

OPERA FORIS.

MATERIALS FOR THE PREACHER.

XIII.

I CORINTHIANS xvi. 14: *Let all that ye do be done in love* (πάντα ὑμῶν ἐν ἀγάπῃ γινέσθω).

Why does Paul add this word at this point? He has been exhorting the Corinthians to a manly, resolute religion: *stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.* Why speak of *love* in this connexion? Because love is the atmosphere of a robust faith. There is a spurious or inferior type of strength which has firm convictions but insists upon its own opinions or methods without paying sufficient regard to the feelings of other people. This masterful temper is often confounded with true strength of character, and Paul seeks to guard against this misconception. A firm grasp of principle is always apt to be uncharitable. Its temptation is to grow impatient of any defects in the belief or conduct of others, and a trifle hard in its moral judgments. Resolute natures often say and do the right thing, but it is in the wrong spirit. Instead of edifying their fellows, they produce a feeling of irritation. They are difficult to work with. They want echoes, not colleagues, in the church. Their very tenacity of purpose develops an inconsiderateness which tends now and then to make trouble, instead of peace, in the community.

Paul suggests that forbearance and consideration, so far from being a mark of weakness, are an inseparable element of strength. A man who is strong in the faith, full of clear ideas and energy, ought to be strong *in love*, conciliatory, unselfish, forbearing. It is easy for him to be domineering and censorious, and he often imagines that he is thereby displaying firmness of character and the courage of his con-

victions. But impatience and self-assertion of this kind are really a flaw, inasmuch as they violate the cardinal law of love. It is childish and not manly, Paul implies, to take offence at any difference of opinion or method among your fellow-Christians, and to be overbearing even in the pursuit of ends which are intrinsically Christian. As Crashaw puts it :—

'Tis love, not years or limbs, that can  
Make the martyr or the man.

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2 Timothy iv. 16–17. A study in unselfishness. It is especially difficult to avoid egotism, when one has to speak of one's own experiences, but Paul's unselfish spirit comes out with remarkable clearness in this passage at three points. (i.) In his references to the Roman Christians who seem to have failed him at the critical moment. *At my first defence no one took my part, but all forsook me : may it not be laid to their charge.* He does not blame them for their gross cowardice. It is not their desertion of him which weighs on his mind, so much as their failure to seize an opportunity for serving Christ. *May it not be laid to their charge!* The tone is magnanimous pity. Paul forgives and prays that God may forgive them. He entertains no personal resentment. (ii.) In his references to his own courage. That was due to divine aid ; he claims no credit for it, and does not draw attention to his own virtues. *The Lord stood by me and strengthened me.* Paul got power to stand firm and give a ready answer to the judge's queries. He does not plume himself upon his ready wit and bravery, but acknowledges the hand of his Lord in the matter. If he was not intimidated, the glory was God's. (iii.) The object of his personal deliverance was wider than his own comfort. The aim of God's intervention, in sparing his life for the meantime, was *that through me the message might be fully*

*proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear.* Even the postponement of the trial served, in his judgment, to promote the greater ends of the gospel. He regarded himself consistently as the agent of the cause, not as the main object on which all other considerations should hinge. This absence of pretension forms the third and highest note of unselfishness in the passage. He would not pose as a victim or as a hero in the cause of Christianity.

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Jeremiah xvii. 12-13 : *A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary. O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed ; they that depart from me shall be written in the earth (or, cut off from the earth, so Giesebrecht ; cp. Ps. xxxiv. 17), because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters.*

The supreme hope of religion is a God who is not only permanent but fresh, whose life is not merely stable but vital and accessible to men. The eternity of God, says the prophet, is a consolation to men, because it assures them of a lasting refuge against the changes and overthrow of the world. But life requires more than permanent protection. It depends on sustenance no less than on a sanctuary. The God who is to satisfy its needs must be a source of unfailling freshness, and Jeremiah accordingly supplements his idea of God as the eternal refuge with the conception of an unfailling spring of vitality. The double note of the passage is therefore the Protection and the Provision made for human life by God.

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Hosea x. 4 : *They speak (mere or vain) words, swearing falsely in making covenants : therefore judgment (i.e. punishment) springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.*

The idea of the prophet in the second clause may be termed "The Homeliness of Punishment." Wrong-doing is not

requited in some distant scene or in a far-off, eccentric fashion. It is neither future nor foreign, but a present experience of life. Like the hemlock (or *rōsh*), a rank weed probably of the poppy order, which spoils the fields from which the farmer hoped to reap a harvest of good grain, punishment appears above the surface of our common life, meeting us in the very sphere where we had sinned—in *the furrows of the field*. It is homely alike in its season and in its sphere. Life here and now has its element of retribution. To punish a society or an individual for falsehood or formality or any self-indulgence, God does not require to transport the offender to some weird, remote scene. Punishment is not a Dantesque experience; it is made up of the simplest elements in our being. It is wrought into and out of the very faculties of the mind and body which we have abused. Thus, e.g., the parent reaps disappointment and shame from the children whom he has mismanaged in early life. Instead of growing up to be a comfort to him, they reward him for undue laxity or severity by ingratitude and wilfulness. *In the furrows of the field*—in the very relationship which should be full of joy and help, and at the very time when he might expect to reap happiness from his sons and daughters, he has the vexation of seeing an ugly crop springing up to flaunt him with idle, bitter habits. So with a man's sins against his body or mind, or against work and friendship. The punishment for these comes home to him in person in the after-years. It is developed from the germs of the undisciplined living and shallow thinking in the past.

It is more difficult to recognize the homeliness of punishment than to admit its certainty. That is one reason why Hosea insists upon the inward and present law of retribution in human life. As the self-sacrificing disciple, in the words of Jesus, reaps a hundred-fold *now in this time*, being enriched in character by his self-denial and self-sacrifice, so,

on the reverse side, any excess or indulgence is visited a hundred-fold now and here upon the transgressor.

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Luke viii. 2-3.

This passage, one of Luke's special contributions to the gospel-narrative, describes the double circle of Christ's followers.

(a) *And with him the twelve*, i.e. those specially called to high enterprise and service. This represents the circle of people in the Church who are conscious of a definite vocation and moved by the Spirit of Christ to serve the Church with consecrated lives.

(b) But alongside of these are *certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities*, e.g. Mary Magdalene, etc. The dominating motion of their discipleship is gratitude for personal benefits. Their's is not the vocation of the twelve, but they have their own place and work. The memory of their deliverance moves them to support by their gifts the disciples who form Christ's inner circle (cp. Galatians vi. 6). This represents the subordinate rôle of many in the Church, who rank among the followers of Christ, and who, though they cannot take part personally in the great Christian mission, can make the task of the active servants easier by their liberality and sympathy.

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John vi. 37:—*All that which the Father giveth me shall come to me.*

„ „ 44:—*No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him.*

„ „ 45:—*Everyone that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me.*

This series of words contains Christ's definition or description of the true disciple. (i.) Faith is not accidental or

due to the initiative of men. The genuine disciples—those who *come to Jesus*—are the Father's gift to the Son. Their coming or adherence to Jesus may seem to be their own choice. But, in reality, behind their choice of Jesus lies God's choice of them. What they are at first most conscious of is their own initiative in the matter; their resolve, their trust, their loyalty. Yet, as the Fourth Gospel repeatedly suggests, further reflection will show that this position is reached by them under the influence of a Divine suasion. The relation between them and Jesus has a history deeper than their own experience. It goes back to a Divine choice prior to their own.

This is developed in (ii.) the thought of the Father *drawing* true disciples to Jesus. This attraction is exerted on the mind and will by the revelation of the Father in the historic person and spiritual witness of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is assumed, of course, that those only can be drawn who are sensitive to the revelation and who yield to the power of the truth manifested in Jesus. The phrase marks an advance upon the previous one, and the two are not exactly identical. The "drawing" is a further stage of the "giving." The conception of the disciples as "a gift" does not bring out their will and choice. The reference may even be to a predestined election. But this is supplemented by the further metaphor of "drawing," i.e. of a Divine action upon the human personality.

The line of thought is finally (iii.) drawn out, in order to set aside any idea of caprice or arbitrary compulsion, by the description of the true disciples as those who are taught of God, who accept His teaching and show themselves sensitive to His discipline of mind and heart. Here the element of

<sup>1</sup> Especially by the revelation of Jesus the crucified, as is suggested by xii. 32. Dr. Abbott happily compares the saying of Epictetus (i. 2. 4) that man is drawn (*ἐλκόμενον*) to nothing so much as to τὸ εἶλογον.

personal sympathy and co-operation comes to the front.<sup>1</sup> What is uppermost is the hearty response of the hearer to the divine revelation. He is not only a gift of the Father to the Son, and drawn by the Father, but a conscious agent who exerts his own powers of attention, subduing pride and prejudice in order to accept the gospel of the Father and the Son, and to occupy the position which all along has been his destiny. The recognition of Jesus as God's Son obviously implies far more than the mere recognition of historical facts or the acceptance of doctrine. It is a spiritual relation, involving the exercise of those inward qualities which can alone receive the illumination of the Spirit.

The first two expressions of the series thus stand over against the third, but all three form a moral unity. They represent the co-operation of the disciple in the saving purpose of God, and his responsibility for making the most of his opportunity. The divine side is prominent in two facets. But the three expressions are intended to bring out various sides of a truth which eludes any logical or rigid presentation. "Ne sont-elles pas, au fond," as Loisy puts it in his Commentary, "une même réalité vivante, que l'esprit humain regarde de deux côtés, et qu'il dédouble en idée, parce qu'il est incapable de la voir directement et de la définir simplement ?" The mission of Jesus, as the Son and Sent of God is in a divinely established harmony with the vague longings and moral aims of human life. Those who are true to the latter will find them satisfied in Christ, and then they will become conscious that their efforts and aspirations and prayers are only the other side of a Divine movement which,

<sup>1</sup> The "drawing" of ver. 44 is a wider conception than that of ver. 45. The influence exerted by a father on his son, e.g., is always wider and deeper than the latter is ever conscious of. He may listen to his father's counsels and allow himself to be controlled by his advice. But this, though it is the most spontaneous and definite form of adherence, is by no means equivalent to the entire effect produced by his father.

long ere they became conscious of their needs, had embraced them in its eternal design. By grace, they confess, they are what they are.

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John xiv. 13: *And whatsoever ye shall ask (αἰτήσητε) in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

On the five occasions on which Christ is represented as using the active (*αἰτεῖν*), instead of the middle (*αἰτούμαι*), the qualifying phrase *ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου* is added, in order (Dr. Abbott holds, *Johannine Grammar*, p. 391) to exclude "selfish or arbitrary asking." The disciples are not to ask recklessly for favours, or to imagine that their private fancies will be gratified. But while this restricting force of the phrase is obvious, the restriction is the outcome of a higher and positive content. Prayers in the name of Jesus exclude many things, just because they move on a high level of their own. What is that level? What are the specific qualities of this prayer *ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ*? In his recently translated volume of lectures upon *The Fundamental Truths of the Christian Religion* (pp. 296 f.), Dr. Seeberg defines prayer in the name of Jesus as follows. It comprises (i.) a definite object. Such prayer is "for what communion with Jesus brings me," i.e. for faith and love. Prayer for such gifts of the inward life is sure of its answer, since it lies in the line of God's will. (ii.) Prayer offered in the name of Jesus means mutual prayer and intercession. "Christ worked for his Church; so he who lives in communion with Him prays for the Church of Jesus Christ and for all the individuals that belong or should belong to it." Thus, while (i.) excludes from this prayer selfish, outward petitions, (ii.) rules out a subtler form of selfishness.<sup>1</sup> Even when prayer

<sup>1</sup> This is brought out e.g. by H. T. Holtzmann in his note upon the passage: "Ein Gebet im Namen Jesu ist nämlich ein Gebet im christl. Gemein-



does rise to the region of spiritual desire, it may nevertheless be shadowed by egoism. Whereas genuine prayer in the name of Jesus can only be offered by one who is conscious of his obligations as a member of the community of Jesus, and who realizes that he can only be blessed in and through the fellowship of the faithful. (iii.) A third side, according to Seeberg, is the certainty that such prayers are heard, since the increase of faith and love is willed by Christ. Only, the answer is not always what we expect. As the experience of Paul with his thorn in the flesh teaches us, "prayer is always heard and always answered, even though our wishes and the pictures of our fancy remain unfulfilled. That points us to the barrier of faith and humility which the Christian ever erects around his prayer." It is certain that every petition for the increase of faith and love is answered, but it is as certain that these may grow in and through the pressure of some trouble, from which, in our short-sighted moods, we would fain be free. Prayer in the name of Jesus means that the Christian is content to leave the outward circumstances to God's will and wisdom, and to bear even the continuance of what is irksome, provided only that the spiritual boon is granted. This attitude implies an identification of ourselves with the aims and spirit of Jesus. It means that His interests are regarded by us as supreme, and that we desire nothing better than to be in line and touch with him.<sup>1</sup>

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geiste." Heitmüller's objections (*Im Namen Jesu*, pp. 77 f.) do not serve to invalidate this interpretation.

<sup>1</sup> Compare Mr. T. J. Hardy's definition of "the essential character of prayer as an expression of loyalty to the Father's will; a taking up, as it were, of our own spirit into His; a letting go of ourselves towards God in respect of everything that concerns us" (*The Gospel of Pain*, pp. 128-129)