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*PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF THE TRANSFORMATION
OF EXPERIENCE.*

WHEN the Apostle Paul uttered his calm and yet triumphant certainty, "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good," he was doing something more than making a categorical statement which he had himself accepted, and which he desired his readers to accept, in a spirit of unquestioning faith. He was formulating a principle which he held to be involved, one might say, in the very nature of things, and a principle so essentially reasonable, and so capable of commending its own reasonableness, that he does not pause to enumerate in detail the considerations which make it valid. The statement is not a bare assertion : it is the summing up of an argument which Paul has at the moment no time to draw out in fulness. Its significance is not merely that the Christian men and women to whom Paul was writing were expected to rest in faith amid the trials through which they passed, believing that "all things" would ultimately be proved to have been beneficial in their effects. Its significance is rather this. In so far as the love of God filled their hearts, they would find that love possessed of the power to transform experience—at the time and in the process of its passing—into a source of good. The reasoning behind the assertion—the reasoning implied, though not expressed—is that love is a power which forces all life and experience into the service of its own ideals, and that love, directed upon God, must, therefore, force all life and experience into the service of godliness. And because Paul's utterance is not seldom quoted without full appreciation of its point, it may be worth while to make an attempt at drawing out something of its significance here. It contains the Apostle's definitely conceived doctrine of the transformation of experience for

the Christian man. According to Paul, even those elements of life which the ordinary man satisfies himself with 'disarming if he can, are for the Christian to be, not only disarmed and robbed of their power to sting and harm and wound, but turned from foes to friends—and this because it is the natural effect of a God-ward love to make all experience a positive contributor of good.

The true spirit, if it dwell in a man, unites all things for him in the ministry of one common purpose. That is the first outstanding idea. The true spirit makes things work together, reduces life to a unity, and whether the incidents that happen be in themselves sweet or sad, compels them to serve one supreme end. That is, of course, to say that the possession of the true spirit solves one of the most pressing problems of life—the problem of making all life a *positive* matter. The desire is universal to find one unifying and constant purpose running through all the range of life: did all its experiences, whatever might be the variety of their shape and the changings of their colour, manifestly assist in the achievement of one great aim, human hearts would be content; and it is precisely because this uniting bond appears to be lacking that restlessness besets the soul. Man is pulled in one direction by one set of circumstances, and dragged in another by the second. What happens to him to-day looks, superficially, almost as if it might have been ordained by a different God from that which happened to him yesterday. One moment brings a message which the next moment contradicts. There is opposition everywhere, and life is a tumult rather than an order: friction and unsettlement and actual conflict on all hands: unity, the thing most desired, is the thing most markedly unattained. The elements of life do not fit in. Life itself is not a positive thing. It is a temporary and painful clambering up the steep, followed by a long backward slide, not a

steady and persistent ascent to the summit of the heights.

Paul's doctrine is that for the true man all this contradiction should have disappeared ; and whatever the immediate experience may be, it should for him be an assistance—and should be recognized as an assistance—in the working out of life's end and aim. For him " all things work together." For him, all the seemingly disunited elements of his living are united by the fact that, whatever they may be in themselves, it is good (in the sense to be presently emphasized) they produce. And Paul would not have had the Christian disciple be content unless he was rising into a consciousness of this definite and positive mastery and lordship over all. Was Christianity to make a man indifferent to what his days might bring ? In a sense, it was to do that, but it was to do more. Was Christianity to make a man strong to endure ? It was, of course, to do that, but only because it did more. It was to make him able to bend all things to life's high purpose : it was to give him some secret charm whereby he could force all things, out of their varied contents, to minister the same richness ; and he was ever to find, under the changing dress that experience might wear, the one unchanging form of good. The disciple was to find all life pulling him one way. The old quarrel between joy and sorrow, success and failure, was to be silenced once for all. A deeper harmony was to be found between things which on the surface looked as if no reconciliation could be. For the disciple, even tribulation and anguish and persecution and famine and sword—death and life and principalities and powers and things present and things to come—Paul's whole catalogue of experiences—were to work together for one great purpose, which they could not but help on.

And the purpose they served was a purpose of " good." That is the next outstanding idea. It is precisely at this point, however, that one needs to put in a plea for a right

understanding of Paul's word. Out of the significance suggested by the word "good" the moral element must on no account be dropped, if Paul's doctrine of the transformation of experience is to be truly apprehended—for, indeed, the moral element is the chiefest thing of all. It is not primarily good in the sense of happiness, but good in the sense of (the morally and spiritually good, that all things are to work. If one needs evidence that this interpretation is the interpretation consonant with the Apostle's intention, one can find it, first, in the particular Greek word employed; and next, in the fact that Paul immediately passes on to supply a clear indication of his meaning by speaking about being "conformed to the image of the Son." Of course, Paul would have subscribed with all his heart to the truth that all appearances of evil would be found to be, in the common phrase, "all for the best"; and he spoke in high tones about the trials of the present time not being worthy to be compared with the later glory; but for the moment that side of things is not his concern. We get at the precise meaning of Paul's utterance if we render—"to them that love God all things work together for *goodness*." To them that love God there is a spiritual education in all, and a spiritual profiting to be obtained from all; and the one purpose which life through all its range can be made to serve by those that have the true spirit in them is the purpose of enlarging their hearts' endowment of all that is worthy and noble and true.

The Apostle's statement, therefore, gives no warrant for supposing that pain and sorrow will be, or ought to be, *in themselves*, different things for those that love God, from what they are for other people. The modern mind, searching for the comfort of Paul's doctrine, often understands "good" as if it meant "pleasantness" rather than "worth." Face to face with life, the modern man often says that these

darksome experiences are going to work for his good—that is, he is going to find, now or later, something pleasant come out of them, spite of the unpleasantness which at the moment they bring. They really make for his good—that is, he ought not to feel hurt when these things strike him; and if he could only rise to his privilege, he would find their severity to be only a phantom of his imagination. He does not, of course, formulate in set words any such ideas; but in his heart he carries a vague notion that the Christian disciple ought to find no meaning in the words sorrow and disappointment and bereavement and pain: somehow, through God's manipulation of them for him, their essential character should be transformed. "To them that love God all things work together for pleasantness." Paul's declaration cannot be legitimately so read. It is not with the question of what experience is in itself, but with the question of its final effect upon the disciple, that the Apostle was dealing; and he did not mean that God would conjure with His almighty power and skill upon hardship and sorrow until nothing more than the apparition of them was left to assail the heart that loved. His assurance was, that all things would make a man better—not happier, except in so far as to be better always means to be happier—that all things would make a man better, if in him the true spirit dwelt. It was for spiritual education and development that all life might be made to tell.

The condition on which life might be made to further this one object was that there should be in the heart a God-ward love. That is the third outstanding idea. And here is really the main stress of Paul's doctrine of the transformation of experience—here we come upon the implied argument to which, at the outset, reference was made.

What is the principle involved? How can a love of God, dwelling in a man, force each incident of his experience to

tell towards the spiritual enrichment of character ? What connexion is there between the supposed cause, a God-ward love, and the supposed effect, a power to draw "good" even out of the darker experiences and sadder elements of life ?

The principle is simply this—that the active yearning after good (for the love of God is, of course, the love of good) finds a suggestion and a ministry of good in all that befalls. Him who cares for good, every experience will enrich with good : him who hungers for good, every experience will feed. If affection for good be the dominant characteristic in a man, that affection will nurture and satisfy itself from all that the man goes through.

The legitimacy of the principle cannot be matter of dispute. For it is undoubtedly the case, that in a broad sense life tends to feed and to confirm whatever is the ruling element in a man's character. The effect which the experiences of life produce depends upon that, within the soul, with which they come into contact : there is not a single joy and not a single sorrow which affects two people in precisely the same way : the nature in them takes up the experience as it comes, is worked upon by the experience and itself works upon the experience, and strengthens itself in whatever its dominant quality may have been by the experience as it passes by. The predominantly mean and ignoble man will rise for a moment to sunlit heights of joy, and the joy will only minister to his meanness ; or he will be clasped for a moment in the arms of sorrow, and the sorrow will but fling him out of its embrace presently meaner and more ignoble still ; and all things work together for meanness to him who loves what is mean. The predominantly great-souled man will climb to those same summits of joy and submit himself to the clasp of that same sorrow, and will come down from the mount of delight and emerge from the embrace of grief with a yet more fulfilled greatness in him, with the moral quality

of his being strengthened and confirmed ; and all things work together for greatness to him who loves what is great. In a broad sense, life tends to feed and confirm whatever is the ruling element in the character of him who lives it. And it is on that fact that Paul's doctrine is based. To them that love God—to them that love good—all things work together for good. They meet the sorrow which would narrow and belittle another, and, because care for nobleness is supreme in them, the sorrow works out in nobleness. They are touched, as others are, by the finger of pain, and, though to them pain is pain still, the soul takes no hurt thereby, but, because care for all great qualities is supreme in it, grows the greater for the very pain. If the Apostle's readers desired to find the true unity of life, it needed that they should keep the love of good alive in all its strength, and should keep the heart aspiring towards good with all its power, and should keep the passion for that which is good palpitating through every fibre of their moral being. And then to their predominant love of good, all life, whether for the moment it wore its robes of gladness or its sombre garb of grief, whether it came with gifts in its hand or with a sword to destroy what they had held most dear—to their predominant love of good all life would answer with good. Through the subtle transformation of experience which God-ward love in them would work, life's whole process would be made to yield the good for which they cared the most.

Paul does not stop to commend the sufficiency of his doctrine. He assumes that his readers would find in the doctrine a promise sufficiently inspiring, and would be able to face life unfearing, if through having the love of God in their hearts they could subdue it thus. Certainly to Paul himself, passionately in love with righteousness as he was, such a unity as this that love for good assured left nothing

more to desire. He would have believed, of course, that there was a fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore to come by-and-by, that buried delights would rise from their graves, that all discords would change at last to sweetest music in heaven. But he would have said that all this, in its fulness at any rate, was for those who cared for this truer "good" most and first. It was one of the Apostle's first concerns that man should secure the transformation of experience which God-ward love could perform; and his song of gladness was inspired by the thought that already, in so far as a God-ward love was there, "all things are yours."

HENRY W. CLARK.

"THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

(HAB. II. 4; GAL. III. 11; HEB. X. 38; ROM. I. 17.)

THE principle of development, so fruitful in physics, begins to play a great part also in theology. Already we can see plainly that much was authorized and almost sanctioned in one age, which was promptly denounced when the race had learned enough to profit by its denunciation.

The vine which was brought out of Egypt had to strike its roots and spread its branches far. Messiah had to await the fulness of the times, before the ideas which slowly took form in the Old Testament could become the historic facts of the New.

It is therefore little wonder, when the whole system was developing, advancing, taking newer and deeper meanings undiscerned before, that sometimes a phrase, a text, quoted from the Old Testament in the New, assumes there a depth and richness of significance which the writer little meant. Instead of reckoning as a difficulty this contrast between