

TITUS.¹

II.

THE PEOPLE HE MIXED WITH.

BY THE REV. W. B. RUSSELL CALEY, M.A.

WE all know something of the power of influence, how people act and re-act upon one another, and how circumstances affect character. So Titus and these early Christians enormously influenced one another. In a sense all Christians are chameleons and take their colour largely from their environment, and if we always remember this, we shall judge far more kindly of those we differ from.

We have considered that Titus' life-work fell into three parts—Church Morality, Finance, and Organization, and thus we learn something of the people amongst whom he moved, that they were (1) persons of loose morality, largely the result of custom, (2) of generous impulses if rightly appealed to, (3) ignorant, yet willing to be guided, restrained and taught.

Being a Greek by birth, Titus was intimately acquainted with the conditions of the heathen world, and the workings of the Gentile mind, but having also been brought into close contact with Jews, both of strict and liberal views, he was fitted to be an ideal missionary, or, as we might now call him, "Bishop's Messenger," while his close intimacy with Paul made him a convinced sympathizer with the Apostle's doctrines and methods. Titus is, in fact, a revelation of the power of spiritual influence. People could have no doubt of the depth of his personal piety, consistency, sincerity, sympathy, and thus he won his way amongst all. He was thoroughly natural, while at the same time intensely spiritual, for 2 Corinthians vii., viii. reveal to us the spiritual atmosphere which surrounded him, and that Paul's feelings, hopes and fears were largely his also.

We will now consider the constituents of that curious crowd amongst whom he moved with so much brightness, earnestness and power. Jews, Corinthians, Cretans, masters and slaves (Tit. ii. 9-10), men and women of diverse ages and positions (Tit. ii. 2-6), the general throng of merchants, sailors, travellers, he would con-

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tinuously meet in the harbours of Corinth and Crete—amid such people Titus became a man of wide outlook and liberal sentiment, and the fact that he exercised such a powerful influence on this jostling community of many races, creeds and customs shows what a truly great man he must have been.

Let us think a little of what each of these classes meant to him, and how they affected him.

(a) *Jews*: Naturally opposed to, and contemptuous of him as a Gentile, they were exclusive and proud, full of religious bigotry and national isolation, yet Titus realized how great was his debt to them; in common with all Christians, he had mixed with them at Jerusalem and in many cities—Crete was full of them—and doubtless St. Paul's glorious tribute to their great past was entirely endorsed by him (Rom. ix. 4, 5, xi. 28).

(b) *Corinthians*: The inhabitants of a powerful, idolatrous, sensual city, yet Titus felt special affection for them (2 Cor. vii. 15). He met them with marvellous tact, and drew out the very best in them, and rejoiced over their growth in grace with the most brotherly delight (2 Cor. vii. 7, 13–viii. 6–7, 23–24). Thoroughly unselfish, he condemned covetousness (2 Cor. xii. 18); manifestly spiritual in his own life, he drew them from sensuality.

(c) *Cretans*: Crete, now called Candia, was inhabited by a wild, degraded race, whom a poet of their own—Epimenides—(600 B.C.) had described as untruthful, cruel, idle, gluttonous—Titus i. 12 (R.V.). They had been conquered by Rome, and Titus had to restrain the infant Church, strongly and wisely, from political agitation—Titus iii. 1. How difficult must it have been to organize a truthful, loving, pure Church out of such material, and composed of such diverse elements of Gentile and Jew! and how reverently we must recognize the Holy Spirit's power through the human instrument.

St. Paul had lived with them—Acts xxvii. 2, 21; Titus i. 13—so he knew how great was the task Titus undertook, and his commission was a splendid tribute to Titus' personal worth.

But Titus not only mixed with persons of diverse nationalities, creeds and customs, but with varying classes and ranks of society.

The world was then one of sharp contrasts; slavery was universal; cruelty was popular; tyranny was unchecked. It was the anti-thesis of the world of to-day, and it is a matter of immense interest

to see how Christianity was adapted to such conditions. Paul gives Titus advice—as far-seeing as it was wise. Like their Divine Master, Paul and Titus inculcated principles which in their operation were transforming. The change in society was to be effected by the leaven of ideas from within, not by violence from without—Titus ii. 12, xiii. 1, 8. The attitude of Titus to the society of the day is indicated by the advice he is commissioned to give.

(a) *Advice to slaves*—Titus ii. 9, 10. Titus is to remind them that spiritual equality does not mean social equality. Cp. Ephesians vi. 5, 6; Colossians iii. 22–25; 1 Timothy vi. 1–2. The exhortation to elder men—Titus ii. 2—would in this case cover the duties of masters mentioned separately in other Epistles.

(b) *Advice to men, old and young*—Titus ii. 2, 6.

The advice to elder men is fuller than to the young, because their opportunities and responsibilities are greater, but each is exhorted to be “*sober-minded*” (R.V.). This same advice is also given to “*bishops*,” ch. i. 8; “*young women*,” ch. ii. 5 (R.V.), and “*all men*,” ii. 11, 12. The same word is used in the Gospels for being in one’s right mind (Mark v. 15), and it is worthy of special attention in these days how strongly the leaders of the Primitive Church insisted on a *sane faith*, one firmly established in truth, and not easily influenced by strange and fanciful ideas (Eph. iv. 14). At the present time Christians are usually ill-instructed in the fundamentals of the faith—breadth is considered more important than depth—and therefore they are the easy prey of false teachers. Titus is instructed to warn all of this peril, and to exhort to self-restraint in our acceptance or rejection of truth—error is usually the exaggeration of some truth—and we need to be on our guard.

(c) *Advice to women, old and young*—ch. ii. 3–5—and we should note the duty of instruction which Titus is most wisely to impress on the older women (v. 4), and which is peculiarly needful in these times. It is a beautiful portrait of a true woman. “*Reverent in demeanour*” (v. 3, R.V.), restrained in speech and pleasure, a teacher of that which is good, full of domestic love, pure, industrious, kind, submissive, always keeping in view the glory and presence of God. If Christian women were like this now, what an incalculable blessing they could be in the world, in contrast to the vulgar, selfish, idle spirit of the age. Cp. Proverbs xxxi. 25–31. Titus is an example of discretion in his intercourse with women.

(d) *Advice to Christian workers*—Titus i. 6-9. Titus had had great experience of such in many cities and countries, and the counsel here given shows a profound insight into the temptations and difficulties which then surrounded and threatened workers for God. For the qualities required in the ordained ministry were none the less needful in the rank and file of the Church—ch. ii. 7, 8—and if Christians would spend more time in examining their own lives and works instead of criticizing others we should soon have a vast increase in the Church of Christ. Cp. I Timothy iv. 12, 13.

The Christian leaders with whom Titus associated were the elite of the Early Church. *Tychicus*, iii. 12, beloved, faithful, humble (Eph. vi. 21; Col. iv. 7); *Apollos*, iii. 13, eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, bold—Acts xviii. 24—probably sent to Crete to “water” the youthful Church—I Corinthians iii. 6—kindred spirits all of them, and a great witness to unity in the aristocracy of holiness.

We must close our study of the people with whom Titus mixed with the reflection how strong must have been the influence he exerted on “all sorts and conditions of men.” It is extremely difficult for us to enter into the social arrangements of an age so entirely different to our own. The Church and the home of those bygone times were in many respects the opposite of ours. The home was the abode of slaves; vice, cruelty, pleasure, were its main characteristics. The Church was an assembly of mostly poor and uninfluential people, looked upon with ridicule and suspicion, generally meeting in a private house, or the school of a philosopher, or the open air—just a despised sect.

What a task had Titus before him. Yet he was evidently a man of a cheerful temperament, full of love, and brave of heart.

In the spirit of love, prayer, earnestness, humility and watchfulness, he passed from place to place, teaching, encouraging, sympathizing, correcting, leaving amongst all those he mixed with the savour of a truly holy and lovable life. He is lost amidst the mist of tradition and speculation, yet like all good men, all humble followers of, and workers for the Lord Jesus Christ, he is never really lost, for he has left us a lasting example of the power of influence and sympathy. Christ's influence on him was the secret of his influence over others. Is it so of us?

W. B. RUSSELL CALEY.