

HEBREWS VI. 4-6.

“ For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”

WE propose to examine the above deeply interesting and important passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with the view of endeavouring to ascertain whether the commonly received interpretation, by which it is understood to express the fate of apostates from the faith of Christ, is necessary; or whether it may be still more suitably applied to persons more numerous, more widespread, and more frequently met with. The passage, too, is one of those which demand attentive consideration in the light of its immediately practical results. Like the words of our Lord Himself, when He says of the sin against the Holy Ghost, that it cannot be forgiven either in this world or the world to come, the words of the Epistle have struck terror into many a heart, and have led not a few followers of Christ into despair rather than into renewed or increased exertion in the Christian life. It becomes, therefore, of the more consequence that we endeavour to understand them rightly, so that we may apply to the proper parties the solemn warning which they contain. In doing this it will not be possible to defend every interpretation of particular words or phrases which we shall adopt. Want of space forbids this, and many of these interpretations may be accepted or rejected without affecting the main line of argument. A different course must be pursued where the argument is touched.

1. We have to think of the actual condition of those to whom the verses before us were addressed. That condition is described in chapter v. 11, 12, and again in the present

chapter, verses 1 and 2 and 4-6. For it must be observed that these three groups of verses refer to one and the same class of persons. It will not do to say that the first two groups refer to some who are only beginning; the last group to others who have made great advances in the Christian life. The sacred writer does not, in order to warn and stimulate the first class, introduce the thought of a second class overtaken by complete apostacy from Christ. Had he done so, the force of his warning would have been in great measure lost. It was essential that the Christian experience described in chapter vi. 4-6 should be felt by those to whom he is writing to be a description of what either was now or had been their own state, and not of a state of others which they had never reached. That different points of progress are alluded to when, on the one hand, we read in chapter v. 12, 13 and chapter vi. 1 of "the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God," of "milk," of "babes," and of "the word of the beginning of Christ"; and when, on the other hand, we read in chapter vi. 4-6 of all that is involved in the clauses there heaped one upon another, cannot indeed be denied: but it is clear that both points had been, at one time or another, attained by the readers of the Epistle. The use of the word *γεγόνατε* in chapter v. 11, 12 is sufficient to prove this—not "ye are," but "ye have become." They had begun well, and for a time at least they had made progress corresponding to their beginning. At all events, whatever meaning we may attach to the successive clauses of verse 5 until we reach the end of the verse (but not including the first clause of verse 6), it is hardly possible to doubt that the state described had been that of those to whom the writer speaks. Or if, passing to the first clause of verse 6, *καὶ παραπεσόντας*, we understand it as generally understood, not as a condition into which those addressed had actually sunk, but as the condition "of those who, with a distinct

conviction of the Divine mission of Jesus, have deliberately joined His foes, unite in denouncing Him as a deceiver, rejoice in His shame, and thus 'for themselves crucify a second time the Son of God'" (Moulton, *in loc.*), may we not ask whether such a description, not applicable to themselves, could have had any powerful effect upon the readers of the words? Would they not have replied, You are dealing with others than us; we have committed no such sin? Regard either side of the description as simply supposititious, and the words of the sacred writer lose their practical application to an actually existing state of things. When, accordingly, Dr. Westcott speaks of "such men as have been *imagined*" (on ver. 6), he seems to introduce a thought foreign to the course of reasoning before us; and we must rather agree with Dr. A. B. Davidson that, "though the apostle's language is general and spoken in a historical way, it has no relevancy unless meant to be a picture of the 'Hebrews'" (*in loc.*). The supposed case is made by the latter commentator, whether rightly or wrongly we shall not now enquire, to begin with *παρρησιόβητας*. Upon the point just mentioned, then, we have to make up our minds. If all that could be said of the Hebrew Christians addressed is contained in the first and second verses of the chapter; if they had as yet had no practical experience of the spiritual power described in the fourth and fifth verses, the interpretation of the passage as a whole will be materially affected. Believing, however, that, if those whose condition is delineated in verses 1, 2 had not also passed through the spiritual experiences of which mention is made in verses 4-6, the nerve of the Apostle's argument is destroyed, we are compelled to conclude that the description given in these latter verses is applicable to the persons spoken of in the first two verses of the chapter.

When, then, we note what the actual condition of these

Hebrew Christians was, we shall at once see that no indication is given us that, after having for a time believed, they had at length completely rejected Christ. They had received Him at the first as the Messiah promised to their fathers. They had welcomed His great salvation. In repentance from dead works—that is, works apart from Christ, the only source of life; in faith towards God as revealed to them in the Son;¹ in learning to draw a broad line of distinction between the washings of the Jewish law and the great washing of Christian Baptism; between the layings on of hands with which they had been familiar, and the new laying on of hands by Apostles and divinely commissioned ministers of Christ, through which the Holy Spirit, in the manifoldness of His power was given them; in paying due heed to the teaching of the Church of which they had become members, with regard to the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment;—in all this they had laid the foundations of the Christian life, and that, too, with earnestness and sincerity of heart. They did not need to lay such foundations a second time, even if it had been possible to do so. They had started on the Christian race, and were in a condition wholly different from that of their unbelieving countrymen who denied the claims of Christ and continued to denounce Him as an impostor and blasphemer. Nay, further, they had not only thus laid the foundation of Christian living—they had both in a large degree experienced the blessings which accompanied it, and had exhibited the higher energies from which Christ in the soul

¹ The question is often asked, Why do we read of “faith towards God?” and it is supposed that we have in the words a Theistic rather than a Christian belief—a faith in God absolutely rather than with the Christian element contained in it. That is impossible. The explanation seems to be that the writer could not use the words faith in Christ, because, with the view of Christ now in his mind, it was precisely there that the Hebrew Christians had failed. In a certain sense they did believe in Christ and in God in Him; but they had not risen to what alone constituted faith in its highest and most proper sense—faith in the exalted and heavenly Redeemer.

could not be separated. As we learn from the fourth verse of the chapter, they had been "enlightened"; had been brought into the state of those from whose hearts the natural darkness of man had been dispelled, that the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ might shine into them. Thus illuminated by Him who is the Light of the world, they had also tasted of the heavenly gift of a redemption which came from heaven, not from earth; which in every one of its characteristics belonged to the sphere of heaven, supplying heavenly motives, clothing the partakers of it with a heavenly character, and animating them with a heavenly hope. All that it bestowed on man was part of a higher and better world than the present, and had been freely given them of God. More still than this; they had been made partakers of Holy Spirit—of the Spirit of God in His various influences as he appealed to what they were by nature, and transformed their natural into spiritual gifts. They had tasted the good word of God, or rather had known in their own happy experience that every word spoken by Him was good, or beautiful, or noble, excellent in what it was, not less excellent in its effects. Finally, they had experienced the powers of the age to come, of that kingdom of God which had already been introduced into the world, and which was to extend itself, in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, both over all men and over all that all men were. The privileges enjoyed by them had been high; the graces exhibited by them had borne no small token of their heavenly origin; their life had manifested many elements of a Divine power.

But they had become "dull of hearing" (chap. v. 11). They had not advanced as they ought to have done in the knowledge and practice of the teaching of Christ's ministers. When, through the length of time that had passed since they were converted, they ought to have been able to be teachers of the truth, they had rather need that

one should teach them the very foundation-principles of their faith; they were babes in Christ instead of full-grown men. It is needless to say that, in this last description of their state, the sacred writer may in all probability follow the usual practice of one who is disappointed with the progress of those committed to him; and that, in order to rouse them more effectually, he may speak with some measure of greater sharpness than the strict circumstances of the case demanded. But, even though it be not so, though every reproof spoken is to be taken in its utmost literalness, it is obvious that we have before us something very different from a complete departure from the faith of Christ. All that has been said up to this point may probably be admitted. But it may be alleged that a new feature, and that feature now at length supposititious, not real, is introduced by the first two words of verse 6, *καὶ παραπεσόντας*. We have to look at this statement, and to ask whether this verb implies the apostacy, the thought of which is generally attached to it.

The blot was certainly a dark one, and its darkness is probably enhanced by the description given of it in the one emphatic word just quoted, where the tense of the verb renders it necessary to understand it of something which had already happened. "Each part of the picture," says Westcott, "is presented to us in its past completeness" (*in loc.*). Keil also holds that it expresses, in contrast with the present participles following, that change which had once for all taken place in their state (*die einmal geschehene Wendung, in loc.*); and Delitzsch, while saying in one part of his exposition, "It was over this abyss that the Hebrew Christians were now standing," as if they had not yet fallen into the abyss, yet in another part fully allows the force of the participle: "The aorist participle expresses the fatal change that has once for all come over them" (*in loc.*). As to the meaning of the participle, therefore, there can be no dubiety.

The Hebrew Christians had not only been "enlightened," had not only experienced all that is described in the clauses immediately following that word: they had also sunk into the state described by the term *παραπεσόντας*. What then does the term imply? Is it determined and complete apostacy now judicially punished by the Almighty? Is it such a fall that "the apostates can no longer lay hold of the grace of Jesus Christ, even though they wished to do so" (Delitzsch)? The verb *παραπίπτειν* is found only here in the New Testament, though frequently met with in the LXX., and especially in the prophecies of Ezekiel, where it is joined with *παράπτωμα* (*παραπεσεῖν παράπτωμα*, xiv. 13, xv. 8, xviii. 24, xx. 27), but in a sense which shows that the wilfulness of the sin alluded to is in the prophet's mind, and not the sin viewed as the mere result of carelessness and thoughtlessness (*comp. Cremer, s.v.*), yet though in these passages the Greek is the translation of the Hebrew *לַפְּטוֹ*, we have no right, with Cremer, to transfer to it the stronger sense in which that Hebrew word is used in 2 Chronicles xxvi. 18, xxix. 6, 19, etc., where the LXX. render by *ἀποστῆναι*. On the contrary, in the single passage in the prophet in which the Greek word is used by itself, the parallelism makes it clear that it rather signifies transgression in its ordinary meaning, "Thou art become guilty (*παραπέπτωκας*) in thy blood that thou hast shed, and hast defiled thyself in thine idols which thou hast made" (Ezek. xxii. 4). Allowing, therefore, that the thought of deliberateness in sinning belongs to *παραπίπτειν*, it cannot be at the same time allowed that it is always equivalent to *ἀποστῆναι* or *ἀποστασία*. Properly speaking indeed the word means falling aside or swerving from the right path; it may even be intentional turning away from truth that has been learned, entered upon, and walked by. In this respect it corresponds to *ἐκουσίως ἀμαρτάνειν* in Hebrews x. 26, but does not, taken by itself, express so strong a meaning as the other com-

pound of the simple verb in Galatians v. 4, ἐκπίπτειν. Probably the preposition παρά brings in more of the thought of personal action, while the preposition ἐκ leads us rather to the thought of state, in which case the first of these two prepositions has, of necessity, its full meaning only while the personal action is continued. Our contention therefore is that παραπεσόντας in our present passage, while describing a condition into which the Hebrew Christians had fallen, does not speak of it as absolute apostasy, as a condition of alienation from God, in which they were sealed by His just judgment, in which no change of mind could be experienced, and from which there could be no hope of return. They had forsaken the true path, they had entered on a false one, they had abandoned great principles, they had allowed inferior principles to usurp their place, they had sinfully departed from Christ as He was; but they did not wholly and consciously deny Him. Thus viewed also παραπεσόντας is not to be separated from the other aorist participles preceding, as if it meant (with the Authorised Version) "if they shall fall away." It belongs to the same persons whose progress in Christianity was set forth in the previous clauses. The Hebrew Christians reproved "were once enlightened," with all that follows, "and then fell away" (R.V.).

2. What has now been said will become clearer if we observe what it is that the sacred writer wishes those to whom he thus writes to do. Surely it cannot be thought for a moment that his only desire is to stir up in them that "remorseful anguish which comes too late and involves in it a sense of its own impotency" (Delitzsch). His whole aim is rather to urge them to advance, to make a very different progress from what they were now making, in spiritual appropriation of the truth and in practical experience of its power. At verse 10 of the previous chapter he had been suddenly stopped, when about to enter upon the leading theme of his Epistle, by the reflection that the persons to whom he

was writing would be unable to comprehend him. He had in his mind a revelation connected with what he felt to be the highest aspect of that Christianity of which he had been made a minister, but he says that it was hard to be understood, and he means by that that it was hard for him to find words in explaining it which they would be able to appreciate. He would be like a grown-up man using to children words which only grown-up men can interpret. Therefore in the first verse of the sixth chapter he calls upon them to grow, to allow themselves to be borne onward by those gracious influences of God which are ever free and open to those who will receive them, to forget the things that are behind, to press on to the things that are before, to cease to be children, to learn to be men. And this, he says, his spirits rising at the thought that they will obey him, "this will we do if God permit"; until, having recalled as he proceeds with the chapter the many tokens of faith and love which they exhibited, he, at chapter vii. does enter upon the very topic on which he fears at chapter v. 10 that he must be silent. Notwithstanding, in short, the falling away with which they were chargeable, he was "persuaded better things of them, and things that accompany salvation," although he spoke as he did (vi. 9).

Some important words in the passage still remain to be considered before we are in a position to estimate its general bearing, or to decide as to the particular class of persons who are called upon to apply it to themselves. We refer, in the first place, to the participial clause at the close of verse 6: *ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας*. The words *τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ* in this clause will fall to be considered afterwards. Meanwhile we deal only with the participles. Of the two verbs used in the clause it is unnecessary to say much. The first is a *ἀπ.* *λεγ.* in the New Testament, the simple verb being always elsewhere used for the act of crucifying. But this

very fact goes far to confirm the interpretation of the Greek fathers, to whom the meaning of the compound verb as employed in ordinary Greek must have been known, when they see in the preposition with which the simple verb is here compounded a fresh element of force. Nor does it appear that even those who would everywhere conform, as far as possible, to common Greek usage deny that the word may with perfect propriety be so interpreted here. (*See Cremer.*) We may, therefore, without further discussion adopt this view, and translate not simply "crucify," but "crucify afresh." The second verb is also a *ἀπ. λεγ.* in the New Testament, for in Matthew i. 19 the simple form appears to be the true reading, and it marks the fact that those of whom it is alleged were chargeable with the sin of holding up to scorn the Redeemer whom they had professed to honour, and that they thus weakened His influence over others. The most important point, however, in connection with both words is to ask, What is the bearing of the present participles? That they are intentionally used is at once made evident by the transition from the aorists in verses 4 and 5. With that long succession of past tenses in his mind the sacred writer would unquestionably have also here resorted to the same tense had he had any single act of apostacy in view. The presents are presents, and can point to nothing else than something happening at the moment. Westcott speaks of the "active continuous hostility to Christ" that is implied, and Rendall translates "keep crucifying." Without quoting further authorities this much must be allowed by all. Those who had fallen away had not merely sinned once; they are thought of as persisting in their sin. The same observation applies to the use of the present tense in Hebrews x. 26. This being the case, it is impossible to translate (as the Authorised Version, and the Revised Version in its text) "seeing they crucify to themselves," etc., *i.e.* "because they

crucify," etc. It is not denied that the present participle may have this meaning (Winer, p. 432, who compares Acts iv. 21, 1 Cor. xi. 29), but it is in the highest degree unlikely that such is the meaning here. One of two things would be implied by it, for neither of which is there any just foundation in the passage or in Scripture generally—either that, without regard to what might become the state of the guilty parties, God had decreed that such sin should be unpardonable (as Weiss, who, as we shall see, fails to catch the true force of the words "Son of God"), or that the sin of crucifying Christ was in itself unpardonable, while our Lord prayed upon the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The present participles therefore must be interpreted as implying a persistence in the sin of which they speak, and must be translated either "engaged as they are in crucifying," etc., or more tersely (with the margin of the Revised Version), "the while they crucify the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."

WM. MILLIGAN.

(To be concluded.)

THE FIRST STORM.

MATT. VIII. 23. MARK IV. 35. LUKE VIII. 22.

THE mischievous notion is very commonly held, and sometimes by men who are quite unaware of entertaining it, that the ideal cannot become the actual. In common life there is a wide gulf between the two; but this is the result (and perhaps the measure) of the Fall; and our recovery should close the chasm. Therefore the heart of Virgil did not despair, any more than the inspiration of Isaiah, of a perfect world being made the environment of a restored humanity. Yet the notion that the ideal is impossible is