

before him? let two brief dying words suffice for answer. "I would be content," he said, "to reach the humblest place in the outermost circle of heavenly blessedness." And within a day or two of the end, after settling a small matter of business, he added, "I desire now to have nothing before me but an unclouded view of immortality."

JOSIAH GILBERT.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

VIII.

JOY IN SUFFERING, AND TRIUMPH IN THE MANIFESTED MYSTERY.

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church; whereof I was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which has given me to you-ward, to fulfil the word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations: but now hath it been manifested to His saints, to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."—Cor. i. 24-27 (Rev. Ver.).

THERE are scarcely any personal references in this Epistle, until we reach the last chapter. In this respect it contrasts strikingly with another of Paul's epistles of the captivity, that to the Philippians, which is running over with affection and with allusions to himself. This sparseness of personal details strongly confirms the opinion that he had not been to Colossæ. We come however here to one of the very few sections which may be called personal, though even here it is rather Paul's office than himself which is in question. He is led to speak of himself by his desire to enforce his exhortations to faithful continuance in the Gospel; and, as is so often the case with him in touching on his apostleship, he, as it were, catches fire,

and blazes up in a grand flame, which sheds a bright light on his lofty enthusiasm and evangelistic fervour.

The words taken for our consideration now are plain enough in themselves, but they are run together, and thought follows thought in a fashion which makes them somewhat obscure; and there are also one or two difficulties in single words which require to be cleared up. We shall perhaps best bring out the course of thought by dealing with these verses in three groups, of which the three words, Suffering, Service, and Mystery are respectively the centres. First, we have a remarkable view taken by the prisoner of the meaning of his sufferings as for the Church. That leads him to speak of his relation to the Church generally as being that of a servant or steward appointed by God, to bring to its completion the work of God; and then, as I said, he takes fire, and, forgetting himself, flames up in rapturous magnifying of the grand message hid so long, and now entrusted to him to preach. So we have his Sufferings for the Church, his service of Stewardship to the Church, and the great Mystery which in that stewardship he had to unveil. It may help us to understand both Paul and his message, as well as our own tasks and trials, if we try to grasp his thoughts here about his work and his sorrows.

I. We have the Apostle's triumphant contemplation of his sufferings. "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church."

The Revised Version, following the best authorities, omits the "who" with which the Authorized Version begins this verse, and marks a new sentence and paragraph, as is obviously right.

The very first word is significant: "*Now* I rejoice." Ay; it is easy to say fine things about patience in sufferings

and triumph in sorrow when we are prosperous and comfortable; but it is different when we are in the furnace. This man, with the chain on his wrist, and the iron entering into his soul, with his life in danger, and all the future uncertain, can say, "Now I rejoice." This bird sings in a darkened cage.

Then come startling words, "I on my part fill up that which is lacking (a better word than 'behind') of the afflictions of Christ." It is not surprising that many explanations of these words have tried to soften down their boldness; as, for instance, "afflictions borne for Christ," or "imposed by Him," or "like His." But it seems very clear that the startling meaning is the plain meaning, and that "the sufferings of Christ" here, as everywhere else, are "sufferings borne by Christ."

Then at once the questions start up, Does Paul mean to say that in any sense whatever the sufferings which Christ endured have anything "lacking" in them? or does he mean to say that a Christian man's sufferings, however they may benefit the Church, can be put alongside of the Lord's, and taken to eke out the incompleteness of His? Surely that cannot be! Did He not say on the cross, It is finished? Surely, that sacrifice needs no supplement, and can receive none, but stands "the one sacrifice for sins for ever"! Surely, His sufferings are absolutely singular in nature and effect, unique and all-sufficient and eternal. And does this Apostle, the very heart of whose Gospel was that these were the life of the world, mean to say that anything which he endures can be tacked on to them, a bit of the old rags to the new garment?

Distinctly not! It would be contradictory of the whole spirit and letter of the Apostle's teaching. But there is no need to suppose that he means anything of the sort. There is an idea frequently presented in Scripture, which

gives full meaning to the words, and is in full accordance with Pauline teaching; namely, that of Christ's true participation in the sufferings of His people borne for Him. He suffers with them. The head feels the pangs of all the members, and every ache and pain may be thought of as belonging, not only to the limb where it is located, but to the brain which is conscious of it. The pains and sorrows and troubles of his friends and followers to the end of time are one great whole; each sorrow of each Christian heart is one drop more added to the contents of the measure which has to be filled to the brim, ere the purposes of the Father who leads through suffering to rest are accomplished, and all belongs to Him. Whatsoever pain or trial is borne in communion with Him is felt and borne by Him. Community of sensation is established between Him and us. Our sorrows are transferred to Him. In all our afflictions He is afflicted, both by His mystical but most real oneness with us, and by His brother's sympathy.

So for us all, and not for the Apostle only, the whole aspect of our sorrows may be changed, and all poor struggling souls in this valley of weeping may take comfort and courage from the wonderful thought of Christ's union with us, which makes my griefs His, and my pain touch Him. Bruise your finger, and the pain pricks and stabs in your brain. Strike the man that is joined to Christ here, and Christ up yonder feels it. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye." Where did Paul learn this deep lesson, that the sufferings of Christ's servants were Christ's sufferings? I wonder whether, as he wrote these words of confident yet humble identification of himself the persecuted with Christ the Lord, there came back to his memory what he heard that fateful day on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" The thought so crushing to the persecutor

had become balm and glory to the prisoner, that every blow aimed at the servant falls on the Master, who stoops from amid the glory of the throne to declare that whatsoever is done, whether it be kindness or cruelty, to the least of His brethren, is done to Him. So every one of us may take the comfort and strength of that wonderful thought, and roll all our burdens and sorrows on Him.

Again, there is prominent here the thought that the good of sorrow does not end with the sufferer. His sufferings are borne in his *flesh*, for the *body's* sake, which is the Church,—a remarkable antithesis between the Apostle's flesh in which, and Christ's body for which, the sufferings are endured. Every sorrow rightly borne, as it will be when Christ is felt to be bearing it for us, is fruitful of blessing. Paul's trials were in a special sense "for His body's sake," for of course, if he had not preached the Gospel, he would have escaped them all; and on the other hand, they have been especially fruitful of good, for if he had not been persecuted, he would never have written these precious letters from Rome. The Church owes much to the violence which has shut up confessors in dungeons. The prison literature, beginning with this letter, and ending with "Pilgrim's Progress," has been among its most cherished treasures.

But the same thing is true about us all, though it may be in a narrower sphere. No man gets good for himself alone out of his sorrows. Whatever purifies and makes gentler and more Christlike, whatever teaches or builds up—and sorrows rightly borne do all these—is for the common good. Be our trials great or small, be they minute and every-day,—like gnats that hum about us in clouds, and may be swept away by the hand, and irritate rather than hurt where they sting,—or be they huge and formidable, like the viper that clings to the wrist and poisons the life blood, they are meant to give us good gifts, which we may transmit

to the narrow circle of our homes, and in every widening ring of influence to all around us. Have we never known a household, where some chronic invalid, lying helpless perhaps on a sofa, was a source of the highest blessing and the centre of holy influence, that made every member of the family gentler, more self-denying and loving? We shall never understand our sorrows, unless we try to answer the question, What good to others is meant to come through me by this? Alas that grief should so often be self-absorbed, even more than joy is! The heart sometimes opens to unselfish sharing of its gladness with others; but it too often shuts tight over its sorrow, and seeks solitary indulgence in the luxury of woe. Let us learn that our brethren claim benefit from our trials, as well as from our good things, and seek to ennoble our griefs by bearing them for "His body's sake, which is the Church."

Christ's sufferings on His cross are the satisfaction for a world's sins, and in that view can have no supplement, and stand alone in kind. But His "afflictions"—a word which would not naturally be applied to His death—do work also to set the pattern of holy endurance, and to teach many a lesson; and in that view every suffering borne for Him and with Him may be regarded as associated with His, and helping to bless the Church and the world. God makes the rough iron of our natures into shining, flexible, sharp steel, by heavy hammers and hot furnaces, that He may shape us as His instruments to help and heal.

It is of great moment that we should have such thoughts of our sorrows whilst their pressure is upon us, and not only when they are past. "I *now* rejoice." Most of us have had to let years stretch between us and the blow before we could attain to that clear insight. We can look back and see how our past sorrows tended to bless us, and how Christ

was with us in them; but as for this one, that burdens us to-day, we cannot make it out. We can even have a solemn thankfulness not altogether unlike joy as we look on those that we remember; but how hard it is to feel it about those that pain us now! There is but one way to secure that calm wisdom, which feels their meaning even while they sting and burn, and can smile through tears, as sorrowful and yet always rejoicing; and that is to keep in very close communion with our Lord. Then, even when in the whitest heat of the furnace, we may have the Son of man with us; and if we have, the fiercest flames will burn up nothing but the chains that bind us, and we shall "walk at liberty" in that terrible heat, because we walk with Him. It is a high attainment of Christian fortitude and faith to feel the blessed meaning, not only of the six tribulations which are past, but of the present seventh, and to say, even while the iron is entering the quivering flesh, "I now rejoice in my sufferings," and try to turn them to others' good.

II. These thoughts naturally lead on to the statement of the Apostle's lowly and yet lofty conception of his office—"whereof (that is, of which *Church*) I was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God, which was given me to you-ward, to fulfil the word of God."

The first words of this clause are used at the close of the preceding section, in verse 23, but the "whereof" there refers to the Gospel, not as here to the Church. He is the servant of both, and because he is the servant of the Church he suffers, as he has been saying. The representation of himself as servant gives the reason for the conduct described in the previous clause. Then the next words explain what makes him the Church's servant. He is so in accordance with, or in pursuance of, the stewardship, or office of administrator, of His household, to which God had called him, "to you-ward," that is to say, with especial reference to the Gentiles. And the final purpose of his being made

a steward is "to fulfil the word of God"; by which is not meant "to accomplish or bring to pass its predictions," but "to bring to completion," or "to give full development to," and that possibly in the sense of preaching it fully, without reserve, and far and wide throughout the whole world.

So lofty and yet so lowly was Paul's thought of his office. He was the Church's servant, and therefore bound to suffer cheerfully for their sake. He was so because a high honour had been conferred on him by God, nothing less than the stewardship of His great household the Church, in which he had to give to every man his portion, and to exercise authority. He is the Church's servant indeed, but it is because he is his Lord's steward. And the purpose of his appointment goes far beyond the interests of any single Church, for while his office sends him especially to the Colossians, its scope is as wide as the world.

One great lesson to be learned from these words is that *Stewardship means service*; and we may add that, in nine cases out of ten, service means suffering. What Paul says, if we put it into more familiar language, is just this: "Because God has given me something that I can impart to others, I am their servant, and bound, not only by my duty to Him, but by my duty to them, to labour that they may receive the treasure." And that is true for us all. Every gift from the great Householder involves the obligation to impart it. It makes us His stewards and our brethren's servants. We have that we may give. The possessions are the Householder's, not ours, even after He has given them to us. He gives us truths of various kinds in our minds, the Gospel in our hearts, influence from our position, money in our pockets, not to lavish on self, nor to hide and gloat over in secret, but that we may transmit His gifts, and "God's grace fructify through us to all." "It is required of stewards that a man be found faithful"; and the hea-

viest charge, "that he had wasted his Lord's goods," lies against every one of us who does not use all that he possesses, whether of material or intellectual or spiritual good, for the common advantage.

But that common obligation of stewardship presses with special force on those who say that they are Christ's servants. If we are, we know something of His love and have felt something of His power; and there are hundreds of people around us, many of whom we can influence, who know nothing of either. That fact makes us their servants, not in the sense of being under their control, or of taking orders from them, but in the sense of gladly working for them, and recognising obligation to help them. Our resources may be small. The Master of the house may have entrusted us with little. Perhaps we are like the boy with the five barley loaves and two small fishes; but even if we had only a bit of the bread and a tail of one of the fishes, we must not eat our morsel alone. Give it to those who have none, and it will multiply as it is distributed, like the barrel of meal, which did not fail because its poor owner shared it with the still poorer prophet. Give, and not only give, but "pray them with much entreaty to receive the gift"; for men need to have the true Bread pressed on them, and they will often throw it back, or drop it over a wall, as soon as your back is turned, as beggars do in our streets. We have to win them by showing that we are their servants, before they will take what we have to give. And besides this, if stewardship is service, service is often suffering; and he will not clear himself of his obligations to his fellows, or his responsibility to his Master, who shrinks from seeking to make known the love of Christ to his brethren, because he has often to "go forth weeping" whilst he bears "the precious seed."

III. So we come to the last thought here, which is of the grand Mystery of which Paul is the Apostle and Servant.

Paul always catches fire when he comes to think of the universal destination of the Gospel, and of the honour put upon him as the man to whom the task was entrusted of transforming the Church from a Jewish sect to a world-wide society. That great thought now sweeps him away from his more immediate object, and enriches us with a burst which we could ill spare from the letter.

His task, he says, is to give its full development to the Word of God, to proclaim a certain mystery long hid, but now revealed to those who are consecrated to God. To these it has been God's good pleasure to show the wealth of glory which is contained in this mystery, as exhibited among the Gentile Christians, which mystery is nothing else than the fact that Christ dwells in or among these Gentiles, of whom the Colossians are part, and by His dwelling in them gives them the confident expectation of future glory.

The mystery then of which the Apostle speaks so rapturously is the fact that the Gentiles were fellow heirs and partakers of Christ. "Mystery" is a word borrowed from the ancient systems, in which certain rites and doctrines were communicated to the initiated. There are several allusions to them in Paul's writings, as for instance in the passage in Philippians iv. 12, which the Revised Version gives as "I have learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry," and probably in the immediate context here, where the characteristic word "perfect" means "initiated." Portentous theories which have no warrant have been spun out of this word. The Greek mysteries implied secrecy; the rites were done in deep obscurity, the esoteric doctrines muttered in the ear: but the Christian mysteries are spoken on the housetop. Nor does the word *mystery* imply anything as to the comprehensibility of the doctrine or fact which is so called.

We talk about "mysteries," meaning thereby truths that

transcend human faculties; but the New Testament "mystery" may be, and most frequently is, a fact perfectly comprehensible when once spoken. "Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." There is nothing incomprehensible in that. We should never have known it if we had not been told; but when told it is quite level with our faculties. And as a matter of fact, the word is most frequently used in connexion with the notion, not of concealment, but of declaring. We find too that it occurs frequently in this Epistle, and in the parallel one to the Ephesians, and in every instance but one refers, as it does here, to a fact which was perfectly plain and comprehensible when once made known; namely, the entrance of the Gentiles into the Church.

If that be the true meaning of the word, then "a steward of the mysteries" will simply mean a man who has truths, formerly unknown but now revealed, in charge to make known to all who will hearken, and neither the claims of a priesthood nor the demand for the unquestioning submission of the intellect have any foundation in this much abused term.

But turning from this, we may briefly consider what was the substance of this grand mystery which thrilled Paul's soul. It is the wonderful fact that all barriers were broken down, and that Christ dwelt in the hearts of these Colossians. He saw in that the proof and the prophecy of the world-wide destination of the Gospel. No wonder that his heart burned as he thought of the marvellous work which God had wrought by him. For there is no greater revolution in the history of the world than that accomplished through him, the cutting loose of Christianity from Judaism and widening the Church to the width of the race. No wonder that he was misunderstood and hated by Jewish Christians all his days!

He thinks of these once heathens and now Christians at

Colossæ, far away in their lonely valley, and of many another little community—in Judæa, Asia, Greece, and Italy; and as he thinks of how the tide of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ had risen over all the separating rocks of race and religion, and had united these isolated pools and lakelets into a great sea, the vision of the oneness of mankind in the Cross of Christ shines out before him, as no man had ever seen it till then, and he triumphs in the sorrows that had helped to bring about the great result.

That dwelling of Christ among the Gentiles reveals the exuberant abundance of glory. To him the "mystery" was all running over with riches, and blazing with fresh radiance. To us it is familiar and somewhat worn. The "vision splendid," which was manifestly a revelation of hitherto unknown Divine treasures of mercy and lustrous light when it first dawned on the Apostle's sight, has "faded" somewhat "into the light of common day" for us, to whom the centuries since have shown so slow a progress. But let us not lose more than we can help, either by our familiarity with the thought, or by the discouragements arising from the chequered history of its partial realization. Christianity is still the only religion which has been able to make permanent conquests. It is the only one that has been able to disregard latitude and longitude, and to address and guide conditions of civilization and modes of life quite unlike those of its origin. It is the only one that sets itself the task of conquering the world without the sword, and has kept true to the design for centuries. It is the only one whose claims to be world-wide in its adaptation and destiny would not be laughed out of court by its history. It is the only one which is to-day a missionary religion. And so, notwithstanding the long centuries of arrested growth and the wide tracts of remaining darkness, the mystery which

fired Paul's enthusiasm is still able to kindle ours, and the wealth of glory that lies in it has not been impoverished nor stricken with eclipse.

One last thought is here,—that the possession of Christ is the pledge of future blessedness. "Hope" here seems to be equivalent to "the source" or "ground" of the hope. If we have the experience of His dwelling in our hearts, we shall have in that very experience of His sweetness and of the intimacy of His love a marvellous quickener of our hope that such sweetness and intimacy will continue for ever. The closer we keep to Him, the clearer will be our vision of future blessedness. If He is throned in our hearts, we shall be able to look forward with a hope which is not less than certainty to the perpetual continuance of His hold of us and of our blessedness in Him. Anything seems more credible to a man who habitually has Christ abiding in him, than that such a trifle as death should have power to end such a union. To have Him is to have life. To have Him will be heaven. To have Him is to have a hope certain as memory and careless of death or change.

That hope is offered to us all. If by our faith in His great sacrifice we grasp the great truth of "Christ for us," our fears will be scattered, sin and guilt taken away, death abolished, condemnation ended, the future a hope and not a dread. If by communion with Him through faith, love, and obedience, we have "Christ in us," our purity will grow, and our experience will be such as plainly to demand eternity to complete its incompleteness and to bring its folded buds to flower and fruit. If Christ be in us, His life guarantees ours, and we cannot die while He lives. The world has come, in the persons of its leading thinkers, to proclaim that all is dark beyond and above. "Behold! we know not anything" is the dreary "end of the whole matter"—infinitely sadder than the old Ecclesiastes, which from "vanity of vanities" climbed to "fear God and keep

His commandments," as the sum of human thought and life. "I find no God; I know no future." Yes! Paul long ago told us that if we were "without Christ" we should "have no hope, and be without God in the world." And cultivated Europe is finding out that to fling away Christ and to keep a faith in God or in a future life is impossible.

But if we will take Him for our Saviour by simple trust, He will give us His own presence in our hearts, and infuse there a hope full of immortality. If we live in close communion with Him, we shall need no other assurance of an eternal life beyond than the deep, calm blessedness of the imperfect fellowship of earth which must needs lead to and be lost in the everlasting and completed union of heaven.

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

A CRITICAL ESTIMATE.

SECOND PAPER.

WE were somewhat surprised to find that the O. T. Revisers did not leave the Proper Names as they stood in the A. V. They have tried to carry out the A. V.'s system of transliteration "with somewhat greater consistency," leaving unchanged "names which by usage have become English." The changes will probably not be much noticed. We have Ije-abarim for Iye-abarim, Habazziniah for Habaziniah, Kir-heres for Kir-haresh, Jeshurun for Jesurun. Azareel becomes Azarel, which seems no nearer the true pronunciation A'zarêl. Kiriath-jearim is in equal danger of mispronunciation. If conservatism forbade Kiryath, the Kirjath of A. V. should have been left. And why, if it was right to