

SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

THROUGHOUT the whole of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, we hear as it were the distant mutterings of thunder, but the storm never bursts. In the Second Epistle it is raging in full violence around us.

The course of events between these two Epistles is usually explained in a very simple manner. St. Paul, we are told, remained some time at Ephesus in accordance with his expressed purpose (1 Cor. xvi. 8), "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost." The tumult raised by the silversmith Demetrius, brought his sojourn in that city to an end sooner than he intended; and he then fell back on the plan he had previously formed of going to Corinth by way of Macedonia (1 Cor. xvi. 5). He went first to Troas, where he hoped to meet Titus, who was coming from Macedonia and bringing him tidings of the Church at Corinth (2 Cor. ii. 12, 13). Failing to find Titus there, he went on into Macedonia, where he met him; and in consequence of the good news which Titus brought, Paul sent him back to Corinth with this Second Epistle, in which he states his intention of coming himself shortly to the city with the purpose of wintering there. Everything is thus supposed to have taken place according to the plan indicated in 1 Cor. xvi. 5, 6, and thus scarcely six months elapsed between the two Epistles.

We cannot at all share this view. It seems to us that there are indications in this Second Epistle of a much longer interval between the two letters, and of the rise of much graver complications. We are especially struck with the intervention of a fresh co-worker with Paul, Titus the evangelist, and with the great importance attached to his person and mission. Hitherto the only evangelist mentioned had been Timothy, who, after visiting the Church at Corinth, was to have rejoined Paul at

Ephesus, where the three delegates from the Corinthian Church were also awaiting him. The Apostle wished, no doubt, to confer with them over the report which Timothy would bring (1 Cor. xvi. 11). But here we find Timothy has suddenly vanished and everything depends upon Titus. It is upon him, not Timothy, that Paul is counting for the tidings which are to set his heart at rest as to the state of the Church. Not finding him, he is so anxious that he hurries into Macedonia to meet him. It has been conjectured that Timothy had been prevented from going to Corinth (indeed Paul only speaks doubtfully of his expected visit, 1 Cor. xvi. 10), and that after his return to Ephesus Paul had sent Titus instead of him to Corinth. But how is it we find no hint of this in the whole of the Second Epistle, if it were really so? Or, as an alternative, it might be conjectured that it was Titus, not Timothy, who had been the bearer of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. But then how is it that Paul makes no mention of him in that letter, but only of Timothy?

Nor is this the only remarkable circumstance, supposing the facts to have been as suggested above.

In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians there are certain passages in which Paul alludes to a letter of severe rebuke which, with great pain to himself, he had been forced to write to them, and which was to serve instead of an intended visit. "I wrote this very thing, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice. . . . For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be made sorry, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2 Cor. ii. 3, 4). In chapter vii. he says (8-10) that after he had sent the letter he rather regretted it; but he regrets it no longer, now that he sees the effect it has produced. Would such expressions apply to the First Epistle to the Cor-

inthians? This seems to us impossible. That letter does indeed contain many stern passages, but none which would bear out such a reference as is here made. We should search in vain in the First Epistle for a chapter which must have been wrung from the heart of the Apostle with many tears. Further, it appears from certain expressions in the Second Epistle that the Apostle had received some grave personal offence from the Church of Corinth. He declares (chap. ii. 10) that he is quite ready to forgive him who has been guilty of the offence, and that if the Corinthians can forgive so can he. In chapter vii. 12 he says that he has written to them "not for his cause that did the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered the wrong," but that they might know the earnest care which he, Paul, had for them in the sight of God. It has often been thought that the man to whom Paul refers in these passages was the one who had been guilty of incest referred to in 1 Cor. v.; but in that case the person who suffered the wrong could be no other than the father of the offender. But could Paul say in this case that he had not written for his sake that did the wrong? Does he not say that it was in order that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus that he had penned that fifth chapter? and could he here say that he regarded such a crime only from the standpoint of the wrong done to the father of the guilty man? Can we indeed suppose it possible that such an offence could have been committed in the very lifetime of the father? No; in these two passages the offended person can be no other than Paul himself. He means to say that he has not written this severe letter to get the man punished who had done him wrong, and thus to appease his own wounded pride, but for the good of the Church itself. Now how could the Apostle refer to the offence as done to himself, if he were alluding to this crime of incest? These passages must refer to some fact of

which we find no trace in the First Epistle, and which must have taken place in the interval between the two letters.

We may refer further to three passages in the Second Epistle, which speak of Paul's expected visit to Corinth as the third to that city. So far as we have seen at present, this coming visit would be only the second; since after founding the Church at Corinth, Paul had taken up his abode at Ephesus, where, according to the narrative in the Acts, he laboured from that time without interruption. It has been sometimes supposed that before writing the First Epistle to the Corinthians he had made from Ephesus, a rapid journey into Greece and Achaia, not mentioned in the Book of Acts. But there would surely then be some allusion to it in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, as he refers so frequently in that letter to the circumstances of his first visit. And how could it be said at Corinth that he dared not show himself there (1 Cor. iv. 18-21), if he had been there quite recently? Another conjecture has been, that the passages which seem to imply a second visit of Paul, refer only to a projected and promised visit which never really came to pass. This explanation might possibly be admissible for 2 Cor. xiii. 1, but cannot apply to 2 Cor. xii. 14. An attempt has indeed been made to translate this passage: "Behold this is the third time I am on the point of coming to you"; which would not necessarily imply that he had already been twice. But the words which follow: "I will not be a burden to you," intimating as they do that again this time he will not accept the hospitality of any of them, do not admit of this interpretation. They imply that the two previous visits to which he refers in ver. 14, are actual and not merely intended comings. People do not live at others' charges in merely hypothetical visits. The expression "*for the third time*" must refer then to the actual coming and not to the being *on the point of coming*. In chapter ii. 1

we find another passage no less decisive: "I determined this for myself, that I would not come again to you with sorrow," says the Apostle. On his first visit, when he founded the Church, Paul had had abundant labours and trials from without, but for all that he would not have described that visit as a sorrowful one. Between that first coming and the visit he was now projecting, there had then been another very painful to him, and such as he did not desire to repeat.

If we now sum up the hints contained in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians as to the state of things in the Church as the result of the First Epistle, we shall be startled at the gravity of the situation.

There were certain men, whom we cannot fail to identify as those who with their followers claimed to be "of Christ" (see 2 Cor. x. 7; xi. 23), who attacked at once the apostleship, the character, and the teaching of the founder of the Church. "He has not even seen the Lord Jesus," said they, "and yet he gives himself out to be His apostle" (1 Cor. ix. 1; 2 Cor. v. 16). "He is so conscious of the inferiority of his position as regards the other apostles, that he dares not make himself chargeable to the Churches as they did (1 Cor. ix. 5; 2 Cor. xi. 7 ff; xii. 13). He boasts of his disinterestedness, but so crafty is he that he manages to secure his own profit in another manner, by means of his messengers and collections which he gathers professedly for the poor at Jerusalem (1 Cor. xiv. 1-4; 2 Cor. i. 15, 16). He writes powerful threatening letters, but never comes to carry out his threats, or if he does appear, 'his bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account' (1 Cor. iv. 18; 2 Cor. x. 10). His letters are one long strain of boasting; his head is turned with pride (2 Cor. iii. 1; v. 13; xi. 1). For the rest, his teaching is of little value. There are others immeasurably more gifted in speech (2 Cor. x. 10; xi. 6)."

What could the Apostle say or do after such crushing criticism as this? There must surely be an end of him and his work. The Church must be left now to pass into the hands of his adversaries.

We need to realize to ourselves the gravity of the situation in order to understand the events which follow as we shall attempt to reproduce them, and through them to bring out the real meaning of this Second Epistle. The Apostle awaited at Ephesus the return of Timothy, and in consequence of the interviews he had with him and with the three delegates of the Church, he decided to revert to his first plan (which from 1 Cor. xvi. 5 he seemed to have abandoned), and to go direct to Corinth from Ephesus. This visit was a short and painful one, and Paul is referring to it (2 Cor. ii. 1), when he says, "I determined this for myself, that I would not come *again* to you with sorrow." The germs of disaffection towards himself had been growing. The severe and humiliating passages in his first letter had been craftily turned to account, and things had come to such a point that he was made the subject of gross insult without the Church raising a finger in his defence. Feeling that he could not himself insist on the reparation which was due to him, he went away to leave the Church time to act, saying however that he should come back again. He travelled into Macedonia, and perhaps as far as Illyricum on the shores of the Adriatic (Rom. xv. 19). He waited for news of the conduct of the Church. At length, hearing nothing to reassure him, he decided to write this severe and painful letter, watered abundantly with tears, of which he speaks in this Second Epistle. In it he made the Corinthians feel, what they ought to have felt without any such prompting—how much they owed to him; and he gave them their choice between a rupture with him and the punishment of the offenders. The important mission of conveying this letter and supporting it, he committed to

Titus, who was then with him. Then, having no more to do in Macedonia, and not being willing to return to Corinth while matters were in this position, he went back to Ephesus, where it would seem Timothy was grappling with a task beyond his strength. To this time refer the words in this Second Epistle (2 Cor. i. 23; ii. 3): "I call God for a witness upon my soul, that to spare you I forbore to come unto Corinth. . . . And I wrote this very thing (these severe reprimands), lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice."

It is, as we think, to this failure to come back as he had promised, that Paul refers in the justification which he gives of his conduct, 2 Cor. i. 17, 18.

At Ephesus Paul awaited, in much perplexity of spirit, the return of Titus. It was no doubt in this interval that the tumult was raised by Demetrius which nearly cost the Apostle his life, and to this time of trouble and deliverance he refers, as we think, in 2 Cor. i. 8-11. Having escaped this danger, the Apostle starts for the north on the route on which he hopes to meet with Titus. If to the two years and three months of his first stay in Ephesus, we add the few months of this second visit, we get the three years during which, as he says to the Ephesian elders (Acts xx. 31), he had worked and watched for souls in that city. This unexpected prolongation of his stay in Ephesus seems to explain the singular expression (Acts xix. 22) with which the story of the tumult in the city is prefaced. "He himself stayed in Asia for a season." It would not have been possible for him to go west, leaving the Church of Corinth in such a position towards himself as it was at that time.

Arrived at Troas, he failed to find there Titus, the brother whom he was yearning to see (2 Cor. ii. 13): and in his anxiety (for the welfare of the most flourishing of all his Churches was at stake) he went into Macedonia to meet

him. There at length they met, and the news from Corinth filled him with joy. Titus himself was quite reassured by what he had seen and heard, and Paul was so relieved that he resolved at once to send back this faithful fellow-labourer to convey the expression of his satisfaction, and to complete the work of reconciliation before the Apostle came again to pay one final glad visit to the Church and then to leave it for ever.

This Second Epistle to the Corinthians is then, properly speaking, the *Fourth*; for, as we have already seen, that which is called the *First* Epistle had been preceded by a letter which we have lost, and between the first and second we must suppose a third, which, like the first, has not come down to us, probably because both were altogether of a local and incidental character. If things took place at all as we have supposed, they imply an interval not of six but of eighteen months between our First and Second Epistles, namely, from the spring of 57 to the autumn of 58.

The Apostle, writing to the Church in the position we have described, had two main objects in view; first, to testify his satisfaction and gratitude to the majority in the Church who had so warmly taken up his cause and now rendered possible this happy visit to which he had so long been looking forward; and next, to remove all the germs of disobedience and disorder which still remained in the Church, and which might again spring up to trouble him. In a word it may be said, his design was so to strengthen the spiritual bond which united him to the true-hearted majority in the Church, that the still disaffected minority might be powerless to break it. In addition to this, he may have had some special object in view, such as the success of the collection with which he was determined to close his ministry in the East, and which was to be to the Christians in Palestine the tangible proof of the new life awakened in the Gentile world.

In this way we explain the three parts into which this Epistle naturally divides itself. The first seven chapters are addressed specially to the section of the Church which was in sympathy with the Apostle, and their purport is to let them know how his heart has been exercised towards them under the recent crisis. This portion of the letter refers to the *past*. Chapters viii. ix. form a second part, the object of which is to encourage the faithful majority to take an active part in the collection, which is already almost finished in Macedonia. It is with this view that he sends Titus back to them with his letter. This part of the Epistle deals then with the time *present*. Lastly, in chapters x.-xiii. the Apostle, while still addressing himself to the whole Church (because he will not himself create one of those divisions for which he has been reproofing them) turns specially to the disobedient members, showing them how they have been made the tools of intriguing men, and how severely he will have to deal with them if they persist in their hostile attitude and wicked conduct till he comes again. This third portion relates to the *future*.

Such is the natural and simple division of this Epistle. For want of understanding this, doubts have often been thrown upon its unity, and it has been sometimes supposed to be a collection of fragments composed at different times, with different objects and even by various authors.

The whole Epistle follows the historical order.

Paul, and Timothy, who rejoined him in Macedonia, address themselves expressly not only to the Christians at Corinth, but to those of the whole province of Achaia, over which the Gospel had spread since their first sojourn in that district. The Apostle desires first of all that the Church should rejoice with him in his wonderful deliverance from imminent death. He is referring, no doubt, to the tumult excited by Demetrius at Ephesus. He points out to his readers how under God these painful experiences,

through which he is called to pass, become the means of making his ministry more fruitful to the Church, so close is the spiritual union between them (2 Cor. i. 1-11). After this he explains the change in his purpose of coming to them, which his enemies at Corinth had used as a handle against him. It is generally supposed that the reference is to the change mentioned by the Apostle (1 Cor. xvi. 5). But to us it seems that he is alluding to a more recent change: for in the former case he would have said (chap. i. 23), not "I forbore to come unto Corinth" (οὐκἔτι), but "I came not yet (οὐπω) to Corinth." The word οὐκἔτι (no more) implies that he had already been there once, but that he had not returned as he had promised. And we have seen already that after going from Ephesus to Corinth and thence into Macedonia, instead of returning thence to Corinth for the long stay he had promised, he had returned into Asia and settled down again at Ephesus. Why then did he not come back? This is the seeming inconsistency in his conduct which he must explain, for he knows that it will be used against him. He even resorts to a solemn asseveration, calling God to witness, that, if he returned into Asia without visiting Corinth, as he had promised, it was not through fickleness or fear for himself, but because the state their Church was hindered in him. He would rather write the sharp things he has to say to them than come and say them himself. This explains at once the reason of his not coming back and the purport of that severe letter which he had sent them by Titus when he left Macedonia to go back to Ephesus (chap. i. 12-ii. 4). In reference to that letter, he speaks here *en passant* of the punishment of the guilty one administered by the majority of the Church, as the result of Paul's letter, and urges that great indulgence be shown to him, lest Satan, who had tempted him to sin through arrogance, should now let him be swallowed up of overmuch sorrow. If the Corinthians forgave him, they

may be assured that the Apostle forgives also. As we have already seen, such words could only refer to a personal offence committed against Paul himself, and not to the sin of incest (chap. ii. 5-11). From this explanation of the reasons which led him to go back to Asia without visiting Corinth, Paul passes to the account of his recent departure from Ephesus for Troas, and makes the Church feel the greatness of his love for her by his description of all the anguish of mind he was enduring at that time on her account. Not having met Titus at Troas, as he had hoped, he gave up his idea of evangelizing in that district as the way opened, and in his anxiety hastened into Macedonia to meet Titus (chap. ii. 13). Here he lays open the depths of his soul to his readers. He shows them what are the feelings of a true servant of Christ in the fulfilment of his ministry. And first, he initiates his readers into the secret of spiritual power in that ministry, that they may see how needless it is for him to have recourse to the dishonest artifices which the preachers of a legal Christianity are obliged to use. In order to conceal the fact that the reign of law is over, they are constrained to employ some such means as Moses, who put a veil over his face that the people might not see the fading away of its glory.¹ The true servant of Christ beholds his Lord with unveiled face, and being clothed himself with the same beauty, he has nothing to hide (chap. ii. 14-iv. 6). In this admirable passage on the ministry of the spirit, as opposed to the ministry of the letter (of the law), there is the opening of the attack upon the Judaizing teachers, but the battle, properly speaking, is reserved for the end of the letter.

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(To be concluded.)

¹ Not that the Apostle would thus insinuate anything against the character of Moses. When he acted thus, the time was not yet come for Israel to understand the transitory character of the legal economy and its future abolition. It was otherwise at the time when Paul wrote, and when his adversaries were seeking to prolong the Mosaic dispensation, which had really closed with the advent of Messiah.