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St. Paul as a Man of Science.

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INTIMATIONS here and there transpire, through St. Paul's Epistles, of acquaintance with philosophy, as we should naturally expect from a man of his culture and power. His speech on the Areopagus, as recorded by the Acts of the Apostles, confirms this impression. And so we may not unreasonably hope to discover in his writings evidence betraying some knowledge or theory of physics, and proofs that he had formed a working hypothesis, at any rate of the cosmos, as to its structure and laws and meaning. Itinerant philosophers, such as the Cynic (with his *baculum et pera*), were visible and audible everywhere, and went everywhere, carrying new doctrines and old divinities. And it seems certain that St. Paul's learning was not confined to the literature or the teaching and tenets of Rabbinical professors. Evidently he possessed and cultivated an open mind. Even if he had never listened to any public lectures of Stoics or Epicureans as a regular pupil, he must frequently have heard their views discussed, whether as matters for doubt and discredit, or as subjects for repudiation. His age was emphatically an age of many opinions, like our own, and discourses in the open air and not restricted to the privacy of private rooms eagerly courted criticism and invited inquiry. The "goniobombukes" (or "corner-buzzers") did not hide their light under a bushel, and had become by practice far too ready-witted to be apprehensive of any questioning. And, as philosophy and science in his time strode about the streets and mouthed their paradoxes in the market-places, the great Apostle to the Gentiles could not have escaped some tincture of the different principles held by the different schools, and indeed must have been more or less familiar with their cardinal convictions. We know that the populace, the mere mob of Byzantium or Alexandria, argued in the very thorough-

fares of these cities the most knotty points of speculative theology. And we need not doubt that Antioch and Tarsus also threshed out in public the thoughts of cosmologists, amid the buying and selling and chaffering of cheap pedlar's merchandise, and the perpetual stream of idlers who sought and found amusement at each fresh point of arrested progress. The travelling philosopher in those days, half missionary and half pioneer, in search of proselytes and a humble pittance on which to live, took the place of our itinerant vendor of quack medicines or low-priced goods. Accordingly, the greatest recluse, the most bigoted zealot for the Jewish faith, grew gradually and inevitably acquainted with all that was town talk or common street chatter, whether he chose to believe or disbelieve. Agnostics abounded, prepared to prove at a moment's notice that nothing really existed. Short cuts to complete happiness or omniscience were proffered to the bypassers or bystanders on the easiest possible terms by Greek or Asiatic cheapjacks. All the conundrums of all the creeds, all the problems of life, all the riddles of knowing and being, could be solved for a few small coins in a few minutes by the expounders of patent panaceas or universal wisdom. Where we seek remedies for the body, people in St. Paul's period sought remedies for diseases of the mind or soul.

It appears absolutely certain, as we shall discover in the course of this brief inquiry, that St. Paul was conversant with, and practically accepted the physics of, the popular Stoics, and employed their terminology, while applying and extending it to higher and more spiritual purposes. This can be shown without difficulty. Of course, the Stoics were materialists. But the Apostle took and used, for instance, their πνεῦμα (the aboriginal substance from which they made everything proceed) and adapted it to his own sublime ends. Indeed, he could hardly have acted otherwise with any amount of success. We are well aware that our Lord did precisely the same thing in adopting the standpoint in knowledge of his hearers, which obviously did not imply or commit Him to an acceptance of

common fallacies and errors. He simply took the materials which He found ready to His hand, and worked them up into His illustrations for precept or parable. A revolutionary iconoclasm, at the commencement of His ministry, would have been fatal, and created a hopeless prejudice against Him and His teaching. So He embraced for the vehicle of His instructions the moulds of current expression, the prevailing metaphors of thought, and the machinery of the fashionable eschatology, and the language of the great Wisdom literature. St. Paul naturally followed in His footsteps. The best-known and best-approved cosmology then before the world was the Stoics, and to this he appealed, and on this he constructed his more spacious and spiritual universe. Thus with Him the πνεῦμα of the materialists was transformed into the truth of an all-penetrating and all-pervading Divine Spirit. We must not make the mistake of supposing that the Stoic's principle or matrix of everything was coarsely and crudely substantial, for it answered to nothing of the kind. It resembled neither the fire of Heraclitus nor the air of Anaximenes and Diogenes of Apollonia, but was far more like our modern ether. It seems that the Stoics borrowed their πνεῦμα, or vital breath, from the medical schools of Hippocrates and Praxagoras and Erasistratus. We know that Praxagoras, after dissection, finding that the arteries were empty, immediately arrived at the conclusion that these conveyed the πνεῦμα, or vital breath. These philosophers held that their universal principle was present even in stones and metals as a binding force, or ἕξις, as if they had some vague anticipation of modern chemistry and cohesion, or even the electric theory of matter. Though we have no record that they knew birds (especially the toucan tribe) to be literally pneumatic machines, with air in their hollow bones. Indeed, at first they taught that animals were merely ζῶα, and not ἔμψυχα, though finally they did concede to them a soul. If we take only the Epistles to the Romans and the Corinthians and consider these, we shall be astonished at the frequency with which the word πνεῦμα occurs. It appears to be St. Paul's favourite term, and we need not

imagine that 1 Cor. xv. 47 is a contradiction, for the first in revelation would undoubtedly not be the first in order and importance. It would require a big book and not a short essay to elaborate the Apostle's persistent use and application of the term before us. He employed it so often, evidently because it would be familiar to his readers, and was a stock expression of the Stoics.

Another favourite doctrine of this school was that of Tension, introduced by Cleanthes. And the πληγὴ πυρὸς, as well as εὐτονία, played a most important part in the development alike of their physics and ethics. But, while the Stoics limited the possibilities of action to positive contact, St. Paul, as we should expect, transferred them to mere presence and a distance. However, the Stoics were invariably logical and consistent. Thinking only σῶμα, or body, existed, they maintained that even its very qualities were corporeal. St. Paul may allude to this teaching in Rom. xii. 5: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ." And, let us notice here in passing, that the Stoics in their views of Extension and Resistance approached very near to the modern doctrine of Attraction and Repulsion. And their geocentric philosophy held sway from Eudoxus down to Dante and Copernicus. It is impossible to believe St. Paul was not thinking of the Stoic doctrine of Tension when he wrote Phil. iii. 13, etc.: "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It will be observed that he uses the word ἐπεκτεινόμενος. But the idea of strain and effort, while, of course, illustrated by the bodily discipline demanded by the athletic games of Greece, seems unquestionably to derive rather from philosophy than a spectacle, though such bodily exercises were taken by the Greeks at least as seriously as ours, and perhaps without quite so much intrusion and consequent degradation of mere professionalism.

Moreover, the Stoics held a distinctive doctrine of the λόγος σπερματικὸς, or the germinal reason, in which we may almost

discover a principle the precursor of Evolution. They used the word λόγος where Aristotle used εἶδος, and they certainly anticipated the purely modern tenet (as we should claim it to be) of two bodies occupying one and the same space—in their κρᾶσις δι' ὅλου. But we may fairly conclude that St. Paul in 1 Cor. xv. 38, clearly alluded to the λόγος σπερματικός, when he wrote: "To every seed its own body." And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who may just possibly have been St. Paul—now that even the Higher Criticism seems giving us back our Moses and St. John—in chap. iv. 12, bears surely a witness to this peculiar teaching: "For the word (λόγος) of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and body, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The "logos" doctrine should have lifted the Stoics out of materialism, and rendered Deism quite impossible. But the common mistake, shared both by metaphysicians and men of science, that the transfer of purely physical metaphors to things spiritual rendered these therefore incredible, was one that great thinkers should not make or have made. We must never forget we have no choice whatever on the subject. Language was built up by observation of, and reflection on, material processes. And it is probable that St. Paul, following the Stoics, might well have explained everything by the λόγος τῆς οὐσίας. Their teaching that there were two grand principles, the efficient, or positive and the passive, or the capability of acting and being acted upon, or action and reaction, was clearly taught in spiritual precepts and pictures by the Apostle, and was good science as well as good theology. Indeed, the Stoics, in some questions, were greater and wiser than they knew, and in some respects practical evolutionists. Zeno proclaimed the inseparability of form and matter—form being always attached to matter, and matter being always informed by the controlling principle and conformed to its particular type. And the λόγος ἔμφυτος of St. James must have been as familar to St. Paul as to the Stoics themselves. For,

in spite of those easy assumptions laid down by an airy omniscience, assuring us that the Bible contains no evidences of secular knowledge, and was never intended to reveal what the reason can discover, and that it merely tells us the way we should go to heaven, and not the way the heaven goeth, it seems absolutely demonstrable that the Apostle was abreast of the science of his day.

St. Paul, again, appears to have accepted the theory of Heraclitus more thoroughly formulated by the Stoics—namely, the ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω. This view of progress, terminable in a definite time, running in cycles that repeated themselves, through inexorable stages of growth and decay and final catastrophic destruction, bears a very strong resemblance to the modern belief of Evolution ending in dissolution, integration and disintegration returning eventually to a fresh reintegration, as expounded by Herbert Spencer in his "First Principles." For the Stoics proclaimed a perpetual transformation of the one eternal substance. Form succeeded form, passing from one ἀποκατάστασις to another, and no form was, or could be, immortal. St. Paul, with his usual insight and sense of adaptability, applied this cosmic theory to the exposition of his eschatological creed and apocalyptic conceptions. "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. iii. 13). And once more: "To you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance" (2 Thess. i. 7). Of course, the *locus classicus* is 2 Peter iii. 10. But in 1 Cor. xv., and in 1 Thess. iv. 16, and in 1 Cor. vi. 2, and in other passages, we have clear indications of a Christological extension given to the cosmic theory of the Stoics—a definitely long dispensation of one kind superseded by a new dispensation of all things. And we may fairly conclude that the Wisdom literature, treasured and interpreted in the Rabbinical schools

and the teachings of Zarathustra, would not have been so extensively known and become such public property as the familiar tenets of the Stoics with their then popular philosophy and morality and science. Unbelievers, the Apostle wrote, would be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power, when He shall come" (2 Thess. i. 9). And again: "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. ii. 8).

St. Paul, besides, elaborated in his various spiritual applications the sympathy and symphony and "synectic" forces, the continuity and harmony of Nature. The special character of his nomenclature manifests this point at once to all who have learned to read between the lines and understand open or obscure allusions. A considerable philosophic vocabulary might be readily constructed from St. Paul's verbal resources. In the Apostle's persistent endeavour to elucidate the meaning of heavenly mysteries, he shows that the ultimate expression of the physical and the hyperphysical is one and the same. No doubt, he wrote: "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual." But this does not alter or even affect the case. He wished to assert that the materialism of the Stoics, so well known to everyone, when rightly considered and rationally worked out, ended n a logical spirituality. He borrowed his weapons from the armoury of his opponents and pierced them with their own shafts. In the admitted unity of Nature he perceived and preached the confirmation of the Trinity in Unity and the Three Persons in the One God. Metaphysical or scientific phraseology would not be strange to his humblest hearers or readers, though with Galilean peasants it might have been otherwise. But the Apostle of the Gentiles, while he numbered among his devoted adherents and disciples recruits from the lowliest labouring classes, nevertheless always addressed a quick-witted, cultivated audience. And if our street arabs can

and do quote Shakespeare appositely before police magistrates, we need not doubt the intelligence or information of Greeks and Græco-Romans or Asiatics.

But it is, perhaps, in other directions that we shall find St. Paul most powerfully impressed by the physical theory of the Stoics. Their system could not possibly avoid an iron determinism. And we shall see how admirably the hypothesis was used and transformed by the Apostle. Necessitarianism of any kind has no part or place in our religion. It is entirely abhorrent to Christianity. Free will has been and always must be the universal postulate of our faith. Even the omnipotence of God Himself becomes powerless when measured against the self-will of a midge-like man. He cannot, and does not, and will not, ever force us to do what we choose not deliberately of our own initiative. Let us restrict as much as we like the area of our unbiassed volition, there remains still a centre of indifference, or a neutral ground, over which the individual alone reigns and rules without a rival, whatever the influence of environment or the burden or handicapping of heredity. There he stands,

"Sufficient to have stood, yet free to fall."

He can so far devolve the responsibility on no one, neither on the Devil nor on the Deity, neither on his birth and antecedents nor on his miseducation and misfortunes generally. Let him come even upon the scene like a member of the criminal classes, damned into the world (so to speak), without a chance or an opportunity or an opening in his favour. And yet even here he can, at the last moment, draw back and answer the temptation to evil with something of the power and dignity of the categorical imperative and the rudimentary conscience, which even exists in him and bears its infallible testimony till his final dissolution. And in this particular aspect of the Stoic science St. Paul rose to the full height of the occasion. He translated the principle which he recognized so clearly into an effective teleology. Determinism in his hands, and from his inspired and inspiring instruction, was converted into a noble purposeful-

ness. Fate, destiny, necessity, the grinding of the grim, blind, inexorable machine grew a gracious τέλος, or end, which proved to be really and truly and finally Christ Himself. For unless the New Testament witnesses to Him as the ultimate Principle of Progress and the ultimate Interpretation of life and everything, it teaches nothing. The doctrine of election and selection at last runs out thus with irresistible logic. "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to His purpose." "According as He hath chosen us to Him before the foundation of the world . . . having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will . . . according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him: in Whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

It seems quite needless to multiply proofs of our assertion after these quotations. God's great end reveals itself gradually to free moral accountable agents in the history of His paternal Providence through a selection appealing to and answered by a deliberate personal election. The multitudinous evidences of an Almighty Will, energizing for good in the cosmos and its evolution, respond to the passionate requirements of every human will. The grand overruling and immanent Divine action, nearest when most transcendentally removed, invites the appropriate and inevitable reaction of man's heart and mind. Deep calls to deep, Will to will, and Personality to personality. The brute pressure of a fatalistic force is rebaptized into the gentle suasiveness of a just direction that inclines, but never compels. Awful engines and instruments of a merciless might, grinding down into dust whatever opposes or thwarts them, prove to be but the tender drawing of the cords of Love—the

golden chains, as Tennyson says, that bind the world about the feet of God.

> "For so the whole round earth is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

The Apostle, here as everywhere, proclaims the eternal incidence of the ideal on the actual, and the coincidence of the ideal and the real. Never was a finer revenge wreaked upon materialism, which now is a dead, or certainly a dying and desperate, cause, than that of the Apostle. He took the terms, the conceptions, the physical theories of the Stoics, he carried them to and passed them through the transfiguring mint of the Cross, and then reissued them recoined and glorified into new creative ideas and immortal hopes. He revealed in the altar they had erected to the Unknown God an unconscious tribute to Christ, the summing and saving end of all.

> "For I doubt not one increasing purpose through the ages runs,
> And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns."