

"The Inexplorable Wealth of the Christ."

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Τὸ ἀνεξίχνιαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ χριστοῦ.—ΕΡΗ. iii. 8.

FOR a study of St. Paul's teaching the passage in which these words occur is of special importance. It reveals a conception of the Gospel which St. Paul has made peculiarly his own, as well as St. Paul's personal relation towards this conception.

"Unto *me* was this grace given . . . to preach unto the Gentiles the inexplorable wealth of the Christ."

But to understand this passage we must recollect the purpose of the whole Epistle. That purpose is clearly stated in the form of a prayer in the fourteenth and following verses of the third chapter. The writing of this letter and the offering of this prayer involved (1) hard mental work, (2) intense spiritual effort. By the wise man work and prayer are combined. He prays while he works, and his work is of the nature of a prayer. His prayers reveal the nature of the purposes he would accomplish, and he knows that the realization of these purposes will demand strenuous effort.

To effect the object of this prayer St. Paul's whole life, as a Christian, was devoted. In his prayer he has spoken of the *indwelling* and of the *love* of the Christ. To produce the conditions essential for the first, to get all men to realize the blessing and the power of the second, were all his energies directed.

But this prayer in the third chapter is only the resumption of a prayer which opens in the fifteenth verse of the first chapter. This prayer, we notice, passes into a meditation upon a revelation (of both a truth and a purpose) which St. Paul believes has been granted to him. One great issue of this truth and this purpose, now revealed in the Gospel (which itself is of the nature of both a truth and a power), is the breaking down of the barrier between the Jew and the Gentile, and the bringing

to the Gentile—*i.e.*, to the *world*—all the spiritual privileges belonging hitherto exclusively to the Jew. Is the term "a fuller revelation of God's will" wholly inadequate to describe these privileges? Not if we give a comprehensive meaning to the term "God's will."

To the Jew in the past there had been a revelation of this "will." He had, at least comparatively, lived in its light. Now the world should *share* this privilege. Henceforth neither barriers of race nor exclusiveness of nationality should exist in reference to that revelation.

But the word *revelation* in St. Paul's writings at once suggests another word. For where there is revelation there is something being revealed. Also, while revelation is incomplete there is something at least partially secret, there is a *mystery* (in the true sense of the word).

The Old Testament contains a progressive, but, at its best, a still partial, revelation of the Divine "will." In the Old Testament we find an idea known as the Messianic or Christ-idea. It meets us in different books, it is expressed in different forms, and of it different applications are at least suggested.

With the Incarnation the clearness and the content of the Divine "will" as revealed were enormously increased and enlarged. The Lord Jesus revealed, as none other, God's will for man. And did not the most intimate of His personal followers write His life with this object—to show that this Jesus, besides being the Son of God, is the *Messiah*? This same Jesus, who from identity of nature could perfectly reveal the Divine will, did in His complete human nature, perfectly fulfil, as far as an individual could do this, the office and work of the Messiah.

St. Paul at one time could not accept this identification of Jesus and the Messiah. Later he became convinced of its truth; and from the moment he did become so convinced he devoted his life entirely to making known to the world the inevitable issues of this identification.

Thus, a secret or "mystery" is in process of revelation.

That secret is the Divine will or purpose for *humanity*—namely, that the whole human race should share in the knowledge of God, in the Messianic blessing, in the Gospel. The Old Testament in its Messianic teaching, containing a promise of the incorporation of Gentiles into Israel, contains a *partial* revelation of the secret ; but in Jesus, now seen to be identical with the Messiah, is the revelation first fully made. Also through Him are the possibilities of the revelation first made fully available for *humanity*. This St. Paul sees ; and he determines to proclaim this “mystery” to the world. He determines to preach Jesus as the Messiah, for he sees that in the acceptance of this truth lies the one condition for man being able to enter into the Divine wisdom, and so of being able to do the Divine will, and therefore of fulfilling his divinely appointed destiny.

The value of a truth lies in the wealth of its possible applicability. Here is a truth—Jesus is the Messiah. In the light of this truth St. Paul now read the past and the present, in its light he will look into the future ; to do this is to be conscious of boundless possibilities of application. With all his privileges of revelation, St. Paul cannot as yet fully say what these may be in the ages to come, but he is convinced that this truth will prove equal to any demand which may be made upon it. The wealth of the “Christ-truth” and of the “Christ-power” are alike inexplorable. That vein of purest ore and that treasury of potential energy are alike inexhaustible. And these must not be dissociated ; for the Gospel, which in one sense is contained in the affirmation “Jesus is the Messiah,” is more than an intellectual conviction—it is a power *in* life, *through* life, *upon* life. But the idea of a “power” affecting human life involves the idea of a spirit. There is therefore a Messianic Spirit which, because a power, is capable of ruling, purifying, ennobling the lives of individuals and communities ; this power, with its boundless potentialities, is part of the inexplorable wealth of the Christ. The Old Testament witnessed to this—the eleventh, fifty-third, and sixty-first chapters of Isaiah

There is one essential condition of application. The inexorable wealth of the Christ was first made fully available in Jesus—in and through a perfect human life. Only through the totality of our human powers and capacities, sanctified and consecrated by the Divine Spirit, can this wealth be appropriated and dispensed. And this conviction forces yet another¹ upon us—that only through a life of self-sacrifice can the appropriating and dispensing be effected. Israel failed to make this sacrifice, and so failed to fulfil its Divine destiny of service to the world. Jesus made it and succeeded. St. Paul made it, but only in the spirit and power of the Christ. In the same spirit and by the same power we must make the self-sacrifice, both in study and in active service. By assimilation of the truth we enter into communion with God, and all communion demands self-sacrifice. By dispensing the truth at whatever cost we communicate with men. Both actions demand such self-sacrifice as we see in Jesus—the absolute consecration of the whole human nature. Only thus can we proclaim to the world that wherein alone lies the hope of its salvation—“the inexorable wealth of the Christ.”



Literary Notes.

MESSRS. LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO., who usually have a large number of interesting theological books in their new lists of announcements, have at the moment in the press several which are worth perusing. Of course, very often the views to be found in these volumes do not always coincide with one's own; but it is always wise to hear what others have to say. So long as the faith is fixed and the conscience knows what is right and what is wrong, opposite views can do nought else but reaffirm and encourage all that one has come to consider as the life and hope of one's belief. Well, among these new theological books will be found Dr. Davey Biggs's "Public Worship in the Book of Common Prayer: A Handbook for Lay People." The author is Vicar of St. Philip and St. James, Oxford. The work is to be in two parts, but published in one volume. Dr. G. C. Workman's "The Servant of Jehovah," a series of studies on the meaning of the phrase "the servant of

¹ See Isa. liii.