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The Greek and the Aramaic in the Gospels.

BY THE REV. T. H. WIGG, B.D., M.R.A.S., LECTURER IN ARABIC IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

It may probably be now taken for granted that the discourses of Jesus were spoken in Aramaic, and for the most part in His native Galilean dialect. They were first gathered together in that language and, as stated by Papias in the familiar passage of Eusebius, rendered by various hands into Greek. The correctness of this statement of Papias is vouched for by the number of places in which the report of a saying in one Gospel differs from that in another, and in which the different expressions can be most easily accounted for as variant translations of the same underlying Aramaic text. When, therefore, the critic of the N.T. has worked his way back to the oldest form of the Greek text which he can reach, he has not yet finished his task; for he has still to ask himself, what was the Aramaic lying at the back of this oldest Greek? This Aramaic archetype can be reached most surely in those cases in which the form of the Greek in one Gospel differs from that in another and in which both forms go back into the same Aramaic. In such cases the critic may be fairly confident about his results. Perhaps the most familiar example is the use by St. Matthew of the expression 'kingdom of heaven' for the expression 'kingdom of God' used in the other Gospels (cf. Mt 13¹¹ as contrasted with Mk 4¹¹ and Lk 8¹⁰), or the various ways of translating the Oriental phrase, 'Verily I say to you' (Mt 19²⁸, Lk 11⁵¹ 7⁹ 9²⁷ etc.). But there are also a number of the sayings of Jesus of which we have only a single report to go by, and in which we cannot help feeling that the Greek text which we have does not represent the exact meaning of the original words. Several examples of such passages have already been given in the pages of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, and a few more are by the courtesy of the Editor set down here.

The kingdom of heaven is compared (Mt 13³³) to 'leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal.' 'Took and hid' is a rare Hebraism. Absalom 'took and reared up to himself a pillar' (2 S 18¹⁸ and often). But why 'hid'? The Greek word is ἐνέκρυψεν, to hide in a

thing. This verb, however, is used by the LXX translators to render the Hebrew verb 'to bake' in Ezk 4¹², and they regularly translate the corresponding noun meaning 'a cake' by ἐγκρυφίας. The natural English equivalent, therefore, of the Hebrew at any rate would be 'leaven which a woman took and baked in three measures of meal.'

In Lk 16²⁸ the rich man 'lifted up his eyes, being in torments' (ἐν βασάνοις). The fact of being in torment does not appear to be an appropriate cause for his eyes being cast down. The Greek expression is employed by the LXX to render various Hebrew terms, and amongst others, in Ezk 16^{62, 64}, 32^{24, 30}, *klimmah*, 'shame.' We should, therefore, probably read, 'lifted up his eyes, being ashamed.'

In St. Luke's (6²⁶) 'Woe (unto you), when all men shall speak well of you!' the Greek καλῶς εἰπωσι ὑμῶς appears to be a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase which occurs in Gn 37⁴, 'they could not speak peaceably to him,' the only case in which the Hebrew verb 'to speak' takes the direct accusative of the person spoken to, instead of a preposition. Perhaps, therefore, we should render, 'Woe, when all men speak you fair.'

The English Versions speak very frequently in the Gospels of people being 'healed' of their diseases, but constantly the Greek word so rendered is, not ἰασθαι, but θεραπεύειν, which means rather to minister to or attend on the sick. In the O.T. it is never used by the LXX to translate the Hebrew word *rāfa*, which means 'to heal.' Only in Ec 38⁷ is it so used, and this is perhaps a reflexion upon the Hebrew Ecclesiasticus. Whatever the authors of the Gospels may have meant, they do not say that all the sick were cured.

The English Version of Mt 10²⁹, 'One of them (the sparrows) shall not fall to the ground without your Father,' gives us the impression that the sparrow falls *dead*, and this appears to be the meaning of the Greek πεσεῖται also. The common Hebrew verb, however, to which this Greek verb corresponds is *nāfal*. This again has not only the usual different senses of the verb 'to fall' in

English, but it has the special meaning of 'to alight.' Rebekah alighted (literally 'fell,' LXX καταπεδησασα) from her camel (Gen 24⁶⁴), and Naaman from his chariot (2 K 5⁹¹, LXX ἀπέσπασεν). The saying of Jesus would therefore mean that a sparrow does not even *alight* on the ground without God.

The centurion in Mt 8⁹ and Lk 7⁸ says, 'I am a man under authority' (ὕπὸ ἐξουσίας), but he goes on to explain what he means by saying that he has soldiers under him, to one of whom he says Go, and to another Come, and they obey. But surely this is to be a man *in* authority, not *under* it. The Semitic word for authority is *sultān*, and the verb means, not to be put under authority, but to be made *sultān*. Doubtless, therefore, what the centurion really said was that he was a man put *in*, not *under* authority.

The expression of John the Baptist in Mt 3⁸ and Lk 3⁸ also, 'Make, therefore, fruit worthy of repentance,' is a literal translation from the Greek, ἀξίον τῆς μετανόιας. On the analogy, however, of such phrases as 'worthy of punishment' (He 10²⁰) or 'worthy of acceptance' (1 Ti 1¹⁵), 'worthy of repentance' should mean 'deserving of repentance' or 'fit to be repented of.' But this is just the opposite of the sense required, which is, 'Make fruits *not* deserving of repentance.' The fact is that the Greek word ἀξίος ('worthy') here seems to be a translation of the Hebrew word *ben* ('son'), as it is also in Dt 25²: 'And if the culprit be worthy of beating,' literally, 'a son of beating.' 'A son of beating' means 'deserving of blows,' as the Greek has it (ἀξίος πλῆγῶν); but 'a son of repentance' would not in this passage mean 'deserving of repentance,' but 'the outcome of repentance.' The point is that the Greek phrase means 'Do works which will lead to repentance,' but the Hebrew phrase means that the works are the sons or daughters of the repentance, that is, the repentance produces the works, not the works

the repentance. It may be mentioned in passing that the use of the singular 'fruit' in Mt., whilst the plural 'fruits' is used in Lk., is simply due to the fact of each of these being an equally legitimate rendering of the collective Hebrew word *phē*. The LXX also translate now by the singular and now by the plural.

Lk 14^{12, 13}: When you make a feast 'do not invite your friends,' but 'invite the poor.' The usual verb for 'to invite' to a feast is in the Gospels καλεῖν, and in the papyri ἐρωτᾶν (Milligan, *Selections*, Nos. 23 and 39; for καλεῖν, cf. Mt 22^{3f}, 1 Co 10²⁷, and the preceding verses in Lk.); but here the word is φωνεῖν, which properly means 'to shout,' 'call aloud.' The English Version gets over the difficulty very neatly by translating by 'call' instead of their usual 'bid.' In Hebrew the common word for 'to shout' or 'call out' is *qārā*, which is also the usual word for 'to invite' (1 S 9²²). In the former sense it is rendered in the LXX of Jer 17¹¹, Dn 4¹¹ (also Theodotion) 5¹¹ by φωνεῖν, and in the present passage the original translator appears by inadvertence to have used the same word.

The sentence in Lk 22²⁶, 'He that is greater among you, let him be as the younger,' does not present a correct antithesis. The reason, no doubt, is that in Hebrew and Aramaic one word denotes 'greater' and 'elder,' and one word also 'less' and 'younger.' The saying, therefore, would naturally be as the younger,' or, 'He that is greater among you let him be as the less' (cf. Mt 20²⁶, Mk 10⁴⁴).

However often one were to read through the Gospels, it is probable that at every reading he would notice some expressions out of which, on being turned back into the underlying Hebrew or Aramaic, it is possible to get a slightly better sense than is found in the Greek texts which have come down to us.