

an individual, even the mission of the nation in the moulding of the world.

There is an extensive range of subjects here. All that concerns the national life, the personal life, and the home life and its sanctities ; the duties of the single and the married state ; the mutual life and confidence that should bind together husband and wife ; the tender ties that link the life of the parent and the life of the child ; and those bands of brotherhood that should make the whole family of Christ of one mind and one heart—these subjects, which engrossed the attention of the greatest of all preachers, supply themes for exposition and exhortation. Such subjects, treated with average ability and more than average conviction from the standpoint and in the Spirit of Christ, would establish the pulpit as a great spiritual and moral power to raise the tone, refine the morals, and to save the souls of men.



Was St. Paul Right in taking his Last Journey to Jerusalem ?

A REPLY.¹

By THE REV. G. F. W. MUNBY, M.A.

IT is not easy to bring one's self to admit that the Apostle St. Paul, to whose writings all Christian people owe so much, made the grievous mistake attributed to him in the above paper. It is said, in this paper, that the Apostle thought himself to be "guided by the blessed Spirit of God" when he was "not so guided," and that, in making this mistake, his error was caused first by his "not laying aside his own will," and secondly by his "not using his reason properly."

It must be admitted that the argument in favour of this view is stated with much ability, and evidently with the sincere desire

¹ See Canon Kelk's article, with the above heading, in the *CHURCHMAN* for January, 1907, p. 35.

to ascertain the truth, and that it is with evident regret that the writer finds himself obliged to come to this conclusion. I venture to think that this conclusion by no means necessarily follows from the argument used, and for the following reasons :

1. The argument mainly turns upon the fact that, in the twenty-first chapter of the Acts, the disciples, both at Tyre (ver. 4) and at Cæsarea (ver. 12), claim to be led by the Spirit of God in giving St. Paul directly contrary advice to that to which he himself believed the same Holy Spirit was leading him. He himself believed, as he had said to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts xx. 22), that the Spirit of God was leading him to go to Jerusalem. He was "bound in the spirit," he says, to go there. It is true that the expression "in the spirit," as is stated by Canon Kelk, refers to the Apostle's own spirit, and not to the Holy Spirit of God ; but by whom was his spirit bound, if not by the Holy Spirit? He cannot mean that he had "bound" himself. It must have been some influence exterior to himself which had bound him. And what influence could this be other than the Holy Spirit? It seems clear—and Canon Kelk admits this—that, whether rightly or wrongly, at all events St. Paul believed that the Holy Spirit was leading him to go to Jerusalem. And yet the disciples at these two towns distinctly claim also to be guided by the Spirit of God in trying to dissuade him from going. One of the two parties (this is argument) must therefore have been mistaken. "The Holy Spirit," as Canon Kelk says twice over (pp. 38 and 43), "cannot contradict Himself," which, of course, must be absolutely true.

I venture to think that it was much more likely that the good people at Tyre and Cæsarea were mistaken in the matter than that St. Paul was. If the narrative be carefully examined, it will be seen that there was nothing new in what these loving disciples had to tell St. Paul. He had told the Ephesian elders himself (Acts xx. 23) that "the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city" that "bonds and afflictions" were awaiting him. When, therefore, at Cæsarea, Agabus took his girdle and bound with it his own hands and feet, saying, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem

bind the man that owneth this girdle," and claimed to say this in the name of the Holy Ghost, he was only telling St. Paul what the same Holy Spirit had told him before. St. Paul knew it perfectly ; but he was convinced, all the same, that the Holy Spirit bade him go forward to meet the danger, none the less. The tender and loving hearts of these disciples led them to conclude that, because "bonds and afflictions" were predicted to follow, the Holy Spirit was foretelling those sufferings with a distinct purpose—namely, as a warning to the Apostle not to proceed on his journey. This must be the meaning of the expression, when at Tyre they "said unto him, through the Spirit"—that is, through the Spirit's revealing these coming sufferings—"that he should not go up to Jerusalem"; and this it was which led St. Luke (who was present) to say, respecting Cæsarea, "both we and they of that place besought him not to go up to Jerusalem," using exactly the same expression (Acts xxi. 12).

But it is clear that, however convinced they at first were that the Holy Spirit was warning the Apostle, through them, against proceeding on his journey, these affectionate people no longer thought so when they had heard his own strong conviction to the contrary. St. Luke, in relating the issue of their earnest pleading, distinctly says, "when he would not be persuaded, we ceased"—that is, "we gave up urging him not to go," saying, "The will of the Lord be done" (ver. 14). Surely it must be admitted that by the "will of the Lord" they meant the guiding of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore the guiding of the Spirit. They could not for a moment have supposed that St. Paul was wrong in going, if it was the "will of the Lord" that he should go. Does not this make it plain that these fervent-hearted disciples, so anxious for the safety of their teacher, entirely admitted that the Apostle's interpretation of the guiding of the Holy Spirit was the true one, and they had been mistaken in thinking otherwise before.

2. But Canon Kelk would reply to this, that the result, in the conduct of St. Paul, shows that the Apostle suffered afterwards from being "left to himself," and having to "decide by

his own reason," through having failed to interpret aright the guiding of the Spirit of God—that is to say, that a distinct punishment befell him for acting as he did. The proof given of this is first that he "deviated from the highest Christian principle" in associating himself with the "four men who were under a vow," and so sanctioning the observance of ceremonies which were now obsolete. The reference is to Acts xxi. 23. "Supposing," says Canon Kelk, "that this observance (that is, the keeping of the vow of the four men) was right, which is very doubtful, it was not right" for St. Paul to join in it solely, as he did, that people might see him "keeping the Law." Is not the answer to this that St. Paul's acting in this way was entirely in harmony with all his teaching and all his practice, as recorded elsewhere? His object was to disarm the opposition of those "many thousands of Jews which believe" of whom St. James had spoken (ver. 20), who were "all zealous of the Law," and who had heard things said against him which were not true (ver. 21). His own principles, as stated in his Epistles, required this of him. He had told the Romans (Rom. xiv.) that every possible ceremony should be complied with, rather than a stumbling-block should be cast in another's way. He had told the Corinthians (1 Cor. ix. 20) that "unto the Jews he became as a Jew, that he might gain the Jews." He not only observed, like others of his nation, the Jewish festivals, but he had, on leaving Corinth (Acts xviii. 18), distinctly taken a Nazarite's vow upon himself. No one, therefore, can rightly charge him with inconsistency in taking a similar step on this occasion.

The second proof given that his misinterpreting the guidance of God led him to do wrong is that in Acts xxiii. 3 he said to the high-priest Ananias, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall," when he had been most unjustly struck on the mouth by his judge's orders, and that he admitted having spoken wrongly by afterwards apologizing. The answer to this is that his apology was not for using this expression, but for using it unknowingly of "the ruler of his people." To call a person

a "whited wall" is not in itself a worse appellation than to call him a "fox," and this, we know, was an expression used by our blessed Lord Himself (St. Luke xiii. 32).

A third attempted proof is from the same chapter, when, perceiving that both Pharisees and Sadducees were present, the Apostle cried in the Council: "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." In saying this, we are told that, "because of his self-will," he did not seek the Holy Spirit's promised aid, and, it is said "such an assertion was not dictated by the Holy Ghost" (p. 40). And this, not because "it was absolutely untrue," but because the subject of the resurrection was "not the direct matter for which he was brought before the Council on that day." And then it is added, "it can hardly be said to be such a cry as our Lord would have raised." This means that, by thus bringing in the subject of the Resurrection, the Apostle was acting in a disingenuous manner, and trying to raise a false issue in his trial, which was taking an unfair advantage over his opponents. I think most people on reading the story will say that St. Paul, in using these words, not only showed great adroitness and skill, but was employing a most legitimate means of self-defence, which would certainly be sanctioned by his Master. The subject of the Resurrection was to him the keystone of the arch of all his teaching. It is not true to say that it was not involved in his trial at Jerusalem that day. It was at the very root of all the opposition to his message. This is what he meant when he said to his countrymen who came to see him in his lodging at Rome: "For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." The hope of Israel was the coming of the Messiah, and to him, and to all who learnt the Gospel from him, the resurrection of Christ from the dead was the grand and overwhelming proof that the Messiah had come, and that Jesus of Nazareth was He. Rather than say that St. Paul was "left to himself" in making this defence before the Sanhedrin, I should rather believe that there never was an occasion when his Master's promise was more distinctly fulfilled to him, the

promise that "when they deliver you up, it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak" (St. Matt. x. 19).

3. It remains only to reply to the statement on p. 43 that the Apostle "had not laid aside his own will, and had not used his reason properly." If the following "his own will" in this instance means anything, it must mean that to go up to Jerusalem, in the face of "bonds and afflictions" which he knew for certain were awaiting him, was what he naturally and of his own will and inclination desired. This is surely an incredible supposition. And Canon Kelk's argument, as we have seen, implies that he only desired to take this journey because (whether rightly or wrongly) he believed that God was leading him to do so. There can be no need, therefore, to reply further to this.

By not "using his reason properly" it is explained that it is meant that he did not act, in determining his conduct, as he had previously done in following the guidance of God in his second missionary journey. In that journey, as related in Acts xvi., there were two occasions in which he was led by the blessed Spirit of God to abandon a plan which he had thought of. He was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word" in Proconsular Asia (ver. 6); and when "they assayed to go into Bithynia, the Spirit suffered them not" (ver. 7). In both these cases he rightly followed the Divine guidance in abandoning an intention he had formed, because he was convinced, by indications which are not described to us, that God was leading him to do so. Then, the argument is, he ought, if he had rightly used his reason, to have abandoned his journey to Jerusalem for just the same reason. The assurance that was given him "in every city" that "bonds and afflictions awaited him" should have convinced him that he ought to go elsewhere. Is not the answer that, assuredly if he had been seeking his own comfort or his own security, the entreaties of his friends, who were so tenderly anxious for his safety, would have constrained him so to do? But he tells us himself that he had on this occasion an overpowering conviction—like which he had no

conviction whatever when he turned aside from "Asia" and Bithynia—a conviction from which no threatened "bonds or afflictions" should move him; he felt "bound in the spirit" to proceed on his journey, let come what would. And he not only felt this himself, but he entirely succeeded in causing his earnestly entreating friends to feel it too. If he had not done this, they never could have said, as we are told they did say, as to his proceeding on his journey, "The will of the Lord be done." I think it has been shown, therefore, that the argument from the second missionary journey in no way applies in this case. If St. Paul had been asked why he did not show the same persistence then in carrying out his purpose as he did subsequently, he would have replied: "Ah! it makes all the difference in the world; I was in no way 'bound in the spirit' to go to Ephesus or to Bithynia. I had then no conviction in my mind that it was God's will." It seems to me that these considerations show that the beloved and honoured Apostle made no mistake in following what he believed to be the guiding of God in taking his last journey to Jerusalem. The fact that the troubles he expected, and was prepared for, really came, can be no proof (as is asserted) that his interpretation of God's purpose for him was an erroneous one. They came upon him in accordance with definite predictions, of which he was well aware. And the "four whole years" of his subsequent confinement, of which Canon Kelk speaks (p. 40), can no more be attributed to a mistake on his part, than his previous imprisonment at Philippi can be, which, every one will admit, was the result of his "assuredly gathering that the Lord had called him" to sail from Troas (Acts xvi. 10).

