

Exegetical Theology.

THE GENESIS OF NEW TESTAMENT GREEK.

The linguistic character of the idiom employed by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament has been a matter of controversy, sharp controversy at times, carried on by individuals in single combat or by entire schools in pitched battles. "The *Purists*," says Stuart, "would allow nothing but pure Attic Greek in it. Their antagonists, the *Hellenists*, after a long and arduous contest, drove them from the field. But not content with this, they pushed their conquest, as victors are very apt to do, far beyond the bounds of sober consideration. The second generation of Hellenists found Hebraisms everywhere. Not only the phraseology and coloring and sentiment of the New Testament were represented as Hebraistic, but the construction and regimen of the great mass of words were deemed to be Hebrew, the meaning and regimen of the particles were Hebrew; the tenses of verbs and the cases of nouns were conformed to the Hebrew; the article was used in the manner of the Hebrew one; and even the syntax was, in innumerable passages, represented as being conformed to the model of the Hebrew. In a word, any difficulty, as to the meaning of a Greek word, or as to its construction, was solved, if possible, by a resort to the usages of the Hebrew language."¹⁾ The language of the Apostles was, on the one hand, wreathed with honors which it declines to share with the language of the rostrum and the stage, and, on the other hand, reviled as a vulgar dialect bristling with barbarisms and solecisms.

It is not here our purpose to investigate in detail the nature of the idiom peculiar to the New Testament, but

1) Grammar of the New Testament Dialect, p. III. IV.

rather to point out certain general laws of language in their bearing upon the formation of this idiom, and to show how in choosing a language, and a certain dialect of that language, and modifying that dialect in adapting it to its special purpose, the Spirit of God has manifested his divine wisdom to the Glory of God and the salvation of man.

The Mosaic record of man's creation very clearly shows that, whatever the language of primeval man may have been, he certainly had and spoke a language;¹⁾ that language is not a product of human invention, gradually established by mutual agreement, nor a product of natural development from a few rudiments, but a concreated endowment of the parents of our race, a gift of God to man, who in this as in all things was the Creator's handiwork. Rational language is, since the very day when man was made, as truly as his rational soul a feature in the specific difference between man and brute.

The book of Genesis further teaches us²⁾ that for a long time the human race spoke one common language, until by divine dispensation a multitude of languages sprung up at the building of the city and tower of Babel. Since then a diversity of languages has existed on earth, and these languages have had their history and have under various circumstances and influences undergone various changes.

But even as the origin of language and the diversity of languages were not the result of arbitrary invention or contrivance of individuals and of subsequent mutual agreement between them and others upon the use of such invention for the purposes of a language, so also the changes through which languages have passed and are still passing have not been brought about merely by the free will of human individuals dictating to or agreeing with other individuals how language should be changed in its substance or structure, but according and pursuant to certain laws and

1) Gen. 2, 19. 20. 24.

2) Gen. 11, 1. 6. 7. 9.

tendencies inherent in the languages themselves and in the rational mind. When the Roman emperor Tiberius upon a time had blundered in his speech, he was at once corrected by the grammarian Marcellus, and when Capito, another grammarian, said, what the emperor had spoken was good Latin or soon would be, Marcellus, less courtier-like, drubbed Capito a liar and thus accosted the emperor: "Thou canst give the Roman citizenship to men, but not to words." Max Mueller, quoting another and similar anecdote of the German emperor Sigismund, relates: When presiding at the Council of Costnitz, he addressed the assembly in a Latin speech, exhorting them to eradicate the schism of the Hussites. "Videte Patres," he said, "ut eradicetis schismam Hussitarum." He was very unceremoniously called to order by a monk, who called out, "Serenissime Rex, schisma est generis neutri." The emperor, however, without losing his presence of mind, asked the impertinent monk, "How do you know it?" The old Bohemian school-master replied, "Alexander Gallus says so." "And who is Alexander Gallus?" the emperor rejoined. The monk replied, "He was a monk." "Well," said the emperor, "and I am Emperor of Rome; and my word, I trust, will be as good as the words of any monk." No doubt the laughers were with the emperor; but for all that, *schisma* remained a neuter, and not even an emperor could change its gender and termination.¹⁾

Yet, on the other hand, it should be noted that language, being a manifestation of the mind, will, generally, in a measure bear the imprint of the individual mind which manifests itself in speech. A rude mind will, as a rule, use rude language; a polished mind, polished language; a peculiar mind, peculiar language. And as one mind exerts an influence upon another mind not by direct, immediate impact, but chiefly by its language, the conformity ensuing

1) Lectures on the Science of Language, ed. Scribner & Co. I Series, p. 47 f.

from such influence will, in some degree, result in a conformity of language. Thus the disciples of a great teacher will more or less adopt their master's peculiarities of speech. And thus it is that when an individual gains a definite and enduring sway over the minds of an entire nation or a great portion thereof, he will correspondingly affect the language of that nation, especially when that influence is exerted through language in the stereotyped form of widely disseminated writings. The German language would not be by far what it is to-day but for the greatest German, Martin Luther; Latin was largely modified by Tertullian and others who made it the language of Latin Christianity, and in our day the introduction of the Christian religion among a people and, especially, the translation of the Bible into its vernacular tongue, will in some measure work a change in the language of that people.

Generally, the changes which languages are apt to undergo run a more rapid course when and where a language is merely the spoken dialect of a tribe or a section of country. It has been observed by an American missionary in Burmah that the language of a tribe which left its native village to settle in another valley became unintelligible to the relatives in two or three generations. But when a nation or tribe gains a supremacy, and its dialect becomes the language of national laws, of a common religion, and of a national literature, it settles down and becomes more stationary. Thus it was with the Latin Language. Latin was originally a dialect of Latium in Italy, and of Rome in Latium, and of the patricians in Rome, one of the many dialects spoken in Italy, and while it was nothing more than one of a sisterhood of dialects, it was subject to great and rapid changes, so that, after it had become the national language of the republic, and fixed by the creators of a Roman literature, the Romans of later days found the greatest difficulty in making out the remnants of their language in an earlier form. Horace confesses that he could

not understand the old Salian poems,¹⁾ and Polybius tells us that in his days the best informed Romans could only with difficulty make out the sense of the ancient treaties between Rome and Carthage. We have even a more striking instance in the German language. The twelfth century gave rise to a rich German literature, bearing such fruits as the epics of the *Nibelunge* and *Gudrun*, the German Iliad and Odyssee, and the lyrics of the Minnesinger. That luxurious spring time was followed by a barren period of several centuries, during which German was nearly exclusively a spoken language in its various dialects, and by the time that a new period of German literature was called forth in the days of the Reformation, the language presented an appearance so different from that of the language of Walther von der Vogelweide, that Middle High German must now be studied by modern Germans like a foreign language with special grammars and dictionaries. New High German, on the contrary, under the curb of its literature, has changed comparatively little in the course of three centuries.

Returning to the Greek language, we find that in early days there was a great diversity of dialects among those who spoke Greek as their mother tongue, the various sections of the country, and even towns and hamlets, having their peculiarities in their words and forms of words. There were not only the greater dialects of which the Dorian was one, but within this dialect we find the *διιάλεκτοι τοπικαί*, the local dialects, of the Spartans, the Messenians, the Argives, the Cretans, the Syracusans, and the Tarentinians. A common Greek book-language was adopted in and after the days of Alexander the Great, when Greek became a medium of communication throughout the entire Orient. As a spoken language this common dialect, *κοινή διάλεκτος*, received its peculiar complexion in various countries under the influence of the native languages with which it came into contact.

1) Epp. II, 1, 86.

Thus in Alexandria it was modified by the social climate of that cosmopolitan city, especially by the literary Jews who made it the garb of Old Testament revelation in the Septuagint Version, which was read in the Orient and Occident by Jews and Gentiles.

The mother-tongue of Jesus and the apostles as of the Jews in Palestine in their day was most likely the West-Aramean dialect. The various opinions, according to which Christ had preached in Latin, or had conversed and preached chiefly in the language of the Septuagint, or had lectured to his disciples in Hebrew, have been advocated with more learning than wisdom. The truth is that all these languages were heard in Palestine beside the popular West-Aramean. Latin was spoken at Jerusalem and other military headquarters and seats of Roman officials, as in the residence of Pontius Pilate and in the camp of Emmaus. Hebrew was heard in the schools of Gamaliel and at Tiberias; it was read in the synagogues of Jerusalem and Capernaum, where it was translated to the congregation by interpreters, one verse at a time of the Thora and three verses at a time of Prophets; many prayers and benedictions were said in Hebrew, and the Psalms were recited in the same language. Greek was spoken in the numerous Greek colonies in the northern part of Palestine and in Perea; it was the language of the Herodian court and the homes of the courtiers; the *κοινή διάλεκτος* was the English of the Hellenistic Jews, who kept up a continual intercourse with the native land of Israel, and many of whom sojourned or dwelled in Jerusalem and other cities of Palestine.¹⁾ And thus it was that while West-Aramean, of which a Judean, a Samaritan, and a Galilean²⁾ idiom were distinguishable, was the vernacular of the people of Palestine, the Greek that was there spoken

1) Acts 2, 8—11. and 6, 1. 7. It appears from the Greek names of the deacons chosen on that occasion that all of them were Hellenists.

2) Mark 14, 70. "Thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto."

and which the Apostles and Evangelists wrote was tinged with Hebrew, Aramean, and, to some extent, with Latin ingredients, as we shall have occasion to show in detail later on. But to maintain that because of this admixture of foreign elements the language of the New Testament must be termed a barbaric idiom, a mongrel dialect, as compared with the Greek of Homer or Aristophanes, is as little consistent with linguistic justice as it would be to degrade the English of Washington Irving or Fennimore Cooper because of certain elements in their vocabulary which are not found in Chaucer or Shakespeare. And, more than that, if the language of the New Testament must be termed degenerate and barbarous because of the occurrence of such words as *μαμωνᾶ* and *πάσχα*, *μῆ τῶν σαββάτων* and *σατανᾶς*, the English language of to-day is by far the most barbarous language spoken by any civilized nation on the face of the earth.

But to say that New Testament Greek is capable of apology, is saying very little. We claim and maintain far more in its behalf.

The language of Old Testament revelation was the peculiar language of a peculiar people, the people which God had chosen from all the nations of the earth, which he had hedged about and in many ways separated from the gentile nations round about them, in whose capital city he had established his sanctuary and worship, types and shadows prefiguring what should come to pass in the fulness of time. But on the other hand, that people was not domiciled in some secluded inland district of darkest Africa, remote from the rest of mankind, but right in the middle of the old world, in the depression of the Mediterranean, where a multitude of nations shared in making the greater part of the world's history, on or near the great thoroughfare of the commercial intercourse of the East and West, near neighbors to the great seafaring people of antiquity, the Phoenicians. That people had in its childhood sojourned in Egypt

and was later on exiled in the Assyrian and the Babylonian captivities, but not to continue there as a transplanted nation, but to return to its ancestral home, there to bide the fulfillment of the prophecies laid down and preserved in the "oracles of God," the preservation of which was one of the chief purposes of the national existence of Israel according to the flesh.¹⁾ Behold the wisdom of God in placing within the reach of many nations while in safe keeping with a peculiar people the Word which testified of the coming Messiah!

But when the fulness of time was come, when the promised Savior of mankind himself had publicly proclaimed, "It is finished!"²⁾ and when the story of the world's redemption and the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ crucified and the risen Lord was now to be disseminated through the world and handed downward through the ages and to the end of time, when God contemplated the addition of a New Testament to the Old, the language of the new Canon was not to be that of the Jewish people, but that language which was then more than any other the language of the civilized world, which the children of the better classes in the capital city of the world studied and spoke before their mother tongue,³⁾ without a fair knowledge of which no polite education was thought complete, and in which, through the Septuagint version, Moses and the Prophets had for centuries spoken to readers in many lands of the Savior of mankind. And yet it was not the *κοινή διάλεκτος* as it had come from the pen of Polybius, Plutarch, Strabo, Aelian, Lucian and others, which was to be the *Lingua Sacra* of the New Testament. Salvation was of the

1) Rom. 3, 2.

2) John 19, 30.

3) Quintilian, *Inst. Orator.* 1, 1: "A Graeco sermone puerum incipere malo . . . Non tamen hoc adeo superstitiose velim fieri, ut diu tantum loquatur Graece aut discat, *sicut plerisque moris est*;" i. e., I prefer to have the boy begin with the Greek language. . . . But this I would not have observed so scrupulously as to make him for a long time speak or learn Greek only, as is mostly the custom.

Jews, to whom pertained the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose were the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came.¹⁾ From the Jews, also, the records of salvation were to come as by divine inspiration, and the Greek of the New Testament was to bear the stamp and imprint of the country where Jesus lived and died, and of that church and people of which New Testament Christianity is, not in form, but as to its spiritual nature, the true continuation, its adherents living by the same faith in the same Savior as Abraham, their father according to the faith.²⁾ And how this Palestinian Greek was eminently qualified to serve the purpose for which it was chosen, and in what manner it was further modified under divine inspiration, we shall endeavor to show in the continuation of this treatise.

A. G.

(To be continued.)

Historical Theology.

CALVIN AND THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION.

In a letter dated March 25, 1557, and directed to Martin Schalling of Ratisbon in reply to an epistle addressed to him by Schalling on February 4 of the same year, Calvin, while he openly and firmly rejects the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, makes the following statement: "*Nor do I repudiate the Augsburg Confession, which in time past I have willingly and cheerfully subscribed according as the author himself has interpreted it.*"³⁾

1) Rom. 9, 4. 5.

2) John 8, 56. Rom. 4, 3. Gal. 3, 6. 7. 29.

3) *Nec vero Augustanam confessionem repudio, cui pridem volens ac libens subscripsi, sicuti eam autor ipse interpretatus est.* Calvin's opera, ed. Baum, Cunitz, Reuss, vol. XVI, p. 430.