

*THE TEACHING OF PAUL IN TERMS OF THE
PRESENT DAY.*

XXXI. KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE.

PAUL in the "Hymn of Heavenly Love" (1 Cor. xiii.) draws a pointed contrast between partial or present knowledge and perfect (absolute) or future knowledge. As the mind and character of the Christian develops, his partial knowledge is put aside, and done away : that partial knowledge sees only obscurely, for it sees only the reflection of the reality (as in a mirror), and cannot gaze directly on the reality. I cannot but feel, however, that Dr. Harnack, in the striking article in the *EXPOSITOR*, June, 1912, p. 493 f., over-emphasises the irreconcilability of the one kind of knowledge with the other, just as he also seems to over-emphasise the separation between knowledge and love.¹ These two topics, which are in reality correlated, must be considered together.

According to the exposition of Dr. Harnack, the perfect knowledge for which Paul's soul longs has nothing to do with love, though it is the best thing in the world and the best in this temporal life (p. 494). But if it has nothing to do with love, why is so much stress laid on it in this "Hymn of Love," whose object is to emphasise the power and value of love? Dr. Harnack acknowledges that "it is a point of some importance that Paul is led to this knowledge when he is thinking of love; and in another passage of the same letter (viii. 3) he goes yet a step further: 'If any man love God, he is known of Him.' Here, also, he does not indeed

¹ His words are, "in this hymn love and knowledge have nothing to do with one another. Neither does love lead to knowledge, nor knowledge to love." There is a sense in which this is true; but it needs to be guarded against too wide application.

say 'he knoweth God,' but still it is the preparatory step to that combination."

According to our view "to be known of God" is in Paul's thought a correlative expression to the other, "to know God." He that is known of God knows God: the two acts are different sides of one process: the Divine within man reaches forth to the Divine outside of man, striving to be united to it, in proportion as the Divine outside of and above man lays hold of him and takes possession. God knows man by taking man for His own. And so the Apostle says in the same passage, "I shall know even as I am known." Dr. Harnack himself interprets this to mean, "as God knows me, so I shall know Him (and His ways)"; and he goes on to say, "How much Paul lives in the problem that is presented by the relation of our knowledge of God to God's knowledge of us is shown by several places in his letters." In illustration he quotes Galatians iv. 8: "Now knowing God, or rather being known by Him." To know God is here practically synonymous with being known by Him.

Now compare this verse with 1 Corinthians viii. 1-3: "'We know that we all have knowledge.'¹ Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth. If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth not yet as he ought to know; but, if any man loveth God, the same is known of Him." The line of progress is here through love: as a man grows in love of God, he becomes better known of God. The natural inference towards which viii. 1-2a points is that this progress is towards increase in knowledge of God; but forthwith in viii. 2b Paul turns the statement to the other side, and says that the issue of this progress is that the man is known of God. Then we may compare this

¹ Probably the words "we know that we all have knowledge" are a quotation from the letter sent to Paul by the Corinthian Church.

Corinthian statement with Galatians iv. 8 (as just quoted) and Ephesians iii. 17 f., "that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ . . . that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God." It has been doubted what it is that the Ephesians are to be strong to apprehend, whether "the mystery" (iii. 4) or the love of Christ (iii. 18). For our purpose this is immaterial. He who knows the love of God, or the love of Christ, knows God, for goodness is the essence of God and His love is the expression of His goodness. The passage implies beyond all doubt that through increase in love comes increase in the knowledge of God. Therefore in the "Hymn of Love," which glorifies the power and Divine character of love, the stress in the latter part is laid on knowledge, because through growth in love comes growth also in knowledge, the best thing in the world. Such is the teaching of Paul: love is the quality through which man most nearly approaches the nature of God, and to grow in love is to grow towards God. "I shall see face to face" shows that the perception will be mutual, i.e., that to be known will imply to know.

XXXII. PARTIAL AND COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE.

Now, as to perfect knowledge and partial knowledge, how are they related to one another in the mind of Paul? It is true that he expresses a very low opinion of partial knowledge: it has to be eliminated and done away with: it must be replaced by another quite different kind of knowledge. This partial knowledge feeds the vanity of man (1 Corinthians viii. 2): it tends to make him proud and conceited, and is therefore an extremely dangerous quality. There is nothing Paul dreads more in the nature of man than his tendency to think too much of himself and to put

himself in the place of God instead of giving God the glory,¹ in other words to make himself the centre of his universe instead of regarding God as at once the centre of his being and the goal of his development. The result of this is that he loses his perception of the nature of God and his love of God, whom he misrepresents more and more completely in his own imagination.²

In the Corinthian congregation Paul recognised that there existed a certain tendency towards self-complacency, and especially towards an over-estimation of their knowledge. This tendency to self-confidence is deep-seated in the Greek character: it has often led to bold action and success, but far more frequently it is the cause of failure. The Christians in Corinth were very conscious of, and confident in, their knowledge, whereas they had as yet not acquired any true and real knowledge. Paul has in his mind as one of the guiding purposes of the first Corinthian Epistle the desire to reveal to his readers the difference between the lower and the higher knowledge, and to make them look on towards the higher and never rest contented with the lower.

Yet even in the same Epistle where he warns his readers so often and so emphatically of the danger of partial know-

¹ Romans i. 21 f.

² Modern experience confirms the judgment of Paul that great danger lies in over-estimation of oneself. It is well known that an exaggerated estimate of one's skill and power proves in many cases to be a sign of incipient insanity. In an asylum for lunatics there is no symptom so widespread as the preoccupation with oneself, one's powers, one's rights and one's wrongs. The patient lives in a world of his own, created by his individual fancy. In the thought and view of Paul, to mistake one's true relation to the world involves a misapprehension of the nature and the purpose of God. If the mistake and misapprehension goes too far in a certain direction, it takes a form which we now label by the title insanity. I knew of one case in which a lunatic believed himself to be God, and wrote out his edicts in that character and with that signature, and an experienced physician told me that this same delusion was far from being unparalleled in asylums.

ledge, it is characteristic of Paul that he pictures true and perfect knowledge in the most entrancing fashion. As Professor Harnack says, "he contemplates it in trembling emotion and in ardent impulse" . . . as "the absolutely best." He does not warn the Corinthians against knowledge, but only against a danger that is connected with knowledge. He lauds it as "the absolutely best," provided that the true knowledge, perfect and face to face with God, is understood as the object of his panegyric.

According to Professor Harnack's interpretation, "this perfect knowledge is not to be expected till that which is perfect has come, that is when (through the second appearance of Christ) this temporal life suddenly comes to an end." Hence he finds that Paul draws an absolute line of separation between the partial knowledge and the perfect knowledge. The "perfect will suddenly appear" through "a future event," viz., "the second appearance of Christ."¹ The present partial knowledge can never grow into the perfect: "no bridge leads from the partial to the whole." The imperfect must be cast aside before the perfect knowledge can come.

This interpretation of Paul's doctrine is out of harmony with the view which we take of his attitude towards the problems of life. It regards Paul's doctrine as static and unphilosophic; whereas in our view the world is to Paul always changing, and the purpose of God rules the world towards development or growth. All that we have just quoted from Professor Harnack is said quite truly; but it states only one side of the truth, and it requires to be completed. There are two sides to the phenomenon of growth; there is always a past and a future, but the present is only an abstraction; the present has no sooner been observed than it has disappeared and become a thing

¹ EXPOSITOR, June, 1912, p. 493.

of the past, while a new stage, which was previously in the future, has taken its place, destined in its turn to pass away forthwith.

It is quite true that perfect knowledge is a thing of the future. But Paul can always say the same about all perfecting, all attaining, and all Salvation: they are in the future. Yet he can say equally emphatically (and even more frequently so far as Salvation is concerned) that they are in the present; they are here and now. The whole of life is a process of attaining, of reaching forward to that which is beyond, of constantly apprehending and then of finding that the Divine towards which one strives is still beyond and must be striven towards by a fresh effort. Paul fully recognises that on the one hand Christ is in him, and that his life has been merged in Christ and therefore has been perfected; but on the other hand he equally and even more emphatically recognises that his life is a struggle against the evil which constantly besets him; "I myself with the mind serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin"; and therefore he longs and prays to be "delivered out of the body of this death."¹ He is made perfect, and he is not yet made perfect: he is saved, and yet he is only in process of being saved, and is working out his own salvation with the whole energy of mind and will and effort.

Perfect knowledge, then, is a thing of the future: it lies ever before us; but I cannot persuade myself that Professor Harnack is right in positing as the Pauline doctrine that this knowledge is irreconcilable with our progress in this life, and is attained only in the final cataclysm by a stroke from without at the second coming of Christ. Are we not (according to Paul) attaining towards it in this life? Is not the knowledge of God something towards which we

¹ Romans vii. 25, 24.

are growing? Is it not implied in Salvation? Can man be saved except through knowing God? Is not the whole of life either, on the one hand, a process of losing right conception of God, and passing through stage after stage of idolatry and falsehood towards utter separation from Him and ignorance of Him, or on the other hand a process of learning to know God as He is? Paul prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened that ye may know" the hope, the will and the power of God.¹ In these words the Apostle evidently is picturing a process of gradual enlightenment, i.e., of partial knowledge growing towards perfect knowledge. This partial knowledge does not require to be cast aside before the perfect can come: it is antiquated and set aside through growing into the perfect. Borrowing the words of Dr. Harnack, we believe that "a bridge leads from the partial to the whole."

It is true that this quotation is from Ephesians, which (if I remember rightly) Professor Harnack hesitates to accept as fully Pauline²; but to the judgment of the present writer it expresses plainly and characteristically the law of right life as a development towards wisdom through revelation, the end of the development being the perfect knowledge of God, attained finally only in the coming of Christ, but yet in process of being acquired in every step of right knowing. In 1 Corinthians ii. 9 f. the same truth is expressed emphatically, for it lies at the basis of Paul's thought: "Whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him: unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the

¹ Ephesians i. 18 f.

² The above was written far from books in dim recollection of his *Chronologie der altchr. Litt.*, i. p. 239. I think that he feels now less hesitation.

Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God . . . we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things which are freely given us of God." Paul here speaks in the first person ; but all that he says is fully applicable to all the saints. The life of the saint is a gradual process of attaining, through the continuous steps of revelation, unto the knowledge of God and the deep things of God.

It is true that Paul might differ from some modern opinion, perhaps from modern views generally, as to what knowledge is worth attaining, and what knowledge leads on towards a right conception of God. The purely verbal and worthless speculation to which the age was given seemed to him, beyond doubt, to be empty, useless, false and bad, because it did not clarify men's minds about God. But was he wrong in that ? He condemned, as one cannot doubt, all the science of the time ; but that pseudo-science was false in method and devoid of results. It only spread idle fancies through the "educated" world of that time : the more men learned about nature from the popular teaching of the time, the less they knew. No condemnation can be too strong for the current methods of substituting knowledge of words for the study of things. In this judgment Paul was not wrong.

It would, of course, be absurd to say that Paul would have distinguished between right and false scientific method in the study of nature, if the question had been put to him. He knew and condemned the false : he did not know or dream about the true. He would save his own people from empty and foolish speculation. It was not his province, nor within his power, to teach true method in science. He would turn men from idle talk to study the nature of God in the love of God : he knew nothing else worthy of attention in the world.

It would, however, be equally absurd to argue that, because Paul condemned all the scientific speculation of his time, and because he did not make any exception in favour of the right study of nature, about which he knew nothing, therefore he condemned all that he did not know. There can be little doubt that Paul accepted the principle that he who learns to know the works of God, is learning to know partially the nature of God ;¹ but, for himself, he had never come into contact with any formal scientific study conceived in the spirit of truth ; and probably he may have disbelieved in the possibility of right method in such study. We must not, however, transform a negative into a positive prohibition, when we try to state fairly and understand rightly the teaching of Paul. In our modern application of the teaching of Paul we have to ask whether or not any modern institution is in accordance with the essential spirit of his thought, and not whether he condemned a contemporary institution which was lacking in all the quality that makes the modern thing worth having.

Paul had a right conception of the growth of knowledge. He did not think that it consisted in adding part to part, and unit to unit. It was, in his view, not a process of simple addition but a process of creation. The whole is more than the collocation of the parts ; there is something vital and spiritual imparted to it beyond the sum of the parts, which makes it a new creature. At every step in the path of knowledge, one eliminates and does away the old, and re-makes one's vision of the world : one learns and knows that the old vision was inadequate and there-

¹ That is implied in repeated statements of his : God has in His works shown His nature and His goodness. Through them the pagan world had the opportunity of learning something about Him in the simple contemplation of his good gifts to men ; and some pagans had made good use of this opportunity.

fore false : one sees facts in a new correlation : something of what had been dark in the world around becomes illuminated and clear. This is not a mere addition of a new element : it is the introduction of a transforming element. In Pauline language, it comes, not in word, but in power ; and " out of three sounds one makes, not a fourth sound, but a star."

This principle Paul applied only to moral and religious growth in knowledge, for there was in the world of contemporary thought no other department in which it could be applied.¹ In the progress of thought the same principle is now employed far more widely than Paul dreamed of ; but such wider application of Pauline principle is not un-Pauline ; it is simply outside of his range and his interest.

But an objection may be brought against the view which we have stated : is it not an essential condition of the perfect knowledge that it comes through revelation ? Does not this make an impassable division between the perfect and the partial ? The perfect knowledge is the intuition of God : the partial knowledge is a study of details in nature.

One may define revelation too narrowly. Revelation is proportioned and suited to the character of different men. God speaks in many voices. The act whereby the human mind, after combining detail with detail, adds to the parts that indescribable element which vitalises the whole into a new creation and a new stage in knowledge, is essentially creative and spiritual. Does it come wholly from within the man ? Is it not the result of the firm grasp of the Divine unity and plan in the world, and therefore in a sense given by a power without, which seizes and holds the mind of the

¹ An exception should perhaps in some small degree be made in regard to medicine, which, however, though growing, was purely empirical and not scientific in its method.

discoverer ? It may be said that the process and growth of the partial knowledge is essentially different from the gift of the perfect knowledge, which is recognised intuitively by the Divine spirit within the man. But does not the Divine plan of the universe, as comprehended to some degree in the process of partial knowledge, place some knowledge of God within the mind ? It is true that some have refused to see this, and have denied the existence of God, while they study nature. They deny they know not what. It may be said, also, that the process of acquiring partial knowledge is different, not in degree, but in kind from the process of perfect knowledge. But one may well be doubtful about the distinction. We know too little to justify us in distinguishing degree from kind in such process ; and it is always uncertain whether difference of degree may not be intensified until it becomes difference in kind. This all hangs on the meaning and nature of development.

One thing seems certain, that it was impossible at that time to apprehend the scientific spirit in knowledge. The world of the Mediterranean lands had entered on a period of deterioration in the realm of thought. The great period of Greek progress had passed away, and centuries had to elapse before a new time of progressive thought was to begin. In a time of such deterioration, the spirit of progress seemed to have disappeared. This spirit is hostile to the selfishness and the arrogant conceit which Paul dreaded so much in the nature of men. In the ardour of discovery all thought of self perishes ; and there remains only the eagerness of the search for truth. The happiness of discovery contains an element of the Divine quality : in its highest manifestation it is unselfish and wholly directed to the unseen, the eternal, and the law of the universe : it does not conduce to self-glorification and self-congratulation, but rather to the recognition of the infinite external power that

moves through the processes of nature: it strengthens the love of truth and the zeal for truth within its own range: it makes the discoverer of knowledge set truth above self: it raises man above the sordid glories of international strife and the vulgar struggles of political contention, and places him in the serener atmosphere of eternal truth and the laws of nature.

We cannot for a moment suppose that Paul was aware of this side of knowledge; but we do maintain that he stated principles which are applicable forthwith to this and every other new aspect of a life wider than that which Paul knew. The development of modern study has widened our knowledge of the works of God, and shown sides of the Divine action and purpose which formerly were not dreamed of. Yet the principles laid down by Paul, when rightly understood, remain as true about the new as they were about the old.

XXXIII. THE RIGHTS OF MAN.

The glorious and happy lot which has been set before man as the end of his being in the purpose of God¹ has not been attained by man. Paul charges the whole blame upon man, who has deliberately gone wrong, preferred self to God, and as far as possible wrecked for himself and those who came under his influence the Divine plan and intention. Man could not wholly ruin the purpose and thwart the will of God; but he has done all in his power to attain this result; and his best endeavours are often mistaken and injurious.

In one respect the Apostle runs contrary to the general course of European thought and feeling and history. The development of European history is almost always explained by philosophic historians as the result of a struggle for

¹ See Section xxviii., p. 280 ff.

rights or of a passionate revolt on the part of the oppressed against injustice and wrongs. St. Paul would reply that man has no rights except the right of helping to realise the purpose of God: he would assert that no man can honestly dare to ask for justice, and that men are deceiving themselves when they speak about their wrongs. He would certainly not regard the revolt against Charles I. or any other of the violent actions through which the "freedom" of modern Britain has been attained, as specially honourable episodes in the history of the country, or as even consistent with true Christianity; and he would perhaps declare that the price for all this error had to be paid by the children and children's children of the original actors in those great scenes. They were responsible for beginning, or for fomenting, a wrong spirit, and turning the people to a wrong method.

The kind of resistance to oppression which was commended both by Paul and by John was endurance; and the victory over tyranny and compulsion was gained through death. But in Paul there appears little or no sympathy with the tendency to resist the minor injustices and inequalities of an unfair social organisation, and to devote to the task of protesting and to the meaner business of political conflict the time and energy which ought to be spent in seeking the true object of life.

Even in the case of slavery the Apostle has been sharply criticised by many for acquiescing in it as a social institution. That he did think the slave wrong who ran away from his master, that he did think the right conduct for a slave was to perform as well as possible the work that was imposed on him by the custom of society and of the law, that he directed the runaway slave to return to a Christian master—all that is quite true. Whether he would have directed the Christian slave to return to a master who had

announced that he would not permit his slaves to practise the duties of the Christian religion is perhaps doubtful ; but it seems to be in keeping with his doctrine that he would have bidden the runaway slave go back and endure bonds and stripes. Whether he would have directed the slave to return to a master that constrained his slaves to minister to vice and to give up their children to vice—all which was sanctioned by law—remains more doubtful. The evidence does not prove it ; the case did not present itself ; nor do we know anything that can fairly be construed as evidence of Paul's judgment in regard to such a case. We do know that, if a master had ordered his slave to offer sacrifice to the gods and to curse Christ, Paul would not have permitted the slave to obey the command. There was a point at which, in Paul's judgment, the right of the master to command was forfeited and the duty of the slave to obey ceased.

One thing we can say with confidence as we look back over nearly nineteen centuries of history. If Christian doctrine had made it a prime object to redress, either by active refusal or by passive resistance, the superficial evils and the graver social injustices of Roman law and rule, then Christianity would long ago have passed away or sunk to the level of the dead religions that still cumber the world, while slavery would remain the rule of the whole earth. It was by disregarding all merely superficial and unimportant facts in society and by concentrating the efforts of all on the great and real things of life, that the Christian faith succeeded in keeping its place above the level of common life, as a power and an inextinguishable fire to quicken the minds and fire the best emotions of men. Paul did not approve of the Roman social system and the Roman government. It was evil, and it must pass away. But it had its purpose in the Divine plan. It was granted a time in which to work. The Christians must acquiesce in it, and

must obey its laws so far as these did not order them to curse God or to do evil to man.

The European idea that the man who rebels against what he considers to be the unfairness of established society is the man to be praised and admired as a hero has not yet justified itself by its results. That the world is better than it was, that progress has been achieved, is true ; but the proof or the probability that the tendency to complaint against injustice in trifling matters and to the claiming of so-called rights has played a beneficial part in forwarding this progress has not yet been furnished, and the teaching of Paul even in this respect has not been disproved.

Paul taught in great principles, and does not descend to legislation about details. Even the veiling of women he attempts to enforce on grounds as wide as the universe and as high as the angels ; but in this perhaps for once he may have descended to legislation about a detail.

His guiding principle, however, always is that man must seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness ; and all the details will gradually be moulded into conformity with that Kingdom. What we call the growth of true education and the raising of public opinion and social judgment to a higher level are simply the slow, gradual approach of the Kingdom of Heaven, which, as it approaches, re-makes human life. But the attempt to re-make human life except through the Kingdom of God must fail. The violence, the vulgarity and the sham of much that has masqueraded under the show of resistance to wrongs and demand for justice did not raise the social standard, or promote the kingdom of Heaven ; and it is a false judgment that sees in things like this the cause of human improvement. The true cause lay deeper, and was sometimes concealed and impeded by the noise and the ostentation of those who stood prominent in the public eye. W. M. RAMSAY.