

THE EPISTLE TO TITUS.

INTRODUCTION.

1. THE PASTORAL EPISTLES.—The narrative of St. Paul's missionary labours given by his scholar, St. Luke, closes with his two years' detention at Rome, in easy captivity. The charges on which he had been arrested were not charges which the Roman courts could sustain, for Christianity had not then become a *religio illicita*. He was accordingly pretty sure of liberation in the long run, although the "law's delay" and the slackness of his distant accusers to forward the necessary evidence occasioned a tedious confinement. When he wrote his letters to Philemon and the Philippian Church, he certainly anticipated an early release (Philem. 22; Phil. ii. 24). It is true that of his liberation we have no express record; but a tradition as old as the second century represents him as carrying out his contemplated journey to Spain (Rom. xv. 23); and such a tradition could scarcely have found currency had there been no period of active ministry later than his first imprisonment. It has, therefore, been usual to assume that upon his two years' captivity there followed about two years more of liberty, devoted to fresh labours, before the final arrest took place which led to the martyrdom of the Apostle.

Upon this assumption of a double captivity depend the dates which we assign to the composition of the Pastoral Epistles. The very close resemblance of the three Letters known by this name constitutes them a distinct group, and compels us to assign them to nearly the same period. The very marked difference betwixt them and his other writings requires us to remove them by some considerable interval from the rest. These critical conditions are not met by any theory which assigns them to the years we know so well from the Acts of the Apostles. Of such theories the

least difficult is that advocated by Reuss, Schaff, Wieseler, Pressensé, and others, which supposes that during his two years' stay at Ephesus St. Paul took Crete *en route* in a flying visit which he is supposed to have paid to Corinth. But the objections to this guess, on historical as well as critical grounds,¹ appear to me so strong, that, even had we no independent reason to assume a later period of activity followed by a second imprisonment, we should be compelled to imagine one in order to find a place for the composition of these three Pastoral Letters, and for the events to which they allude.

Of course the difficulty of placing the Letters to Timothy and Titus would be at once evaded, could we accept the view that they are forgeries of a later age. But the objections alleged against their authenticity by modern critics are far too precarious to set aside the strong external evidence on its behalf. These Letters certainly indicate that the condition of the early churches was undergoing rapid change. Heresies which a few years before existed only in germ were in advanced development. Questions of Church organization were, as a natural consequence, assuming larger importance. The administration of Church affairs, too, was passing into younger hands. But all this agrees with indications to be found in other late books of the New Testament; nor can it be shewn that the changes are in excess of what a few years might effect in young societies where everything was in a state of flux. The difference of style in the Pastoral Epistles from St. Paul's earlier and unchallenged Letters is no doubt considerable. But the style of an active many-sided thinker and worker varies too much at different periods, or when handling different topics, or when writing for different readers, for us to lay down limits of variation with any security. St. Paul's was a mobile mind. Already it had passed through

¹ See Ruffet, *S. Paul et sa double Captivité à Rome*. Paris, 1860.

several phases. New aspects of divine truth had successively emerged into prominence in his writings, and with new truth came a new phraseology to match it. In style, as well as structure and subject, Romans differs from Thessalonians, and Ephesians from both. It need occasion no great surprise if Paul, addressing familiar letters years after to confidential workers, should express himself in other terms from those which he employed when his great theological manuals were dictated for public perusal at Colosse, Corinth, or Rome. Besides, the difference is after all only a superficial one. In all essential respects the doctrine is identical in these later with those earlier writings; and in all essential respects, too, the writer remains the same—the same warm, impulsive, subtle, eager intellect; the same affectionate, lowly, frank, outspoken heart of the man Paul whom we know so well.

How the Apostle spent his time between the two imprisonments, if two there were, must to some extent be matter for conjecture. But in his earlier Letters he had sketched extensive plans of travel (Rom. xv. 24; Philem. 22; Phil. ii. 24); and the Pastoral Epistles reveal the same unwearied missionary of the cross as in younger days. The brief Letter to Titus (which probably falls in date between the two to Timothy) is the only one, however, which speaks of his breaking new ground. Elsewhere we read of familiar names—Ephesus, Macedonia, Troas, Corinth (1 Tim. i. 3; 2 Tim. i. 15; iv. 13, 20). Only from the Titus Epistle do we gather that he had paid a visit during these later journeys to the island of Crete. To the interest which its rude population and neglected communities of Christians awoke in the aged Apostle's bosom, Christendom owes this very instructive book of Holy Scripture.

2. CRETE AND THE CRETAN CHURCH.—Crete is a large island in the Greek seas with a range of high hills running through its entire length from east to west, from which

fertile valleys open upon a continuous strip of flat shore round the coast line. On the north it possesses good natural harbours. In its palmy days these served as outlets for the abundant crops of wheat, wine, and oil which it then yielded to the industry of a dense population. Descended from an ancient Greek stock, its early inhabitants were employed partly as cultivators in the interior, partly as seamen on the coast. They were a somewhat rude, turbulent, and independent race, among whom the usual defects of the Greek character in its less cultured condition were very strongly marked. Of these defects, falsehood, both in the form of over-reaching and in that of treachery, has always been the foremost. To this vice there were joined, in St. Paul's time, gross forms of licentiousness and a readiness to swift insolent brawling such as has never been quite cured among the maritime Greeks of the Archipelago.

Such a population did not offer very hopeful soil for the Gospel; nor had Christianity been introduced into Crete, or propagated there, under the most favourable auspices. In its seaports, as in other business centres of the Mediterranean, numbers of Hebrews were at that period to be found. It is probable that a good share of the export trade of the island was in their hands. Some of these Jews of Crete had been among the motley and polyglot audience which listened to St. Peter's first Christian sermon at the memorable Pentecost. It is a fair presumption that, having accepted the new Gospel of the Messiah of Nazareth, some of them would carry back the tidings to the island of their adoption. But how it was propagated from one coast town to another, we do not know; nor how far it succeeded in penetrating the interior and winning converts among the farmers, shepherds, and peasants, who lay more remote from Hebrew and foreign influences. When Paul paid his hurried visit to the island in the year 66 or so,

it is certain that he found congregations already existing in most of the chief seats of population ; nor were these congregations of recent origin, since he anticipated no difficulty in selecting for office in the Church men whose families had been trained in the Christian Faith. "Ordain elders," he writes, "in *every city* ;" men "having *faithful*" (that is, believing or Christian) "*children*" (Tit. i. 5, 6).

Extensive, however, as the Cretan Church was, and of some standing, its condition left much to be desired. Previous to this year 66, it does not appear that any apostle or leading missionary had visited the island for missionary purposes. St. Paul himself, during his voyage to Rome as a prisoner under appeal, some three or four years before, had been detained through stress of weather in one of the southern harbours, which are all bad. Had Centurion Julius and his sailing master hearkened to Paul's advice on that occasion and wintered at Fair Haven, not only would their disastrous shipwreck on the Maltese coast have been escaped, but the future of Cretan Christianity might have been different. But the stay of the vessel was too brief to make it likely that Paul the prisoner could either visit the island churches or acquaint himself with their condition ; and we know of no other apostolic worker who so much as touched at the island. It can hardly have been usual for passenger ships, plying between Corinth and Asia Minor, to take it on their way, unless compelled to do so by adverse winds.

3. THE FALSE TEACHERS.—Under these circumstances, Cretan Christianity had been up to this time indigenous in its growth, or affected only by stray influences. One is led to wonder to how many portions of the Empire did the currents of business in that travelling age carry the seeds of the new Faith, without there being any authorized hand to nurture or to train the life which sprang from such sporadic dissemination. In the case of Crete, it was

inevitable that the prevailing type of Christianity, down to the date of our Epistle, should be Hebraic. Jewish traders had imported the young religion; and through these Jewish traders in its ports must have come whatever influences reached the Greek converts. More than elsewhere in Europe, therefore—more even than at Ephesus, that hotbed of fermenting ideas from East and West,—the Cretan Churches were found by St. Paul to be infested with Jewish zealots, who, under the Christian name, were teaching a fanatical and spurious Judaism.

Of these men, we can only judge from the Epistle itself. But its allusions enable us to sketch their views in tolerably complete outline. They made much of the law of Moses. Not of its moral elements, however; nor even of its religious ritual; nor of its observance as a means of attaining to righteousness. What they appear to have chiefly insisted upon was the distinction it drew between what was ceremonially “clean” and “unclean” in food, and the like external matters—portions of Mosaic legislation which many even among the Hebrews had come to regard as its least important or permanent features. On such points, they added new Rabbinical prohibitions to those of the original law. They had even introduced doctrines foreign to the whole spirit of Hebrew thought and history. For example, they discouraged marriage and extolled celibacy, as well as denied a literal resurrection of the body. It is clear, therefore, that the root idea which underlay their speculations and practical rules was the same belief in the essential evil of matter which for some years had been operating injuriously (as we see from the Letter to Colosse) upon the churches of Asia Minor, and which, after St. Paul's decease, was destined to blossom into the vast and many-headed heresy of Gnosticism.

The legitimate offspring of all speculations of this complexion, which assign moral evil as a property to matter,

not to the spirit, is, first, a false asceticism, and, at the next remove, immoral indulgence. To this last, even, it had already come with certain of the Jewish teachers at Crete. They were worming their way into Christian families, undermining authority in the household, and seeking by all means to win proselytes to their views, for the purpose of enriching themselves; and, under a garb of self-denial, they indemnified themselves for ascetic restraint by flagitious laxity. Such are the charges brought against them by St. Paul. It was, therefore, no abstract error which had to be combated. A "gangrene" of immorality, as the natural product of fanciful speculations which were dangerous as well as false, was laying waste the Church, demoralizing the behaviour of professed believers, and endangering the very existence of a healthy Christianity in the island.

The evil was by no means peculiar to Crete, although it had there acquired unusual development. It was destined to overrun all churches. It was the same evil the foresight of which, in its finished form, darkened the last days of Paul and which is dealt with by the pens of St. Peter and St. Jude. All the more interesting does it become to note how the great missionary dealt with it in the present case. No sooner was he on the spot than he felt the need for a prompt and drastic remedy. The mischief had gained too firm a footing to be readily expelled. It found support in the low morals of the Cretan population. Before it could be counteracted it would therefore require courage, plain speaking, a vigorous enforcement of discipline, and, above all, a faithful exhibition of Gospel truth *in its essential connection with sound morality*. But in the way of applying remedies such as these there stood one patent hindrance. The scattered congregations of disciples were as yet unorganized. No stated office-bearers had been appointed. The pastoral or presbyterial office, long ago

introduced into the better known churches of the mainland, had never yet, it seems, been set up in unvisited Crete. To this point accordingly St. Paul directed, in the first instance, his personal endeavours. Evidently, he attached to the stated ministry of oversight in the Church a great value as a safeguard against false teaching and lax manners in the Christian community. But being compelled (through what urgent occasion we do not know) to leave the island before he had overtaken this task, at least through its whole extent, he left behind him, to complete the work, one of the most tried and judicious of all his assistants.

4. TITUS.—Titus was by this time no novice in the management of difficult affairs. Eight or nine years had elapsed since St. Paul entrusted him with a mission to the most unmanageable of churches—that in Achaia—at a moment when that church was in its most distracted condition. This delicate mission, over the issue of which St. Paul fretted so sorely at Troas, appears to have been admirably discharged; for, in the Letter with which he sent back his commissioner again, Paul speaks of Titus with the warmest appreciation (2 Cor. viii. 16, 23; xii. 18). Ever since then, it can hardly be doubtful that Titus must have been acquiring similar experience. None of the band of missionaries who took their inspiration and their guidance from the great Apostle stood higher than he for energy, tact, and ability. Hence, although he could be ill spared, Paul left him behind for a time to finish the task he had begun, of organizing the Cretan congregations. At parting he had given him verbal instructions. Not content with this, he sent back to him, for his fuller guidance, the manual of directions preserved to us in this inspired Epistle; bidding him remain at his post on the island until he should be relieved by the arrival of another of the Apostle's assistants; one probably who could be better

spared; whether Artemas or Tychicus it was not yet certain. So soon as his successor arrived, Titus was to hasten to rejoin his chief before the approach of winter should render voyaging in the Ægean precarious or impossible.

Such a rapid sketch as has now been attempted of the circumstances under which it was penned, appeared to be quite indispensable to any intelligent study of this Epistle. To an examination of the sacred text itself I shall proceed in my next paper.

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SCRIPTURE STUDIES OF THE HEAVENLY
STATE.

II. WITH WHAT BODY DO THEY COME ?

THE fact that such a question as that we have prefixed to this article should have first been asked by the Church of Corinth has always seemed to us one of the most striking circumstances in the history of Christian belief. It shews that the reception of Christianity by the first converts was not the result of credulity. Here is a Christian Apostle putting into the mouth of his readers a rationalistic objection to one of the greatest mysteries of Divine truth, and proceeding to meet that objection with its own weapons. One would have thought that in a subject so mysterious, human reason would have received a very different treatment at his hands. We should have expected him to say on this, as on another occasion: "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Instead of that, he finds fault with them for not having used their reason to better purpose. He tells his imaginary antagonists, not that the theme they have chosen for attack is one which is above argument, but that the argument lies on *his* side