

*THE EPISTLE TO TITUS.*

VII. CIVIL AND SOCIAL DUTIES.

*Chapter iii. 1-3.*

THE directions given by St. Paul in the second Chapter refer to domestic life: those to which he now proceeds in the third, to the public or social conduct of the Cretan Christians. They fall under two classes; for a Christian's duty to society comprises: (1) a right attitude to civil authority in the State, and (2), a becoming behaviour in private intercourse. On both points, the Apostle has some appropriate counsel to give.

I. If we would do justice to the first group of directions, we must remind ourselves of the political situation with which his agent Titus had to deal. Throughout the ancient world, authority, whether domestic or civil, wore a more severe countenance than it does with us, and pressed with what we should consider an excessive weight upon the subject classes. It was so within the little kingdom of the family. Roman, as well as Hebrew, law gave to the father an almost unlimited control over his children, and to the master despotic power over his slaves. It was inevitable that the entrance of Christianity should beget in the slave, and in the child, some impatience of this domestic tyranny. The baptized bondsman was strongly tempted to resent the mastership of a heathen lord, now that he had been taught the spiritual equality of all men before God, and knew himself to be a freeman of Christ. The converted son was certain to dispute his parent's interference with the new allegiance which he had learnt to pay to his Father in heaven. It became necessary to warn "believing children" against "unruly" behaviour, and to charge slaves "to be obedient to their own masters." Otherwise

the new Faith would not have been "adorned" and commended, but discredited, in the eyes of the heathen public.<sup>1</sup>

Precisely similar was the danger which arose in political life. The rule of Rome, which then lay upon all those lands in which the Gospel was being preached, was a rule which rested on the sword. Everywhere ancient nations had been subjugated, venerable thrones had been overturned, the freedom of commonwealths jealous of their independence had been ruthlessly suppressed; and, although it was the policy of Rome to leave the old forms of administration untouched wherever possible, it was of course as impossible to conceal from the conquered peoples the degrading tokens of their subjection, as it is for us to do so in our Indian Empire. Roman troops sentinelled the palaces where Roman proconsuls sat in the seats of dethroned kings; Roman judges administered the law; writs ran in the Roman tongue; oaths were sworn to the Roman Cæsar; taxes were paid in Roman coin. The military power which imposed such subjection upon haughty and once mighty nations was at the best a heavy yoke. The imperial laws were on the whole just, but they were stern and could be mercilessly enforced. Nor were the imperial courts above the imputation of corruption. The imposts were very heavy. Provincial governors were usually rapacious. The provincial revenues were drained off to feed the monstrous dissipation of the Capital. For the most part, therefore, the provinces groaned beneath a burden which the strongest of them was unable to shake off, but which was enough to goad the most passive into turbulence.

It was into a society thus honeycombed with political disaffection, and ready at every point to burst into revolt, that Christianity entered with its new conceptions of human dignity and spiritual freedom. Its entrance could not fail

to add to the ferment. It quickened in men's minds that sense of injustice which oppression breeds. It deepened their irritation at the insolence and wrong-doing of the dominant race. It produced a longing for the happier era when the Kingdom of God, which they had received into their hearts, should be also a kingdom of social equity and brotherhood. Hence it became an urgent duty with the leaders of the young society to warn their converts against political restlessness. Do as they might, the Christians could hardly hope, under a government like Nero's, to escape suspicion. They were pretty certain to be reckoned among the dangerous forces in a community which heaved with discontent. But to do anything to encourage such suspicion, or afford the authorities a pretext for repression, would have been foolish as well as wrong; for it would have compromised the Gospel at its outset by mixing it up in matters with which the Gospel has nothing directly to do. Indirectly, no doubt, the new faith was sure to affect in the long run political affairs, as it affects every province of human life. No community of brave men who are animated by the lessons of Christianity will always sit still, contented in a condition of vassalage. The Gospel has proved herself the mother of freedom. The most resolute and successful resistance that has ever been offered to arbitrary power has been offered by men whom the truth had made free and who carried their Bible beneath the same belt to which they buckled their sword. But personal and political liberty is a secondary effect of the Gospel, after it has penetrated the structure of society and has had time to reform nations on its own lines. For the individual convert in the age of Paul to revolt against the emperor or to run away from his master, would have been to misrepresent his faith to his contemporaries. The question at what time or in what way a Christian State is justified in deposing its tyrant, in order to organize

itself as a free commonwealth, is a question which, as it concerns the Christian community and not the individual merely, so it can only arise under a different condition of things altogether. What the Gospel enjoins upon private citizens, so long as governments stand and a successful resistance by the people at large is out of the question, is—submission. They are to discern underlying all authority, so long as it is legitimate, a Divine ordinance, and to render such obedience as is due to the magistrate within his proper sphere, not merely through dread of consequences, but still more for the sake of a good conscience towards God.<sup>1</sup>

It is curious to observe that the two Churches to which Paul addressed the most explicit instructions on this subject were those of Rome and Crete. Rome was the natural focus for the dissatisfied and lawless. There the venality of the court, the license of the aristocracy and the corruption of justice, were most conspicuous. To it every complaint was carried; in its purlieus every conspirator could most securely lurk. Some years before St. Paul wrote his warning to Rome, the government had made a raid upon the turbulent Hebrew population of the capital, and with the Hebrews the Christians were as yet mingled and confounded. In Crete, likewise, local reasons existed to call for a similar warning. For one thing, it was a nest of Jews; and, wherever Jews were found, they were noted as fomenters of disaffection. Nor did the native population of the island stand in any need of foreign instigation. A hundred and twenty years earlier, their democratic constitution had been abolished by a Roman general, and the island, annexed to an adjoining province, had been placed under the orders of a Proprætor. But the islanders never took kindly to their new masters, any more than they have since taken to the Turks. In Paul's day, as in our own,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiii. 1-7.

Crete was a restive dependency, whose Greek population struggled at intervals, but struggled in vain, to recover its lost prerogative of self-government. It was, therefore, thoroughly prudent and pertinent advice which Paul sent to the Christian converts when he bade them "submit to lawful authorities, yield obedience to their orders, and be prompt for whatever good action they might enjoin."

II. Of still greater consequence for the repute of their religion were the instructions which follow. These refer to the spirit in which a Christian is to behave toward his unbelieving neighbours in social intercourse. A handful of converts in the midst of a swarming heathen population occupies everywhere a difficult position, but at the same time it sustains a peculiar responsibility. The case of modern mission churches in China or India resembles very closely that of St. Paul's converts. They are imperfectly cured of their old habits. Yet with the vices of paganism scarcely eradicated, they cannot escape contact with pagan example, but are compelled to breathe a vitiated moral atmosphere, and are pressed on every hand by idolatrous usages and unchristian modes of thought. Besides, they are daily exposed to rude remarks, or even to abuse, for the singularity of their religion. Petty acts of mischief are perpetrated at their expense, for which no remedy can be found. Occasionally a grosser outrage occurs, which must be endured as they best can. Even when the government is a tolerant one, and its officials are either indifferent or well-disposed, public dislike of the "foreign superstition" is at no loss for disagreeable and vexatious ways of expressing itself.

All this is hard to bear, especially for men just emerging out of heathenism; and it was made worse for the Cretans by their national habit of giving a loose rein to the temper and tongue. The lower orders in the seaports of the island were noted as a passionate people, rude in manner, quick to

take offence, and, when provoked to a brawl, by no means nice in their employment either of vituperation or of violence. We know pretty well what the scum of a Greek port is like to this day. It was hard work to teach such men Christian meekness or patience under provocation. Yet if the Cretan Christian shewed himself not less prompt to resent an insult than ever, if in the wineshop he flew into a passion as readily as his comrade who still swore by Jupiter, if the insolent speech, the quarrelsome temper, and the hasty knife were not exchanged for demeanour more becoming the disciples of Jesus—what the better was the man for his Christianity, or how could his fellows learn to respect his new faith?

The graces, therefore, which, more than any other, St. Paul desired his delegate to urge upon these converted islanders, were just those characteristic virtues of the Christian life which formed the strongest contrast to their former habits. They were never to let a word of abuse pass their lips. They were to keep themselves clear of brawls and quarrels. They were to give way before insolence or injury rather than resent it. In short, they were to display towards all sorts and conditions of men every form of Christian meekness. Meekness is a quality which heathenism has everywhere scouted as mean-spirited, but which it is the honour of the Gospel to have canonized. By it is meant such an inner condition of mind as, springing out of penitence for sin with a profound appreciation of the Divine Mercy, predisposes one to forbear and forgive the injurious treatment of others. At bottom it has nothing in common with pusillanimity. But it takes its origin in that peculiar religious exercise called conversion. It is after the taproot of human pride has been cut through by a thorough discovery of one's sinfulness before God, and the sinner has been reduced to beg for unmerited mercy as a free gift at the hand of the Most High, that the heart, pardoned and

tender, grows susceptible of genuine meekness. Then humbleness enters, and a mild charity for all men, and the conviction that one who has himself done so much evil ought to bear with evil in others—that he who owes everything to mercy needs to be above all things merciful.

It might well appear a difficult undertaking to persuade the quick ungoverned boatmen of a Mediterranean harbour to check the biting repartee upon their tongues, or listen with the patience of a saint to the jibes of some tipsy comrade, or take with gentleness the deliberate rudeness of some fanatical Jew. But Paul knew what moral change, more strange than magic, had come over these men since they had welcomed Christ's new message. He had felt by experience what transforming virtue resided in that Gospel to remodel their very nature, turning the lion into a lamb. Therefore he did not despair of making them to their astonished neighbours the models of an unheard of virtue, if only they would give to the facts of their own conversion their full influence over daily conduct.

The splendid sentence which opens with the third, and only closes with the seventh, verse of this Chapter, comprises a mass of central and precious teaching, the unfolding of which must be reserved for another paper. It is packed so full of evangelical truth as to sparkle among the minor Epistles as one of their most conspicuous and memorable passages. It should be noticed, however, that it enters into the current of Paul's letter simply as an argument to sustain his plea for meekness. It is no digression. It assigns the reason why the Apostle expected his Cretan friends to exhibit under trying circumstances so rare a gentleness. It involves the powerful motives to which he trusted for such a victory over nature and habit. No man is fonder than he of running back the homeliest duties to their roots in the most central and awful doctrines of the faith; and we must attempt, ere we close, to do justice

at least to the argumentative value of the passage which follows.

The whole sentence is in form a contrast. It reminds the Cretans of what they had been in their unconverted condition. Against that it sets their present position as Christians. It grandly magnifies the Divine grace which had made them to differ. Out of this little biographical sketch there sprang two arguments for a meek behaviour.

In the first place: These heathen neighbours, whose abusive attitude is so irritating, are not at all different from what you used to be. Recall what you were before God's grace changed you: precisely such as they are to-day. You did not then see your own foulness—not then, before the light came; neither do they see theirs now. Yet contemplate the hateful picture! What is pagan life? (*a*) So dark on religious matters as to possess no true acquaintance with God nor any just apprehension of spiritual truth at all; (*b*) as a result in part of this ignorance, disobedient in practice to all the requirements of Divine law; (*c*) deluded indeed and misled to false conceptions of duty and false superstitions in worship; (*d*) worse than that, enslaved to the desire for enjoyment, given over to indulgence in what seems most pleasant, no matter how immoral; (*e*) socially, leading a life too selfish to be either just or generous to others, cherishing rancour against one another for imagined slights and jealousy on account of superior fortune. Is this a just picture of the natural life as it mirrors itself in the enlightened Christian conscience? Sum it up in a single word: Are not such men repulsive as well as repellent—hateful as well as hating? Yet such were you. By the recollection of your former state, remembering the old darkness out of which you indeed have been rescued but not they, bear with them tenderly, think of them kindly!

To this argument, a second joins itself: Out of that



universal degradation of unregenerate nature, how is it that you have been rescued? By an effort of your own, or by Another's favour? Nay: not through any righteous actions or meritorious struggles to grow better, as you very well know; but through the mere mercy and cleansing and renewing power of "God our Saviour"; by a salvation which came to you unsought, found you helpless, surprised you with its benefits, and by its own virtue made new men of you in that day when you turned from your idols to become through Jesus Christ the heirs of life eternal! Saved thus by the sheer philanthropy of Heaven, have you none for your unsaved brothers? Changed by Divine mercy from a state like theirs, where is your mercy to them? They are as you were: treat them, then, as God treated you! How if He had been as resentful against us, as quick to take offence and ready to strike? Ah, how ill it becomes a Christian to speak evil of others, to brawl, to give back word for word and blow for blow! By the kindness your Saviour has returned for your wrong, shew to your still wrongful fellows what is that love of God to man which has been manifested unto you; that they too may be won to taste that God is good!

Thus have I tried to read back into the brief reasoning of the Apostle a little of its original force, addressed as it was to a few converts out of prevalent heathendom; for, so read, his words may perhaps recover a certain freshness to our minds and the edge of his argument be whetted. But to ourselves, if we have been turned from the selfish and godless life of nature, the appeal carries equal force. There is scarcely anything in which a chastened, or, as I may say, *Christened*, temper discovers itself so unmistakably and with equal charm, as in sweetly bearing the rude or angry antagonism of irreligious people. Still, as in Crete, meekness sits well on the forgiven. Still the amazing example of Him who might have "ta'en the vantage"

when our "lives were forfeit," pleads with his followers for forbearance. Still God's "philanthropy" breathes an inspiration and prescribes a model. By the memory of his spontaneous grace which made us what we are, let us reach after that crown of saintliness, the meekness that beareth all things and forgiveth all things for Christ's dear sake!

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## THE REFORMERS AS EXPOSITORS.

### II. LUTHER.

THAT the services of Luther to the cause of Biblical Interpretation were immense, and indeed unique, is acknowledged by nearly every one who has touched on the History of Exegesis. Unhappily, there is no good book on Luther as an Expositor; yet he did more than any one to give force and currency to the principles which had originated with his ablest predecessors, from Nicolas of Lyra down to Laurentius Valla, and which had found in Erasmus their most powerful exponent. Luther gave to Germany an open Bible written in a style which has moulded and permeated the whole German language. His Commentary on the Galatians<sup>1</sup> is his only complete and continuous contribution to the Exegesis of the New Testament, yet it was that single work which led to the conversions of John Bunyan and John Wesley, whose religious influence has been as powerful as that of any teachers in the last three centuries. Luther's German Bible may be regarded as being in many places a most valuable commentary, and in his Prefaces, his Sermons, his doctrinal works, his polemical treatises, and his Table-talk, he enunciated rules to which the com-

<sup>1</sup> 1519. Re-edited in 1524 and 1535.