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II.

THAT CHRIST SPOKE GREEK.

I now proceed to deal with a very crucial question, as respects the subject under consideration. In what language, I venture to ask, was the *Sermon on the Mount* delivered? Most readers will doubtless be inclined at once to answer that it was in Aramaic. This is the almost universal opinion. The ablest and most elaborate works on this portion of Scripture, while touching upon every other point concerning it, quietly assume that its original language was Hebrew. In accordance, however, with the thesis I have undertaken to prove, I maintain the contrary, and affirm that the language used by our Lord on this great occasion was Greek; and that for the following reasons.

To *whom* was the discourse addressed? This question has obviously a most important bearing on the other as to the language in which it was spoken. Our Lord, of course, intended that his hearers generally should understand Him. He did not, therefore, employ a form of speech which, while it might be understood by some, would be unintelligible to others; but, ignoring provincial or local peculiarities of dialect, addressed them all in one common language.

Let us look, then, at the composition of his vast

audience, as that is suggested to us by St. Matthew. In the introduction to the great discourse recorded by that Evangelist, we read as follows (Chap. iv. 23-25): "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from *Decapolis*, and from *Jerusalem*, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan." And then we immediately read (Chap. v. 1, 2) that, "seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying," &c. There can be no doubt that the discourse was addressed to the whole assemblage, so far as the mere hearing of it was concerned. Several passages, indeed, such as Chapter v. 13; vi. 9, &c., indicate that our Lord spoke more immediately to his disciples. But it is also plain from other passages that He spoke so as to be heard and understood by the multitude at large; for we are told (Chap. vii. 28), that "when Jesus had ended these sayings, the *people* (*οἱ ὄχλοι*) were astonished at his doctrine"—thus proving that his words had come home to them all, and that they had listened with some degree of intelligence to the weighty instruction which He delivered.

Now, have we any reason to believe that the

inhabitants of Decapolis understood Hebrew? Is it not, on the contrary, well known that the ten cities which gave its name to that region were thoroughly Greek, and that vast numbers of the population were not even Jews by religious profession, but heathen? It is difficult to ascertain, with exactness, the particular ten cities which were included in the district; and not improbably the name continued while some of the places once comprehended under it had sunk into decay. But there is no doubt as to the leading cities, which were Gadara, Gerasa, Philadelphia, Hippos, Pella, and Scythopolis; and the important point to be noticed is that, as Josephus informs us, these were thoroughly Greek cities. He expressly gives that name to Gadara and Hippos (*Ἑλληνίδες εἰσὶ πόλεις*),¹ and he refers to the others in such terms as leave no doubt that the Greek element prevailed largely among their inhabitants.² Nothing, indeed, is more certain, or more generally agreed upon by critics, than that the region of Decapolis was occupied almost exclusively by heathen settlers, or by Hellenizing Jews. It follows, therefore, as a matter of course, that as the Sermon on the Mount was intended to be understood, and actually *was* understood by inhabitants of that district among others, it must have been delivered in the Greek language.

This conclusion is greatly strengthened when we turn to the parallel passage in St. Luke. At Chapter vi. 17, we find the persons who were addressed described as follows:—"And he came down with them (the apostles), and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people

¹ *Antiq.* xvii. 11, 4

² *Wars*, ii. 18, 1.

out of all Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, which came to *hear* him, and to be healed of their diseases." We thus learn that among our Lord's audience on this occasion there were the inhabitants at once of Jerusalem and of Tyre and Sidon. What then was the language in which they were addressed? Will any one maintain that it was Hebrew, in the face of that clear evidence which we possess that Greek was the only language then generally known in the region of Tyre and Sidon? Let me quote only one passage from Josephus bearing upon this point. He has preserved¹ an edict of Mark Antony sent to the people of Tyre, which begins as follows: "Marcus Antonius imperator, to the magistrates, senate, and people of Tyre, sendeth greeting. I have sent you my decree, respecting which I will that ye take care that it be engraven in the public tables, in Roman and Greek letters, and that it stand engraven in the most conspicuous places, so as to be read by *all*." It is plain from this that Greek was the language of the district, and that no other was commonly used; since, in addition to the official Latin, Greek was the only tongue in which the edict was commanded to be published.

There are just two views which can be taken of that portion of the Gospels we have been considering. The sermon (or, if you will, sermons) referred to was spoken either in Hebrew or Greek. If any one says Greek, he admits all for which I plead. If, on the other hand, any one maintains that it was Hebrew, he is bound also to maintain that the in-

¹ *Antiq.* xiv. 12, 5.

habitants of Decapolis and Tyre and Sidon then understood that language. In that case, I beg to demand the proof of such an allegation. I venture humbly, but confidently, to affirm that no proof of the kind can be produced. Assumptions may, no doubt, be met with in several writers to the effect that what they call a Syro-Phœnician dialect was then prevalent in these regions ; but not a vestige of evidence is presented. On the contrary, Gesenius expressly states, in his elaborate treatise on the ancient language of Phœnicia, that, from the time of Alexander downwards, it was gradually encroached upon by the Greek, until at length it became altogether extinct.¹ He thinks, indeed, from the evidence of a few coins of uncertain date, that it continued to be used, *aliquo modo*, down to the times of the Antonines, but is very far from suggesting that it was generally employed among the people in the days of our Saviour. And even granting that this was so, it would still remain to be shewn that the Syro-Phœnician and Syro-Chaldaic dialects were identical, or, if different, which of them was now adopted by our Lord, since He had hearers at this time both from Tyre and Jerusalem. The truth is, as I trust has been sufficiently proved, that neither the one nor the other was employed ; but that the very Greek in substance which is still preserved in the Gospels—the peculiar orientalized Greek of Syria and Palestine, bearing throughout such a strong Shemitic colouring, and embalming, so to speak, some such Aramaic terms as *Raca* and *Morè*, which had, most naturally, forced their way into the lan-

¹ *Scripture Linguæque Phœnicia Monumenta*, p. 339.

guage—was made use of by our Lord in this the solemn and impressive commencement of his public ministry.

But then, as every one must feel, this is a *ruling* case with respect to the question under discussion. If our Lord spoke in Greek on the occasion referred to, it is certain that the inhabitants of Judæa and Jerusalem were thoroughly familiar with that language; and it would therefore be quite arbitrary to conclude that the Saviour ever employed any other in addressing them, unless a special intimation to that effect is made by the Evangelists, or some circumstances present themselves which render it probable that a departure from his usual practice did at any time take place.

Let me next direct the reader's attention to those passages in the Gospels in which our Saviour on the one hand, or his hearers on the other, are represented as making *quotations* from the Old Testament. The question which here occurs is, In what language were these quotations made? To this question it may be answered: (1) That they were made directly from the original text in ancient Hebrew; or (2) that they were made in Aramaic; or (3) that they were made, as they still stand in the Gospels, from the Greek Version of the Septuagint. Let us examine these three hypotheses, with the view of ascertaining which of them alone can be regarded as consistent with the facts of the case.

First, then, there is probably a vague notion in the minds of ordinary readers that the citations referred to were made from the ancient Hebrew text. When we read, as we so often do, of the appeals

which our Lord and those around Him made to the *Scriptures*, we think, of course, of the Old Testament; and the impression is perhaps received and rested in, that the references were made to the original Hebrew. But a very few words are sufficient to refute this opinion. It is certain that, long before the birth of our Saviour, the ancient Hebrew had ceased to be generally known or used among the people. Every scholar admits that, at least a century before the commencement of our era, the old language of the Jews had sunk into disuse; and that, while it still continued to be studied by the learned as being the language of inspiration, it was, in the days of Christ, utterly unknown to the great majority of the nation. This being the case, it could not possibly have been in the ancient Hebrew that those quotations were made which occur in our Lord's addresses to the multitude, or which they employed at times in conversation with Him. Refer for an example of the first kind of quotation to Mark xii. 35-37, in which passage the Saviour is set before us teaching publicly in the temple, and introducing an Old Testament text into his discourse. "And the common people," we read (ὁ πῶλος ὄχλος, who certainly knew nothing of ancient Hebrew), "heard him gladly." Next, let us view the matter conversely, when the quotation from the Old Testament is made, not by Christ, but by the people. Turning to John vi. 31 for an example, we find the *multitude* (ὁ ὄχλος, Verse 24) addressing the Saviour in these words: "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert, as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." They thus quoted familiarly from the Book of

Psalms ; and in what language was the quotation made ? Certainly not in the *ancient* Hebrew, for, as all authorities admit, that language was then totally unknown to the great body of the people.

But, abandoning this first hypothesis, many will be inclined to take their stand on the second, and maintain that such quotations were made in Aramaic. This, however, may be shewn to be an equally untenable opinion with the former. The truth is, we have no satisfactory evidence that a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures *ever* existed in the Syro-Chaldaic language. Frequent reference is, no doubt, made in the writings of modern Biblical scholars to ancient Targums, or translations and paraphrases of the Old Testament, which were formerly in use among the Jews. But when we come to examine the matter, we find it is a mere assumption that these existed in the days of our Saviour ; or that, if known at all, they circulated in a *written* form among the people. Can it be supposed that it was to such Versions our Lord referred when He said to his hearers, " Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they which testify of me " ? These words evidently imply (whether the imperative or indicative rendering of ἐπευνᾶτε be adopted) that the people had easy and familiar access to the inspired writings, and that they could read and compare them, from beginning to end, without any dependence on rabbinical or sacerdotal aid. There must, therefore, at the time, have been some written Version current among the people. But, as has been already said, there is no evidence whatever that any such Version existed in the Ara-

maic language. It seems quite inconceivable that, if the Old Testament had then been in the hands of the Jews in an Aramaic form (as was of course the case if Christ's exhortation to "search the scriptures" referred to the sacred books in that language), all traces of such a Version should so utterly have disappeared. In fact, there is nothing except the necessity, which certainly then existed, of the people of Palestine possessing the Scriptures in a language more generally known than the ancient Hebrew, that gives any countenance to the idea that an Aramaic Version of the Old Testament was then current among them; and we have now to consider whether that necessity may not be shewn to have been met in another and better way than by assuming the existence of a translation which has left no trace, either of its origin or its influence, in the literature of antiquity.

I hold, then, that when the Saviour quoted the Scriptures of the Old Testament in his popular addresses, or when the people did so in conversation with Him and his disciples, such quotations were invariably made, more or less exactly, from the Septuagint translation. We know that this Greek Version of the whole of the ancient Scriptures had existed for long before the times of Christ. And we possess the clearest evidence, both in the writings of Josephus and in the several books of the New Testament, how commonly it was employed by the Jews of Palestine. We find, in fact, that most of the quotations which occur in the Gospels agree almost *verbatim* with the rendering of the Septuagint; and that those are very few indeed which seem to depart

from its phraseology, and follow more closely the original text. There is not a single passage presenting such variations but may, after all, be regarded as derived from the Greek Version. The differences in question are easily accounted for on the ground (1) of the citations having been made from memory ; or (2) of a somewhat different text of the LXX. having been followed from that which is current at the present day ; or (3) by taking into consideration the undoubted fact that our Lord and his apostles often introduced into their quotations from the Old Testament a few words which did not exist in the original, or gave the passage quoted a higher and more special significance than it at first possessed.

And thus at length we understand how the Saviour could have addressed to the Jews at large such a precept as, "Search the scriptures." That precept, as all must acknowledge, could not have referred to the inspired books in their original language. And even though it be admitted, without sufficient evidence, that written Chaldee translations of some parts of Scripture then existed, that does not much help the matter ; for Chaldee, such as that of the most ancient Targums, was certainly not then the familiar language of the Jewish people. We conclude, therefore, that the words of our Lord above referred to pointed to the Septuagint ; that his quotations were made from it ; that it then constituted the *People's Bible* in Palestine, in fact ; and that, therefore, they must have been thoroughly familiar with the Greek language.

Proceeding now to the Acts of the Apostles, we

and every Chapter giving more or less support to the proposition which I have undertaken to establish. Only a few out of many available passages can here be noticed.

First, then—In what language did Peter deliver his great sermon (Chap. ii. 14–36) on the day of Pentecost? It is plain that he addressed the whole multitude at one time, and in the same language. It is also plain from the result—the conversion of no fewer than three thousand—that they all understood him. He must, therefore, have used a form of speech with which they were all of them familiarly acquainted. What, then, was that form of speech? Was it the Greek or Aramaic which was the language common to all those “Jews out of every nation under heaven”? This is surely a question which it is not difficult to answer. I should think that, if any argument at all is required on the subject, there is enough to convince every one that Aramaic could not have been the language in question in the fact that we find, in the list of those addressed by the apostle, “men of Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes.” Will any one maintain that these persons understood and employed Hebrew?

The reader should carefully observe that both the native and foreign Jews were *simultaneously* addressed on this occasion. This appears very plainly, among other proofs, from the exordium of the Apostle. He begins his address thus: “Ye men of Judæa (*Ἄνδρες Ἰουδαῖοι*), and all ye that dwell in Jerusalem (*καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἅπαντες*), be this known unto you,” &c.; and by these different appellations he can only mean, as is agreed by all critics, the native

Jews who were habitually resident in Jerusalem, and the temporary sojourners from other countries. Both classes were among his hearers, both were addressed in the same speech, and that speech was delivered in the Greek language. Can any one of these statements be controverted or refuted? If so, let the argument which I build upon them fall to the ground. But if not so—if it must be admitted that we have here a clear instance of a Jew of Palestine addressing, among others, Jews of Palestine in the Greek language, and so well understood by them that a vast multitude repented and believed—the inference is surely manifest that Greek was then thoroughly familiar to the inhabitants of that country.

Advancing now to Chapter vii., we find ourselves upon ground which can hardly be disputed. The reasons for holding that the speech of Stephen before the Sanhedrin was delivered in Greek are very obvious and decisive. We may notice (1) that his accusers were unquestionably men to the majority of whom the Greek language only was vernacular. They consisted of Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others (Chap. vi. 9) — foreign Jews accustomed to the use of Greek, and to whom, as a rule, Hebrew was utterly unknown. If, then, these men were present, as many of them would needs be, when St. Stephen made his defence before the Sanhedrin, the speech which he delivered must have been in Greek, else it would have been to them unintelligible. Again, (2) it is a necessary inference, from the verse which has been referred to, that Stephen was himself one who was in the habit of employing the Greek language. “There arose certain,” we read, “of the

synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen." It naturally follows that, as he and they had been accustomed to dispute together in Greek, the speech which he now delivered in self-defence would also be in the Greek language. And again, (3) if we look at the address itself, we find that it bears plain evidence of having been spoken in Greek. It consists, in substance, of a cento of extracts from different parts of the Septuagint, strung together in a loose, yet masterly, manner. And nothing, surely, could be more improbable, than either that Luke adopted the version of the LXX. so often in this chapter differing from the Hebrew (see, *e.g.*, *Verses* 14 and 44), while Stephen really cited the original Scriptures; or that Stephen himself, in quoting the Hebrew, altered it as we find in the Greek version of his words. One or other of these improbabilities must be maintained by all who hold that Hebrew was employed by the proto-martyr on this occasion; and there are probably few readers who will be inclined to adopt either of the alternatives in preference to the natural conclusion reached on other grounds, that Stephen now made use of the Greek language.

Here then, again, we have a decisive case. We find that a long and important speech, addressed to the most national and distinctive of Jewish courts, was delivered in Greek. There can be no doubt that it was an *open* assembly in which Stephen now pleaded; that vast multitudes of the common people were present; that he addressed himself to them all

(*Verse 2, ἄνδρες, ἀδελφοί, καὶ πατέρες*); that all perfectly understood him (see *Verse 54*); and that, therefore, the inhabitants of Jerusalem in general were familiarly acquainted with the Greek language.

Turning now to Chapter xv., we once more find the clearest and most conclusive evidence in favour of the proposition sought to be established. The speeches of St. Peter and St. James before the assembly which had been convened in Jerusalem to deliberate on the point then threatening to break the peace of the Church, as well as the letter by which the mind of the council was conveyed to the disputants, may all be shewn by the most satisfactory proof to have been spoken and written in the form in which we still possess them—the Greek language. We naturally suppose, indeed, that the various speakers would make use of the same language that we have always hitherto seen them employing, and not Hebrew, the use of which would have necessitated the employment of an interpreter to some of the audience, a functionary of whom not the least trace is to be found in the narrative. And the speech of James, who seems to have spoken as president, contains positive evidence that Greek was the language employed. It includes a very remarkable citation from the Book of Amos, differing widely towards the close from the Hebrew original, but agreeing as nearly with the Septuagint as is usually the case with those *memoriter* quotations which occur so frequently in the New Testament. Now, it is quite impossible to believe that the historian would have attributed the words of the LXX. to the Apostle on this occasion, had not St. James actually employed them, since, in fact,

the weight of the argument greatly depends on that part of the citation which differs from the Hebrew text. It is therefore evident that the speech must have been delivered in the Greek language.

Again, that the epistle agreed upon by the assembly to be sent to "the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia" (*Verse* 23), was written in Greek, is too plain to require any remark. No one can possibly deny it who considers either its form, which is in the regular epistolary style of the Greeks, or the persons to whom it was addressed, who are expressly described as Gentiles. The formula of salutation with which it opens (*Χαίρειν*) is the same with that contained in the letter of Claudius Lysias to Felix (Chap. xxiii. 26), occurring in the New Testament only once again in the Epistle of James; and, like both these documents, the letter in question was undoubtedly composed in the Greek language.

Once more, let me refer to the narrative contained in Chapter xxi. *Verse* 27, and the following verses. It happened that some Jews from Asia, who had, doubtless, been among the former opponents of St. Paul at Ephesus (Chap. xx. 19), were then in Jerusalem, and, seeing him in the temple, seized the opportunity of exciting the minds of the people at large against him. Laying hold of him where he stood, and evidently determined in the most summary manner to gratify the hatred which they bore him, they cried out, "Men of Israel, help: This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath pol-

luted this holy place." Now, in what language, I would ask, was this exclamation uttered? The answer is obvious that it was in Greek. For, from whom did the words proceed? From men of Asia—inhabitants of Ephesus or the neighbourhood—persons to whom the Greek only was vernacular, and of whose knowledge of Hebrew, ancient or modern, not a tittle of evidence can be produced. It is easy, no doubt, to assume that these foreign Jews did understand and employ Aramaic. But until some proof is advanced such an assertion deserves no consideration. And I venture to maintain that no proof *can* be produced that the inhabitants of the district of Ephesus then made use of any other language than Greek. In Greek, therefore, I hold their appeal was now made to the Jewish multitude in Jerusalem. These, we find, were at once roused by the outcry of their brethren from Asia; and as it is impossible even for those writers who are fondest of the hypothesis of an interpreter on other occasions, to imagine that one was employed at this time, it follows, beyond all question, that the common people of the city, the very rabble (*ὁ ὄχλος*, *Verse 27*), were then perfectly familiar with the Greek language.

Objections to this conclusion, which have been derived from some passages in the Acts, will be afterwards shewn to be groundless, and to melt away, on consideration, into corroborations of the position which has already been so abundantly established.

A. ROBERTS.