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1 COR. 13¹², βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι

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MOST modern interpreters of this passage would probably agree on a rendering something like this: "Now we see (reality, the life eternal) as the reflection in a mirror, as an enigma." There is, to be sure, a tendency to emphasize the imperfection of the image in ancient mirrors generally, and particularly in those which the Corinthians could purchase.¹ Robertson and Plummer see an incongruity in the mixture of metaphors, *βλέπομεν ἐν αἰνίγματι*, and Preuschen² suggests the rejection of the last two words. All modern interpretations, however, agree in giving to *αἰνίγμα* its negative signification, a dark saying, a riddle, something which baffles. I wish to suggest that the positive meaning of *αἰνίγμα*, as the expression of an underlying truth, should be included in the interpretation; that there are reasons for thinking that St. Paul meant it to be understood thus, and that the passage thereby gains in significance.

I

The positive signification of *αἰνίγμα*, and of words derived from the same root, is found, along with the negative meaning,

¹ This introduces a modern idea into the interpretation. That the ancients did not think of the imperfection of the image in a mirror is indicated by Jas. 1 23, ἀνδρὶ κατανοοῦντι τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ, κατενόησεν γὰρ ἑαυτόν.

² Bachmann, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*² (1910), 406, Anm. 2.

all through the history of the Greek language. It is, in fact, the primary meaning. The negative signification, an obscure saying, is not explicit in the word, but is a secondary meaning, derived by implication from the tendency of the *αἶνγμα* to be obscure. The primary meaning, which was preserved long after the time of St. Paul, has nothing in common with our word, 'enigmatical'. This is clear from the derivation of the word. *αἶνγμα* is a regularly-formed noun denoting result, from the verb *αἰνίττομαι*. This verb, a by-form of *αἰνίζομαι*, means, literally, 'produce an *αἶνος*.' Now an *αἶνος* was a fable, whose purpose was to convey a truth by means of a tale, that is, to give a picture of a truth.³

The words *αἰνίττομαι*, *αἶνγμα*, *αἰνγμός*, and the like, while often implying obscure utterance, still preserve the idea of figurative or illustrated truth: Arist. *Rhet.* 3, 1405b 4, *μεταφοραὶ γὰρ αἰνίττονται*, 'metaphors suggest the truth'—in the context Aristotle cannot mean that they obscure the truth. This positive connotation of the word is supported by some of the definitions given by the old lexicographers. Hesychius explains *αἶνγμα* as *ἐμφατον*, which is the implication of a meaning not explicit in the words. Timaeus, *Lex.*, compares it with *ὑπόνοια*, 'hidden meaning', or with an allegory. *Etym. Mag.* 36, 31, explains it as a parable. Sometimes the positive overshadows the negative meaning: Ar. *Peace*, 47, 'The dung-beetle means (*αἰνίττει εἰς*) Cleon', that is, Cleon resembles the dung-beetle. In fact, Hesychius equates *αἰνίσματα* with *ὁμοιώματα*, 'resemblances'. In Ar. *Frogs*, 61, Dionysus cannot describe to Heracles his yearning for Euripides, but he makes his meaning clear *δι' αἰνγμῶν*, 'by an illustration' as the sequel proves, for he compares his own longings to Heracles' craving for pea-soup. *αἶνγμα*, therefore, in its positive aspect expressed the semblance of the truth, but in the language of fancy. This meaning it kept till the end of antiquity: Arethas,

³ The assumed connection of *αἶνγμα* with the adjective *αἰδός*, 'dread' (Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1922), is not recognized by etymologists of authority.

On the Apocalypse, Ch. XVII, p. 707 D, ἡ λευκὴ στολὴ αἴνιγμα τοῦ κεκαθάρθαι, 'The white robe is the symbol of the purified state.'⁴

II

The evidence just presented merely shows that αἴνιγμα along with its negative meaning of 'dark saying' may also have the positive signification of a real truth expressed in terms that describe a concrete instance, that is, truth clothed in the language of imagery. We must next investigate the possibility or the probability that St. Paul had in mind also this positive meaning. The first evidence that we find in favor of this view is in certain of the early translations. In the Bohairic version our passage is interpreted as meaning, "For now we see through (by means of) a glass (mirror) in a likeness."⁵ The Sahidic rendering of ἐν αἰνίγματι means 'in an image'.⁶ In Syriac the Peshitta version is thus rendered in English: "Now we see as by means of a mirror in (or, by) a parable (or, allegory)."⁷ Of course this kind of evidence proves

⁴ Here the use of αἴνιγμα is almost as 'incongruous' as Robertson and Plummer find it in 1 Cor. 13 12. But to pass from 'symbolic statement' to 'symbol' is easy. In Num. 12 8 (see below, p. 235) the antithesis ἐν εἰδει(δε) αἰνιγμάτων indicates a similar transference of meaning from the sphere of language to that of sight.

⁵ *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect*, Oxford 1905, p. 179. The alternative renderings included in parentheses were given to me by Professor Hatch. See Note 7.

⁶ *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect*, Oxford 1920, p. 283, renders, 'in an outline'. Professor Bacon prefers 'in a figure'. The rendering, 'in an image', is that of Professor Hatch. See Note 7.

⁷ The translation is that of Professor W. H. P. Hatch of the Episcopal Theological School at Cambridge, who brought to my attention the Syriac version, and kindly gave me his renderings of the two Coptic versions. Professor Hatch also contributes the following illuminating comment on αἴνιγμα: "αἴνιγμα in the LXX renders the Hebrew אָמָרָה, which means not only a riddle, but also an allegory, an allegorical or figurative saying. Cf. Num. 12 8; Prov. 1 6. The latter passage, though not referred to by the commentators (so far as I have noticed), seems to me instructive on account of the parallelism. The word translated 'figure' in the R. V. (אָמָרָה) is

nothing with regard to what St. Paul meant by the words ἐν αἰνίγματι. But it does show unmistakably that the phrase permits of this interpretation.

The probability that St. Paul intended the phrase ἐν αἰνίγματι to convey this meaning rests on parallels in literature which are likely to have suggested to him the figure which he uses in 1 Cor. 13 12. The student of Greek at once thinks of Plato's simile of the Cave (*Resp.* 514 A). If this were known to St. Paul, our interpretation would need little further support. But modern scholars are generally agreed that St. Paul did not know Greek literature at first-hand.⁸ It is more likely, as is generally recognized, that he had in mind LXX Num. 12 8. There Jehovah is defending Moses against Miriam and Aaron, and says: "To other prophets I appear in visions and speak in dreams. But with Moses I speak mouth to mouth, in my own likeness (ἐν εἶδει) and not δι' αἰνυμάτων." The αἰνύματα through which Jehovah talks with other prophets are visions and dreams—here again αἰνύματα refers, to some degree at least, to the phenomena of sight, rather than of speech. Dreams and visions are difficult to understand, it is true, but nevertheless they impart the truth, for the prophet's vision or dream reveals to him the word of God, though wrapped in figurative

interpreted by some to mean a satire or satirical poem. But I think you are safe in taking it in the sense of 'figure.' I have collected a few opinions, on which you can rely for the sense of the word. 'Rede . . . in Bildern'—Wildeboer; 'gedrehter, verschlungener, daher rätselhafter Lehrspruch'—Strack; 'a turned figurative saying, one that looks toward another scene'—Toy. Hence, on account of the parallelism, the Hebrew word (אִמְרֵי), which is translated by αἰνύμα in the LXX and by 'dark sayings' in the R. V., must mean figurative sayings. This passage then is in line with the Peshitta version's interpretation of ἐν αἰνίγματι in 1 Cor. 13 12. Num. 12 8 is also instructive, where δι' αἰνυμάτων (אִמְרֵי) is contrasted with ἐν εἶδει (אִמְרֵי).

In this connection I wish also to acknowledge my obligation to Professor Benjamin W. Bacon of Yale University for helpful suggestions in preparing this paper.

⁸ Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, II, 158, where other authorities are cited. I have not seen Rendel Harris, *St. Paul and Greek Literature*, London 1927.

language and expressed in pictures. The chief point of the passage is that other prophets see Jehovah only in an image; Moses sees him as he is. This is a close parallel to the meaning which our proposed interpretation gives to 1 Cor. 13 12.

III

By recognizing both the positive and the negative meanings of *αἰνίγμα* the whole context gains in clarity and in significance. Human knowledge, St. Paul says, changes at different stages of human existence. The child sees reality in one way, the man in another. In this life we human beings see reality only as in a mirror. The mirror shows us only the reflection of reality. This reflection is, as it were, an *αἰνίγμα*; it must be interpreted and may not be interpreted rightly, for it is hard to interpret; but nevertheless, it is what a mirror shows, a likeness, a resemblance. It is reality wrapped in imagery, like an allegory. All human knowledge must be expressed figuratively, in the form of myth or fable or other likeness of the truth. Santayana remarks⁹ that even the truths of science are expressed in 'myths', in fact, he says that 'wise myths' report the movement of the world's thought. This means that the partial, changing knowledge of mortals is never more than a picture of the truth, the truth expressed *ἐν αἰνίγματι*. If we interpret the phrase thus, St. Paul's third illustration of the relation between human knowledge and reality becomes more intelligible: "Now I know in part, but then (when this mortal shall have put on immortality) shall I know (the truth, reality, God) even as I (before I put on immortality) was recognized."¹⁰ that is, 'I shall not have to interpret the reflection, the likeness of reality, but I shall see it face to face, as Moses saw Jehovah.'

⁹ *A Long Way Round to Nirvana, The Dial*, November 1923, p. 438.

¹⁰ To one who is more familiar with Greek than with the interpretation of the New Testament it is hard to see the reason for supplying *ὡς θεοῦ* with *ἐπιγνώσθη*. The verb *ἐπιγνώσκειν* is used in both the N. T. and the LXX in the sense of 'recognize (the identity of a person or thing)': *Luke* 24 16; *Acts* 12 14; *Gen.* 42 7, 8.