

of the spiritual chain by which we shall obtain the meat that endureth unto everlasting life!

“O Thou, out-topping all we know or think,
Far off yet nigh, out-reaching all we see,
Hold Thou my hand, that so the topmost link
Of the great chain may hold from us to Thee;

And from my heaven-touched life, may downward flow
Prophetic promise of a grace to be;
And flower, and bird, and beast may upward grow,
And find their highest linked to God in me.”

HUGH MACMILLAN.

INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS VIII. 33, 34.

AMONG the minor questions of New Testament exegesis, there is no one which is more interesting than that which bears upon the proper punctuation and translation of this passage. The first inquiry which occurs is: Are the words, *Θεὸς ὁ δικαιοῦν*, to be viewed as affirmative or interrogative? and is the rendering consequently to be, “It is God that justifieth,” or “Shall it be God that justifieth?” If the former view be accepted, the words are to be regarded as an affirmative answer to the challenge contained in the previous clause of the verse; if the second be preferred, the words must be taken as a virtual *reductio ad absurdum*—a strong interrogative answer to the preceding question, implying the utter impossibility of entertaining for a moment the idea suggested by the opening clause of the verse.

And next, according as the one or the other of these views is adopted with respect to the clause referred to, will almost certainly be the conclusion reached in regard to the remaining portion of the verse. The interrogation, *τίς ὁ κατακρίνων*, will, in one case, be regarded as affirmatively

answered by the statement, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Or, in the other case, the reply will, as before, be viewed as contained in an additional question, which utterly scouts the possibility of such a thing as condemnation happening to God's people, and the translation will then run as follows: "Who is he that condemneth? Is it Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?"

On looking back upon the history of the interpretation of the passage, we are perhaps warranted in saying that opinion has been pretty equally divided among commentators as to the two views which have been stated. This has, at least, been the case until recent years, when Biblical critics have, for the most part, been found inclining to that rendering of the verses which is contained in our Authorised Version. Since Dean Alford published his commentary, in which he departed from what had become the prevailing view, there have been very few writers on the Epistle who have followed on the same side. Many have taken no notice of the question at all. Others have decidedly preferred the common opinion, and have barely admitted the possibility of the alternative rendering. The Revised Version may be regarded as, more or less, representing such critics, for it adheres to the ordinary view in the text, while it assigns the other a place on the margin.

The only decided expression of opinion which I have met with, in recent commentaries on the Epistle, in favour of the second view mentioned above, is given by Mr. Moule, in *The Expositor's Bible*. With fine exegetical tact (if my judgment in the matter is worth anything), he says, in a note on the verses, "We adopt the interrogative rendering of all the clauses here. It is equally good in grammar, and

far more congenial to the glowing context." It is to the illustration and confirmation of this view that I wish to devote the present paper. And I shall begin with some general remarks on the phraseology of the New Testament writers, which will by-and-by receive a special application.

It appears to me, then, that the purely Hellenic factor has never yet had sufficient weight assigned to it in considering the style of the various human authors of the New Testament. There has even existed a prevalent habit of asserting that the Jews, in the times of Christ and His Apostles, hated all that was Greek. This is a totally erroneous opinion. It is opposed to all that we learn from the best and most ancient Rabbinic sources. We meet, for instance, with such statements as the following, which are quoted by Dr. Hamburger from the most trustworthy Jewish authorities: "The patriarch Rabbi Juda i. thus admonished his readers, 'What is the need of the Syrian tongue in Palestine? use either the Hebrew or the Greek.' 'The Law must be translated only into Greek, for only in that language can it be perfectly rendered.' 'The Greek language may be used for everything.'" ¹ To the same effect, Dr. Tholuck has shown how highly those Rabbis, who were, as nearly as possible, contemporaries of Christ, esteemed the Greek language; and how carefully they studied Greek writers. He sums up his statements on the subject by saying that "the Greek language was prized as the medium of public intercourse and of literature, while the Grecian authors were studied by the Rabbis, and their writings were even made the express subjects of instruction." ²

In full accordance with these representations are the undoubted facts which meet us in the New Testament.

¹ *Real-Encyclop. für Bibel und Talmud.* Arts. "Unterricht," and "Griechenthum."

² *Commentar zum Briefe an die Hebräer.* Dritt. Kap.

No one, for instance, who was not conversant with the Greek classical writers, could have composed the preface to St. Luke's Gospel. Its style is so remarkably pure that we might almost imagine it to have been written by the pen of Thucydides. So again, the Epistle to the Hebrews (whosoever may have been its author) betrays unmistakable signs, in the flow of its periods, and the general character of its diction, that the writer possessed an acquaintance with the great models of Greek composition. Nor is it scarcely possible to believe that the Epistle of St. James, with its accuracy and sparkle, could have been the production of any one who was not acquainted with the Attic poets and historians. Critics have vied with each other in their expressions of admiration for the Greek of this Epistle. Thus, to quote only two out of a multitude, Credner declares that "the author exhibits a delicate acquaintance with the Greek language"; while Winer speaks of the Epistle as being written "in a style of choice, or, it may even be said, exquisite Greek." All this clearly points to a familiarity with the works of the best Greek writers.

But we are, if possible, still surer of our ground when we now turn to St. Paul. We know that his birthplace, Tarsus, was a thoroughly Greek city—in fact, a very citadel of Hellenism, where the language and literature of Greece were firmly established. Moreover, we have plain and direct evidence of the Apostle's acquaintance with the classical writers. Three quotations from them appear in the Epistles which bear his name. The first occurs in his celebrated speech at Athens (*Acts* xvii. 28), and consists of these words from the *Φαινόμενα* of Aratus,—*Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν*—"For we are also his offspring." The second quotation is found at 1 *Corinthians* xv. 33, where the following Iambic trimeter is cited from the *Thais* of Menander, but, as some have thought, is ultimately traceable to Euripides—*Φθείρουσιν ἤθη χρῆσθ' ὀμιλῖαι κακάι*—"Evil

communications corrupt good manners." The remaining quotation is found at *Titus* i. 12, and is probably from Epimenides, a Cretan poet, though some have referred it to a later writer, Callimachus of Alexandria. It consists of the following Hexameter verse—*Κρήτες ἀεὶ ψεύσται, κακὰ θηρία, γαστέρες ἀργαί*—"The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies."

Now, it would be obviously absurd to suppose that, in such a city as Tarsus, the Apostle's knowledge of the Greek writers could be limited to those whom he has happened to quote. He, doubtless, had access to the whole range of classical literature. And, that being granted, as common sense requires it should be, the special point which I wish to make is this: that there is a striking similarity, to some extent, between the Apostle's style and that of Demosthenes. I do not, of course, deny that there are many marked differences between them; but what I wish to maintain, and to use as a clue to the correct interpretation of the passage before us, is that there is also, in some respects, and in *one* especially, a remarkable likeness. The very terms in which St. Paul's critics of old described his Epistles (2 *Cor.* x. 10), when they styled them *βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραί*, "weighty and powerful," will serve, perhaps as well as any others, to characterise the speeches of the great Greek orator. And, conversely, when Cicero says (*De Orat.* iii. 28), "Vim Demosthenes habuit," and when Quintilian (*Instit.*, x. 1, 76) makes use of the expression "vis" as specially descriptive of the merits of Demosthenes, a term is selected which may, with equal justice, be applied to St. Paul's Epistles. This Latin word *vis* corresponds to the Greek expression *δεινότης*, which denotes *energy and impressiveness*, and these qualities are strikingly illustrated in the extant writings alike of St. Paul as of Demosthenes.

But now, to approach more closely the subject immediately in hand, I observe specially that the Apostle imitates

the Greek orator in this respect,—that he is fond of expressing a strong negation *by means of an interrogation*. Let us first see the practice of Demosthenes with regard to this matter. Take *e.g.* the following passage from the *Olynthiacs* (iii. 36). The orator has been inveighing against the foolish course pursued by the Athenians, under the influence of their political advisers, with reference to Philip. “Let any one,” he says, “come forward and tell me by whose means except our own Philip has grown strong.” Then he supposes some person among his hearers to reply to this effect:—*Ἀλλ', ὦ τᾶν, εἰ ταῦτα φαύλως, τά γ' ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ πόλει νῦν ἄμεινον ἔχει*,—“Well, my good sir, though these things look badly, affairs in the city itself at least are better.” Then follows a series of questions implying a strong denial of this assertion, and presenting, I think, a somewhat striking analogy to the passage before us as I interpret it. The orator exclaims,—*Καὶ τί ἂν εἰπεῖν τις ἔχοι; τὰς ἐπάλλξεις ἅς κονιῶμεν; καὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς ἅς ἐπισκευάζομεν; καὶ κρήνας καὶ λήρους*;—“What has any one to say in proof of this? The parapets which we whitewash? the roads which we put in order? the fountains and fooleries?” No, no, no, must be the reiterated answer given to these questions; and thus the speaker’s desire of expressing the most vehement denial, in reply to the interrogation first uttered, is accomplished.

Next, let us look at the following passage in the speech of Demosthenes, *De falsa legatione*. The orator has been referring to a certain line of conduct which the king of Persia had adopted with regard to the Athenians, and he argues that Philip of Macedon would have acted, and would still act, in the same way, if their conduct gave him a chance of choosing such a course. His words are,—*Ταῦτο τοίνυν τοῦτ' ἂν ἐποίησε Φίλιππος, εἴ τινα τούτων εἶδε δίκην δόντα, καὶ νῦν, ἂν ἴδῃ, ποιήσει. Ἐπειδὴν δ' ἀκούῃ λέγοντας, εὐδοκιμοῦντας ἐν ὑμῖν, ἐτέρους κρίνοντας, τί καὶ ποιησῆ; ζητῆ*

πόλλ' ἀναλίσκειν, ἐξὸν ἐλάττω, καὶ πάντας θεραπεύειν βούληται, δὴ ἢ τρεῖς ἐξὸν ; μαίνοιτο μέντ' αὖν,—“ Philip, then, would have done the same, if he had seen any of these men subjected to punishment, and now, if he sees it, he will do so. But when he hears that they are still speaking in your assemblies—that they are held in reputation among you, and that they put others upon trial—what is he to do? Shall he seek to incur great expense, when he may do with less, and show his willingness to pay court to all, when two or three would suffice? Acting thus, he would be mad.” Here again, the strongest negation is evidently involved in the questions which precede the final statement. It was so inconceivable that Philip should adopt the course referred to that, had he really done so, he would have proved himself bereft of reason.

Let us take yet another passage from the same writer's famous oration, *De corona*. It occurs immediately after the celebrated adjuration by those who died at Marathon, Salamis, and other scenes of patriotic devotedness, which were the glory of the Athenians. Addressing Æschines, the great orator exclaims: Ἐμὲ δέ, ὦ τριταγωνιστά, περὶ τῶν πρωτείων σύμβουλον τῇ πόλει παριόντα τὸ τίνοσ φρόνημα λαβόντ' ἀναβαίνειν ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμ' ἔδει; τὸ τοῦ τούτων ἀνάξια ἐροῦντος; δικαίως μέντ' αὖν ἀπέθανον,—“ O you mere third-rate performer, when I was in my place to counsel the State how to retain her pre-eminence, in what spirit did it behove me to mount the rostrum? Was it in the spirit of one offering counsel unworthy of these my countrymen? In that case, I should justly have suffered death.” Demosthenes here declares that such conduct as is suggested in the question he puts, was so utterly abhorrent to his character—so sheerly impossible in any upright citizen—that, could he have conceived himself as being guilty of it, he would have felt righteously condemned to perish.

With these examples before us, let us now inquire

whether or not similar passages are to be found in the writings of St. Paul. They do, in fact, meet us in abundance. We think at once of the Apostle's eloquent apostrophe to death in 1 *Corinthians* xv. 55, when he exclaims: *Ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ κέντρον; ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ νίκος.* "O death, where is thy sting? O death, where is thy victory?"¹ The obvious force of these questions is that, terrible though death naturally appears, yet, through the operation of God's grace and power, it comes to have *no* sting, and can secure *no* victory.

We may next turn to *Galatians* iv. 16, where we find the words, *ὥστε ἐχθρὸς ὑμῶν γέγονα ἀληθεύων ὑμῖν;*—"Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" Of course, the meaning of the Apostle is that the very opposite inference from that here suggested should be derived from the fact of his having told them the truth. He wishes emphatically to affirm that, by acting as he had done, so far from having shown them any hostility or ill-will, he had proved himself the true friend of these Galatians.

We shall look only at one passage more, and it is found at 2 *Corinthians* vi. 14-16. The words are: *Μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις· τίς γὰρ μετοχὴ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνομία; ἢ τίς κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος; τίς δὲ συμφώνησις Χριστοῦ πρὸς Βελιάλ; ἢ τίς μερὶς πιστῶ μετὰ ἀπίστου; τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναῶ Θεοῦ μετὰ εἰδώλων;*—"Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols?" The object of this passage clearly is to affirm, with all possible earnestness, that there can be *no* fellowship between righteousness

¹ I have given the Revisers' reading, though by no means certain of its superior claims to that of the A.V. For our present purpose it matters not which of the rival texts is accepted.

and iniquity, *no* communion of light with darkness, *no* concord between Christ and Belial, and *no* agreement between a temple of God and idols.

I am, of course, far from maintaining that the idiom we have been considering is to be found only in the writings of Demosthenes and St. Paul. It occurs frequently in other authors, both secular and sacred, as might very easily be shown. But what I venture to affirm is, that it is so common in the great orator of Athens and the great Apostle of the Gentiles, that it may be regarded as one of the characteristics of their style, and thus forms a phraseological tie which binds the literary productions of the one to those of the other.

And now let us view the passage under our eye in the light of all that has been stated. When we do so, and bear in mind that St. Paul here evidently wishes to deny as strongly as words will enable him, that any charge can be brought against God's elect, we are surely warranted in believing that in this, as in so many other passages, the Apostle has recourse to his favourite questionary form in order to express strong negation, and asks with a kind of sublime and sacred irony: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Shall it be God that justifieth? Who is he that condemneth? Is it Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?" This seems to me quite in accordance with the usual practice of St. Paul, and strikingly harmonious with the fervour of spirit which glows and burns throughout the latter half of this chapter. It is also worthy of notice that this interpretation brings the verses before us into analogy with verse 36 immediately following, in which verse the question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" is answered only, but very effectively, by a series of other questions.

I may now remark that the view of the passage before us

for which I have been pleading, is by no means a mere modern opinion. On the contrary, it was held both by St. Ambrose and St. Augustine among the Fathers, and was maintained by Erasmus at the period of the Reformation.¹ It has, as I have already hinted, failed to win the assent of the majority of modern commentators. Some of them, indeed, have expressed themselves very strongly against it. Philippi, for instance, says that "apart from all else, the question whether God who justifies will accuse, which is meant to repel with still greater force the possibility of accusation on the part of any one whatever, contains, at least to our taste, nothing but an unwarranted subtlety or intolerable irony." But, notwithstanding such opposition, the view which has been supported in this paper will, I believe, yet revive in favour, and will ultimately be accepted as the only satisfactory explanation of the passage.

It deserves here to be briefly noticed how tenaciously the late Archbishop Whately adhered to the interrogative rendering of all the clauses in the verses under consideration. A friend who visited him when very near his end writes as follows:—"The Sunday before his death he seemed unconscious, and I read Romans viii. (a chapter for which he had asked more than once during his illness) by his side, not being quite sure, however, that he could hear or notice it. Instinctively I read verses 33, 34 as he had taught me to do on a previous visit: 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? *Is it* God that justifieth? Who is he that condemneth? *Is it* Christ that died?' etc. The eyes of the dying man opened for a moment. 'That is quite right,' he whispered.'" ²

Whichever of the alternative renderings of this passage is

¹ To some extent, at least, for his paraphrase of the words, Θεὸς ὁ δίκαιῶν, is—"Num audiet calumnifatorem adversus eos, quibus ipse gratis omnia commissa condonavit?"

² *Life of Dr Whately*, by his daughter, ii. 440.

adopted, no one can fail to perceive the wealth of divine consolation which it conveys to every true follower of Christ." "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" is the bold challenge uttered by St. Paul in the face of an intelligent universe. And, on listening to it, the mind naturally thinks, in the first place, of God as the supreme Judge of all. Some such words as those of the Psalmist will suggest themselves to the heart, when he exclaimed (*Ps.* cxliii, 2), "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." As Bishop Horne remarks on this statement:—"The thoughts of such a trial are enough to appal the soul of the best man living, to make his flesh tremble, and all his bones shake, as if he stood at the foot of Sinai, and beheld Jehovah ready to break forth upon him, in the flame of devouring fire." But the Apostle has a most effective means of dispelling all such terrors, and of vindicating the lofty position which he has assumed. He reveals God as Himself standing in the relation of *ὁ δικαίων* towards His people: as a Saviour He has already justified them; and therefore there is the utmost certainty that never can they be brought by Him into condemnation.

But again, on hearing St. Paul's challenge, our thoughts may turn to Christ, inasmuch as we read, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Here also, however, the Apostle furnishes abundant reasons for dismissing all the fears which might thus be engendered. For, first, "Christ died"—died for the sins of His people, thus obtaining "eternal redemption" for them, and so wiping out their guilt for ever. But, further and better, having "died for their sins, He rose again for their justification." His resurrection was the seal and evidence of the victory He had gained on their behalf. And yet more: He is now exalted as their representative to the right hand of God, and is still mindful of their interests,

for, adds St. Paul, "He also maketh intercession for us." Whatever their wants, He lives to supply them; whatever their weakness, He is able to furnish them with divine strength; whatever the conflicts in which they are called to engage, they must at last through Him prove "more than conquerors." The arch of victory is thus complete; no accusation can be sustained against the justified: God, with all His attributes of power, justice, and holiness is on their side; and thus, as the Apostle has declared in the opening verse of this chapter, there is absolutely "no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

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