

ST. PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

XXI. THE LAST THINGS.

ON no subject, perhaps, was St. Paul, in his way of thinking, more a man of his time than on that of eschatology. And on no subject is it more difficult for one influenced by the modern spirit to sympathise with, or even to understand, the apostle. For modern modes of thought in this connection are very diverse from those of the Jews in the apostolic age. Not only our secular but even our religious interest centres largely in the present; theirs looked to the future. We desire to possess the *summum bonum*, salvation, life as it ought to be, here and now; for them it was something that was coming in the end of the days. And if we still believe in a final consummation, it is for us indefinitely remote, a goal so distant that we can leave it practically out of account, and conceive of the present order of things as going on, if not quite for ever, at least for a long series of ages. For the Jew, for St. Paul, the end was nigh, might come any day, probably would come within his own life-time. The last time, indeed, had already come; Christ himself, even at His first coming, was an eschatological phenomenon, and His second Advent could not be separated from His first by much more than a generation.

All this now seems so strange that the subject of the eschatology of the New Testament in general, and of St. Paul in particular, is apt to appear the reverse of inviting, a theme to be passed over in respectful silence. But in connection with an attempt to expound the Pauline system of thought such procedure is inadmissible. The prominence of the eschatological point of view in the Pauline letters forbids evasion of the topic simply because it may happen to be difficult or distasteful. For eschatology

in these letters does not mean merely the discussion of some curious, obscure, and more or less unimportant questions respecting the end of this world and the incoming of the next. It covers the whole ground of Christian hope. Salvation itself is eschatologically conceived. We had occasion to observe this fact in connection with the earliest of the Pauline Epistles, in which Christians are described as waiting for Christ from heaven;¹ but the remark applies more or less to all the Epistles.²

Those who wait for a good greatly desired are naturally impatient of delay. Hence the second Advent, in the apostolic age, was expected very soon. The Apostle Paul expected it in his lifetime. To us now, this may appear surprising, not so much on account of the complete ignorance as to the future course of things the expectation implied, as by reason of the indifference it seems to show to the working out of the end for which Jesus Christ came into the world. How, we are inclined to ask, could a man who, like St. Paul, regarded the gospel as good news for the whole world, desire the speedy termination of the present order of things? Why not rather long and pray for ample time wherein to carry on missionary operations? In cherishing a contrary wish was he not preferring personal interests to the great public interest of the Kingdom of God? Surely it was desirable that all men should hear the good tidings! That end was not accomplished by preaching the gospel in a few of the principal centres of population in Asia and Europe. True, the faith might spread from town to country, and the evangelization of Corinth might be regarded as in germ the christianization of Greece. But that meant a process of gradual growth demanding time. And if time was not to be allowed for that process, was it really worth while contending so

¹ *Thess.* i. 10.

² *Vide* on this Kabisch, *Die Eschatologie des Paulus*, pp. 12-70.

zealously for the cause of Gentile Christianity? Why not let the Judaists have their way if the end was to be so soon? If the programme: a gospel of grace unfettered by legalism for the whole human race, was worth fighting for, surely its champion ought in consistency to wish for time to work it thoroughly out! The Jewish day of grace had lasted for millenniums; was the pittance of a single generation all that was to be thrown to Gentile dogs? To us it certainly seems as if the bias of St. Paul, as the advocate of Christian universalism, ought to have been decidedly in favour of a lengthened Christian era and an indefinitely delayed *παρουσία*; unless by the latter he meant Christ coming not to judge the world, but to resume the gracious work He had carried on in Palestine, adopting the larger world of heathenism as His sphere, and to quicken by His presence the energies of His servants, so that the process of converting the nations might go on at a tenfold speed.

A trace of the conception of a protracted Christian era may be discovered in the words of *Ephesians* iii. 21: "To Him be glory in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, unto all the generations of the age of the ages." But for critics this fact might simply be an additional argument against the authenticity of the Epistle. Turning to the Epistles more certainly Pauline, we find in two of them indications of a change of view to some extent in reference to the second coming. In *Philippians* the apostle represents himself as in a strait between two alternatives: one being to live on in this present world in spite of all discomfort for the benefit of fellow-Christians, the other to die (*ἀναλῦσαι*) and to be with Christ.¹ We see here the apostle's generous heart leaning to the side of postponement of the end. But the event to be postponed is not the second coming of Christ, but his own departure from this life. And the change in his mind does not consist in thinking that the

¹ *Phil.* i. 23.

Advent will not happen so soon as he had once expected, but rather in thinking that death will overtake himself before the great event arrives. He had hoped that Jesus would come during his lifetime. He cherishes that hope no longer, because the prospect before him is that his life will be cut short by an unfavourable judicial sentence. In *2 Corinthians* v. the same mood prevails, possibly for a different reason. "We know," writes the apostle, "that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."¹ This is in a different key from those words in the first Epistle to the same church: "Behold I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."² In the earlier Epistle, written not long before, the apostle seems to hope to be alive when the Lord comes; in the later he writes like a man who expects to die, and who comforts himself by thoughts of the felicity awaiting him beyond the grave. Whence this altered mood within so brief an interval? It may be due to failure of the physical powers through sickness and hard conditions of existence, premonitory of dissolution at no distant date. The preceding chapter is full of hints at such a breaking down. The phrases "earthen vessels" (iv. 7), "the outward man wasting" (iv. 16), "the lightness of our present affliction" (iv. 17), are significant, implying bodily affliction by no means light, but *made* light by the buoyant spirit of the writer, and by the hope of the glory which awaits him when life's tragic drama is ended.

This change in the apostle's personal expectation was likely to have one consequence. It might lead him to reflect more than he had previously done on the state of the dead intermediate between the hour of death and the resurrection. As long as the second Advent was expected within his lifetime the intermediate state would not be a

¹ *2 Cor.* v. 1.

² *1 Cor.* xv. 51.

pressing question for him, and as far as appears he does not seem to have thought much about it. The phrase he uses in 1 *Thessalonians* to denote the dead is "those who sleep,"¹ a vague expression conveying no definite idea, or suggesting an idea analogous to that entertained by the ancient Hebrews, according to which the life of the departed was a shadowy, unreal thing compared with the life of those living on earth. In 2 *Corinthians* this vague phrase is replaced by much more definite language. The apostle expects at death to exchange the frail tabernacle of his mortal body for a permanent dwelling-place in heaven, and by this house from heaven he seems to mean a body not liable to corruption. It is to be put on as a garment (*ἐπενδύσασθαι*) fitting close to the soul. The word "naked" (*γυμνοὶ*) in *v.* 3 points in the same direction. The nakedness shrunk from is that of a disembodied spirit. The apostle does not wish to enter the world beyond as a bodiless ghost,—that seems to his imagination a cold, cheerless prospect—he simply desires to exchange the body that is mortal for a body that is endowed with the power of an endless life.

If this be the apostle's meaning, the question arises: how is this idea of a body in heaven to be put on at death to be reconciled with the doctrine of the resurrection? To what end a resurrection body if there is a body awaiting the deceased to be put on immediately after the corruptible one is put off? Or if the resurrection is to be held fast, is this body which the soul puts on as a new garment at death to be viewed as a temporary body, not an *οἰκητήριον*, or house, after all, but a tabernacle also, like the mortal body, only perchance of finer mould? This curious notion of a temporary body to be worn in the intermediate state has actually been resorted to by some interpreters, as a hy-

¹ 1 *Thess.* iv 13, 14.

pothesis wherewith to reconcile St. Paul's various statements about the future life. But it is a very questionable way of getting out of a difficulty. It is better to hold that the apostle had no clear light on the subject of the intermediate state, no dogma to teach, but was simply groping his way like the rest of us, and that what we are to find in *2 Corinthians* v. is not the expression of a definite opinion, far less the revelation of a truth to be received as an item in the creed as to the life beyond, but the utterance of a wish or hope. One cannot but note the contrast between the confident language of the first two verses and the hesitating tone of the next two. "We know," says the apostle in v. 1, "if being clothed we shall not be found naked"; "we wish not to be unclothed, but clothed upon," are the phrases he employs in vv. 3 and 4. It would seem as if in the first sentence of the chapter the writer's mind contemplated the future state as a whole without distinction between the pre-resurrection and the post-resurrection states, and that then the intermediate state occurring to his mind led to a change of tone.

Passing from this obscure topic to the more important subject of the resurrection, several grave questions present themselves for consideration, such as these: "Whom does the resurrection concern? What is the nature of the resurrection life, and of the resurrection body; and what the relation between the second Advent, the resurrection, and the final consummation or the end?"

1. As to the first of these questions, we are accustomed to take for granted that in the New Testament generally, and in the Epistles of St. Paul in particular, the resurrection of course concerns all men. To one whose mind is preoccupied with the belief in a general resurrection, both of the just and of the unjust, of believers and unbelievers alike, it seems easy to find traces of the doctrine in *1 Corinthians* xv. The words "as in Adam all die, even so in

Christ shall all be made alive,"¹ seem to express it plainly ; and the "end" spoken of in v. 24 is naturally taken to mean the end of the resurrection process, accomplished in three stages : Christ the firstfruits ; then those who belong to Christ rising at His second coming ; then, finally, after an interval, the resurrection of all the rest of the dead. But an imposing array of interpreters dispute this view of the apostle's meaning, restricting the "all" who are to be made alive in Christ to those who before their death were in living fellowship with Him, and seeing in the "end" not a reference to the concluding stage of the resurrection, but rather to the final stage of Christ's mediatorial work when He shall deliver up His Kingdom to the Father. It is conceivable of course that the apostle might have nothing to say on the subject of the general resurrection in a particular passage, while yet believing in it and even teaching it in other parts of his writings. But there are those who would have us believe that St. Paul knew nothing of a general resurrection, or of a life beyond for the ungodly and the unbelieving, and that his programme for the future was : life perpetual for all who believe in Jesus, for all the rest of mankind total extinction of being after death. It is even contended that the precise object of the Christian hope, according to St. Paul, was continuance of life, in the literal, physical sense, after death, and the privilege of the Christian, as compared with other men, that in his case this hope will be realised.²

To those accustomed to other ways of thinking these views are startling and disconcerting ; and apart altogether from the discomfort connected with the unsettling of preconceived opinions, it is disappointing to meet with so much diversity of view as to the interpretation of texts whose meaning had previously appeared so plain. But it is idle to

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 22.

² So Kabisch, in *Eschatologie des Paulus*.

indulge in querulous reflections. The wise course is to adjust ourselves to the situation, and to recognise once for all that the eschatological teaching of St. Paul is neither so simple nor so plain as we had imagined, and that the whole subject demands careful reconsideration. The result of a new study may, not improbably, be to convict such a discussion as that of Kabisch of the "vigour and rigour" characteristic of so many German theories. But it were well that that should appear as the conclusion of a serious enquiry rather than be assumed at the outset as an excuse for neglecting further examination. Meantime it is satisfactory to find that there is a large measure of agreement in regard to one fundamental point, viz., that St. Paul did earnestly believe and teach a resurrection of *Christians* to eternal life.

2. And yet there are those who seem not disinclined to call even this in question, or at least to rob the fact of abiding value for the Christian faith, by insisting on the *ethical* aspect of resurrection as opposed to the eschatological. The basis of this view is the manner in which St. Paul seems in various places to blend together the two aspects: the resurrection now experienced in the new life in the spirit, with the resurrection of the dead. Two instances of this may be cited. In *Romans* viii. 11 we read: "If the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you"; and in 2 *Corinthians* v. 5: "Now He that hath wrought us for this very thing is God (the thing referred to is investiture with the heavenly body), who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." In these texts the apostle seems to found on the spiritual resurrection of the soul to a new divine life an argument in favour of a future physical resurrection to eternal life. It is a line of argument with which we are perfectly familiar, and of which all Christians feel the force in proportion to the vigour of their own

spiritual experience. But writers such as Pfleiderer and the late Mr. Matthew Arnold, acting as the mouthpieces of the modern spirit, find in these and kindred texts much more than this, even a new ethical way of thinking really incompatible with the old Jewish eschatological theory of the universe; co-existing indeed in St. Paul's mind with the latter, but destined eventually to supersede it. "The three essential terms of Pauline theology are not," writes Mr. Arnold in *Paul and Protestantism*, "calling, justification, sanctification. They are rather dying with Christ, resurrection from the dead, growing into Christ. The order in which these terms are placed indicates the true Pauline sense of the expression resurrection from the dead. In Paul's ideas the expression has no essential connection with physical death. It is true popular theology connects it with this almost exclusively, and regards any other use of it as purely figurative and secondary. . . . But whoever has carefully followed Paul's line of thought as we have endeavoured to trace it will see that in his mature theology, as the Epistle to the Romans exhibits it, it cannot be this physical and miraculous aspect of the resurrection which holds the first place in his mind, for under this aspect the resurrection does not fit in with the ideas he is developing."¹ Mr. Arnold does not mean to deny that St. Paul held the doctrine of a physical resurrection and a future life. He admits that if the apostle had been asked at any time of his life whether he held that doctrine he would have replied with entire conviction that he did. Nevertheless he thinks that that Jewish doctrine was only an outer skin which the new ethical system of thought was sooner or later to slough off.

"Below the surface-stream, shallow and light,
Of what we say we feel,—below the stream,
As light, of what we think we feel, there flows,
With noiseless currents strong, obscure and deep,
The central stream of what we feel indeed."

¹ p. 260.

The question thus raised is a momentous one, the full drift of which it is important to understand. It is nothing less than whether the eschatological point of view in general be really compatible with the ethical. If the question be decided in the negative, then all the eschatological ideas, resurrection, judgment, a future life with its alternative states, must be given up, or resolved into ethical equivalents; the resurrection into the new life in the spirit, the final judgment into the incessant action of the moral order of the world, and the eternal beyond into the eternal here which underlies the phenomenal life of men. On this theory the eschatological categories will have to be regarded as products of the religious imagination, just as the blue sky is the illusory product of our visual organs. The judgment will become the perpetually active moral order of the world projected forward in time by conscience, as the blue sky is the environing atmosphere projected by the eye to an indefinite distance in space. Heaven and Hell will be projections into the future of the rewards and punishments inseparable from right and wrong action falling within present human experience, and brought about by the natural operation of the law of cause and effect.

To these modern conceptions we may concede cogency so far as to admit that eschatological ideas require to undergo a process of purification in order to bring them into harmony with ethical views of human life and destiny. But it is an unfounded assertion that eschatological ideas in any form are incompatible with the ethical view point, to such an extent, *e.g.*, as to involve the denial of the future life altogether, which is by far the most important interest at stake. The hope of a life beyond in which the ideal to which the good devoted their lives here shall be realised seems to be a natural element in the creed of all theists. Nor does it appear incapable of being reconciled with the doctrine of evolution in the moral world, as even Bishop

Butler seems to have dimly perceived, for he endeavours to remove from the future state the aspect of arbitrariness, and to make it the natural outcome of the present life in accordance with the analogy of seed-time and harvest.

How time brings its revenges! Some years ago Mr. Arnold told us that St. Paul, without being aware of it, substituted an ethical for a physical resurrection, and an eternal life in the spirit here for an everlasting life hereafter. Now a German theologian tells us that St. Paul knows nothing of a figurative "life" ethical in quality, but only of a physical life; that prolongation of physical life after death is the object of his hope, that even the Spirit, in his system of thought, is physical and finely material, and communicates itself by physical means, by baptism, and even by generation through a Christian parent, that the germ of the resurrection body is a spiritual yet physical body, existing now within the dead carcase of the old body of sin, and that the essence of the resurrection will consist in the manifestation of this spiritual body by the sloughing off of its gross carnal envelope.¹ Such are the two extremes. Surely the truth lies somewhere between!

3. In comparison with the reality of the life hereafter the nature of the resurrection body and of its relation to the mortal body laid in the grave is a topic of subordinate interest, but a few sentences on it may not be out of place. The apostle broadly states that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.² From this it may be inferred that the resurrection body must differ greatly in nature from that worn in this present life. If we inquire further as to the positive character of that body, the only suggestion we can gather from the apostle's statements is that it will be composed of a light-like substance, so that it will shine like the heavenly bodies: though it is not perfectly certain that the

¹ Kabisch, *Eschatologie des Paulus*, zweiter Abschnitt, §§ 1 and 5.

² 1 Cor. xv. 50.

allusion to the latter in 1 *Corinthians* xv. 40, 41 is meant to serve any purpose beyond illustrating the difference between the natural body and the spiritual body. Yet it would not be surprising if St. Paul conceived of the spiritual body as a luminous substance, for it seems to have been a current opinion among the Jews that in the life to come the righteous would have shining bodies.¹ Too much stress, however, must not be laid on this, especially in view of the fact that more than one way of thinking seems to have prevailed in Rabbinical circles. According to Weber, there was a spiritualistic conception of life in the future world, as a life lacking all the characteristics of the present life: eating, drinking, generation, trade, and consisting in an eternal enjoyment of the glory of the Shekinah; and there was also a materialistic conception according to which eating and generation would continue, only the food would be exceptionally good, and the children all righteous.² It is difficult to decide how far such statements are to be taken seriously. The Jewish mind was realistic and sensuous in its way of thinking. Spirit was conceived of grossly and invested with some of the properties of matter. It was a kind of thin matter, an ether endowed with the properties of permanence, luminousness, and power to penetrate all things. So at least enquirers into these obscure regions tell us.³ If these views are to be taken literally, and if St. Paul is to be regarded as sharing them, the word "body" in the expression "a spiritual body" is superfluous. A spirit is a body, and a spiritual body is just a spirit.

What connection can a body of this kind have with the body which dies and is buried in the tomb? None at all, replies such a writer as Holsten, who goes the length of maintaining that even in the case of Christ, the post-resurrec-

¹ *Vide* Langen, *Judenthum in Palästina zur Zeit Christi*, p. 507.

² Weber, *Die Lehren des Talmud*, p. 383.

³ *Vide* Kabisch, *Die Eschatologie des Paulus*, pp. 188-228.

tion body stood in no relation to the crucified body, in the view of St. Paul; in other words, that the apostle did not think of the crucified body as rising again. This hypothesis hangs together with the dualistic interpretation of the Pauline doctrine of the flesh, according to which the flesh is radically sinful, Christ's flesh not excepted, and the atonement really consisted in the judicial punishment of sin in Christ's own body, which, as a criminal, was not worthy of the honour of being raised again. On this view the body in which Christ appeared to St. Paul on the way to Damascus must have been an entirely new creation. The construction thus put on the resurrection of Jesus, and on the resurrection generally, is not the one which an unbiassed consideration of the texts naturally suggests. The very words *ἐγείρω* and *ἀνάστασις* imply the contrary view, suggesting the idea of the resurrection body springing out of the mortal body as grain springs out of the seed sown in the ground. The analogy may not be pressed too far, but it contains this point at least, that the new will be related to the old so as to insure identity of form if not of substance, as the grain on the stalk is the same in kind, though not numerically the same, or composed of the same particles, as the seed out of which it springs.

4. Our last question is, is there any trace of chiliasm in the Pauline eschatology, any recognition of a period of time intervening between the second coming and the end when Christ shall resign the kingdom? An affirmative answer may plausibly be justified by a particular mode of interpreting 1 *Corinthians* xv. 22-28. Thus: there are three stages in the resurrection process; first Christ, then Christians, then the rest of mankind. With the third final stage coincides the "end." But between the second and the third stages there is an appreciable interval. This is implied in the term *τάγμα* involving the notion of succession, and also in the words *ἀπαρχή, ἔπειτα, εἶτα*, which

it is natural to regard as indicative each of a distinct epoch. We know that the first two stages are separated by a considerable interval, and it may be inferred that the second and third are likewise conceived of as divided by a long space of time. Another consideration in favour of this view is that on the contrary hypothesis Christ's reign over His Kingdom in glory would be reduced to a vanishing point. The argument has some show of reason, but the subject is obscure, and a modest interpreter must step cautiously and timidly, as one carrying but a glimmering torchlight to show him the way. Perhaps the apostle's thoughts were as represented, perhaps not; perhaps, like the prophets, he had himself but a dim, vague, shadowy conception of the future, very different from the future that is to be. The chapter on the resurrection in 1 *Corinthians* xv. is a sublime one, full of great thoughts and inspiring hopes. But beyond one or two leading statements, such as that affirming the certainty of the future life, I should be slow to summarize its contents in definite theological formulæ. I had rather read this chapter as a Christian man seeking religious edification and moral inspiration than as a theologian in quest of positive dogmatic teaching. The spirit of the whole is life-giving, but the letter is *δυσερμήνευτον*, and while some interpreters feel able on the basis of it to tell us all about the millennium, and others find therein a universal *ἀποκατάστασις*, when God shall be all in and to every human spirit, I prefer to confess my ignorance and remain silent.

A. B. BRUCE.

A CENTURY OF GERMAN THEOLOGY.

IF Ritschl can be said to have had a rival during the last dozen years, the man who deserved the title was probably Frank of Erlangen. His recent death is mourned by his disciples as premature; but his work was wonderfully