

pupils presented Dr. Driver with his portrait, an admirable work by Mr. Briton Riviere. In acknowledging the gift, he spoke, in his self-effacing way, of the changes that had come about in the study of the Old Testament since the day when he succeeded Dr. Pusey. Lower criticism, higher criticism, historical criticism had come into existence as recognized departments of the science, involving changes in traditional views, but changes in harmony with the general movement of thought

and discovery elsewhere, and all in the direction of a truer understanding of the records of God's revelation. On his own share in this advance he was characteristically silent, but we who listened to him knew how predominant that share had been. It is for others to carry on the task which he has laid down. He has bequeathed to us a high tradition of diligence, concentration, and single-minded devotion to the truth in the service of God. *πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἰκανός;*

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF PHILIPPIANS.

PHILIPPIANS I. 6.

Being confident of this very thing, that he which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.

THE Epistle to the Philippians is distinguished by the affectionate warmth with which it was written. It is suffused throughout with the spirit of commendation and good cheer. There is an entire absence of the reproofs and warnings which most of the Epistles contain, and it abounds in expressions of affection and hope, which show how dear the Philippians were to St. Paul's heart, and how responsive they had been to his ministry and to his great message of God's grace through Jesus Christ. With this spirit the text is altogether in harmony. It naturally divides itself under three heads:

- (1) God's good work; (2) its perfecting; and (3) the Apostle's assurance.

I.

GOD'S GOOD WORK.

1. 'He which began a good work in you.' This good work, as it is called, is wrought within the soul. The Philippians, it is true, altered some of their outward habits. Instead of observing pagan rites as heretofore, they observed the rites and worship of Christianity; they gave up customs that were idolatrous or immoral, and pursued the way of purity and righteousness. But the work was deeper than these things of themselves implied. They became new creatures in Christ Jesus; there

was a spiritual renovation of their whole nature. To use the language of the New Testament, they passed from death unto life.

2. This good work was of God. Every house is built by some man, but He who builds this temple is God. To His skill and influence we are indebted both for framing the plan and for carrying it into execution. Others, indeed, are labourers together with God. Those in whom the work is wrought are themselves commanded to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, yet they all act under the direction of the great Master-builder, and depend upon the effectual concurrence of His providence and grace for the success of their labours.

Thus the Apostle claims a Divine origin for the experience of the humblest soul; he says that our religious life is a spark from the heavenly fire, our devotion is the result of a wondrous inspiration. By Christian experience we mean the struggles with sin, the longings after purity, the feeling of calm confidence in God, and the personal attachment to the Lord Jesus. These are the marks of true discipleship; they are not the fancies of fanatics, they are not the morbid product of an over-heated imagination, they come to us from the eternal God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The believer knows that his life is changed and glorified by the vision of the Christ. Those who laugh at this experience as an unreal thing, as feeble mysticism which will not stand the searching light of science, simply show the shallowness of a scepticism which seeks to ignore one of the mightiest powers that the world has ever known.

All the great prophets and apostles, leaders and heroes claim that their power to face a hard unbelieving world comes from the indwelling spirit of God. If we could imagine the history of man to be bereft of all that has been created by the fire of religious enthusiasm and by the inspiration of Christian hope, it would present a very dismal picture. Only that which comes from God can lift men heavenward.

We know with certainty that God's covenant of grace is a system of exquisite adaptations and compensations; that it is ordered in all things and sure. And if the mathematician can demonstrate that the leaves of a plant are arranged around its stem so as to give them the fairest possible freedom of access to air and light, and the planets placed at such distances from the sun as to give them the fairest possible chance of revolving around him undisturbed by their neighbours, surely the Christian can prove, from his own experience and observation, that 'God performeth the thing that is appointed,' and adapts His dealings to the necessities of His people. The conclusion therefore is as irresistible as it is welcome, that we need not fear any of the ills of life, for He who has begun the good work in our souls is too wise to err, and has so loved us that He did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.¹

II.

ITS PERFECTING.

1. There is a ring of certainty in the language of the Bible. Philosophical speculations, dialectics, or guesses at truth are excluded from its pages. This certainty arises from two causes—the action of the Spirit on consciousness, and the action of faith in experience. Divine revelation and conviction of its verity proceed from the first, experiential Christianity from the second. The Apostle was persuaded that the end was contemplated in the initial stages of grace, because the first act embodied plan, substance and action commensurate with the completion of the work. This was true, not only of the Divine order in a general sense, but of the particular case under notice—'this very thing.' The life of the Philippian Church would be advanced by the energy of the Holy Spirit through all its stages to final perfection. God has the end in view from the beginning. Such assurance from such a source was especially helpful to the Philippian Church in its struggles; and a like assurance also on the part of Christian teachers will strengthen men equally to-day in their endeavour to rise to greater proficiency of experience.

¹ Hugh Macmillan.

2. St. Paul's confidence had a deep root. He took his stand upon the principle of life in Christ Jesus, and upon the unchanging love and irreversible purpose of the heavenly Father. This principle was firmly grasped by the Apostle. His conception of the Divine life, involving mystical union with Christ, was such that it carried with it the ideas of permanency and growth. Christ's entrance into the soul through faith was no casual visit, but an abiding presence, an indwelling which nothing could vitally disturb, the beginning of a fellowship which was eternal.

Christianity, by its completely rounded view of the world, guarantees to believers that they shall be preserved unto eternal life in the Kingdom of God, which is God's revealed end in the world.²

3. But the same guarantee was given by the unalterable purpose of God. God would not abandon a work which He had begun; that were to entertain most unworthy thoughts of Him, ascribing to the Divine Being a vacillation and fickleness utterly contrary to His nature. With God to work is to finish. The plan by which He works needs no amendment, and can suffer no frustration. As it has been well summarized: Human need remains to the end; God's purpose holds to the end; Divine love persists to the end; and the Almighty arm is strong to the end.

The principle is that the work of saving grace clearly begun by the Spirit of God shall not be destroyed and come to nothing, but shall be carried on to complete salvation. This principle is not received by all Christians as part of the teaching of Scripture; but it seems to be recognized not merely in a few, but in many passages of the Bible. We have, for example, our Lord's word in Jn 10²⁸: 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.' And there is hardly one of St. Paul's Epistles in which the same principle is not presented to us, stated in express terms, or assumed in stating other doctrines, and applied to the comfort of believers (1 Th 5²³⁻²⁴, 1 Co 1⁸, Ro 8³⁰). The ultimate salvation of those in whom a good work is begun is, in this view, conceived to be connected with the stability of God's purposes, the efficacy of the Son's mediation, the permanence and power of the Holy Spirit's influence, and the nature of the covenant under which believers are placed. And the perse-

² Ritschl, *Justification* (Eng. trans.), 200.

verance thus provided for is supposed to be made good through the faith, patience, fear, and diligence of those who persevere, and by no means without these. As to the place before us, whatever exceptions and whatever distinctions may be taken on the subject, it must be owned that, gladly recognizing Christian character and attainment as a fact, the Apostle finds therein a warrant for emphatic confidence about the future, even to the day of Christ.

As an architectural achievement, Cologne Cathedral doubtless is the expression of a sublime idea. The history of its erection also is singular and significant, and its formal completion in 1880 was a great event. The first stone was laid in 1248, and notwithstanding the lapse of all these centuries, including long periods of forgetfulness, neglect and intentional delay, the building has at length been finished according to the original plan. The thought of that one man Gerhard von Riehl, who was laid to rest more than half a millennium ago, has been carried out from the ground plan to the loftiest arch and the last pinnacle. So that this Cathedral will always stand as an impressive illustration of the persistent vitality of a true, harmonious and beautiful idea. So also where the work of saving grace has been begun by the Spirit of God, we believe that in accordance with the stability of God's purpose, that work in faithful persevering hearts will go forward, in spite of many doubts and fears and drawbacks, until God's work is carried out to complete salvation.¹

4. There is one further reason, hinted at rather than distinctly stated, why the Apostle's utterance was so strong—that derived from his view of the Day of Christ. It was a day when Christ's work would be exhibited in all its fulness; when the harvest would be reaped; when the dispensation of grace below would issue in the Kingdom of our God and His Christ. The Day of Christ, without redemption, would indeed be a dark day. Where is redemption consummated, except in the perfecting of this work in the individual sinner? Where do you find redemption, if not in the redeemed? And, if this work be not perfected, what will there be to make the day of Christ a blessed and glorious day? The day of Christ without redemption consummated (and it can be consummated only in the perfection of individual sinners) would be a day of blackness instead of a day of brightness.

Great Master, touch us with Thy skilful hand,
Let not the music that is in us die;
Great Sculptor, hew and polish us; nor let
Hidden and lost Thy form within us lie.
Spare not the stroke, do with us as Thou wilt,
Let there be nought unfinished, broken, marr'd;
Complete Thy purpose that we may become
Thy perfect image, O our God and Lord.

¹ F. Cowles.

III.

THE APOSTLE'S ASSURANCE.

The Apostle's assurance of the ultimate salvation of the Philippians had, as we have shown, deep roots. It was not a mere hope or generous assumption, it rested upon the nature of the Gospel, and the character of God. But it was no hard-and-fast dogma, such as some schools of thought have endeavoured to maintain, and which, embodied in the phrase, 'Once in grace, always in grace,' was made an excuse for sin. St. Paul looked at it in a very different light. It made him all the more solicitous about the Philippians, that they should stand fast in the faith, and press toward the mark. Rightly viewed, therefore, this assurance is a help to devotion and Christian progress.

1. *Hope itself will stimulate the soul to put forth its best efforts.*—If we are haunted by the fear of falling short at last, it may preserve us from some transgressions, but it will not help us much in pressing onward. Hope points before; and when discouragement from past failure hinders us, it will revive our courage, and enable us to reach forth again to the prize which Christ offers to him who overcometh. It is so with our heart. It will often seem to us that it has gone back into a desert state; but spring will return—the blossoms will come out again—and it will be God's garden at last.

2. *This assurance constrains us to be ever looking to God.*—We are not fighting our hard battles each for his own hand, in his own strength, with none to uphold, none to care whether we stand or fall. We are in God's school, under His discipline. Every trial (or temptation, as we call it) is allowed, measured by Him. He cares—cares infinitely—that we should be good. The work is His—His in conception. It is He who had faith in us, and so put faith into us, who makes us His children, and bids us live as His children—His in performance. He is ever at hand to suggest, inspire, protect, strengthen. The work is His. This is the persuasion in which St. Paul rests. What other hope were there for any who look on anxiously at the life-struggle of others, seeing possibilities and promise of good, but seeing also actual failure, shortcomings, disappointments without end? What other hope were there for ourselves?

Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe relates a striking incident which once gave to a speech which Frederick Douglass was

delivering a startling and almost overwhelming power. Douglas was descanting in his usually impassioned manner upon the wrongs and miseries of the negro race. Warming with his subject, and waxing more and more indignant with their persecutors, he seemed to lose all patience, and at last said that they must henceforth trust in the strength of their own right arm, seeing that it was in vain otherwise to hope for deliverance. At this moment there arose a tall aged negress who, while perfect silence reigned throughout the hall, said in a voice, not loud but deep, which thrilled every heart in that excited assembly, 'Frederick ! is God dead ?'

Lord, many times I am aweary quite
Of mine own self, my sin, my vanity—
Yet be not Thou, or I am lost outright,
Weary of me.

And hate against myself I often bear,
And enter with myself in fierce debate :
Take Thou my part against myself, nor share
In that just hate.

Best friends might loathe us, if what things perverse
We know of our own selves, they also knew :
Lord, Holy One ! if Thou who knowest worse
Shouldst loathe us too.¹

3. *This assurance will teach us to use all means necessary for steadfastness and progress.*—For the assurance is of a kind which by magnifying God's

¹ R. C. Trench.

grace in Christ, obtains a clear view of the difficulties which that grace has to overcome. So we shall wait upon God day by day, realizing the need of prayer, and of keeping in close touch with Jesus Christ, lest some temptation should take us un-awares. But we shall use the means freely not slavishly, as a privilege not as a task, finding in fellowship with God its own blest reward.

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An Important Reading in the Diatessaron.

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ANY person who expects to solve the problem of the diversity of the New Testament text in the second century, without employing in the solution the Old Syriac and associated versions and the closely connected Diatessaron of Tatian, is, no doubt, the victim of a delusion; and with almost as great a sense of hallucination, we may say that the person who attempts to clear up the New Testament problem with the aid of both Old Syriac and Diatessaron, is mistaken, unless he can include in his preparation for the problem some greater acquaintance than ordinary with the genesis of both of the explanatory factors. This last remark is not meant to be in disparagement of the attempt of Professor von Soden, of whose co-operation we have been recently bereft, to explain striking variants by the influence of the Diatessaron; what we want to say is that, if Professor von Soden

was right, then we ought to know a great deal more about the Diatessaron and the associated Syriac Versions. Nor was the former remark as to the necessity of acquaintance with Syriac texts meant to be offensive to my friend Professor Souter, though I must admit that his book on the *Text and Canon of the New Testament* amazes me, both by the thoroughness of its treatment of the Latin Versions and by the inadequacy of its references to the Oriental texts; Professor Souter must build broader, before he builds higher; already his centre of gravity is in danger of falling outside his base.

What then is necessary by way of guidance, if we are to move towards a sufficiently considered and adequately supported solution? My impression is that we need to spend much more time on the Diatessaron and its comrades. For those who