

ST. PAUL.

THE fascination of St. Paul's personality lies in his humanity. He is the most human of all the Apostles.

That he was in many ways the ablest and the greatest, the most creative mind, the boldest originator, the most skilful organizer and administrator, the most impressive and outstanding personage in the whole Apostolic circle—that will be admitted by most readers. That he was the most clever and the most brilliant of the Apostles every one must feel. But all that might be granted, without bringing us any nearer an explanation of the undying interest and charm he possesses for us. Those are not the qualities which make a man really interesting, which catch the heart of the world, as Paul has caught it. The clever man is, on the whole, rather repellent to the mass of mankind, though he will find his own circle of friends who can at once admire his ability and penetrate to the real nature underneath his cleverness. But St. Paul lies closer to the heart of the great mass of readers than any other of the Apostles; and the reason is that he impresses us as the most purely and intensely human of them all.

The career of St. Paul can easily and truthfully be described as a series of brilliant achievements and marvellous successes. But it is not through his achievements and his success that he has seized and possessed the hearts of men. It is because behind the achievements we can see the trials and the failures. To others his life might seem like the triumphal progress of a conqueror. But we can look

through his eyes and watch the toil and the stress; we can see him always on the point of failure, always guarding against the ceaseless dangers that threatened him, "*pressed on every side, yet not straitened, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed.*"

We follow his fortunes with the keenest interest, because in everything we feel that he was so thoroughly representative of the mere man, and his career was so full of situations and difficulties such as the ordinary man has to face in the world. The life of St. Paul, as it stands before us in his letters and his biography, was one constant struggle against difficult circumstances. He was always suspected, always misunderstood, by some; and he always found a friend to stand by him in his difficulties, to believe in him in spite of appearances, and to be his champion and guarantee. That is the daily lot of the men who work, of all who try to do anything good or great, of all men who strive towards an ideal of any kind, in patriotism, or in loyalty, or in honour, or in religion. They must be prepared to face misconception, suspicion, blame greater than they deserve; and they may hope to find in every case a friend such as Paul always found.

The description of his first entry into the Christian world of Jerusalem is typical. "*When he was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way. . . . And he was with them coming and going out of Jerusalem. . . . And he disputed against the Hellenist Jews; but they went about to slay him.*" All the rest of his career is similar to that. His past life, with its passions, its errors, its attempts and its failures, always impeded him in every new enterprise. No one could "*deliver him from this body of death.*"

We see, too, that—as is the case with all men—his difficulties and his failures almost always were the result of his own nature. It was his own faults and errors that caused the misconceptions and suspicions, by which he was continually pressed and perplexed. In the intense enthusiasm of his nature he often failed to recognize the proper limitations, and erred in the way of overstraining the present emotion. He was carried too far in act and in word; and at a later moment he became conscious that he had been over enthusiastic, and had not been sufficiently mindful of all the complex conditions.

When we say that he failed to recognize the proper limitations, we feel that the phrase is unsatisfactory; and we must try to express what we aim at in another way. Let us compare him with the greatest of his contemporaries, the Apostles John and Peter. When we are in contact with them, at least in their later life, we are impressed always with the completeness of statement and the perfectness of vision that are implied in everything recorded of them. They had lived in company with Him who, in a sense far truer than Matthew Arnold meant,—

saw life steadily and saw it whole;

and they had caught from Him something of that faculty of calm, steady, completeness of vision.

In all the words of Jesus the reader is impressed with that completeness of statement: the truth stands there whole and entire. You never require to look at the language from some special point of view, to make allowances for the circumstances and the intention of the speaker, before you recognize the truth of the words. You do not feel that there are other justifiable points of view which are left out of account, and that from those points the words of Jesus must be considered inadequate. The word is never one-sided.

Take any one of the sayings, such as, "*Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's*": or "*Wisdom is justified of all her children*": or "*The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.*" Each of them is a complete and rounded whole, perfect from every point of view. There is nothing more to be said. The true commentator may expound laboriously from various points of view the truth of those matchless expressions, and thereby render a real service to the reader. You must look at each saying first in one light, then in another, analyze it, explain it, and you will better appreciate all that lies in it; but you cannot add to it, or make it more complete than it is. It stands there once for all. It is the final statement.

Something of that perfection of vision and of expression—that calm serene insight into the essential truth beneath the flow and change of things—that power of contemplating the world upon the plane of eternity—had passed into the mind of John and of Peter. Their acts and their words are alike on that plane of perfectness and finality. Their words were so, because their life and minds were so. "*We cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard.*" They had looked on the Truth: they had lived with the Truth. Never again could they live on the plane of ordinary humanity or see things exactly as men see them, for they had gazed upon eternity, and the glory was always in their eyes.

Something too of the same steadiness and completeness of vision belongs, and must belong, to the great prophets of the world. They were prophets because they had come into relations with the Divine nature and had seen the Truth. They too could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard.

Let us try another illustration—a modern one, drawn from Hegel's brief essay, entitled *Who is the abstract thinker?* in which he distinguishes the analytic method of scientific and abstract reasoning from the direct contemplation of the con-

crete truth of the eternal world. The great German philosopher in a few sentences hits off the various points of view from which a murderer on the scaffold is regarded by different persons.¹ The sociologists trace the conditions of society and education that led him to his crime: the moralists or the priests make him the text of a sermon on the corruption of the class to which he belongs. They see the murderer: they have no eyes for the man as part of the eternal world, as an item in the Divine plan. Sentimental ladies, as they look on, are struck with his handsome and interesting figure: they see another side, and there they are content: if they do not perhaps carry their words of admiration into action by throwing flowers to him on the scaffold. But one person, a poor old woman in the crowd, beheld the scene as a whole, as one act in the drama of eternity: *'The severed head was laid on the scaffold,' and there was sunshine.* "*But how beautifully,*" said she, "*does God's sun of grace lighten up his head!*" *The most contemptuous word we can use in anger is, "You are not worth the sun shining on you."* *The woman saw the sun shining on the murderer's head, and knew that he was still worth something in the eye of God.* She uttered in a flash of intuition a whole concrete truth, while the learned, the educated, and the fashionable world saw only one side or another, abstract and incomplete.

Now with Paul we feel ourselves in contact with a more simply human character than when we study the great Apostles John and Peter. It is not that he never moves and thinks and speaks on the plane of eternity. He often stands, or almost stands upon it, and sees accordingly. But he does not live on it. He only strives towards it. He is the typical, the representative man, who attains in moments of higher vision and inspiration to behold the truth, to commune with

¹ *Vermischte Schriften*, ii. p. 403 (*Werke*, vol. xvii.). A fine page in the late Prof. Wallace's *Logic of Hegel* (Proleg. lxxix.) directed my attention to it in undergraduate days, and fixed it in my mind for ever.

the Divine nature. He has, too, far more of such visions than other men. They are the greatest glory of his life, in which he might reasonably take pride.

But one feels that with Paul the vision lasted no long time. It was present with him only for a moment; and then he was once more on the level of humanity.

Yet that, after all, is why Paul is so close to us. We too can sometimes attain to a momentary glimpse of Truth, when the veil seems for an instant to be withdrawn from her face;

I will go forward, sayest thou,
I shall not fail to find her now;
Look up, the fold is on her brow.

Throughout his life, we have to study Paul in this spirit. He sees like a man. He sees one side at a time. He emphasizes that—not indeed more than it deserves—but in a way that provokes misconception, because he expresses one side of the case, and leaves the audience to catch his meaning, to sympathize with his point of view, to supply for themselves the qualifications and the conditions and the reservations which are necessary in the concrete facts of actual life.

Alike in his acts and his words we notice the same tendency. When, after the agreement with the Judaic party in the Church, he went out on his second journey, he was ready, in his unhesitating and hearty acceptance of the arrangement, to do a very great deal in compliance with the Jews' natural and not unjustifiable prejudices. He even made the half Jew Timothy comply with the Jewish law. No act of his whole life is more difficult to sympathize with: none cost him more dearly. It was misunderstood by his Galatian converts¹ (as Bishop Lightfoot well explains in his

¹ This statement is quite independent of the south and north Galatian controversy. A few north-Galatian theorists, and a very few south-Galatian

commentary on the Epistle, pp. 104 f., 206 f.); and the Epistle which he afterwards addressed to them was intended to bring home to them the whole truth respecting their position in the Church. But as his act had given dangerous emphasis to one side of the case, the Epistle can restore the equilibrium and give concreteness and wholeness to the truth only by emphasizing the other side.

We on our part have to keep the two sides in mind in estimating the historical situation; and we must both take into consideration the later words when we judge the act as an indication of Paul's mind, and remember the earlier act when we estimate the meaning of certain very strong statements in the Epistle, such as "*if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing,*" or "*ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the Law.*" Those words are one-sided, and not the whole many-sided truth. They are over-strained; and it needs much sympathy, and much allowance for the unexpressed but necessary conditions, in order to read in them the Pauline gospel.

Similarly, time after time, we find in the Epistles that Paul has laid himself open to misconstruction in the minds of his converts by emphasizing one side of the case, and has to give completeness to his teaching by stating another aspect. He wrote to the Corinthians, forbidding them in too general terms to have no social relations with immoral persons; but he feels afterwards that this, taken literally, would be equivalent to an order to go out of the world and to cut themselves off absolutely from the city in which they lived, inasmuch as all pagan society lived on an immoral basis. Therefore conditions and qualifications and explanations have to be added in 1 Corinthians v. 9-13. The first

theorists, would deny it. But from one point of view or another the overwhelming majority will accept and carry out in their own way what Lightfoot has said truly in the passages quoted above.

message was not a complete and perfect truth. It was a law that needed a supplement and a restriction.

Again, the second letter to the people of Thessalonica is to a great extent an attempt to guard against a misconception of his teaching; and the misconception was evidently due to the strong emphasis which he had laid on such ideas as the coming of the Kingdom.

But that is the way of mankind. If we would do anything we must strive and struggle along the difficult path of the world, making mistakes often, over-emphasizing often the side which we see, afterwards correcting our errors, completing our deficiencies; and worn out at last and spent with the heat and dust and fatigue of the toilsome road, we may need a friendly voice to tell us that we have not worked in vain, while we are ourselves too conscious of the failures to have any sense of the actual measure of achievement. In the life of Paul we read the life of man; and thus his story never grows old and never loses its fascination.

But the human character alone, even in conjunction with his great achievements, is not sufficient to explain the fascination that St. Paul exerts on us. I should not reckon even his power of sympathizing with and understanding the nature and needs of his followers in so many different lands as furnishing the full explanation. The reason seems to lie in that combination of qualities which made him representative of human nature at its best: intensely human in his undeniable faults, he shows a real nobility and loftiness of spirit in which every man recognizes his own best self.

The part which he had to play in Christian society was a difficult one. He came into it as much junior in standing and inferior in influence to all the great men of the company. Yet he was conscious that in insight, in practical sense, in power of directing the development of their young society, he was superior to them. He saw what they did not at first recognize, the true line of development for their

cause. He carried them with him, as their *de facto* leader. He had on one occasion to rebuke for his wavering and inconsistent conduct the one who at first had been the most enterprising and directing spirit among them. Moreover, he was of higher rank among his own people, sprung from an influential family which could not be ignored even in Jerusalem, marked out from youth as a person of consequence by his education and ability and energy, taking a prominent part among the leaders of his people from the day that he entered on public life. Finally, he was in all probability older than several, perhaps even than many of the Apostles.

All these causes conspired to render the position of Paul among the Christians of Jerusalem a very delicate one. Only the most perfect courtesy and respect for the rights and feelings of others, founded on the truest self-respect, could have carried him safely through the difficulties of the situation. He dared not yield to them, or sink his own personality in respect for their well-deserved authority, for he was strong in the mandate of revelation. Yet he would forfeit our love and respect if he ever obtruded his policy and his claims on them, or failed in the respect and reverence which was due from a neophyte to those whose eyes and minds were quickened with the glory of long communion with the Saviour.

In that difficult situation the world of readers and thinkers has decided that Paul never seriously erred. He never failed in reverence to the great men, and he never failed in the courage and self-reliance needed to press his policy on their joint councils. That is why we are still under his fascination, just as much as those who beheld his face and listened to his words and thought it was an angel that spoke. He stands before us not merely as a representative of simple human nature, but also as typical of the highest and best in human nature. We never understand him rightly, un-

less we conceive his action as on the highest plane that mere humanity is capable of permanently occupying.

It must be acknowledged that this description of St. Paul's relations to the older Apostles is very different from that which is commonly given by modern scholars. In the pages of most of them we find the picture of Paul as a man actuated always by jealousy of the great Apostles, continually trying to undermine their authority and to set himself in their place, driven on by the feeling that he could prove his own position only by picking faults in and criticizing his seniors, and that he could rise in the Church only by getting them turned out of their place. They set him before us ambitious, envious, almost selfish, a carping critic of others, yet not himself always very scrupulous in his methods, the least lovable and the most unlovely character in early Christian history. This picture is most characteristic of what is wrongly called the "critical" school, but is far from being confined to it, for the most extreme example is found in a Study of St. Paul, which takes the most "orthodox" view in all matters of criticism.

The upholders of that view seek to justify it chiefly by their interpretation of the second chapter of Galatians; but they rest on what is really a misinterpretation of the plain words under the influence of a preconceived theory as to St. Paul's character. The theory came first, and produced the false interpretation first of that paragraph and thereafter of many incidents in his career.

In opposition to that view we rest firmly on the general impression of the mass of readers: it is a case in which *securus judicat orbis terrarum*, the voice of the world must be right. The error has been widely spread by the vice of modern scholarship, a vice due in no inconsiderable degree to the over-developed system of examination and competition. We must, when still young, have command of enough knowledge—or rather, enough acquaintance with

opinions—to delude examiners into the belief that we possess knowledge; and we acquire this show of knowledge rapidly by reading the opinions of others in place of studying and thinking for ourselves.

By how many modern writers is a question of supreme importance in early Christian history set aside, with the remark that modern opinion is now agreed in regard to the late date and spurious character of some document: then a long series of arguments are heaped up which have been collected from other writers, obviously without any real independent thought or genuine unbiassed and open-minded study of the document in itself and at first hand. The groundless and empty opinion that there must be something in the conclusions of so many modern scholars seems often to be the sole original idea that the writer of some large book puts into it: the rest is simply borrowed argument.

And, further, there are many books which are vitiated from end to end by one extraordinary and unscholarlike fallacy: if some modern writers, for example, argue that the Pastoral Epistles ought to be dated about 160 A.D., and others that they were written about 120 A.D., and again others that they were composed about 90 A.D., by enlarging or adding to still earlier documents, the irrational prejudice reigns very widely that these diverse opinions support one another in disproving the Pauline origin of those Epistles. This is an exhibition of false method and pure *Unsinn*. Any opinion or reason that would place the composition of those Epistles amid the historical circumstances of 160 A.D. is as much an argument against the date 90 A.D. or the date 120 A.D., as against the date 60–70 A.D. Those diverse opinions, in place of supporting one another, as is commonly assumed, really are mutually destructive. It is only the ignorance in which most of those critics are involved of the real spirit of the Graeco-Roman world in both

90 and 160 that makes them fail to see the absolute hostility between the various phases of their arguments.

Most repellent of all, and most worthless, are those lists of authorities with their contradictory opinions, with which our modern books are loaded. If some great scholar had been so misguided as to delude himself into the theory that the Second Epistle to Timothy was forged under Marcus Aurelius, can we not let his blunder sleep in peaceful oblivion? He has only shown thereby that he has totally misunderstood the Epistle, or the age of Marcus, or both. Why blazon his shame to the world? We all make mistakes sometimes: even the youngest scholar will admit that about himself: even the greatest scholar is not free from human frailty. But let us forget the blunders, and record only the successes.

But the foundation of everything is the *a priori* assumption that what is stated in the collection of historical documents called the Bible must be inaccurate, and that in order to reach the truth we must get behind those documents, see how they were concocted, and determine what prejudices and intentions led the concocters into the mistakes which they made. In some extremists this assumption is pushed so far that their aim seems to be to construct a "history" of the Biblical period, in which there shall not be a single statement resting on ancient authority.

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