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THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—THE THIRD EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.

THE observation was made in a former article that the two small Epistles of St. John have their chief interest from such light as they throw on the life of the Church at the time and on the mind of the writer in connection with it. In both respects the observation, true of the Second Epistle, is much more obviously true of the Third. In fact, while the letter to the "Elect Lady" has not those marks of a private letter, which consist in references to actual incidents and mutual relations, the letter to Gaius is full of them. It is a little picture of persons and circumstances alive with the feelings they create. In the remarkable dearth of information in the period to which it seems to belong, it is like an island of light in a land that is shrouded in mists. It reminds the present writer of an effect in natural scenery which, though seen long ago, he never forgets, and which he may be pardoned for recalling here. From a familiar point of view a wide prospect lay before him, but under a leaden sky, the earth as in a mist, and every object indiscernible. Suddenly there was a rift in the clouds, and a stream of sunshine fell upon a single spot, where a homestead, trees, and moving forms were clearly seen—a vivid picture framed in encircling gloom.¹ A like effect he finds in this Third Epistle of St. John. After the last words from St. Paul and St. Peter there is silence in Scripture through the following decades, while the Gospel was steadily making way in the world, and Christian Churches were passing through their second genera-

¹ The place was Birdlip Hill, a spur of the Cotswolds, "the high, wild hills of Gloucestershire," where the elevation commands the plain below, the Severn valley, bounded by the heights of the Forest of Dean and the Malvern Hills—a scene of richness and beauty, at that moment shrouded from view, save in the one little area of light described above.

tion. In this period, near the end of the first century, St. John's little letters break the silence, telling of things that are happening—samples of what may be taking place elsewhere. The Second Epistle shows the activity of heresy in outlying Churches in Asia; the Third indicates the movements within the Churches themselves.

We see, first, the occasion of the letter—and a very interesting occasion it is. Certain "brethren" have been on some mission for extension or edification of the Church in some locality apparently within St. John's sphere of influence. On their return to the place from which they went forth, where the Apostle is resident, they are received (like Paul and Barnabas at Antioch after the first missionary journey), and make their report "before the Church" (*ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας*) of their acts and experiences. As they proceed, it is plain how their work has been assisted and their hearts comforted by the generosity and love of Gaius, and, on the contrary, how they have been thwarted and distressed by the self-will and arrogant conduct of Diotrephes; also, perhaps, how much the work of Demetrius needs the assistance of authoritative commendation and support. St. John returns from the assembly with his mind full of what he has heard, and hence the letter which we have. The persons named in it pass under the light only for a moment, but their characters remain for ever, striking illustrations of human nature in the Christian Church as it was then, as it always is.

The mention of things passing in the Church in missionary action and mutual communication, though slight and incidental, is none the less suggestive of the methods by which the Gospel was quietly extending and establishing itself in the midst of the heathen world. The Churches already formed are missionary centres for fresh advance. From them brethren go forth to places whence calls have come or where doors are open. Other Churches or Christians, wherever they find them, are their hosts and helpers, and set them forward on their way. In a few brief words the letter depicts the character of these movements, their motives and aims, and the duty and happiness of a common interest and contributory participation in their work. It is said to Gaius:

"Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest towards brethren, and strangers withal, whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God; because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth."

The motive and mind of the missionary, the duty of others to help, the practical methods of doing so, the partnership in the great cause—all are here in expressions as distinct as they

are simple. "For the Name's sake"—there is the missionary spirit in its source and in its power. No need of explanation: the one word tells everything, and has done so from the first, when the Apostles rejoiced that they were "counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name" (Acts v. 41)—"the Name which is above every name," than which "there is none other name under heaven given among men wherein we must be saved." It is the power of that Name in the hearts of believers which should make them partners with those who go forth for its sake. Practical partnership is in methods which time and circumstances determine. In that age it was to receive them (*ὑπολαμβάνειν*) in the way of welcome, support, and supply, as on such missions taking nothing from any but the faithful, and then to forward them (*προπέμψαι*) on their way. So St. Paul admonished Titus in his charge in Crete: "Set forward Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting to them"; and he adds with reference to the like services: "Let our people also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful" (iii. 14). Here St. John for such kind of service appeals to a higher motive in its participation in a glorious cause, "that we may be fellow-helpers to the truth," as the Authorized Version renders it, or, as the Revised Version, "fellow-workers with the truth." The latter rendering, preferable as translation, has also the deeper meaning. In the one case the fellowship is with the agents in their work for the truth; in the other it is fellowship with the truth itself in the work which it achieves by its own force and virtue. Such was felt to be its power in that early period when Christianity was noiselessly rooting itself in the great centres of population and striking its offshoots in the country places. Not by public preaching to crowds, but in the varied intercourse of social life, by the contagion of conviction, and the examples of moral change, the Word awoke men's souls, answered their secret questions, and met their conscious needs. Preachers and teachers of the Word relied on its inherent power, and all who took part in its advancement felt it their glory and joy that they were fellow-workers with the truth.

This diffusive and communicative spirit which animated the Christian societies, combined with their strong internal union and phenomenal brotherly love, made the Church throughout the empire the expanding and prevailing power which it proved to be. Such was the history upon the whole, but with a very mingled character in the actual course of things. Tendencies of the natural man—inherited dispositions and traditional ideas—survived within the Church, and here

and there were roused into activity, with their accustomed consequences of contention, jealousy, and division. The apprehension of this is shown in the Apostolic writings by exhortations, warnings, and reproofs. It is human nature, says St. Paul, carnal and unregenerate. "Whereas there is among you envying and strife and division, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" Party spirit, so strong in Corinth, might appear elsewhere, personal ambition anywhere. It seems to be a flagrant case with which St. John has to deal. The letter which he writes to commend in one man the faithful love which assists the truth condemns in another the schismatical egoism which obstructs it. The contrast is striking. They are typical instances of the opposite casts of mind, and the strong impression which they make is manifest. Thus, the letter, brief as it is, affords a threefold study of character. The estimate of the men and the notice of their action make us well acquainted with Gaius and Diotrophes, and no less does the unreserved expression of feeling help us better to know St. John.

In the first part of the letter, relating to Gaius himself, there is an attractive and peculiar charm. At once in its opening words the reader finds himself in an atmosphere of truth and goodness, and in the warm sunshine of love unfeigned :

"The Elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I myself (ἐγὼ) love in truth.

"Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth. Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."

Here is no conventional style. It is all, as one may say, so natural. The occasion of writing is a pleasant incident—brethren arriving, who bring good tidings of one beloved, concerning whom, perhaps, anxiety had been felt. There is a touch of some such feeling in the joy that ensues, and a tone of fatherly tenderness as well as of genuine personal affection. The prayer, that "thou mayest prosper in all things (περὶ πάντων) and be in health," is just such a prayer as we may naturally make for those we love; and this Apostolic example is a warrant for so doing. But the example must be taken as a whole. Health and prosperous success are not here, as they are with many, the sum of well-being. They are subordinate to a higher thought—that of the essential thing for man, present to the writer's mind in joyful assurance, "even as thy soul prospereth." That assurance is caused by the reliable witness to character and consistent action (as it is said)—"to thy truth, even as thou

walkest in truth." Then follows the fervent ejaculation, a revelation of the inmost heart: "I have no greater joy than to hear of my children walking in the truth." The pointed expression, τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα, equivalent to "my own children," marks the spiritual relationship in which Gaius is included. The love in truth, the walking in truth, or in the truth, have in the mind of the writer their definite meanings. We know what kind of love and what manner of life they intend, as there was occasion to point out when they occurred in the Second Epistle; and they derive force from the sense of the dangers that were abroad, and the faltering or failing of many. This settled faith and consistent walk is the fulfilment of St. Paul's words to these same Asiatic Churches: "As ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in your faith, as ye were taught" (Col. ii. 6, 7).

In Gaius this walking in the truth was further illustrated by active service and generous aid to its missionary work, as testified by men who were engaged in it. They had received his help, and, it appears, would need it again for undertakings that were before them, and the promotion and support of these is one purpose of the letter. An effort for this object had already been made, but had failed of its effect from a cause to which it is now necessary for the Apostle to advert.

"I wrote somewhat to the Church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not." He had then written, not as now to a particular person, but to the Church. Christians in the place in question were an organized community, which could be so addressed; and St. John had written in the exercise of his care of the Churches, and, as the word "somewhat" shows, in a mild and moderate tone. But there was one on the spot who carried things with a high hand, and would not admit the Apostle's authority, perhaps did not even communicate the letter, and certainly set at nought its admonitions. What possessed the man? The spirit of self, in self-exaltation and self-will. The spirit of self is the essence of sin, being in its nature separation from God, and in its effect separation from man. It has many forms—self-indulgence, self-interest, self-conceit, and other varieties. That which is ascribed to Diotrephes is expressed by the description, ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν, rendered in the Authorized Version and Revised Version, "who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them." This gives the disposition and habit of the man. The disposition is natural, in some natures strong, and indulged as habit it becomes character. Such character is not strange to us. We may have seen it in others, others may see it in us. It easily finds

occasions, not only in public life, but in smaller circles—municipal, social, domestic. There is room for it in religious communities. In ecclesiastical history it has been the cause of tyrannies, conflicts, and schisms. Its movements were felt in the little company of the first disciples in disputes as to who should be greatest; and their Master, not only for their sake, but with foreseeing eye, made it the subject of His most touching instructions both by precept and example. The frequency and earnestness of these exhortations is a warning that there is danger in this direction among adherents to His name and cause—a danger in their case the more subtle from the facility of adopting spiritual language and a religious tone to disguise dictation and self-will. The surprising thing is the occurrence of these moral aberrations in the earliest stage of Christianity, when men became Christians by spontaneous choice, with prospects of probable peril, and without the later complications of worldly motives and prevalent custom, and while the Apostolic authority was still a present fact. In what a degree these characteristics of the old human nature could survive baptism and reappear in the life of the Church was part of the pastoral experience both of St. Paul and St. John.

In the case of Diotrephes the offence was very pronounced. Loving to have the pre-eminence among them, or, as Wycliffe renders, “to bear primacie in hem,” he receiveth us not. In the change of expression from singular to plural, there is an accession of force and dignity, the writer associating other leaders with himself, and speaking as a ruler in council. The rejection is quietly stated. “Not receiving” is a phrase which has its meaning from the nature of the claim refused. Spoken of a ruler, it is repudiation of authority; spoken of brethren, it is denial of fellowship. Both offences were found in this contumacious and schismatic person. There is no blame in respect of faith, no intimation of false doctrine or of connection with the rising heresy mentioned in the Second Epistle. The fault is personal in character and habit. He had local influence and a sufficient following, was used to have things his own way, and resented interference with it. We might have supposed him to be an able man, but his ungoverned talk and violent proceedings are characteristics, not of strength, but of temper; and if he has little reverence for the Apostle, the Apostle has evidently a very poor opinion of him. The letter speaks of him as “prating against us with evil words, and, not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the Church.” He does so at least in intention and effort, and the present tenses, *κωλύει ἐκβάλλει*,

imply no more than that. But things will not be left as they are. Whatever measures may be taken in the meantime to stay the mischief and restore order, St. John expects to visit the place himself, and implies that his presence will be decisive. The words and deeds will not be passed over: "I will bring to remembrance the works which he doeth." The language is less effusive, but not less determined than that of St. Paul, speaking in the prospect of a like corrective visitation to the disordered Church at Corinth, when he declares his "readiness to avenge all disobedience," and says, "To them that have sinned heretofore, and to all the rest, if I come again I will not spare" (2 Cor. x. 2-6; xiii. 1-3). The two men were very different in themselves and in their use of words, but the power which St. Paul calls "the proof of Christ speaking in me" would beyond doubt be equally felt in any Apostolic action of St. John. In the few words which announce the judgment of the Apostle, we also know something of the spirit of the man. In the "prating against us with evil words," and in "when I come I will bring his works to remembrance," there is a touch of human feelings which we understand. At least, they are indications of character. Like the severe epithets, the shutting of doors and withholding of greetings, in the Second Epistle, they reveal in the writer a susceptibility of sterner moods than those of contemplation and love. So he can speak and feel when there is a cause, though it is his habit to say no more than there is need.

The letter quickly passes from this painful topic to end with one word of holy instruction, one of cordial commendation, and one of affectionate hope:

"Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." There is a lesson in men's ways—even in those just mentioned. Example is a great factor in life, because of the natural instinct of moral imitation, the inclination to do what is done by others. But there is also the responsibility, as in other things, so in this—to refuse the evil and choose the good. The character depends on the relations with God. "He that doeth good is of God" (*ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστίν*). His principles and life are from the source of all good. "He that doeth evil hath not seen God"; that light has never reached his soul. The men to trust are believers tried and proved. Demetrius is such. You can rely upon him. He is an established character. All men bear witness to him. So, one may say, does the truth itself, as illustrated by his life and teaching; and we add our own testimony, true, as thou knowest, in greater things than this. But who is Demetrius? and why this accumulated testimony? These are questions

for us, not for those who would receive the letter. They knew the man and his mission, and were doubtless sensible of the importance and difficulties of the work which these energetic testimonies were intended to strengthen and support—a work in which he either was actually engaged, or, more probably, which he came to undertake with this commendatory letter in his hand.

Now all is said that must be said, and the letter is brought to an end, not because there is little to say, but because there is too much. Manifold are the interests in the writer's mind, and the subjects on which he would like to communicate with his friend—but not, he says, with ink and pen. It appears that St. John wrote with reluctance. He had not the facilities of literary habit. His Gospel, even, is said to have been put in writing only after strong pressure from “his fellow disciples and bishops.” So both these Epistles are cut short, and in each case the “many things” are deferred to an anticipated coming and a time of meeting. In the Third Epistle that is not distant or uncertain. The contemplated journey into the country of Diotrephes and Gaius is on the eve of being undertaken, and will give opportunity for necessary correction of the one and for happy intercourse with the other. “I hope to see thee shortly (*εὐθεως*, speedily), and we shall speak face to face” (*στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν*).

With this pleasant prospect the letter ends.

The two Epistles complete our knowledge of St. John's Apostolic ministry. “For the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” he was an exile in Patmos. His special part in that testimony we know from the Gospel to which it was at last consigned. The teaching which he founded upon it we learn from his First Epistle. The Epistles to the Seven Churches show his knowledge of those under his peculiar charge in their circumstances and spiritual conditions. For his subsequent work among them we derive our information from these two short letters. That information is considerable, for there is nothing exceptional in the particulars mentioned, which are of a nature to show the general habits. Such are the intense and constant insistence on the truth, the stern denunciation of anti-Christian heresy, the watchfulness over its aggressions and warning of its approaches, the interest in missionary movements, the action taken on reports received in quick encouragement of loving services and reprobation of schismatic conduct, the firm lines of good and evil, the observation and estimate of character, the sympathetic spirit, the anxious love for his own children, the joy in evidences that their souls prosper and that they are walking in truth, the journeys taken as he is able for visitation of churches, the

correspondence and intercourse of personal affection. This is the mind—these are the ways of a true shepherd of Christ's flock, of one who heard, recorded, and fulfilled the final charge: "Lovest thou Me? . . . Feed My sheep."

Thus, at the close of the first century, the Apostolic age was ended, under gathering clouds, but also with the gentle lights and tender colours of a holy sunset in the last ministry and unrecorded death of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

There is a natural inclination to identify the Gaius of this Epistle with one whom we knew before: "Gaius, mine host, and of the whole Church," as St. Paul calls him (Rom. xvi. 23). It is so pleasant to meet an old friend after a lapse of years and in unexpected circumstances. In both cases, too, there is the same generous and hospitable character, and a like neighbourhood to schismatic disturbance. In the "Speaker's Commentary" Bishop Alexander dwells on these points, and concludes: "The supposition, then, that the Gaius of this Epistle is the Corinthian Gaius is, at least, not improbable." But the name Gaius (Latin, Caius) was most common. The characteristics were proper to the first Christians, and not rare amongst them; and there is a difference between the Corinthian party spirit and the ambition of Diotrephes. Time and place are against the supposition. Between the Epistle to the Romans (A.D. 58) and the probable date of St. John's Epistles there is an interval of some thirty or thirty-five years. St. John's pastoral connection was in proconsular Asia, and he appears never to have visited the Western Churches. It is most improbable that in advanced old age he should contemplate a journey from Ephesus to Corinth, and speak of it as in the ordinary course of things. It is still more so that he should designate a friend, and presumably a convert of St. Paul, who was a distinguished member of the Church in the previous generation, as one of his own children (*τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα*), the testimony to whose walk in the truth rejoiced his heart.

T. D. BERNARD.



ART. II.—THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE BIBLE.

I VENTURE to think it would be well if it were more clearly realized that the question of the trustworthiness of the Bible is the great practical issue which is brought before us by recent criticism, and that this question may be practically decided without entering into many points of detail, on which critics may remain for a long time divided. It is independent, for instance, and confessedly independent, of much of the current theories respecting the composition of the Pentateuch. It is not indeed true, as is so often alleged, that the dominant theory on that subject is one upon which all competent scholars are agreed. A powerfully written book, recently published by Professor Sayce, entitled "Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fallacies," in which, in view of the most