

THE EPISTLE TO TITUS.

The Salutation (Chapter i. 1-4).

FROM the sketch given in my former Paper of the Cretan Church and of St. Paul's relations to it, it is easy to understand how his Letter should lay emphasis upon these two points: First, the moral tendency of all sound Christian teaching; and, second, the importance to the Church, from this point of view, of competent and well-chosen pastors. Both of these topics receive ample illustration as the writer proceeds with his task. But the former of them—the moral influence of the Gospel—being by much the more vital of the two, is present to the writer's mind, from the moment he takes pen in hand, with such prominence that it colours even his opening salutation.

St. Paul's salutations to his correspondents are never mere phrases of formal courtesy, like the customary opening words of other letter-writers. On his lips, as it befitted a messenger of Christ, the barren good wishes of a man of the world deepened into a prayer for such rich and everlasting benefits as accompany salvation. Every one of his salutations, therefore, invokes upon his correspondents the two characteristic blessings of the Gospel; "grace" and "peace." Both words recall the terms of courtesy in which the Greek and the Hebrew respectively were then accustomed to salute their friends. The "greeting" (*χαίρειν*) of a Greek gentleman,¹ reappeared in St. Paul's "grace" (*χάρις*), which denotes the favour of the Heavenly Father restored to every believer through his Son. The conventional "peace be unto you" of his Hebrew fellow-countrymen (still surviving wherever Semitic tongues are spoken) is ennobled on Paul's page into that deeper "peace" which had been his Master's legacy—the peace

¹ Compare Acts xxiii. 26.

of reconciliation to God and of parental favour to which Jesus has restored us. Thus has the "water" of the world's politeness been turned into strong sweet "wine" of the kingdom, by the power of Christian love. In the other two Epistles of this period, and in them alone, the Apostle has inserted between these two standing terms, "grace and peace," the additional word "mercy." From the Letters to Timothy, it very early crept, without (as it seems) adequate authority, into the text of Titus also. But its undoubted occurrence in the other two deserves to be noted as perhaps one sign among many how, as age drew on, the heart of St. Paul rested more than ever upon the Gospel as good news for the guilty—a revelation of mercy toward the "chief of sinners."

After the period at which attacks began to be openly made upon the apostolic authority, it became a custom with Paul to insist in the headings to his letters upon the fact that he was (as he usually put it) "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."¹ With some variations of expression he still continues to do so in these latest Epistles, although that bitter controversy was now over. He is "God's bondsman"; and more than that, he is a "messenger of Christ Jesus." But not content with saying this, he proceeds to do what he had not done since he dictated, some eight years before, in the heat of conflict, those two polemical letters to the Roman and Galatian Churches; namely, to develop at length the design and character of his apostolic commission. This parenthetical explanation probably betrays some disinclination on the part of Jewish heretics at Crete to recognize his full authority; although in more frequented parts of the Church it was by this time generally acknowledged. At all events

¹ Wanting in the Thessalonian Epistles; very full in Romans and Galatians; brief (as above) in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy.

his words bear, as we might expect, on the needs of the Cretans, the errors of their teachers, and the purpose of the Epistle : and they run somewhat thus :—

“ An apostle of Jesus Christ—with a view to produce faith in God’s elect ones and full knowledge of that truth which tends to godliness, based upon the hope of eternal life which God (who cannot lie) promised before eternal times ; but He manifested at the fit season his word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted by the command of our Saviour God.”

Surely in every way a noteworthy utterance from the aged Paul ; and one which we cannot readily suppose to have proceeded from any pen but his own. Let us examine its contents a little.

The first thing we notice is that the apostolate, as Paul himself conceived it, had two principal ends in view. It aimed first at bringing the elect to faith : this gave it a missionary character, and explained the wandering life led by the Apostle. It aimed, next, at bringing believers to a full knowledge of revealed truth : this made it an office at the same time of pastoral supervision, and accounts for the literary activity of the Apostles. The former of these objects does not come into direct consideration here. Only it is worth remark in passing how carefully guarded is the language which St. Paul employs to describe his aims as a missionary evangelist. Even in his more ardent and sanguine youth, St. Paul had never deceived himself into any expectation that all men would be converted.¹ He felt that he was labouring for the sake of a chosen company whom God foreknew ; pleased if by all means he succeeded in saving some ; and well knowing at the same time that if his Gospel was hidden, it was hidden from them that were lost. The awful alternative to salvation, the shadow which rests upon those who reject Christ, was

¹ See 2 Thess. iii. 2, and indeed 1 and 2 Thess. *passim*.

never far from his earnest heart ; yet it was never suffered so to oppress him as to paralyze hope or quench his joy over the few chosen souls whom God gave him for " a crown of glorying."

But the calling of men everywhere out of darkness into the marvellous light of Christ, although it was a passion with this propagandist and missionary, did not obscure for a moment his other function, to build up the saints upon the foundation of their most holy faith. He was no less eager to add fresh graces to old Churches than to found new ones. The development of the saintly character in disciples, through their sober and patient growth in the understanding of revealed truth, was really the object of all Paul's epistolary labours. For he well knew that the Church of Jesus must soon cease to be an organ for the calling of sinners to saving faith, if she herself ceased to advance in holiness ; and that such advance is only possible through a fuller and yet fuller knowledge of the truth as it has been made known to us in Christ. Whoever may disparage a rich and ample theology, or count theological and exegetical study of secondary value to the preaching of the Gospel, these apostolic letter-writers never did so. Right study and right teaching of the full many-sided truth of Scripture, are the conditions of healthy progress in religious life. And it is the healthy progressive Church which ought to succeed best in widening the area of God's kingdom by bringing his chosen ones to faith in Christ.

The next point which strikes the reader of Paul's opening paragraph is, that he makes this to be an invariable characteristic by which revealed truth, such truth as Christian men ought fully to know, may be tested : It harmonizes with, and it tends to, practical godliness of life. The precise expression employed by Paul may signify either of these two ideas ; the fact embraces both of them. Revealed truth corresponds to and befits a godly character ; it

has likewise an inherent tendency to produce it. Now, godliness is the precise opposite to that ethical result which the Hebrew teachers were fast producing, to their shame, in the island of Crete. They were practically giving the lie to such knowledge of God as they professed, by "abominable and disobedient" conduct. The fruit of their doctrine was "ungodliness and worldly lusts."¹ By such a plain test did their teaching stand self-condemned. On the contrary, the genuine doctrine of God our Saviour may be known by this, that it produces such a "fear and love for God, as, from the inmost heart of a man, penetrates his whole character, sentiments and behaviour,"² working a reverential submission to the Divine will in all things; in one word, it produces "godliness." What is this but a fresh application to the facts of his own time, of his Master's courageous test of religious teachers and teaching: "By their fruits ye shall know them"?

Once more; Christian faith and Christian knowledge are here made to repose upon a foundation of Christian hope. In the greatest of all his letters, St. Paul had written that we are "saved by hope." For one essential merit of the Gospel is undeniably this, that it has opened before the soul of fallen man a very different prospect from that which naturally we have to face. The religions of nature hold up before our eyes only a curtain of ignorance, screening the hereafter from view. Or if, on that dark background, it be permitted to the imagination of man to paint a future life at all, what ought that picture to be but a "fearful looking-for of judgment"? It is the boast of Christianity that it alone has succeeded in bringing to light "life and immortality," or, as St. Paul here phrases it, "eternal life"; a future existence, that is, which shall be life indeed; not living death, but blessed fellowship with the Father of spirits. As yet, no doubt, that blissful life to come can be

¹ See i. 16; ii. 12.

² So *Matthies, in loc.*

little more than a "hope." It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. None the less is it the progressive disclosure of this splendid future which has already filled the history of Revelation. Already it has passed through two great stages which are here distinguished by St. Paul: the stage of promise, which answers to the elder dispensation, or covenant before Christ; and the stage of partial manifestation, which answers to the New Covenant in Christ. With this key in your hand you can read sacred history.

First came the promise of eternal life through a Saviour to come. This promise is so ancient, so primeval, that Paul rhetorically dates it from before the eras of human history; "before eternal times." This difficult expression cannot be understood (with Alford, Ellicott, and others) as referring to the Divine counsel or purpose from eternity, without compelling us to read the word "promised" in the sense of "decreed to promise"—a violence to language which we are not warranted in having recourse to. It is true that the "grace" of eternal life was "given" to the elect from eternity, as Paul writes in 2 Tim. i. 9; but it was not "promised" until the opening of human history in Paradise. From that date onwards, it constituted the central "hope" of all Old Testament prediction, for the fulfilment of which, in the Messiah, the elder saints were trained to wait, relying on the faithfulness of a Promiser, who (as Paul reminds us by a unique word, found also in Euripides) "cannot lie."

But what has only been promised is still, in the main, a thing concealed. The fit season came; that epoch in history when all things suited; or to use a Pauline expression in another place, "the fulness of the time."¹ Then, says Paul, breaking off his sentence to commence a new construction, as though the new era deserved no less, "[God] manifested his word." The emphasis of this phrase almost

¹ Gal. iv. 4.

calls for our writing "Word" with a capital initial. It is the Eternal Word whose personal advent and self-manifestation in the flesh is the fulfilment of all ancient hope; He it is who by his life and death and resurrection has made that eternal life for men, for which the fathers waited, *a manifest certainty*. From his lips we hear the assurance of it as a present boon. By his decease we behold it won for us. In his resurrection we recognize the pledge and earnest of it. Through his quickening Spirit do we receive the actual beginnings which are to grow into its final or complete fulfilment.

We, then, who have welcomed this Gospel message and live under the era or period of manifestation, how do we stand related to eternal life? Are we still saved only by the *hope* of it? Yes, it is still ours, if you will, to wait in hope of life eternal; yet not as the elder saints did. They waited in hope of what was promised only, never beheld, never tasted. We wait as men, who have seen the commencement, hope for the end; as men, who have tasted the first fruits, hope for the harvest. Two stages are past or present; the last is near. The age of promise lies behind us; the age of partial manifestation is ours; soon shall dawn the day of perfected possession. Blessed are they who still believe, and believing, hope, and hoping, wait; they shall inherit everlasting life.

After this remarkable exordium (for it is more than a salutation) the Apostle proceeds at once to his immediate purpose in writing. As consists with its practical character, the main body of the letter (extending to Chapter iii. 11), admits of the simplest possible division. Down to the close of the first Chapter the writer is giving to his representative a charge respecting the Church organization he was to set on foot as a safeguard against the influence of the errorists. This section falls easily into two paragraphs, of which the former (i. 5-9) describes the qualifications of the elders to

be ordained over congregations; and the latter (i. 10-16) explains the necessity for strong measures in defence of the Church's purity by describing the false teachers and their dangerous influence. In what remains of the central portion of his Epistle, St. Paul instructs Titus how to urge, upon various classes among the private members of the Church, the practical duties of a Christian life as they legitimately spring out of Christian doctrine. This section subdivides in like manner into two: the duties respectively of domestic and of social life (ii. 1-15, and iii. 1-11); but under both the main interest attaches to those weighty sentences in which the writer enforces his admonitions by motives drawn from the great facts and truths of evangelical religion. In no other portion of his writings does the Apostle descend into more detailed or elementary moral instructions; in none does he ground his ethics more expressly on the most sacred doctrines of the faith.

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THE EXEGESIS OF THE SCHOOLMEN.

So far we have at once recognized one source of the weakness of scholastic exegesis—its secondhandness, its lack of independence, its traditionalism, its abject submission to inadequate authority in matters wherein abdication of the individual right to test truth and to acquire fresh knowledge is fatal to progress. A few men of genius like Abelard, Rupert of Deutz, and above all, Nicolas of Lyra, gave a fresh impulse to the science of interpretation; but, practically, between the sixth and the fifteenth century there was little genuine criticism, and still less demonstrable progress. It was not till the taking of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, the invention of printing in