

It is significant, and I think not fanciful, that the Word of God is the name given, in the prophetic period, to the message which the prophets received directly from God and uttered as from Him : this was the period of creation. Then followed an age when the Word of God was identified with a written book, Deuteronomy and the codified Law : this may be called the period of reflection. At last the time arrived when the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us : this is the time of illumination—the time in which we are called to study and to understand. We must be loyal to the whole truth ; following each stage in the process of its unfolding with a trained historical sense, and interpreting it all in the light, the True Light, which has shined for us.

G. A. COOKE.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY AND THE LOWER CLASSES.

II.

THE student of Primitive Christianity—the classical and creative period, distinguished from all others by the two names of Jesus and Paul—now finds himself in a new position. The lower classes of the period having been rediscovered, he is enabled to test critically the correctness of the first instinctive impression which comes to us of a close connexion existing between Primitive Christianity and the lower classes. And here a remark has to be made. On the one hand we see clearly, in the light of the recent discoveries, that Kautsky and Kalthoff were glaringly mistaken in their hypothesis when they derived Primitive Christianity directly from

movements of social revolution among the proletariat. On the other hand, however, we see no less clearly—the fact indeed is overwhelming—that Primitive Christianity is closely intertwined with the lower classes. More clearly than ever before, Primitive Christianity appears to us to-day as a movement among the lower classes of the early Roman Empire, a movement, however, neither political nor social, but *religious*.

The popular character of Primitive Christianity is reflected first of all in a quarter where there is little scope for imagination, but where by dint of sober attention to details there is much to be discovered, viz., in its language. We possess in the New Testament a considerable number of Greek texts that were either written by leading men of the classical Christian period, or at least preserve fragments of their oral deliverances in the form of very early Greek reports, dating back to the creative period.

It is a matter of old observation that the Greek of these most ancient Christian texts differs markedly from the Greek of the contemporary secular literature. Indeed, the contrast was so strongly felt that, in order to account for it, a distinct form of "Biblical" or "Christian" Greek was postulated, in the formation of which the "Semitic" genius in the language of the Apostles was supposed to have taken a large part. Even in this old way of looking at the language of the Apostles there was an instinctive appreciation of the problem of division between classes, though it was defined as division between races. I believe that much is true in the details of the statements on this head. I fully recognize that there is Semitic influence in the language of the Apostles. But this influence has been beyond measure exaggerated. The *peculiarity* of apostolic Greek can certainly not be grasped by mere attention to the racial division. It is explainable by the facts of class-

division. It was popular Greek that the Apostles spoke : popular Greek with intrusive Semiticisms here and there.

Here the written memorials of the lower classes have come to our aid and helped us to understand the matter more in detail. The inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca are for the most part written in the popular colloquial language of the age. Of course this colloquial language in its turn exhibited various grades, from the vulgarities of the playground and the alley to the more restrained forms in the language of business and the courts. But in spite of its own pronounced variations it is clearly distinguishable as a whole from the Attic then employed for artistic purposes by the leading men of letters. It was bound to be so, for these literary magnates waged vehement war against the encroachments of the popular language, which to them was altogether plebeian. And now we find that the New Testament, in the majority of its component parts, speaks the non-literary language of the people. Hundreds of linguistic details that used to be set apart as isolated peculiarities of New Testament Greek can now be proved by quotations from contemporary inscriptions in Asia Minor, or from Egyptian papyri and potsherds, to have been common to all speakers of popular Greek.

There is no need for me to weary you with details. They have their place in the study and the theological class-room. But I may be allowed to add a short survey of the whole field of the New Testament writings.

The most popular in tone are the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, especially when they are reporting the sayings of Jesus. Even St. Luke, with his occasional striving after elegance, has not deprived them of their simple beauty. The Epistle of St. James clearly re-echoes the popular language of the Gospels.

The Johannine writings, including the Revelation, are also linguistically deep-rooted in the most popular colloquial

language. The Logos in the very first line of the Gospel has blinded most critics to the essential character of a book which, for all its share in the world's history, is a book of the people.

St. Paul, too, can command the terse pithiness of the homely gospel speech, especially in his ethical exhortations as pastor. These take shape naturally in clear-cut maxims such as the people themselves use and treasure up. But even where St. Paul is brooding to himself and takes more to the language of the middle class, even when he is carried away by the priestly fervour of the liturgist and by the enthusiasm of the Psalmist, his Greek never becomes literary. It is never disciplined, say, by the canon of the Atticists, never tuned to the Asian rhythm : it remains non-literary. Thickly studded with rugged, forceful words taken from the popular idiom, it is perhaps the most brilliant example of the artless though not inartistic colloquial prose of a travelled city resident of the Roman Empire, its wonderful flexibility making it just the very Greek for use in a mission to all the world.

We are thus left with the total impression that the great mass of the texts which make up the New Testament, forming at the same time the most important part of the sacred volume in point of contents, are popular in character. The traces of literary language found in some few of the other texts cannot do away with this impression. On the contrary, the contrast in which the Epistle to the Hebrews, for instance, stands linguistically to the earlier texts of Primitive Christianity is peculiarly instructive to us. It points to the fact that the Epistle to the Hebrews, with its more definitely artistic, more literary language (corresponding to its theological subject-matter), constituted an epoch in the history of the new religion. Christianity is beginning to lay hands on the instruments of culture. The literary and theological

period has begun ; the end of the creative period is in sight.

The modern conception of New Testament Greek is not altogether a new thing ; our advances in knowledge seldom are. Under the later Roman Empire, when the old learning and culture came into hostile collision with Christianity, pagan controversialists spoke mockingly of the language of the New Testament as a boatman's idiom. The Christian apologists accepted the taunt and made the despised simplicity of that language their joyful boast.

I consider that their pride was wholly justified. In my estimation the New Testament, a simple monument of the language of the people, stands high above the artificial products of the contemporary secular literature in gracefulness and sheer native strength. The New Testament springing from the living language contrasts with the artificial, cold, ornamental language of the literary magnates in a way that reminds me of a sight that I have often seen in the East : a field strewn with ruins, ancient marble blocks scattered in wild disorder, and shooting up among them in bright profusion the red and blue flowers of an Anatolian spring.

The significance of the linguistic criticism for our purposes is that Primitive Christianity, from the decidedly popular character of the language of the New Testament, is seen to be most intimately bound up with the non-literary lower classes. The contemporary *litterati*, intent on the pursuit of that delusive phantom, Attic as the language of art, gaze fixedly backward upon the classical past, and are out of all touch with the masses. Primitive Christianity, speaking the language of its time, is in living connexion with its contemporaries. Exalted as it is, in the persons of its great creators, high above the masses and above the upper class, it yet stands firm and immovably rooted *in* the masses.

A similar conclusion would be reached if we were to exam-

ine the New Testament from a literary point of view. We should find that some of the texts produced by Primitive Christianity are not literary at all, while the rest are not artistic literature for the cultured, but popular literature. But for the sake of brevity I will only hint at these considerations here.

Still more important is the fact that the whole cultural background of Primitive Christianity is simply the ancient culture of the people. All attempts to exhibit Primitive Christianity with the ancient philosophy as a background are highly unjust, for they uproot Primitive Christianity and drag it into the sphere of the doctrinaire culture of the upper class. All the ancient philosophy that enters into the background of Primitive Christianity is simply so much of popular wisdom as had filtered down to the lower classes. The great conflict and compromise of the Gospel with high secular culture does not begin until after St. Paul, who for his part still contemplates the wisdom of the world with the consciousness of superior strength.

In its creative period the cultural structure of Primitive Christianity is altogether popular in character. There were, it is true, decided differences in the popular element according as it was rural and Palestinian or urban and cosmopolitan. To understand these differences it is necessary to know what the culture in town and country was like in ancient times. While we were fairly well acquainted with the great cities of antiquity from literary sources, the villages and small country towns, being seldom touched on in the literature, were practically beyond our ken. Archaeology has restored them to us, chiefly by means of the papyri and ostraca that have been discovered. It is the villages and small country towns of Galilee that count for most in the background of the Synoptic Gospels, and we

have at any rate learnt something about such places in the neighbouring land of Egypt.

As regards certain Egyptian villages and small towns we now possess most abundant and vivid materials for the history of their culture. Any one who was country-bred and has still a breath of imagination in him can now without difficulty participate by sympathy in the thousand and one little things that made up the social vortex for the men and women of these places. The same trifles, of daily occurrence among their not very dissimilar neighbours in Galilee at the same epoch, served the Master of parable as symbols of the Eternal. Again and again details of the life of the Galilean people that Jesus has recorded in His parables can be illustrated from Egyptian papyri. Features in the parables of the wicked servant, the good Samaritan, the importunate widow, the prodigal son, thus find parallels. And one who is familiar with the Gospels learns still more from the total impression than from the details : they are the same men of the non-literary classes who meet us in both places. Even before the new discoveries the rural background of the Synoptic Gospels was indeed clear enough. Animals and plants, vineyard and cornfield, sun and rain, sowing and reaping—how often they figure in the words of the Master ! In the parables especially, as already hinted, innumerable incidents in the life of the farmer, the shepherd, the fisherman, and such lowly persons are immortalized. Notwithstanding the various parables of kings one cannot help feeling that the Saviour borrowed most of the forms of His symbolic language from the rural culture of the lower classes.

In contrast to the rural setting of the Gospel of Jesus the background of the Pauline mission to the world is essentially that of the populace of the great cities. Born himself in a great city, and by fate a cosmopolitan, St. Paul has not the same magnificent immediateness as the Master in his rela-

tion to nature. His figures taken from country life tend to be somewhat conventional. But where St. Paul uses legal metaphors, especially those taken from the law of domestic relations, inheritance, and the criminal law, figures from the army and the gymnasium, there the man of towns is in his element. His central conceptions of justification, i.e., acquittal, of redemption, i.e., buying out, adoption as a son, and many others, although they have since been made unspeakably difficult by the theologians, were in fact easily understood by plain men of the ancient world.

The rural element is counterbalanced by others characteristic of the great cities of the world when we come to the Gospel of St. John, the great book which combines the qualities of the Synoptic with the Pauline style. It is neither decidedly rural, nor decidedly urban, but it *is* decidedly popular. Its background, in spite of the Logos in the opening line, is not the colourless, literary culture of the period, but the bright world of early Christian non-literary piety. It is no mere accident that so many scenes and sayings recorded by St. John have found their way to the heart of the people in later Christian generations.

Seen against the general background supplied by the ancient popular element, the two dominant personalities of the creative epoch, Jesus and Paul, now both appear inseparably linked with the lower classes. In speaking of "two dominant personalities" I do not think of Jesus as the first and Paul beside Him as second. To place them thus side by side would be unhistorical—a modern collocation. Their historical position is: Jesus the One, Paul the first after the One, the first *in* the One. From the personality of Jesus there went forth the decisive impulse, the effects of which are felt to this day; historically speaking, Jesus is the origin of our religion. The historical significance of St. Paul is that by insistence on the cult of the ascended Master

he preserved what was precious for men's souls in the revelation of Jesus, saved it from being narrowed by the national religion and from being sacrificed to legalism, and secured it to the heart of the people for ever. He gave to the cult of Christ at once both its popular shape and the outlines of its world-wide organization. The structure of their inner lives is alone sufficient reason to prevent Jesus and Paul from being ranked together. With Jesus all is bed-rock, resting on nothing but itself. St. Paul's masonry needed foundations; Paul is great, but he is great in Christ.

Only from the sociological point of view do Jesus and St. Paul rank together, and this because they do not belong to the thin upper layer of literary culture but have grown up from the mass of the many. As leading personalities they tower high above the many below and the few at the top, but they are not on that account in opposition to the lower classes. On the contrary, they are united to them as closely as head and hand are to the body.

In judging of the underlying popular element in Jesus and St. Paul it is of the utmost importance to remember that Jesus, on good authority (Mark vi. 3), was a carpenter, and, as a prophet, was always poor, while St. Paul was a weaver of tent-cloth. Of St. Paul we know that, even as a missionary, he pursued his trade and supported himself entirely by the work of his hands, so as not to be a burden to his poor congregations. He refers with pride to his own labour (1 Cor. iv. 12). His big, clumsy handwriting, of which he speaks once (Gal. vi. 11, R.V.), may well have been the writing of a tired artisan-hand, deformed by labour, and we can imagine that it was pleasanter for him to dictate his letters than to write them himself from beginning to end. What a suggestive picture of the guild life of the working-classes we have in the Acts of the Apostles (xviii. 1 ff.), where St. Paul, arriving at Corinth, finds lodging and employment in

the house of his guild-brother, Aquila. The passages in the New Testament dealing with work and wages, in the literal and in the figurative sense, sound very differently, and far more life-like, when we know that they were addressed by working men to working men, in phraseology that had long been customary in the workshop. There is a phrase we find on the tombstone of a humble man of the early Empire in a country district not far from the home of St. Paul in the south-west of Asia Minor. To the eye wearied with the bombast of overloaded eulogy in showier inscriptions it appears scarcely noticeable, and yet how eloquent in reality is this simple form of praise: Daphnos, the best among the gardeners, has raised for himself a hero's resting-place (Heroön), and now has reached the goal, "after that he had much laboured."¹ To any one with a sense for beauty in simplicity these lines concerning the much labour of the gardener Daphnos are as a green spray of ivy tenderly clasping the tombstone of its old friend. And the words of St. John, in the Revelation, are no less racy of the people when, recording the voice heard from heaven, he gives a slight Asiatic tinge to an old Biblical phrase, and says that the dead "rest from their labours" (Rev. xiv. 13). St. Paul, however, the artisan missionary, catches the popular tone of his native country even better when he boasts of an Ephesian Mary, while she was yet living, that she "bestowed much labour on you" or "much laboured for you" (Rom. xvi. 6). Again, in a Roman cemetery² of later date, we hear the old popular phrase re-echoed by a wife who praises her husband, "who laboured much for me."

In fact, with regard to all that Paul the weaver of tent-

¹ R. Heberdey and E. Kalinka, *Bericht über zwei Reisen im Südwestlichen Kleinasien*, Denkschriften d. kaiserl. Akad. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Classe, 45 Band (1897); Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten*, p. 227.

² *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, No. 9552; Deissmann, *loc. cit.*

cloth has to say about labour, we ought to place ourselves as it were within St. Paul's own class, the artisan class of the Imperial age, and then feel the force of his words. They all become much more lifelike when restored to their original historical *milieu*. "I laboured more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor. xv. 10)—these words, applied by St. Paul to missionary work, came originally from the joyful pride of the skilled weaver, who, working by the piece, was able to hand in the largest amount of stuff on pay-day. The frequent references to labour in vain are a trembling echo of the discouragement resulting from a width of cloth being rejected as badly woven and therefore not paid for. And then the remark to the pious sluggards of Thessalonica: "that if any should not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. iii. 10). I remember a newspaper controversy in which a social reformer, not quite so well up in his Bible as he should have been, denounced this text as a heartless capitalist phrase. As a matter of fact, St. Paul was probably borrowing a bit of good old workshop morality, a maxim coined perhaps by some industrious workman as he forbade his lazy apprentice to sit down to dinner.

In the same way we can only do justice to the remarks in the New Testament about wages by examining them *in situ*, amidst their native surroundings. Jesus and St. Paul spoke with distinct reference to the life of the common people. If you elevate such utterances to the sphere of the Kantian moral philosophy and then reproach Primitive Christianity with teaching morality for the sake of reward, you have not only misunderstood the words, you have torn them up by the roots. It means that you have failed to distinguish between the concrete illustration of a popular preacher, perfectly spontaneous and intelligible in the native surroundings of Primitive Christianity, and a carefully considered ethical theory of fundamental importance to first principles.

The sordid, ignoble suggestions, so liable to arise in the lower class, are altogether absent from the sayings of Jesus and His apostle, as shown by the parable of the labourers in the vineyard and the analogous reliance of St. Paul solely upon grace.

And what Jesus says about the building of houses and towers, sowing and reaping, and many things besides, cannot have come from idle observation of the work of others. It is the reflection of His own experience gained by many a hard day's toil.

A thorough man of the people in His outward appearance, a man of the people, also, as none other before or since in His mastery of language, Jesus, according to the best and oldest authority, often stood literally before the masses when He spoke or acted in public. It is highly significant how often the words "much people" and "multitude" occur in the Gospels when the auditors of Jesus are mentioned. The people surround the house where He is so closely that it is impossible to break through the living wall and so reach the door; a sick man has to be let down by ropes through the roof. An innumerable multitude of people, "myriads," gather together another time about Him, so closely crowded that they tread one upon another (Luke xii. 1). Most vividly of all, however, the pictures of the feeding of the four thousand, and of the five thousand, record this impression: Jesus with the masses.

This pressing of the masses to Jesus is responded to by a strong sympathy of Jesus for the masses. We have proofs enough that His grand consciousness of His mission drove Him to the many. His call goes out to "many." He speaks, in one of His deepest utterances, of the "many" for whom He must lay down His soul as the price of redemption; they are the "many" for whom, as He said at the

Last Supper, according to St. Mark, He would shed His blood. He even appeals to "all," all that are weary and heavy laden, and He looks out over the people as over a broad cornfield that promises a plenteous harvest (Matt. ix. 37).

What He thought of the multitude in His heart may be gathered from the Evangelist's statement—admirably characteristic, and probably reminiscent of some saying of Jesus Himself—that He felt compassion at sight of the people, because they were lying down exhausted, as sheep having no shepherd (Matt. ix. 36). He speaks with especial warmth of His mission to those whom He calls "the lost" or "the little ones." Defiantly, like one of the old prophets, He takes His stand by "the poor," mistrusting altogether "the rich," who in His experience were as a rule not susceptible of the Kingdom of God. Where He has observed cases of the exploitation of the weak by the strong He attacks the exploiter: a typical instance is His upbraiding of the Pharisees, who devour widows' houses (Matt. xxiii. 14; Mark xii. 40; Luke xx. 47). Full of irony against "them that are full," He sympathizes most deeply with the multitude of the hungry and thirsty, the naked and sick, the strangers and prisoners. How deeply He sympathized with them is strikingly shown by the picture of the Last Judgment, in which Jesus identifies Himself with these unhappy ones, all of whom belong to the lower classes.

Most instructive of all, however, is His own testimony in the solemn prayer of thanksgiving (Matt. xi. 25 ff.; Luke x. 21). Full of deep joy, according to St. Luke, He thanks the Father for having hidden from the wise and prudent the powers at work in His mission, and for having revealed them to babes. Here, on His own experience of life, Jesus draws the distinction between classes: on the one hand the but slightly susceptible upper class, full of obscurantism and self-

exaltation of the wise and prudent, from whom God hides Himself ; on the other hand the babes, judged by God to be worthy of mighty revelations.

The picture of Jesus amid the lower classes repeats itself in its main lines in the case of St. Paul. It is of course obvious that St. Paul achieved no wholesale results on the masses. Such mass-revivals as took place on the first apostolic Whit-Sunday, according to the Acts of the Apostles, were probably never experienced by St. Paul in his evangelization of the world, although he was extremely conscious of the universality of his mission. But the social structure of his churches points none the less clearly to the lower grades of the town population. The names of slaves in the lists of persons to be greeted in his letters are sufficiently typical of this. Still more instructive is the organization of collections for the poor at Jerusalem. The Galatian churches and the Corinthians were advised by St. Paul to raise the money by weekly instalments, payable on the Sunday (1 Cor. xvi. 1 f.). This is advice to poor people, working for a daily wage. In the church of Thessalonica also manual labourers must have been to the fore (1 Thess. iv. 11). St. Paul speaks expressly of the deep poverty of the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. viii. 2). And besides this there is the great confession in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, at the end of the first chapter. In the spirit of the Master's prayer of thanksgiving St. Paul looks out upon those who had been won to the Gospel, and observes that not many men of worldly culture, not many men of influence, not many of good family had been called by God. Things that counted in the world as foolish, weak, and of base extraction, things that were naught—these had God chosen.

From such passages as this we must construct our picture

of the churches of St. Paul, and from the realistic imagery employed by the people we must try to understand the forms of expression that St. Paul created for the new cult. We possess these forms of expression only in fragments, and those fragments scattered up and down the Epistles. Read, however, in their real context, they appear far more simple, far more popular in character than they are usually conceived to be by Pauline scholars. Some details I have alluded to already. To any one at all conversant with Hellenistic popular law the ideas of justification, redemption, and adoption would be at once intelligible. For congregations especially in which the slave element was more or less strongly represented, salvation in Christ could not be illustrated more popularly than by the figure of emancipation for a sacred purpose. The Primitive Christian preaching of Christ crucified, as formulated by St. Paul and other like-minded apostles, is altogether of great popular simplicity in its outlines. The eternal glory of the Divine Child with His Father, His coming down to earth in voluntary self-abnegation and servitude, His life of poverty with the poor, His compassion, His temptations and His mighty works, the inexhaustible riches of His words, His prayers, His obedience, His bitter suffering and death, and after the cross His glorious resurrection and return to the Father—all these episodes in the great divine drama, whose peripeteia lay not in hoary antiquity, but had been witnessed a score or so of years ago, were intelligible to every soul, even to the poorest, and particularly to the poorest. And the titles with which the devotee decked the beloved object of his cult could, many of them, claim domicile in the souls of the poor and the simple: titles such as Lamb of God, the Crucified, Shepherd and Chief Shepherd, Corner Stone, Door and Way, the Corn of Wheat, Bread and Vine, Light and Life, Head and Body, Alpha and Omega, Witness, Mediator and Judge, Brother, Son of Man,

Son of God, Word of God and Image of God, Saviour, High Priest, Lord, King. Unfathomable in intellectual content, giving scope to every variety of personal Christian experience and every motive of self-sacrificing obedience, this series contains not a single title that was likely to impress by mere sacerdotal associations or unintelligibleness. In the same way the gospel tradition of worship, with its sturdy, popular tone, was far superior to the fantastic, hysterical mythologies of the other cults, which piled one stimulant on another. So too the celebration of the mysteries of Christ required no magnificent temple or awe-inspiring cavern : it could take place wherever two or three were gathered together in His name. All great movements in the history of our race have been determined by conditions of the heart of the people, not by intellect. The triumph of the cult of Christ over all other cults is in no remote degree explainable by the fact that from the first Christianity took deep root in the heart of the many, in the hearts of men and women, old and young, bond and free, Jews, Greeks, and Barbarians.

Holding these views we of course run counter to the widely spread theory that St. Paul turned the simple gospel of Jesus into an abstruse theological system. No ! Jesus far exceeds him in simplicity and in popularity of appeal, but St. Paul as the evangelist of the great cities has not parted company with the lower classes, nor does he preach above the heads of simple folk. The doctrinaire elements that St. Paul undoubtedly has adopted from the culture of the upper class are altogether eclipsed by the popular build of his personality as a whole.

How truly St. Paul was a man of the people may be seen admirably by comparing him with one of his contemporaries, Philo of Alexandria, who undoubtedly belongs every inch of him to the upper class. A Jew—and, like St. Paul, a Jew of the Diaspora and the Septuagint,—like St. Paul, moreover,

a man accustomed to great cities,—Philo, in spite of these and other noticeable affinities, is nevertheless sharply contrasted with St. Paul. We can perhaps formulate the contrast by saying that Philo, the Platonist and man of letters, stands at the last stage of the ancient culture, unconnected with the masses. St. Paul, the practical man and witness to Christ, stands at the beginning of the religious transformation, surrounded by the non-literary inhabitants of the great city.

The result of our observations so far is this : Primitive Christianity, alike in its leading personalities and in the preponderating number of its adherents, was a movement of the lower classes. The water of life did not filter down from the upper level to the many and the insignificant, but came welling forth from the depths of a soul of Divine simplicity. The first to drink of it were fainting stragglers from the great caravan of the unknown and the forgotten. Again it was a simple man who led forth the waters of the unquenchable spring into the world, for simple men and women to drink at. Let two or three generations pass away, and then the wise and prudent will be thronging to the well-spring.

ADOLF DEISSMANN.

WELLHAUSEN AND OTHERS ON THE APOCALYPSE.

THIRTEEN years ago it looked as if the analytic, literary method of investigating the Apocalypse of John had almost exhausted itself. Gunkel's *Schöpfung und Chaos*, published in 1895, opened up a fresh method of research, which promised to solve the problem of the book by exploiting the hypothesis of different eschatological traditions ultimately derived from oriental cosmology and current in the writer's