

seasons out of His hand, and He acquiesced in its decision. Without making any protest He stopped and bade them call the son of Timæus to Him.

Forthwith officious voices cried out to the blind man, "Take courage! Arise! He calls you!" He threw off his cloak and sprang up. Then, perhaps led by friendly hands, perhaps guided only by the wonderful instinct of the blind, he came to where Jesus stood waiting for him, and heard the Master ask him, "What would you have me do?"

"Rabboni," he answered, using a title of honour only found here,¹ "that I may receive my sight."

"Go your way," answered Jesus; "your faith has saved you."

At once the blind man's sight returned to him, and he joined the company that followed Jesus to Jerusalem.

It was the last of Jesus' mighty works of healing, wrought in response to unquestioning and persistent faith; wrought without effort or delay, in the full tide of spiritual force in which He moved onward to His death.

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THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF ST. PAUL.

(2) SOME GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

IN seeking to obtain a general conception of St. Paul's ethical teaching as a whole it is of the first importance to keep always in mind the occasional and non-systematic character of the writings in which it is contained. The Epistles are not treatises, doctrinal or moral, but *epistles*, that is to say letters, written for the most part under the stress of some urgent need, and revealing in every page the traces of their origin. This does not by any means rob them of their character as authoritative expositions of the mind of Christ, nor reduce them to the level of mere private

¹ I.e. in St. Mark.

obiter dicta of the Apostle, but it does explain certain obvious characteristics which might otherwise be a source of perplexity to us. Thus, not everything in St. Paul's teaching is for all time; the local and temporary mingle with the universal and eternal. The Apostle's purpose being for the most part immediate and practical, he passes quickly from general principles to their particular application to the case before him. And though the principles abide for our guidance still, their application in the twentieth century may be widely different from that given to them in the first. Thus, for every Christian man, as for the Apostle, liberty must always be limited by expediency; but the precise character of the limitation will vary indefinitely; the New Testament draws no rigid boundary lines. So that to seek, e.g., to bind the hands of the Church to-day by certain regulations which, for temporary and prudential reasons, St. Paul laid down concerning the position of women in Christian assemblies 1,900 years ago, would be a sheer perversity of mis-interpretation. The Apostle's own disregard of the solemn decision of the Council of Jerusalem in the matter of the eating of meats offered to idols should be a sufficient warning to us not to confuse the local and temporary with the universal and eternal in the Word of God. It further follows from the character of St. Paul's writings that besides some things which do not now need to be said, or which must be said differently, there are other things which Christian ethics to-day must treat of, but concerning which they are wholly silent. In other words, there are in St. Paul's ethical teaching certain great ethical implications which remained in the Apostolic age implications only, and which it is the business of the Christian teacher and preacher from time to time, as the need may be, to make explicit.

Despite, however, this inevitable fragmentariness, and admitting that the moral utterances of the Apostle "do

not seem to spring from any consciously developed system of moral ideas,"¹ it is, I think, still possible to speak of St. Paul's ethical teaching as a whole, and to indicate two or three of its general characteristics. These will form the subject of the present paper.

I.

Reference has been made in the previous paper to a statement of Professor Huxley to the effect that Christianity inherited a good deal from Paganism and from Judaism; and that if the Stoics and the Jews revoked their bequest the moral property of Christianity would realize very little.² It is indeed strange that so keen an observer as Huxley should have missed so completely the wholly new element which with Christianity entered into the moral life of the world. The ancient world had its own lofty ideals of goodness, and there is no need to depreciate them in order to exalt the ideal of the New Testament; it is nevertheless a fact that in the emphasis which it laid on the gentler virtues, on humility and patience and forbearance, on pity and kindness and the spirit of service, the New Testament struck a note which was wholly new in the ears of men. To that fierce, hard Roman world it proclaimed: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and railing be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as Christ also in God forgave you."³ It

¹ T. B. Strong's *Christian Ethics*, p. 77.

² McGiffert's language is almost as unguarded as Huxley's: "When it came to the specific traits of character, or the specific duties which conformity to the Divine will required, it is a notable fact that there was comparatively little difference between the ethical principles of the Christians and the principles of the best men of the Pagan world. The general ideal of the Christian life was practically little else than complete conformity to the highest ethical standards of the world at large" (*The Apostolic Age*, p. 506).

³ Eph. iv. 31, 32.

laid low all vaunting pride, all shrill ambitions: "Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus."¹ It plucked up by the roots the blood-red blossom of hate: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath"; "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink."² Let us think of what Corinth was in the middle of the first century of the Christian era, and then of the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle which St. Paul wrote to the Church in that city, and we shall have some measure of the greatness of the change which must have come before men could so much as think it right to order their lives by words like these.

Nothing perhaps illustrates with more startling clearness the contrast between the ancient and modern world than the place assigned in each to such virtues as humility and forgiveness. In the Pauline list of virtues they rank among the highest; to the moral teachers of antiquity they were of less than no account. Mr. Morley has told us how once, at Biarritz, as Mr. Gladstone was discoursing on his favourite theme, the superiority of the Greeks, there followed this instructive bit of table talk:—

Mr. G.: "I admit there is no Greek word of good credit for the virtue of humility."

J. M.: "*ταπεινότης*? But that has the association of meanness."

Mr. G.: "Yes; a shabby sort of humility. Humility as a sovereign grace is the creation of Christianity."³

An exactly similar claim is put in for the Christian virtue of forgiveness by the author of *Ecce Homo*. "In the law of forgiveness," he says, "and still more in the law of un-

¹ Phil. ii. 4, 5.

² Eph. iv. 26; Rom. xii. 20.

³ *Life of Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 466. In confirmation of the accuracy of Mr. Gladstone's dictum see Trench's *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 148. In the Roman civilization, says Mr. Lecky, "pride was deemed the greatest of virtues and humility the most contemptible of weaknesses" (*Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe*, vol. ii. p. 102).

limited forgiveness, a startling shock was given to the prevailing beliefs and notions of mankind. And by this law an ineffaceable and palpable distinction has been made between ancient and modern morality. . . . Undoubtedly friends fell out and were reconciled in antiquity as amongst ourselves. But where the only relation between the two parties was that of injurer and injured, and the only claim of the offender to forgiveness was that he was a human being, then forgiveness seems not only not to have been practised, but not to have been enjoined nor approved.”¹

The significance of this new accent in morals which we owe to Christianity has been recognized by few writers more clearly than by Mr. Lecky. “In antiquity,” he says, “the virtues that were most admired were almost exclusively those which are distinctively masculine. Courage, self-assertion, magnanimity, and, above all, patriotism, were the leading features of the ideal type; and chastity, modesty, and charity, the gentler and the domestic virtues, which are especially feminine, were greatly undervalued.”² But these latter—the “amiable” virtues, as Mr. Lecky elsewhere calls them—are the very virtues which the New Testament crowns with glory and honour. In this writer’s judgment Christianity has effected nothing less than a reversal in the order of pre-eminence among the virtues; it has put down courage and patriotism from their seat and has exalted humility and meekness, and in this change he sees the great and characteristic distinction between ancient and modern morality. Mr. Lecky being judge, “the moral property of Christianity” would seem to be pretty considerable after all.

In admitting, however, the general accuracy of the view expressed with such vigour and lucidity by the historian of European morals, we must avoid the error of supposing

¹ pp. 272 seq.

² *History of European Morals*, vol. ii. p. 361.

that the New Testament exalts any particular type of virtue at the expense of another. What it really does is to make human character complete. It does not dethrone courage—was there ever a braver man than St. Paul?—but it enthrones meek humility by its side. To the strength of manhood it adds the grace and tenderness of womanhood, and in the life of Him who is our great Exemplar it reveals a character which is neither male nor female, but human and complete. So of the unfinished arc does it make the perfect round. And if in the words both of the Master and of His Apostles there is a seeming disregard of that which before the best had counted most worthy of honour, if courage and justice and patriotism seem to receive less than is their due, the explanation is not that these things were by them lightly esteemed, but rather that the time had now come when to the old must be added the new and harder lesson without which men could not be made perfect.

II.

It is an easy transition from what has just been said to the second distinguishing characteristic of the ethical ideal revealed in St. Paul's teaching to which I wish to refer, viz. its *symmetry* and *balance*. "Since all ethics," says a thoughtful writer,¹ "are a delicate equipoise, it is possible to incline the balance too far, and in over-doing a virtue to make it first cousin to a vice." It is one of the common-places of morality that great virtues and great vices are often closely allied, the vice being but a perversion, or exaggeration, of its kindred virtue. Thrift is good, but how easily it passes into miserliness! Tenderness is a Christian duty, but how few are the steps down to culpable weakness! We do well sometimes to be angry, but how quickly is the clear, bright flame of holy wrath lost in the dark fumes of vindictive hate! Indeed, the welfare of our

¹ In the *Spectator*, July 28, 1904.

moral life is continually being imperilled by the dominant authority which certain ideas exercise in the mind to the practical exclusion of almost all others.¹ Those strange gaps in the character of good men with which we are so painfully familiar usually indicate corresponding blanks in the ethical ideals by which they are governed. Human nature, it has been wittily said, is "evangelized in sections," and religion instead of being made authoritative over the whole life is used simply as a confirmation of a particular moral hobby, with the result that what ought to be the fairest and comeliest of all God's works—a Christian character—is a synonym in many minds to-day for moral unshapeliness and deformity.

But however freely criticism may speak in presence of the Christian ideal as it is revealed in the life of to-day, it can have little to say against that ideal as it is set before us in the writings of St. Paul. There, at least, is an ideal whose beauty of moral symmetry all men must desire; for, in the Christian character, as it is outlined by the Apostle, there is tenderness without weakness, strength without harshness, meekness without cowardice. "The fruit of the light is in *all* goodness and righteousness and truth."² And though it be true that the Epistles are but a fragment, yet in them we behold, as in some unfinished work of art, the perfect proportions and harmonious grace which betray the master's hand. One example must suffice to illustrate what is meant. A first reading of the Epistles might perhaps leave on the mind the impression that the writer had exaggerated the importance of the virtues of self-restraint. The summons to that "limitless self-suppression" which

¹ As an illustration of what is meant I may quote (without necessarily endorsing) Dean Church's remark concerning Dean Stanley: "He was a very earnest preacher of religious morality, though he was blind to some important parts of it, and was driven by his religious partizanship to exaggerate some other parts" (*Life and Letters of Dean Church*, p. 294).

² Eph. v. 9.

has been said to be "the secret of life,"¹ is both loud and reiterated. Apart, however, from the fact that the moral necessities of the Churches to which St. Paul's letters were addressed would naturally lead him to lay emphasis on those virtues which were wanting in the ideals of Paganism, a fuller and closer examination of his writings will go far to modify the first impression. He exhorts men to meekness and patience under wrongdoing; yet the fires of resentment are not to be quenched; they must learn to be angry and sin not.² He insists in words white hot in their intensity on the absolute finality of the Gospel which he preached; for it was not his but Christ's. Yet again and again he makes his appeal to the judgment; he bids his readers prove all things,³ judge what he says,⁴ approve what is excellent⁵; in nothing would he lord it over their faith.⁶ St. Paul is the great Apostle of spiritual emancipation, with all its risks and inconveniences; and he is never perhaps more truly himself than when, as in his Epistle to the Galatians, he is fighting the battles of spiritual freedom. It is a significant fact that the spirit of national independence has nowhere been so strong as in those nations which have received most plainly the impress of his powerful mind. In the old conflict, too, between culture and restraint, between Greek and Hebrew ideals, St. Paul holds the balance even. Hebrew as he was, it was impossible that he should not see the need and the worth of asceticism; but he is no apostle of asceticism for its own sake. "I buffet my body," he says, "and bring it into bondage," but only for this reason: "Lest by any means that, after I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected."⁷ The means is of value only for the sake of the end; the self-renunciation only for the sake of that ultimate self-development which is the true goal of life. Did ever a

¹ See the motto prefixed to the Life of Hugh Price Hughes.

² Eph. iv. 26.

³ 1 Thess. v. 21.

⁴ 1 Cor. x. 15.

⁵ Phil. i. 10.

⁶ 2 Cor. i. 24.

⁷ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

Greek in the fervour of his enthusiasm for self-affirmation propose to himself a nobler ideal than that which St. Paul held before the eyes of the Philippian Christians? "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."¹ In the Apostle Paul the Hebraist and the Hellenist are met together,²

III.

A third characteristic of the Pauline ethic which may be noted is its *universality*. It makes its appeal to no aristocracy of intellect, but to all men; the highest it declares to be within reach of the lowest: "Admonishing *every* man and teaching *every* man in all wisdom, that we may present *every* man perfect in Christ,"³ where the emphatic reiteration is a designed protest against the intellectual exclusiveness of the Gnostic heresy. Most of St. Paul's letters were addressed to churches in which a very large proportion of the members must have belonged to the poorest and most neglected classes of the community; yet his words were meant for all without distinction. Never once does it seem to occur to him, even in his loftiest flights of moral appeal, that he is mocking the slave and the outcast with visions of the unattainable. As a recent writer⁴ has pointed out, questions like housing arrangements, rate of wages, and other matters of a similar kind, which from our

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

² "It is important to note how far superior the Christian Ethic is, in this respect, to earlier and moral systems, and especially to Stoicism. In its initial stage, Stoicism narrowed the fulness, and broke up the harmony of life by repressing the freedom of its powers; while it ended in the mutilation of human nature, the withering of the emotions, and even the extinction of the passions. Christianity, on the other hand, enjoined no kind of crucifixion, except of things that are intrinsically evil; its aim being the transfiguration of the passions. The end it contemplated was the restoration of humanity, and the increase of its powers" (Knight's *Christian Ethic*, p. 29).

³ Col. i. 28. See Lightfoot, *in loco*.

Dobschütz, *Christian Life in the Primitive Church*, p. xxxiv.

modern point of view are so full of moral significance, are never once touched upon by St. Paul. Social statistics lie wholly below his horizon. We are not sure whether it is possible for a man to be a Christian on a pound a week, or in a one-roomed house; the Apostle is confident that by the grace of God we may "all attain unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."¹

And here, again, we see the sharpness of the contrast between ancient and Christian ethics. The pre-Christian moralists never shook themselves free from their aristocratic conception of morality. Through all their teaching there runs, consciously or unconsciously, a doctrine of election: the heights for the few; the plain—or the depths—for the many. "The temper of Stoicism," says Lightfoot, "was essentially aristocratic and exclusive in religion, as it was in politics. While professing the largest comprehension, it was practically the narrowest of all the philosophical castes."² In Cicero's *De Officiis* a distinction is drawn between the ideal morality of the wise man and the morality of the common man.³ The same temper meets us in Philo; "His Gospel," says Jowett, "is not that of humanity, but of philosophers and of ascetics. . . . There is no trace in him of that faith which made St. Paul go forth as a conqueror."⁴

The daring sweep which St. Paul gives to his teaching is explained and justified in large measure by the character of the teaching itself. It is universal in its reach because it is universal in its character; it speaks to all because

¹ Eph. iv. 13. "It seems to me," writes Dean Church, "that the exultation apparent in early Christian literature, beginning with the Apostolic Epistles, at the prospect now at length disclosed within the bounds of a sober hope . . . that men, not here and there, but on a large scale, might attain to that hitherto hopeless thing to the multitudes—goodness—is one of the most singular and solemn things in history" (*The Gifts of Civilization*, p. 156).

² Essay, "St. Paul and Seneca," *Epistle to Philippians*, p. 322.

³ *Luthardt's History of Christian Ethics*, p. 16.

⁴ Essay, "St. Paul and Philo," *Epistles to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans*, vol. i. p. 429.

it has something to say to all. With Christ and His Apostles the whole notion of morality moves inward. Instead of the "provincial edicts" with which pre-Christian morality was so largely engaged, we have now "imperial laws" which are meant to govern the whole universe of moral agency.¹ For reasons which have already been explained, questions purely local and temporary in their interest, and (we may sometimes be tempted to add) trivial in their character, do, it is true, find a place in the writings of St. Paul. But trivial as the question to us may now seem to be there is nothing trivial in the Apostle's treatment of it. The last charge one would be disposed to bring against the great Stoic moralists is a lack of inwardness, yet can any one imagine St. Paul gravely writing a sentence like this from the pen of Seneca? "To Attalus I owe it that I have never all my life touched oysters or mushrooms; that I have given up perfume, and absolutely renounced the use of enervating warm baths, as well as of wine. The other bad habits, which I then got rid of, have alas! returned; but if I do not totally abstain, I at least practise moderation, which is almost as difficult."² Let any one call to mind St. Paul's discussion of the vexed question of the eating of meats offered to idols, which figures so largely in his Epistles. To us to-day that question is in itself of no more concern than the controversies of Lilliput. But the Apostle's treatment of it—his large-mindedness, his moral sanity, his resolute appeal to the loftiest Christian principles—has raised what in other hands might have remained a petty parochial squabble, to the level of an object-lesson for all time in the delicate and difficult task of adjusting the rival claims of Christian liberty and Christian expediency.

IV.

Real and important, however, as are the facts to which

¹ The distinction is Professor Knight's; see his *Christian Ethic*, p. 51.

² *Sénèque et Saint Paul*, par Charles Aubertin, p. 119.

in the preceding sections attention has been drawn, it has once more to be said that it is not in any of them, nor in all of them combined that the essential *differentia* of St. Paul's ethical teaching is to be found. The "cardinal virtues" of antiquity, *plus* the "theological virtues" of the New Testament, are much, but they are far from exhausting the moral content of Christianity. It is conceivable that it might have been possible to collect from various sources a book of ethical scriptures worthy in every sense to compare with the ethical precepts of St. Paul; yet even so the moral supremacy of the New Testament would have been in no wise affected. What gives to Christianity, as St. Paul received and taught it, its distinctive character is the Person in whom it centres. And until He, and the relation in which He stands towards them that are His, are construed aright, all our attempted interpretations of New Testament religion—its morality no less than its theology—are mere fumbings at a locked door of which the key is lost. To those to whom Christ is only a moral ideal, "a brilliant and primitive illustration of the religion which bears His name," a large part of the language of St. Paul must remain blankly unintelligible. It is indeed a great thing to possess, and to be able so to use, the "historic sense," as to re-create from the Four Gospels the figure of the human Jesus, the Man of Nazareth, the Prophet of Galilee; and every reader knows how serious is the loss to writers in whom this sense is wanting. Yet, after all, it is but a little way that the realism of the modern novelist, as it has been called, can carry us in the interpretation of Christianity. Of infinitely greater moment is it that we come to know Jesus Christ as our great Contemporary, risen and regnant, the First and the Last and the Living One, who was dead and is alive for evermore. The key of all St. Paul had to teach, in ethics as well as in theology, is to be found in his favourite phrase, "In

Christ.”¹ And if, as Dr. John Duncan used to say, the great glory of God’s revelation is that it has changed our abstracts into concretes,² it is the chief glory of St. Paul that, in place of the “moral ideal” of the secular moralist, he has given us a living, present Christ, in whom our life may find at once its norm, its source, and its guide. This all-essential fact, which is the true *differentia* of the Apostolic message, cannot be better stated than in the words of Bishop Lightfoot: “One might have thought it impossible to study with common attention the records of the Apostles and martyrs of the first ages or of the saints and heroes of the later Church, without seeing that the consciousness of personal union with Christ, the belief in His abiding presence, was the mainspring of their actions and the fountain of all their strength. This is not a preconceived theory of what should have happened, but a bare statement of what stands recorded on the pages of history. In all ages and under all circumstances, the Christian life has ever radiated from this central fire. Whether we take St. Peter or St. Paul, St. Francis of Assisi or John Wesley, whether Athanasius or Augustine, Anselm or Luther, whether Boniface or Francis Xavier, here has been the impulse of their activity and the secret of their moral power.”³

¹ “*The free gift of God is eternal life in (not through) Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. vi. 23). It is indeed most true that the Son of God won life for us, but it is not anything apart from Himself. We live, as He has made it possible for us to realize life, only in Him. Am I then wrong in saying that he who has mastered the meaning of those two propositions now truly rendered—“into the Name,” “in Christ”—has found the central truth of Christianity? Certainly I would gladly have given the ten years of my life spent on the Revision to bring only these two phrases of the New Testament to the heart of Englishmen” (Westcott’s *Some Lessons of the Revised Version of the New Testament*, p. 63). There is a similar passage in the same writer’s *Lessons from Work*, p. 169.

² I owe this quotation, as well as one or two phrases of this paragraph, to Dr. James Moffatt’s “Introductory Sketch” in his delightful *Golden Book of John Owen*.

³ “St. Paul and Seneca,” p. 326.