

## The So-called Biblical Greek.

BY J. RENDEL HARRIS, M.A., LL.D., LITT.D.

ALL scholars are by this time familiar with the revolution that has been effected in our ideas of the character of the Greek of the New Testament and of the Septuagint by the discoveries of masses of contemporary documents collected from the Egyptian sands. These documents have been used to restore to us the spoken Greek of the early centuries of the Christian era, and to enable us to rewrite under their influence both the dictionary and the grammar of the speech of the people. The supposed isolation of Biblical Greek has disappeared; it has, as Professor Moulton says, been destroyed by the new evidence. There is no more any 'language of the Holy Ghost,' in which sacred books were providentially written, only the speech of the people of the time, used by apostles just as by merchants and artisans. With the dissolution of the figment of Biblical Greek, there has also vanished (so, at least, it is supposed) the translators' Greek, especially in the sense of Hebraisms or Aramaisms, which were supposed to colour so intensely the sacred diction. The matter is summed up for us by Professor Milligan in his little book on the Greek Papyri as follows (p. xxix):

'In the matter of *language*, we have now abundant proof that the so-called "peculiarities" of Biblical Greek are due simply to the fact that the writers of the New Testament for the most part made use of the ordinary colloquial Greek, the *Koiné* of their day.'

Dr. Milligan, however, was wisely cautious in not following Professor Moulton in his almost exclusion of translation Greek and Hebraisms. He reserved some possible small place for these, while adhering to the statement that the Greek of the New Testament is the *Koiné*. This revolution in theological learning was nowhere more strikingly felt than in the work of Professor Moulton himself, who, starting from the presumption that Winer's method of treating the Greek of the New Testament was correct, and essaying the filial duty of completing and re-editing his father's edition of Winer, was obliged to abandon the whole subject to which *pietas* had closely attached him, and rewrite the New Testament grammar *de novo* from the standpoint of recent discoveries. All of this is

well known, and every one agrees with Deissmann, Moulton, and Milligan, except that we, some of us, hold that there is abundance of translators' Aramaism in parts of the New Testament, which cannot be contradicted, and must be allowed for. Now, in connexion with these forward movements in philology and grammar, it was interesting to ask whether the changes had been foreseen, or in any way foretold.

Professor Moulton, in the additional notes to the second edition of his *Grammar of N.T. Greek*, produced a statement which appeared to involve in the discovery of the *Koiné* no less a name than that of Dr. Lightfoot. The note is as follows:—

'The Rev. J. Pulliblack sends me an interesting extract from his notes of Bishop Lightfoot's lectures in 1863. Speaking of some N.T. word which had its only classical authority in Herodotus, he said: "You are not to suppose that the word had fallen out of use in the interval, only that it had not been used in the books which remain to us: probably it had been part of the common speech all along. I will go further and say that if we could only recover letters that ordinary people wrote to each other without any thought of being literary, we should have the greatest possible help for the understanding of the language of the N.T. generally."'

The sentences quoted from Bishop Lightfoot were so striking that it is not surprising that Professor Milligan printed them as an introduction to his study of the Greek Papyri.

We are now going to draw attention to an earlier authority, who says substantially the same thing as Lightfoot, and we shall raise incidentally the question whether Lightfoot himself may not have been indebted to the source from which we are transcribing: at all events we propose to show (Dr. Moulton will perhaps start on hearing it) that Lightfoot had been anticipated by Winer himself. Well, not exactly by Winer, but by one of the English editions of Winer. I have before me a translation of the sixth edition of Winer by Edward Masson, formerly Professor in the University of Athens; it is the third edition of the translation, and is dated in 1861. (I find, moreover, on

examination, that the preface is substantially the same as in the first edition of 1859.) In the translator's Prolegomena it is at once clear that the writer has not resided in Athens to no purpose, he understands the importance and validity of the Greek accents, which he vigorously defends; he understands also the popular overestimate of the itacistic variations in transcribed Greek texts from the earliest times; but it is when he comes to remark upon what he calls dialectology that he breaks most decidedly with current ideas, and prepares to deal out translator's footnotes to Winer himself: for Masson had arrived, by the study of the modern Greek, at the same results which Deissmann and Moulton reach from the study of the papyri, namely, that the supposed Biblical Greek was the spoken Greek of the day. Let us, then, see what Masson says on the point; here are some sentences:—

P. vii. 'The diction of the New Testament is the plain and unaffected Hellenic of the Apostolic Age, as employed by Greek-speaking Christians when discoursing on religious subjects.

'It cannot be shown that the New Testament writers introduced any word or expression whatever, peculiar to themselves; . . . the history and doctrines of Christianity had been for some years discussed in Greek before any part of the New Testament was written. . . . Apart from the Hebraisms—the number of which has, for the most part, been grossly exaggerated—the New Testament may be considered as exhibiting the only genuine *facsimile* of the colloquial diction employed by *unsophisticated* Grecian gentlemen of the first century, who spoke without pedantry—as *ιδιώται* and not as *σοφισταί*.'

Here, then, we have the supposed Biblical Greek banished as effectively as by our modern exegetes and critics; the writer is as outspoken in

his scepticism of Hebraism in the New Testament as Professor Moulton himself, though he arrives at his results by a somewhat different road, and probably overshoots the mark in respect to Semitisms as Moulton did and as Hellenists might easily do. He is anxious to retain the authorship of the New Testament writings for Greek gentlemen, instead of cobblers and fishermen and agriculturists, but he admits that his gentleman writer is unsophisticated and is talking as *ιδιώτης*, which very nearly puts the matter as the papyri would suggest, and is practically equivalent to the assumption of the existence of the *Koinῆ*. They wrote, as Lightfoot imagined, *without any thought of being literary*.

If one reads Masson's preface as it appears in the English Winer, it will perhaps strike the reader as being somewhat superficial and his results rather hastily stated; but this is due, not to lack of ability to present his case, or to undue rapidity in formulating his conclusions, but to editorial compression exercised from without. It is much to be regretted that Masson's preface was reduced, I suppose by the publishers, to its present state of tenuity. One can only speculate on the reason for this treatment, for which Masson expresses regret; perhaps it was considered inimical to the interest of the author translated that his foundations should be undermined by his translator; but, whatever was the reason, there seems no doubt that a valuable piece of investigation was suppressed, or reduced to such scanty dimensions that its main thesis escaped the attention of New Testament students generally: even Professor Moulton, who had the re-editing of Winer in hand, does not seem to have been aware that any one had arrived some fifty years since, by the road of modern Greek, at the main conclusions of the papyrologists.

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF PHILIPPIANS.

#### PHILIPPIANS IV. 13.

**I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.**

1. It is not Paul the Apostle that is speaking here, but Paul the man; the man tried and trained, inured to hardship, and disciplined to

contentment by the numberless terrible vicissitudes of his strange, eventful life; the man of like passions with ourselves; the man who had to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, even as he exhorted others; and when, therefore, he thus tells us of the mastery which he had obtained over