

THE EPISTLE TO TITUS.

V.—DUTIES OF THE HOUSEHOLD. *Chapter ii. 1–10.*

THE errors which prevailed in Crete, although they rested upon a basis of theory, were in the main errors of conduct. They required to be met not merely by preaching correct doctrine, but likewise by the enforcement of Christian duty. It is rarely sufficient for the teacher to expatiate upon the lofty doctrines of revelation alone, trusting that their appropriate lessons for daily life will follow, by mere force of inference, or spontaneously, under a law of spiritual growth. For, although it is true that to preach the “grace of God that bringeth salvation” is the best way of schooling men into sobriety, justice, and piety, yet the careful pastor will find it needful to indicate and urge the practical consequences of his teaching as well—rebuking and exhorting with all authority the souls entrusted to his care. It is, indeed, a rare point of wisdom when the pulpit knows how to set forth these two, grace and duty, in their just proportions and in their vital relationship to one another. The extreme of a lifeless morality, divorced from the warm gospel of God’s grace on the one side, and on the other the extreme of a barren evangelism, puffing men into a shew of piety without real goodness, are equally to be avoided. Equally have they wrought serious mischief in the past experience of the Church.

This task of enforcing Christian duty becomes, of course, much more delicate when the teacher attempts, like St. Paul, to descend into details. There is, indeed, one uniform type of character which is appropriate for all Christians. Like a broad substructure, the cardinal virtues of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, are to underlie every social relationship. Yet it is not sufficient for the healthy progress of a Christian community that its members be admonished

in identical terms to practise these universal graces. This ground type of a good character has to undergo, it is obvious, specific modifications according to age, sex, and the social position of the individual. For Christianity respects, and consecrates, the natural ties both of the home and of the commonwealth. It possesses no such anarchic tendency as Paul detected in the pernicious views of the Cretan Jews. Far from upsetting, it sanctifies those seemly and wholesome relationships which it finds established among men ; relationships upon the due maintenance of which the well-being of society must always depend. It is called upon, therefore, to shew how its general principles of virtue will apply to the several relations of rich and poor, of ruler and ruled, of master and servant, of old and young, of parent and child, of husband and wife. Nor can the overseer and guide of a Christian society claim to have exhausted his functions, until, after apostolic models, he has done his best to develop in each class that character which belongs to it, that both the Christian state and the Christian household may be strengthened and adorned with every virtue which becomes " sound doctrine."

These remarks are suggested by the section of this Apostolic Letter to the opening of which we are come. It follows up the polemic in the opening chapter by instructing Titus, how, in counteracting the errorists of Crete, he was to press upon every class of Christians, in detail, those practical virtues which have their roots in the doctrines of the Gospel. The section is marked as important by its length as well as by its central position ; for it fills the whole of the second, with eleven verses of the third chapter. It breaks easily into two paragraphs, of which the former, occupying Chapter ii., deals with the family, and the latter, in Chapter iii. 1-11, with civil and social life. What is carefully to be noted, as significant of the Writer's strong conviction on the internal connexion betwixt homely duty

and gospel doctrine, is that each of these two paragraphs contains a splendid appeal¹ to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and the gratuitous benefits which have been poured forth upon sinners by the advent of our Saviour. The spontaneous love of the Father, the ransoming self-sacrifice of Jesus, the regeneration of the soul by the Holy Ghost, our justification by free grace, our filial standing, and the blessed hope of our Lord's appearing:—all these are among the most mysterious and abstract doctrines of the evangelical faith; yet from these are fetched the motives which are to make old men sober and young women chaste, to teach fidelity to the slave and loyalty to the citizen!

Before proceeding to notice the particular duties of home life in detail, the reader will not fail to remark once more the frequent occurrence of a single epithet which may almost be said to characterize Christian behaviour, as St. Paul, in his later days, came to conceive of it. The repetition of the word I mean is veiled from readers of the Authorised Version by variations in the rendering of it. In one form or another it really occurs in these verses four times. First, old men are to be "temperate": that is its first occurrence. Then, elderly females are to teach the young wives to be "sober," another use of the same word. Next, the younger women are to be "discreet," the same word. Finally, it is the solitary requirement for young men that they be "sober-minded," where once more the same word is retained. What is this moral quality which Paul felt it to be so necessary to enforce upon every age and on both sexes? It denotes (as was before explained in an earlier paper) that moral health which results from a complete mastery over the passions and desires, "so that," in Archbishop Trench's words, "they receive no further allowance than that which the law and the right reason admit and approve." Self-control would probably come as near the

¹ See ii. 11-14 and iii. 4-7.

idea as any single word we can employ. But it includes such moral sanity or wisdom of character as is only to be attained through the habitual control of the reason over loose, illicit, or excessive desires of every kind.

It is by no means to be wondered at that St. Paul should have laid much emphasis on this virtue. Heathen society in its later periods was remarkable for the weakening of self-control. Self-indulgence became at once its danger and its disgrace. When religion came to be thoroughly divorced from ethics, no curb remained strong enough to restrain the bulk of men either from angry passion or from sensual gratification. Multitudes cast off every curb, religious reverence, fear for consequences, public opinion, domestic authority, even self-respect ; and a laxity of manners set in, in conversation, in dress, in deportment, in the intercourse of the sexes, and in the enjoyment of every whimsical or extravagant invention which could stimulate the jaded capacity for enjoyment, such as almost passes belief. Against this tendency of the later classical period, philosophers and moralists were never weary of inveighing. The very word which St. Paul here uses was with them the technical name for a cardinal virtue, the praises of which, as "the fairest of the gifts of the gods" they were always sounding. But the foolish excess which heathen religion had failed to check, defied heathen philosophy too. The time had come for Christianity to try its hand. The task was a hard one. I have no doubt Paul beheld with anxiety the growing inroads which, before his death, the loose and reckless habits of his age had begun to make even upon those little sheltered companies that had sought a new refuge beneath the Cross. In these latest writings, he reiterates the warning to be soberminded with no less urgency than Plato or Aristotle. We may well thank God that he based the admonition on more prevailing pleas. It took a long time for Christianity to lay the foundations

of a manlier and purer society; but it did so in the end. The old civilization was past remedy and perished. Into the new, which should take its place, the Gospel inspired a nobler temper. The restored authority of divine law and the awful sense of the evil of sin, which were the Church's inheritance from Judaism, the value of personal purity which it learned at the Cross, the new conception of sanctity which Christ created, the hopes and dreads of the hereafter: these things trained our modern nations in their youth to a reverential sobriety of character, an awe for what is holy, and a temperate enjoyment of sensual delights, such as had utterly disappeared from the Greco-Roman world. It is for us to take heed, lest, amid the growth of wealth, the cheapening of luxuries, and the revolt against restraining authority which distinguish our own age, we should forfeit, before we are aware of it, some of that chastened decorous simplicity and manly self-control which lies so near the base of a noble Christian character, and which has been one of the Gospel's choicest gifts to human society.

Coming now to the admonitions which the Apostle addressed to various classes in the Cretan household, we find that these turn, in the first instance, upon the diversities of age and of sex, to which has to be appended the social inequality due to domestic service.

1. In so far as the senior members in a Christian home are concerned, what is seemly is that they should set the example before all things of that grave and wholesome self-restraint, which, as it is desirable at every period of life, so it peculiarly becomes the mature. Four attributes are required in the old,¹ which bear so close a connexion that they serve to support one another. (a) Intemperance in the use of wine must have been a prevalent Cretan infirmity, for the first requirement in elderly people is

¹ Though applied expressly to old men only in Verse 2, they are meant to extend to the other sex as well, as is shewn by *likewise* in Verse 3.

that they be "sober."¹ And the same care in the use of stimulants is enjoined in so many words upon aged matrons, a warning which can surprise no one who is aware what temptations come with failing physical powers and the loneliness of widowed years. None, as Chrysostom has remarked, need the support of wine more than the aged: for that very reason the risk of abusing it by excessive indulgence lies so much the nearer. It is not supposed that the aged Christian falls so far as to become the helpless slave of his appetite, or drinks to the loss of his reason. That is rarely likely to occur. But the mere suspicion of a slight excess, such as will flurry or over-excite the brain through the too frequent or too free use of what is medically permissible and even advisable, would be fatal to that reverend gravity, or worshipfulness, which ought to sit like a crown of honour on the hoary head.

(b) This is the second grace of character which Paul would have the elderly Christian prize and guard. "Be grave," says he, "reverend," rather, meriting from younger men a loving veneration which has in it some touch of awe, or somewhat akin to worship; a sentiment which men scarcely accord to any, save to those who are habitually conversant with celestial themes and dignified through their fitness for that eternal world to which they are drawing nigh. All this appears to underlie the term we render "grave." The word recalls, mayhap, some aged and revered saint, true father in God, ripe in sacred wisdom, learned in Heaven's own school, and beautiful for the light that seemed already to play about his head, with whose image we associate a sanctity that overawes as much as it rejoices the heart. To venerableness like this it ought to be the ambition of the aged believer to aspire. What can more utterly dissipate such reverence than when the white locks are soiled by the least touch of insobriety?

¹ The word is here employed, I think, in its literal sense.

(c) But excess in drink is merely a single example of that ill-governed habit of the soul, against which, in all its exhibitions, Christian principle protests. If the old man would be venerable, let him be "temperate" in everything. Thus (d) will his moral and religious character grow wholesome, or, as our version commonly renders the word, "sound"—free from any morbid one-sidedness in excess or in defect. His "moral and religious character," I say: for the three cardinal graces named here as the virtues in which such soundness is to be displayed, are just those which lie deepest and last longest,¹ those in which ethics and piety meet and combine. Faith, love,² and patience:³ these three endure. These three are at once the choicest products of the Holy Ghost operating upon a renewed heart, and also the pillars on which is built the temple of a sanctified character. These three belong equally to religion and to morals; they are graces of the religious, virtues of the ethical, life; profitable for this world, and destined to adorn that which is to come. It is reasonable to look for their healthful and balanced development in the Christian of ripe experience and full of years.

2. I have said that similar admonitions apply to elderly matrons in the Church; but they apply with certain modifications which the Apostle proceeds to notice. (a) In the first place, the greater reserve imposed by the modesty of her sex requires that the gravity and self-command of a Christian matron should shew itself in the details of her deportment;⁴ not in dress alone, but, as Jerome expands it, "in her walk, gesture, countenance, speech, silence even." Details of such subordinate moment are sufficiently noticeable in a woman to be alluded to. Even in these should

¹ As 1 Cor. xiii. teaches.

² So in Revised Version.

³ *Patience* is that brave cheerful steadfastness under trial which constitutes the practical exhibition of a Christian's "hope."

⁴ "Behaviour."—A.V.

the dignity which beseems a sacred person be reflected. For the Gospel makes priests unto God (in the spiritual and real sense of that word) of its "holy women" also. (b) Further, the limited sphere of household duty within which chiefly woman is meant to move, exposes her to a special fault, as well as lays on her a special duty. The fault of "slander,"¹ meaning by that the habit of evil-speaking behind one's back, or scandal-mongering, becomes a temptation to elderly women just because, while they usually enjoy a good deal of leisure, they move among a limited circle, and are less occupied than men with outside affairs of more general interest. It is a sin, as the word imports, of a peculiarly diabolical² complexion. The surest method of avoiding the temptation is to preoccupy the leisure of advanced matronhood in that duty which is appropriate to it; that is (c), by lesson and example to school the younger wives in those duties which belong to their condition and are appropriate to Christian womanhood.

3. A delicate tact may be observed in St. Paul's management of the younger women. To them he does not bid Titus address himself at all. Although he thinks of them as already married, yet the admonitions of the Pastor are to pass, as it were, through the lips of the senior matrons. Some of these may have been official "deaconesses" (like Phœbe at Cenchræa), but this is by no means essential to the spirit of his instructions. Whether officially set apart to minister among her own sex, as was the salutary habit of the early Church, or not, it is in the privacy of the home, or the retired gathering for prayer and female industry, that the wholesome influence of a Christian matron of experience and weight of character may most advantageously be exerted. And it is through the familiar intercourse of such "mothers in Israel" with their younger

¹ The Rev. Ver. renders what is "false accusers" in A.V., by "slanderers."

² Literally, "devils," *διδύμοι*.

sisters that a Christian minister can most suitably and safely reach the maidens and young housewives of his flock. So at least St. Paul judged. The homely housewifely virtues which are here specified do seem to be best taught by female lips. In seven particulars has this unmarried old man succeeded in covering the circle of a young wife's duties. Her devotion to husband and babes, her discipline of herself into suitable decorum, her womanly purity, her household industry, her benign sweetness of temper, her due deference to her husband: such are the graces by which within her gracious realm of home the youthful matron is to glorify her Saviour and her God. What a surprising elevation did the Gospel confer on woman at its first promulgation! The sudden discovery that "in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female" might have a tendency at the first to relax somewhat those restraints which sex and marriage impose on woman; but, if the wholesome influence Paul desired could be exerted by matrons of maturer character, it is plain that so far from the Christian wife giving her husband (heathen though he might still be) any cause to speak ill of her new faith—her chastity, her meekness, her diligence, her obedience, would be certain to recommend the Gospel in which her soul had found the secret of a behaviour so gracious and so beautiful.

4. Quite different was to be the attitude of Titus toward the young men of Crete. Comparatively a young man himself, he was to be their pattern as much as their monitor. The virtue in which youth needs to be specially schooled, because it is for youth specially arduous, is precisely that temperate and prudent self-control, to which reference has so often been made. Young men are on their way to become old men. In order that they may attain in age the venerableness of saints, they need to lay in youth the foundation of self-command. Indulgence of the passions

may be in maturer years the more shocking ; for the young it is a more powerful seduction and a nearer danger. Let it be recollected, however, that (in the words of a Latin Father already cited) " self-restraint is necessary not merely in fleshly actions or in the lusts of the mind, but in all things ; that we should neither desire honours which are not our due, nor be inflamed with avarice, nor subdued by any passion whatsoever." The language in which Paul counsels his assistant to conduct himself as a public teacher deserves to be closely studied, especially by entrants on the holy ministry, and by all who find themselves called in early manhood to duties in the service of religion.

5. The section closes with a wise warning to that unhappy class of domestic slaves among whom the Gospel found many of its readiest converts. To their acceptance it had much to recommend it. It taught them a new sense of personal worth. It opened for them a way of escape, not only into spiritual freedom, but into the dignity of sonship to the Most High. It lightened their present burdens by the prospect of a splendid undying inheritance beyond the tomb. For the servile classes, who made up so large a part of the population, although they fill so small a space in ancient history, Christianity was destined to accomplish great things. In the long run it was sure to strike their fetters off altogether ; for how can one man whom Christ redeemed continue to claim property in another man whom, equally with himself, the Saviour's blood has bought to be a possession for God alone ? But the earliest service which the Gospel had to render to domestic bondsmen throughout the Roman empire was, to teach them patience and contentment. If in the heart of an *Æsop*, or an *Epictetus*, Stoic philosophy could quench that restless, bitter, and indignant temper which oppression is wont to work even in wise men, much more did the glad tidings of God's love for all mankind, of an equal price paid for master and slave,

of a divine brotherhood which bonds could not destroy, of an everlasting home where all should be equal and all be free—much more, I say, did such glad tidings reconcile the slave to his position, and dispose him meanwhile to serve his master, not grudgingly, or dishonestly, or skulkingly; but with a noble fidelity, as in his dear sight who is the Master of us all!

To thwart the wishes of a harsh master and to purloin his goods are exactly the temptations which lie nearest to the domestic servant. They are faults which the casuistry of the wronged might have led some slaves even to excuse. But no slave could suppose that by perversity or by speculation would the faith he had embraced be “adorned” in the household of a Greek gentleman, any more than it is to be in the workshop of an English manufacturer. This, after all, is the royal motive in every genuine Christian bosom. To have been brought so near to God that his good name is involved in our own; to have received at his hands such a position as calls us to imitate his own nobleness of conduct; to have no coin wherewith to repay Christ’s love, save a lowly, loving temper, and a praising spirit; to be the Lord’s own substitutes set in such a position of trial on purpose that by persistent goodness we may win back to God the soul of a master, a husband, a comrade, recompensing, after Heaven’s example, our neighbour’s evil with eternal good:—these are the divine impulses to divine virtue. They are for us all. For each of us has it in his power to shew how a Christian can curb his temper, serve the thankless, or obey the harsh; can remain pure amid temptation, gentle under provocation, or patient in calamity; can be temperate in his youth, or reverend in age. Each of us may adorn, in some humble ministry and common duty of household life, the doctrine of God our Saviour.

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