

CHRISTUS CONSUMMATOR :

LESSONS FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

I. THE TRIALS OF A NEW AGE.

“ This word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain.”—*Heb.* xii. 27 (Rev. Vers.).

EVERY age which is moved by the Spirit of God feels keenly the searching, chastening power of that Divine Presence. “ He that is near Me,” the Lord is reported to have said, “ is near fire.” And we cannot hope to enjoy the splendour of a fuller, purer light without enduring the pain which necessarily comes from the removal of the veils by which it was obscured. Gain through apparent loss ; victory through momentary defeat ; the energy of a new life through pangs of travail ; such has ever been the law of spiritual progress. This law has been fulfilled in every crisis of reformation ; and it is illustrated for our learning in every page of the New Testament.

But in no apostolic writing is the truth unfolded with such pathetic force as in the Epistle to the Hebrews. And so it is, I think, that that mysterious “ word of consolation ” appeals to us with a voice of thrilling power in our time of trial, when the law of progress, the law of fruitfulness through death, seems to be hastening to a fresh fulfilment. The student of that Epistle cannot but observe that no men were ever called upon to endure greater sacrifices, to surrender more precious hopes, to bear deeper disappointments, than those to whom it was first addressed. Men who had lived in the light of the Old Testament, men who

had known the joy of a noble ritual, men who had habitually drawn near to God in intelligible ways, men who had but lately welcomed Him in Whom they believed that the glory of Israel should be consummated, were most unexpectedly required to face what seemed to them to be the forfeiture of all that they held dearest. The letter of Scripture, the worship of the temple, the expectations of national triumph, had to be abandoned. The heirs of the patriarchs, when they first felt that they were entering on their inheritance, were compelled, if they remained Christians, to accept the position of outcasts from the ancient commonwealth of God, and to confess themselves followers of One crucified and rejected, Who delayed to assume His throne.

And what then? They could not but begin to reckon up their loss and gain. The fresh enthusiasm of their early faith had died away in the weary waiting of a lifetime. They had in part degenerated because they had not grown. But they were not uncared for in the crisis of their peril. Out of the darkness of the gathering storm, in which the Holy Place was to be for ever swept away, came a voice which interpreted the sad riddles of their fate. Under the guidance of a nameless apostle, the Hebrews were enabled to see how the sufferings of Christ were not a difficulty in the way of His Messiahship, to be compensated by a visible triumph, but the very pledge of the fulfilment of the destiny of man in spite of sin; to see how the unbelief of Israel opened the way for the larger unfolding of the world-wide counsels of God; to see how in giving up type and shadow they secured the realities which these signified; to see how things visible and transitory were replaced by things unseen and eternal; to see how above the vanishing grace of the Levitical service rose in supreme and sovereign majesty the figure of the ascended Christ, Priest and King for ever, seated at the right hand of God, infinite in sympathy and power:

Now when we read the apostolic words, and picture to ourselves the sorrows which they illuminated—when we feel that in the portraiture of the perils of early believers we have the record of true human struggles, and know that the essential elements of human discipline must always be the same—we cannot, I think, fail to recognise in the trials of the Hebrews of the first age an image of the peculiar trials by which we are beset; and so by their experience we may gain the assurance that for us also there is the promise of larger wisdom where they found it, that *the removal of those things that are shaken* is brought about in order that *those things which are not shaken may remain* in serener and simpler beauty.

If we look at the circumstances of the Hebrews a little more closely we shall notice that the severity of their trials came in a great degree from mistaken devoutness. They had determined, in obedience to traditional opinion, what Scripture should mean, and they found it hard to enter into its wider teaching. They had determined that institutions which were of Divine appointment must be permanent, and they found it hard to grasp the realities by which the forms of the older worship were replaced. They had determined that Christ's sovereignty should be openly vindicated by the victorious faith of God's people, and they found it hard to hold their belief firm against the general unbelief of their fellow-countrymen.

Now in these respects, we cannot, as I said, fail to recognise that the difficulties of the Hebrews correspond with our own. For I am speaking now of the difficulties of those who hold to their first faith, and are yet conscious of shakings, changes, losses, of the removing of much which they formerly identified with it. Many among us, for example, tremble with a vague fear when they find that that "Divine Library," in the noble language of Jerome, which we call the Bible—"the Books"—"the Book"—cannot be sum-

marily separated by a sharp, unquestionable line from the other literature with which it is connected; that the text and the interpretation of the constituent parts have not been kept free from corruptions and ambiguities which require the closest exercise of critical skill; that deductions have been habitually drawn from incidental modes of expression in Scripture which cannot be maintained in the light of that fuller knowledge of God's working which He has given us.

Others again find the historical problems raised by the study of the Bible carried into a wider region. They learn in the turmoil of action, and they learn in the silence of their own souls, that the Faith can no longer be isolated and fenced off from rude questionings as something separate from common life. They perceive that they must bear, as they can, to see the deepest foundations of truth laid open and tested by impetuous inquirers; bear, as they can, to acknowledge once and again that formulas which, in earlier times, seemed to declare the Gospel adequately, no longer cover the facts of the world as they have been revealed to us in these later days.

And others have a more grievous trial still. As their view of the world is widened; as they come to understand better the capacities of humanity and the claims of Christ; as they are driven to compare the promises of the kingdom of God with the present fruits of its sway; as they feel that they cannot separate themselves from the race of which they are heirs; as they look upon the light, still after eighteen centuries struggling (as it appears) against eclipse, their heart may well sink within them. We cannot wonder if such are tempted to ask with those of old times, *Where is the promise of His coming?* or to listen with little more than the sad protest of a lonely trust to the bold assertions of those who say that the Faith has exhausted its power in dealing with the facts of an earlier and simpler civilization.

There is not, I believe, one who reads these words—not one who looks with calm, open eyes upon the spectacle of the world and the nearer vision of his own nature—who has not been stirred by the anxious thoughts which I have indicated, and asked how they shall be met, met not by a strong effort of overmastering will, but with that quiet confidence which is able to welcome every lesson of the discipline of God. And what then shall we say? How shall we escape the double danger which besets us, of hastily surrendering every position which is boldly challenged, or of rigidly refusing to consider arguments which tend to modify traditional opinion?

I do not doubt one moment, as to my answer. I bid those who are tempted to accept their trials with the frankest trust, as the conditions through which they will be brought to know God better. I have been forced by the peculiar circumstances of my work to regard from many sides the difficulties which beset our historic Faith. If I know by experience their significance and their gravity; if I readily allow that on many points I wish for fuller light; then I claim to be heard, when I say without reserve that I have found each region of anxious trial fruitful in blessing: that I have found my devout reverence for every word of the Bible quickened and deepened, when I have acknowledged that it demands the exercise of every faculty with which I have been endowed, and, that as it touches the life of man at every point, it welcomes, for its fuller understanding, the help which comes from every gain of human knowledge; that I have found my absolute trust in the Gospel of the Word Incarnate confirmed with living power, when I have seen with growing clearness that no phrases of the schools can adequately express its substance, or do more than help men provisionally to realise some part of its relation to thought and action; when I have learnt through the researches of students in

other fields to extend the famous words of the Roman dramatist, and say "*Christianus sum : nihil in rerum natura a me alienum puto*"; that I have found, even in the slow and fitful progress of the Church, which still does move forward, a spring of hope, when I turn, as I must turn from time to time, to take count of the unutterable evils of great cities, and great nations, and whole continents, which wait for atonement and redemption in the long-suffering and wisdom of God. Yes, if, as I have endeavoured to show, our trials, the trials of a new age, correspond with those of the Hebrews, the consolation which availed for them, avails for us also. We shall find in due course, as they found, that all we are required to surrender—child-like prepossessions, venerable types of opinion, partial and impatient hopes—is given back to us in a new revelation of Christ; that He is being brought nearer to us, and shown in fresh glory, through the "fallings from us, vanishings of sense and earthly things" which we had been inclined to identify with Himself.

There is a picture with which we are all familiar, in which Christ seated in glory is represented as dispensing His gifts to the representatives of suffering humanity. From His hands the slave receives freedom and the sick health: the mourner finds rest in His sympathy, old men peace, children joy. "*Christus Consolator*" is indeed an image which touches every heart. But it is not the whole Gospel; it is not, I venture to think, the particular aspect of the Gospel which is offered by the Spirit of God to us now for our acknowledgment. Sin, suffering, sorrow, are not the ultimate facts of life. These are the work of an enemy; and the work of our God and Saviour lies deeper. The Creation stands behind the Fall, the counsel of the Father's love behind the self-assertion of man's wilfulness. And I believe that if we are to do our work we must learn to think, not only of the redemption of man, but also of

the accomplishment of the Divine purpose for all that God made. We must learn to think of that *summing up of all things in Christ*, in the phrase of St. Paul, which crowns the last aspirations of physicist and historian with a final benediction. We must dare, in other words, to look beyond Christ the Consoler to Christ the Fulfiller. *Christus Consolator*—let us thank God for the revelation which leaves no trial of man unnoticed and unsoothed—leads us to *Christus Consummator*.

This thought of “Christ the Fulfiller” is, as it seems to me, the characteristic teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The author of that marvellous book, speaking to the heart with a pathos to which the prophecy of Jeremiah offers the only parallel in the Bible, shows us in many ways how He through whom God made the world in all the rich variety of its growing life, has been appointed heir of all things; how He has fulfilled the destiny of men in spite of the inroad of sin, and borne humanity to the throne of the Father; how in the plenitude of royal majesty He appears before God for those whose nature He has taken to Himself; how in Him we have present access to a spiritual society, in which earth and heaven, men and angels, are united in a glorious fellowship; how He has given us for our daily support a covenant and a service, which transfigure the conditions of our conflict into sacraments of a higher order.

These, then, are the four thoughts which I wish to follow out in due succession. They meet our difficulties, as far as I can judge, with messages of widened hope, as they met the difficulties of the Hebrews. They enable us to realise with a personal and present conviction, that the Spirit of God is even now *taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us*; that we too are living in an age of revelation, and called to listen to a Divine voice.

And if the thoughts seem strange to any, and removed

from the familiar circle of religious reflection; if they require devout patience for their mastering; if they add an element of infinite interest to the commonest details of life, and therefore claim the tribute of complete self-surrender; let us remember that progress is still, as in the first age, the essence of our faith. We have to gather little by little the fruits of a victory in which Christ has overcome the world. The Hebrews were, as we have seen, in danger of apostasy, because they failed to go forward. And that we may be shielded from the like peril, the words which were spoken to them are spoken also to us: *let us be borne on to perfection*, not simply "let us go on," or even "let us press on," as if the advance depended on the vigour of our own effort, but "let us be borne on," "borne on" with that mighty influence which waits only for the acceptance of faith, that it may exert its sovereign sway, "borne on" by Him whose unseen arms are outstretched beneath the most weary and the weakest, "borne on" by Him who is the Way and the End of all human endeavour.

And as we are thus "borne on," as we yield ourselves, yield every gift of mind and body, of place and circumstance, yield all that we cherish most tenderly, to the service of Him in Whom we are made more than conquerors, let us not fear that we shall lose the sense of the vastness of the Divine life in our glad consciousness of its immediate power. We assuredly shall not fail in reverent gratitude to our fathers for the inheritance which they have bequeathed to us, while we acknowledge that it is our duty to improve it. We shall not disparage the past, while we accept the inspiring responsibility of using to the uttermost the opportunities of the present. We shall cling with the simplest devotion to every article of our ancient Creed, while we believe, and act as believing, that *this is eternal life, that we may know*—know, as the original word implies, with a knowledge which is extended from generation to

generation, and from day to day,—*the only true God and Jesus Christ.*

By the pursuit of this knowledge we come to acknowledge that the difficulties which press us most sorely are really the discipline through which God is teaching us: veiled promises of coming wisdom. We learn through the living lessons of our own experience that the eternal Gospel covers the facts of life, its sorrows, its needs, its joys, its wealth. Through every conflict the Truth is seen in the majesty of its growing vigour. Shakings, shakings not of the earth only but of the heaven, will come; but what then? We know this, that all that falls is taken away, *that those things which are not shaken may remain.*

BROOKE FOSS WESTCOTT.

LIGHTFOOT ON THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES.

II. GENUINENESS AND DATE OF THE EPISTLES.

i. GENUINENESS OF THE EPISTLES.

THE Epistles of Ignatius, as is well known, have come down to us in three different recensions. Mainly through the researches of Zahn,¹ it is now generally admitted that of these three recensions the shorter Greek recension (containing seven Epistles) is the earliest, and that it alone can be taken into account in the discussion regarding genuineness. Lightfoot, who was previously disposed to regard the Curetonian Epistles as the earliest, has now expressed his thorough agreement with Zahn. In two comprehensive chapters,² he has discussed the longer Greek recension and the Curetonian Epistles, and has shown that the former

¹ *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 1873.

² See vol. i. pp. 222-266; 267-314.