

THE LETTER OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH
TO ST. PAUL.

THE two Epistles to the Corinthians are part of a correspondence carried on between the Apostle Paul and the Saints in Achaia, which extended over some considerable time, covering a wide range of topics and a variety of complicated and rapidly changing circumstances. The first (canonical) Epistle replies to a recent letter from Corinth (see vii. 1, etc.), which itself was based upon an earlier despatch to the Church from Paul (v. 9 ff.), and probably bore reference besides to a visit of inspection, brief and painful, that the Apostle had paid to Corinth still earlier but yet at a recent date (see 2 Cor. ii. 1, xii. 21-xiii. 2).¹ As Prof. Lock has shown in this journal (V. vi. pp. 65-73), and as other scholars have indicated at different points, 1 Corinthians betrays manifold allusions, besides its explicit references, to the lost Church letter. The more closely the Epistle is read in the light of this suggestion, the more evident it becomes that it is, in its construction and main tenor, a *rejoinder*. We are listening, as we read it, to one party of two engaged in a continued dialogue; and we can only guess from what we hear at what the other party, out of earshot, must have said. This paper is a guess at the missing half of the conversation; it is an attempt to reproduce, from the historical circumstances and from the hints of 1 Corinthians, the Epistle of the Cor-

¹ For this explanation of Paul's *τρίτον τοῦτο ἐρχομαι* (2 Cor. xiii. 1), see chap. ii. in the Introduction to the Commentary on 1 Corinthians contained in vol. ii. of the *Expositor's Greek Testament*.

inthians to Paul which lay before the Apostle as he wrote or dictated his reply.

As to the general characteristics of the Epistle from Corinth, we gather that it was somewhat prolix and studied in style, coming from a Church that rated itself high in "word and knowledge"; that it was self-complacent and high-sounding, not to say pretentious, in its religious tone, and made strong declarations of fidelity; that it glossed over the quarrels of the church factions and ignored the criminal case brought into view in 1 Corinthians v., for of both these matters St. Paul hears from other sources; while it put forward a series of debatable questions for the Apostle's solution, which indicated great activity of mind and an earnest desire to have the relations of the Church with heathen society put upon a settled and tolerable footing.

This effort of reconstruction, however far it falls short of verisimilitude, may perhaps be justified as throwing into dramatic form the view of the situation, and of the relations between the Corinthian Church and its founder, which we gather from the New Testament documents. (Reference is made in brackets to the passages of 1 Corinthians, or in some instances of 2 Corinthians, which suggest the topics and sentences of our imaginary letter.)

"The assembly of the Christians in Corinth to Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ, greeting.

"Gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus, we salute thee in love, remembering thee continually in our prayers. We acknowledge thee always in all thankfulness as the Apostle of Christ unto us, and our father in Him; for we are indeed thy work in the Lord (ix. 2). Be assured that we are mindful of the traditions received from thee and thy fellow-labourers in the Gospel, and we hold them fast (xi. 2). The gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon us through

thy ministry, continue and abound (i. 7). Our prophets and teachers are building richly upon the foundation thou hast laid (iii. 10 ff., iv. 8). Apollos, above all, rendered us welcome and fruitful service after thy departure, confirming our faith by reason and Scripture and confuting the adversaries of the Gospel (see Acts xviii. 27 f.). We glorify God on his behalf, for the wisdom and persuasive speech and abounding zeal with which he laboured for our good. Haply at thy request (for we understand he tarries with thee at Ephesus), he will come again to Corinth and resume his work amongst us (xvi. 12); this we earnestly desire and entreat. Many of the brethren, thou wilt rejoice to hear, are eminently growing in knowledge and in utterance (i. 5). There is no lack of fit speakers in the assemblies; each has his psalm or tongue or prophecy; our difficulty is to find a hearing for all whom the Spirit prompts (xiv. 26 ff.). The whole Church is looking for the revealing of Jesus Christ, and for the coming of the kingdom of God unto which we were called (i. 7 ff.).

“ We received thy letter of admonition (v. 9) with heedfulness and godly fear. Seeking to obey thy behests as the command of Christ, we desire to know more clearly their intent, concerning which there is debate amongst us. Thou biddest us separate ourselves from the unclean and have no fellowship with those who live in the sins of the Gentiles. Are we to take this injunction in its unrestricted sense? Our city, as thou well knowest, teems with impurities. If we may not in any wise mix with transgressors, we must depart from Corinth—nay, we doubt whether in the whole world we should find any spot where men dwell that is clear of defilement. We stand in doubt therefore, and beg thee to write once more (unless thou wilt thyself come forthwith), giving us instructions that none can mistake; for it is our wish to be ruled by thee and to please thee in whatsoever is possible.

“ It grieves us to learn of the lasting grief that was caused thee on thy visit to our Church (2 Cor. ii. 1, xii. 21). We have not forgotten, and we have impressed upon the offenders, the dreadful warning thou didst then pronounce (2 Cor. xiii. 2). We trust they will come to a full amendment, that so their backslidings may be healed, and that when thou returnest thou mayest have joy over all of us thy children in Corinth (2 Cor. ii. 2, 3). We count greatly upon thy promise to come hither first from Ephesus, on the way to Macedonia, and then to make thy home with us for a while after thy mission there. Our joy will thus be doubled (2 Cor. i. 15), and thine also, as we trust, through thy repeated presence in our midst.

“ We have several questions, greatly discussed amongst us, which we here submit to thy wisdom, knowing that thou hast the mind of Christ ” (1 Cor. ii. 16).

(a) “ Is the single or the married state worthiest and fittest for a Christian,—especially for ourselves, situated as we are at Corinth ? (vii.). It is gravely doubted whether a fixed condition of celibacy is right in itself and according to God’s will for man. Thou knowest, moreover, the perils and suspicions to which the unwedded are here exposed. About our maiden daughters, who are asked in marriage, some of us know not how to decide for the best. There are not a few of the married, both men and women, whose spouses are still unbelieving. To such the yoke of wedlock is often grievous; the Christian partner is much hindered in the service of the Lord, and exposed to bitter trials. Sometimes a separation is wished for by the unbeliever; often it is refused. Several of our members judge that earlier marriage ties are dissolved by union with Christ, and thou hast bidden us ‘not to be unequally yoked’; others hold marriage to be indissoluble by the law of the Creator. What sayest thou concerning this?

(b) “ We are perplexed about the eating of *idolothyta*

(viii., etc.). We all have knowledge in this matter, understanding, since we have turned to the living God, that the idol is a vain thing and cannot pollute the creatures offered to it. For us, as thou hast taught us to say, 'There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things and we for Him; one Lord, even Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through Him.' And in this knowledge some of the brethren are so strong that they dare even to sit and eat in the house of the idol. To others this kind of freedom is a sore offence and scandal. They shudder at the thought of touching that which has been in contact with the idol; if they go to market, they inquire anxiously whether the meat on sale is consecrated flesh; if they dine in the house of an unbeliever, they are in embarrassment and fear (x. 25 ff.). Thus, thou seest, we are divided in opinion, and many times annoyed and vexed with each other. We remember thee saying, in regard to the like matters, 'All things are within my right.' From this it would seem that those are justified who use an unshackled liberty; and most of us incline to this way of thinking. But again we ask, What is thy judgment touching this thing, and how wouldst thou have us act?

(c) "Once more, we wish to inquire about *the workings of the Spirit*. We need some test to distinguish His genuine inspirations. Strange cries are raised, even in our assemblies as well as in other companies, that sound as divine and above nature and that confound our understanding (xii. 1-3). How may we discriminate these voices? Of the unquestioned gifts of the Spirit of Christ we have great variety and wealth. We need some means of regulating their use, so as to turn them to the best account. Some of us think more highly of this charism, some of that; and those who admire one gift are apt to disparage another. So there comes to be rivalry, and even wrangling and clamour in the assembly; and the exuberance of our spiritual

powers, through the malice of Satan, is turned to confusion. The gift of Tongues, we know, is an eminent faculty, bestowed on the Church from the beginning; thou dost thyself excel in its exercise (xiv. 18). Should it therefore be practised in the meetings of the Church without restraint, and take precedence of other charisms, even of prophecy? Some of us venture to question its utility, and would forbid altogether its public display (xiv. 39); moreover, strangers who happen to witness the Glossolalia are unfavourably affected thereby, and give it out that we are demented rather than inspired of God (xiv. 23). We are much at a loss, and need the light of thy counsel concerning this also.

(d) "We received with all good will thy appeal touching *the collection* for the poor of the saints in Jerusalem (xvi.); and Titus, when he came on this behalf, found us prepared to help according to our power (2 Cor. viii. 6). But the business halts through our uncertainty as to the best mode of gathering the money. Differing plans are proposed, and we are waiting for thy further advice, being wishful to do all things according to thy mind, and to collect a sum such as it will not shame thee to present (1 Cor. xvi. 4) as our contribution to this sacred necessity.

"With this letter our beloved brethren, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, dear also to thyself, will arrive at Ephesus, and will impart concerning our welfare, and concerning our love to thee and longing for thy presence, more than we can here set down. We have charged them with many messages of affection from the brethren, sent both to thee and to Apollos our brother, and to our beloved Aquila and Prisca. Perhaps thou wilt send us a reply to our questions through these our deputies, whose return we look for shortly, when they have been refreshed by thy company—bringing to thee also, as we fain hope, some refreshment of spirit on our part (xvi. 17 f.).

"We salute in Christ Jesus the brethren in Ephesus,

and in all the Churches of Asia. We rejoice greatly to hear that the word of the Lord is glorified amongst them, and to know that thou art reaping much fruit of thy continued labour in that region.

“Mayest thou, by the mercy of God, be strengthened in body, and be comforted in heart in regard both to us and to all thy disciples in the Lord. Our love be with thee in Christ Jesus. Farewell!”

GEO. G. FINDLAY.

CHRIST'S THREE JUDGES.

I. CAIAPHAS.

(MATTHEW XXVI. 57-66.)

ON Caiaphas, first, was laid the burden of judging Jesus of Nazareth; and the temper in which he faced the task is worthy of our study, for it shows in a great historic instance the difficulty a man must find in denying to Christ His place. Caiaphas, of course, had had his mind made up for long; rumour had discovered this man to him as an enemy of order and religion, and he was not sorry when, at length, the chance was offered of giving effect to that opinion. But the judgment seat is bound by self-respect; and when the men were face to face, Caiaphas could not speak simply from rumour or his own prejudice—he must, as a judge, find reason for thinking the worst of his prisoner. The interest of the situation arises at that point: he wished to justify his own prejudice, and to justify himself in getting rid of Jesus as a disturber. But the task was harder than he thought, and, at last, we see his temper, fretted by the unlooked-for hindrances, rush up in sudden conflagration as he cries, “I adjure Thee by the living God that Thou tell us if Thou be the Christ, the Son of God.” The question did not aim at information, for no assurance on Christ's