

ARTICLE X.

CRITICAL NOTES.

A STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS.

EXAMINATION of some excellent Commentaries for the dominating thought and controlling motive of St. Paul's First Corinthian Epistle is somewhat disappointing.

Several seem to hold, with Olshausen, "that the points treated by the apostle in his writing are *extremely varied in their nature*; nevertheless, a strong thread of connection is evident throughout." Yet, with him, most fail to define satisfactorily this "strong thread," and to treat the contents of the letter at all germinally. "This Epistle divides itself into two parts," says Bishop Ellicott in his Handy Commentary. "The first section, extending to chap. vi. 20, deals with the reports that had reached St. Paul as to the condition of the Corinthian church; and the second section, which occupies the remainder of the Epistle, is a reply to the letter received from Corinth." But is the apostle here merely answering their six questions, or rebuking the three evils of the Greek church?

The Epistle does not begin in this style, nor with such a motive. Nor does the apostle pen a desultory letter about nine or ten important things for this church to know or to do. Did Paul ever write such a letter? While always embodying these practical issues, he invariably strung them on the "strong thread" of some radical truth, which gave them a temporary value, and which, too, lent perpetual significance to the particular problem of that early church.

The underlying truth always more than sufficed for the special cases named or treated. Our undertaking is, then, *to discover, if possible, the motive, or theme, of the First Corinthian Epistle*. The only and the sure way of doing this, is to traverse thoroughly the territory lying before us. This has been done; and, without requiring any tedious journeyings of the reader, he may be presented with a bird's-eye view of the entire country.

After nine verses of greeting to the church at the Greek Isthmus, St. Paul very earnestly exhorts the membership to *unity of mind* and life. The nature of their divisions is noted, and the basis of their union—the false and the true—are distinctly and emphatically named. It is not Paul, nor Apollos, nor Peter; it is not world-wisdom; but it is the gospel of the Cross, the wisdom and power of God: Jesus Christ is the real bond of union.

Now for three chapters on (ii.-iv.), the writer tells of the nature of *his personal union with those to whom he is writing*. He is united with them, not, as some have evidently thought, by his *oratory*, nor again by his *wisdom*: the real grounds of their relationship are those by which they are truly bound with one another. These are found, by reading and comparing, to be almost identical in their wording. (Cf. ii. 1-16 and i. 13-31.¹)

The nature of the relation of Apostle Paul with his brethren is *spiritual*, not carnal, continues Chapter Three. Paul and the apostles are from the Lord. God's enduring foundation is Christ. Christians are God's holy place. Christ is the Christian's *Unifier* with God's universal Kingdom (iii. 22, 23).

And now, advancing from the spiritual union of himself with the church, St. Paul emphasizes the *Nature of his Mission* as spiritual, and, as we may discern, tending to unity. Thus the fourth chapter. The apostle deals with God's mysteries, and his mission is beyond human criticism, even his own. Hence men must not go beyond the word of revelation. To do so is perilous! For this reason, to some, the apostles are fools! But in Christ were the Corinthians begotten of Paul, and should follow his ways in Christ!—for the Kingdom of God is in power, not in human wisdom. Thus, with this unifying tendency, closes what Olshausen terms the "first part" of the Epistle to the Corinthians. And perhaps this division may more generally commend itself than that of Ellicott.

Having written so much about Christian Unity, the question might now arise, What shall be the theme of the remainder of the Epistle, and what relation, if any, may it bear to the foregoing? To suppose it should bear no special relation to the first four chapters would be to suspect St. Paul of being un-Pauline. The "antecedent probability" is that somewhere within the lines of these four chapters there is contained the golden thread of truth belonging to the entire writing. And if it be not this *Christian unity*, what can it be? If it be not this, to what effect has he written; if not so, why does he continue thus, exemplifying the *Practical Application of his Mission*?

This he begins at Chapter Five, urging, first, Purity of the Church. And this is emphasized, as it needs to be, by means of the iniquity, news of which has come to him across the *Ægean Sea*. Here, again, is taken up the theme of i. 10, viz., that of division, or disunion, though, indeed,

¹Chap. ii. 1-16.

- (1) Not oratory and self-wisdom, 1, 4^a.
- (2) But Christ crucified, 2, 3.
- (3) The Holy Spirit, 4^b-5, 10-13.
- (4) Divine Wisdom, 6-9.
- (5) Christ's mind in the believer, 14-16.

Chap. i. 13-31.

- (1) Not Paul, etc., 13-16.
- (2) Gospel of the Cross, 17-19.
- (3) Not world-wisdom, 20-23.
- (4) Wisdom and power of God, 24-29.
- (5) Jesus Christ, our wisdom, etc., 30-31.

under another color. Formerly, it was a quarrel over the apostles ; here, a quarrel over licentiousness. Both had made dreadful divisions, and rent the Christian brotherhood. And so here is urged separation from the impure, that harmony may be restored and maintained. These divisions are to be settled in the church, by the church herself. The world shall not judge the saints : God's order is the reverse ! Now the writer comes to the personal, or the physical bearing of this theme: *the physical Christian*. In the latter portion of the sixth chapter he declares that what may be physically legal may be inexpedient from the moral point of view. The body is for God. Physical and moral impurity identifies with the impure. But *union with Christ purifies* (ver. 17) ; and the Christian body is a holy temple.

Personal purity in the family relation, which probably troubled somebody, is treated largely upon "the calling of God" ; and virgins are to be virgins, not for self-gratulation, but for the cause of Christ (vii. 32). Thus purity is essential to Christian unity, both with Christ and between Christians !

The three chapters following (viii.-x.), while they may be regarded as a disquisition upon *Christian liberty*, in order to be comprehended must be appreciated in their setting, i. e., as related to Christian unity. The delicate or divine quality of the Christian's freedom is here set forth in his relation with paganism. The Christian is secure against idolatry. He knows not to practice heathenish customs, but mere knowledge is insufficient. It may serve only to puff up man ; only love builds up. The Christian's chief care is his liberty "lest the weak perish" and he "sin against God" in its transgression. His own liberty St. Paul employs to illustrate the general truth. In the exercise thereof he had right to take a wife, but declined. He, by right, could live by the gospel, but the rather earned his own livelihood. Never did he exercise his full gospel rights, on account of the souls of others, and that he might be a "joint partaker" of the gospel !

In other words, the Apostle employed his liberty that he might succeed in unifying mankind with himself in the Christian life. Hereupon he gives a warning on self-deception in this liberty (chap x.), exemplifying it by a number of historic illustrations. Liberty has been ridden to the death, for it took no consideration of the neighbor's good, but violated his conscience. True liberty has the purpose of glorifying God ; regards the profit of all men ; and imitates the Christian example. That is, *Christian liberty is unifying in its nature*.

Four chapters (xi.-xiv.) are now penned on the more vital *Inter-Christian Life and Equipment*. And, firstly, as to the Corinthian Assembly. The conduct of the women, from the standpoint of custom and from the Christian point of view, is distinctly set forth. This commentary of St. Paul is flavored with the liberty-teaching of the previous chapters. Woman is not to boldly disregard nor violate custom or Christian

teaching and instinct, because she is Christian. Woman must not make herself a divisive factor in the Christian assembly.

The Lord's Supper ought surely to be a unifying agency in the body of Christ. One motive should pervade every heart,—the remembrance of Christ, the proclamation of the Lord's death!

But the *spiritual equipment* is a chief means of unifying the Christian body. This is the *Holy Spirit*! He inspires the testimony to Jesus, the diverse gifts to be found in the church, the very body itself. This correlation of the parts of this Christian organism is of God (chap. xii.).

The greatest gift of God, the most profitable for its possessor, and the most enduring of all, is that of *love* (xiii.). Yet the desirable gift for Christians to seek is that of prophecy (xiv.). It edifies the church, the believer, learned and unlearned; and, while "tongues" are to be allowed, prophecy is to be coveted. All can prophesy, and profit all, under the spirit of the prophets. To every prophet-inspired person all are to listen in silence, even the women. This common gift evidently *unifies in service*, for it gives to each a special power and service essential to the health and development of the "body of Christ."

At length, looking to the completion of the letter, St. Paul conceives the idea of giving the Corinthian church a summation and consummation of his gospel and theirs; which he preached, and they received; wherein they stood, by which they were saved. And, after setting forth Christ's death for our sins, and his resurrection in the memorable fifteenth chapter, he closes it with the "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," etc. *Abiding union* and coöperation in Christ's work is a fitting word for closing such a theme as this! And, without doubt, this gospel foundation that he has laid is sufficient for sustaining this magnificent superstructure of the church of Christ. The "contributions" of which mention is made in the closing chapter, taken in connection with the purpose for which it is to be used by bringing into a common treasury a common fund, must evidently render moral, financial, and social relationship between the local churches the more intimate and vital. To this same end would his anticipated visit conduce, as well as their ideal relationship with their ministers, who "refreshed my spirit and yours."

Why, now, did St. Paul write such an Epistle as this? Merely to answer questions, or to correct some contaminating evils? The news he had received disclosed the great peril of disruption in the church of Corinth, and suggested the only panacea for this mortal disease,—God's remedy. It was Christ, dead and risen; the Holy Spirit endowing and inspiring the church to common, consecrated life, testimony, service. Thus, by agency of Christ and his Spirit is Christian union established and perpetuated. So may it be.

J. BOUTON LAWRENCE.

UNITARIAN BENEVOLENCES.

IN my article in the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* for January last, the remark was made, "that the Congregational churches of one town in New England gave more money for benevolent purposes than did all the 420 Unitarian churches in America."

I had in mind the statement made some time ago by Senator Hoar, and thought it referred to the moneys raised by Unitarians for all forms of mission work; but Rev. G. W. Young, of Lawrence, Mass., kindly informs me that "Senator Hoar's statement was made in criticism of his brethren giving so little for *propagandism*, in which he compared our body with a limited number—less than a score, I think—of 'Orthodox' churches near his Worcester home. His criticism was just." I gladly make this correction; though it seems to leave untouched the position taken, that a liberal theology lacks the power of self-propagation. If Unitarian churches best represent the teachings of Jesus Christ, why are they less ready to spend money and labor in multiplying their number than are the orthodox churches, "adhering to dogma, declared by methods which would put to shame the modern ward caucus, controversial theology, which prevents the clearest insight into the Master's real teaching," as they are described by Dr. C. D. Wright in his last President's address before the American Unitarian Association?

It seems to be admitted that Unitarians do not give as much for their church work as others do. There remains the question: Do they do as much for education, Bible societies, and other branches of benevolence of a general character as do the orthodox churches? Of this Mr. Young says, "Probably it would be impossible to give statistics, though the general impression is that such work is possibly that in which Unitarians are not behindhand."

We have not the means of making a statistical comparison. From the annual report for 1899 of the American Unitarian Association, we see that \$4,300 were spent for the salary of Rev. C. MacCauley and for other expenses of the mission in Japan. This is the only foreign mission work of the Unitarian churches. This sum would represent about \$10 from each Unitarian church. The Congregational churches last year raised for foreign missions \$644,200, or an average of \$133 a church. For work among the negroes, the income of the Frothingham Fund, No. 2, amounting to \$400, was given to the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, representing less than \$1 per church; the Congregational churches last year gave for work among the negroes \$122,457, or at the rate of \$25 a church. For Sunday-schools, which may be regarded as somewhat general and missionary work, the Unitarian Sunday-School Society reports for 1899, \$21,923 from invested funds; of contributions further it says that nearly 200 churches helped, and the sum total was a trifle less than that of the previous year. The 420 churches gave \$4,000, or less than \$10 each. The Congregational churches in 1899 gave

for general Sunday-school work \$56,690, or at the rate of \$11.68 a church. For home missions the Unitarians raised and spent \$28,961, or \$69 a church; the Congregationalists contributed for the same general work \$477,690, or \$98.50 a church. For education Unitarians do much; but in the annual report of their Association we find only \$400 given to theological students, and \$8,600 spent for books, tracts, and denominational literature, in addition to the \$400 from the Frothingham Fund to colored students in Tuskegee. The Congregationalists raised for education \$153,670 in 1899. But of course both denominations give much for education which is not included in church reports. The "National Alliance of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Women," according to their Manual of 1899, kindly sent me by Mr. Young, raised \$53,391 during the year from 242 branches with 10,212 members, for religious work. The Congregational women raised for mission work abroad last year \$133,286, and a small sum for home work; so that, considering their being ten times as numerous, the comparison here is in favor, perhaps, of their Unitarian sisters. Certainly the work of the Alliance of Unitarian women appears to lead the activities of the "liberal Christians." I know that much of the best work of churches cannot be represented by statistics; and I have not the information for even a brief summary of what statistics might tell. The above references, however, from the work of the two wings of the Congregational churches of America, may indicate in some degree the relation between the kind of theology and the grace of giving, and, while making the correction desired by Mr. Young, show that in the main my contention was not groundless.

H. M. SCOTT.

CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.