

TRAVEL AND CORRESPONDENCE AMONG THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

MANY writers on many occasions have perceived and described the important part which intercommunication, whether by personal travel or by epistolary correspondence, between the widely separated bodies or congregations of early Christians played in determining the organization and cementing the unity of the Universal Church.¹ Yet perhaps all has not been said that ought to be said on the subject. The marvellous skill and mastery with which all the resources of the existing civilization were turned to their own purposes by St. Paul and by the Christians generally may well detain our attention for a brief space.

Travelling and correspondence by letter are mutually dependent. Letters are unnecessary until travelling begins: much of the usefulness and profit of travelling depends on the possibility of communication between those who are separated from one another. Except in the most simple forms, commerce and negotiation between different nations, which are among the chief incentives to travelling, cannot be carried out without some method of registering thoughts and information so as to be understood by persons at a distance.

Hence communication by letter has been commonly

¹ The present writer has referred to it more than once (*The Church in the Roman Empire*, pp. 364 ff., 437, etc.); and he has made a more elaborate study of the subject for an article in the fifth volume of *Dr. Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible* on Travel in New Testament Times, a few of the results of which are here set forth in an expanded form.

practised from an extremely remote antiquity. The knowledge of and readiness in writing leads to correspondence between friends who are not within speaking distance of one another as inevitably as the possession of articulate speech produces conversation and discussion. In order to fix the period when epistolary correspondence first began, it would be necessary to discover at what period the art of writing became common. Now the progress of discovery in recent years has revolutionized opinion on this subject. The old views, which we all used to assume as self-evident, that writing was invented at a comparatively late period in human history, that it was long known only to a few persons, and that it was practised even by them only slowly and with difficulty on some special occasions and for some peculiarly important purposes, are found to be utterly erroneous. No one who possesses any knowledge of early history would now venture to make any assertion as to the date when writing was invented, or when it began to be widely used in the Mediterranean lands. The progress of discovery reveals the existence of various systems of writing in the most remote periods, and shows that they were familiarly used for the ordinary purposes of life and administration, and were not reserved, as some scholars used to believe, for certain sacred purposes of religion and ritual.

This discovery that writing was so familiarly used in early time has an important bearing on the early literature of the Mediterranean peoples. For example, no scholar would now employ the argument that the existence of the Homeric poems as great continuous poems was impossible without the ready use of writing, and therefore belongs to a comparatively late day—an argument which formerly seemed to tell strongly against the early date assigned by tradition for their composition. The scholars who championed the early date assigned by tradition to those great works used to labour an attempted proof that they were composed and preserved

by memory alone. That is, however, extremely improbable; but we need now have no doubt that from remote antiquity writing was ready to preserve them.

A similar argument was formerly used by older scholars to prove that the Hebrew literature belonged to a later period than the Hebrew tradition allowed; but the more recent scholars who advocate the late date of that literature would no longer allow such reasoning, though it may be doubted whether they have abandoned as thoroughly as they profess the old prejudice in favour of a late date for any long literary composition, or have fully realized how readily and familiarly writing was used in extremely remote time, together with all that is implied by that familiar use.

That prejudice still exists, and it operates in two ways. In the first place, there is a feeling that it is more prudent to bring down the composition of any ancient work to the latest date that evidence permits. Such an argument is commonly used, and it rests ultimately on the old prejudice that people have become gradually more familiar with the art of writing as the world grows older, and that one should not, without distinct and conclusive proof, attribute the composition of a work of literature to an early period.

In the second place, there is also a very strong body of opinion that the earliest Christians wrote little or nothing. It is supposed that partly they were either unable to write, or at least unused to the familiar employment of writing for the purposes of ordinary life; partly they were so entirely taken up with the thought of the immediate coming of the Lord that they never thought it necessary to record for future generations the circumstances of the life and death of Jesus, until lapse of long years on the one hand had shown that the Lord's coming was not to be expected immediately, and that for the use of the already large Church some record was required of those events round which its faith and hope

centred, while on the other hand it had obscured the memory and disturbed the truth of those important facts.

This opinion also rests on and derives all its influence from the same old prejudice that, at the period in question, writing was still something great and solemn, and that it was used, not in the ordinary course of human everyday life and experience, but only for some important purpose such as the registration of great and important events for the benefit of future generations. Set aside that prejudice, and the whole body of opinion which maintains that the Christians at first did not set anything down in writing about the life and death of Christ—strong and widely accepted as it is, dominating as a fundamental premise much of the discussion of this whole subject in recent times—is devoid of any support.

But most discussions with regard to the origin, force, and spirit of the New Testament are founded on certain postulates and certain initial presumptions, which already contain implicit the whole train of reasoning that follows, and which in fact beg the whole question at starting. If those postulates are true, or if they are granted by the reader, then the whole series of conclusions follows with unerring and impressive logical sequence. All the more necessary, then, is it to examine very carefully the character of such postulates, and to test whether they are really true about that distant period, or are only modern fallacies springing from the mistaken views about ancient history that were widely accepted in the eighteenth and most part of the nineteenth century.

One of those initial presumptions, plausible in appearance and almost universally assumed and conceded, is that with regard to the absence of early registration of the great facts in the beginning of Christian history. This presumption we must set aside as a mere prejudice, contrary to the whole character and spirit of that age, and entirely im-

probable: though, of course, definite disproof of it is no longer possible, for the only definite and complete disproof would be the production of the original documents in which the facts were recorded at the beginning.

So much may be said at once, summing up in a sentence the opinion which arises from what is stated in the following pages. So far as antecedent probability goes, founded on the analogy and the general spirit of preceding and contemporary Greek or Graeco-Asiatic society, the first Christian account of the circumstances connected with the death of Jesus must be presumed to have been written in the year when Jesus died.

But the objection will doubtless be made at once—If that be so, how can you account for such facts as that Mark says that the Crucifixion was completed by the third hour of the day (9 a.m., according to our modern reckoning of time), while John says that the sentence upon Jesus was only pronounced about the sixth hour, i.e. at noon. The reply is obvious and unhesitating. The difference dates from the event itself. Had evidence been collected that night or next morning, the two diverse opinions would have been observed and recorded, already hopelessly discrepant and contradictory. One was the opinion of the ordinary person, unaccustomed to note the lapse of time or to define it accurately in thought or speech: such persons loosely indicated the temporal sequence of three great events, the Crucifixion, the beginning, and the end of the darkness, by assigning them to the three great successive divisions of the day—the only divisions which they were in the habit of noticing or mentioning¹—the third, sixth, and ninth hours.

¹ Matthew once mentions the eleventh hour, but without any accuracy of observation: he merely uses a proverbial expression, indicating that the allotted time had nearly elapsed, Matt. xx. 9. Mark and Luke mention only the three great divisions. The precise note in Acts xix. 9 (Bezan text), "from the fifth to the tenth hour" is a precise record in a style quite out of keeping with Luke's looseness in respect of time: it is there-

Ordinary witnesses in that age would have been nonplussed, if they had been closely questioned whether full three hours had elapsed between the Crucifixion and the beginning of the darkness, and would have regarded such minuteness as unnecessary pedantry, for they had never been trained by the circumstances of life to accuracy of thought or language in regard to the lapse of time.

The other recorded statement was the opinion of an exceptional man, who through a certain idiosyncrasy was observant and careful in regard to the lapse of time, who in other cases noted and recorded accurate divisions of time like the seventh hour and the tenth hour,¹ and who had observed and noted the passage of time, which was unnoticed by others, at the trial. The others would have been astonished if any one had pointed out that noon had almost come before the trial was finished. He alone marked the sun and estimated the time, with the same accuracy as made him see and remember that the two disciples came to the house of Jesus about the tenth hour, that Jesus sat on the well about the sixth hour, that the fever was said to have left the child about the seventh hour. All those little details, entirely unimportant in themselves, were remembered by a man naturally observant of time, and recorded for no other reason than that he had been present and seen or heard.

It is a common error to leave too much out of count the change that has been produced on popular thought and accuracy of conception and expression by the habitual observation of the lapse of time by hours and minutes. The ancients had no means of observing the progress of time.

fore marked as a later addition, embodying an interesting tradition, and my former hesitation whether it should be regarded as original Lukan or as a correct tradition added in the second century was unnecessary. I should now say that one who is sufficiently familiar with the style of Luke cannot long feel doubt.

¹ John i. 39, iv. 6, iv. 52.

They could only make a rough guess as to the hour. There was not even a name for any shorter division of time than the hour. There were no watches; and only in the rarest and most exceptional cases, were there any public and generally accessible instruments for noting and making visible the lapse of time during the day. The sundial was necessarily an inconvenient recorder, not easy to observe. Consequently looseness in regard to the passage of time is deep-seated in ancient thought and literature, especially Greek. The Romans, with their superior endowment for practical facts and ordinary statistics, were more careful, and the effect can be traced in their literature. The lapse of time was often noted publicly in great households hour by hour by the sound of a trumpet or some other device, though the public still regarded this as a rather overstrained refinement—for why should one be anxious to know how fast one's life was ebbing away?¹ Occasionally individuals were more accurate in the observation of time, owing to their habit of mind, or because they were more receptive of the Roman spirit of accuracy.

The progress of invention has made almost every one in modern times as careful and accurate about time as even the exceptionally accurate in ancient times, because we are all trained from infancy to note the time by minutes and to suffer loss or inconvenience occasionally from an error in observation.

But it does not follow that, because the ancients were not accustomed to note the progress of the hours, therefore they were less habituated to use the art of writing. It is a mere popular fallacy, entirely unworthy of scholars, to suppose that people became gradually more familiar with

¹ See Petronius, 26. The use of the trumpeter to proclaim the lapse of time was kept up until recent time (if not still) in the old Imperial city of Goslar, where, in accordance with the more minute accuracy characteristic of modern thought and custom, he sounded every quarter of an hour, as a friend tells me. I did not hear him when I visited Goslar.

writing and more accustomed to use it habitually in ordinary life, as time progressed and history continued. The contrary is the case ; at a certain period, and to a certain degree, the ancients were accustomed to use the art familiarly and readily ; but at a later time writing passed out of ordinary use and became restricted to a few who used it only as a lofty possession for great purposes.

It is worth while to mention one striking example to give emphasis to the fact that, as the Roman Empire decayed, so familiarity with the use of writing disappeared from society, and a knowledge of writing continued only as the possession of a few persons, who were for the most part connected with religion. About the beginning of the sixth century before Christ, a body of mercenary soldiers, Greeks, Carians, etc., marched far away up the Nile towards Ethiopia and the Sudan in the service of an Egyptian king. Such persons as those hired soldiers of fortune were likely to belong to the least educated section of Greek society, and, even where they had learned in childhood to write, the circumstances of their life were not of a kind likely to make writing a familiar and ordinary matter to them, or to render its exercise a natural method of whiling away an idle hour. Yet on the stones and the colossal statues at Abu Simbel many of them wrote not merely their name and legal designation, but also accounts of the expedition on which they were engaged, with its objects and its progress.

Such was the state of education in a rather humble stratum of Greek society six centuries before Christ. Let us come down to eleven centuries after Christ, when great armies of Crusaders from the west were marching across Asia Minor on their way to Palestine ; those armies were led by the noblest of their peoples, statesmen, warriors, and great ecclesiastics ; they contained among them persons of all classes, burning with zeal for a great idea, pilgrims at once and soldiers, with numerous priests and monks. Yet,

so far as I am aware, not one single written memorial of all those crusading hosts has been found in the whole country.¹ On a rock beside the lofty castle of Butrentum, commanding the approach to the great pass of the Cilician Gates—that narrow gorge which they called the Gate of Judas, because it was the enemy of their faith and the betrayer of their cause—a castle which they must have occupied before they could approach the Gates, there are engraved many memorials of their presence ; but none are written ; all are mere marks in the form of crosses.

Probably there were in that small body of mercenaries who passed by Abu Simbel six hundred years before Christ, more persons accustomed to use familiarly the art of writing than in all the hosts of the Crusaders ; for even to those Crusaders who had learned how to write the art was far from being familiar, and they were not wont to use it in their ordinary everyday life, though they might on great occasions. In those seventeen hundred years the Mediterranean world had passed from light to darkness, from civilization to barbarism, so far as writing was concerned. Only recently are we beginning to realize how civilized in some respects was mankind in that early time, and to free ourselves from many unfounded prejudices and prepossessions about the character of ancient life and society.

The cumbrousness of the materials on which ancient writing was inscribed, may seem unfavourable to its easy or general use. But it must be remembered that, except in Egypt, no material except of the most durable character has been or could have been preserved. All material more ephemeral than stone, bronze, or terracotta, has inevitably been destroyed by natural causes. Only in Egypt the

¹ Even in Palestine, where they were in permanent possession for a long period, written memorials of them are exceedingly rare : one occurs in *Pal. Expl. Fund. Quart. Statement*, 1901, p. 408, and another is referred to in the same place, p. 409.

extreme dryness of climate and soil has enabled paper to survive. Now the question must suggest itself whether there is any reason to think that more ephemeral materials for writing were never used by the ancient Mediterranean peoples generally, or that Egypt was the only country in which writers used such perishable materials. The question can be answered only in one way. There can be no doubt that the custom which obtained in the Greek lands in the period best known to us had come down from remote antiquity; that custom was to make a distinction between the material on which documents of national interest and public character were written and that on which mere private documents of personal or literary interest were written. The former, such as laws, edicts, and other state documents, which were intended to be made as widely and generally known as possible, were engraved in one or two copies on tablets of the most imperishable character and preserved or exposed in some public place; ¹ this was the ancient way of attaining the publicity which in modern time is got by printing large numbers of copies on ephemeral material. But those public copies were not the only ones made; there is no doubt that such documents were first of all written on some perishable material, usually on paper. In the case of private documents, as a rule, no copies were made except on perishable materials.

Wills of private persons, indeed, are often found engraved on marble or other lasting material; these were exposed in the most public manner ² over the graves that lined the great highways leading out from the cities; but wills were quasi-public documents in the classical period, and had been entirely public documents at an earlier time, according to their original character as records of a public act affecting the community and acquiesced in by the whole community.

¹ See EXPOSITOR, Dec. 1888, vol. viii. pp. 407-8.

² EXPOSITOR, *loc. cit.* p. 408.

Similarly, it can hardly be doubted that, in a more ancient period of Greek society, State documents were likely to be recorded on less perishable substances, than those which were only of a private character and of merely personal or literary interest. This view, of course, can never be definitely and absolutely proved, for the only complete proof would be the discovery of some of those old private documents, which in the nature of the case have decayed and disappeared. But the known facts leave no practical room for doubt.

Paper was in full use in Egypt, as a finished and perfect product, in the fourth millennium before Christ. In Greece it is incidentally referred to by Herodotus as in ordinary use during the fifth century B.C. How long it had then been used there no evidence exists; but there is every probability that it had been imported from Egypt for a long time, and Herodotus says that before paper came into use on the Ionian coast skins of animals were used for writing. On these and other perishable materials the letters and other commonplace documents of private persons were written.

Accordingly, though few private letters older than the imperial time have been preserved, it need not and should not be supposed that there were only a few written. Those that were written have been lost because the material on which they were written could not last. If we except the correspondence of Cicero,¹ the great importance of which caused it to be preserved, hardly any ancient letters not intended for publication by their writers have come down to us except in Egypt, where the original paper has in a number of cases survived. But the voluminous correspondence of Cicero cannot be taken as

¹ When communication was possible, he and Atticus often wrote every day to one another. Their letters were written conversation, as Cicero often says.

a unique fact of Roman life. He and his correspondents wrote so frequently to one another, because letter-writing was common in the Roman society of the time. It was easier and safer to send letters than it had been in earlier time: the civilized world, i.e. the Roman world, was traversed constantly by messengers of government or by the letter-carriers of the great financial and trading companies. Commercial undertakings on such a vast scale as the Roman needed frequent and regular communication between the central offices in Rome and the agents in the various provinces. There was no general postal service; but each trading company had its own staff of letter-carriers. Private persons who had not letter-carriers of their own were often able to send letters along with those business communications.

In proportion to the opportunities for transmission, at least as many letters probably were written in the Greek as in the Roman time. The power to write and the inclination were there: opportunities were not quite so frequent. But the number of persons living in strange cities, the activity of intercourse, commercial, educational, and political, were great in the Greek period, especially after the time of Alexander the Great.¹

The one condition which was needed to develop epistolary correspondence to a very much greater extent in the Roman Empire was a regular postal service. It seems a remarkable fact that the Roman Imperial Government, keenly desirous as it was of encouraging and strengthening the common feeling and bond of unity between different parts of the Empire, never seems to have thought of establishing any postal service within its dominions. Augustus established an imperial service, which was maintained throughout subsequent Roman times; but it was strictly confined to

¹The busy character of that period has been described in the *EXPOSITOR*, Dec., 1901, p. 406.

imperial and official business, and was little more than a system of special Emperor's messengers on a great scale.

The failure of the Imperial Government to recognize how much its own aims and schemes would have been aided by facilitating communication through the Empire was connected with one of the greatest defects of the Imperial administration. It never learned that the strength and permanence of a nation and of its government are dependent on the education and character of the people: it never attempted to educate the people, but only to feed and amuse them. The Christian Church, which gradually established itself as a rival organization, did of itself what the Government aimed at doing for the nation, and succeeded better, because it taught people to think for themselves, to govern themselves, and to maintain their own union by their own efforts. It seized those two great facts of the Roman world, travelling and letter-writing, and turned them to its own purposes. The former, on its purely material side, it could only accept: the latter it developed to new forms as an ideal and spiritual instrument.

In the early Roman Empire travelling, though not rapid, was performed with an ease and certainty which were quite remarkable. The provision for travelling by sea and by land was made on a great scale. Travellers were going about in great numbers, chiefly during the summer months, occasionally even during the winter season. Their purposes were varied, not merely commerce or government business, but also education, curiosity, search for employment in all departments of life. It is true that to judge from many expressions used in Roman literature by men of letters and moralists, travelling might seem not to have been popular. Those writers often speak as if travelling, especially by sea, were confined to traders who risked their life to make money, and as if the dangers were so great that none but the reckless and greedy would incur them; and the opinion

is often expressed, especially by poets, that to adventure oneself on the sea is an impious and unnatural act. The well known words of Horace's third Ode are typical.

But that point of view was traditional among the poets ; it had been handed down from the time when travelling was much more dangerous and difficult, when ships were small in size and fewer in numbers, when seamanship and method were inferior, when few roads had been built, and travel even by land was uncertain. Moreover, seafaring and land travel were hostile to the contentment, discipline, and quiet orderly spirit which Greek poetry and thought loved to dwell on and to recommend : they tended to encourage the spirit of disorder, rebellion against authority, self-confidence and self-assertiveness, which was called by Euripides "the sailors' lawlessness" (*Hecuba*, 602). In Roman literature the Greek models and the Greek sentiments were looked up to as sacred and final ; and those expressions of the Roman writers were a proof of their bondage to their Greek masters in thought.

When we look deeper, we find that very different views were expressed by the writers who came more in contact with the real facts of the Imperial world. They are full of admiration of the Imperial peace and its fruits : the sea was covered with ships interchanging the products of different regions of the earth, wealth was vastly increased, comfort and well-being improved, hill and valley covered with the dwellings of an increasing population : wars and pirates and robbers had been put an end to, travel was free and safe, all men could journey where they wished, the most remote and lonely countries were opened up by roads and bridges.¹ It is the simple truth that travelling, whether for business or for pleasure, was contemplated and performed under the

¹ See the passages quoted from Philo and Pliny, Appian and Plutarch, Epictetus, Aristides, etc., by Friedländer in the early pages of the second volume of his *Sittengeschichte*.

Empire with an indifference, confidence, and, above all, certainty, which were unknown in after centuries until the introduction of steamers and the consequent increase in ease and sureness of communication.

The impression given by the early Christian writings is in perfect agreement with the language of those writers who spoke from actual contact with the life of the time, and did not merely imitate older models and utter afresh old sentiments. Probably the feature in those Christian writings, which causes most surprise at first to the traveller familiar with those countries in modern time, is the easy confidence with which extensive plans of travel were formed and announced and executed by the early Christians.

In Acts xvi. 1 ff. a journey by land and sea through parts of Syria, Cilicia, a corner of Cappadocia, Lycaonia, Phrygia, Mysia, the Troad, Thrace, Macedonia, and Greece is described, and no suggestion is made that this long journey was unusual or strange, except that the somewhat heightened tone of the narrative in xvi. 7-9 corresponds to the rather perplexingly rapid changes of scene and successive frustrations of St. Paul's intentions. But those who are most intimately acquainted with those countries know best how serious an undertaking it would be at the present time to repeat that journey, how many accidents might occur in it, and how much care and thought would be advisable before one entered on so extensive a programme.

Again, in xviii. 21 St. Paul touched at Ephesus in the ordinary course of the pilgrim-ship which was conveying him and many other Jews to Jerusalem for the Passover. When he was asked to remain, he excused himself, but promised to return as he came back from Jerusalem by a long land-journey through Syria, Cilicia, Lycaonia, and Phrygia. That extensive journey seems to be regarded by speaker and hearers as quite an ordinary excursion. "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem ;

but I will again return unto you, if God will." The last condition is added, not as indicating uncertainty, but in the usual spirit of Eastern religion, which forbids a resolve about the future, however simple and sure, to be declared without the express recognition of Divine authority—like the Mohammedan "inshallah," which never fails when the most ordinary resolution about the morrow is stated.

In Romans xv. 24, when writing from Corinth, St. Paul sketches out a comprehensive plan. He is eager to visit Rome: first he must go to Jerusalem, but thereafter he is bent on visiting Spain, and his course will naturally lead him through Rome, so that he will, without intruding himself on them, have the opportunity of seeing and affecting the Romans and their Church on his way.

Throughout mediæval times nothing like this off-hand way of sketching out extensive plans was natural or intelligible: there were then, indeed, many great travellers, but those travellers knew how uncertain their journeys were, and they would hardly have expressed such rapid plans in a matter of serious business, because they were aware that any plans would be frequently liable to interruption, and that nothing could be calculated on as reasonably certain: they entered on long journeys, but regarded them as open to modification or even frustration: in indicating their plans they knew that they would be regarded by others as attempting something great and strange. But St. Paul's method and language seem to show clearly that such journeys as he contemplated were looked on as quite natural and usual by those to whom he spoke or wrote. He could go off from Greece or Macedonia to Palestine and reckon with practical certainty on being in Jerusalem in time for a feast day not far distant.

It is the same with others: Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos, Silas, Epaphroditus, Timothy, etc., move back and forward, and are now found in one city, now in another

far distant. Unobservant of this character, some writers have argued that Romans xvi. 3 could not have been addressed to correspondents who lived in Rome, because Aquila and Priscilla, who were in Ephesus not long before the Epistle was written, are there spoken of as living among those correspondents. Such an argument could not be used by persons who had fully understood that ubiquity, independence of mere local trammels and connexions, and quite a marvellous freedom in locomotion, are strongly marked facts in the early Church. That argument is one of the smallest errors into which this false prepossession has led many scholars.

Communication by letter supplemented mere travelling. Such communication is the greatest factor in the development of the Church; and the present writer has elsewhere attempted to show that the bishops derived their importance in great degree from being the representatives of the several congregations in relation to each other, charged with the duty of hospitality to travellers and with the maintenance of correspondence.¹

The Christian letters contained the saving energy of the Christian Church, for in correspondence flowed its life-blood. Thus arose a new kind of letter, hitherto unknown in the world. The Christians developed the letter into new forms, applied it to new uses, and placed it on a much higher plane than it had ever before stood upon. In their hands communication by letter became one of the most important, if not the most important, of the agencies for consolidating and maintaining the sense of unity among the scattered members of the one universal Church. By means of letters the congregations expressed their mutual affection and sympathy and sense of brotherhood, asked counsel of one another, gave advice with loving freedom and plain speaking to one another, imparted mutual comfort and en-

¹ *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 361 ff.

couragement, and generally expressed their sense of their common life. Thus arose a new category of Epistles.

Deissman,¹ following older scholars, has rightly and clearly distinguished two previously existing categories, the true letter—written by friend to friend or to friends, springing from the momentary occasion, intended only for the eye of the person or persons to whom it is addressed—and the literary epistle—written with an eye to the public, and studied with careful literary art. But he has erred in trying to reduce all the letters of the N.T. to one or other of these categories. Though he shows some vague sense of the insufficiency of the two older categories, yet he has not seen with sufficient clearness, nor stated with sufficient precision, that in the new conditions a new category had been developed—the general letter addressed to a whole congregation or to the entire Church of Christ. This class of letters are true letters, in the sense that they spring from the heart of the writer and speak direct to the heart of the readers; that they rise out of the actual situation in which the writer conceives the readers to be placed; that they express the writer's keen and living sympathy with and participation in the fortunes of the whole class of persons addressed; that they are not affected by any thought of publication for a wider public than the persons immediately addressed. On the other hand, the letters of this class express general principles of life and conduct, religion and ethics, applicable to a wider range of circumstances than those which have called forth the special letter; and the letters appeal as emphatically and intimately to all Christians in all time as they did to those addressed in the first instance. Such letters have a certain analogy to the edicts and rescripts by which Roman law grew, documents arising

¹ See Deissman, *Biblical Studies* (an improved edition of his *Bibelstudien* and *Neue Bibelstudien*), also his article on "Epistolary Literature" in *Encycl. Bibl.* ii. p. 1323.

out of special circumstances but treating them on general principles. As expressing general truths and universal principles, those letters must have been the result of long and careful thought, though the final expression was often hasty and roused by some special occasion. This more studied character differentiates them from the mere unstudied expression of personal affection and interest.

Those general letters of the Christians express and embody the growth in the law of the Church and in its common life and constitution. They originated in the circumstances of the Church. The letter of the Council at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 23 ff.) arose out of a special occasion, and was the reply to a question addressed from Syria to the central Church and its leaders; the reply was addressed to the Churches of the province of Syria and Cilicia, and specially the Church of the capital of that province; but it was forthwith treated as applicable equally to other Christians, and was communicated as authoritative by Paul and Silas to the Churches of Galatia (Acts xvi. 4).

The peculiar relation of fatherhood and authority in which Paul stood to his own Churches developed still further this category of letters: but that is a subject too wide to treat in a brief article. Mr. V. Bartlet has made some good remarks on it in Dr. Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, i. p. 730.

A still further development towards general philosophico-legal statement of religious dogma is apparent on the one hand in Romans, addressed to a Church which he had not founded, and on the other hand in the Pastoral Epistles. The latter have a double character, being addressed by Paul to friends and pupils of his own, partly in their capacity of personal friends—such portions of the letters being of the most intimate, incidental, and unstudied character—but far more in their official capacity as heads and overseers of a group of Churches—such parts of the letters being really

intended more for the guidance of the congregations than of the nominal addressees, and being, undoubtedly, to a considerable extent merely confirmatory of the teaching already given to the congregations by Timothy and Titus. The double character of these Epistles is a strong proof of their authenticity. Such a mixture of character could only spring from the intimate friend and leader, whose interest in the work which his two subordinates were doing was at times lost in the personal relation.

The Catholic Epistles represent a further stage of this development. First Peter is addressed to a very wide yet carefully defined body of Churches in view of a serious trial to which they are about to be exposed. Second Peter, James, and First John are quite indefinite in their address to all Christians. But all of them are separated by a broad and deep division from the literary Epistle written for the public eye: they are informed and inspired with the intense personal affection which the writers felt for every individual of the thousands whom they addressed.

A serious study of all the early Christian Epistles from this point of view is much needed, and would bring out in strong relief their real, human, individual, and authentic character. The seven letters to the seven Churches contained in Revelation i.-iii. are full of touches special to the individual Churches, many of which have hardly been observed in modern times, but which show close personal knowledge of the cities on the part of the writer; and yet they are written on a uniform plan, which gives them a certain literary type to a degree and of a kind differing from any of the other letters. They stand by themselves, written in the inspiration of one single occasion, which expressed itself suitably to the individual circumstances of each of the seven Churches, yet conformably to certain general lines.

This remarkable development, in which law, statesman-

ship, ethics, and religion meet in and transform the simple letter, was the work of St. Paul more than of any other. But it was not due to him alone, nor initiated by him. It began before him and continued after him. It sprang from the nature of the Church and the circumstances of the time. The Church was imperial, the Kingdom of God; and its leaders felt that their letters expressed the will of God. They issued their truly imperial rescripts. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" is the bold and regal exordium of the first Christian letter.

Christian letters in the next two or three centuries were often inspired by something of the same spirit. Congregation spoke boldly and authoritatively to congregation, as each was moved by the Spirit to write: the letter partook of the nature of an imperial rescript, yet it was merely the expression of the intense interest taken by equal in equal, and brother in brother. The whole series of such letters is indicative of the strong interest of all individuals in the government of the entire body; and they form one of the loftiest and noblest embodiments of a high tone of feeling common to a very large number of ordinary, commonplace, undistinguished human beings.

Such a development of the letter was possible in that widely scattered body of the Church only through the greatly increased facilities for travel and intercourse. The Church showed its marvellous intuition and governing capacity by seizing this opportunity. In this, as in many other ways, it was the creature of its time, suiting itself to the needs of the time, which was ripe for it, and using the conditions and opportunities of the time with true creative statesmanship.¹

That Christian official and private correspondence—and the small number of letters that have been actually preserved to us gives a wholly inadequate idea of its extent—

¹ Colossians iv. 5, as interpreted in *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 149.

was indubitably carried by Christian messengers : Epaphroditus, Tychicus, and so on, are examples of a whole class. As soon as we begin to work out the idea of the preparations and equipment required in practice for this great system, we find ourselves obliged to admit the existence of a large organization. The Church stands before those who rightly conceive its practical character, as a real antagonist in the fullest sense to the imperial government, creating and managing its own rival administration. We thus understand better the hatred which the Imperial Government could not but feel for it, a hatred which is altogether misapprehended by those who regard it as springing from religious ground. We understand too how Constantine at last recognized in the Church the one bond which could hold together the disintegrating Empire. Whether or not he was a Christian, he at least possessed a statesman's insight. And his statesmanlike insight in estimating the practical strength of rival religions stands out as all the more wonderful if he were not a Christian at heart ; for (though many years of his youth and earlier manhood had been spent in irksome detention in the East, where Christianity was the popular and widely accepted religion), yet his choice was made in the West, the country of his birth and of his hopes, where Mithraism was the popular and most influential religion : it was made amid the soldiery, which was entirely devoted to the religion of Mithras.

W. M. RAMSAY.