

OPERA FORIS.

MATERIALS FOR THE PREACHER.

XIV.

GALATIANS iv. 16. *So then (ὥστε) am I become your enemy, because (ἀληθεύων ὑμῖν) I tell you the truth ?*

Both Blass (*Rhythmen der asianischen und römischen Kunstprosa*, 1905, p. 210) and Könnicke (*Emendationen zu Stellen des NT*, 1908, pp. 29-30) change ὥστε into ὡς δέ, and read the sentence as a statement, not as a rhetorical question. Zahn and Mr. Rendall, though retaining ὥστε, similarly refuse to take the sentence as interrogative. But the so-called consecutive ὥστε with the indicative offers no great difficulty, and the proposed alteration does not give any better sense to the passage. Taken as a reproachful question, it runs thus : " After all our happy relations, my trust in you and your devotion to me, has it come to this, that I am (judged by you to be) your enemy because I have dealt faithfully and plainly with you (i.e. on my previous visit) ? " Paul cannot reproach himself with any undue severity in this case. He had to point out the failings and errors of his friends for their own sakes, and he had done so in love (cp. Eph. iv. 15), without any trace of personal feeling. The Galatians could not plead the excuse of their friend having shown temper. They were guilty of a childish petulance in attributing hostile motives to the well-meant remonstrances of their apostle. They could not conceive of a friend being obliged to differ from them for their own sake, and their wounded pride rebelled against any reflection being cast upon their conduct. Compare <sup>1</sup> the preface to Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*, in which he observes : " It is the sinful

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Terence's *Andria*, Act i. Scene 1, 40-41 : " Hoc tempore obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit."

unhappiness of some men's minds that they can hardly think well of the best words or ways of those whom they disaffect ; and they usually disaffect those that cross them in their corrupt proceedings, and plainly tell them of their faults. They are ready to judge of the reprover's spirit by their own, and to think that all such sharp reproofs proceed from some disaffection to their persons or partial opposition to the opinions they hold. But plain-dealers are always approved in the end ; and the time is at hand when you shall confess that those were your truest friends." <sup>1</sup>

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Galatians iv. 18 :—*It is good to be affected at all times, and not only when I am with you.*

The precise sense of the words is not quite certain, ζηλοῦσθαι being rather ambiguous. But they may fairly be taken, in general, as a protest against instability of character. The Galatians, Paul says, were all right so long as they had their apostle's strong influence bearing upon them. But when that was withdrawn, they relapsed. Their religion was too much a matter of association and companionship.

It is some credit to be influenced by a good man. Susceptibility to a fine character and admiration for a strong nature should count for much. But this ought to produce eventually a strength of personal conviction which can stand by itself, and such a result is the aim of every influential man. He seeks to create not adherents of his own opinion but continual followers of the truth. Genuine religion must be more than an enthusiastic devotion to the person of anyone who first impresses us with a sense of the reality of God. However powerful may be the impression he makes, faith must strike its roots deeper than personal admiration or the acceptance of another's lead. Otherwise our character

<sup>1</sup> Zahn thinks that Isa. lxiii. 7-9 was in Paul's mind. A better parallel would be 1 Kings xxi. 20.

simply becomes an echo of the last strong personality with whom we have been thrown in contact ; and as a strong influence is not always identical with a wise and sound impulse, the character lacks any steadfast and continuous principle. This, says Paul, is *not good*.

Galatians vi. 3 and 7.

The twofold province of self-deception, in relation to the wrongdoing (*a*) of others, and (*b*) of oneself.

(*a*) After speaking of the duty of Christian forgiveness, Paul sharply adds a word against the danger of censoriousness. *If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives (φρεναπατᾶ) himself.* If he prides himself upon his own integrity, in contrast to the stained and broken character of a brother, he is making an immense mistake. He is the dupe of his own folly. It is self-deception to plume oneself upon being holier than one's neighbour. That is only to feed one's vanity, which is an empty nothing. It is an entire delusion, says Paul, for the religious man to entertain a lofty self-esteem, or to foster a sense of his own exceeding merit by dwelling censoriously upon the lapses of his brethren.

As Sieffert and Zahn point out, it is not necessary to refer this verse to verse 1, as if verse 2 were a parenthesis. The error denounced in verse 3 includes the idea that a man is superior to the duty of laying himself alongside of his erring brethren, being too good, forsooth, to associate with them. The self-delusion consists in the feeling that he can afford to look down on them and also to hold aloof from them.

(*b*) Similarly, with regard to a man's own wrongdoing. *Be not deceived (μὴ πλανᾶσθε),* the apostle insists ; no pretences will prevent the law of retribution overtaking a man, for all his fine words and position. *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.* The religionist deceives himself if he imagines that an exception will be made in his

favour, on account of his standing in the Church or formal attendance upon ceremonies. This is entirely to misconceive the character of the God with whom he has to do. Neither excess nor indolence will be overlooked, and it is a sinful self-delusion to think otherwise.

There is a close connexion between the two forms of self-delusion. The man who so mistakes his own position as to look down with the eyes of a Pharisee upon his erring brethren is very likely to cherish the idea that his own errors will be leniently treated, if not overlooked, by the God to whom he imagines that he stands specially close.

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Hebrews ii. 8 : *Now we see not yet all things subjected to him.*

It takes no faith to see and state this. The fact is patent. It is a vision of sad reality which requires no transcendental insight but only a pair of eyes.

“ One thing appears to me—  
The work is not complete ;  
One world I know, and see  
It is not at His feet.”

Yet the Christian outlook includes a further hope. *We see not all things under His feet.* That is the pathos of faith, and it may develop into an actual pessimism. But, if we are Christians, there is something which we do see, and that is *Jesus crowned with glory and honour.* The revelation of His person and purpose is a re-assurance, amid the apparently chaotic and adverse facts of the present world-order. These are not all that they seem, and they are not the total reality of existence.

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Hebrews x. 4 : *For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.*

To a modern these words have an antiquated sound. The

world of ideas which they suggest has passed so entirely away that we look back upon the stage they represent as a stage far below us, so far, indeed, that it is barely conceivable. But they were originally the apex of a long ascent. The quiet decisiveness and even scorn with which the writer sets down this conviction breathe a feeling of relief, after the long centuries of persistent and unavailing sacrifices. Humanity is drawing breath after a prolonged nightmare. The primitive ritual of purification was based on the belief that the blood of animals could wipe away sin, "because the animal that has been consecrated by contact with the altar becomes charged with a divine potency, and its sacred blood, poured over the impure man, absorbs and disperses his impurity." Thus, as Dr. Farnell continues (*The Evolution of Religion*, pp. 120 f.), the cognate idea of the pure heart was "not necessarily wholly ethical," as yet, but often "co-existent with the ideas of sin that do not clearly recognize moral responsibility or the essential difference between deliberate wrong-doing and the ritualistic or accidental or involuntary sin." "The final point is reached when it is realized that the blood of bulls and of goats cannot wash away sin, that nothing external can defile the heart or soul, but only evil thought and evil will. This purged and idealized concept will then in the progressive religions revolt against its own parentage, and will prompt the eternal antagonism of the prophet against the ritual priest, of the Christ against the Pharisee."

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