

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

There is such a thing—we are unhappily getting only too familiar with it—as cutting yourself off from all the experience of the past and the “authority,” which is but that same experience finding utterance and exercising its due influence. There is such a thing as advocating revolution and anarchy, that every man may do that which is right in his own eyes, and sheltering yourself behind the honoured names of Reform and Liberty. While it is my object to distinguish the principle of free growth as a sign of healthy life, from mere mechanical reproduction of the forms of the past, I hope I have not seemed to throw any doubt on the necessity both for authoritative regulations of Church doctrine and discipline (to be from time to time revised), and for loyal obedience to be paid to the same.

I can hardly give better proof that the position I am contending for is liberty, not license, than by taking shelter behind the great name of Hooker, and closing my paper with a quotation from the Fourth Book of the “*Ecc. Pol.*,” chap. ii.:

“The glory of God and the good of His Church was the thing which the Apostles aimed at, and therefore ought to be the mark whereat we also level. But seeing those rites and orders may be at one time more which at another are less available unto that purpose, *what reason is there in these things to urge the state of one only age as a pattern for all to follow?* It is not, I am right sure, their meaning, that we should now assemble our people to serve God in close and secret meetings; or that common brooks and rivers should be used for places of baptism; or that the Eucharist should be administered after meat; or that the custom of Church feasting should be renewed; or that all kind of standing provision for the ministry should be utterly taken away, and their estate made again dependent on the voluntary devotion of men. In these things they easily perceive how unfit that were for the present, which was for the first age convenient enough. The faith, zeal, and godliness of former times is worthily had in honour; but doth this prove that the orders of the Church of Christ must be still the selfsame with theirs, that nothing may be which was not then, or that nothing which then was may lawfully since have ceased? *They who recall the Church unto that which was at the first must necessarily set bounds and limits unto their speeches.*”

F. DAUSTINI CREMER.



ART. II.—NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS NOT COMMEMORATED—ANANIAS.

THE city of Damascus is at once one of the most ancient and of the most beautiful cities in the world. It existed in the time of Abraham. Tradition makes it his resting-place in his migration to the promised land; and history points it out as the birthplace of his faithful steward, “this Eliezer of

Damascus."¹ It is still, in our own day, a thriving city, with 150,000 inhabitants. "Beautiful for situation," by the common consent of all who have visited it, it is declared to be. "The eye of the East,"² with reference to the sudden burst of the bright, sparkling river, to which it owes its fertility, from the rocky gorge of the Anti-Libanus; "a handful of pearls in its goblet of emerald,"³ as the white towers and buildings of the "lovely glittering city" stand out against the "island" of verdure on which they rest; the earthly "paradise" from which Mahomet, "whilst yet a camel-driver from Mecca," is said to have turned away, as he exclaimed, "Man can have but one paradise, and my paradise is fixed above"⁴—such are some of the tributes which the poetry of the East has lavished on the fair city of Damascus.

For the student of Holy Scripture many and deeply interesting associations gather round Damascus. From Abraham to David there is no mention of it in the Bible; but from the reign of David onward, the history of Damascus and of the country and people to which it belonged is closely interwoven with that of the chosen nation. No event, however, in its history, as we gather it from the Old Testament, can equal in interest or importance the New Testament incident of which it was the scene, and to one of the actors in which we now call attention.

How Christianity first reached Damascus we are not distinctly told. That some of its Jewish inhabitants, who had gone to worship at Jerusalem, at the Great Pentecost, carried it thither on their return is not improbable. That of those Christians who fled from the persecuting zeal of Saul of Tarsus, some may have taken refuge in Damascus, has not unreasonably been conjectured. At any rate, it would seem that a sufficient number of converts to the new faith were known or credibly stated to be there, to warrant a special errand of the great persecutor to effect their extermination.⁵ Among them was one who was destined to render a signal service to him whose "wonderful conversion" had transformed him from Saul, the persecutor of the Church, into Paul, the "Apostle of Jesus Christ."

¹ Genesis xv. 2.

² "Sinai and Palestine," p. 414, i., note.

³ Farrar, "Life of St. Paul," i. 190. ⁴ "Sinai and Palestine," p. 414, i.

⁵ "The special journey to Damascus presupposes the existence of Christians there, and in some numbers. This would be accounted for by the return of many who may have been converted at the Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit: and perhaps also by some of the fugitives from the persecutions having settled there. This latter is rendered probable by Ananias's *ἤκουσα ἀπὸ πολλῶν περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου*, ver. 13."—Alford on Acts ix. 2.

We know but little of Ananias, but that little is enough to show that he was a *ready instrument* for the work to which he was called. Like all the unrecorded Saints whom we are now considering, he makes but a brief appearance, as it were, upon the stage, and passes out of sight so soon as his short part is done :

Content to fill a little space,
If God be glorified.

Yet he tarries long enough to teach us this, among other lessons, that it is the servant who is living near his Lord and in close communion with Him, whom his Lord honours with the special commissions of His grace. The correspondence between the two visions vouchsafed to Saul and Ananias,¹ and those other two to Cornelius and Peter,² has often been pointed out. And it is important to notice it, as an illustration of the universal principle, that the preparation by God Himself of the messenger to convey and of the hearer to receive are alike necessary conditions of a fruitful reception of the Divine message. But it is also worthy of observation that Ananias was no less ready for immediate intercourse with his Lord in heaven, than was St. Peter himself. There is a *naturalness* about the colloquy in which the commission is given him. There is nothing unexpected, nothing startling, in his being spoken to by Christ. He seems to accept it as a matter of course.

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus [so the story runs] named Ananias ; and the Lord said unto him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus : for, behold, he prayeth ; and he hath seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight.³

The happy days of the Church's childhood, when God talked with patriarchs and prophets "as a man talketh with his friend ;" when the Lord called "Abraham, Abraham," and Abraham answered, "Here am I," are come back again to earth. And there is a *simplicity*, a childlike freedom, an opening all his case, as a child does, without stopping to reflect how much better known it is already than he can tell it, about the answer of Ananias :

Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem, and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon Thy name.⁴

The age of visions and of miracles is past, but the abiding Presence is with us still, if we will but have it so, of Him Who

¹ Acts ix. 10, 12.

³ Acts ix. 10-12.

² Acts x. 3, 17.

⁴ Acts ix. 13, 14.

said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." To realize that Presence as Ananias did is to be *ready*, as he was, to do His bidding. In this lies the secret of being "prepared for every good work."¹

And as he was ready, so also was Ananias *qualified* for the mission which was entrusted to him. The antagonism of the Jews to Christ and His Church stands out in such bold relief in the New Testament that we are apt, perhaps, to forget how many of them there were who, with Simeon and Anna and Andrew and Nathaniel, "justified," as her children, the Divine wisdom, and accepted, instead of "rejecting, for themselves the counsel of God."² Judaism was the divinely appointed preparation for Christianity; the law was a tutor to bring men unto Christ.³ So was it found to be by those who, like Ananias, having been good Jews, passed on as by a natural growth and development to be good Christians. That such a man was chosen to seal, as it were, the conversion of Saul, and admit him by baptism into the Church of Christ, added weighty testimony, so far as the Jews were concerned, to the nature and reality of the change which had passed upon him. This is the use which he himself makes of it when narrating his conversion to the Jews. St. Luke is content to speak of Ananias as "a certain disciple."⁴ St. Paul before Agrippa does not mention him at all.⁵ But on the steps of the Castle of Antonia, to the Jews becoming a Jew, he describes him as "a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there."⁶ Nor can we doubt that, besides thus enhancing the value of his testimony, his having experienced himself, though by a gentler process, the same transition from the law to the Gospel qualified him in no common degree to minister to the converted Pharisee at this great crisis of his spiritual life. Once again a standing law of the kingdom of heaven, in the selection of agency, in the helpfulness of human ministry, is here exemplified. He who lives nearest to his Lord is the most ready; he who has passed by the same way is the best qualified instrument of His grace to others.

And this brings us in conclusion to what is perhaps the most striking feature in the brief notice of Ananias. The ready and the qualified was also the *loving* instrument of his Master's purpose. In his Master's spirit he set his hand to his Master's work. It is with no hesitating or unwilling steps

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 21. *κάν μη πράττη, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐπιτήδειον ἐστί, δεκτικόν.*—Chrys., quoted by Alford.

² Luke vii. 30, 35.

³ Gal. iii. 24, R. V.

⁴ Acts ix. 10.

⁵ Acts xxvi.

⁶ Acts xxii. 12.

that he wends his way along the "Straight Street," which in the unchanging East "still extends through Damascus in long perspective from the Eastern gate,"¹ till he reaches the house of Judas, and asks for "one called Saul, of Tarsus," who is lodging there. The answer of Christ, "Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto Me," has swept aside all objections. Gladly he speeds on his errand of mercy. The messenger of love, love breathes in word and look and action. Dejected and exhausted with his three days' agony and fast, in darkness still, though looking hopefully for the promised light, expecting eagerly the messenger whose healing advent he has already in vision welcomed, he finds the man of whom he is in search. Hitherto he had only known him as the mad persecutor, who as a wild beast made havoc² of the sheep of Christ, and who, having done his worst at Jerusalem, had come on his pitiless errand to Damascus. But no thought of these things, no chilling remembrance that he himself might well have been amongst the first to have been carried bound by him to Jerusalem for punishment, now fills the mind of Ananias. His first action, as he stands above that prostrate and darkened form in the house of Judas, is to lay his hands on him in token of fellowship and blessing. His first word to him is a recognition of brotherhood in the family of God. His first look, as it greets the eyes from which the scales have fallen, is one which in after years it is pleasant to recall.³ The look, the word, the action, alike interpret the spirit of the messenger, and are alike typical for all true messengers of Christ. The hand that would heal and bless must not shrink from touching, even as His Hand was laid on the diseased and wounded, and turned not aside from the loathsome contact of leprosy itself. The eye that would win and guide must kindle with compassion and beam with love. It must be an eye which misery does not shun, which invites confidence and promises succour and awakens hope. The voice that would speak a word in season to him that is weary must speak in a brother's accents from a brother's heart. "Brother Saul!" What a sermon might be written on that short text! How it reveals to us the spell by which God's "children who are in the midst of this naughty world" are evermore to be brought to Him "that they may be saved through Christ for ever"! Brother, that is the password of the kingdom of heaven. Used rightly, it is the proof that "the Lord, even Jesus, hath sent me," my credentials as a messenger from Him, Who came to reconstitute the dispersed and scattered family of God.

¹ Conybeare and Howson, i. 115.

² ἐλμαίνετο, Acts viii. 3.

³ Acts xxii. 13.

“This, My son,” if thou art, and because thou art thyself My son indeed, is “this thy brother”¹ also. Recognise the double relationship, and strong in the strength of it win and welcome the lost and erring to the Father’s heart and home. So, even now shalt thou do the work of angels, and share the joy of heaven “over one sinner that repenteth.”

T. T. PEROWNE.

ART. III.—A POET OUT OF FASHION.

THERE are certain poets that are never out of fashion. Their style may be no way like that which prevails now or at any particular time; their method of treatment may be different from that of others, for each generation has its own voices and methods; but their genius is so fine that it carries them triumphantly through all accidents of time and place, of style and treatment. Chaucer and Shakespeare are read, studied, and admired to-day as much as they ever were; but if we compare their style with that of Lord Tennyson or Mr. Browning, we see a vast and striking difference between them. The universality of their genius rises above the accident of their style. Chaucer, for example, is never out of fashion, though he is not so easily read as any of the moderns, because he deals chiefly with man and nature, and man and nature are never out of fashion. Humanity appears before us to-day clothed in the new garments of modern civilization; but underneath those splendid robes the old self is the same as it was in the Middle Ages. In the essential features of his nature man remains unchanged. And creation is unchanged, ever fresh and ever young. The stars and the singing birds and the purple heather and the yellow cornfields and the wandering clouds and the soft piping winds and the whispering leaves and the serene sunsets and the stormy majesty of the sea, are to us what they were to Chaucer; and therefore “the Father of English poetry” is as real now, and as much in fashion now, as he was in the fourteenth century.

Old England’s fathers live in Chaucer’s lay
As if they ne’er had died : he group’d and drew
Their likeness with a spirit of life so gay
That still they live and breathe in fancy’s view,
Fresh beings fraught with truth’s imperishable hue.

So it is with the author of the “Ring and the Book” and the Laureate. We cannot imagine that they will ever give place to a newer fashion, a fresher style, or a younger time, for they write of things that are of universal interest—

On man, on nature, and on human life.

¹ Luke xv. 21, 32.