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The Greek Style of St. Paul.

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Readers of Peake's lecture on 'Paul the Apostle: his Personality and Achievement,' reprinted in the *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, 1928, will recall his reference to the opinion expressed by Wilamowitz-Moellendorff on St. Paul as 'a classic of Hellenism.'

This was a striking testimony from one of the most brilliant and learned of German classical scholars given in *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, 232 (1912, Leipzig-Berlin). It is quoted with approval by Johannes Weiss in his *History of Primitive Christianity*, which has recently been translated under that title from the original to the great benefit of English readers, and contains a penetrating study of Pauline style by one of the most enlightened critics of the Apostle's writing. It is worth while to turn to Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's critique. He believed that while St. Paul never borrowed directly from Hellenic culture, yet there could have been no St. Paul without Hellenism. His textbook was the Greek Bible, and he thought only in Greek, while remaining to the end 'a Jew, as Jesus Christ was a Jew . . . he is great because of what he inherited from his own people, but more especially because of what is particularly his own self as opposed to the Greek.' He then proceeds to point out that his Greek has nothing in common with any school or model, but 'flows straight from the heart, clumsily, a hasty sputter, yet real Greek—no translation from the Aramaic, like the sayings of Jesus.' The phrasing suggests a mountain stream moving to a definite goal but in its course broken by interposing stones into eddies and twists. This may be accepted as a vivid figure of St. Paul's style, especially in the two Corinthian Epistles where the soul of the Apostle throbbing with varied emotions of sorrow and joy, sternness and gentleness, speaks now in tones of remonstrance and strong condemnation and now in those of gratitude and hope. There is no parallel to his Greek style in his predecessors or in contemporary Hellenistic writers. Philo of Alexandria (died *c.* A.D. 41) has often been brought into comparison with Paul, and Prof. A. D. Nock in his recent *St. Paul* has made a well-balanced statement of the relationship between them. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, who gives a brief critique of Philo immediately preceding that of St. Paul, expresses an unfavourable opinion of him. His Judaism appears to be half-hearted: he puts on two different masks in his endeavour to present the Torah in terms of Greek philosophy to his contemporaries, and in this way discloses his immunity from the fanaticism of his compatriots. The faith of his fathers sinks into the background, while he displays himself to the public at large as a scholar used to all the forms of philosophic writers in a style which is 'the same throughout, grandiose, rhetorical, well-constructed, overflowing with words, hardly the first beginnings of Atticism, a link between Posidonius and Plutarch if such a link could be constructed.' Others take a more favourable view of Philo, but that he influenced St. Paul has never been established, though it is not unlikely that the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Fourth Gospel owed something to the teaching of the Jewish Alexandrian school, even if certain elements in the Philonic system—such as his view of the Logos—were entirely alien to Christian thought. Philo is an imitator of Greek models both in thought and style, while St. Paul's style is all his own. None of the epithets applied to Philo by Wilamowitz-Moellendorff could be fitly used of the Apostle's style. His familiarity with the LXX left its mark on his diction, especially the Wisdom writers, whose exposition of ethical maxims is set forth in the typically Semitic forms of parallelism and antithesis. Perhaps actual Semitisms are less noticeable in St. Paul than in St. Mark and the other Synoptists and the Fourth Gospel. Some mannerisms, such as his extended use of the preposition ἐν (often like the Hebrew בְּ), and the use of the genitive of definition in such phrases as θάνατος σταυροῦ, are typically Semitic (see for others, Moulton and Howard *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ii. 413–485).

What, then, entitled the Apostle to the place of a 'classic'? Certain it is that the form of his writings, the Epistle, was a new feature. It is not a personal letter like the papyri letters: even the private letter to Philemon has a certain carefulness of expression as befitting a judgment of momentous import on an aspect of the Christian ethic. 'Nor is it literature, it is some inimitable mixture,' says Wilamowitz-Moellendorff: but I question if he does not go too far in adding, 'he has no artistic vein.' He deprecates and counters the obvious objection that may be raised against this verdict

from the example of the Hymn of Love which has to most readers more than a touch of artistry: for he considers that he employs the same 'rhetorical figures' which are used in the speech of Agathon in Plato's *Symposium*—an interesting reference to which we shall return—but, on the other hand, confesses that 'the formlessness of his style is refreshing in a world of conventional forms, polished beauty and platitudes.' He adds the opinion which will not carry conviction to all minds that Plato, while he would have acknowledged the value of Paul's religious personality, would have been out of sympathy with him because of his lack of form and because he was not a Greek.

It has to be admitted that there is a lack of regularity and smoothness in the sentences of the Apostle and both *anacoluthon* and *aposiopesis* interrupt their grammatical construction. But here we may quote Jowett, who in his Preface to the *Dialogues of Plato*, p. xx, remarks on 'the ear and intelligence of the Greeks for long and complicated sentences which is rarely found in modern nations,' and adds that 'there was nothing shocking to the contemporary of Thucydides and Plato in anacolutha and repetitions,' though in later Greek the tendency was towards simplification and precision.

Deissmann always insisted on the non-literary style of the Apostle, *e.g.* in *Paulus* (Eng. Tr., *St. Paul*: *A Study in Social and Religious History*, 53). It was a sort of obsession with him that St. Paul was a man of the people and a member of the artisan non-literary classes, explaining his 'large letters' (Gal 6^{11}) as the writing of a workman's hand deformed by toil. Yet he separates him from the proletarian class, and admits that the evidence of contemporary papyri reveals a superiority in his vocabulary which lifts him above colloquialism. This is certainly a noteworthy feature of his style: *e.g.*, in 1 Co 13 we find at least nine expressions which are without parallel in the Greek Testament. By all students this chapter and the closing verses of Ro $8^{31ff.}$ are singled out as showing marks of careful workmanship and suggest a certain deliberateness in the choice of words and real literary craftsmanship. It is, in fact, the variety of his vocabulary which rather discounts the argument based on the number of *hapax legomena* in the Pastoral Epistles which has been often urged against the authenticity of those writings. Nägeli's monograph on the 'word-treasury' of the Pauline writings illustrates the wealth of the Pauline word-system. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff concludes by the statement that the classics created classics only on Latin soil, while Greek had long passed its artistic prime, even if Paul, Epictetus, and Plotinus wrote in that language from the heart.

If, then, the evidence of style leads to the conclusion that Pauline Greek is that of his age, when the Greek language had been and continued to be subject to the influences arising out of the mingling of races in the Græco-Roman world, it yet remains an individual achievement in the Epistles, which became a powerful medium of direct personal appeal. Exposition and doctrine found expression in terms which were accompanied by entreaty, exhortation, reproof, condemnation, and judgment as the conditions of the community required or evoked. Never was there a clearer example of the truth that 'the style is the man.' The Greek may be faulty, broken, rapid: yet the writer rises at times to artistry of a remarkable order while his spiritual intensity will ever seem to be worth more than classic ease and elegance. Jowett considered that an 'interminable marsh' succeeded the classic age of Greek literature: 'only in Plutarch, in Lucian, in Longinus, in the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Julian, in some of the Christian Fathers are there any traces of good sense or originality or any power of arousing the interest of later ages.' The nature of the language in which the New Testament was written does not enter into his survey: but it is to be remarked that in his introduction to *The Dialogues of Plato* he frequently adduces parallels with St. Paul, especially in the group which contains the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. And here one may quote the testimony of Edward Norden in his *Die griechische Kunstprosa* (quoted by J. Weiss *op. cit.*), who in speaking of the noble earnestness and enthusiasm of the Apostle adds that 'the diction of the Apostle in such forms as 1 Co 13 and Ro $8^{31ff.}$ rises to the height of the Platonic *Phaedrus*.'

It is sometimes stated that St. Paul's quotations, like those from Menander in 1 Co 15^{33} and Epimenides in Tit 12, are mere popular tags, and the quotation from Aratus of Soli (or possibly from the Hymn of Cleanthes)—*τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν* (Ac 17^{28})—may be due to Luke his reporter. But it is surely not impossible that St. Paul as a young man at Tarsus became acquainted with some of the Greek classics, and that if he listened to Stoic lecturers who had been trained in the school of Athenodorus of Tarsus, he would become acquainted with the thought of Plato, which influenced the Stoic creed, moral and religious. Undoubtedly, Stoicism left a mark alike on his mind and his language even if he never had actual contact with Seneca. The diatribes of Epictetus (died

c. A.D. 150), as recorded by Arrian, show traces of the influence of the N.T. writings and contain parallels in expression and thought, although there is no proof that Epictetus was well disposed towards Christianity or had read its literature. It is, of course, in the ethical teaching of St. Paul that we are reminded of the elements of Roman Stoicism, which had a healthy effect on the social life of the early empire.

The speech of Agathon given in the *Symposium*, referred to above, is on the theme of love and contains expressions which strike the reader as curious anticipations of St. Paul's treatment—*e.g.* 'love is our lord who sends courtesy and sends away discourtesy, who gives kindness ever and never gives unkindness, the friend of the good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the gods . . . regardful of the good, regardless of the evil—saviour, pilot, comrade, helper, glory of gods and men, leader best and brightest, in whose footsteps let every man follow . . .' (Jowett's translation). But Plato rises to a greater height in the speech of Diotima as reported by Socrates, where love attains the perfect vision of beauty by an ascent 'from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty and at last knows what the essence of beauty is' (*ib.*). Perhaps, however, the closing prayer of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* affords a clearer parallel with St. Paul's distinction between flesh and spirit when he says, 'Give me beauty in the inward soul and may the outward and inward man be at one' (*ib.*). Another parallel with the noblest forms of classical thought may be quoted from the *Antigone* (454–5) of Sophocles: here the heroine in a famous passage claims that 'the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven are more binding than mortal decrees'; similarly, St. Paul allows to the Gentile world without the law 'the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith' (Ro 2 [15]).

Such links with the deepest aspirations of the Greek mind are powerfully suggestive to those who believe with the Greek theologians that the Logos or Word-Reason of God was leading man's spirit through the ages to Christ, informing the intellect of prophet and philosopher—an Isaiah and a Plato alike. τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια (2 Co 4[18]) is the essence of Platonism, and when we pass from St. Paul to Plotinus, we discover that the Greek language is the medium of a mystic philosophy which powerfully influenced mediæval thinkers like the Areopagite and Scotus Erigena and to-day is the subject of the fresh and absorbing contemplation of many minds.

It is, then, on the ground not of the Greek style of the Apostle but of his passionate gospel of redemption set forth in a popular idiom but bearing the stamp of his own individuality that the judgment of Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and others may be justified that St. Paul was 'a classic of Hellenism.' The Epistle, a new form of literature, was fashioned by a master hand into

> . . . a trumpet; whence he blew
> Soul-animating strains—alas, too few!

At his best, as E. Norden says, he gave to the Greek language 'that which for hundreds of years had been lost, the earnestness and enthusiasm of a man who has been inspired by union with his God, such as we only meet in Plato and, finally, Cleanthes.' But the Platonic vision of reality and the Stoic hymn to the First of the Immortals have given way to something more profound and more satisfying for human need. Plato had indeed sublimated the Greek term ἔρως and setting it free from degrading associations, identified it with the contemplation of the Eternal Beauty. St. Paul chose another term ἀγάπη and brought it into harmony with the concept of personality which was never grasped by Greek philosophy. God was a Person, and God was Love. Love was greater than γνῶσις, the central motive of all the mystery cults, and in the Person of Christ in whom the union of God and man was perfected the redemption of the world was achieved. His was the Name above every name at which 'every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.' Henceforth 'every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' To the advocacy of this truth which had made him a new man, the Apostle dedicated his life, leaving as the monument of his labours the letters which hold a secure place in the supreme literature of the world.