

Studies in Pauline Vocabulary.

BY THE REV. R. MARTIN POPE, M.A., WIMBLEDON.

Of Indwelling Power.

ἤδιστα οὖν μᾶλλον καυχῆσομαι ἐν τοῖς ἀσθενείαις μου ἵνα ἐπισκηνώσῃ ἐπ' ἐμέ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.—
2 COR. xii. 9.

It is not easy to discern the reason why St. Paul should use in this passage the very rare verb ἐπισκηνώ, when other more familiar expressions might have even more clearly indicated his meaning. The lexicographers can quote no parallels in the whole range of Greek literature, except two passages in Polybius (see iv. 18. 8, 72. 1), where the word is used in a military connexion of soldiers lodging or being billeted in certain houses. There is no example in the Septuagint. Stephanus in his *Thesaurus* gives two patristic examples (from Gregory of Nyssa and Basil) of the use of the noun ἐπισκήνωσις as 'habitatio' or 'inhabitatio.' The Vulgate renders the verb by *inhabitet*. Bengel makes the word practically synonymous with ἐπισκιάζω ('overshadow'), which is used in Ex 40³⁵ by the LXX as a translation of the Hebrew כָּשַׁף (of the cloud of the Shekinah overshadowing the Tabernacle). But the word כָּשַׁף means to settle down, to rest or pitch a tent in, and would thus be more adequately rendered by St. Paul's word ἐπισκηνώ. The simple verb σκηνώ, which is used in Apoc 12¹² 13⁶ 21³, is found in Jn 1¹⁴ in the greatest of all statements, 'The Word became flesh and tabernacled (ἐσκήνωσε) among us.'

The phrase 'the power of Christ' is not so familiar to St. Paul's readers as 'the power of God,' or the power which is associated with the Spirit. But in v.⁹ of this chapter ἡ δύναμις (even without μου, which is found in some good uncials) is evidently to be understood of the Lord's power; while in 1 Co 5⁴, where the excommunication of the incestuous person is referred to, St. Paul expressly indicates that the spiritual authority of Christ Himself (οὖν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ) which is imparted to the Church, brings additional weight to that solemn decision. Undoubtedly the passage before us offers an obvious analogy to statements referring to the illapse or descent of the Divine Spirit; but St. Paul never

explicitly refers to the historical event of Pentecost. He regarded the Spirit as the permanent possession of Humanity and as 'the active principle of Christ's personality,' going indeed so far as to identify the Spirit with the Person of Christ, e.g. 'The Lord is the Spirit' (2 Co 3¹⁷), and again, 'We are changed into the same image by the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Co 3¹⁸). But such passages are to be regarded as indicating his profound conviction that 'it is only through our connexion with Christ's Person and our faith in Him that we experience that specific working of God's Spirit that was exemplified supremely in His life' (Somerville's *St. Paul's Conception of Christ*, p. 120). Without in any way detracting from the work of the Divine Spirit, St. Paul frequently describes it in terms of the glorified Christ. Consequently the dynamic of Christ may be appropriately described as resting upon the individual in the same way as the Divine Spirit rests upon him.

By the aid of such data we can arrive at a fairly definite impression of the meaning of the Apostle's words in 2 Co 12⁹. The thorn (σκόλοψ) in the flesh, whatever its nature, was regarded as a humbling, if painful, discipline. The pain was keen enough to move the Apostle to pray that it might be removed. The prayer was answered in the Lord's own way. 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for power (or my power) is made perfect in weakness.' When the Apostle realized this to be the ultimate purpose of the suffering, he not only accepted his infirmities but gloried in them. So far from resenting the discipline, he was prepared to make a boast of it, to the end that the power,¹ which was so to be perfected, might indeed rest upon him. The Revisers' marginal comment on the rendering 'rest upon me' is 'cover me, Gr. spread a tabernacle over me.' Bengel, as we have seen, took the word in effect as equivalent to

¹The R.V. reverses the translation of A.V., giving 'power' for δύναμις in the earlier part of the verse, and 'strength' in the later; but there seems to be no adequate reason for the alteration in the rendering of the word either in the A.V. or R.V.

ἐπισκιάζω, and, translating the passage *ut tanquam tentorium superobtegit me*, decides against the idea of 'inhabitation' as tending to destroy the Apostle's sense of weakness. No doubt the conception of Christ's power as a sheltering tent is attractive; but we agree with the Revisers in adopting a rendering of ἐπισκηνώσῃ which is more in harmony with the only extant examples of its usage and with the formation of the word itself, namely, to rest upon, encamp or settle upon, fix a tent or home in. The preposition ἐπι, with the accusative, indicates a movement from above, but a movement which is to result in a residence or home. True, a 'tent' is not a permanent dwelling-place, but to a nomadic people or to an army on campaign it was their home. Again, the word σκηνή is the LXX and N.T. word for the Tabernacle of Israel. The Tabernacle was not the Temple, but none the less it was the symbol of the permanent realization of God's Presence in Israel. Hence, while the concept of 'tent' or 'tabernacle' implies transitoriness, it also carries with it the further ideas of sanctity, communion, rest, protection. It is curious, indeed, when we remember that St. Paul was a weaver of tent cloth, that the word σκηνή so familiar in the Epistle to the Hebrews does not occur in Pauline language, though there is one example of σκηνος (2 Co 5⁴) of the body, which is the tent or tabernacle of the soul. When St. Paul speaks of 'the power of Christ' (which may be interpreted 'Christ as Power') resting upon him, he has perhaps lost sight of the transiency associated with the word σκηνή, and been influenced by the more august conception which the term would convey to the Hebrew mind. But apart from this, the word σκηνή is in harmony with the fleetingness of human life; cf. the touching lament of Hezekiah, Is 38¹², 'Mine age . . . is carried away from me as a shepherd's tent.' Certainly there is nothing out of place in the conception of Christ's Power making a kind of earthly home or shrine for itself in the heart of the saint. The enshrinement of a divine Power in human nature—this is the essence of the Christian revelation as well as the secret of a noble character.

The context suggests that such power comes as the issue of suffering nobly borne and nobly understood. The latter for the purposes of life is as important as the former. Many a man who has no personal experience of religion can bear bodily infirmity without flinching or murmuring; but he

has a secret resentment against the discipline of suffering and against the forces of the universe which seem to thrust it upon him. Now, St. Paul was not only a brave sufferer, but he was a brave interpreter of suffering. Over against weakness he placed power, and that power, spiritual; nay, the very power of Christ Himself which, lighting upon him, made his being its home. F. W. Myers is here one of our most helpful interpreters, thus rendering the Apostle's testimony to his Lord:

He as he wills shall solder and shall sunder,
Slay in a day and quicken in an hour,
Tune him a music from the Sons of Thunder,
Forge and transform my passion into power.

Ay, for this Paul, a scorn and a despising,
Weak as you know him and the wretch you see—
Even in these eyes shall ye behold him rising,
Strength in infirmities and Christ in me.

Again, in another passage where the same poet compares the sudden inspiration of the saint with the bursting into flame of a glorious pæan in the soul of an Ægean bard, the power of Christ becomes a wondrous and thrilling possession from above.

Scarcely I catch the words of his revealing,
Hardly I hear him, dimly understand,
Only the Power that is within me pealing
Lives on my lips and beckons to my hand.

The power of Christ comes, then, in response not only to courageous endurance, but to courageous acceptance of suffering. His Will is not only our Peace but our Power. One of the obvious marks of second-century Christianity, if we may judge by the testimony of contemporary writers, was the fact of a strange moral power which was at work in the Christian communities making the sinful pure, the selfish loving, the shrinking brave even to death—transforming thousands of quiet obscure people into saints and heroes. There was only one explanation. 'These things seem not to be the works of man: these things are the *power of God*,' said the author of the Epistle to Diognetus (see Edghill, *Spirit of Power*, p. 74, who quotes other similar testimonies). And it has been so through the ages. Amid the sorrows and pains of the struggling souls of humanity the power of Christ shines with a Shekinah-glory more wonderful than that which overshadowed the ancient Tabernacle of Israel, and brings a transfiguring and healing virtue to those hearts in which it makes its home.