenismus*, 228.

² On the date of the levelling of quantity, so notable a feature in Modern Greek, see Hatzidakis in *Ἀθηνᾶ* for 1901 (xiii. 247). He decides that it began outside Greece and established itself very gradually. It must have been complete, or nearly so, before the scribes of **Σ** B wrote.

sense, just as we choose between *kings*, *king's* and *kings'*, or between *bow* and *bough*. He wrote $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}$ nominative and $\sigma\acute{o}\iota$ dative; $\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ infinitive and $\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\sigma\theta\epsilon$ imperative; $\phi\iota\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\iota\varsigma$, $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\delta\omicron\nu$ indicative, and $\phi\iota\lambda\acute{\eta}\varsigma$, $\acute{\iota}\delta\omega$ subjunctive; $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota$ verb, but $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\acute{\eta}$ noun. But there was nothing to prevent him from writing $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\acute{\epsilon}\phi\nu\eta\varsigma$, $\acute{\epsilon}\phi\nu\acute{\iota}\delta\iota\omicron\varsigma$, $\acute{\alpha}\phi\epsilon\iota\rho\eta\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$, etc., if his antiquarian knowledge gave in; while there were times when his choice between (for example) infinitive and imperative (as Luke xix. 13) was determined only by his own or perhaps a traditional exegesis. It will be seen therefore that we cannot regard our best MSS. as decisive on such questions, except as far as we may see reason to trust their general accuracy in grammatical tradition. Westcott and Hort may be justified in printing $\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha$. . . $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\iota\acute{\alpha}\sigma\epsilon\iota$ in Acts v. 15, after B and some cursives; but the passage is wholly useless for any argument as to the use of $\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha$ with a future. Or, let us take the constructions of $\omicron\upsilon\acute{\mu}\eta$ as exhibited in Moulton-Geden's concordance (for W.H. *text*). There are 73 occurrences with aor. subj., and 2 more in which the $-\sigma\omega$) might theoretically be future. Against these we find 8 cases of the future, and 14 in which the parsing depends on our choice between $\epsilon\iota$ and η . It is evident that editors cannot hope to decide here what the autographs had. And if they had the autograph before them, it would be no evidence as to the author's grammar if he dictated the text. To this we may add that by the time \aleph and B were written \omicron and ω were no longer distinct in pronunciation, which transfers two more cases to the indeterminate list. It is not therefore simply the overwhelming manuscript authority which decides us for $\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\mu\epsilon\nu$ in Rom. v. 1. Were the versions and the patristic authorities wanting, we might have some difficulty in proving that the orthography of the MSS. went back to a very ancient traditional interpretation. It is indeed quite possible that the Apostle's own pronunciation did not distinguish them sufficiently to give Tertius a clear lead

without making inquiry.¹ In all these matters we may fairly recognize a case nearly parallel with the editor's choice between such alternatives as *τίνες* and *τινές* in Heb. iii. 16, where the tradition varies. The modern expositor feels himself entirely at liberty to decide according to his view of the context.

Before passing on from the dialect question it may be well to make a few more remarks on the nature of the contributions which we have noted. Some surprise may have been felt at the importance of the elements alleged to have been brought into the language by the "North-west Greek,"² a dialect which lies altogether outside the literary limits. The group embraces, as its main constituents, the dialects of Epirus, Ætolia, Locris and Phokis and Achaia and is known to us from inscriptions, in which those of Delphi are conspicuous. It is the very last we should have expected to influence the resultant language, but it is soon observed that its part (on Kretschmer's theory) has really been very marked. The characteristic Achaian accus. plur. in *-ες* successfully established itself in the common Greek, as its presence in the vernacular of to-day sufficiently shows. Its prominence in the papyri³ indicates that it was making a good fight, which in the case of *τέσσαρες* had already become a fairly assured victory. In the New Testament, *τέσσαρας* never occurs without some excellent authority for *τέσσαρες*:⁴ cf. W.H. App. 150. Moreover I note in Rev. i. 16 that A has *ἀστέρες*—with omission of *ἔχων*,

¹ *ο* and *ω* were confused in various quarters before this date: cf Schweizer, *Pergam.* 95; Nachmanson, *Magnet. Inschr.* 64; Thumb, *Hellenismus*, 143.

² Brugmann, *Griech. Gram.* 3 17.

³ See *Class. Rev.* xv. 34, 435, xviii, 109, I must acknowledge a curious mistake I made there in citing A. Thumb for instead of against Kretschmer's argument on this point.

⁴ John xi. 17 **Δ**; Acts xxvii. 29 and Rev. ix. 14, **Δ**; Rev. iv. 4 **Δ** A (and so W.H. marg.); vii. 1 A *bis*, P *semel*.

it is true, but that may well be an effort to mend the grammar. It is of course impossible to build on this but taking into account the obvious fact that the author of the Apocalypse was still decidedly ἄγράφματος at Greek; and remembering the already described phenomena of the papyri, I should be greatly surprised if his autograph did not exhibit accusatives in -ες, and not in τέσσαρες alone. The middle conjugation of εἰμί, is given by Kretschmer as a North-west Greek feature, but the Delphian. ἦται and ἔωνται are balanced by Messenian ἦνται, and Lesbian ἔσσο, which looks as if some middle forms existed in the earliest Greek. But the confusion of the -άω and -έω verbs, which is marked in the papyri¹ and New Testament and is complete in Modern Greek, may well have come from the North-west Greek, though encouraged by Ionic. I cannot attempt to discuss here the question between Thumb and Kretschmer, but an *à priori* argument might be pleaded for the latter in the well-known fact that from the third to the first century B.C. the political importance of Ætolia and Achaia produced an Achaian-Dorian Κοινή, which yielded to the other Κοινή about a hundred years before St. Paul began to write: it seems antecedently probable that this dialect would leave some traces on that which superseded it. Possibly the extension of the 3rd plur. -σαν, and even the perfect -αν, may be due to the same source²: the former is also Boeotian. The features we have been mentioning have in common their *sporadic* acceptance in the first century Hellenistic, which is just what we should expect where a dialect like this contends for survival with one that has already spread over a very large area. The elements here tentatively set down to the North-west Greek secured their ultimate victory through their intrinsic advantages. One (-άω and -έω verbs)

¹ See *Class. Rev.* xv. 36, 435, xviii. 110.

² It is found in Delphian (Valaori, *Delph. Dial.* 60) rather prominently both in indic. and opt. The case for -αν (*ibid.*) is weaker.

fused together two grammatical categories which served no useful purpose by their distinctness; another (accus. in -ες) reduced the number of separate forms to be remembered, at the cost of a confusion which English bears without difficulty, and even Attic bore in πόλεις, βασιλείς, πλείους, etc.; while the others both reduced the tale of equivalent suffixes and (in the case of -σαν) provided a very useful means of distinction between 1st sing. and 3rd plur.

We come to securer ground when we bring in the part taken by Ionic, for here Thumb and Kretschmer are at one. The former observes that only the establishment of an entirely new type can be conclusive for our recognition of a particular dialect as the source of some modern phenomenon. The nouns in -ας -ᾶδος and -οῦς -οῦδος are by this principle recognized as an undeniable debt of Modern Greek to Ionic elements in the Κοινή. Like the other elements which came from a single ancient dialect, they had to struggle for existence. We find them in the Egyptian Greek, but in the New Testament -ας makes gen. -ᾶ, as often even in Asia Minor, where naturally ᾶδος is at home.¹ Kretschmer gives as Ionic elements in the Κοινή the forms κιθών (=χιτών) and the like, psilosis (which the Ionians shared with their Æolic neighbours), the uncontracted noun and verb forms alluded to already, and the invasion of the -μι verbs by thematic forms (contract or ordinary). He does not accept the declension σπεῖρα σπεῖρης, normal in the Κοινή from the first century B.C., as due to Ionism, but to the analogy γλῶσσα γλώσσης. To his argument here we might add the consideration that the declension -ρα -ρης is both earlier and more stable than -ῦια -ῦιης, a difference which I would connect with the fact that the combination ιη was barred in Attic at a time when ρη (from ρFα) was no longer objected to (contrast ὕγιᾶ and κόρη): if Ionic forms

¹ It is in a minority both at Pergamon and at Magnesia: Schweizer 139 f., Nachmanson, 120.

were simply taken over, εἰδυίης would have come in as early as σπείρης.

But this discussion may be left to the philological journals, for we must endeavour to bring the generalities to a close to make way for a survey of the syntax in its several divisions. What concerns the student of the written vernacular is rather the question of dialectic varieties in itself than in its previous history. Are we to expect persistence of Ionic features in Asia Minor, and will the Greek of Egypt, Syria, Macedonia and Italy differ dialectically to an extent which we can detect after two thousand years? Speaking generally, we may reply in the negative. Dialectic differences there must have been in a language spoken over so large an area. But the differences need not in theory be greater than those between British and American English, which when written conceal the main differences, those of pronunciation. The analogy of this modern *Weltsprache* is in fact very helpful for our investigation of the old. We see how the educated colloquial closely approximates everywhere when written down, differing locally to some extent, but in vocabulary and orthography rather than in grammar. The uneducated vernacular will differ more, but its differences will still show least in the grammar. The study of the papyri and the Κοινή inscriptions of Asia Minor shows us that we have essentially the same phenomena in Hellenistic. There are few points of grammar in which the New Testament language differs from that which we see in other sources of common Greek vernacular, from whatever province it comes. We have already mentioned cases in which what may have been quite possible Hellenistic is used beyond the limits of natural Greek because of coincidence with Semitic. Apart from these, we have a few small matters in which the New Testament differs from the usage of the Papyri. The prominence of οὐ μή is the most important of these, for certainly the papyri lend no countenance whatever to any

theory that οὐ μή was a normal unemphatic negative in Hellenistic. I must return to this when the negatives come to be discussed; but meanwhile I may note that in the New Testament οὐ μή seems somehow necessarily connected with “translation Greek”—the places where no Semitic original can be suspected show it only in the very emphatic sense which is common to classical and Hellenistic use. Among smaller points are the New Testament construction of ἔνοχος c. gen. of penalty, and the prevailing use of ἀπεκρίθην for ἀπεκρινάμην: in both of these the papyri agree with the classical usage, but that in the latter case the New Testament has good Hellenistic warrant is shown by Phrynichus (see Rutherford, p. 186 ff.), and by the modern Greek ἀποκρίθηκα.

The whole question of dialectic differences within the spoken Κοινή is judicially summed up by our greatest living authority, Dr. Albert Thumb, in chap. v. of his book on Greek in the Hellenistic age, already often quoted. He thinks that such differences must have existed largely, in Asia Minor especially, but that writings like the Greek Bible, intended for wider circulation, employed a *Durchschnittsprache* which avoided local individualisms. (The letters of St. Paul would not be an exception, though intended for single localities, for he would not be familiar with the peculiarities of Galatian or Achaian, still less of Roman Κοινή). To the question whether our authorities are right in speaking of a special Alexandrian Greek, Thumb practically returns a negative. For nearly all the purposes of our own special study, Hellenistic Greek may be regarded as a unity, varying almost only with the education of the writer, his tendency to use or ignore features of literary language, and his dependence upon sources in a foreign tongue which could be either freely or slavishly rendered into the current Greek.

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