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he said pleadingly then. But he knows God better now. He has had rewards he never dreamed of. He has had a vision of a God who breaks the letter of His promise in order that He may keep it with overwhelming excellence in the spirit. He has seen that nothing is impossible with God, and that He is able to give him Isaac back again. Or if not—and this is now the secret of the father of the faithful—he has discovered that when God says He is a rewarder, the reward, the final and the full reward, is Himself. So Abraham went to the land of Moriah, and he who had received the promise went to offer up the son through whom alone the promise could be fulfilled, not because faith is blind and unreasonable, but because, dearly as he loved Isaac, and fondly as he still hoped that through him should arise the family by whom all the nations of the earth should be blest, God Himself had at last become his shield and his exceeding great reward.

The New Testament

IN THE LIGHT OF RECENTLY DISCOVERED TEXTS OF THE GRÆCO-ROMAN WORLD.

By Professor Dr. theol. Adolf Deissmann, of the University of Heidelberg.

III. The Importance of the Texts for the Literary Interpretation of the New Testament.

The foregoing estimate of the New Testament may be reached also from the point of view of the historian of literature, and again it is the texts of the imperial age that furnish the proper standard for criticizing the New Testament as literature.

The principle thus enunciated seems, however, to place us in an awkward situation. We have repeatedly insisted on the fact that the texts in question are largely of a *non*-literary character, and shall we now expect light on the state of literature from non-literary texts? That seems to involve a contradiction; and we admit that it may sound surprising at first when it is claimed that from such poor texts as papyrus and potsherd often afford, we can learn to estimate rightly the Epistles to the Romans and the Corinthians, and at length to comprehend the literary development of Primitive Christianity.

In speaking of the literary development of Primitive Christianity we approach a subject which has not yet been recognized by many persons in its full importance. Huge as is the library of books that have been written on the origin of the New Testament and of its separate parts, the New Testament has not often been studied by historians of literature; that is to say, as a branch of the history of ancient literature. Indeed, the whole problem of the literary study of Primitive Christianity has been understood by very few scholars. An honourable exception must be mentioned, Franz Overbeck, with his important treatise on the beginnings of patristic literature.[1] As a rule, the very existence of the problem is not realized, because people approach the New Testament with the idea that the early Christian writings collected and preserved in this book are each and all of them literary works.

But the problem calls for consideration. Whoever looks on the New Testament simply as a collection of small literary works, and studies it as such, commits the mistake of which a writer on art would be guilty who should deal with a collection of curios in which natural petrifactions lay side by side with ancient sculptures, as if it were simply and solely a collection of works of art. It is wrong to *assume* that the New Testament is literary in all its parts; it is our duty to inquire whether it is so. This question coincides with another, somewhat differently formulated: Was Primitive Christianity literary from the beginning? or, When did Primitive Christianity become literary, and what are the separate stages in its literary development?

[1] *Historische Zeitschrift*, 48; Neue Folge, 12 (1882), pp. 429 ff.

In order to answer these questions—questions not of academic interest merely, but conducive to an intimate knowledge of the essence of Christianity—we must have a clear idea as to the meaning of the term 'literature,' and the various forms in which literature may express itself. And here the inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca render us an inestimable service—first as non-literary texts, by teaching us that not everything which is written, or which has come down to us in written form, is to be regarded straightway as literature; and secondly, as popular texts, by teaching us that within the department of literature we must distinguish between what is literary and popular and what is literary and professional.

What is literature? We define it thus: Literature is that which is written for the public, or for a public, and which is cast in a definite artistic form. The man who writes a lease or a receipt, or an application to official quarters, or a letter, does not in so doing contribute to literature. All the texts just named, lease, receipt, petition, letter, and scores of such, are non-literary texts, created not by art but by the necessities of life, destined not for the public and future generations but for the trivial round, the household purposes, so to say, of a man's life, or dedicated to the memory—alas, so brief—of one fallen asleep. This is precisely the charm which the thousands of such non-literary texts on stone, papyrus, and clay possess for us, that they are to a large extent documents of human life, not creations of art, that they are records of work and joy and sorrow, not intended for us, but placed in our hands by a kindly fate that wished to bring us of a later generation into human touch with the olden time. One class in particular of these documents of human life and work has been made accessible to us by the new discoveries in surprising abundance and delightful freshness—that is the ancient *letters*, the private, familiar correspondence of individuals, not in later copies, but the actual originals on stone, lead, papyrus, clay, and wax. What was impossible, say, in the decade before 1885 has now become a possibility: we can really write the history of ancient letter-writing, in its full extent of several thousand years, if we take it in the most comprehensive sense, and of more than one thousand years even if we limit it to ancient letter-writing in Greek and Latin. The oldest Greek letter known, which was rescued by Professor Wünsch of Giessen, and has lately been the subject of a description[1] by Dr. Wilhelm of Athens, is written on a leaden tablet of the fourth century B.C. that was found near Athens, and is now in the Berlin Museum. After that date we have many hundreds of Greek autograph letters on papyrus and clay, written chiefly by unknown Egyptians from the third century B.C. down to the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.—a truly splendid collection of materials for the student of ancient letter-writing. Among them there are perfect gems of the most naïve humanity. These letters, accompanied by translations, ought to be made accessible to all educated people;[2] the continuity of the inner life of man throughout the centuries would be made plain to every discerning reader of these simple lines. Even supposing the letters were before us in a neat little volume, as clear as print could make them, yet no person of intelligence, despite the literary garb in which they had been arrayed after fifteen hundred years, would regard them as literature. Every one would know at once that these letters from soldiers, peasants, and women were non-literary, that they were meant for the person to whom they are addressed, and that *we* possess them by the merest chance. The letter is a confidential conversation in writing. Individual and personal in its nature it is just as non-literary as an exercise-book, a lease, or a receipt. The public has nothing to do with it; it is and wishes to be private.

All this is very obvious, but it often happens that the obvious escapes people. One reason why the non-literary nature of the letter has not always been clearly understood is that even in antiquity there were authors who wrote literary matter in letter form. Long before the beginning of our era such literary letters were published, and down to the present day this unhampered, easy literary form has remained popular, especially in political literature, where, in the guise of the 'open letter,' it is fond of taking sides on questions of the hour. Theodor Mommsen repeatedly chose this form for his political manifestoes, and the letter of the Emperor William II. to Admiral Hollmann on the 'Babel-Bible' controversy was destined for publication from the beginning, and was not a familiar private letter, but a literary letter, an epistle. We will reserve this name 'epistle' for the literary as

[1] *Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Instituts*, 1904, vii. pp. 94 ff.

[2] See the specimens given in the *Bible Studies*.

distinguished from the real letter. The epistle is a form of literary art, just like the drama, the epigram, the dialogue, the oration. It has nothing in common with the letter but its form; in all else it is the opposite of a real letter. Its contents are intended to interest some sort of public. General in substance and in purpose, it makes use of what is individual only to keep up the appearance of a letter. The letter is private, but the epistle is cried in the market; every one may read it, many copies of it are published: the more readers it finds, the better its purpose is fulfilled.

The epistle is as different from the letter, as the historical drama is from history, as the epigram from an inscription on a vase, as a Platonic dialogue from the confidential talk of friends, as a funeral oration from the words of consolation spoken by a father to his motherless child—in short, as art differs from nature. The letter is a fragment of life, the epistle is a form and a creation of art.

What is the purpose of this distinction between the letter and the epistle to which we have been led by the ancient letters on stone, papyrus, clay, etc.? It is a matter of great importance for our subject. In the New Testament there are quite a number of longer or shorter texts which claim to be letters—'letters' of St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter, etc. The question should surely at once suggest itself. Are these texts non-literary letters, or are they literary epistles? Yet the fact that all these texts with the outward marks of letters have been collected in a book, the New Testament, has long blinded men to the existence of the problem. Most scholars, almost without troubling to examine them, concluded that all these texts were literary works. But now that the newly discovered letters have raised the whole problem and provided us with the standard by which an ancient text must be judged with regard to its epistolary character, the question can no longer be suppressed. In the judgment of the present writer there is but one answer possible as we rise from the study of those newly discovered letters, namely, a decided affirmation that the letters of St. Paul are not literary, that they are genuine familiar letters, not epistles, not written by St. Paul for publication and for after-ages, but simply for those to whom they were sent. Of course, even before the discovery of the ancient autograph letters there were scholars who recognized the letter-like character of the Pauline Epistles by internal evidence. But, on the whole, the study of St. Paul was dominated by the misconception that his writings were of the literary order. Now, however, in face of the wealth of materials for the history of ancient letter-writing, the conviction that St. Paul's writings are of the true letter-type will gain ground as time goes on. We must only beware of discussing the question in its bearing on St. Paul to the Romans until we have first dealt with his smaller writings. They must be compared with the soldiers' letters and peasants' letters from Egypt, and with all the other ancient letters; the relationship of the two groups as regards phraseology and general style will then become apparent immediately. Even the oldest letter of all, written on the leaden tablet from Athens, is instructive. It contains an expression that, clearly current in the colloquial language, causes no surprise in a letter, and occurs again four hundred years later in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.[1] When once the letter-like nature of the shorter Pauline Epistles has been recognized, that of the longer Epistles will be admitted without difficulty.[2] It is true, these letters were collected at an early date by the piety of the Churches, and after the death of St. Paul they rose to the dignity of literature, literature in the exalted sense of canonical literature. But that is purely an incident in the subsequent history of the letters which has analogies in many episodes of literary history, ancient and modern. This subsequent treatment can no more alter the original character of the letters than publication in a collected volume would affect the character of the papyrus letters from Egypt. St. Paul had no intention of increasing the existing number of Jewish Epistles by a few new writings, and still less did he think to enrich the sacred literature of his people: when he wrote he always had some perfectly concrete incentive in the often stormy life of the young Christian communities. He never dreamed of the destiny in store for his words in the history of the world, and had no idea that they would be in existence in the next generation, still less that they would one day become Holy Scripture to the nations. They have been handed down to us by the centuries with the patina of literature and the halo of canonicity upon them; we must imagine both of

[1] The stereotyped use of *τυχόν*, as in 1 Co 16[6].

[2] For what follows, cf. *Bible Studies*.

these removed if we wish to comprehend their real historical character. St. Paul had something far better to do than write books; he wrote only letters, genuine letters. His letters differ from the simple papyrus letters from Egypt not by being letters, but by being the letters of St. Paul.[1]

The letter-like nature of the short Epistle to Philemon will be the most readily admitted. It would be a very dense and very uninspired criticism that should see in this jewel that a kindly chance has preserved for us a literary essay on 'The Attitude of Christianity to Slavery.' It is, in fact, a brief letter full of delightful, unconscious naïveté, full of kindly humanity.

Equally clear is the letter-like nature of the recommendation contained in the sixteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The fact that it is addressed to a plurality of persons, probably to the Church of Ephesus, will surely not be brought forward as an objection; a plurality of addressees cannot affect the classification of the letter.

The Epistle to the Philippians is, however, as letter-like a letter as ever was written; the apostle was compelled by a definite state of affairs to take up his pen, and what he wrote reflects, or at least suggests, a definite state of mind.

The same is true of the Epistles to the Colossians and Thessalonians, and also of the longer Pauline Epistles. They are indeed didactic in part, they even contain theological discussions, but here, again, the apostle had no intention of writing literature.

The Epistle to the Galatians is not a pamphlet on 'The Relation of Christianity to Judaism,' but a letter sent to correct the want of intelligence on the part of the Galatians. It is not intelligible except in reference to the actual facts which occasioned the letter.

The Epistles to the Corinthians bear much more clearly the stamp of real letters. The Second Epistle, indeed, betrays its purpose in every line; it is, in our opinion, to be considered one of the most letter-like of all the Pauline Epistles, although it is not so obvious as in the case of the Epistle to Philemon. It is difficult for us to understand, because it it so thoroughly like a letter, so full of allusions and familiar references, so steeped in irony and in dejection, fighting against itself—things which the writer and his readers would understand as they were meant, but which we for the most part can only approximately explain. The didactic element is not an end in itself, but is purely subsidiary to the purpose of the letter as such. The Corinthians themselves quite understood the nature of the letters which were brought them by St. Paul's fellow-labourers, or they would scarcely have allowed one or two of them to get lost. They agreed with St. Paul in thinking the end of the letters was attained when once they had been read. We may regret most deeply that they took no pains to preserve the letters, but it would be absurd to reproach them for the omission. The letter is, and desires to be, something ephemeral; it is as little anxious for immortality as the confidential conversation is anxious to be made the subject of a minute. Moreover the spirit in which Paul and his converts spent their days was most unlikely to arouse in them an interest in the coming ages. The Lord was at hand; their outlook extended to His coming, and such hope as this knows nothing of the contemplative book-lover's joy of collecting.

The guileless religious temperament has never inclined to the things that interest the learned. Considered from the literary point of view, the fact that two Epistles to the Corinthians are actually preserved is the result of a later accident, owing, perhaps, to the comparatively great length of the letters, which saved them from immediate destruction.

The Epistle to the Romans is also really a letter. There are, indeed, parts in it which might equally well be in an Epistle; as regards its whole tone it is distinguished from the rest of the Pauline writings. But, nevertheless, it is not a book, and the favourite dictum, that it is a compendium of Pauline Christianity, and that the apostle here laid down his dogmatics and ethics, is, to say the least, liable to misconception. Of course, St. Paul wished to instruct, and he did so partly with the resources of contemporary theology, but he did not write for the literary public of his day, nor for Christendom at large; his appeal is to a handful of men at Rome, of whose existence the public knew practically nothing. That the Epistle to the Romans is not so instinct with personal touches as St. Paul's other letters is explainable by the circumstances under which it was written. The

[1] Cf. the suggestive appreciation of the Pauline Epistles by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in the work already quoted at page 13, *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, i. 8. pp. 157 ff.

apostle was writing to a congregation that was not yet known to him personally. Thus understood, the absence of the personal element does not speak for the epistolary and literary character of the Epistle to the Romans; it is rather the natural consequence of the non-literary circumstances that occasioned the letter. The didactic portions, moreover, were written by St. Paul with his heart's blood.

But why these long excursions on letter and epistle? Is not the distinction merely a dispute about words, one of those trifles over which a cloistered learning waxes warm? We think not. If St. Paul wrote epistles, then he was a literary man, and Christianity in him had already become literary; if St. Paul wrote letters, then he was not a literary man, and Christianity, therefore, had not yet become literary.

At the beginning of Christianity there certainly stands neither book nor letter, but spirit and personality. Jesus of Nazareth was altogether non-literary, and left not a line behind Him. He relied entirely on the living word, splendidly confident that the scattered seed would one day spring up.

And beside Him there stands, equally non-literary, His great apostle. St. Paul, like his Master, did not make of Christianity what many people consider it to be—the religion of a Book. Like his Master, St. Paul, the non-literary Paul, embodies, in conscious opposition to the letter that killeth, the Spirit that maketh alive.

Thus, on the basis of inquiry into the history of literature, as it concerns the classical origins of Christianity, we can say: In its classical period, represented by Jesus and Paul, Christianity was not the religion of a book, not the religion of a law, but the religion of the Spirit.

Having realized this important fact, we can now take a hasty view of the subsequent course of development.

The time came when Christianity was to become literary, owing, doubtless, to a necessary historical evolution.

The first stage of Christian literature is inter-Christian, literature for Christians, and corresponding to the social structure of Primitive Christianity; it is, on the whole, popular literature. Here belong the Gospels (including the Gospel of St. John, which is far more popular than is generally allowed), the Acts of the Apostles, and that most genuine people's book, the Revelation of St. John.[1] Even on stylistic grounds all these books are to be regarded as popular productions. The pagan texts do us the service of making clearer than before the nature of the popular language and of all that is denoted by the word 'popular.' But also as regards subject-matter, these Biblical writings are popular to the core. To this first popular stage belong also the Epistles of St. James, St. Peter, and St. Jude, and the didactic work that goes under the name of the First Epistle of St. John. We have here before us not genuine letters, but literary epistles, popular pamphlets addressed to the Christian public in the form of letters. Only the Second and Third Epistles of St. John are in the true sense short letters.

The second stage in the literary development of Christianity is the beginning of an artistic literature, with which the new religion rises out of its original stratum and aspires to culture, learning, and perhaps also power. One of the first evidences of this phase, and as such of unusual importance, is the Epistle to the Hebrews, a highly artistic theological book, polished in form and of carefully considered contents.

The third stage, falling within the second century A.D., is the beginning of a Christian world-literature: no longer literature solely for Christians, but books for the widest possible public, with a polemical and apologetic purpose. The so-called Apologists are representative of this phase.

The last stage, so far as essentials are concerned, about the middle of the second century, is the canonical literature: the formation of a new Christian canon beside the Old Testament, the consolidation of a 'new' Sacred Book, namely, the New Testament, into which the literary and non-literary inheritance from the great preceding epoch was gathered as a standard generally binding. And this is the point at which the evolution of Christianity to the religion of a Book sets in, its evolution to a Church with a legal status, the evolution of dogma and theology on the great scale.

[1] We place here a few words on the Apocalypse in a letter received from Carl Neumann, of Kiel, the biographer of Rembrandt: 'If you disregard the questions as to source, etc., and observe, as the commentator is no longer ingenuous enough to do, the effect of the whole, then I know no work of such powerful colouring in the contrasts, or you may say, of such wonderful instrumentation. There is something of barbaric freedom in it all.'

If now, at the end of this third chapter, we were to be told that all this might have been known without any knowledge of the inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca, we should enter no indignant protest. But we could certainly reply, that to us, at least, the outlines which we have sketched of the literary history of Christianity were first perceptible after a study of the said inscriptions, etc., had made clear to us the great difference between the literary and the non-literary, more particularly after the papyrus letters had taught us the nature of the ancient letter.

After that the full greatness of the literary history of early Christianity first dawned upon us. In the beginning there was not the written Book but the living Word, not the law but the Spirit, not the Gospels but the Gospel: in the beginning there was Jesus. And to this beginning, based as it is pre-eminently on the power of the Spirit, belongs also Paul, the Christian and apostle.

Then we see how simple, popular books arise for the unlearned humble members of the Christian brotherhoods, how the foundations of Christian literature are laid by the Evangelists and apostolic writers. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we see Christianity stretching its wings for the conquest of culture—the presage of a world-wide future for the new religion. We see the beginnings of the New Testament canon.

Throughout this literary development there is mirrored the great historic process which we are accustomed to call the history of Christianity. We see clearly the growth of our religion from the Gospel up to the organized, constitutional Church. This growth is nothing but a huge process of cooling and congelation. The Reformation, brushing the centuries aside, appealed to the New Testament, and, in so doing, to an authority which, although in the form of a book edited by the Church, was yet, as regards the greater part of its contents, pre-literary—prior even to the Church itself. Thus the Reformation fused the cold, hard metal, and set it flowing once more, a glowing stream. By its use of the Book the Reformation saved Christianity from remaining permanently a religion of the book and the letter.

Literature.

Documents from Nippur.[1]

Professor A. T. Clay of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, U.S.A., by the munificence of the 'Eckley Brinton Coxe, Junior, Fund,' has been enabled to produce two more magnificent volumes of that University's publication of the Cuneiform Tablets acquired by its Babylonian Expedition to Babylonia, rendered famous by Hilprecht's *Explorations in Bible Lands in the XIXth Century*. Another volume by Dr. H. Ranke, containing *Babylonian Legal and Business Documents from the Time of the First Dynasty of Babylon*, has already appeared, and will prove no less important. These two volumes deal with *Documents from the Temple Archives at Nippur*, vol. xiv. those bearing complete dates, vol. xv. those less fully dated. They are superbly produced, the texts probably faultlessly copied and autographed, with many half-tone reproductions, enabling the reader to check results for himself, indexes of proper names, an invaluable facsimile list of the signs used during the Cassite era, and excellent introductions. They are packed with important information, all the more welcome that with the exception of Dr. Peiser's *Urkunden aus der Zeit der dritten babylonischen Dynastie*, Berlin, 1905, and a few boundary stones, we had little bearing on the private life of Babylonia for this long period. In my *Laws, Letters, and Contracts* (T. & T. Clark, 1905) it had to be treated as a blank.

We may content ourselves with noting the contents for profit. It is interesting to know that Burnaburiash reigned at least 25 years; Kurigalzu, 23; Nazimaruttash, 24; Kadashman-Turgu, 16; Kadashman-Bēl II., 6; Kudur-Bēl, 9; Shagarakti-Shuriash, 22; and Bitiliash, 6. Also that the conjectural Kadashmanburiash never existed. These are welcome notes to enter in our history books. The Cassites dated by the regnal year, and did not

[1] *The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania.* Series A: Cuneiform Texts. Vols. xiv.–xv. *Documents from the Temple Archives of Nippur.* By Dr. A. T. Clay. Philadelphia. 1906.