

“Is this the city that men called the Perfection of Beauty, the Joy of the whole world?”

All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee:

they say, “We have swallowed her up;

certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it.”

* * * *

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?

Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me,

Wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger.

JAMES STALKER.

ST. PAUL IN ATHENS.

THE generally accepted interpretation of the remarkable incident narrated in *Acts* xvii. 18-33 seems to be that Paul was conducted away from the Agora to the Mars Hill in order to address an audience, who thought they would have a better opportunity of hearing him on the Hill than in the Agora. Perhaps I am not fairly and adequately stating the current view, for, when I try to elicit from the works of Conybeare and Howson, Farrar, and Meyer-Wendt (taking them as fairly indicative of common and widely accepted views) what is their view of motives and action, I fail to get any connected and consistent theory; and when I try to express in clear, brief terms their meaning, I find that anything I say on the authority of one page is contradicted by some sentence on a different page.

Dean Farrar, who always has the merit of putting in a clear and simple form the most sensible tendency of current opinion, brings the innate want of consistency of the common view into prominence, when he says, “as the Areopagus (*i.e. the Hill*) would furnish a convenient area for an harangue, and as it was there that the court met which had the cognizance of all matters affecting the State religion, it was perhaps with some sense of burlesque that

they led him up the rock-hewn steps—which still exist—to the level summit, and placed him on the ‘Stone of Impudence,’ from which the defendants before the Areopagus were wont to plead their cause.” And he proceeds to treat the “scene as a sort of parody of the judicial preliminaries.” This exaggerates to a degree that seems incredible the levity of the Athenian people. I do not gather clearly whether Dean Farrar imagines that the court of Areopagus, famous and proverbial for its strict judicial gravity, took part in this parody of judicial procedure, or merely that Dionysius the Areopagite took an unofficial part in the profane burlesque, for profane it must have been to him.

Meyer-Wendt consider that the scene “shows not a trace of judicial procedure,”¹ and that its only object was to “gratify the curiosity of the populace which gathered on the Areopagus”;² but why the populace collected on such an unsuitable place as Mars Hill on such an occasion as this, they do not condescend to explain. Dean Farrar, with the natural practical instinct of an orator, feels the necessity of giving some explanation why the populace abandoned the Agora, where they naturally and regularly congregated, and went away to the small, confined, and exposed top of a rocky hill. Conybeare and Howson, like Meyer-Wendt, give no intelligible reason for the change of scene: they say that the Hill was “the place which was at once most convenient and most appropriate. There was everything in the place to incline the auditors, so far as they were seriously disposed at all, to a reverent and thoughtful attention.” In one place they seem half inclined to the view which Dean Farrar has carried out more fully, for they speak about “something of a mock solemnity in this ad-

¹ *Hergang der von richterlicher Verhandlung keine Spur zeigt*, p. 377.

² *Dass es nur auf Befriedigung der Neugierde des auf dem Areopag zusammenströmenden Volkes abgesehen war*, *ibid.*

jourment," and they consider that *v.* 21 "is so introduced as to imply that curiosity was the motive of the whole proceeding. But in a footnote on the same page they say that "the Areopagus was preferred to the larger Pnyx as the scene, because it was more *appropriate* for a discourse upon religion." At the same time they imagine "that Dionysius, with other Areopagites, were on the judicial seats"; and yet they are certain that there was no trial before the court, because there is not "anything in the speech of a really apologetic character" (which is, of course, a correct statement).

This view, or rather these views, seem to me to be false in local colour, to lose much of what is characteristic of Athens, and to add much that is *in Athens* improbable or impossible. An examination of the localities in 1882 with a view to test the credibility of the incident left me convinced that the narrative was not historical, for the idea that the fault lay, not in the narrative, but in the common interpretation did not at that time occur to me, and was first brought home to me by Professor E. Curtius's paper (quoted hereafter). The following reasons against the usual conception of the scene must occur to any one who examines the Hill and compares the narrative as usually interpreted with the localities.

(1) There is no place on Mars Hill where an audience of even one hundred persons could listen with convenience, advantage, and comfort, to a speech, and the reason for the crowd adjourning to the Hill could not lie in these considerations. Since 1882 I have discussed the subject with other visitors, and especially with my friend and former pupil Rev. A. F. Findlay, who spent last winter in Athens and examined the localities and the incident with the utmost care, discussing on the spot with others the conditions of the case, weighing all the published opinions, and embodying his results in a paper read before the British School of

Athens. What I say under the present head agrees with his views ; but I must not be understood to claim his agreement in the view which is to be stated in the sequel. It seems unnecessary to discuss the topographical question further, as that would require much space if it were to be done satisfactorily. The opinion stated under this head is not a hastily formed one ; and the following quotation from a well-known German scholar will probably be considered sufficient to show what is the impression made on any visitor.

In the *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift*, 1895, p. 174, Dr. Chr. Belger says, "When I was in Athens in 1894, I pondered upon the hill of Areopagus about the possibility of Paul's sermon." He comes to the conclusion as probable that on the Hill "there was no room for a large assembly, while the whole scene suits perfectly the lively activity of the market place."

Standing on the hill, I could see no other possible interpretation except that the speech was delivered on the flat top of the small rocky peak opposite the Acropolis, and, so far as I can learn, every modern historian or commentator or visitor who attempts to fix the scene on any precise spot has come to the same conclusion. There, as is universally agreed, the members of the Council of Areopagus sat, when they judged in solemn state after the ancient immemorial custom cases of homicide. On this little plateau perhaps nearly a hundred persons might stand in a dense crowd and listen to Paul ; and, to give him any advantage in addressing them there, he must have stood, as Dean Farrar suggests,¹ on one of the two stones,

¹ He fixes on the stone of the defendant as the actual one occupied, suitably to his conception of the scene as a parody of judicial proceedings ; but by an odd error he considers that the Stone of Shamelessness was the defendant's place. Obviously Shamelessness (*ἀναιδέα*) was the characteristic of the pertinacious prosecutor, while Crime or Insult (*ἔβρις*) was on the side of the prosecuted.

called the stone of Insult and the Stone of Shamelessness, which have been left opposite each other on the summit.¹

(2) It is inconsistent with Athenian patriotism and pride that they should conduct a "babbling," for whom they expressed such contempt, to the most impressive seat of Athenian religious and national history in order that he might there prate to them. The Athenians were in many respects flippant, but their flippancy was combined with an intense pride in the national dignity and the historic glory of the city, which would have revolted at such an insult as that a babbling should harangue them about his foreign deities on the spot where the Athenian elders had judged the god Ares and the hero Orestes, where the goddess Athena had presided in the highest court of her chosen people, and where still judgment on the most grave cases of homicide was solemnly pronounced.

(3) The place is in itself one which no southern race would voluntarily choose for comfort or pleasure in listening to a speech. On a fine day the sun's rays are studiously avoided by a southern populace, and no one who has experienced the sun of Athens would select a rocky summit as the place to listen to a philosophic oration. Still less would the hill be suitable on a rainy or windy day; now windy weather is exceedingly common on the hills of Athens, low as they are; and, to put the matter briefly, so far as I may judge, I can imagine no circumstances in which a set of Athenians would take Paul to the top of Mars Hill as a convenient place to listen to him.

(4) A small knot of people, who desired to quietly discuss a philosophic problem, might be expected to retire from the Agora to some sequestered spot. If Paul's audience retired, we may expect that it was a knot of interested listeners and debaters; and it may be granted that such a group of people could find accommodation on the Mars Hill. But

¹ The summit has been prepared by cutting for its purpose.

that view is not in accordance with the ordinary interpretation, which demands a large audience. So far it appears to me that the ordinary interpretation is correct: this scene breathes the spirit of the Agora and the open, free, crowded life of Athens, not the quiet atmosphere of the philosophic classroom; and the language of *v. 18* savours not of philosophic interest and careful discussion, but of contempt and dislike.

(5) The words "in the middle of Mars Hill" are far from natural or clear. What is the middle of a hill? Is it the middle of the slope or the middle of the top? Every one must feel the inappropriateness of the expression; and when he stands on the spot, the words do not become more luminous (as they ought in a good document). I could see no sense of the phrase possible, except the middle of the small rocky summit already described; and then the words amount to a denial that Paul stood on either of the stones whence he could speak with advantage. A natural and true instinct, then, usually leads those who talk about the scene to omit the word "midst," and say, "Paul stood on Mars Hill"; and many interpreters (including the latest, Dr. F. Blass) justify this by supposing that *ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου πάγου* is a Hebraism for *ἐν* as in *i. 15, ii. 22*. Against this interpretation reason and analogy protest loudly. (a) What is a Hebraism doing in this Attic scene, full of Attic touches and containing typically Attic words like *σπερμολόγος*? In *i. 15, ii. 22*, a Hebraism is natural, and was certainly derived by Luke from the authority on whom or which he necessarily was dependent; but here it is quite out of place. He that thrusts a Hebraism into this place denies that Luke had any sense of appropriateness in language. I know that hardly any person appreciates that Luke had a most delicate sense of appropriateness in words; but that is because few have opened their eyes to see, or their minds to understand.

(b) There is no real analogy between this passage, if it

be understood in the usual way, and i. 15, ii. 22; in them ἐν μέσῳ is used of a speaker standing amidst a crowd of persons, and it quite well might be taken in the strictest sense. At any rate it must be rendered "among." We cannot reason from these passages to the scene on Mars Hill. Paul certainly did not stand "among the hill," but "on the hill": where can we find a Hebraism giving "in the middle of" as equal to "on."

(c) Further, we must press the word "midst" here, for it occurs twice; at the opening "Paul stood in the midst of Areopagus," and at the conclusion "he went forth from the midst of them." These two expressions correspond to and explain each other. Where ἐν μέσῳ is used in *Acts* it is usually accompanied by a genitive, denoting an assembly or a group of persons;¹ and here, he that "went forth from the midst of them" must have been standing "in the midst of them." Now, the term "Areopagus" is sometimes used in the sense of "the Council or Court of Areopagus"; and surely this argument makes it as clear as noonday that here we must take Paul to have stood "in the midst of the Court of Areopagus," as, in iv. 7, Peter stood in the midst of the Sanhedrim.

Dr. Blass, indeed, in his valuable and instructive edition of *Acts*, denied that in Greek ὁ Ἄρειος Πάγος could mean the Court, and declared that it can only mean the hill; but in EXPOSITOR, Feb., 1895, p. 135 note, there is pointed out an example from Cicero (which in a letter Dr. Blass acknowledges in a most courteous and scholarly way to prove that he has spoken too strongly), and Mr. A. F. Findlay gives me another indubitable example from an inscription.²

¹ So i. 15, ii. 22, iv. (genitive understood from the context, xxvii. 21). The only exceptions are of no avail against this analogy: in *Acts* i. 18, Judas "burst asunder in the midst," and xxvii. 27, "about midnight" the idea "middle" has to be pressed. An examination of the usage in the Gospels would strengthen the opinion expressed in the text.

² The inscription, which is of the latter half of the first century after Christ,

Several other examples which I should also take in the sense of "Court" are not admitted by Dr. Blass; and, though I still maintain them, yet the two instances just quoted, which are admitted by him, are conclusive, and we need not discuss the others. Moreover, the example from Cicero suggests (what is undoubtedly the case) that this sense of Ἄρειος Πάγος was rather colloquial, whereas ἡ βουλή ἢ ἐξ Ἀρείου Πάγου was the formal and official designation. Here, therefore, we note (as Dr. Blass finely says¹ about σπερμολόγος, v. 19) that the author catches the very term which the actual speakers employed; and I hope shortly to prove the same with regard to several other unusual terms in the account of scenes in Asia Minor. The language of *Acts* is the language of educated conversation, vivid and racy.

The expression in v. 19 now acquires more significance. The words are closely analogous to ix. 27: "Barnabas taking hold of Paul brought him to the Apostles." The words, "taking hold of him" have there a marked force; when all the brethren in Jerusalem were afraid of Paul, Barnabas took him by the hand as a sign of friendliness and confidence, and led him thus publicly into the presence of the Apostles.

In all other cases where ἐπιλαβέσθαι is used, it has a marked force, whether friendly or hostile: in xxi. 30, the Jews seized Paul to drag him out of the temple: in 33 the tribune seized hold of Paul to save him from the Jewish mob: in xxiii. 19 the tribune took the hand of Paul's nephew to draw him apart for private talk, a kindly act to a young man in a difficult and almost a dangerous position; in xviii. 17 the Jews seized Sosthenes to beat him; in xvi. 19 Paul's accusers seized him and dragged him before

is published by M. Cavvadias, *Fouilles d'Epidaure*, I. p. 68 no. 206, and uses the words Ἄρειος Πάγος ἐν Ἐλευσίνι λόγους ἐποιήσατο.

¹ Hoc exceptit ex ipso ore Atheniensium.

the magistrates. The word has either a marked friendly sense, or a decidedly hostile sense; and it is obvious that when one man goes so far as to lay hold of another, his feelings must be deeply moved to express themselves in that gesture.

It is then not permissible to take *ἐπιλαβόμενοι* in *v.* 19 as a mere otiose word, which might be omitted without much loss; there must have been some stronger emotion among the philosophers than mere contempt mingled with curiosity, when they actually placed their hands on Paul.¹ But, undoubtedly, the context shows clearly that the grasping of Paul was not done by friends who were acting as his escort and his sponsors (like Barnabas with Paul); and I see no resource except to understand that they grasped Paul in the way of compulsion and took him before the Court.

Paul then was brought before the Court of Areopagus. The phrase *ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον πάγον* is quite correct in this sense. *ἐπὶ* is used of bringing a person before a judge or a tribunal in ix. 21, xvi. 19, xvii. 6, xviii. 12,—in fact, *ἐπὶ* is the regular Lucan word in that sense. His position before the Court was one that involved a certain degree of danger; and thus the phrase used in *v.* 33 acquires real significance similar to what it has in Acts xxiii. 10, where Paul was rescued by the Roman soldiers from the midst of the rioters at Jerusalem.

The opinion that Paul was actually on trial before the Areopagus has often been expressed; but the attempts made to explain the following scene on that supposition have not been successful. The fact remains incontestable that no formal trial takes place, that Paul's speech is not of the nature of a defence, that there is no definite accuser, and no definite accusation is described. If this is a trial, it must

¹ Some take the people in general, and not the philosophers, as the nominative in this sentence. The point is immaterial at this moment, but will be discussed in the sequel.

be confessed that the narrative misses almost all the characteristic points of a trial. A most interesting attempt to justify that view was made recently by the distinguished historian of Greece, Prof. Ernst Curtius; and his familiarity with the country and the people, combined with his sympathetic insight into the religious side of Greek life and thought, give his words the right to cordial welcome and make his opinion one of great weight. He touched on the subject first incidentally in his *Stadtgeschichte von Athen*, where he treated the scene unhesitatingly as a trial; but afterwards in the fascinating paper, "Paulus in Athen,"¹ where he discussed it more fully and in more detail, he drew back a little and defined the situation as being rather a preliminary examination than an actual trial. The same view was stated by Dr. Plumptre in his commentary on *Acts*;² and his words give such a fair and clear account of the situation and difficulties, that the briefest course will be to quote his note: "The narrative that follows presents no trace of a formal trial, and hence it has been questioned whether the Apostle was brought before the *Court* of the Areopagus. Unless, however, there had been some intention of a trial, there seems no reason for their taking him to the Areopagus rather than to the Pnyx or elsewhere; and the mention of a member of the Court as converted by St. Paul's preaching, makes it probable that the Court was actually sitting at the time. The most natural explanation of the apparent difficulty is, that as the charge of bringing in "strange deities" was one which came under the jurisdiction of the Areopagus Court, the crowd who seized on St. Paul hurried him there, not presenting a formal indictment, but calling for a preliminary inquiry, that his speech accordingly, though of the nature of an *apologia*, was not an answer to a distinct accusation, and that having heard

¹ Published first in the Berlin Akad. *Sitzungsberichte*, afterwards in his *Abhandlungen*, vol. II.

² In *Ellicott's New Testament Commentary*, II. p. 114.

it the Court looked on the matter as calling for no special action, and passed to the order of the day."

This explanation does not appear to be thoroughly satisfactory, though it certainly approximates much more to an intelligible picture of the incident than the common view in any of its various forms. I cannot trace any appearance that the scene is like a preliminary action of the Court in reference to a serious charge like "bringing in strange deities." Moreover there is no example that a charge of introducing strange gods was tried before the Areopagus.

Prof. Curtius puts the idea of a preliminary inquiry more definitely: he defines the scene as a *προδικασία* conducted before the Areopagus as the police court charged with the maintenance of order in a city which was subject to frequent disturbances; and he considers it as probable that a committee of the Areopagus, sitting permanently in a hall opening on the Agora (probably in the King's Hall, *στοὰ βασιλείος*), had the regular duty of promptly investigating any cases of disturbance in the market place.

But, while I think Prof. Curtius is fully justified in the opinion that the commonplace duties of the Court of Areopagus did not take place on the sacred and solemn and stately, but most unsuitable and awkward summit of the Hill, but in the Hall on the Agora, yet in this case one sees no appearance of an uproar or a disturbance in the narrative. Rather it seems clear that the whole proceedings were natural and orderly in their evolution; and, if a preliminary enquiry were being made on a charge of disorder, it is difficult to imagine a speech further from the point than the speech of Paul. Prof. Curtius has described the character of the earlier scene most admirably, when he speaks of verses 1-16 as containing "such a mass of historical matter, everything in them is so pregnant and individualized, so vivid and characteristic," that the impression is given that "a well-informed witness pictures the proceedings with lifelike truth." But in the latter

part, the lifelike character disappears, if Paul must be supposed to have been apprehended on a charge of disturbance.

In these two theories, which have much in common, and are in several respects correct and suggestive, the cause of error seems to be that they do not rightly conceive the environment amid which Paul is here placed. He is not surrounded by persons eager to maintain the purity of Athenian worship, nor by persons who could be thought of in connexion with disorderly or uproarious conduct. He is among the recognised teachers of philosophy in the greatest university of the world. Herein lies the interest of the scene. In *Acts* we find Paul in many different situations and among the most varied kinds of society—before kings, Roman officials, and Greek magistrates, in conflict with priests, magicians, and rioters, mixing in every kind of contemporary life. Here alone we find him amid the surroundings of a great university, and disputing with its professors. It is, therefore, a scene of special interest; and if we keep in mind the special character (as none of the commentators seem to do), the details become clearer.

The first point that we must become clear about is the meaning of the comments made in *v.* 17. The first quoted remark is generally taken as a mere expression of contempt—"what would this babbler say?" but I cannot agree with the interpretation. As Dr. Blass finely says, Luke has caught this word (*σπερμολόγος*) from the lips of the Athenians: it is a characteristic term of Attic slang. We must therefore ask what is its sense in the mouth of an Athenian; and I find no jot of evidence that Attic slang ever used it in the sense of "babbling." *σπερμολόγος* has been absurdly supposed by some to have some connexion with *λόγος*; and hence we find in the Latin version the rendering *seminivertibus*. But the accent shows that the meaning must be "seed-collector"; and two applications of the word were

current in Athens, (a) a bird that picks up seeds as food,¹ (b) a worthless fellow of low class, with the insinuation that he lives at the expense of others (like those who hang about round the corners of the markets in order to pick up any scraps which fall from the loads that are carried about), but without any insinuation that he is a babbler.² Absolute vulgarity and inability to rise above the most contemptible standard of life and conduct is the connotation, and there clings often to it the additional suggestion of the stealing of refuse and scraps, and in literature of plagiarism.³ A review of the samples quoted by Wetstein in his commentary on this passage, supplemented by a few others mentioned in *Stephani Thesaurus*,⁴ shows this, but I need not occupy space in doing what every one can do for himself. The word is common, and its sense very definite and strong. There is in no case in any classical author any suggestion that a *σπερμολόγος* is a babbler or mere talker; in many cases that sense is excluded by the context, and in the rest the analogy of those others is conclusive.⁵ The word is several times connected with slave life; the *spermologos* was near the type of the slave, and inconsistent with the nobler character of the free man.

¹ In this sense the name is supposed by some to indicate a bird with a harsh, loud voice, and hence to be diverted to denote a human babbler; but in the descriptions of the bird no allusion is made to its voice.

² Harpocration, an excellent authority on Attic slang, defines the term *σπερμολόγος* as ὁ εὐτελής καὶ καταφρόνητος ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἴσως ἀπὸ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων διαζῶν.

³ *σπερμολόγια ῥήματα* is coarse, vulgar language, "Billingsgate" (Plutarch, *de ira cohib.*, p. 456 c.); but *ῥήματα* is here added (the adj. means only vulgar).

⁴ See also the articles on *σπερμολογέω*, *σπερματολόγος*.

⁵ For example, Plutarch, *Alcib.*, 36, p. 211 D, says that Alcibiades ruined the navy by selecting for command his drinking companions, men of *ναυτικῆς σπερμολογίας*, and even in the *Thesaurus* and in Liddell & Scott's *Lexicon*, this is interpreted as *vaniloquentia*, babbling, gossip. But Plutarch refers not to the capacity for foolish talk (which was about the last quality to recommend men as companions to the brilliant and gifted Alcibiades), but to low rank in the service. So τὰ *σπερμολόγια τῶν παιδαρίων* in Athenæus III, 85 F. does not mean *babbling boys*, but *vulgar street-cads*, and there is no reference intended to their talk, but only to their using shells as whistles.

Yet some cases undoubtedly remain in Hesychius (an alternative rendering), in an *Onomasticon* quoted by Wetstein, in Gregory Nazianzen *de Fil. Orat.* I., and some others (*e.g.* Latin versions of *Acts* xvii.), in which the sense of garrulity and foolish talk is intended. Probably all these cases spring from a misunderstanding of the word by persons who, from defective knowledge of Greek, took *σπερμολόγος* to mean *sower of words* (*seminator verborum, seminiverbius*); and the misinterpretation became customary in this passage, and thus affected authors like Gregory Nazianzen.

Sometimes the word conveys the sense of plagiarism when it is used in a literary connexion. Eustathius speaks of rhetoricians who were mere collectors of words and consistent plagiarists,¹ and says that the word is applied to those who make a show in unscientific style of knowledge which they have got from misunderstanding of lectures.² Eustathius is a late writer, but he was exceedingly well read in classical Greek; and Philostratus has the same idea, saying that Dionysius's lectures were declared by some of his detractors to be made up of scraps from various sources (*Vit. Soph.*, I. 22).

The only acceptance that gives good sense and good Greek in *Acts* xvii. 18 seems to be that of "plagiarist," and there is an intentional humour,³ or perhaps sarcasm, in the juxtaposition of the two inconsistent accusations, "this fellow is a vulgar, unskilful plagiarist," and "this fellow discourses of strange, foreign gods."

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(To be continued.)

¹ λογοσυλλεκτάδαι ὄντες καὶ δι' ἑλοῦ σπερμολογῶντες on *Il.* xxiii., p. 1425, 13 (1309, 4).

² ἐπὶ τῶν ἀλαζονομένων ἀμεθόδως ἐπὶ μαθήμασιν ἐκ τινῶν παρακουσμάτων on *Od.* v. p. 241; ii. (1547, 52).

³ The humour of Luke is not, perhaps, much noticed; but it is hardly possible to read the trial and prison scene at Philippi without being struck with this quality in the picture of the fussy "Praetors."