The Minister and his Greek Testament

By The Rev. Philip E. Hughes, M.A., B.D.

It has often been said, and with perfect truth, that the best commentary on the New Testament text is the original Greek itself. Familiarity with the original language of the New Testament can, then, be nothing other than a distinct advantage to the Christian Minister. To him is entrusted the ministry of the Word in exposition and exhortation, and it is of inestimable value to be in a position to open up to his hearers the treasures of Holy Scripture with a note of authority that is supported and enhanced by an inductive study of the terms and significances of the original text. By this means, and assisted by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, he will be enabled to penetrate to and appropriate some of the choicest secrets of the divine Revelation. There are, in truth, many phrases in the Greek of the New Testament which it is not possible to translate adequately into the less delicately expressive medium of the English tongue. Careful comment and paraphrase are needful for the elucidation of such passages to the English hearer, and these can only be given satisfactorily by one who is readily conversant with the niceties and idioms of the original.

The zealous Christian minister, though hemmed in by a multitude of parochial imperatives, will make time for the regular study of his Greek Testament. For this purpose he will set aside an hour after breakfast every morning, and, so far from its being a period of tedium, it will bring refreshment to his soul, and he will find himself gradually accumulating a thesaurus of sermon material of the highest order. And the blessing which he culls from this daily hour will extend through him to his people for their permanent enrichment. For him and, in sequence, for them a fresh revitalizing light will shine upon the familiar page of the New Testament.

I

For the study of the Greek Testament there are certain prerequisites and helps that it may be worthwhile to mention.

(1) *Text.* In the first place, of course, a good Greek text is necessary, and it would be difficult to recommend a better one than that which is the product of the devoted research of those great scholars, Bishop Westcott and Dr. Hort. Moreover, appended to the Westcott and Hort edition is a most valuable essay on the principles of textual criticism, and also a summary of the documentary evidence for the text, together with lists of suspected readings, of rejected readings, and of quotations from the Old Testament. A study of this appendix will not fail to be most helpful and instructive. If a wide-margin edition of the Greek text can be obtained, it will be a considerable asset, enabling the reader to write his own notes and comments opposite the text itself.

(II) *Grammar.* The fullest and most up-to-date grammar of New Testament Greek is that by James Hope Moulton. It is a monument of careful research and analysis in the ever-increasing field of Hellenistic language and literature, and a mine of information for the man who wishes to make an accurate study of the peculiarities of style and expression of the New Testament writers. But for those who for one reason or another must be content with a lesser ambition, a grammar such as that by S. G. Green will be found very serviceable, especially as included in it is a complete vocabulary and an examination of the chief New Testament synonyms.

(III) *Commentaries.* The Minister must beware of becoming the slave of other people's thought; he should always see to it that his own faculty of judgment is active. But he cannot afford to despise or neglect the great commentators, and he will be well advised to build up a section of his library consisting of the best commentaries on the Greek of the individual books of the New Testament. In the forefront of commentators is that master-scholar, Bishop Lightfoot, whose published works include commentaries on Galatians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, and, in the posthumous volume entitled *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul,* Romans i-vii, I Corinthians i-vii, and I and II Thessalonians. Other commentaries of outstanding merit are those by Bishop Westcott on St. John's Gospel, Hebrews, and the Johannine Epistles; by Dr. Swete on St. Mark and the Apocalypse; and by the Dean of Winchester (Dr. E. G. Selwyn) on I Peter, a work of great erudition. The standard of scholarship in T. and T. Clark's series of International Critical Commentaries is on the whole high, though it is a disadvantage that the contributors to this series seem generally to have permitted the head to run away with the heart. Perhaps the most notable volumes in this series are those by Plummer on St. Luke and II Corinthians, by Sanday and Headlam on Romans, by Robertson and Plummer on I Corinthians, and by Charles on Revelation.

Of the one man commentaries on the Greek Testament, Alford's four-volume work is still of considerable value, though it should be used with discretion because of the great advances in textual and linguistic knowledge since its publication; Bishop Wordsworth's commentary is exegetically full of good things, and a veritable chrestomathy of the comments of the early Fathers; and Bengel's *Gnomon,* albeit two centuries old, is a unique evergreen, and its author a consummate master of the terse and pregnant Latin epigram—therefore, if able to do so, read Bengel in the Latin, but if not, English translations are obtainable.

(IV) *Further aids* to serious study will be found in *The Englishman's Greek Concordance,* which is of particular assistance in studying the usage and significance of different words; the Grimm-Thayer *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Cremer's *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*; Deissmann's important books, *Light from the Ancient East* and *Bible Studies*; Gospel Harmonies such as Wright's *Synopsis of the Gospels in Greek* and Creswell's *Harmonia Evangelica*; and Archbishop Trench's *Synonyms of the New Testament.*

II

If the fullest benefit is to be won from the study of the Greek Testament, careful attention must be given to detail and one's examination of the text should be both analytical and comparative. It is an important principle of exegesis that the tenses of verbs should be closely investigated. The distinctions introduced by the Greek tenses are particularly expressive, and frequently convey a nuance that in English can only be rendered paraphrastically. The Present tense normally denotes continuing or linear action, but it is not so distinctive as the other tenses because of the Greek fondness for graphic speech. Thus the retention in indirect speech of the tense of direct speech, and the fondness for the use of the "historic" Present in recounting something that had already happened, helped to enhance the vividness of the event reported. In the loose narrative style of the Gospels it is common to find Aorists and "historic" Presents intermingled. The idiom of John xiv. 9, τοσοῦτον χρόνον μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμί; and xv. 27, ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστε — literally, "Am I being for so long a time with you?" and "You are being with Me from the beginning"—is an effective instance of the linear connotation of the Present tense; but the idiom is foreign to the English tongue, and must be rendered, "Have I been for so long a time with you?" and "You have been with Me from the beginning." It is, however, an idiom which falls quite naturally on French, German, and Dutch ears.

Closely allied to the Present is the Imperfect tense, as is shown by the attaching of the augment to the Present stem. It expresses duration or linear action in the past, and its force may be iterative, indicating habitual or repeated action, or inceptive, indicating the commencement of a process, or conative, indicating an attempted action. As examples one may cite Mark xv. 6, κατὰ δὲ ἑορτὴν ἀπέλυεν αὐτοῖς ἕνα δέσμιον — "at the time of the feast he used, or it was his custom, to release for them one prisoner" (iterative); Mark iv. 2, καὶ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτούς ἐν παραβολαῖς — "and He began to teach them in parables" (inceptive: the commencement of a new series of parables); and Matt. xiii. 14, ὁ δὲ ἐκώλυεν αὐτόν— "but he tried to hinder Him" (conative).

The Aorist tense normally signifies pointed action in the past, as contrasted with the linear action of the Imperfect. *Cf.* Mark x. 52, καὶ εὐθὺς ἀνέβλεψεν καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ — "and immediately he received his sight" (Aorist: the event of a moment) "and followed Him in the way" (Imperfect: the continuing action of a new devotion). In the expressing of prohibitions (negative commands) an important distinction should be noticed between the use of μή with the Present Imperative and μή with the Aorist Subjunctive. The former orders the discontinuance of something which has already been begun, whereas the latter forbids the doing of something not yet begun. *Cf.* Acts xviii. 9, μὴ φοβοῦ, ἀλλὰ λάλει καὶ μὴ σιωπήσῃς — "Don't go on being afraid" (as you are now: μή with the Present Imperative), "but speak, and don't begin to be silent"

(μή with the Aorist Subjunctive). Here again the underlying distinction is between linear and pointed action.

The Perfect tense expresses an action which has been brought to completion but whose effect continues in the present. *Cf.* γέγραπται —"It stands written": it has been written and remains so (Matt. iv. 4, 6, 7, 10). Tense contrasts are well illustrated by the following two examples: Col. iii. 3, ἀπεθάνετε γάρ, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ —"For you died" (at a point of time in the past, Aorist), "and your life has been and remains hidden" (Perfect) "with Christ in God." Mark v. 19, ἀπάγγειλον αὐτοῖς ὅσα ὁ κυριός σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἠλέησέν σε — "Tell them what great things the Lord has done" (the effects of which are abiding, Perfect) "and how He had mercy on you" (referring to the momentary event of his healing, Aorist).

An eye should be kept open for intensive or, as J. H. Moulton calls them, perfective compounds, that is verbs compounded with a preposition to express the intensification or completeness of the action implied in the verbal stem. Such compounds are not infrequent in the New Testament. Here are some examples: βλέπω, I see, διαβλέπω, I see clearly (*cf.* Mark viii. 24, 25); καθαρίζω, I cleanse, διακαθαρίζω, I cleanse thoroughly; θαμβέω, I am astonished, ἐκθαμβέω, I am utterly astounded; γελάω, I laugh, καταγελάω, I laugh to scorn; πίνω, I drink, καταπίνω, I swallow whole or engulf; στυγέω, I hate, ἀποστυγέω, I utterly abhor; τηρέω, I keep, συντηρέω, I keep safely; ποθέω, I desire, ἐπιποθέω, I earnestly long for. *Cf.* Matt. xxvi. 48, 49, ὃν ἂν φιλήσω αὐτός ἐστιν . . . καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν — "The one whom I shall kiss is he . . . and he kissed Him fervently"; and I Cor. xiii. 12, ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθην — "Now I know partially only, but then (in the heavenly state) I shall know fully, even as I also (while here on earth) was fully known," ἐπιγινώσκω being used to express the fulness of the divine knowledge. It may perhaps be advisable to add the reminder that the majority of verbs compounded with a preposition have their meaning modified in accordance with the normal meaning of the preposition; *e.g.*, βάλλω, I throw, ἐκβάλλω, I throw out, εἰσβάλλω, I throw into, ἀποβάλλω, I throw away.

III

Even more perfunctory than what has preceded must be any reference to the question as to how much or how little the Greek of the New Testament has been influenced by Semitic thought and idiom. That the Hebrew of the Old Testament, whether directly or *via* the Greek of the Septuagint, should have made a contribution towards the moulding of the language of the New Testament, is only to be expected. Utterances such as ταλειθά κούμ, κορβάν, ἐφφαθά, Ἀββά, and Ἐλωί, Ἐλωί, λαμὰ σαβαχθανεί; are but trans-

literations from the Aramaic, and indicate that this was the dialect normally spoken by our Lord; and forms such as καλόν . . . ἢ (=טוב מן) for expressing a comparison, ἀποκριθείς . . . εἶπεν (=ויען ויאמר), καὶ ἐγένετο . . . καὶ ἰδού (=ויהי והנה), οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων and οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος (=בני אדם and בני החפה), and τί ἡμῖν καὶ σοί; (=מה־לנו ולך) all bespeak a definite Hebraistic influence. Then, too, there are the solecisms of the New Testament, and in particular of the Apocalypse, which call for some explanation. J. H. Moulton firmly denies that the Greek of the Apocalypse owes any of its barbarisms to "Hebraism," and in general, assuming the role of debunker of the view which favours a Semitic basis or origin of the New Testament, he maintains that "what we can assert with assurance is that the papyri have finally destroyed the figment of the N.T. Greek which in any material respect differed from that spoken by ordinary people in daily life throughout the Roman world." C. C. Torrey on the other hand, unconvinced by the pleading of Moulton, earnestly puts forward a case for both the Apocalypse and the Gospels as being careful translations from Aramaic originals. The whole matter can be studied in his three books, *Documents of the Primitive Church*, *Our Translated Gospels*, and *The Four Gospels, A New Translation*.

Well, the student of the New Testament must choose, or perhaps steer a middle course, between these two views. At any rate, I trust that what has been so cursorily put forward within the compass of this brief article may serve to demonstrate to the Christian minister what an absorbingly interesting and profitable field of study lies open before him in the pages of his Greek Testament. Only let him ever eschew the snares of pedantry and pontification!

American Theological Literature 1947-8

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During the past months I have sought from time to time to give brief reports in the columns of *The Record* on new books which have been published in this country, and I will not attempt to repeat what I have written there. Looking back over the past 12 to 18 months, I gain the impression that it has been a rather lean period in the world of theological literature. Good books have appeared, but few could be called standard works, and I doubt if any have attained a very wide circulation.

Of the larger books, Wolfson's *Philo* is now available in England. The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament has had an enormous circulation on this side and is also reasonably well known in England. A standard work on *The Lutheran Liturgy* by Luther D. Reed has been well received by liturgical experts. It runs to nearly 700 pages, and has been beautifully produced. Roughly one-third is devoted to an historical survey and the remainder to detailed commentary on the Service. In his Preface, Dr. Reed compares the Lutheran Liturgy with the Roman and the Anglican, and remarks: "As one of the three great liturgies of the Western Church, the