
“ grand recoil
Of life resurgent from the soil
Wherein we drop this mortal spoil ”?

If we do, we share the faith, as well as the gospel, of faithful Abraham. If we do not, it cannot but shame us to reflect that, even now that Christ has come to shew us the saving love of a friendly God and to despoil the grave of its terrors, we have not risen so high as the patriarch who rejoiced in the day of Christ forty centuries ago.

EDITOR.

THE EPISTLE TO TITUS.

IV.—THE FALSE TEACHERS OF CRETE. *Chapter i. 10–16.*

IT is not “naked truth” which meets us in the New Testament, but truth armed at all points and doing battle with manifold error. From this there results a great advantage for the student of revelation. The truth of God is all the better understood when it is beheld in divergence and conflict with untruth. Nor is this an advantage which is wholly lost when religious controversy changes its form through lapse of time. Such a passage as this, for example, ought not to be deemed obsolete, because the exact type of teaching prevalent in Crete has long since passed away. Not only must the truth itself remain identical in every age, although it assume various forms; to a large extent the same may be said of error. For though each generation has its own warfare to wage with new shapes of falsehood and mistake, yet all these will be found to spring out of a few roots which are constantly present in human nature; so that the same radical error tends to crop up afresh in successive periods, and the foes we have to contend with to-day are “old foes with a new face.”

It must therefore possess more than a merely antiquarian value if the false doctrine which was infesting the Church of Crete when Paul wrote can be made intelligible to modern readers. The attempt is encompassed with serious difficulty, as the conjectures which have been hazarded by scholars abundantly shew. The few particulars to be gathered from St. Paul's incidental allusions may easily be enumerated. The false teachers were mostly Hebrews; they taught Jewish myths and human commandments; they made distinctions betwixt things clean and things unclean; they were given to word wrangles of a foolish description, made much of genealogies, and discussed the Mosaic Law; they boasted of their exceptional knowledge of God, but set themselves against the Gospel as rightly understood, and for the sake of gain made it their business to upset the order of the family and deceive the unstable and ill-instructed; finally, they were men of immoral habits.¹

Founding upon these materials, various theories have been started. They all fall, however, into three classes. (1) Some see in these men Gnostics pure and simple, as Baur, who identifies them with the Marcionites of the second century; or Neander (in his first edition), who identifies them with the earlier Cerinthians. (2) Others take them for non-Christian Jews; whether under the shape of mere Judaizers (as some of the Greek Fathers did), or of Kabbalists (as Grotius and Baumgarten), or of Essenes (Michaelis, etc.), or of Therapeutæ (Ritschl). Lastly, (3) the more judicious of recent commentators hold them to have been nominal Christians of Hebrew nationality, tintured more or less deeply with the Oriental speculations which a little later developed either into Ebionitism (so

¹ Compare the expressions used in Titus i. 9, 11, 14-16, and iii. 9, 10, with the accounts, so similar in many respects, of the errorists at Ephesus, in 1 Tim. i. 4-7, iv. 1-7, vi. 3-5, 20, 21, and 2 Tim. ii. 14-18, iii. 6-9.

Huther), or into the Gnosticism of Cerinthus (so Light-foot).

It is not my design to discuss the grounds which have been alleged for these divergent views; but, assuming the substantial correctness of those in the last-named class, to sketch the general current of speculative opinion which, in my judgment, must have led up to the state of matters dealt with in the Epistle. I take these Cretan errorists to have been passing through one stage only in a widespread and continuous movement of thought, which, having its source far back in the dualism of the East, had, in the course of its westward progress, become mingled first with purely Jewish elements in Essenism, and now with Judæo-Christian elements in the churches of mixed blood, but which was hereafter to give rise (when its antagonistic factors of Hebrew and of Gentile origin came to be separated) on the one side to Ebionitism and on the other to Gnosticism. The precise point in this long course of development marked by the Epistle to Titus is, however, of less practical moment to the understanding of its lessons, than is a clear insight into the main current of thought itself.

Ultimately we have to trace this whole stream of speculation back to that ancient problem with which, especially in the East, men of both the Semitic and Aryan stocks have always vexed their souls and often perplexed their intellects: the problem—whence comes the evil that is in the world? It is a witness for the original “good estate” of man that evil should always have appeared to him to be a puzzle, a paradox, and an anomaly. The answer to this problem which among the eastern Aryans has found the widest favour has been, under one form or another, this: The seat of evil lies in the material world. Spirit, it is assumed, is, and must be pure; but the imprisonment of a divine soul or breath within a material organism, dwelling

in an unclean world of matter, gives rise to all those evils, moral as well as physical, under which we suffer. Such a theory was not at all an unlikely one for speculative thinkers to start. Once started, it gained ready acceptance in regions where man is far less dependent than in western Europe upon material comforts; where life can be sustained in ease, thanks to a prodigal soil and a genial sky, without such expensive dwellings, elaborate clothing, and food laboriously won, as we find indispensable.

The error spread and fructified. First, it profoundly affected theology, then morals. If matter is the seat of evil, how came matter to be created by the good God? There are but two exits from this difficulty. The one is by the hypothesis that matter never was created at all, but is eternal like God Himself. In this theory of dualism lay the germ of the ancient Persian religion and of all creeds and philosophies which have sprung out of it, including the Manichæism of a party in the early Church. The other door of escape is this: Matter is a creation, only not created immediately by the good God Himself, but by some inferior Power derived remotely from God, yet less entirely spiritual and pure than He. A desperate resource this last conjecture may now appear to be, to bridge the gulf that yawns betwixt good and evil, spanning the awful interval by means of imaginary beings of intermediate or mingled character, growing less divine at each remove, until the last or lowest in the series is inferior enough to become the creator of an evil universe of matter. Yet, foreign and almost grotesque as the radical principle of Gnosticism may seem to modern minds, it plainly exercised a wide fascination in the opening of the Christian era. Its elements had begun to ferment not only in Crete, but also in Asia Minor (at Ephesus and at Phrygian Colossæ) before St. Paul was removed from the scene. And its wild bloom of luxuriant speculations in the succeeding generations came near to

corrupting the simplicity, if it did not even threaten the existence, of Christianity itself.

Of greater consequence to us were the practical results of this theory upon morals. These were of two kinds, and the two were quite opposed to one another. The earliest and, on the whole, the safest inference to be drawn from the inherent evil quality of matter was to have as little to do with it as possible. Out of a material body you could not go; only you might indulge it very little, thwart it a good deal, curtail its sensual pleasures, and, as far as practicable, withdraw from material contact into an ideal region of purity and of spiritual contemplation. In very early times this inference had given rise in the remote East to rules of asceticism—forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from flesh and from wine; had given rise likewise to solitary lives of austerity as well as to communities which obeyed a common rule. It was inevitable that when East and West touched, this Oriental view of abstinence from impure matter should find in the Hebrew laws of uncleanness something congenial to itself. The Essenes of Palestine and the Therapeutæ of Egypt sprang naturally out of that alliance. Just as Christianity was declaring all things lawful and all meats clean, the old Mosaic distinctions were acquiring a fresh prominence by being drawn into connection with a deeper philosophy. In the essential evil of matter, speculative Jews conceived they could find a point of attachment for ancestral usages, which heretofore had been supposed to rest on nothing better than a prudential desire to hold the sacred nation aloof from heathen intercourse.

To such a gospel of abstinence grave evils are sure to attach themselves. It withdraws men from their true place in society. It deprives society of the sweetening influence of its best members. It tends to denaturalize humanity by destroying healthy human instincts. For genuine purity in

motive, which is Heaven's difficult ordinance, it substitutes a cheap and easy, but worthless, virtue of mere outward behaviour. It nourishes religious conceit, which is the snare of all separatists and Puritans. Still, this method of dealing with the evil of matter is nobility itself compared with the other inference which it is possible to deduce from the same premises. There are always plenty of people glad to discover in their religious creed an excuse for self-indulgence. The argument lies fatally near to hand: If evil belongs solely to the body and its material surroundings, then must the soul remain apart and uncontaminated by the excesses of the flesh. Immerse yourself as you please in sensual gratification; embrute your body even in licentious indulgence; where is the harm, if the body alone—the material part—be affected by the evil, and the immaterial divine essence be of its own nature incapable of a stain? If, when the hour shall come for that spark from God which is in you to escape the bonds of matter that it may rejoin its native sphere, it is to return undefiled as it came, why need you abridge your present enjoyment by useless self-denial? Do as you will, the clean soul cannot be defiled; neither can the unclean flesh be purified, abstain as you may.

Thus by a too convenient, though perverted, logic (if not by the mere reaction from over-restraint), there was certain to follow upon asceticism the opposite mischief of licence. Under the guise and sanction of religion, a poison of immorality began to insinuate itself, against which St. Paul, as the representative of a purer faith, felt himself compelled to protest with unusual vehemence, against which in his old age he had to fight with every weapon, moral and administrative.

Such ideas as have now been described, floating thus in the air, borne westward by currents of intercourse, found in the island of Crete a congenial soil. According to St.

Paul, its people were predisposed to self-indulgence and prone to revolt against moral restraints. With much outspokenness he cites against them the evidence of a witness whom the Cretans could hardly accuse of unfairness—"one of themselves, a prophet of their own." The line quoted is a hexameter by Epimenides, a name most honoured in the island, where he had flourished some six centuries before.¹ What exactly he was in his day it is not easy to make out from the extravagant eulogies of the ancients. He seemed to later times a poet, a seer, a theological reformer, a sacred teacher, and something almost more than any of these. In the island, where he was nearly adored, legends gathered thickly round his name. Even Plato styles him "a divine man;" Cicero ranks him among the "*vaticinantes*"; while Plutarch only echoed a general sentiment when he described him as a "friend to the gods and wise in the things of religion."² The description of his fellow islanders which this great teacher had left behind him was far from complimentary; but it was found to be still accurate by the greater teacher who came after him: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons."

The design of this unflattering citation was certainly not to prejudice the mind of Titus against the people of his charge, but to impress upon him the necessity for sharp measures. Among a population notorious for falsehood,

¹ That it occurred in a lost work of Epimenides rests on the authority of several Greek Fathers and of Jerome. Theodoret alone ascribes the verse to the extant Hymn to Jupiter (v. 8) by Callimachus of Cyrene, but he may have borrowed it from the earlier poet. See Meursius on Crete (*Opera*, Vol. iii. and iv. Florence, 1744) and Wolfgang, *Dissertatio de Cretensium Mendacibus* (Lips. 1684).

² The controversy in what sense St. Paul styles Epimenides a "prophet," has ceased to retain the keen interest it used to possess. In any case the name is too slender a basis for any safe inference respecting Paul's view of heathen inspiration; while it must remain uncertain whether Epimenides pretended to foretell the future or not, since Aristotle denies and Plato affirms it. Those who wish to see the point discussed at length may consult Gottschalk, *de Epimenide Prophetâ* (Altdorf, 1714).

sloth, and sensuality, the worst consequences were to be apprehended from such teaching as had been imported into the Christian community. Gentle dissuasives would not suffice where the proclivities of the people harmonized but too well with the fatal tendency of the doctrine. First of all, therefore, these Hebrew teachers themselves would have to be "muzzled,"¹ as Paul pithily puts it; summarily silenced by shewing to all what sort of men they really were and to what consequences their error led. To expose such men was to silence them. Their interested motives, their immoral lives, and the anarchic principles they were sowing in the home for the subversion of family discipline, were enough to condemn them, when once they were known. Besides that, it was necessary to rebuke "with severity" native Cretan Christians who were being led astray by those Hebrew foreigners. Some of the Gentile converts had evidently begun to listen to the new teaching on the subject of Jewish myths and rabbinical rules respecting food and drink and the like details of social usage. It was needful to tell them that these were the prescriptions of men who had themselves turned aside from revealed truth; who, under the pretence of improving upon Christ's Gospel, were really perverting it so as to undermine its wholesome influence upon character. Wherever disciples were found to have lent a favourable ear to novelties, it would be the duty of Titus, as well as of the Elders he ordained, to confute with vigour these pernicious theories, and (which would be most effectual) to expose their baneful effects on conduct.

Paul, however, was not the man to pass away from a serious error without laying his axe to the root of it. This he does in the fifteenth verse. With exquisite precision and the "brevity," which is "the soul of wit," he has condensed into four Greek words that central truth which corrects for all time the ancient Oriental mistake about

¹ ἐπιστομίζειν (only here in N. T.) has this precise meaning.

matter as the seat of evil. "To the pure," he writes, "all things are pure:" words which stand as the charter of Christian freedom in the use to be made of this world and its enjoyments. The words clearly imply that purity in the moral sense is a quality not of material objects, but of man himself as a spiritual being. So far from the taint of evil inhering in matter as the Manichee holds and the ascetic implies, St. Paul recognized, with the earliest scripture of his people, that in the beginning God had created all things and pronounced them very good.¹ Viewed simply as matter and for their own uses or ends, even material objects may be called "good." But such goodness involves no thought of ethical purity. That lies only in the motives and in the choice of personal agents. In itself, apart from any use man makes of it, matter remains void of moral quality; morally colourless or neutral. The purity or the defilement of our converse with the world must turn solely upon the spirit in which, or the purposes for which, we handle it. Be yourself clean in heart and will: then for your use and enjoyment are all things in nature clean. For your lawful use and enjoyment were they made at the first, and sanctified by the Maker—have they been afresh redeemed, and restored to you by the Redeemer.

Under this wide charter, as I said, does man hold this world in fee. Being a spiritual person, he has the right of spirit over matter to control it by observing its laws and to serve himself of it for his higher ends—under this sole condition that he keep himself spiritually pure. Undoubtedly he is at liberty, in the pursuit of noble tasks, or out of respect for a brother's welfare, to abridge at pleasure his lawful enjoyment, and, if he think good, to eat no flesh nor drink wine while the world stands. But this he does under no external law, nor with any hope to render himself

¹ This is unquestionably the basis for his important parallel passage in 1 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

by such abstinence purer or better. The Christian is aware that neither if he eat is he the worse, neither if he eat not is he the better. But he uses, or abstains from using, alike, because he is this world's master, not its slave; and because his freedom to use implies an equal freedom from sanctified motives to abstain from using. It is superfluous to point out how much more worthy is the position thus assigned to mankind than the one which results from the theory of asceticism. Instead of a captive spirit immured in a fleshly prison-house, and in continual hazard of involuntary defilement from a world out of which he cannot escape, man is recognized as the lord of the earth to whom all things earthly minister. Material pleasures are not evils in disguise, but pure gifts of Heaven's bounty to be temperately enjoyed with praise to the Giver. The body is not a mere adversary to be beaten down, nor a tempter to be feared, but the organ and handmaid to the nobler spirit within, through which the pure will may realize upon earth the perfect will of God.

What then has Christianity to say of gross and sensual vice, or of that enervating and luxurious gratification of the senses which when Paul wrote was working the decay of Pagan civilization? Later classical heathendom was perishing through the excessive culture of physical delights—dying of lust, gluttony, drunkenness, sloth, and unbridled self-indulgence. Do not these things defile a man by debasing his spirit and drowning in sensuality the diviner faculties? Most certainly they do, and most fatally. But before the world and the flesh can thus become base ministers to human impurity, there must first have been impurity in the human soul. It is deplorably true that spiritual evil diffuses its own unclean breath over the whole of God's fair creation, and with insatiable desire drags the blessed universe into the service of its own pollution. To men who are unholly in their affections, and being also

“unbelieving” abide in that sin, nothing can be said to be clean. There are such men, whose inner nature on its intellectual and its moral side alike (“mind and conscience” ver. 15), has been surrendered to illicit desire. By their touch God’s best gifts will be smirched and turned to evil use. Only let not God’s abused creation bear the blame ; but the evil will and heart of man.

Remembering then the true seat of evil, where will you commence the much needed task of human purification ? With this problem every religion and every ethical system has to reckon. In view of what has been said, it is plain that the abstinence theory of purification breaks down. Can you work from the outside inward ? If the seat of uncleanness be in the soul, will mere avoidance of contact with the outer world purify the man ? The Oriental mystic, the fakeer, the anchorite, the Essene, the Manichæan, the Gnostic ; all these, like their modern and western imitators, sought redemption from evil through maceration or mortification of the flesh, by abstinence from physical enjoyment. “Touch not,” was their motto ; “taste not, handle not such things as perish in the using.” On Paul’s principle, this system was a false one ; ineffectual for the end proposed. Because it rested on a mistaken conception of sin, it could not conduct to a true theory of morals. It stood condemned as a gospel of deliverance for mankind. A better gospel Paul had found elsewhere, as shall be seen further on in his letter. He found it in the grace of God that bringeth salvation, not by works of ours, but by divine mercy ; not through bodily abstinence but through an interior renewal by the Holy Spirit. What Christ provides is spiritual cleansing for the spiritual defilement of man ; a new life-force within, working outwards in healthy regulated activities ; a reign of the Divine Will over affections and conscience which, while it restores man as God’s child to the free enjoyment of whatever God has created for his use, prescribes a wise self-

control as the guardian of freedom and the limit of indulgence. It is thus the Christian Gospel trains us to deny our worldly desires that we may lead, not outside of this present world, but *in it*, a life that is sober, righteous and godly. Thus Christ, who redeemed us from all iniquity, purifies us to Himself as a people of his own, zealous for good works. Whereas to make a virtue out of things indifferent is to debauch men's sense of right and wrong. To drill unregenerate nature into refusing some innocent pleasures or starving natural propensities leads to development of evil in less coarse but no less perilous forms. To enforce abstinence on a large scale from things innocent or permissible is a violence upon nature which avenges itself in the long run by an outburst of license. Regeneration by force of law must therefore prove a failure. From the heart are the issues of life. Begin there : of what use will it be to scour the cup and the platter ?

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE APOCALYPSE.
HER UNIVERSALISM.

No inquiry connected with the light in which the Church of Christ appears in the Apocalypse is more important than that before us in this Paper. Upon the manner in which we answer it must to a large extent depend our view of the book as a whole, our estimate of the position of its author in the development of early Christianity, and the conclusion to which we come upon the question whether he may or may not be identified with the writer of the fourth Gospel. If, on the one hand, the book is so Judaic as many suppose it to be, it will not be easy to vindicate its