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THE VOCABULARY OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS. I

THE distinctive characteristics of the Epistle to the Hebrews in point of style and method of treatment are so pronounced that the bulk of modern expositors concur in ascribing its grand revelation of the priesthood of Christ, with its correlative postulates, to another writer than the Apostle of the Gentiles. In so doing, be it noted, they are not impugning its canonicity, but assessing the internal evidence that it contains indicative of its origin. Many erroneously fancy that the critical judgment is a faculty of modern birth; but Origen long ago felt its weight in the case in hand and Luther and Calvin likewise. There is an Alexandrian tincture in the diction, an elaboration in the phraseology, an expanding, unbroken sequence in the argument, which bespeak a mind steeped indeed in the lore of the Old Testament and profoundly convinced of its unique authority, yet trained in a rhetorical and grammatic school of another order. And if Blass's contention be well founded that the author of Hebrews alone among New Testament writers complies very extensively with the Isocratean usage of avoiding hiatus for the sake of euphony, his idiosyncrasy would seem to be fairly established. We may perhaps agree with Erasmus that the matter is Pauline, but the style unlike his, and then the idea of collaboration, as not incompatible with inspiration, may suggest itself to us; for there were obvious reasons why, if Paul were led to address a special letter to his kinsmen after the flesh, his identity should remain concealed. Yet the heart of the mystery surely consists in the fact that the framer of such a majestic fabric, immortally instinct with grace and power, and, as his greetings evince, well known to his first readers, should ever have become anonymous or sunk into the gulf of oblivion.

But it is not our present purpose to canvass the authorship of the Epistle. All that we design is to pass some of its more notable wordings under review. We begin with a sample which the writer shares with the apostle Peter in Acts (iii. 15, v. 31).

1. ἀρχηγός (ii. 10, xii. 2). This vocable hovers between the two senses of *Chieftain* and *Founder*, according as the main stress is laid on the first or the second syllable respectively.

Both Greek literature in general and the papyri lend support to either concept. In the familiar phrase "Captain of our salvation" applied to Christ, the former interpretation clearly predominates, as in the version "Prince and Saviour" from the second passage in Acts. Some may discover therein a reference to Joshua, the Saviour's namesake, the very type of an invincible leader. The word does not indeed occur in the LXX where we might expect it to render *sar* in the vision of a divine Commander-in-chief accorded to Joshua outside Jericho; but elsewhere it is freely used of the princes of the twelve tribes, of Jephthah's call to rulership and in other connections.

When followed, however, by a possessive case, the notion of a *prime agent* or *factor* prevails. That exegesis unquestionably accords best with Peter's earlier phrase, δ ἀρχηγός τῆς ζωῆς and those met with in Hebrews, δ ἀρχηγός τῆς σωτηρίας and τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγός καὶ τελειωτής, as well as with the Vulgate *auctor*. In fact, Plato (*Crat.* 401) and Polybius (i. 67) conjoin ἀρχηγός with αἴτιος and Athenaeus interchanges it with *auctor primus*. Cf. Philo's expression (*De Mosis Vita*, 3, 28), ἀρχηγικώτατον αἴτιον. Quotations might be multiplied in which the word bears the meaning of *originator* or *initiator*. For example, Aristotle (983) calls Thales the ἀρχηγός of philosophy and Josephus (*Contra App.* i. 19) terms Noah δ τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν ἀρχηγός. Like its cognate ἀρχηγέτης it is especially appropriated to *pioneers* and *founders of states*, or such "pathfinders" as the historical Columbus or his mythical progenitor Jason. So Isocrates (53) designates the ancestral Spartans, and Plutarch (*Mor.* 1135) dubs the Phrygian Olympus ἀρχηγός τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς μουσικῆς, and entitles Dionysus ἀρότου καὶ σπόρου ἀρχηγός (ib. 299) and Hephaestus (958) πασῶν τεχνῶν ἀρχηγός. The LXX was not unaware of this connotation; for in Mic. i. 13 ἀρχηγός τῆς ἁμαρτίας = *a pioneer in sin*, much as Menander speaks of night (*Fr.* 402) as κακῶν ἀρχηγός, *a precursor of ills*. We take it then that Christ is thus set forth as the Source both of life and salvation and the Author and Consummator of our faith. So Chrysostom expounds the appellation.

2. μετριοπαθεῖν (v. 2). This striking expression traces its genesis to the Peripatetic philosophy, in contradistinction from the Stoic's affectation of a marble apathy of demeanour. Within the bounds of self-respect it advocates a tolerant or sympathetic posture of mind in respect of provocations from others or

misfortunes that may have overtaken them. The term *μετριοπάθεια* is accordingly coupled with *πραότης* and *ἐπιεικεία*, especially by Plutarch, with whom it is a favourite locution. The noble portrait of Achilles limned by Euripides in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (920 f.) presents its prototype:

ἐπίσταμαι δὲ τοῖς κακοῖσι τ' ἀσχαλᾶν
μετρίως τε χάρειν τοῖσιν ἐξωγκομένοις.

Such a blend of forbearance and condolence was ideally requisite in God's high-priest under the old dispensation, both in his sacerdotal and judicial functions. But human infirmity marred the fair vision, till the Eternal Priest, Perfection's real Counterpart, trod the scene. For (and this renders the word almost untranslatable) *μετριοπάθεια* is the golden mean between indifference and mawkish sentimentality. Aaron's fond compliance with Israel's masked idolatry and Eli's lax indulgence of his profligate sons were gross abuses of their lofty office. The true high-priest's long-suffering will be *duly* measured, proportionate to the case in hand and the ignorance or waywardness he has to deal with; it will be adjusted to an equitable standard and free from extravagance no less than insensibility; not gushing, yet, unfeignedly gracious.¹ And who save Immanuel meets these requisitions entirely? *To treat considerately* is an inadequate rendering, yet we can devise no better.

3. *κριτικός* (iv. 12). This adjective with its objective genitive, often wrongly construed as a noun, also reverts to Aristotelian phraseology. KRI, as a Sanskrit root=*to sift*, and the whole group of classical words, of which the Latin *cernere* and the Greek *κρίνειν* and *κρίσις* are samples, reproduce more or less their etymological signification. The divine Word is here affirmed to be *κριτικός ἐνθυμησέων καὶ ἐννοιῶν καρδίας*, *discriminative* of the heart's thoughts and intents. This construction is somewhat rare; but the Stagirite supplies an instance of it in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (vi. 11), where treating *συγγνώμη* as a species of forbearance he styles it *γνώμη κριτική τοῦ ἐπιεικοῦς ὀρθή*, a judgment correct in its appreciation of the equitable. Elsewhere he calls *γεῦσις τῶν σχημάτων* (properties) *κριτικωτάτη*. Plutarch also borrows from Aristotle the assumption of a *κοινὴ αἴσθησις ἢ τῶν συνθέτων εἰδῶν κριτική*

¹ Cf. Aristeas, 256: τὰ πρὸς τὸν καιρὸν πρᾶσσειν δεόντως μετριοπαθῆ καθεστῶτα.

(*Mor.* 900), and we read in Vettius Valens of certain dispositions (7) as *κακῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν κριτικοί*. In all these examples it is a sifting process that is at work; and what winnowing-fan can vie with the gales of the Spirit blowing through the Word?

4. *τραχηλίζειν* (iv. 13). In pursuance of his vivid photography of that Word in its penetrative and unmasking potency, already half-personified, the writer proceeds to fasten our gaze on the omniscient Searcher of hearts Himself, and employs the foregoing vocable to rivet the truth he is inculcating. The general bearing of his metaphor is obvious, but much difference of opinion has arisen as regards the precise allusion intended. The perf. part. *τραχηλισμένος* coupled with *γυμνός* clearly expresses a state of exposure to the divine scrutiny under which the whole field of being is laid bare. The surveillance predicated is absolutely exhaustive; nothing escapes its ken. But the image conveying this solemnising thought is by no means equally transparent. It puzzled the Greek Fathers themselves. Chrysostom's elucidation has its attractions, but lacks linguistic confirmation. He interprets it as depicting a flayed and suspended carcase hung up by the neck and stripped of all integuments or disguises. There would certainly seem to be a reference to the ritual of animal sacrifices, so familiarised to Jewish readers. From a passage in the *Characters* of Theophrastus (xxvii) it appears that the verb was used of bending back the neck of the victim for the fatal stroke; in which case the *laid open* of the R.V. would be a commendable version. Yet Philo makes use repeatedly of the word in a somewhat different application and of the strengthened form *ἐκτραχηλίζειν* too. His meaning is rather obscure, but in the passive voice its signification with him may be construed *exhausted*; for in the wrestler's art *τραχηλισμός* was a grip of the antagonist's throat akin to the bandit's *garrote*, rendering him limp and powerless. Thus he writes, *ὅπ' ἀπορίας τραχηλίζεται* (ii. 470); *ἀδυνατεῖ ὑπὸ ῥώμης δυνατωτέρας ἐκτραχηλιζόμενος* (ii. 413); and similarly Josephus (*B. J.* iv. 6), *ἐμφυλίῳ πολέμῳ τραχηλιζόμενοι*. This characteristic figure then may be held to represent either the denuded or helpless plight¹ of all created persons or forces when brought face to face with their Creator and Lord.

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¹ Plutarch's vivid snapshot (*Mor.* 998) of the sacrificial victim combines both ideas.