

can be considered complete without a full and careful examination of the text of the Gospel and citations to prove the points adduced ; but perhaps what has been advanced may lead some to hesitate before rejecting St. Matthew's claim to the authorship of the Gospel or to its rank as a work of original, if inspired genius. ARTHUR CARE.

MARRIAGE PROBLEMS AT CORINTH.

(1 CORINTHIANS VII. ETC.)

THE letter which the Corinthian church had addressed to St. Paul about its difficulties probably began with the topic of marriage ; at any rate, it is in connexion with that problem that the Apostle first makes mention of the letter (1 Cor. vii. 1). There had been much difference of opinion at Corinth. If they could have brought their own wise heads into agreement, they would not have troubled their founder with questions ; their words breathe no spirit of modesty. Usually, emphasis has been laid upon the probable drift of Corinthian opinion towards ascetic condemnation of marriage ; lately, however, Professor Sir W. Ramsay has argued that there must have been a party at Corinth who desired to impose marriage as a universal duty, and that St. Paul's decisions are mainly intended to bring that party to a better mind. We may content ourselves with recognizing that there must have been extreme antagonisms in Corinthian opinion, and that it is hardly likely any of the brethren had hit the precise happy mean which St. Paul indicates, or even that other central line which modern Protestantism might prefer. And we might describe the extreme Corinthian views as follows : on the one hand, a party holding that *marriage is dangerous if not polluting* ; on the other hand, an "enlightened" party holding that *celibacy is contemptible*.

The very first words of chapter vii. give St. Paul's answer to the latter view. Christian celibacy is not contemptible; it is or it may be admirable; at its best, it is distinctly preferable to marriage. The last of these statements perhaps is not plainly included in *v.* 1, but subsequent recurrences to the theme (*vv.* 7, 8, 32, etc.) leave us in no doubt that St. Paul so judged. Protestants can hardly welcome that decision. Still, we must bow to facts; it is a fact that St. Paul held and encouraged that belief. And even the Protestant mind can discover, if it will, points of sympathy with the Pauline view. Enlightened scorn for celibacy takes at the best a physiological view of human nature. It considers man as an animal, framed like other healthy living creatures for continuing the species. Celibacy, therefore, is failure, and wilful celibacy ridiculous. That type of enlightenment agrees with Mr. Rudyard Kipling's Indian critic, who describes the unmarried ladies of Great Britain as "the barren women." If a spiritual view of man is introduced, all the values are changed. Even on the human side, "more" may be "the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife." The unwedded may have in God's house and within His walls, "a memorial and a name better than of sons and of daughters." Like the great suffering Servant, such a one even in death may "see his seed," and "the pleasure of the Lord prospering" in his hands. *There be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.*

On the other hand, in reply to the persons who despised or distrusted marriage, St. Paul quotes three authorities. First we may name the teaching of Jesus, forbidding divorce. Secondly, there is the prudential consideration, that, if wholesale celibacy is enacted, there will ensue a series of ghastly moral breakdowns, worse than marriage even on

the most unfavourable view of marriage that can be taken. Thirdly, there is the great principle of abiding in the condition in which God called one. Converting grace had come to Corinth, and had won a welcome partly from the wedded, partly from the single. Now the grace of God, which comes not to destroy but rather to fulfil, formulates no demand that men or women should forsake the outward framework of their lives. What they have to do is to fill it with a new spirit. The wedded are to remain wedded, but they are to be henceforth Christian man and Christian wife. The single are to remain single, but they are to be henceforth pure and Christian celibates. In these different paths of life, where God's grace found them, with its wonderful illumination and its new springs of power—there they are to live on; there from henceforth they are to glorify God. This third principle is plainly a lofty moral and Christian thought, though we may be staggered to see how wide a sweep St. Paul gives it. It takes the form it does partly because of his conviction of the imminence of the second Advent. Evidence in support of this statement will appear as we proceed.

Let us now turn to the special issues or detailed problems, either suggested to St. Paul, or distinguished by him in his own handling of the general question.

We may hold that in verses 1-7 St. Paul deals with the married. This has not generally been admitted. It has been supposed that the Apostle starts off with the general problem of sex relations, particularizing at a later point. But what absurd conclusions that view involves! According to it, St. Paul lays down the following general theses: (1) Celibacy is ideally preferable, *v. 1*; (2) safety, however, requires a universal policy of marriage—"let each man have his own wife," etc., *v. 2*; (3) the unmarried are, if possible, to continue unmarried, *v. 8*; (4) the incon-

continent must marry, *v.* 9. We need impute no such confusion and self-contradiction to St. Paul if we realize that at *v.* 8 he passes to a new class, and by consequence that verses 1-7 must have dealt with the class of the married. Hence, too, we infer that a tide of ascetic feeling had risen so high at Corinth as to make a certain section of the church propose a dissolution of marriage relationships. St. Paul forbids this: Let each man have—i.e. live with—his own wife. By way of permission (*vv.* 5, 6), he encourages temporary separations for the purpose of special devotion. But these separations must take place by agreement, and with careful limitation in point of time. All this set of verses is ruled by the practical or prudential motive. It is *unsafe* to break up marriages. Only when he turns back a second time to the married, at verses 10 and 11, does the Apostle recall Christ's words forbidding divorce, which he treats as laying down the same law suggested by prudence to his own mind. As it is not safe, so it is not lawful for married persons to repudiate their obligations; Christ forbids it.—It seems plain that St. Paul's permission (*v.* 6) is the permission to set apart special seasons for uninterrupted communion with God. He cannot possibly describe the whole passages 1-7 as permissive. The earlier verses assume plainly the tone of command: "Let each man"—i.e., as we have argued, each person already married—"have his own wife, and each wife her husband."¹

Verses 8 and 9 introduce a second case, that of the persons converted in a state of celibacy. If they can persevere in a virtuous celibate life, that course will be the best; he

¹ Paul, in describing himself (*v.* 7) as superior to sex cravings, negatives the characteristic R.C. view that his "stake in the flesh" (2 Cor. xii. 7) was of the nature of a sensual suggestion. Paul was no quietist, and he had ten thousand troubles in life. Nay more; like a wise man he stood on guard against the approach of sensual temptation (1 Cor. ix. 27). But this was not among his actual troubles. Here he stood clear.

has already laid down his principle at *v.* 1 and again at *v.* 7, though the explanation why he so greatly prefers celibacy is to come later (*vv.* 32, etc.). If, however, the converts cannot persevere in the single life without incurring temptation, then the maxim of safety comes into play, bidding them marry (*v.* 9), as already it has taken its part in commanding the married not to break off relations with each other. Summing up later at *v.* 17, he brings into prominence the maxim of *abiding as one was called*. True, it may be needful to study safety ("as the Lord hath distributed unto each man"; compare *v.* 7: "Each hath his own gift from God"). But, if possible, loyalty to the condition in which grace found one is to determine duty; "As God hath called." This latter maxim is a universal principle of the Pauline churches (*v.* 17), and has various applications. The converted Jew is to remain a Jew, though a Christian Jew (*v.* 18). It is foreign to the spirit of the passage to suppose that St. Paul is merely discouraging the surgical operation by which the marks of the Jewish rite were effaced. That is literally what he says, but he must take the word in a wider metaphorical sense. Each man is to continue what he was when called by grace; and so the Jew is to be a Jew still.—Perhaps it should be allowed that St. Paul is a shade carried away by his argument at this point. Personally at least he felt as a Christian that he was "not himself under the law," and only by a loving accommodation accepted its requirements from time to time (*ix.* 20). Whoever can and must speak thus, is scarcely what Jews call a Jew.—Correspondingly, the converted Gentile is to be a Christian Gentile (*v.* 18). Again (*v.* 21) the converted slave is to remain a Christian slave; it is possible that St. Paul qualifies this advice in the closing part of the verse, but it is also possible to hold that he intensifies the advice;

and perhaps that more difficult rendering carries out better the spirit of the passage. If the Lord's coming were so near (see verses 29-31), might it not seem that slavery was indeed an adiaphoron, and that the man who clung to it was the more fully loyal to converting grace? The table of Family Relationships (Eph., Col.; comp. also 1 Peter) includes Husband and Wife, Father and Child, Master and Slave. So early did the Christian church come to embrace slave owners as well as their proprietary articles male and female. And so calmly did an apostle of Christ recognize facts. What does outward slavery or what does outward freedom matter (*v.* 22) in comparison with the Christian freedom and again with the Christian servitude which are the blessing and glory of every true disciple? ¹

The third class contemplated are of the nature of a special sub-class—married persons whose marriages are what we call “mixed.” Probably the marriages in question had not been “mixed” at the first; one would not willingly suppose that even at Corinth Christian men or Christian women had married out of “the Lord” (compare *v.* 39). At first, then, these marriages had been heathen—unmixedly heathen. But converting grace, when it drew near, had shown itself eclectic. One partner was taken and one left. The husband had become a Christian while his wife remained a Pagan; or the wife had learned to love Christ, while the husband continued outside the faith. This was a state of matters of which Jesus on earth had had no cognizance; and St. Paul sharply contrasts the case which Jesus definitely settled—a normal marriage relation between two wor-

¹ It might be possible to interpret *v.* 23—“*Become not (R.V.) servants of men*” as discouraging the passing of a Christian into servitude. To become a slave would have everything against it. It would not only be a social loss but an act of disobedience to the spiritual intimations afforded by converting grace. However, it is probable that at verse 23 St. Paul is allegorizing, and is warning fanatical adherents of human masters—Paul, Apollos, Cephas—that they are really slaves of men.

shippers of the true God—from this other and seeming doubtful case, where the two who are one have a barrier between them which penetrates to the depths of their being, and rises to the heights of heaven. Even in this case, St. Paul forbids any dissolution of the marriage by the action of the Christian partner. Its continuance might well seem doubtful. If all marriages were suspected things in certain quarters at Corinth, how much more the continuance of marriage with an unbeliever! But St. Paul gives the assurance that there is no possibility of pollution here. God—so we may fill in his hints—has called a soul to serve Him; but the new and supreme duty does not cancel the older and lower yet truly sacred duty of wife to husband or of husband to wife. Whatever disturbance a one-sided Christian faith brings to such a marriage, yet the marriage relationship itself becomes more than ever a holy thing. Vicariously, the Christian partner blesses or consecrates the non-Christian, just as a Christian parent consecrates or makes holy his offspring,¹ though born to the inheritance of sin. Here, as B. Weiss says, we have no trace of infant baptism, but we have the line of thought indicated which makes infant baptism inevitable in the future. Thus the mixed marriage is a very special case of duty found in existence, recognized, elevated, by the grace of God. Henceforth faithfulness towards the other partner involves not simple loyalty or kindness, but, if it be possible, the greater benefaction—to “save” the as yet unconverted husband or wife! A very arduous but also very glorious vocation surely, this vocation of a mixed marriage blindly and innocently contracted. The Christian partner, cheered by that

¹ Surely Paul does not mean the special Christian parent who is joined in mixed marriage to a heathen! Doubt as to the imputed consecration of a heathen partner could hardly be removed by a reference to half-heathen progeny.

wonderful hope, is to continue dwelling with the unconverted partner. But, on the other hand, if a breach comes from the side of the unconverted partner, it is to be acquiesced in. God, in such a case, while refusing the supreme blessedness of "saving" the other, has granted the great if inferior blessedness of "peace"—a life no longer cruelly distracted, but henceforth wholly for Christ and for His people. No Christian is to raise difficulties about such a divorce. That would be running beyond duty. They cannot tell, after all, whether many more years of the mixed marriage and of the distracted home would have been crowned with the "saving" of the unconverted one. St. Paul names that hope as a thing so uncertain—"How *knowest* thou?"—that Christians may thankfully be freed from mixed marriages where they innocently can. If we had to render "How knowest thou whether thou shalt not *save*" the other, the next verse (17) could not begin with an adversative "only," but must be introduced by such a word as "therefore." It is by mere implication that St. Paul sets before the mixed marriages which remain undissolved the high and inspiring hope of gaining for Christ an unconverted partner.—Upon this passage, wisely or unwisely, many systems of law—e.g., that of Scotland—have established the right of divorce on the ground of desertion.

Verses 25–40 deal with a fourth case—the case of young virgins. This case has two peculiarities. First, it cannot well be settled by the principle of abiding as when called to Christ. Conversion had found many of the Corinthians in childhood; but even in a year or two, in the course of nature, the boy becomes a man and the young girl a marriageable maiden.¹ There is no need for St. Paul to say anything

¹ This must be the sense of *ὑπέρακμος* (v. 36), if only because there had not been time for the belles of the Corinthian church to become

further about the boy. The rules already laid down (*vv.* 8, 9) apply directly to him. He is to keep single if he can—to marry if he must; he is his own master. But the maiden is in a different position. She is emphatically, in that age and land, a being not at her own disposal. And this constitutes the second peculiarity of the new question to be discussed. It is hard to accept for oneself such a taxing ideal as celibacy, yet it may be easier to do that than to thrust it upon others. We cannot wonder if the Corinthians asked St. Paul how they were to act towards their daughters. On the whole, St. Paul declines to modify the positions he has already laid down. His language is more delicate and reserved, but his thought is unchanged.

In a sense, he so modifies or expands the principle of “abiding as called” that it stretches even to the new case. There is a “present distress” which speaks more loudly against marriage than the voice of nature can plead for it. What is meant by this “distress”? There was no persecution at the moment when St. Paul wrote our First Epistle; had there been, it must have left unmistakable traces on his thought and on his words. The conception is a theological one; more precisely, it is eschatological. “The Lord is at hand”; and the troubles which surround all Christians are the signs of His near coming. *Judgment must begin at the house of God*; it will soon take the significant form of persecution. The career of the Gospel is to be no smooth optimistic progress, but a drama, a battle, a tragedy. Growing love to God and Christ will be matched elsewhere by growing hatred.

Granting this analysis of the situation, we may feel a lessened surprise at St. Paul’s decision. It would please him well to hear that there were no marriages at all in

passées, although time enough had elapsed to bring some of the young girls to womanhood.

prospect among the young people of the Corinthian church. Recognizing frankly that that is impossible, he yet clings to the hope that the marriages will be very few. And what wonder, upon the assumption he makes? There are seasons and circumstances in which a purpose of marriage must mean either great heroism or great frivolity; and, in most communities—not to say specially in such a community as Corinth—frivolity is a more probable factor than heroism. At its best, how pathetic a thing is any marriage, in spite of all the shouting we make over it! To launch a new family upon the uncharted sea of human life ought to be the work of sober courage. And yet, is not Christian faith a fountain of such courage? All that St. Paul can say about the alarms and sorrows of wedded life is in a sense permanently true. The wider we make the circle of those very dear to us, the more numerous become the “hostages” we have given to “fortune,” and the points where sorrow can strike right home to our hearts. A life full of interests is also full of cares. A heart filled with love must be filled with fears—so precious a treasure in such frail vessels. Yet assuredly the Christian, *ceteris paribus*, will prefer the full life to the empty. It is unbelieving, it is anti-Christian—Buddhist perhaps it may be!—to insure against sorrow by narrowing our affections. But the last word on the whole matter is what St. Paul himself would say—that no life is really empty where God is present, and no life really full where God is absent. Unless we ought still further to add—what again surely corresponds to the spirit if not to the letter of St. Paul’s teaching—that the fuller life is good *where God grants it*. “Each man hath his own gift from God.”

It is needful that we should clearly realize the helpless pupillage of these Corinthian maidens. As a wife, the Corinthian woman has legal opportunity (*v.* 10) to divorce

her husband ; St. Paul quotes against such conduct Christ's words in a form like that in Mark's Gospel¹ (Mark x. 12), which applies to Gentile as well as to Jewish conditions—to divorces initiated by the woman as well as by the man. Again, as a widow (*v.* 39) the Corinthian lady had both legal and moral right, according to St. Paul, to make her free choice between remarriage or continued widowhood. In Hinduism, the woman is always in a state of vassalage ; Greek or Hellenistic ideas seem to have made marriage a veritable emancipation for her, leaving the unmarried girl to servitude. Nor does St. Paul criticize these ideas ; probably he shares them. The girl's wish, to marry or not to marry, is never once referred to. It constitutes no element in the case. Perhaps St. Paul assumed that she was sure to prefer marriage unless older and wiser persons could give her better guidance. What wonder if she did wish to marry ? What else had she to look forward to ? She was to say her prayers, apparently, and be happy in that occupation during the brief space of time till the fabric of this world had dissolved away (*vv.* 31 and 34). The problem, the duty, the burden, is one for her guardian,² i.e., normally for her father. The only way in which she can force his hand is a deplorable one ; if he is convinced that she cannot safely live single, he is to let her marry. It is exactly the teaching of verse 9 over again. Both with man and woman, St. Paul is convinced, godliness is more likely to flourish in celibacy than in marriage (*vv.* 32-34). Wedded love competes dangerously against that supreme

¹ We might suppose that St. Paul was generalizing the principle of our Lord's teaching. But the anxious and precise way in which he contrasts two authorities—"the Lord, not I" ; "I, not the Lord"—points rather to his knowing the tradition of Christ's words in this modified shape.

² Whatever the language may admit, the context is decisive against supposing that the author of verses 1-7 recognized anything of the nature of the later bizarre and hateful system of *subintroductæ*.

love which saves. Hence he *advises*—a “counsel” of perfection (comp. Matt. xix. 21), as the Catholic churches call it—celibacy wherever possible. And he “thinks” that he is a spiritual man, no less than his enlightened censors at Corinth (*v.* 40 ; comp. xiv. 37).

When we inquire into the modern Protestant attitude towards marriage problems, it is obvious that the whole situation changes with our changed eschatology. The world has lasted some eighteen and a half centuries since St. Paul wrote ; plainly therefore it was not and is not God’s purpose that we should construe duty in terms of the imminence of Judgment Day. But a change in our moral conceptions is even more important. The slow working of Christianity, along with that of other elements of civilization, has produced the ideals of romantic love ; and we cannot get away from these. We must not exaggerate their value. A marriage “arranged” for a virtuous young couple upon the French system does not on the average work out so differently as we might suppose from a marriage directly due to personal choice. Nor must we ignore the dangers of romance. Fickleness and frivolity constantly claim the privileges of true love, and secure them only to abuse and discredit them. Yet upon the whole the advance is real, is immense ; and even a St. Paul who leaves out romantic love from his calculations leaves out one of the central points, and must rank in part as obsolete. If love is what sanctifies marriage, it is not possible to treat marriage as a panacea for the sexually weak. There are innumerable conjunctions of circumstance which may shut up Christian man or Christian woman to a virtuous celibate life. Because they “must” lead it, they “can.” A marriage may be within legal and technically within moral limits ; but, unaccompanied by love, marriage is a shameful thing. We have come to see that, and must accept the

responsibility of what we have learned. Also, of course, it is impossible now to think of marrying off any persons, or of constraining any sane and healthy adults to a single life, against their own wishes.

It is evident that St. Paul, with all his wealth of knowledge and spiritual insight, was a one-sided child of his age in his blindness to the higher ideal glories of marriage.¹ But it might be a hasty inference to say that he undervalues woman. Does he underrate woman any more than he underrates man? Is it not rather a whole side of human life upon earth which he fails to understand? And yet how much he has been taught! It is part of St. Paul's historic greatness that he accepts given conditions and works upon these. He had no call to construct social Utopias, and go wandering into the land of "Nowhere." God was to construct Utopia Himself—very soon—at Christ's second Advent. Meantime, St. Paul works *everywhere*; he becomes "all things to all men, that he may by all means save *some*," as he writes with a terrible sobriety of outlook. It was perhaps a dangerous policy. Our flippant application of the phrase, when we describe very supple persons as being "all things to all men," suggests how the policy may degenerate. But St. Paul himself carried it out with noble self-forgetfulness, and with the practical wisdom which accepts men, so far as possible, as they are. And the God of St. Paul granted to him the joy of saving not "some" only, but multitudes. On his own assumptions, too, how masterly, how perfect is his handling of the Corinthian problems! If a twentieth century Christian could have talked to the Corinthians about the glories of true love, he might only have bewildered them and made the confusion greater than ever.

¹ Unless we ought to accept the claim sometimes put forward, that by the time he wrote Eph. v. 22-33 his mind had ripened.

On one question of fact, long Christian experience joins issue with St. Paul. Making full allowance for the self-sacrificing services of Christian maidenhood, we do not find in Christian matrons the spiritual inferiority which St. Paul feared. Only those who are riding a theory to death could pretend to detect any such thing. The Catholic churches, of course, are in the grip of such a theory and have no choice. But Protestants are free to see things and persons as they really are. We do not find marriage a secularizing influence on our mothers or our wives. We find it to be their gift from God, sanctified to the Christian heart, inferior to none.

That being so, must we face the question whether, in other respects, St. Paul did misconstrue or undervalue the woman's gifts? The modern woman movement may be compelled to answer "yes." It has broken fresh ground. Romanticism or chivalry, at its best, sees new depths in love and marriage, and in the heart of woman as man's lover and helpmeet. But the modern movement is half inclined to suspect servitude in marriage, and takes more interest in securing independent careers for women. In a word, it carries on the fuller assimilation of man and woman. Now St. Paul is against this. Yet at other times he seems to furnish a programme for the movement. It is as if he fought upon both sides. In parallel cases, too, he carries out his theoretic principles to unexpected practical results. There was no more Jew or Gentile in Jesus Christ; but just because the distinctions were adiaphora, they might last as external customs; and St. Paul thought they ought to do so. There was no more bond or free—and yet, here again, the outward institution lives on, and Onesimus must return to Philemon. There is no more male or female in Christ: that principle, clearly announced by St. Paul (Gal. iii. 28), may justify any revolutionary innovations

in the way of equality between the sexes. And yet for St. Paul himself Christianity confirms the relative distinction of the sexes, and even implies the greater technical nearness of the man to God than of the woman (1 Cor. xi. 3).

History has worked out other points of the Pauline programme to issues which he did not formulate. Jewish Christians have long ceased to exist as Jews ; slavery within Christendom is all but entirely unknown. Shall we say that the Apostle was wrong when he took the social distinction between men and women for a permanent thing ? Is abstract and absolute equality the real meaning of Christianity as applied to sex, or is it not ?

The question is too hard to be answered by this writer, and too complex to be discussed in a closing paragraph. But that, in all its hardness and complexity, is the issue raised for us to-day, not merely by the dame- and damosel-errants of Female Suffrage but by many calmer spirits. Is it prejudice, or is it principle, which has restricted the Christian ministry itself in all the greater communions to men ? Must we look forward to Christian ladies presiding at the Lord's Table ? There are those who could do that well, if it be a lawful thing ; I do not think any well-conditioned male Christian will either contend in speech, or think in his heart, that he and his fellows are essentially nearer to God or to the pattern set by our Lord Jesus Christ than Christian women are. And yet—is that to lead to our blurring the separation, in politics or in religion, between the two sexes ? St. Paul vehemently dissents. He speaks (in 1 Cor. xi.) like one feeling about for arguments to support an instinct, and to justify a foregone conclusion. Many of the arguments may leave us unmoved ; but can we possibly despise the instinct, in such a man as St. Paul ? Or was it only a case of the earthen vessel slightly tainting the divine treasure ? It is indeed a hard question, but it clamours for an answer.

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