

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS.

BY THE REV. HERBERT MARSTON, M.A., Rector of Lydford-on-Fosse, Somerset.

III.

FOUR topics, perennial as elements of Christianity, jut like salients from this epistle into the thought of modern men. They are these: The personality of Jesus, the doctrine of grace, the Atonement, the possibility of communication between the world of sense and the beings and forces of the world unseen, and even of the world beyond the grave.

I will collect and combine in one view St. Paul's messages to us on these topics. Their significance is obvious. No one can peruse current fiction, poetry and speculation, without becoming aware of the largeness of the space which they fill. They figure largely in Browning. Mrs. Humphrey Ward rose to celebrity by her handling of the first of the four. A tribe of inferior writers constantly make them the themes of loose and illiterate lucubration. One deals with the eclipse of faith. Another describes the making of a Christian. A third lets imagination run wild in the grotesque fable of the reativity of Christ. A fourth fills a serial story with the progress of a saint. If these performances are for the most part worthless so far as religion is concerned, they evidence conclusively that the popular mind is full of a sort of interest in religion. I hope, therefore, that St. Paul may get a hearing on the subject so much in the vogue.

I. The personality of Jesus is the most interesting of these topics. I do not here refer to the theological doctrine of the "Person of Christ." I am thinking neither of Athanasius nor of Dorner. I am thinking of the identity between the Jesus of this epistle and the Jesus of the four Evangelists. Eight times does St. Paul in this epistle mention our Lord by His human name. This is an unique phenomenon in his writings. Some psychological reason for this phenomenon must have existed. The Jesuits adopted the sacred name Jesus as peculiar to their order, because they wished to exalt the virgin mother by depressing her divine Son. The early Evange-

licals brought back into the living usage of the Church the name of Jesus because it expressed and enshrined the offices of redemption, which they insisted upon. The Apostle also had his reason for dwelling on the name of Jesus. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" had been the words of the voice which arrested and converted him long years before. He was himself now in the midst of persecution for Jesus' sake. He recalled the voice and the Name above every name; for they calmed and fortified his soul. When he mentions the triumphal progress of the Gospel, he speaks of his Lord as Christ. He describes the subject of his preaching at Corinth as "the Son of God Christ Jesus." The atoning work he couples with the title Christ. The appeal to be set free from the thorn in the flesh was addressed to "the Lord." But when he is delineating his tribulations and the power that sustained him, he speaks of Jesus—the life and the dying of Jesus; he is their bond-slave for Jesus' sake. The Incarnation in his view is "The well known grace of the Lord Jesus." Any tampering with his original gospel he repudiates as being the inventing of another Jesus—a Jesus not his nor belonging to the twelve.

The evidence of this series of uses of the sacred name is strongly adverse to the crudely improbable assertion that St. Paul knew and cared little about the earthly life of the Redeemer. The name Jesus could have meant nothing to the Corinthians but a historical person, Who but He who is depicted in the four Gospels could be that historical person? We know that on his first visit to Jerusalem after his baptism St. Paul passed a fortnight in the company of Peter and of James, the Lord's brother. From them he learned the story of the divine life. With them he conversed about those additions to it which he could make. Together they wove into a true unity the narrative of Jesus. There is no schism in the New Testament. There is no ingenious effort to patch up or to conceal that schism. There is not one Jesus for the Jews, and another for the Gentiles. There was not one Jesus preached by Cephas and another preached by Paul. The Jesus of the Evangelists is the Jesus of St. Paul. He loved Jesus; he preached Jesus; he was the slave of men for Jesus' sake.

From these considerations flows clearly a conclusion of devotional value. There is abundant justification in Apostolic usage for the familiar way of speaking of our Lord specially dear to a certain

type of modern Christians. There is among them a felt need for a human Saviour. A frigid and distant mannerism is repellant to them. They must speak of their Lord as they find Him, very human indeed. The instinct of these hearts is amply justified by the usage in this epistle. "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds" is Pauline, as well as an Olney hymn.

2. The doctrine of grace has lost in our generation much of that commanding preoccupation which it used to exert. This misfortune is partly due to the dreary formalism with which the Divines of the Protestant Churches invested the living reality. It is due also to the crude and bitter controversies which, in England at least, divided good men, who all meant the same thing, yet who each angrily contended that his brethren meant something else. It is also due, in part, to the scientific temper, which has overspread all religious thought, and which suspects a term which more than any other represents a thing claiming to be above nature. The habit of contrasting grace with nature, though it has the support of our Catechism, cannot be justified from Scripture. In itself it seems unreasonable; for the Bible maintains that God is the Author of nature and of grace. The New Testament opposes to grace either Law or Sin. It never opposes to grace nature either human or cosmic. This fact ought to conciliate the truly scientific mind. Grace is an influence or force which runs parallel to nature. It comes in to supersede moral law where moral law cannot effect the supreme object. It is in conflict with sin, because sin is that in the world which defies all law and thus requires the introduction of power more effectual than law.

We need only recall the names in Christian history, connected with the doctrine of grace, to see what a venerable and wholesome prescription sustains it. Augustine, Bernard, Calvin, Pascal, Romaine, are but a few of them. Each of these great and good men impressed on the human mind the sovereign importance of the doctrine of grace. Each of them felt it as a personal possession. Its hold over them was not ecclesiastical and dogmatic, but vital and interior. The mind of our age turns strongly another way. We are above all things humane. We call for the social virtues, and for a social spirituality. We want people to be good, to be happy, to be sound. We have left in majestic isolation the deeper things of God. Yet after all Christianity is the religion of grace. Here is

its origin, its principle. It is indeed true that the word never appears on the lips of Jesus. Yet His first recorded utterance is described by St. Luke as exciting wonder, because of the grace that characterized it. And when St. John sums up the effect of the religion of the Incarnate Word he does so in the sentence " Grace and Truth came into being through JESUS CHRIST." A time must surely come when the spiritual life will consciously return to its fountain head in the doctrine of grace.

3. This epistle contains, as I venture to think, the most powerful of all St. Paul's references to the Atonement. The close of the fifth chapter is the passage to which I allude. We are all familiar with the formula " The Atonement in the light of modern thought." May I without impertinence invert the formula and consider modern thought in the light of the Atonement? As I compare this passage with the views that are current among us, a noteworthy difference is apparent between our contemporaries and the Apostle.

Without attenuating divine justice, without compromising upon human sinfulness, without importing the harsh idea of a commercial arrangement, without reducing the reconciliation to a weak and good-natured concession, St. Paul states the event, and the process, with simplicity and dignity; his touch is firm, and his vision clear. St. Paul says that atonement is reconciliation. This reconciliation affects the whole world. This reconciliation was brought to pass by God. It was an act done by Christ the sinless one, when He was made sin for us. It is intended to produce righteousness in those who receive it. It is pressed on men by the ministers of the gospel; it is the very word of the gospel itself. Though volumes have been written on the Atonement, and though volumes more will be written upon it, the passage before us suffices for the preacher, for the believer, for the seeker after truth and peace. Doubtless various human souls appropriate the doctrine in various ways. But as the reconciliation is one, so the appeal to all men is " Be reconciled to God." Any reconstruction of the gospel that omits this appeal from its central place, will ere long succumb before the moral misery and impotence of the world.

4. With no subject is the mind of our age more strangely fascinated than with that of the unseen world. Intercourse with the East has revived among us interests in the cults of Eastern peoples, and in those cults the world unseen figures large.

A reaction from the hidebound materialism that prevailed after

the publication of "The Origin of Species," has gone after a spiritual background to the universe. Independent thinkers, like Sir Oliver Lodge, have tried to apply scientific method to the phenomena of spiritualism. In another quarter the inquiry has taken a more healthy and useful direction. There are many who desire to see revived those charismatic gifts of the Spirit, which certainly existed among Christians for a long time after the Apostolic age. This desire has set us on inquiring what is the relation of body to spirit in this life present. We ask boldly, "Have these extraordinary gifts totally ceased?" We ask further, "If they have ceased, is not the cessation our own fault?" and "Ought not that fault to be corrected?" Such are the causes that have again brought into prominence the question of the two worlds.

Three passages in our epistle throw welcome light on the subject. I would remark upon them that they are all serious and candid; they have nothing of superstition or of ecstasy about them; they justify us in inquiring fearlessly and without shame into these problems. Everything is strictly verified in experience. St. Paul knows; he tells us when he does not know.

The first passage in order of time is that in chapter xii. He describes a wonderful experience which happened to him fourteen years before he wrote. He was caught into Paradise; there he heard and saw. Of the precise nature of the experience he could not speak positively. It may have been bodily; it may have been out of the body. Of the event he had no doubt; of its moral value he was willing to boast. He was kept sober in the retrospect of this experience by the assurance that God knew all about it.

The second passage is the immediate sequel. The rapture into Paradise was counterpoised by another experience of a mysterious order. St. Paul became the victim of a Satanic visitation. It beat upon his frame; it was managed by an angel. This creature pierced his bodily frame with acute suffering. The trouble became chronic. He appealed to the Lord for relief. The reply is significant, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Grace has a bodily function. It can correct not merely the vices of the soul, but also the plagues and vexations of the fleshly frame. From this conviction we derive the belief that by Christ's grace we may prevail over the more subtle forms of evil.

The third passage is in the fifth chapter. St. Paul depicts the house not made with hands. This appears to be a vesture which

clothes the spirit of the believer at death. It is not the spiritual body, nor is it the body of Christ's glory ; yet it may well be akin to both. In this vesture we are to appear before the *bema* of Christ. In it we shall receive the things done in the material body. In it we shall be at home with the Lord—to adopt the dubious but tender language of our Bible.

If we now combine these passages and contemplate the general cast of the teaching, we shall find that it amounts to this. The Christian as such has dealing with both worlds. He has nothing to fear about either, for God knows all about each of them. That grace, by which spiritual life is nourished, has a close and powerful relation with the body, with Satanic powers, with being as a whole. His mortal part is destined to undergo a change, but a change similar to the order of things, in which he now moves.

There is an underlying unity between the operations of grace and of nature. Sin, as the negation of nature, is the only alien thing ; and its disturbing eccentricities must at last be removed from the universe. Till that high consummation, Christ reigns over His people totally, not partially, always, and by moral order. No sublimities, no profundities, are beyond the grace of Christ. Purity, humility, and charity are everywhere at home and everywhere supreme.

HERBERT MARSTON.



STUDIES IN TEXTS.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMONS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

III. A SENTRY IN STONE.

Texts.—"The Lord be the Watchman between me and thee."
 "Jacob swear by the Fear of his father" (Gen. xxxi. 48, 53).
 "Swear not at all, but let your speech be 'Yes,' 'Yes,' 'No,' 'No'"
 (St. Matt. v. 34, 37).