

THE SOURCES OF ST. PAUL'S TEACHING.

V. CLASSICAL TRAINING.

I. IN considering how much St. Paul owed to his early schooling, and what traces exist in his writings of any general culture, and of what is commonly understood by a classical education, it is natural to begin with a reference to the three quotations from Greek poets to be found in his Epistles and speeches.

These are well known, and are pointed out in every Commentary.

(1) The first occurs in 1 Corinthians xv. 33, and consists of a line from the "Thais" of Menander, containing the moral warning, "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (*φθειρουσιν ἡθη χρησθ' ὁμιλῖαι κακαί*), which is supposed to be a citation by Menander from a lost tragedy of Euripides.

(2) The second may be seen in the Epistle to Titus (Chapter i. 12). It describes the character of the Cretans in the words of "one of themselves, a prophet of their own," viz. Epimenides, a Cretan poet who flourished in the sixth century before Christ: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons" (*Κρήτες ἀεὶ ψεύσται, κακὰ θηρία, γαστέρες ἀργαί*).

(3) The last is in some ways the most striking of the three, although at first sight we may be inclined to regard it as of the smallest importance. It consists of half a line of hexameter verse, embedded in St. Paul's speech at Athens (Acts xvii. 28), "Certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (*Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν*). The words in question are found in two separate ancient writings, a hymn to Zeus by Callimachus and the Phænomena of Aratus; and it seems clear that the Apostle was aware of this, and had both writings in his mind, because he notices that the passage occurs not in one but

in "certain" (*τινες*) of their own poets. But Callimachus was a Lycian, and Aratus came from Soli of Cilicia, near St. Paul's own city Tarsus. How then could he, when addressing an Athenian audience, speak of these men as poets of their own? The answer lies in the fact that both the poets in question were Stoics, and we are expressly given to understand that a considerable number of St. Paul's hearers consisted of members of this particular philosophical school. Hence, as Bishop Lightfoot has pointed out, there can be little doubt that by *οἱ καθ' ἑμᾶς ποιηταὶ* he means the poets belonging to the same school as his Stoic audience.

These are all the direct quotations from Greek poets that are adduced. Their value has been very variously estimated, and it is as easy to exaggerate their importance as it is unduly to depreciate their significance. On the one hand, they are sometimes pointed to triumphantly as conclusive evidence of an advanced classic culture on the part of the Apostle; while, on the other hand, we are told that they furnish "very little proof of anything more than the most superficial acquaintance with Greek writers."¹ The truth probably lies midway between the two extreme views. From the mere fact that St. Paul quotes some three lines of Greek poetry it is hardly satisfactory to argue that he must have possessed an intimate knowledge of this literature. But, when we remember how very little scope the character and object of his writings afford for such allusions, and yet how singularly apt are at least two out of the three quotations, we see that it is not fair to conclude that his knowledge was so limited and superficial as some would persuade us. That the Apostle was able to quote a Cretan poet in writing to one who was ministering in Crete, and Stoic poets in addressing an audience largely composed of adherents of that philosophical school, may fairly be set

¹ Farrar's "St. Paul," vol. i. p. 631.

down as a hint of a more extended acquaintance on his part with the classics than the actual number of the citations might lead us to infer.

II. There is, however, another and a more important class of classical allusions in St. Paul's Epistles, which is often overlooked, but to which the third of the poetical quotations forms a natural introduction. It consists of those references to Greek philosophy, its ethics and language, which imply that St. Paul in his early years, before his conversion to Christianity, must have made some study of the tenets of at least one important school, that of the Stoics. This is of itself only what we might expect. Tarsus was at that day one of the most famous and important seats of Greek learning, hardly inferior to Athens or Alexandria. Almost every school of philosophy was represented there, and among them none more largely or more ably than that of the followers of Zeno, who took their name from the Porch (*στωά*) in which their master taught. It is said to have been customary for students thus trained in the university of Tarsus to finish their education elsewhere, and hence it may be conjectured that the Apostle's training in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel was supplementary and additional to some earlier teaching in the more liberal school of Hellenic culture in his own city.

There are indeed one or two slight traces in his writings of an acquaintance with the works of Aristotle. One passage of the "Politics" has been supposed to have left its mark on two of the Epistles of the New Testament, viz. Pol. III. xiii. 14, where it is said of men eminent for virtue and wisdom, *κατὰ δὲ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστι νόμος αὐτοῖς γὰρ εἶσι νόμος*. It is certainly hard to believe that the coincidences are purely accidental, when we find in Galatians v. 23 the very same words with which the passage opens, "Against such is no law" (*κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστι νόμος*), and in Romans ii. 14 words which closely resemble

the last clause, "these having no law are a law unto themselves" (*ἐαυτοῖς εἰσὶν νόμος*), a statement which also recalls a passage in the fourth book of the Ethics, "the refined man and the 'gentleman' (*ἐλευθέριος*) will bear himself thus, as being a law to himself" (*οἷον νόμος ᾧν ἑαυτῷ*. Nic. Eth. IV. viii.).

But far more numerous and more conclusive are the parallels of thought and language between St. Paul's Epistles and the works of the Stoics. So close at times indeed is the similarity between the writings of the Apostle and those of Seneca, the greatest representative of this philosophical school in that age, that some have inferred that the Latin writer must have had some knowledge of the New Testament, or even a personal acquaintance with St. Paul himself during the years of his Roman captivity. Such theories have been shewn by Bishop Lightfoot¹ to be entirely baseless; and the true account of the similarities between the two writers which undoubtedly exist is probably that which refers them to identity of origin, and, taking the language of Seneca as representing the teaching of the Stoics, sees in the parallel passages of St. Paul a reflection and reminiscence of the teaching of the same philosophical school.

It is an interesting subject of enquiry how far the ethical system of the Stoics corresponds with and anticipates that of Christianity, and how far the two are dissimilar and contradictory. But to enter on this now is entirely alien to my present purpose. All that I would urge here is that St. Paul, having received some early training in Stoic principles, found in the language and teaching with which he was then familiarized thoughts and expressions and figures to which he gave a place in the Christian system in forming which, under God's providence, he had so large a share. The figure is often transfigured and glorified.

¹ "Philippians," p. 289 seq.

The expression receives a new force and a higher meaning. The thought is made the basis of thoughts still higher. But it can often be traced back to its source, and shewn to have had a place originally in the teaching of that school to which some of the noblest of the "seekers after God" among the heathen belonged.

On one occasion only, so far as we know, was St. Paul during his ministerial life brought into close connexion with Greek philosophy. This was on his visit to Athens in his second missionary journey. Here he not only "reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons," but also took his stand "every day in the market-place," and argued with them that met him. "And certain also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him." In this sentence the Apostle of the Gentiles and the representatives of Greek learning and culture are brought face to face, and the question naturally arises how far was St. Paul able to enter into their position, and thus qualified to meet them on their own ground. For the answer to this question we must turn to his own speech on Mars' hill, which betrays an intimate and accurate knowledge of the tenets of these schools; so much so indeed that it is said by one writer¹ to be "nothing but a statement of the Stoic morality, with the doctrine of Jesus Christ and the resurrection superadded." This perhaps is going rather too far, but it is impossible to read the speech without being reminded at every turn of the teaching and characteristic language of that school. "God," says St. Paul, "that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands." In almost identical terms Seneca reminds us that "the whole world is the temple of the immortal gods,"² and that "temples are not to be built to God of stones piled on high. He must be consecrated in the heart of every man."³ "Neither," proceeds the

¹ Professor Mahaffy.

² *De Benef.* vii. 7.

³ *Fragm.* 123.

Apostle, "is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life and breath and all things . . . He is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being: as certain of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." In similar terms we are told by Seneca that "God wants not ministers. How so? He Himself ministereth to the human race: He is at hand everywhere and to all men."¹ "God is near thee; He is with thee; He is within."² How different is this from the teaching of the Epicureans, who referred the origin of the world to a fortuitous concourse of atoms, and removed the gods far from men, denying that they troubled themselves in any way with mundane affairs! On this point, at any rate, St. Paul decides in favour of the Stoic rather than his rival. "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and device of men." These are the Apostle's next words, to which Seneca shall once more supply a parallel: "Thou shalt not form Him of silver and gold: a true likeness of God cannot be moulded of this material."³ Here the two teachers part company, for St. Paul proceeds to teach the need of repentance, the future judgment, and the resurrection, doctrines which would be "foolishness" to his Stoic contemporary, as they were to those Athenians who mocked when they heard of the resurrection of the dead. But up to this point it is evident that St. Paul is consciously and of set purpose adopting language which would commend itself to a considerable section of his audience, and would convince them that the speaker was one who on matters of philosophy as well as of religion had a right to claim a patient hearing.

¹ *Ep. Mor.* xciv. 47.

² *Ibid.* xli. 1.

³ *Ibid.* xxxi. 11. These quotations are all given in Lightfoot, "Philippians," p. 288.

This Athenian speech, as might be expected, is the most convincing evidence of the Apostle's acquaintance with the principles of Stoicism. But it does not stand alone. There are many phrases and expressions in his Epistles which appear to have been borrowed by him from the same source. They are all collected by Bishop Lightfoot in his essay on St. Paul and Seneca, to which allusion has already been made. Among them the following deserve special notice.

(1) The heavenly citizenship of St. Paul, which recalls the cosmopolitan teaching of the Stoics, who loved to dwell upon the thought of a city of God, and taught that the duties of humanity extended to all classes and ranks in the social scale, even to slaves. "The Stoics," writes Clement of Alexandria, "say that heaven is properly a city, but places here on earth are not cities; for they are (merely) called so;"¹ and in confirmation and illustration of this Bishop Lightfoot quotes several passages from Seneca which make it hard to think that St. Paul "spoke quite independently of this Stoic imagery, when the vision of a nobler polity rose before him, the revelation of a city not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."²

(2) The Stoic conception of the wise man, who alone is free, alone is rich, alone is king, and whose "most prominent characteristic is that he is sufficient in himself, that he wants nothing, that he possesses everything";³ this, we may well believe, suggested to the Apostle the thought of the true self-sufficiency (*ἀνταρκεία*) of the Christian, who has learnt in whatsoever circumstances he is to be self-sufficing (*ἀνταρκής*), who has all things to the full⁴ and to overflowing (Philippians iv. 11, 18); and was perhaps present to his mind when he described himself and his fellow apostles as "being grieved, yet alway rejoicing; as

¹ *Stromata*, III. xxvi. ² See "Philippians," p. 305. ³ *Ibid*, p. 301.

⁴ *ἀπέχων* (the word here) as well as *ἀνταρκεία* (occurring elsewhere in 1 Tim. vi. 6) and *ἀνταρκής*, was a favourite Stoic word.

beggars, yet making many rich ; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians vi. 10) ; "in everything at every time having every self-sufficiency (*αὐτάρκεια*) ; in everything being enriched" (2 Corinthians ix. 8-11).

(3) Of conscience (*συνειδησις*) it has been said that "both the expression and the fully correspondent idea are foreign to the Old Testament."¹ *Συνειδησις* appears once only in the whole of the LXX. version of the Canonical books, in Ecclesiastes x. 20, where it is used as a translation of the Hebrew *עָרַב* (A. V. "thought") and not at all as a moral term. In the Apocrypha it is equally rare, occurring only in Wisdom xvii. 11, where however it has its ethical meaning of conscience. In the New Testament it is never found in the Gospels (John viii. 9 is of course an interpolation). Nor does it occur anywhere outside the Pauline Epistles and St. Paul's speeches in the Acts, except in the 1st Epistle of St. Peter, where we meet with it three times. These facts shew that the idea was not a natural product of Judaism. And yet St. Paul uses the word no less than twenty-two times. Whence, then, came it that it was so familiar to him, while it was strange to almost every other writer of the Old and New Testaments? Whence, if not through his acquaintance with the tenets and terminology of the Stoics, through whose influence the term became "current coin," if indeed it was not "struck in their mint"?²

(4) Besides these important expressions, which suggest that a part of the Apostle's system was built up with stones from the Porch of Zeno, there are several idioms and phrases scattered about through the Epistles in which we seem to catch an echo of the language of the same school: *e.g.* St. Paul's "spend and be spent" (2 Corinthians xii. 15) reappears in the very same form in Seneca ; while the charge of the Apostle in Ephesians v. 16 to "redeem the

¹ Cramer's Lexicon, s. v.

² Lightfoot, "Philippians," p. 301.

time" finds a parallel in the philosopher's exhortation to "gather up and preserve the time"; and where one writer, speaking of human frailty, says that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians iv. 7), the other likens men to "a cracked vessel which will break at the least fall."

Many more such coincidences are given by Bishop Lightfoot.¹ It is impossible to believe that they are all accidental. They are too close and too numerous to be set down in every case to chance; and thus they seem amply sufficient to establish the fact that at some time or other St. Paul must have made a direct study of the principles of Stoicism; and where is he so likely to have done this as in his native city, which, as we have already seen, was a prominent seat of this particular philosophy?

III. There is yet one more branch of a liberal education, of which we may claim St. Paul as a student. The subject of Roman law is one which he would almost of necessity have studied. He was himself a Roman citizen, and valued the privilege highly.² It would therefore be most needful for him to make himself acquainted with its privileges and responsibilities, with the duties and the rights which the law gave him. We are told also that the sect of the Stoics generally made a study of Roman law; and if therefore we are right in supposing St. Paul to have attended the lectures of that philosophical school, it is probable that at the same time he would have mastered the elements of the legal system of the Romans, some knowledge of which may be traced in a few passages of his Epistles. This subject has been made peculiarly his own by the Dean of Ely, who first drew attention to it in his Boyle Lectures for 1864, on "The Conversion of the Roman Empire," and has since repeated his observations and illustrations in his little volume on "St. Paul in Rome." In the earlier of these two works he tells us that St. Paul was personally well

¹ Lightfoot, "Philippians," p. 285 *seq.*

² Acts xvi. 37; xxii. 25-28.

versed, in the principles of Roman law, and that "there is in some parts of his teaching a direct application of Roman legal principles in illustration of his doctrine, which none but a Roman could be expected so to apply, none unless versed in Roman law would be able to employ."¹ Three instances are given, all of which appear to be worth considering, although they are not of equal value.

(1) The first is drawn from the way in which our Lord's mission is described by St. Paul "as the accomplishment of a task imposed on Him by the Father." From one point of view Christ's work was purely voluntary, and it was "of Himself" that He laid down his life. But from another point of view we may regard Him as "sent" by the Father, and as working out our salvation in obedience to that Divine mission. Both views of his work are found in Holy Scripture; but the latter is the aspect in which it is generally regarded by St. Paul. Romans iii. 25, "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation"; v. 19, "Through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous." Galatians i. 4, "Who gave Himself for our sins . . . according to the will of our God and Father." Philippians ii. 8, "He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death"; Colossians i. 19, "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself."² "But this notion," says Dean Merivale, "of the absolute subjection of the Son to the Father agrees exactly with the well known principle of Roman law involved in the *patria potestas*, or authority of the father. Down to a late period of the empire the law of the twelve tribes, which gave the father power over the person and property of his son, even

¹ Boyle Lectures, p. 81.

² With these passages we may compare the following from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which in this as in other matters reflects St. Paul's teaching; v. 8, "Though he was a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

after he had come of age, continued, at least in theory, unabated. Gaius, under the Antonines, still speaks of it as peculiar to Roman law (*Institut.* i. 55): 'Our children whom we have begotten in lawful wedlock are in our own power, a right which is peculiar to Roman citizens, for there are hardly any others who have the same power over their sons as we have.'"¹ The Roman jurist, however, proceeds to notice the existence of a like authority over children in one other nation, and one only. That one is the nation of the Galatians. Was this fact known to the Apostle? It is certainly remarkable that, in writing to the church of that very nation (*Gal.* iv. 1), he should use language which is in exact conformity with the custom peculiar to them and to the Romans: "But I say that so long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bond-servant, though he is lord of all; but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed of his father. So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world; but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son," etc.

(2) The same Epistle to the Galatians (*Chap.* iii. 15) supplies the second example of a supposed allusion to Roman law: "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant (*Margin:* 'testament'), yet when it hath been confirmed no one maketh it void or addeth thereto." This the Dean supposes to refer to the Roman law of wills, "according to which the testator, after certain formalities fulfilled, could neither revoke nor alter his disposition of his property. Thus when we are told by Suetonius that Cæsar, and subsequently Augustus, placed their testaments in the hands of the Vestal Virgins (*Jul.* 83, *Oct.* 101), we are to understand that they thereby renounced the power of cancelling or adding a codicil to them." We are further reminded that the Romans

¹ Boyle Lectures, p. 203.

“invented the will,” and that it is “doubtful whether a true power of testation was known to any original society except the Romans.” I cannot, however, say that the allusion in this case is by any means certain. *Διαθήκη* here as everywhere else in the New Testament, except Hebrews ix. 15-17, is probably used with the meaning of covenant, and not of will or testament, and it is quite possible to obtain an easy and natural sense for the passage without connecting it with the law of wills.

(3) Far stronger is the third instance given, and Dr. Merivale is not exaggerating when he calls it “unquestionable.” The figure of sonship as representing the true relation of the believer to the Father is one which meets us frequently in Holy Scripture. But whereas St. John and St. Peter represent this sonship as a natural one, St. Paul, and St. Paul only, describes it as sonship by adoption. Romans viii. 15-23: “Ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. . . . The creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. . . . And ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” Galatians iv. 5: “That we might receive the adoption of sons.” Ephesians i. 5: “Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons.”

Now adoption was essentially a Roman and not a Jewish custom. The law of Moses nowhere recognizes it, and the Jews had no word to express it. But with the Romans it was an every day occurrence for a person, having no children of his own, to adopt as his son one born of other parents. “It was a formal act, effected either by the process named *adrogatio*, when the person to be adopted was independent of his parent, or by *adoptio*, specifically so

called, when in the power of his parent. The effect of it was that the adopted child was entitled to the name and *sacra privata* of his new father, and ranked as his heir-at-law; while the father on his part was entitled to the property of the son, and exercised towards him all the rights and privileges of a father. In short, the relationship was to all intents and purposes the same as existed between a natural father and son."¹ It is this that was in the Apostle's mind when he spoke of *υιοθεσια* enjoyed by Christians. The word occurs nowhere in the LXX., nor is it used by any writer of the New Testament except St. Paul, who has actually been supposed to have first framed the word for his own use. We need not perhaps go quite as far as to assert this, although it appears to be a fact that the word is not found in any earlier Greek writer whose works still exist. It is, however, likely to have been employed as the nearest equivalent to *adoptio* by those Greek teachers from whom we suppose the Apostle to have learnt the elements of law; and whatever we may think of the history of the word, there can be little doubt that it was the Roman custom which supplied the Apostle with the illustration which he develops most fully in his Epistle to the Roman Christians.

This concludes Dean Merivale's list of passages in which the teaching of St. Paul is thought to be imbued with the ideas of Roman jurisprudence. Few though they are, they are perhaps sufficient to incline us to add a knowledge of law to the elements of Stoic philosophy and an acquaintance with the Greek poets, as among the forces and influences which have left their mark on the mind of the Apostle of the Gentiles, and to lead us to include a classical education as one of the sources of his teaching.

EDGAR C. S. GIBSON.

¹ "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 23.