

Words Worth Weighing in the Greek New Testament

E.K. Simpson, M.A.

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No competent judge can dispute the claim of Greek to pre-eminence in any congress of languages, ancient or modern. In its golden prime it presents an unrivalled combination of elegance and vigour, of variety of style and precision of statement. "The instrument responds," remarks Jebb, "with happy elasticity to every demand of the Greek intellect." And when we call to mind the felicities of its characteristic idioms, the repleteness of its syntax, the intricate harmonies of its prosody, and the sonorous cadences of its stately prose, or reflect on the copious invention exhibited in its teeming vocabulary; and then bethink ourselves of the monumental longevity of the tongue, the siege of time it has sustained without capitulation; the title of Greek to homage in any symposium of the commonwealth of letters must be fully conceded.

New Testament Greek, to be sure, appertains to a phase of its age-long history when this masterpiece of logical expression was past its acme, and to an outlying province of its domain. Yet in the first century A.D. the higher *Koine* still ranked as the most delicate intellectual organ current in the ancient world. It was surely meet that such a *lingua franca*, by no means decrepit or threadbare even in its decline, should be the medium of a Gospel ordained for world-wide promulgation. At the same time we recognize that writers charged with a message so momentous and heart-moving, "past the size of dreaming," would have shown themselves.

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wanting in spiritual discernment and untrue to their unique commission, had they affected the finical purism of the neo-Atticist, or sacrificed for starchy embellishment's sake the glow and intensity of their homelier diction. Their tones were not modulated in deference to an idealized past, but attuned to a real and most urgent present, a seed-time fraught with illimitable issues. The Lord chose His secretaries as men of vision, not of vocabulary, living epistles to be known and read of all men, not prized by the fastidious for their artistic binding or superfine *lettering*.

In recent years we have been flooded with testifications to the vernacularity of the New Testament; so much indeed that methinks the balance needs to be somewhat redressed. Unquestionably we owe a debt to the Egyptian papyri and inscriptional lore that cannot be ignored. They have shed light on many incidental points in the sacred text and supplied parallels to many anomalous grammatical forms. When we wish to ascertain the exact sense of λογία or ἀπογραφή, or of a phrase like συναίρειν λόγον (Matt. xviii. 23), "to square accounts," or ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς (Gal. v. 12), "your up-setters," the papyri stand us in good stead. They illustrate the language of the market-place or the courts of law, wherever such

aspects of life crop out in the Gospels or Epistles. In wayside episodes popular diction suits the speakers. Τί σκύλλεις τὸν διδάσκαλον; (Mark v. 35), “Why do you bother the teacher?” matches with the lips in which the sentence is placed. It tallies perfectly with its popular environment, and, needless to say, can be plentifully paralleled from the papyri, so large a proportion of which are scribbled waste-papers,

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which betray by their misspellings the hand of illiterate scrawlers. As long as Scriptural writers hug the coast of mundane affairs, the Egyptian pharos yields a measure of illumination to their track; but when they launch out into the deeps of the divine counsels, we no longer profit by its twinkling cross-lights.

Another consideration deserves notice. There has been too much of a tendency to regard the *Koine* as stereotyped by some imperious fiat of Alexander, its most powerful promoter. But though, like modern English, it approximates to a common standard, that does not imply a hidebound, cast-iron pattern. From no living language can minor discrepancies of usage be eliminated; least of all when its orbit is cosmopolitan. Even Cicero’s patches of Greek wear a Roman complexion, and the diction of Marcus Aurelius is distinctly piebald. Many assume that the new discoveries have put an extinguisher on the conception of *Jewish* Greek. Doubtless Philo and Josephus took pains to conceal their Hebraism under a bushel; but who can deny its presence in the LXX, or challenge the assertion that the New Testament contains an irreducible minimum of that article, quite sufficient to prove its diffusion from a Palestinian base? Jerome went the length of discovering a batch of Cilicisms in St. Paul’s Epistles, perhaps not altogether without warrant. At any rate, notable divergencies of style and vocabulary are patent in the pages of the New Testament. Spontaneity signalizes the compositions of these writers; mere copyists assuredly they were not. Individual traits are stamped upon them, interveined with a certain family likeness, not so much reminiscent of the crowd or the market-place as of

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their peculiar training and bilingual environment, somewhat akin to that of the modern Weishman or Breton. It must be borne in mind that “Galilee of the Gentiles” adjoined Decapolis and Gadara, the latter a focus of Greek culture and tuition.

Furthermore it must not be overlooked that the Christian terminology, born of the new dispensation, if levied in many instances from phraseology already extant, is transfigured in the process of adaptation. Such terms as χάρις, πίστις, σωτηρία, δικαίωσις, ἁγιασμός thus acquire an immensely enhanced significance. But such watchwords of the faith belong to the province of systematic theology. In casting a glance at them to begin with, we shall confine ourselves to two or three samples of the group.

I

Ἀπολύτρωσις. Ritschl and his disciples have striven hard to tone down this Pauline watchword to the nebulous sense of *deliverance*. They lay stress on the LXX usage of the simple verb λυτροῦσθαι and its Hebrew equivalents to denote Israel’s emancipation from

Egypt or Babylon.¹ But, even in Old Testament usage, notably in Isa. xliii. (“I gave Egypt for thy ransom”), the vocable carries a stricter and more profound meaning, that of ransom by recompense. Note especially Psalm xlix. 7, where the LXX reads: οὐ δώσει τῷ θεῷ ἐξίλασμα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν τιμὴν τῆς λυτρώσεως τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ. The

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distinction discernible here between the Testaments is that in the Old the emphasis rests on redemption through power and in the New through purchase, by virtue of the costliest of all “king’s ransoms”, the infinitely precious blood of the Lamb, the flawless counter-ransom (ἀντίλυτρον) of 1 Tim. ii. 6.

On consulting Moulton and Milligan the student is disappointed to find this watchword of Pauline theology and its cognate verb wholly omitted, the reason of course being that it is not a vernacular vocable, but one devised for a special purpose. Dr. Warfield (*Biblical Doctrines*, p. 327) has been at the pains to trace its genesis in an instructive article. Starting from the Homeric ἀπολύειν (active and middle), he has shown how ἀπολυτροῦν and ἀπολυτροῦσθαι came to replace the older term for ransom, in order to ensure greater accuracy of statement by the incorporation of λύτρον in the concept; and how the later word retained its distinctive impress unimpaired throughout the history of literary Greek. Instances of its occurrence are comparatively sparse; but from the era of Plato to that of Polybius, Plutarch and Josephus it conserves the specific meaning of *redeeming*. I could adduce two passages unremarked by the lexicons, one in a fragment of Menander (Loeb, p. 410) and one from Strabo (iv. 4), in which, as elsewhere, a specific payment is expressed or implied.

Here, then, the stable Scriptural doctrine of redemption is rescued from evisceration by appealing to standard Greek usage in a case where popular evidence is not forthcoming. Such examples could be multiplied, and they teach us that New Testament phraseology embraces a wider field than the language of “the man in the street”.

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Other instances might be named in which theological prepossessions tend to warp the mind of the exegete. We can notice only two or three.

1. The sacrificial connotation of the verb ἀναφέρειν has been called in question, albeit attested by some 90 passages in the LXX (e.g. Lev. xiv. 20; Isa. lvii. 6). Its occurrence in the Epistle to the Hebrews admits of no dispute, and it is equally manifest in James’s reference (ii. 21) to the offering of Isaac or in the passage in 1 Peter (ii. 24) where he speaks of Christ as “bearing our sins in His own body onto the tree”. This religious application of the verb can be corroborated moreover from pagan sources (Eur., *Or.* 597, etc.) and from the noun ἀναφορά, as well as from the standing usage of Josephus.

2. Plenty of squeamish religious teachers nowadays view the judicial functions of Deity with no friendly eye; and these parties who, in many cases, like Béranger, tend to believe only in a

¹ There is one passage in the New Testament (Heb. xi. 35) in which ἀπολύτρωσις appears to be thus loosely employed. (Cf. Dan. iv. 32, LXX.) But even here the deliverance not accepted resolves itself into a ransom refused, the price of recantation, and in *Daniel*, as with Ahab, reformation is viewed as the price of the prolongation of Nebuchadnezzar’s tenure of power.

saccharine divinity² and deny that “God’s holiness gives the law to His love”, are disposed to emasculate the sense of ἰλάσκεσθαι and ἰλασμός in Scripture. Nevertheless, as Trench insists, the propitiatory element cleaves indissolubly to this etymon, the stress of which falls on the piacular medium of reconciliation. That same sense of the need of indemnification for transgression was not unrecognized in heathen theories of sacrifice, which oscillated between the rival hypotheses of respectful homage and substantial reparation of guilt. The deeper interpretation of the necessities of the case comes out plainly enough in Plutarch’s remarkable

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essay, *De Sera Vindicta Deorum*, and in such phrases of his as ἐξιλάσκεσθαι τὴν ὀργήν, τὴν μῆνιν, τὸ μῆνιμα, ἀνίλαστος, and the like.³ No doubt ἰλεως, like our own adjective *propitious*, lent itself to a shrunken signification; but even if we pronounce ἰλαστήριον in the great evangelical passage of Romans (iii. 25) to be adjectival, we cannot evacuate its native force, supported as it is by the entire context. Josephus does not do that when he pens the phrase ἰλαστήριον μνῆμα (*Antiq.* xvi. 7), which seems synonymous with Deissmann’s inscriptional examples of ἰλαστήριον, ἀνάθημα being perchance understood.

Yet after all, granting the epithetical construction, little is gained; for it renders the clause ὃν προέθετο ἰλαστήριον at once awkward and inapposite. Paul has just affirmed that his Gospel is witnessed to by the Law. He must be referring to the Levitical ordinances, the “Gospel in hieroglyphics”, as Bishop Horsley styled them; and what more natural than that he should proceed to instance the *Kapporeth* in the holy of holies, which hid from sight the Law’s accusatory tables? Was it not the culminating point of the most solemn acts of priestly expiation? In its sole other mention in the New Testament (Heb. ix. 5) ἰλαστήριον confessedly designates the mercy-seat; and it is worth noting, as a point telling in favour of that sense in *Romans*, that nouns in -τήριον form a class by themselves, generally indicating a local area. There are 40 such verbalisms in circulation. We may specify ἀποδυτήριον, ἀκροατήριον, βαπτιστήριον, ἐργαστήριον, δικαστήριον, κοιμητήριον, κολαστήριον, and in particular the analogous terms θυσιαστήριον,

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ἀγνευτήριον, χρηστήριον. In view of such an array of “localisms”, why should not ἰλαστήριον denote the seat of propitiation?

3. A flagrant specimen of biassed translation meets our eye in Moffatt’s rendering of the last clause of the opening sentence of John’s Gospel: “the Logos was *divine*.” It is the more wanton because θεός here stands in the most prominent relief, placed first and foremost in the clause. Moreover, some of the best Greek writers have themselves carefully discriminated between the substantive θεός and its derivative θεῖος. Plato has drawn that distinction in his *Philebus* and *Sophist*, and Plutarch in a passage in his *Morals* (685), wherein he mentions certain parties who held the Earth to be not merely divine (θεῖος) but actually a deity (θεός). Now John wrote his Gospel that we might “believe on the Son of God”, his Lord and God as much as the God and Lord of his brother-apostle Thomas; not that he might set forth a quasi-divinity or crowning sample of apotheosis, but a veritable theophany. Nor would any reflective

² “Je ne crois qu’à des dieux indulgents” (*Le Dieu des bonnes Gens*).

³ Plut. *Mor.* 170, 557; *Cat. Min.* 61 ; *Lys.* 20.

mind be in danger of confounding the titular or abusive employment of the word “god”, exemplified in the abject flatteries tendered to the Ptolemies or the Caesars, with John’s solemn ascription of essential Deity to the only-begotten Son. When Bacon styles man “the god of the dog”, we do not suspect his theism, because we are well aware that he is dropping a remark, not reciting his creed, as the beloved disciple *is* doing in his sublime prologue.

To clench the matter it suffices to scan Paul’s deliberate differentiation of θεότης and θεΐτης in *Colossians* and *Romans* respectively. He tells us in *Romans* (i. 20) how God’s eternal power and

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divinity (θεΐτης) reveal themselves by the light of nature to the heathen mind, but of Immanuel, that in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead (θεότης) embodied (Col. ii. 9). The *hand* of omnipotence may be traced in the countless orbs that bespangle the heavens, and in the marvellous coadjustments of our comparatively tiny globe; but in the Son we behold the *face* of God unveiled, the express image and transcript of His very Being.

In setting bounds to the utility of the papyri regarded as interpreters of the New Testament we are not acting without warrant. For Milligan himself in the final preface to his *Vocabulary* candidly admits that the Scriptural texts may be ranked intermediately between the literary and everyday scripts, the balance being adjusted in consonance with the range and subject-matter of the sacred writer in question.

II

Let us pause a moment to recognize that *literary element* which transcends the plebeian level. Take two or three examples from the physical sphere, in which the commonalty should find itself quite at home.

1. Πνίγειν (Mark v. 13) and ἀποπνίγειν (Luke viii. 33) in the sense of *drowning* do not seem to be prevalent in the vulgar parlance. In literature they are found as early as Demosthenes. That Plutarch was conversant with the usage three passages at least (*Mor.* 304, 599, 1063) bear witness, and instances could be produced from Polybius, Epictetus (ii. 5), and Lucian (*Tox.* 20). The other employment of the terms (Matt. xiii. 7; Luke viii. 7)

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and of συμπνίγειν (Mark iv. 7) for *choking weeds* can also be paralleled from literary sources exclusively.

2. ἄλογα ζῶα (2 Peter ii. 12 and Jude 10) is another instructive locution in this respect, corresponding broadly with our expression “the brute creation”. The phrase wears a neutral tint, poorly represented by the “creatures without reason” of the R.V., and conveys *per se* no contemptuous innuendo. It appears in Xenophon (*Hieron* vii. 3), repeatedly in Plutarch (*Mor.* 91, 310, 493) and in Philo. If in Byzantine or Modern Greek *alogo* came to designate the *horse*, the process was much the same as when our old-stager of a drayman dubbed his shaft-horse “the brute” *par excellence*.

3. Ἐκπνεῖν is a poetic vocable reserved for solemn occasions, characteristic of Attic tragedy, but rarely found in prose. We cannot class it among workaday words any more than the expression “to give up the ghost”, by which it is rendered in the A.V. A few instances of its use can be supplied from Josephus (*Antiq.* xii. , 9; *B.J.* i. 13) and Plutarch (*Mor.* 347, 597) in dignified connexions; for its two occurrences in the fabulist Babrius must be set down as mock-heroic. In its application to the dying Saviour by Mark and Luke a certain air of gravity seems imparted to the passages concerned (Mark xv. 37; Luke xxiii. 46).

4. These are cases in which we derive no help from the papyri; but as regards the pugilistic metaphor ὑπωπιόζειν which surprises the reader in Luke xviii. 5 and 1 Cor. ix. 27, it is most tantalizing to find them of no avail. In the latter place Paul seemingly informs us that he *pommels* or *cudgels* his body; for ὑπόπιον, properly a black eye, was

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extended in later usage to other bruises. In the Gospel parable the unjust judge laments that the importunate widow *pesters* or *bludgeon* him, employing the vehement image of assault by way of safety-valve for his ruffled feelings. But for any illustration whatsoever we have to go back to the *Pax* of Aristophanes, where cities are described (541) as *battered* (ὑπωπιασμένοι) by dint of war; and even this must be reckoned a literary reference and no exact counterpart to the personal metaphor we have cited.

III

The conclusion we reach upon detailed examination takes shape in the broad affirmation that a large proportion of the New Testament vocabulary may be classed as the *common property* of literary Hellenistic and popular parlance. Let us single out the thrice repeated ἀπέχειν of Matt. vi as a sample. A great deal has been made by Deissmann of the fact, brought to light by the papyri, that ἀπέχει is the technical form of a receipt, an observation of undoubted value. Of the value, however, of his explanation of Christ's saying, which runs: “Their right to receive a reward is realized, as if they had already given a receipt for it,” we are far less certain. It strikes us as a typical specimen of German mystification. Surely the sense is much simpler. “They are in receipt of their payment; they have what they seek, human applause.” We get the echo of this sentiment in Epictetus (iii. 24) when he says of his happy man: ἀπέχει ἅπαντα τὰ ἃ θέλει, “he has all he wants, cash in hand.” In point of fact, this idiomatic use of ἀπέχειν, which recurs in Phil.

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iv. 18, is quite familiar already. The phrase τὸ χρέος ἀπέχειν is as old as Callimachus, and the identical wording of it, τὸν μισθὸν ἀπέχεις, may be met with in Plutarch's *Life of Solon* (22). He has the phrase elsewhere, εὐδαιμονισμὸν ἀπέχειν (*Pelop.* 34), and when he wishes to describe the wages of iniquity, he writes, ἐκπλέω, τὴν δίκην ἀπέχει. In like manner Marcus Aurelius remarks, ἀπέχω τὰ ἐμὰ “I have my goods in hand.” Indeed Luther's version, *sic haben ihren Lohn dahin*, hits the mark very fairly. The believer awaits his promised reward; the Pharisee accepts no deferred payment, but exacts his meed of glorification in ready cash. Cf. Luke vi. 24.

The solitary word ἀπέχει which closes so abruptly Christ's parting charge to His disciples in Mark xiv. 41 is far more abstruse. The only parallel produced for the received translation, "it is enough," is drawn from the pseudo-Anacreon (xv. 33)⁴ where it relates to a portrait in process of execution and reads like a direction to the painter to hold his hand. Perhaps Luke's ἰκονόν ἐστι (xxii. 38), uttered at a later moment, is deemed confirmatory of this rendering. We do not see why Mark's ἀπέχει should not correspond in meaning with those of the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord's prescience of the details of His passion cannot be gainsaid. In any case it comprised every Old Testament prediction thereof; nor could Zechariah's thirty pieces of silver cast to the potter (xi. 12) have escaped His Messianic consciousness. Does not that inner eye of His, which beheld Nathanael under the fig-tree, now espy Judas in treaty with the chief-priests, grasping at this moment the bargain of betrayal which Jesus had bidden him transact with all speed (John xiii.

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27), and is He not enforcing His own verdict on blind self-seeking? "It is settled! The deed of infamy is done! He pockets his reward." For what is the sentence immediately ensuing? "The hour is come; the Son of Man is being betrayed (present tense) into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go hence! My betrayer draweth nigh."

IV

We can only canvass a few of the many expressions that solicit remark; and, in default of a better principle of selection, it may not be amiss to survey a handful of the renderings of the Authorized Version that are admittedly susceptible of improvement, yet have not been emended with perfect success.

1. Its version "castaway" for ἀδόκιμος (1 Cor. ix. 27) has always struck us as objectionable. The word has probably somewhat changed its sense since Tyndale's day; for Sir Walter Raleigh in his *History* talks of "castaway leisure, to wit, unprofitable waste of time". Ἀδόκιμος, it is well known, is a term often applied to light coins (Plut. *Mor.* 94; Epictet. i. 7); but *castaway* now suggests ruin or shipwreck; whereas Paul is thinking of spurious pretensions. Οἱ δόκιμοι in 1 Cor. xi. 19 are the *sterling* converts and δόκιμοι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις (Rom. xiv. 18) = "approved in the sight of men". The charge of being counterfeits seems to have been levelled at the apostles by certain Corinthian coteries. Cf. 2 Cor. xiii. 6, 7, where this expression reappears. It may signify merely *unacceptable* or else *discredited*. Lucian employs it of a parasite unsuccessful in sponging on a patron (*De Merce Cond.*

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11). The utmost reproach it could insinuate would be that of Jeremiah's "reprobate silver". We wonder whether the agonistic imagery of the preceding verse, to which we have already drawn attention, is continued, or a metallurgic figure of light weight superinduced. If so, we might construe: "lest, after preaching to others, I myself should prove *base metal*."

⁴ xvi. 33 in Rose's Teubner edition.

2. Another passage in which the A.V. fails to do justice to a kindred expression occurs in 1 John ii. 16, where the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh are coupled with the pride of life. But that phrase scarcely represents ἀλαζονεία. The term ἀλαζων in effect blends the conceptions of an impostor and a braggadocio. Plutarch stigmatizes a quack doctor as ἰατρος ἀλάζων (*Mor.* 523). On the other hand, in the *Characters* of Theophrastus it is the braggart who figures under this title, with his gross exaggerations and gasconading airs. Bogus assumption lies at the base of ἀλάζονιστάτων; and when Plato in his *Philebus* brands pleasure as ἀλάζονιστάτων it is the illusive element in its seductions that he is exposing. The R.V.'s "vainglory of life" is a real improvement, yet not quite adequate. When the apostle John abandons, as here, his spare vocabulary for a polysyllabic noun, there must be cogent reasons for his procedure. He is contemplating the unregenerate world as a Vanity Fair, and the full strength of his expression can be brought Out only by some such translation as the *charlatanry* or *make-believe* of life. In Plato's *Definitions* (if they are his) ἀλάζονεία is explained as a state of mind pretentious of what does not belong to it. James so employs it (iv. i6) of those who boast of to-morrow, which is not theirs to boast of at all.

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3. Another defective rendering of the A.V. crosses our path in Heb. v. 7, where the clause εἰσακουσθεῖς ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας is paraphrastically translated "heard in that He feared", and in the R.V. "heard for His godly fear", which leaves us still in the dark. Trench has rescued this noun from detraction by showing that the Stoics reckoned it a positive virtue, the golden mean between rashness and poltroonery. According to Diogenes Laertius it is the very antithesis of fearfulness. In Luke's diction εὐλαβῆς is the devout, god-fearing soul, and later on in this Epistle the cognate verb is predicated in commendation of Noah's watchfulness. It corresponds with Cicero's *cautio*, defined in his *Tusculans* (iv. 6) as *a malis declinatio, si cum ratione fit*, and is summed up by Plutarch in the dictum: εὐλαβεῖσθαι σοφῶν ἴδιον (*Mor.* 1038). Philo uses the term of Eve's initial scruple to eat of the forbidden tree. It stands then for *circumspection*, *heedfulness*, the German *Behutsamkeit*. Πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐλάβεια is Plutarch's standing phrase for religious punctiliousness, and γεροντικὴ εὐλάβεια (*Brut.* 12) a praiseworthy feature of old age, namely *wariness*.

The writer here is reverting to the scrupulosity of the human soul of Jesus in Gethsemane, solicitous to be fully assured of the necessity of the impending cross. That unutterably bitter cup of wrath and dereliction—must He drink it? And we recall how His cry of poignant distress, that pathetic S.O.S. wrung from the Prince of Altruists, prescient of the fell tornado of wrath about to burst on His devoted head, was heard, and an angel sent to strengthen Him for the Atlantean load.

4. Nor can we overlook the great lesson of unselfishness taught by St. Paul in Phil. ii, where the

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scala dolorosa of Christ's voluntary self-oblation is set over against His triumphant investiture with Mediatorial sovereignty. We can only pause to reconnoitre verse 6, with its enigmatical ἀρπαγμός, no longer translated with the Vulgate and the A.V., "robbery," but a *prize* or *thing to be grasped at*. But a word must be prefaced in regard to the foregoing clause, ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων. That participle is usually viewed as tantamount to ὄν. No doubt in Hellenistic

Greek its pregnant sense of *being already* or *to begin with* was enfeebled. The introduction of προὑπάρχειν evinces its need of reinforcement. But its etymological significance still lurked in the word, as e.g. it does in our English verb *induce*, which recovers from its hebetude when we speak of inducing a disease or a state of mind. Here then in a context wherein every syllable is emphatic and weighted with meaning, we may expect ὑπάρχειν to do the like. At any rate that happens in other Pauline passages, such as Rom. iv. 19, where Abraham is depicted as already (ὑπάρχων) an hundred years old, or Gal. ii. 14, where the apostle reminds Peter that he is by extraction a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων). Philo in fact ascribes ὑπάρξις, original or essential being, to God alone, and differentiates between εἶναι and ὑπάρχειν in the remarkable sentence, ἔστι τὸ θεῖον καὶ ὑπάρχει (Creat. 61). Is not Paul here avowing that the preexistent Son is vested with the status and subsistence of Deity?

But the crux of the verse consists in the term ἄρπαγμός, suddenly intercalated in connexion with this sublime equality of rank with the Most High. It is at this point that hermeneutics seem to fail us. What is this cryptic expression designed to convey?

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Field insists that it means “a thing to be snatched at”, but leaves the exegesis to others. ἄρπάζειν is a verb the stem of which re-emerges in our word *rapine*; nor can it be divested of its radical notion of depredation or piracy. Matthew uses it of the rifling of the good seed by the devil (xiii. i 9), and John of the intention of the multitude to take Jesus forcibly, that they might make Him a king (vi. I 5). The name of the Harpies or Grabbers was derived from this etymon; and Virgil, in latinizing Apollonius Rhodius’s sketch of their plundering, translates his ἥρπαζον by *diripiunt dapes*. When Aeschines accuses Demosthenes of “clutching at distinction”, his language is ἄρπάζει τὴν φιλοτιμίαν. Plutarch brackets ἄρπαγμα with λάφυρον (*Mor.* 330), and in the LXX it is used of beasts of prey. ἄρμαγμός itself, properly the act of ravaging, is of the utmost rarity; indeed only found once in Plutarch (*Mor.* 12) and once in Vettius Valens (122), in both cases in allusion to projects of spoliation akin to the rape of the Sabine women in Roman tradition.

Look at the context. Paul is condemning self-assumption and self-seeking, and recommending the perfect pattern of self-abnegation as the Christian ideal. I submit, therefore, that this negative proposition does not refer to the Redeemer’s cession of His native glory, but to something contrasted with His upyielding spirit. The contrary assumption underlies the postulate of nearly all expositors that we should interpret the clause in terms of the Saviour’s humiliation, which seems to me to be portrayed in the succeeding verses, introduced by the emphatic adversative ἀλλά. Lightfoot argues that ἄρπαγμός has suffered depletion of meaning and connotes merely *price* or *treasure*, and appeals

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to the Greek fathers, evidently nonplussed by the term, in support of that assumption. But they were intent on rebutting Arian inferences from the text; nor can the fact that rapacity dominates the word and its cognates be seriously disputed.

The Puritan John Owen suggests that the reference is to Adam’s self-aggrandisement, when the primal pair yielded to the bait of “being as gods” dangled before their eyes by the tempter. He is on the right track, but stops short of the goal. Surely the hooded figure here is Satan himself,

the supreme incarnation of insatiate pride and lust of empire. Surely the apostle is here re-evoking the colossal effigy of Lucifer drawn in Isa. xiv under the mask of the Babylonian despot, whose manifesto of sedition culminates with the arrogant vaunt: “I will ascend into heaven : I will be like the Most High” (American R.V., “I will make myself [*Pi’el*] like the Most High”). Ἐσομαι ὅμοιος τῷ Ὑψίστῳ is the LXX version, but it might have been worded, as here, ἔσομαι ἴσα θεῷ. The eternal Son has His abode in the fathomless splendours of Deity; yet He deigns to veil those transcendent glories in a mantle of flesh that He may succour an apostate race; whilst the arch-usurper, though creaturely by nature, in a frenzy of selfish ambition aspires to exalt his throne above the stars of God and blaze forth his Creator’s peer. To his mind sovereignty bulks as an ἀπαιγμός, a booty to be seized at a swoop. Thus by one powerful stroke the antithesis is presented between the self-sufficient Titan, bent on scaling the throne of Deity, and Him who was willing to forgo more than any other being possessed for our sakes, who bowed Himself to a low estate and vagrant homelessness and predicted ignominy

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and reviling, to be the “despised and rejected of men”, to wear the crown of thorns and hang a gazing-stock on the accursed tree as our Sponsor. The *ne plus ultra* of self-centred egotism forms the most effective of foils to the *ne plus ultra* of sacrificial love.

5. Two more questionable renderings of the A.V. may be noted. “Be not of doubtful mind” appears to us to be a doubtful version of the μὴ μετεωρίζεσθε of Luke xii. 29. As a separate injunction it might forbid elation of mind (cf. αἰωρεῖσθαι, ἐπαίρεσθαι)—it represents lofty-eyedness in Ps. cxxxii. i, LXX— but that clashes in a measure with the context and the parallel passage in Matthew. More probably it disallows a state of suspense and tension, *dubia spe pendulus horae*, at variance with faith unfeigned. Polybius and Josephus so use the adjective μετέωρος, and Plutarch has the phrase μετέωρος γεινόμενος for “becoming flurried”. Μετεωρισμός = disturbance of mind in Vettius Valens. In a letter of Augustus quoted in Suetonius (*Claud.* iv) μετεώρως *deligere* is to choose at random. Our Lord’s admonition seems to be meant as a deterrent from a chafing, disquieted humour, racked by suspense and unbecoming His disciples.

6. We think too that the translation “a light shining in a *dark* place” (2 Peter i. 19) can hardly be justified. The R.V. margin has “squalid “, but that is too strong for ἀρχμηρός, unless treated as a Latinism. Aristotle contrasts the word with “gleaming”; so *drab* or *grimy* would be more suitable. It is the standard epithet for mourners with unkempt locks (for it may mean *dusty*), shabby attire and general frowsiness of aspect. Plutarch has the identical phrase ἀρχμηρόι τόποι in referring to the

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waste tract of country through which Pompey marched to succeed Lucullus in Galatia (*Lucull.* 36) I should take the adjective to mean “scrubby” from the context. The veteran apostle is eyeing the “world that lieth in the wicked one” as a sombre tract; till it is lit up with the reanimating beams of Gospel light, and entitles it a *dingy* or *arid* place.

V

1. But the A.V. outvies all its competitors in point of style and rhythm, and is interwoven with our childish memories and lodged in our inmost hearts. Let us then make amends for our criticisms by defending one or two of its renderings against their impugnors. We fully endorse, for example, Field's verdict on the meaning of ἡλικία in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vi. 27). It is true that its normal sense, exemplified in John's Gospel, relates to age, not stature, and that sense being the vulgar one prevails in the papyri. It is equally certain, however, that it can be applied to height, from which age can so frequently be inferred. When J. H. Moulton expresses amazement that anyone should call the addition of 18 inches to one's stature "that which is least", he must have been in an ultra-prosaic mood. Field remarks that a specific reason attaches to this scale of measurement, because τρίπηγος was the current Greek equivalent for a short, and τετράπηγος for a tall, man. The affirmation then is that nobody can modify his height even to the extent of a third of the average quantum of stature. Moulton argues that the interpretation, "which of you by anxiety can prolong his life one moment?" is far less bizarre. It is

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more insipid at any rate, and not likely to imprint itself on the memory like the other. However attractive to minds wedded to the tritonal, the bathos is dearly purchased. Elsewhere there are passages (e.g. Eph. iv. 13) where ἡλικία must needs signify stature, unless anyone is consistent enough to maintain that in Luke's story of Zacchaeus (xix. 3) Zacchaeus climbed up into the sycamore tree because he was under age! We grant that the word = *age* in the LXX, with the possible exception of Ezek. xiii. 18. But the sense of stature cannot be ruled out of court on partial evidence. That it is classical can be demonstrated from Plato (*Euthyd.* 271), Demosthenes (c. *Boeot.* ii. 56) or Herodotus (*passim*); and it is found in Hellenistic to boot as late as the *Tabula* of Cebes (18) and Lucian (*V.H.* i. 40; *De Syr. Dea* 28; *Pro Imag.* 13); also Epictetus (iii. 1). The use of the term πῆγος, a measure of space, is really decisive on the point at issue. We are referred, it is true, to the poet Mimnermus, who has the queer expression "a cubital period", in proof that the cubit might serve as a mensuration of Lime. But sticklers for contemporary diction have small right to appeal to the unique expression of a versifier of the sixth century B.C. in favour of their particular brand of the commonplace.

2. In that undeniably dubious passage, Phil. ii. 16, we are also disposed to uphold the version of ἐπέχειν adopted by the A.V. and R.V. It reverts to the primitive Homeric signification of the verb, *to hold up or forth*, overlaid in after days by many secondary senses. But none of these have any relevance to the passage in hand, with its imagery of celestial luminaries, λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες. The survival of the literal meaning, clearly visible in Theocritus

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(xiii. 46), is sufficiently attested by the established phrase μαστόν or θηλήν ἐπέχειν to offer the breast to an infant, current in Euripides (*Ion* 1492; *Androm.* 225), which reappears in later writers, Pausanias (i. 33), Plutarch (*Mor.* 268), Dionysius Hal. (i. 84) and Lucian (*Zeux.* 4). Plutarch uses the word of drawing swords (*Caes.* 8) and Vettius Valens of heavenly bodies prognosticating a year of blessing or bane (194, 5, 7). As light-bearers, the Philippians are to display the word of life; as shiners, to diffuse the illumination imparted to them.

3. Among traits indicative of literary craftsmanship one of the chiefest is the art of compressing large meaning into cursory adjuncts of the sentence, interlaced with the main proposition. Let us select an instance from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Εὐπερίστατος (xii. 1) is inserted in this fashion, and we hold to the A.V. and R.V.'s translation in this instance. The verbal adjective may be construed either actively or passively and is therefore susceptible of divers interpretations. Believers are here likened to runners in a race, encompassed by a host of sympathetic witnesses, but liable to hampering obstructions inimical to their progress. The ὄγκος spoken of is some positive encumbrance, and it is coupled with the sin qualified by this pregnant epithet, which must be inserted as a dissuasive from its indulgence. Some have indeed fancifully rendered it "the sin which men admire", inasmuch as περίστατος may convey the sense of being gaped at. But that supposition is utterly foreign to the context. The surest clue to the expression presents itself in the twofold meaning of περίστασις and its cognate verb, which has been explicitly noticed both by

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Epictetus (ii. 6) and Marcus Aurelius (ix. 13). can either indicate the *circumstantia* or surroundings of a person or event, or else be used in a pejorative acceptance of a state of beleaguerment, of exigencies and straits, in like fashion with θλίψις, "a squeeze," or the Latin *angustiae*. This latter sense dominates our εὐπερίστατος. When Polybius writes (ii. 48), θλιβόμενος ὑπὸ τῆς περιστάσεως, he appears to be envisaging this image of a clogging encumbrance; and Epictetus likewise (iv. i, 159), in alluding to Diogenes as a kind of anchorite, dubs him ἀπερίστατος (i.e. unencumbered), one proud of his independence of circumstances and family ties.⁵ On the other hand, Diodorus Siculus (iii. 51) represents a throttling or stifling environment as συμπνιγῆς περίστασις. That environment may work for good or ill; it may clasp or constrict. The difference in effect is akin to that of a girdle or a shackle respectively. The girdle braces its wearer, the shackle impedes him. Εὐπερίστατος presents the latter spectacle by way of warning, the picture of *besetting* sin that has become a household word and a salutary admonition to the Christian athlete. The sin *so prone to hamper* or *trammel* would be our version.

4. We feel constrained to sustain the A.V. and R.V. against their emenders in another verse of *Hebrews* (ii. 16), where it is now the fashion to dwarf the meaning of the emphatic verb (for it is reiterated) ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι to the sense of helping, a connotation wholly unrecognized by Liddell and Scott, and for which no evidence is produced save a passage

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from the Apocrypha (*Sir.* iv. 11) that can be other-wise construed. The writer is enforcing the necessity of Christ's assumption of human nature, *Son* though He were, "for the suffering of death." He has taught us how, inasmuch as the children whom He calls brethren are partakers of flesh and blood, it behoves Him to share in the same. "For not of angels," he proceeds, "taketh He hold, but of the seed of Abraham He taketh hold." Lapsed angels are not the quest of our Proxy, but sons of men. Westcott assumes that His ability to succour, dwelt on lower down, furnishes the key to the ἐπίληψις here signalized; but salvation is the primary work of

⁵ Polybius (6. 44) uses the phrase ἀπερίστατοι ῥαστώναι, which Liddell and Scott render "unguarded", a sense scarcely attested elsewhere. Probably it = unshackled *laissez-faire*; for Polybius is contrasting the state of things in wartime and peace, giving the palm, of course, to the latter in the spirit of Aristophanes's *Acharnians*.

the Redeemer, succour the secondary, and the ἰλασμός of the succeeding verse bespeaks its climax. It was for that transcendent end that Jesus Christ became παθητός (Acts xxvi. 23). In the nature that sinned reparation must be offered to the outraged majesty of holiness. Hence the requisition that the *Go'el* should be our Kinsman and take hold of the chosen line of the "seed of the woman". The-present tense is urged as an objection against the received version. But that only renders the proposition timeless; for the date of the cross pertains not to its essence; it may be styled a separable adjunct of the one availing Sacrifice for sin. Our contention is that ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι retains its normal significance, that which it bears in a subsequent quotation (viii. 9) or when employed by Matthew (xiv. 31) of Christ's catching hold of sinking Peter or of His hand laid upon His patients, or metaphorically of laying hold of eternal life. Plutarch uses the term of a thorn-bush catching hold of one's clothes (*Mor.* 94), Xenophon (*Equ.* 8) of grasping a horse's mane, Josephus of fire taking hold of a

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building (*B.J.* vi. 4), Aeschines and Plutarch of seizing by the hair. Observe too that the whole stress of the verse we are scrutinizing rests on the verb; else why is it duplicated, contrary to the general practice of the writer? If the mystical union underlies the saint's fellowship with his Lord, racial union lies at the root of His representative character as the last Adam, His public action and passion on man's behalf.

5. There is one compound phrase, by the way, in *Hebrews* and *Romans*, which we always regret to see treated as a loose prepositional *addendum* to the sentence, and printed consequently as two words. That is the περιμαρτίας of Heb. x. 6, 8, 18; xiii. 11, and Rom. viii. 3; which should be read as a single vocable, indeclinable, if you will, for a *sin-offering*. That is manifest from the LXX usage (Lev. iv. 33; xiv. 19; Num. viii. 8, and the ὀλοκάματα καὶ περιμαρτίας of Ps. xl. 7). We even find the verb περιμαρτίζειν in Aquila and Symmachus, and the latter employs the noun περιμαρτισμός of Zechariah's fountain opened for uncleanness. Possibly when Peter (1 Ep. iii. 18) writes περί ἀμαρτιῶν ἀπέθανε δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, he is not alternating περί with ὑπὲρ, but using a technical synonym for the *ἡατῆαθ*, already familiar to his readers.

VI

Some of Paul's favourite verbalisms invite attention, but these we waive for the present. One sample must suffice. The ethical application of the word εἰλικρίνεια seems to be his patent. Whether its etymology reveals the figure *sun-sifted* or no may be

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uncertain; it certainly conveys the notion of something pure and unalloyed, and the apostle reckons the term as a treasure-trove, representing *moral transparency*. It suited his personality right well. Pretence was a thing he could not brook. "Honest love is not afraid to frown"; and Paul could not bring himself to wink at dissimulation even in bosom-comrades like Peter and Barnabas. No-conception could better body forth his ideal of Christian manhood or portray the Sir Galahad of its chivalry, clad in armour of proof. Few have more nobly embodied that ideal than Paul himself, treading in his Lord's steps with scrupulous integrity and a crystal-heartedness impatient of all double-dealers and skulkers. In the King's Own ranks there must

be no blenching, no tergiversation or traffic with the enemy! “What communion,” he asks “has light with darkness?” Self-evidently none; they are sheer contradictions. Truckling here is treason.

We at once recall his Ephesian admonition (iv. 14.) not to be whirled about by every wind of teaching, obsequious to the wiles of error. Περιφέρεσθαι is a Hellenistic similitude for *veering* or *shilly-shallying*. Plato had used it literally of twirling tops and Xenophon of dogs dancing whirligigs round their owner. Plutarch and Josephus extend the word to-cases of weaklings stunned or dizzied by calamity, and Philodemus applies συμπεριφέρεσθαι to flexible accommodation on the part of temporizers to the set of the current. What Paul abhors is the eddying spirit destitute of principle, which surrenders the truth from feeble-mindedness or utter apathy to the issues at stake. Its volatility or indolence places it at the mercy of ἡ μεθοδία τῆς πλάνης, *the wheedlings of error*, its blandishments and wiles. Μέθοδος and

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μεθοδεύειν in later Greek acquired the meaning of fraudulent dealing which they wear in Polybius and Vettius Valens, who uses μεθοδικός for *crafty*. Let the believers, to use another of Paul’s coinages, ὀρθοποδεῖν (Gal. ii. 14), *walk straightforwardly*, and offer no resemblance to the bends of a river, curvilinear because it takes the line of least resistance.

VII

One closing reflection may be of service. While we are following up linguistic clues we are apt to lose sight of the inspiration of the writers chosen for the office of laying down Christianity’s permanent way. That function the Scriptures both claim and assume, and a wide consilience of inductions substantiates its validity. To the testimony of the Holy Spirit our fractional judgments should unhesitatingly defer; but theories of inspiration are fallible and may prove mischievous. It is obvious that the idiosyncrasies of the sacred penmen are preserved inviolate, and that ordination serves the important end of identifying them, or at least supplying evidence of their identity. In Bishop Moule’s specification of the matter: “their Inspirer used them with the sovereign skill of Deity. For He can take a human personality in all its living thought, sensibility and will, throw it freely on its task of thinking and expression; and behold I the product shall be His.”

Luke’s medical eye and John’s mystical intuition, Paul’s analytical mind, catholicity of spirit, and recourse to every weapon logical or rhetorical to establish truth or uproot falsehood, and James’s

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sermonic mannerism, all have their use; and they reproduce their authors’ individuality intact. How Matthew’s fingerprint, for instance, his fiscal habitude of mind, reappears in the monetary parables which he alone reports; in the “forgive us our *debts*” of his Lord’s Prayer; in his rehearsal of the incident of the tribute-money; even in the business-like fashion in which he docketts the fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament and stresses the exact amount paid to Judas and the purchase of the potter’s field therewith, or relates how a bribe of gold induced the guard stationed at the sepulchre to circulate a fabulous tale concerning the resurrection. The

canon of Holy Writ is no arbitrary fixture. It carries its own watermark interwoven on its scrolls. And the quality and texture of the witness, co-operant amid all “diversities of gifts”, seals its speciality of origin and severs its contents generically from the general mass of religious literature. In Sir William Ramsay’s caustic simile, the organs of the Spirit, when compared with apologists of the second century, show “like eagles among the wrens”; and the descent to their successors resembles a transit to the swampy flats of Holland from the dazzling snow-crests and ravishing panoramas of the Bernese Oberland. And the conspiracy of Scripture attests its inspiration. For “The varying bells make up the perfect chime “.

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