

ART. V.—THE LANGUAGES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

PART IV.

TO complete the survey of the Languages of the New Testament there remains for consideration the writings of St. John, the Apostle and Evangelist, and cousin of our Lord.

The case of John is, in some respects, more difficult, and in some respects easier than that of Peter. He was quite a young man when our Lord left the earth. He appears to have lived a long period at Ephesus, in Ionia, amidst a Greek population, in ease and dignity. All the disciples who knew the Lord sixty years before had passed away, and many also of the second generation, who had had intercourse with the Apostles and disciples. St. John's statements are quite free from the possibility of contemporaneous criticisms. Everything had changed. The Temple had disappeared, the Christian Church was separated from the Jewish; we feel in St. John's Gospel that we are entering another world as regards language and style.

Written documents of the kind described above¹ may have been handed down and been current in the Church. The aged Apostle may, over and over again, in his discourses at Ephesus, have repeated the conversations of his Lord, but the time had come when it was felt necessary to close the record of the inspired writings absolutely, for spurious gospels were coming into existence, and diverse heresies were springing up. Explanations are given by St. John of Jewish customs and Aramaic words, which shows that a different class of readers was addressed in a different state of culture, and with a different environment of prejudices and preconceptions. Sometimes the manner in which the Apostle expressed himself, or rather in which his amanuensis took down his words, causes ambiguity; *ex gratiâ, εὐρήκαμεν τὸν Μεσσίαν, ὃ ἐστὶ μεθερμηνεύμενον χριστός*, John i. 41. In this passage, and John iv. 24, the word "Messiah" appears, and nowhere else. The meaning of the Hebrew word had been forgotten, when St. John wrote, but when the Synoptists wrote, there was no necessity for explanation. Again, in John i. 42, our Lord remarks: "Thou shalt be called Kephas;" the amanuensis adds, "which is by interpretation a stone." It can scarcely be believed that these two passages are pressed into the service of the argument that our Lord spoke Greek to His Apostles, and that the woman of Samaria spoke Greek to Him, and that the two fishermen of the Sea of Galilee, Andrew and Peter, communicated to each other in ordinary conversation in Greek.

¹ The CHURCHMAN, vol. iii. (N. S.), p. 652.

The word *χριστιανός* is never used by St. John, and in fact only occurs twice in the Acts and once in the Epistle of St. Peter; in all three times. It is a hybrid word: a Greek root with a Latin suffix. It was probably a term of reproach, or used in a hostile sense. Events repeat themselves, for in British India it was, in my time, a term of reproach. In visiting a native Christian village, I happened to ask in Hindustani an aged convert when he became a "Christian." The missionary checked me, and asked me not to use that term, but "Masihī," and, I remark, that in the Hindustani Bible, in Acts xxvii. 28, Agrippa says to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Masihī," but St. Peter iv. 16, accepting the term as one of abuse, is represented in the Hindustani Bible as stating, "if any suffer as a *Kristian*, let him not be ashamed." Perhaps the Church at Ephesus had the same feelings, and we can understand them. To call a man "a Turk" in London is an insult; it is an honour to be so called in Constantinople.

In considering the language used by St. John in his writings, I must assume, and ask my readers to accept for sake of argument, the theory propounded by judicious scholars, that the Apocalypse was written at least a quarter of a century before the Epistles and Gospel. No one can fail to be struck by the serious grammatical errors in the Apocalypse. In ch. i. ver. 5, we read *ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ—ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς*; there are many more errors of grammar of a kind, which cannot be attributed to inaccuracy of the text. The English translation in a language free from the trammels of number, case and gender, does not exhibit these defects. Dr. Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln, remarks: "This book studiously disregards the law of 'Gentile' syntax; it Christianizes Hebrew words and clothes them in Evangelical dress, and consecrates them to Christ." And again: "In the Apocalypse the reader is to be prepared for combinations independent of the ordinary rules of grammar, and having a grammar of their own, *the grammar of inspiration*." I cannot agree with this style of commentary; it seems a degradation of the Scriptures, a total misconception of the meaning of grammar, which is the method, unconsciously adopted by past generations, of expressing their sentiments by articulated sounds and sentence-moulds. To say that inspiration has anything to do with the structure of sentences, or observance of grammatical rules, is as absurd as the remark of a certain king, "Ego sum rex Poloniae, et super Grammaticam."

I have taken the trouble of comparing all the verses, in which these errors occur, with the version into Latin by Jerome, into German by Luther, and into Sanscrit by Carey, these three being languages which are analogous in their rules of structure and

concord, and I do not find that these translators have in any single instance paid attention to the grammar of inspiration.

The explanation must be sought for elsewhere. The Apocalypse was written in Patmos, a small and sparsely inhabited island; the Apostle himself was then a tyro in the knowledge of Greek-written composition, and in that out-of-the-way spot he had not the assistance of a skilled amanuensis which could be supplied to him at Ephesus, when he commenced his later labours, which, as Greek compositions, are above criticism; the errors are just such as a Semite would make in first dealing with an Aryan language, of which, with the exception of English and Persian, gender, case, and number are a chief feature. We all know what blunders Englishmen make who attempt to write French and German. The official in British India, when out upon some expedition of political or police importance, finds himself compelled to make use of the best amanuensis whom he can lay hold of in an out-of-the-way village, to communicate with his subordinates at a distance, who know not a word of English; and the production, when it finds its way into the head-office, raises a pitying smile in the countenance of the skilled draftsman.

It is a fatal mistake to claim infallibility for subjective considerations in matters of pure science, and to improvise miracles to account for the inaccuracy of a Greek sentence or the unexplained knowledge of a foreign language by an unlettered man. The servants of the Lord are quite as well equipped, and *vice versa*, to maintain His honour now, as they were in the first century. If from purely linguistic, and, therefore, scientific grounds, we are drawn to a particular conclusion, it would be cowardly to say, that theology is above grammar. We in this way add an additional poison to the shafts of an adversary. Our cause is a good one, and *non eget tali auxilio*.

St. John clearly thought in Aramaic, and we recognise a Semitic mind in an Aryan dress. Two strong points used to be urged in favour of the argument, that the Lord conveyed His message in the Apocalypse to St. John in the Greek language.

1. That He calls Himself Alpha and Omega, which clearly apply solely to the Greek alphabet.

2. That in Rev. xiv. 18 the Apostle indicates the number of the beast by a Greek cryptogram—666.

To both these there is a reply. "Aleph and Thau" is an old Hebrew proverb for the beginning and the end: the Syriac translation has returned to this rendering; the Greek amanuensis substituted the last and first letters of the Greek alphabet, and some of the translators of the Bible at the present day into savage languages, which use the Roman alphabet, have proposed to substitute "I am A and Z." The Apostle, when he dictated the cryptogram 666, was thinking as a Hebrew:

he had no such familiarity with the Greek alphabet as to base his sayings upon it. The Aramaic language had a well known written character, and each letter had a numerical value, and 666 resolves itself without difficulty into "Neron Kesar," and no doubt the Emperor Nero, who slew St. Peter and St. Paul, was intended. However, the only interest attached to this solution is, that no argument in favour of Greek being the language of the Apostle can be based for it, but the contrary.

In his old age the Apostle drew upon a store of sanctified recollections, and wrote his Gospel; there is no evidence that he had seen the Synoptic Gospels, but his Gospel has a supplementary character. We all know how in old age the nearer Past, as it were, vanishes away, and the far-off Past comes before the recollection. Aged people recount in great detail, and accurately, conversations which took place half a century before: there is a peculiar illumination round the setting sun.

One point of language suggests itself. Our Lord raised three persons from the dead; I have visited each of the spots where these great miracles were performed with profound reverence. It might have been expected, that as our Lord had used the words "Talitha Kumi" when He raised the daughter of Jairus, the Evangelist would have recorded analogous terms when He raised the widow's son. But St. Luke records the words *Νεανίσκκε, σοί λέγω, ἐγερθήτι*. St. Mark had learnt his lesson from an eye-witness, St. Peter, who was an Aramean, and remembered the words uttered. St. Luke had learnt his lesson chiefly from St. Paul, and others not eye-witnesses; he wrote as a chronicler rather than a reporter. So when Lazarus was raised, St. John, who is the only chronicler of this event, did not record the *ipsissima verba* of his Lord, but supplied a translation, *Ἀδζαρε δευρο ἔξω*. We see the process: St. Peter remembered the words of his Lord, and St. Mark, in the freshness of his life-like sketch, took them down. St. Luke was an historian, who reduced all his information, whether of facts or utterances, to Greek. When St. John's time came, Aramaic had ceased to be understood; he may possibly have been one of the few who knew it out of Palestine.

I shall be sorry if any words of mine, in these Papers on the Languages of the New Testament, may have distressed any tender conscience. After all, if portions of the New Testament are but translations, we must reflect what a blessing translations have been to the world, and how fortunate we are that our Faith has chosen the best of the two alternatives. All false religions have shrunk into a dead language, which language was in very deed the language spoken by the Founder, but which has ceased to be intelligible, and is jealous of trans-

lation into the vernacular. The precious truths of the Gospel have not come down to us in the very words of the Lord and His disciples, but through the channels of translations made from the earliest periods, and, multiplied to a prodigious extent during this century, they are blown over the world. In former years subtle arguments were based on the words of the English translation, which was deemed the one unquestioned form for the English-speaking people, as, indeed, in the early century of the Christian Era the Septuagint-translation of the Old Testament was deemed an inspired book. We have got beyond that stage of critical obliquity. It may be truly said, that of all the books of, or antecedent to, the Augustan age, no book has come down to us with such satisfying evidence as to its genuineness and authenticity as the New Testament.

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Short Notices.

It Might Have Been. The Story of Gunpowder Plot. By EMILY S. HOLT. John F. Shaw and Co.

THIS story is, of course, highly informing as well as interesting. It is the work of an able and gifted romance writer, who is a diligent student of historical records, and who has, moreover, a singularly good judgment. The volume is illustrated, and has a tasteful cover.

Self-Discipline. A Memoir of Percy Clabon Glover, M.A., Worcester College, Oxford. By his father, Rev. RICHARD GLOVER, M.A., Author of "The Golden Decade of a Favoured Town," etc. Nisbet and Co.

An edifying memoir, in some respects unique.

Counsels of Hope for Invalids.—Selected by the Rev. H. M. NEVILLE, Rector of Ford, Northumberland. With Illustrations by Louisa Marchioness of Waterford. Pp. 170. Rivingtons.

This volume, tastefully got up, and printed in large type, is an excellent present for the "afflicted or distressed." Passages in prose and verse have been chosen from many authors: they are neither too long nor too short. A piece by Mr. Elliot Stock, entitled "The Lord is thy Sun," is new to us, and we quote it as follows:

O Lord, Thou art not fickle,
As man is wont to be;
Who halts, and doubts, and changes,
And sometimes trusteth Thee.

But, Thou art ever constant,
Like th' eternal sun on high,
That floods the earth with blessing,
Though clouds may hide the sky.