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*SOME GLEANINGS FROM ST. PETER'S
HARVEST-FIELD.*

ST. PETER'S EPISTLES.

I.

PREFACE.—THEOLOGY OF THE INSCRIPTION.

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”—1 PETER i. 1, 2.

IN the present short series of papers I shall attempt, as far as possible, to trace the spirit and character of St. Peter in his letters—to connect the writer of the Epistles with the Apostle of whom we hear so much in the Gospels and in the first part of the Acts. I shall begin by tracing the life of St. Peter after the Resurrection, as recorded by St. Luke. An examination of the inscription of the Epistle may give us some notion of its theological richness and depth.

I. In the record of the life of Peter in the Acts, we find an immediate, and, when duly considered, an adequate fulfilment of the great promise—“thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”¹

In the earliest portion of the Acts, Peter's is a “colossal and commanding” figure. He has at once a form of granite and a heart of flesh. He has the strength that stays and

¹ Matt. xvi. 18, 19.

the voice that wins. He is the rock of the Church and the shepherd of the flock. St. Peter in the Acts fulfils, in three important particulars, the lofty promise that has been quoted.

He is first in the first election to the vacant apostolate.¹ He is first in the first great conversion of souls. His word rolls like the storm. It cuts and pierces like the sword.² We do not require to have the imagination exalted by the vast gilded letters round the cupola of St. Peter's at Rome. This is truly to hold the keys, and to roll back the doors of the Kingdom!

But the great promise to St. Peter is fulfilled in a second way. Spiritual sin would steal into the Church; it would glide in under a haze of profession and pretence, as Milton tells us that Satan passed in mist into Paradise. It is Peter who speaks with such awful power.³ Simon makes an attempt to buy the gift of God with money, and brands upon his own name for ever⁴ its ill-omened connexion with the foul offence (far from obsolete) of buying spiritual offices. Peter's voice pronounces his condemnation.⁵ Herod and his quaternion of soldiers cannot keep the servant of Christ, from whose hands the chains fall off. In all these particulars he seems to represent the Church, against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail.

But there is exhibited yet another fulfilment to the great promise. Peter was again the first to divine the secret of God, to follow the mind of the Spirit. He climbs rapidly to the highest peak, and is the first herald of the dawn. The old is, no doubt, very dear to him; he clings to all that is devout and venerable with the tenacious loyalty of a Hebrew high churchman. He goes up "into the Temple

¹ Acts i. 15-23.

² Acts ii. 14-35 (*ὃν ὑμεῖς ἐσταυρώσατε. . . . κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν. "Aculeus in fine."*—Bengel) cf. iii. 12; iv. 4.

³ Acts v. 3, 8, 9, 10.

⁴ *Simony.*

⁵ Acts viii. 20.

at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour." He ascends the house-top "to pray at the sixth hour."¹ The services of the Temple and the synagogue go on upon a parallel line with the first eucharists.² But this Hebraic Christianity, or Christian Hebraism, cannot continue indefinitely. There are souls among the Gentiles longing for forgiveness, for rest and purity. They are not to dwell in the shadow, to tarry disappointed in the vestibule for ever. It is for Peter to fling back the doors once again. He receives the vision in the house of Simon, the tanner, by the sea-side.

Far o'er the glowing western main
His wistful brow was upward raised,
Where, like an angel's train,
The burnished waters blazed.³

And now his part as founder and rock is almost over. The reception of Cornelius is his last great act. The last mention of his name in St. Luke's narrative is in these sentences: "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, *Peter* rose and said"⁴—his last words are characteristic—"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."⁵

But we should note that by these two Epistles St. Peter carries out another commission of his Lord—"Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you,⁶ that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for *thee*. And do thou, when once thou hast turned again, *strengthen* thy brethren."⁷ The very word ("strengthen") occurs, in different form, *five* times in these Epistles.

¹ Acts iii. 1; x. 9.

³ "Christian Year," Easter Monday.

⁶ Acts xv. 11.

⁶ ὑμᾶς, plural.

² Acts ii. 42-46.

⁴ Acts xv. 5, 6, 7.

⁷ Luke xxii. 31, 32, στήρισον.

The first Epistle was, in all probability, written from Rome, from the mystical Babylon, not the literal city upon the Euphrates.¹ There was danger impending in the Rome of Nero. There was a hidden fire, which only waited a breath to blaze out in its fury. "The fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you."² The second Epistle was written soon after the first indeed,³ but actually under the shadow of impending death. How was this known to St. Peter? One of the few beautiful legends of St. Peter at Rome gives an answer. When the persecution actually arose, the Christians begged their beloved pastor not to remain. He listened to their entreaties, perhaps to the feebleness of his own heart. But as he fled along the Ap-pian Way, Christ stood before him. "Domine, quo vadis?" "Lord, whither goest Thou?" asked the Apostle. And a church, named from those three words, is supposed to mark the spot where they were uttered. "I come," said the Lord, "to be again crucified at Rome." A good illustration of the favourite saying of a wise and holy soul—"never run after a cross, and never run away from it." And so Peter turned to be crucified, head downward, upon the Vatican.

But we need no legend to tell us how the knowledge was bestowed upon St. Peter. We have history.

We have but to turn back to the closing chapter of St. John's Gospel. Immediately after the great commission, Jesus continues, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast younger, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst

¹ 1 Peter v. 13. The most interesting summaries of the argument on this disputed question will, perhaps, be found: for St. Peter's sojourn at Rome, Renan (*l'Antechrist*, pp. 551-557); for the literal Babylon, Stanley, *Sermons and Essays on the Apostolic Age*, pp. 94-101. Against the view which I have adopted is unquestionably Niebuhr's remark, that in 1 Peter i. 1, the countries are addressed, not from west to east (as would be natural for one writing from Rome), but from east to west (as would be natural in writing from Babylon).

² τῆ ἐν ὑμῖν πορώσει πρὸς πειρασμῶν (1 Pet. iv. 12).

³ This is implied in ταύτην ἤδη ἀγαπητοί, δεύτεραν ὑμῖν γράφω ἐπιστολήν (2 Pet. iii. 1).

whither thou wouldest." "Younger," that signifies the years up to the frontier of the icy region of old age. It is no tape-line measure; it is a limit which is differently fixed, as it is surveyed by the old or the young. "Forty," says Victor Hugo, "is the old age of youth; fifty is the youth of old age." "Thou didst gird thyself," as when not long before he girt his fisher's coat unto him,¹ "and walkedst,"—as with Thomas and Nathanael, and the other five²—"whither thou wouldest," as when he exclaimed with masterful independence, "I go a fishing."³ "But when thou shalt be growing old"⁴—for he shall not go far into the land of frost and darkness—"thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee." "This spake He signifying by what death Peter should glorify God."⁵ Why should believers affect a little rationalism here? why should they minimise the wonder of the prophecy, or affect, with a provoking candour, to doubt whether St. John's explanation really means what it *must* have meant to those who read it? What a contrast in the character of the two Apostles! St. John's nature is at once more lofty and more spiritually penetrating.⁶ His work is like Peter's no more than his nature. It is more pastoral or episcopal. Not the great missionary or orator, or expositor; but the dogmatic teacher, his spirit more like the finest essence of some established Church. One gentle word gathers up the biography of long uneventful years—"abiding"⁷ in the boat, in the Church, in life, in one spot. So stands before us the Primate of Christendom, not at Rome but Ephesus. How different too the scenes of their death. In that more than magic glass for one the Vatican gardens, the hurrying feet, the bound hands, the prelude to a death of agony, which nature "wills not;" for the other, the calm old

¹ John xxi. 7.² *Ibid.* v. 5.³ *Ibid.* v. 3.⁴ ὅταν δὲ γηράσῃς.⁵ *Ibid.* vv. 18, 19.⁶ ὑψηλότερος καὶ διορατικώτερος.—⁷ μένων, vv. 22, 23.

age, the seer with a glory opening upon him beyond that of the Grecian skies. Their Lord gave them a gem. In the clear obscure of its lucent depths, for the one was the glory of John's Apocalypse, for the other the outline of Peter's cross. With this passage before us there can be little doubt how St. Peter knew of his approaching death. On the one hand, youth had ebbed away; old age was come. On the other, a fiery trial was on them. No wonder that he wrote, "knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly—even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me."¹

On the whole, then, shortly before St. Peter's death, went that true encyclical, at once so humble and so majestic, from Rome to the Asian Churches, from the hills of Pontus to the cities of the Ægean. It was written with four great objects in view. (1) From a high post of observation to warn Christian hearts, as by a storm-signal, of impending danger. (2) To utter notes of warning against dangerous sins. (3) To inculcate peaceful submission to constituted authority, in a time of Jewish agitation.² (4) Above all, to proclaim without reserve his exact agreement with St. Paul.³

II. When we pass to the inscription:—

1. We note the extraordinary richness of thoughts and subjects. The Church, visible and invisible; the pilgrim life of the saints; the counsel of God towards us; sanctification; atonement; the underlying mystery of the Holy Trinity ("foreknowledge of God the Father," "sanctification of the Spirit," "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"); grace and peace; all are here. To know these thickly crowded lines truly would be to know the Gospel.

¹ 2 Pet. i. 14.

² 1 Pet. ii. 14.

³ Of the great importance of 1 Pet. v. 12 from this point of view, I may have occasion to speak again (cf. 2 Pet. i. 12; iii. 15, 16). It is remarked by Estius and à Lapide, with creditable candour, that the Galatians are specially addressed by St. Peter—but in the Epistle to the Galatians Peter is censured, ii. 15.

Of all religious writings none but those of Scripture possess this teeming life, the Gospel in every fragment, the Divine presence in every crumb. It is as when in a mirror broken outside a house, each splinter reflects all the blue of heaven; or, as when beside a boat, one bubble images all the sea and sky. In poetry we do not find this characteristic in Milton, Keble, Heber, Toplady; we do find it in the Psalms. In prose it is not in Augustine, à Kempis, Fenelon, Doddridge, but it *is* in St. Paul, in St. John, in St. Peter.

2. Let us look at the three attributes which the Apostle assigns to those whom he addresses.

Elect. Election here is assumed by the writer from vocation. All who are duly grafted into the Church, and who profess the faith of Christ, and do not palpably cut themselves off from the fellowship of faithful people, are assumed to be elect. Yet that this is not the shallow, easy-going creed of modern latitudinarianism he makes evident very early in his second Epistle—"give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure."¹

Strangers. The literal and the spiritual blend here. Some of the provinces to which those Christians belonged were fair, their climate was balmy, and their mountains glorious. Yet none of these tracts was their fatherland. Peter, who knew Scripture so well, had in his ear two ripples² from that great deep. He would remind them of Abraham, rising up with a riven heart from before his dead, and saying to the children of Heth, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you."³ He would let them hear something of the wailing pathos of the psalm: "I am a stranger with thee, a sojourner, as all my fathers were."⁴ His meaning is that of the old Christian apologist. "Christians inhabit their own land, but as sojourners. They

¹ 2 Pet. i. 10.

³ Gen. xxiii. 4.

² *i.e.* in the version of the LXX.

⁴ Ps. xxxix. 12, cf. Heb. xi. 13.

share in all things outwardly as citizens, and endure all things as strangers. Every foreign land is theirs, and every land foreign."¹ Home is the one thing sweet on earth. But home is built not of stones, but of hearts. And hearts are breaking and ceasing to beat every year, as the patriarch knew who first used the word.

"Of the *dispersion*." Here we have a word which, carefully considered, is in itself a wonder. It was, so to speak, fashioned and laid up in the repertory of prophecy to be used when the season came, and it should be wanted—fashioned and laid up hundreds of years before the time came when it could be applied to a realised fact. It is the prophetic word for the Israelites to be scattered among all people.² It is a fitting name for Christians in the world, and does not necessarily prove that St. Peter wrote exclusively to *Jewish* converts.

3. Let us observe the three prepositions in the second verse, "according to," "in," unto."³

It is not, I think, pedantic or fanciful to say that we have combined here the three favourite prepositions, the three characteristic prepositions, of the three great writers of the New Testament. "According to" is St. Paul's favourite. It is the expression of a deep sense that our Redemption is after a great purpose, in accordance with an unerring law—no beautiful accident, no temporary caprice, no sweet uncertain note, but the essential purpose of things, the outcome of the wisdom of God, the fixed theme of the harmony of the world. "In" is St. John's favourite preposition. It is a state in which one lives; it is, so to speak, atmospheric; it means, as a great scholar has said, "inclusive fixity in

¹ *S. Justin Mart. Epist. ad Diogn.*, c. 5. Æschines is quoted by Grimm as saying *παρεπεδημία τις ἔστιν ὁ βίος*.—*Lex.* 334.

² *ἔσθ' διασπορά κ.τ.λ.*, Deut. xxviii. 25, LXX.; cf. xxx. 4; Isa. xlix. 6. Used of Babylonian exiles, Jer. xxxiv. 17; Ps. cxlvii. 2. See in N. T., John vii. 35. Hence Christians among Gentiles here, and James i. 1.

³ *κἀτα, ἐν, εἰς*.

time and place.”¹ “Unto” is St. Peter’s favourite preposition; a tendency towards which one moves, a goal which it must reach spontaneously and irresistibly, constant motion *to* or *into*. The first suits the theology of grace, the second the theology of the mystical and sacramental life, the third the life of religious feeling and action. The first is characteristic of the apostle of faith, the second of the apostle of love, the third of the apostle of forward impulse.

4. “According to foreknowledge of God the Father”—a Pauline thought with the Pauline preposition. Yet the word is *Petrine* too. Peter had said to the men of Israel on the day of Pentecost, that Jesus was “delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.”² Of all generations of the Church this is the last which should slur over these words. Of Calvinism in the extreme sense of the word there is little danger, of Augustinianism little hope. Men believe in God too little to be Calvinists; they believe too little in thought to be Augustinian. The progress of positive science has overthrown metaphysics and with it has gone the theology of grace, in popular estimation. But its time will come again, *does* come to most earnest souls.

Now let us observe that there is something of necessary *anthropopathy* in applying foreknowledge to God. “Before” and “after” in strict logic are inadequate. “Contuition,” if there were such a word, might be more fitting. Three Latin words are used by Augustine for the purpose of declaring that God knows all things, once for all, simultaneously, for ever.³ Observe, too, that “foreknowledge” is very generally used for predestination in its bearing upon those who believe.⁴

But the meaning of “elect according to foreknowledge of

¹ Donaldson, *Gr. Gr.*, § 476.

² Acts ii. 23.

³ “Semel, simul, semper.”—*Confes.*, i. 14.

⁴ “Præscienti Dei, cum de bonis ponitur eadem *cum prædestinatione*.”—Estius.

God the Father," is best read by a loving heart. It is all sheer grace, unmerited love, that business of our salvation, from the first page to the last. God did not wait for this late lonely moment which we call our life, to love us. That would be a hard, dry, unlovely chronology to apply to the love of the Eternal. Long before our birth took place, before our parents heard our first cry, God loved us, thought of us. When the hour came, He executed in time what He had meditated in eternity. These poor years of ours are steeped in the light of everlasting years. "O love without beginning, which loved me through the infinite ages," cries Fénelon. We are not here dwelling with the ferocious Calvinism of a certain modern scholasticism (if such a thing survives) which, I suppose, Calvin himself never held, which terrifies and condemns. We are heart to heart with predestination to life, with the predestination which winds round the feeble and suffering child hands that are soft as love and strong as eternity. All who are touched by grace may reason with that tender logic, the syllogism of the soul: may translate the active verb of our human consciousness into the passive of Divine power. "I move my life towards God; therefore I am moved. I love God; therefore, I am loved. I choose God; therefore, I am chosen."

5. Only just remarking that "sanctification" is the atmosphere and contexture in which the life that answers to its election "according to foreknowledge of God the Father," must lie, we think last of the peculiarly Petrine clause,—"unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

Deferring for a moment what we have to say of obedience, let us dwell upon the familiar term—the blood of Jesus Christ.

There is a perpetual danger of cant and unreality in our use of religious language, without true religious effort of

mind. Much indeed of all our language is, as a great philosopher has called it, "cœca cogitatio,"¹ a sort of blind thought. We pack up a whole bundle of ideas in a single term; but we run the string by which they are held into an inextricable knot, and flatter ourselves that we can untie it any time, and possess the contents. This is the secret of lifeless systems, mechanically held propositions, dead dogmas.

The Blood then is the Blood poured forth, *i.e.* the visible expression of the whole voluntary sacrifice of the Son of God. It is the most important consequence of the central Gospel fact, the Incarnation, under the most affecting image of human suffering and devotion. It is dogma, concentrated dogma, but dogma made picturesque, pathetic, victorious; picturesque as the crucifix in the light of a setting sun upon a Southern peak—pathetic as the red stain upon the earth where one we love has bled—victorious in the battle which has been won by the sacrifice of a great life. It tells us of the death of the body from which it passed; of the reality of the suffering by which it was elicited; of the reality of the sacrifice of whose idea it was the visible translation into historical fact. It was the palpable fulfilment of all that was symbolized by the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The old commentators on the "sprinkling of blood," in the Epistle to the Hebrews, were never tired of quoting the saying of the rabbis, "the root of sacrifice is in the sprinkling of the blood."² It should not be forgotten that the word rendered "sprinkling" has, in the original, a passive tinge,— "besprinklement with, being sprinkled by." "No one is actually freed from sin," writes one long dead, "through the blood of Christ, unless he be sprinkled with it, *i.e.* unless Christ's merits be applied to him."

Before saying my last word upon the order observed by

¹ Leibnitz.

² "Radix sacrificii in aspersione sanguinis."

the Apostle in these two things, I ask *how* and *when* we are brought to the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ?"

Baptism were not baptism without this, "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins." Prayer were not prayer without this, for all prayer is "through Jesus Christ our Lord." Holy communion is the soul drawing near to have this applied. The devout communicant is he who comes to be sprinkled. Devout meditation on the death and passion is placing ourselves within its reach. There is no Christ for us without the cross, no cross without the Blood. Occasions, too, there are every day for reaching forth "unto" this, bringing ourselves into touch with it. For we have all something to suffer every day. Little wearying things, petty trials of temper, minute cares, small humiliations. Let us unite them to His. So shall the dull lead be turned to red gold, and the poor rags covered with purple raiment.

Now for the order here observed by St. Peter.

All own that this "sprinkling" is the beginning of salvation. Yes! but the Apostle feels and says that it is the end too. Repentance is necessary. There is a sense in which we must be bathed in tears. "I water my couch with my tears," moans David in one penitential psalm. But there must be more. "Wash Thou me, and I shall be whiter than snow."¹ If election is made sure; after "according to," after "in," after the first part of "unto," must follow something more. God's servant lies on the bed from which he shall never rise. After the holiest life, as it seems to us, we still pray, "wash his soul in the blood of that immaculate Lamb, who was slain to take away the sins of the world." If any spoke of his election being proved by its being "unto obedience," he would add "*and* sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ." Well said a saint of old "the

¹ Psalm vi. 6; li. 7.

Blood of Christ is the key of Paradise.”¹ As we read these simple words on which I have commented, the very “shadow of Peter passes by.” May it overshadow some of us!

WILLIAM DERRY AND RAPHOE.

BISHOP LIGHTFOOT.

AN Oxford man, whose interests are in theology, cannot but look wistfully towards what we are in the habit of calling our sister university at Cambridge. As a sister we think of her, with affection and pride, but with something too of that generous rivalry which does not like to feel itself altogether distanced. We have indeed some consolations. We have had and have divines of philosophic grasp and of fine and beautiful temper, who are not in the first instance exegetes or critics; and we look forward with great hope to what may be done in the department of Old Testament and Hebrew studies. But in the field of New Testament exegesis and analytic criticism we have nothing at all comparable to the little group of Professors who a few years ago shed lustre upon Cambridge. It is a matter of great rejoicing to us that, though lost to Cambridge, the Bishop of Durham has not been lost to theological learning; and Cambridge too could afford to miss one of its leaders, while the others remain to it in the full vigour and maturity of their powers.

What, it may be asked, are the particular qualities which have won for Bp. Lightfoot so pre-eminent a place, by the universal consent of all competent judges both in England and on the Continent? It is necessary here to weigh our words; for though the impression which Bp. Lightfoot.

¹ “Sanguis Christi est clavis Paradisi.”—*S. Jerome.*