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*THE CHURCH AND THE EMPIRE IN THE FIRST CENTURY.*

II. THE PASTORAL EPISTLES AND TACITUS.

IN regard to a subject dependent on a very small number of authorities, which have been discussed over and over again, it is of the utmost importance that each party to the discussion should fully understand the position and opinion of the other. It is therefore necessary to define with the most scrupulous care one's own position and relation to the opposite side. Further, where evidence is so scanty, it is always necessary to keep in mind the whole first-century period, and to constantly glance over it in order to see what bearing our opinion about the Neronian action has on the surrounding periods.

The non-Christian authorities do not afford sufficient evidence to show step by step the character of the relations between the Church and the State during the first century. But the contemporary Christian authorities enable us to complete the picture. The method adopted in my book is to take the fair and natural interpretation of the scanty non-Christian accounts, and then to show that the tone of the Christian documents agrees with the opinions formed from the examination of the witnesses on the opposite side. I regard the Christian documents as being by far the better class of witnesses in this case, because they give unconscious and unintentional evidence. The authors of these documents are not writing history; they give no express account of the attitude of the State towards them; they hardly ever make any direct reference to the government. But incidentally the tone and spirit of the practical advice which they give to their correspondents betrays the spirit in which they looked on the State and the society around them. Evidence of this kind must be true, because it lies

in the nature and the deepest feelings of the men, and not merely in their words.

The interpretation given in my book of Tacitus's account of the Neronian action towards the Christians is at present under criticism. I gathered confidence after much thought to state it formally and finally in its present form, against the opinion of scholars for whom I entertain the most profound respect. I have reconsidered it with the utmost freedom from prejudice that I am capable of, in the light of Prof. Mommsen's and Dr. Sanday's criticisms, and I can see no reason to swerve a hair's breadth from what stands printed in my chapter on the subject. But it is possible to state more precisely the points that bear on the special questions, now at issue, viz., in the first place, the degree in which Tacitus and the Christian documents confirm one another; in the second place, their relation to the brief but most weighty words of Suetonius; and thirdly, the bearing on the position of Christianity in the Empire during the remainder of the first century.

Dr. Sanday and I are fully agreed in the belief that persecution began under Nero; and I have put emphatically and strongly the fact that Nero's action furnished the precedent according to which Christians became liable from that time onwards to suffer to the death at the hands of the Roman magistrates (see pp. 242, 245, 258, 277 note, 278 note, 307, 392, etc.). We differ on the question whether Nero introduced the fully developed procedure popularly known as "persecution for the Name." Is it quite agreed between us what is the meaning of the expression, "persecution for the Name?" It is implied by it that Christians on trial were confronted with the direct and simple question, "Are you a Christian?" and that, on answering in the affirmative, they were liable to instant execution.<sup>1</sup> Anything

<sup>1</sup> But, it may be objected, we find in the *Acta* of martyrs frequent instances where confession of the Name does not entail immediate execution. For ex-

short of this is not "persecution for the Name" in particular, if, as a preliminary to condemnation, any question is raised, or any evidence required, as to misdeeds committed by Christians (magical arts, tampering with the constitution of society, exercising unfair and improper influence on the conduct of others, gross crimes of an immoral character, violation of the law prohibiting secret societies, etc.), the procedure is not "persecution for the Name": the Christian then suffers, not for the Name, but for the particular crime charged against him. Now the latter is the kind of procedure implied in all detailed information that we have about the Neronian period. Crimes are always referred to as connected with the trial and condemnation of Christians, charges seem to be brought and evidence (slight indeed and flimsy, but still evidence) offered; and the Christians are advised by their leaders and advisers to guard against acting in such a way as to afford any ground or appearance of ground for such charges.

Advice to act in such a way as may guard against persecution is quite in place during the Neronian period, as I conceive it; for there is nothing in the slightest degree unworthy in striving to avoid persecution of this kind. The most sensitive and high-strained sense of honour and preference of the divine law to the world's law are both consistent with, and likely to be conducive to, the shrinking

ample, Tarachus was tried three separate times before being put to death (*Acta Sanct.*, 11 Oct., p. 573). But the reason for this and many similar cases lay in the desire of the governors to succeed in bringing back these misguided persons to a right course of action. It would have been esteemed a great triumph to make any prominent Christian turn renegade; and no severer blow against the influence of Christianity could have been struck than through the reconversion of some of the leaders to compliance with the State religion. Hence opportunity after opportunity was given to Tarachus to recant. He was tried and condemned to torture in order to break his obstinacy; but the aim of the State was to put an end to this wrong and dangerous principle, not to exterminate the misguided persons who professed it. I quote the *Acta* of Tarachus, as they have every appearance of being genuine. They are included in the *Acta Sincera* of Ruinart.

from trial for gross and unworthy crimes. The very imputation of such crimes is terrible; and one rightly tries so to live, and rightly advises one's disciples so to live, as to afford no handle to the most suspicious and prejudiced enemy for making such imputations.

But the case becomes quite different when "persecution for the Name" is the rule, and when the question is "Are you a Christian?" Then it becomes a point of honour not to shrink from the inquiry; the thought of trying in any way to avoid the charge of "the Name" seems to be a weakness and a declining from the loftiest line of conduct. The advice to one's pupils to try to avoid such a charge is apt to seem like a dubious and low-toned prudentialism.

In the three great groups of documents, (1) the Pastoral Epistles, (2) First Peter, (3) the Apocalypse, it appears to me that we trace a distinct progress: (1) the straightforward and downright and thoroughgoing advice to all Christians to avoid all ground for rousing charges against themselves, (2) the stage of double advice to glory in being charged for the Name but to avoid giving ground for charges of crime, (3) the final stage of resolute and uncompromising advice to despise the State and its procedure, to refuse to recognise its courts, its officers and its rights, to ignore its authority, and to regard it as absolutely evil and entirely hateful. Yet these three groups are by many modern scholars treated as almost contemporaneous works, emanating from the same general situation in the relations of the Church to the Empire. To me the idea that they are contemporaneous is unthinkable; if they are so, I must renounce the attempt to think about the subject. It would be easier for me to admit that some of them are forgeries than that they are contemporaneous; but I see that they are as certainly genuine as the poems of Lucan and Martial, and also that they are as certainly the product of situations essentially different from each other as are the Satiricon

of Petronius and the First Satire of Juvenal. The fact stands out clear before me in the works; I cannot ignore it, or admit a theory that is inconsistent with it.

Is it the case then that I have misconceived and misrepresented the tone of these documents? Otherwise I can see no escape from the inferences that I have drawn.

As to the Apocalypse, there will probably be no question. Its tone is so marked and impressive that no one who studies it can mistake it; and until there is an express question raised, the correctness of the account which I have given of its tone towards the State may be assumed.

The contrast between the tone of the Apocalypse and that of the Pastoral Epistles must strike every reader, and is undoubtedly part of the reason why those Epistles have so often been considered spurious. If we assume that the tone of Christian documents in reference to the State was uniformly the same throughout the first century, then there can be no question that, if the Apocalypse is genuine, the Pastoral Epistles cannot be genuine. But if my contention be right, the variation and even contradiction in tone is natural and necessary; and no argument can be founded on it against the genuineness of either group of documents.

The tone of the Pastoral Epistles is to me incomprehensible on the supposition that they were written after the fully developed procedure of "condemnation for the Name" had been introduced. Throughout them all runs the same tone of patience, of allowance for the natural inability of the Pagan State to comprehend the Christian position and practice, of deference to the established methods and practices of society. In my chapter xi., p. 246, it is pointed out that the Christians are counselled "to avoid the appearance of interfering with the present social order." Christians in Pagan households are to maintain their previously existing relations of family life (slaves towards masters, wives towards husbands), "that the word of God be not blas-

phemed." "Any vain interference with the established order will give rise to calumnies and accusations against the Christians who bear the name of God, and against the doctrine which they teach."

Again, as to the persecution alluded to in the Pastoral Epistles, the writer "suffers hardships unto bonds as a malefactor" (2 Tim. ii. 9), not "as a Christian," or "for the Name." "All that would live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution"; but the persecution is described as being like what Paul suffered at Lystra, etc., from which patience and blamelessness will set them free, as Paul himself has been set free (2 Tim. iii. 10-12). Persecution is an evil to be avoided, and the divine aid will save Paul and all others from it. How different is this from the spirit which is right and proper, and which Paul of all men would have felt most strongly (if I can sympathise at all with his character), had he been writing at a time when the Name was the one cause and motive of persecution!

The inference from these Christian authorities seems to me unavoidable; and, as has been stated, their value seems to me so much higher, owing to the entirely unconscious and unintentional character of their evidence, than that of any of the non-Christian historians who touch consciously and intentionally on this subject, that I should not hesitate, in case of disagreement, to prefer the Christian authors to the non-Christian. But is there any disagreement? To me there appears to be the most striking and impressive agreement between Tacitus and the idea that we have gathered from the tone of the Christian writers. From the Pastoral Epistles we learn that the result of Paul's trial before the supreme court was an acquittal, *i.e.*, it was formally decided that the Name was legal. In A.D. 64 Nero was as much bound by this decision as any of his subordinate officials;<sup>1</sup> and when in the following year he found

<sup>1</sup> It is, I presume, hardly necessary to protest at the present day against the

it convenient to play down to the popular dislike of the Christians, he could not punish them directly as Christians; he could only accuse them of some definite crime, and punish them as criminals (2 Tim. ii. 9) In the popular excitement and panic the charge found credence and witnesses to support it as readily as the charge of complicity in an imaginary popish plot did in England in A.D. 1679. Dr. Sanday is, I think, in full agreement with me on this point. We are also agreed that Tacitus describes Nero's action as falling into two stages, the first in which only the crime of incendiarism was used as a charge, and the second of a more general character; the first stage furnished no precedent for provincial governors to follow in their action towards Christians; but the second did, and it thus inaugurated the general rule of persecution, which continued in force for more than two centuries and a half. Hence Suetonius rightly says that the Christians were made liable to severe punishment as a mischievous class of criminals (p. 230); he considered "that the permanent principle of condemning Christians originated under Nero"; but it was no part of his duty as a biographer of the individual emperors to recount the precise development and modification which the principle underwent (p. 276 f.).

But in the second stage of Nero's proceedings, the Christian's were accused of "hatred of the human race, *i.e.* hostility to the social organization actually existing in the Roman Empire." Dr. Sanday "accepts my analysis of the meaning of the phrase." The principles of Christianity led

old-fashioned idea, that a Roman emperor could act with the caprice of an oriental despot and reverse next year the action of the preceding year. The whole value and interest of imperial history, the importance of Rome in the world's development, lies in the fact that even a Nero was the sovereign of a constitutional State, and that the imperial law and organization was stronger than the emperor himself, and not liable to be twisted according to his mere whim. The emperor's action required to be directed by reason, precedent, and a general view of public welfare (*utilitas publica*); and Tacitus expressly says that Nero claimed to be acting for this end.



to the commission of acts that involved interference with the existing facts and usages of society; and Christians in great numbers were arrested, tried and punished for the crime of hostility to the existing fabric of society, as shown in acts which they were proved on evidence to have committed. Dr. Sanday says that "we see here the origin of the name of Christian being regarded as penal." That I fully accept: we have here the origin, but not the fully developed form, of punishment for the Name. Only one more step had to be made, and that a very easy one, to reach the final form. The one point of difference between us is on the question, Was the step taken by Nero? I quite acknowledge that we cannot fully prove from Tacitus that it was not; but it has to be well weighed that (1) the Pastoral Epistles show that the step had not been taken when they were written, (2) Tacitus's language is on the whole more easily reconcilable with the same view, on account of his pointed reference to crimes and charges of crime throughout the chapter. I have fully admitted (p. 229) that it is always difficult to disentangle from Tacitus's oratorical and artistic style "the precise and exact facts which he is describing"; but we must also remember that he was trained and had lived his life as a lawyer, and that he must as proconsul of Asia (p. 228 *note*) have been familiar with the later procedure against the Christians. If we do him the credit of understanding his strong reference to charges of crime as indicating a different and earlier method of procedure (which, as has been said, appears to me the more natural interpretation), we find him not merely more accurate in his statement of legal facts, but also in full accord with those Christian documents which must be either contemporary or forgeries.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is no other alternative about the Pastoral Epistles: if they were not written 65-67 A.D., they cannot be ascribed to St. Paul. About the precise date of other epistles doubts and differences of opinion may and do exist, but none can exist about these.

On this question Dr. Sanday says, "Hatred of the human race is not a definite charge. No doubt it included a number of definite acts. . . . But in all this there would be no definite tangible breach of the law, nothing that in itself would involve the extreme penalty." This is all perfectly correct and clearly put. If these acts had been breaches of the law, requiring the extreme penalty, there would have been no reason for saying that Nero introduced the principle of punishing Christians. But the point is that the ordinary law had not hitherto been interpreted as sufficient to condemn the Christians; but Nero treated as crimes all acts leading to changes in family life; divisions between converted and unconverted relatives, and other such interferences with existing social facts (acts which were often the unavoidable effects, as human nature is, of conversion). The mere fact of conversion was treated as a proof of undue influence acquired by witchcraft; and the preacher who had converted another was held to be a magician, and punished with the terrible penalties meted out to magicians by the Roman law (pp. 236, 392, 410).

Dr. Sanday "argues the question without introducing Christian documents" (p. 411); but in this I do not wish to imitate him. It is natural for him to do so, shunning the charge of over-estimating them; and it is the established method of treating this subject. But my aim throughout has been to treat the Christian and the non-Christian documents side by side, to apply the same principles of interpretation to both, and to accept the results of comparative study (p. 174 f., p. 182 f.). Why dismiss from the case the contemporary witnesses? Some critics think they are not contemporary; but the best and the convincing answer to them is to show how history benefits, how the obscure becomes clear, and new facts are elicited, by studying them in their surroundings. Nothing new is ever elicited from forgeries: minute comparison with the other

authorities of the period to which they pretend to belong is the one way of unmasking the forgery and vindicating the genuine historical document.

W. M. RAMSAY,

(*To be continued.*)

### HEBREWS VI. 4-6.

IN this paper I shall say a few words of criticism about Dr. Milligan's exposition of this difficult passage; and shall then endeavour to shed some additional light upon it by careful examination of some of the grammatical forms therein used.

Dr. Milligan interprets Hebrews v. 11, 12 and chapter vi. 1, 2 and verses 4-6 as all describing the spiritual condition of the readers to whom this epistle is addressed. But, as we shall see, this identification is so unlikely that we cannot accept it without clear proof; and of such proof we have none, either in the verses before us or in their context.

It is quite true that in chapter v. 11-14 we have words of blame. The persons addressed are "dull of hearing"; they need that some one teach them the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, and they need milk, being unfit for solid food. But this is very different from "having fallen away" and from "crucifying afresh to themselves the Son of God and putting Him to open shame." The one class of persons had failed to go forward, the others had lost the position they once possessed and were now openly hostile to Christ. This difference is not overturned by the word *γεγόνατε* in verse 12: "Ye have become men having need of milk." For even their stagnation was a sort of evil development. They who fail to grow become dwarfs, and thus become as different from