

The Greek of the Early Church and the Pagan Ritual.

BY PROFESSOR W. M. RAMSAY, M.A., D.C.L., LL.D., ABERDEEN.

DEISSMANN, in his very interesting and *bahnbrechende Bibelstudien* (1895) and *Neue Bibelstudien* (1897) has shown how much light is thrown upon biblical Greek by a study of the language used in the inscriptions of the centuries immediately before and, still more, after Christ, that is to say, the language used by the ordinary population, as distinguished from the literary tongue.¹ In *Bibelstudien* (p. 280 ff.) he rightly remarks on the relation of the Christian expression in the New Testament to the official language which established itself in the cultus of the emperors, such as the use of *αἰώνιος, ἡ θεία δύναμις, εὐσέβεια, κυριακός* (*Neue B.S.*, p. 44 ff.). In my *Church in the Roman Empire before 170* (1893) and *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (1895), I had attempted to follow a similar path, though more on the side of action and life than on that of mere language. But, in this subject, word is correlative to action and life: the Christians were creating a new language corresponding to the new world of thought and life which was being built up for them and by them, but they did not divorce themselves from the world around them. Partly consciously, but far more in an unconscious way, they adapted their work to the life and standard of their age, and used the same devices for administration and organization which the Roman rule had worked out for itself.

The importance of studying the inscriptions of the Greek-speaking cities of Asia is twofold. In the first place, they are the only memorials which we possess of the language which Paul and Luke learned to speak in their childhood. We should be glad to possess any of the writings of Athenodorus, who was living and probably lecturing on philosophy at Tarsus when Paul was young, or of the other older Athenodorus of Tarsus, from whose writings Seneca quotes the comparison of life to a warfare, the advice to 'ask God for

nothing that you cannot ask openly,' and perhaps also the counsel 'so live with men as if God saw you; so speak with God as if men heard you.'² Being denied that, we must content ourselves with such fragments as the inscriptions afford about the society, life, law, religion, and philosophy³ of the time and lands in which the Pauline Churches were founded. The training of scholars in Greek has been always too much confined to the older and greater Greek literature and to the Christian books. Hence it is the difference between pagan Greek and Christian Greek which is most apparent to them, and most dwelt upon by them. They mark off 'New Testament Greek' as if it were a special and separate language, the same in the mouth of Luke the Greek as of John the Jew. They assert that phrases and words are peculiar to Christian Greek, which the epigraphists are familiar with as part of the everyday speech of the Greek Asian cities. Deissmann shows how an end is about to be put to this sort of thing.

In the second place, the epigraphic documents are the best training for the interpretation of the New Testament writings in one aspect, viz. their relation to the life of the time. Pure literature of the highest type, like the great Greek classics, on whom we are trained, is not closely bound to the circumstances of contemporary life; it becomes the heritage of the whole world, because it seizes the permanent facts of life and lays little stress on the evanescent and occasional; hence it can be appreciated on its permanent and its greatest side by one who disregards its relations to contemporary facts. No book can become part of the world's literature, unless it can be appreciated without minute study of contemporary society and life. The more dependent a literary work is on an elaborate commentary, explaining to later generations of readers the allusions, the less chance it has of living. The more it succeeds in setting before all readers men and thoughts which are sufficient in themselves and go direct and

¹ Dr. Deissmann has not observed that Canon E. L. Hicks had preceded him in illustrating the language of the New Testament from the inscriptions of the Greek cities (see two excellent papers in the *Classical Review*, 1887, pp. 4, 42). But it is only very rarely that a German scholar notices anything that is done in Britain.

² *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 354.

³ Philosophy, as, e.g., the doctrine of the Epicurean philosopher of Oitanda, in Lycia, engraved on a series of blocks (*Bulletin de Corresp. Hellénique*, 1897).

unaided to the eyes and mind of all readers, the more fitted it is to become part of the literature of all ages and all men. Now, the New Testament books, while they possess in a wonderful degree the quality of emphasizing the permanent aspects of life and thought, are also, to a very remarkable extent, occasional works, written with a special eye to the circumstances and needs of the moment, assuming in the readers perfect knowledge of the whole practical situation, and explicitly stating only what has to be added to the existing and assumed facts. In this latter respect they resemble the inscriptions. To explain any inscription to a modern reader, or to understand it oneself, it is necessary to bring clearly together in imagination the entire situation in which the inscription was placed; those to whose eyes it was originally addressed were assumed to be familiar with the whole circumstances and conditions; and these the modern reader has to re-create for himself. Practice in interpreting inscriptions is therefore the best training for interpreting one side of the New Testament writings; they help to fill in the background on which the action of the New Testament takes place.

This interpretation of inscriptions must be imaginative and re-creative. The restoration of a defective inscription often depends on the revivification in fancy of the situation in which the writer of the mutilated text was. The same creative imagination is needed to read the history of Luke and the Epistles of Paul; and those who have restricted themselves to the exegesis of the written letter (which is fairly adequate for the literary, philosophical, and part of the religious side), as it is practised by the scholar sitting in his study and not looking beyond its wall, are apt to scoff at the imaginative reconstruction of the epigraphist as purely fanciful and as lacking solid basis. They say that the reconstructor thinks he can hear the grass growing; his firm hold of the essential details of the record as the skeleton round which imagination has to build up the circumstances in order to make the whole picture, they stigmatize as *Micrologie*; but it may be doubted whether they are not sometimes just a little disposed in their study to direct their imagination to the recorded facts, and the painful minuteness to the surrounding situation.

Deissmann's work will do good service if it leads

professional theologians to study the inscriptions, even though their immediate purpose in doing so should be purely verbal.

In several points, as, for example, in that which is quoted in our first paragraph, and in the discussion of *Σαῦλος ὁ καὶ Παῦλος*, Deissmann expresses practically the same views which have been stated by me more on the side of administration and practical work. But there is one department of epigraphy which he has omitted almost entirely, though it throws much light on his special subject,—I mean the votive or hieratic inscriptions of the non-Hellenic religion of Asia Minor. The analogy of this religion and religious expression with the Christian forms has been often in my mind while writing about Paul; and in the present paper it is proposed to make a detailed comparison of the points of analogy.

Deissmann in one case (*Bibelstudien*, p. 77) refers to the fact that words like *ἀγνός*, *ἱερός*, *δίκαιος*, *γνήσιος*, *ἀγαθός*, *εὐσέβεια*, *θρησκεία*, *ἀρχιερεύς*, etc., were familiar to the Asia Minor Christians before they began to read the Septuagint, and puts the question, whether they used such words in their Christian expression because they read them in the Greek Bible, or because they knew them in their home language. But his remarks on this point are vague and general in character. The inscriptions which we propose to consider enable us to look more exactly at the usage in regard to a few important words common to pagan ritual and Christian expression.

I. CHARACTER OF THE HIERATIC INSCRIPTIONS.

This class of votive inscriptions has been found chiefly in the explorations of the last twenty years. They are the work of the less educated and more superstitious classes of society in Asia Minor, of those persons who had little share in Greek ideas and literature, and often only a very scanty knowledge of the Greek language. The inscriptions belong to the first three centuries of our era; and the formulæ are so persistent that they evidently form part of a technical religious language, originated by the priesthood (a more educated class) not much later and probably earlier than the Christian era. They are found chiefly in two districts, which lay off the main lines of trade and development, and which therefore longer retained the native Oriental and non-Hellenic style: one of these was the

Lydian Katakekaumene, with its ten cities,¹ and the other was the Phrygian country round Dionysopolis, which was still organized on the old Anatolian village system, without any city after the Greek style except Dionysopolis, an unimportant and unprogressive place.

Besides these two chief centres there were many others, which may hereafter yield much information, when Asia Minor is once more brought under cultivation, and the archæological wealth that lies below the surface is disclosed—provided that there are any educated persons to copy the inscribed stones, as they are taken from the earth (a duty in which many Greek residents take honourable part), before they are wrought up again into new constructions. But at present very few votive inscriptions of the kind treated in these pages are known in the rest of Asia Minor.

An instructive inscription was erected in duplicate at Laurium, in the south-east of Attica, by a Lycian slave named Xanthos, probably in the late second or the third century after Christ. He founded a *hieron* of the Anatolian god, Men Tyrannos, and drew up a code of regulations for the worshippers. Finding some difficulty in expressing himself in Greek, he made a second copy, which varies a little from the other: one is distinctly better than the other, but the better copy omits entirely the prohibition against a murderer engaging at all in the worship of the God: the murderer is permanently impure, whereas the impurity incurred by other faults enumerated lasts only for a certain number of days. This text is almost the only one of those studied in the following paper that is referred to by Deissmann (see *Neue Bibelstudien*, p. 52).

It will be plain to every reader on the one hand how close is the analogy in language between these hieratic inscriptions and the Christian teaching, and on the other hand how broad and absolute is the contrast between them. There is only one inscription as to which the thought of Christian origin could for a moment rise to the mind of any ordinary human being; and that is an inscription of three words—verb, preposition, and proper name—*εὐλογοῦμεν ἵπὲρ Ἑρμοφίλου*; and there the doubt is possible only because of the emptiness of the text. Obviously there is no opening for hesitation as to the Christian or pagan origin of any

inscription, if anything beyond a single vague generality is contained in it. The words common to the inscriptions and the Christian documents are many and important; but when several of them come together in a Christian writing they have a depth of meaning and an individuality that mark it off unmistakably from a pagan composition.

Let us turn aside for a moment to apply this result to the controversy that has raged in Germany as to the origin of the epitaph of Avircius Marcellus. Here we have a document of considerable length, which describes the most sacred and fundamental points in Christian teaching and belief. It contains not a single word which is not common to paganism; every single point and detail in it can be paralleled from some pagan document or other, as has been proved with much ingenuity and learning by several writers. Misled by this fact, many profound and distinguished theologians have maintained that the epitaph is a pagan composition. But they that have eyes to see and a mind to feel perceive that the life and spirit of this document moves in a Christian medium and on a Christian level of thought. The scholars who maintain its pagan origin have, by looking at the details, blinded themselves to the life and character of the whole; they have forgotten that in thought the whole is different from, and greater than, the sum of its parts; they see the parts, and they miss the whole; they handle the component materials, while they are blind to the life that animates these elements and makes them into a unified organism. Yet these same scholars,² who show themselves so little able to recognize an original Christian document when it is placed single and complete before their eyes and judgment, entertain no hesitation as to chopping up various books of the New Testament; they trust their judgment implicitly as to the origin of every paragraph, almost of every sentence; they distinguish unerringly (but never to the satisfaction of any rival critic) the varying origin of each sentence, and tell exactly the decade—almost the year in some cases—when each paragraph or sentence was written, and what was the attitude and intention of the writer.

They should first convince us that they can

² I refer not merely to those who have publicly written on the subject, but also to others, who have privately indicated their views, though I must not name them; until they choose to make their opinion public.

¹ See *Acta S. Pionii* (1st Feb. p. 43) and *Histor. Geogr. As. Min.* p. 132.

distinguish a Christian document from a pagan before they ask us to believe that they can distinguish a Christian document of one decade from one of another. Are they not in the latter case missing the life while they cut up the single sentences, just as they miss it in the former case?

The resemblance of the hieratic language to that of Paul (and in almost an equal degree of Luke) is especially striking. It is characteristic of Paul's teaching that he should take up the religious terms that were peculiar to his hearers and readers, and give them back with a deeper import: 'What ye ignorantly worship, that declare I unto you.' A large number of the characteristic Pauline words and terms were already familiar to his Gentile converts; and Paul never sought to destroy, but only to direct and develop the germs of religious feeling among them.

There is also a marked analogy in the inscriptions to the Old Testament language and tone. The religion of Asia Minor is practically identical in character with the primitive Semitic idolatry, out of which the Hebrews rose, into which they were always tending to glide back, which was the untutored expression of their religious nature, upon which the religion given by Divine revelation to them had to be built up; and therefore the analogy is just what might be expected. It shows itself in many expressions and words and thoughts. Yet along with the analogy there is that essential difference, which makes those who are most struck with the analogy in certain points most profoundly convinced that by no ordinary and natural process of purification and elevation could the primitive Semitic religion develop into the Jewish religion. Nothing can explain the difference except an external factor, the direct action of a Divine power from above on the inert and unvitalized religious ritual of primitive Semitism. In saying this I am merely repeating what my first guide in these matters, Professor Robertson Smith, has often said in private conversation and also in his published works.

In many cases the word which is used in common in the pagan and the Christian language is the natural Greek term, which might be used by the Christians, even if it had not been used by the pagans. But the essential point is that the terms which had become technical in paganism were not avoided. Paul must have known what religious sense had been taken from such words as *αἰώνιος*, *σωτηρία*, *ἐξομολόγησμαι*, *εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ*,

εὐλογία, *καθαρός*, etc., by those to whom he was writing, and he deliberately uses them. On the other hand there were terms which he never uses, because they implied idolatry; the religious words he adopts and deepens, the words that were too closely connected with idolatry he avoids (*St. Paul the Trav.* p. 146 f.). Take, for example, the words connected with *ἱερός*, *ἱερόν*, *ἱερεὺς*, *ἀρχιερεὺς*, *ἱερατεία*, *ἱεράτευμα*, *ἱερατεύω*, *ἱερόθυτος*, *ἱεροπρεπής*, *ἱεροσυλέω*, *ἱεροσυλος*, *ἱεουργέω*, *ἱερωσύνη*. Paul uses *ἱερόθυτος*, *ἱεροσυλέω*, *ἱερόν*, *ἱερός*, each once. The two former occur in allusions to pagan ritual, which shows that he fully appreciated the idolatrous associations of these words. The other two, *ἱερόν* and *ἱερός*, occur together in a description of the practice at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Co 9¹⁸).

Otherwise Paul pointedly avoids the whole group, except that *ἱεροπρεπής* and *ἱερός* are used in a Christian way in Tit 2³, 2 Ti 3¹⁵, and (as if to bar the argument that only the Pastoral author and not the real Paul used such terms) he has *ἱεουργέω* in Ro 15¹⁶. On the other hand, some words of this group (not *ἱερός*) are frequently used throughout the rest of the New Testament; they are used almost exclusively in relation to Jewish ritual, but are found in a distinctly Christian application (evidently under the influence of the Septuagint) in 1 P 2^{5.9}, Rev 1⁶ 5¹⁰ 20⁶, and often in He, and later the Christian use became much more frequent. But *λεειτουργός*, *λεειτουργία*, *λεειτουργέω*, which had chiefly a political sense in pagan society, are used freely by Paul (Ro 13⁶ 15^{16.27}, 2 Co 9¹², Ph 2^{17.25.30}); still more commonly does he use *διάκονος*, *διακονία*, for though *διάκονος* is used occasionally to designate officials in pagan temples, yet the characteristic connexion of the name was not with idolatry.

For convenience of arrangement I divide the hieratic inscriptions into classes, but this division cannot be carried out thoroughly. Those of one class shade off by imperceptible degrees into other classes, and constantly require to be illustrated by those of another class. But some order is necessary in this exposition; and classification is the only way in which order can be attained.

Except the peculiar case of Xanthos's inscriptions, which are two drafts of the foundation deed of an amateur *hieron*, the series of documents here discussed were engraved on *stelai*, or on tablets, or on altars, dedicated at the *hieron* of Artemis-Leto and Apollo-Lairbenos, near Dionys-

opolis, and at the *hieron* of Artemis-Anaitis and Men Tiamou or Tyrannos, at Satala, in the Lydian Katakekaumene. A very large proportion of these end with the word *εὐχὴν* (governed by some such verb as *ἀνέθηκεν* or *ἀνέστησεν* understood), 'So-and-so dedicated his prayer.' The strict sense of *εὐχὴ*, a prayer and vow, to these Anatolian peasants must be kept in mind.

II. PRAYER AND VOW.

In the pagan conception, the relation of God and man is quite one of trade and business. The worshipper has a request to make of the god. He vows that if the god grants his request he will pay the god such and such a requital for his gift. The prayer, or request for aid, is necessarily coupled with a vow or promise of payment. The two elements, prayer and vow, are mutually complementary, like lock and key: the one is useless and meaningless without the other; where the one is mentioned, the other must always be understood. The word *εὐχὴ*, which is so common in these inscriptions, indicates, like *votum* in Latin, both elements, the prayer and the vow; and sometimes the one is more prominent in thought, sometimes the other.

The idea of payment vanishes almost entirely in the Christian teaching. In the New Testament *εὐχὴ* is used only by Luke in the sense of a vow of the old type, and by James (5¹⁵), where it has the sense of prayer; but the verb *εὐχομαι* is more frequently used of prayer in Ac, Ro, 2 Co, Ja, and 3 Jn. The compounds *προσευχὴ* and *προσεύχομαι* are the ordinary terms used. Was *εὐχὴ* felt to be too much connected with the idea of a vow and a gift promised to God?

The commonest object of pagan vows and prayers is salvation and preservation, *σωτηρία*; vows are made and thanks returned, *ὑπὲρ τῆς ἰδίας σωτηρίας*, *ὑπὲρ τῆς ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίας καὶ τῶν τέκνων*; and so on. The word was taken up in the Chris-

tian teaching; the object of all men is salvation, and the way or the word of salvation is taught in the Christian documents, *ὁδὸς σωτηρίας* (Ac 16¹⁷), *λόγος σωτηρίας* (Ac 13²⁶). The exact familiar phrase, *ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας*, occurs in 2 Co 1⁸, and *περὶ σωτηρίας* (the preposition is found, though rarely, in pagan inscriptions of this kind) in Jude v.⁸

Prayers and vows are also found on account of general bodily health, or the health of some part of the body, *ὑπὲρ ὑγείας*,¹ *ὑπὲρ ὑγείης τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν*, *ὑπὲρ τοῦ ποδός*, *ὑπὲρ τῆς ὀλοκληρίας τῶν ποδῶν*, or on behalf of one's property, *ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἡμίμου*, *ὑπὲρ τοῦ κολασθέντος βοός*.

The verb *ὑγαινώ* and the adjective *ὑγιής* are used occasionally in a religious sense in the Epistles to Titus and Timothy, *διδασκαλία ὑγαινοῦσα*, *λόγον ὑγιῆ*, *λόγοι ὑγαινοῦντες* (1 Ti 1¹⁰ 6³, 2 Ti 1¹³ 4⁸, Tit 1⁹, 13 2¹. 8; comp. 2²).

A remarkable phrase occurs in an inscription of the Katakekaumene. In the year 96 A.D., on the first day of the year,² Menandros paid his vow to the Meter Taszene, *φυλακτήρι(ο)ν λαβών*. In the sense of 'amulet' *φυλακτήριον* is common in the magical papyri; and the Jews wore on the left arm and forehead as *phylacteria* strips of parchment inscribed with texts of Scripture (Mt 23⁵). Except in reference to this Jewish custom, the word could not be expected in the New Testament. It is interesting to find that *phylacteria* were given by the goddess to her worshippers; probably this amulet, given on the first day of the first month, was intended to be efficacious for a whole year.

There were cases in which the worshipper did not recognize when his prayer was granted, and omitted to pay his vow. In this case the god reminds him, and demands payment (see sec. x.).

¹ Almost always the less accurate form *ὑγεια* is used.

² The inscription (copied by me in 1884) has been published by Dr. Buresch in his *Aus Lydien* (1898, p. 83). He has failed to understand the date, which is [*μηρὸς*] Δεῖου Νο(υμηρία), 'On the first day of Deios, the first month.'