

## 2 Thessalonians and Professor Harnack.<sup>1</sup>

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MAY we use the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians to supplement the information given us in the First Epistle and in the Acts as to the Church in that city? This has always been one of the disputed points in the criticism of the Pauline Epistles, because of the really serious doubts which have been quite reasonably entertained as to its authenticity. These doubts were in modern times first expressed in 1789 by Schmidt, who was struck by the contrast between the eschatological passages in the two Epistles, and in 1826 by de Wette, who drew attention to the extraordinary combination of likeness and difference manifested by a comparison of the style and contents of the two Epistles. Thus in two ways doubt was thrown on the authenticity of the Second Epistle. First, because it possessed an eschatological section which seemed to be different from anything else in the Pauline Epistles; and secondly, because it seemed in the other sections to resemble the First Epistle so closely as to give rise to the suspicion that it was the artificial composition of some one who was acquainted with the First Epistle, and had constructed a mosaic of phrases from it in order to create the impression that his work was written by Paul, though he failed to imitate the spirit so successfully as he had the style of the apostle.

As against these criticisms various objections were made which may be adequately summed up as the contentions that the style of the Epistle was undoubtedly Pauline, and that if it were not for the existence of the First Epistle no one would have ever doubted the authenticity of the Second. The strong point of the argument was no doubt the former point, for it could be urged with some force that the latter did not really amount to more than the statement that if circumstances were different things would not be as they are. In the end, however, neither those who maintained the authenticity of the Epistle nor those who rejected it were entirely happy: the latter felt that

their theory demanded exceptional skill from a forger, while the former had to admit that they could not explain all the difficulties raised by their opponents, and the result was that to accept or reject 2 Thessalonians became one of the many subjects in which critical fashion rather than logical conviction was the decisive factor.

About fifteen years ago a new element was introduced by the 'religionsgeschichtliche' study of the New Testament, and especially by Bousset's work on the legend of the Antichrist. This showed finally and conclusively that there was no reason to suppose that the figure of the 'Man of Lawlessness' in 2 Thessalonians had anything to do with Nero (or Caligula), or that there was the smallest reason for thinking the idea was one which was unlikely to have been used by Paul. Thus the eschatological objection to the Epistle was removed, and as this had been one of the chief arguments against its authenticity there was an immediate reaction in favour of the Epistle. In 1903, however, another change was introduced which swung the pendulum back again in the other direction; this was the extremely able treatise of the late Professor Wrede, who submitted the whole question to a new investigation. He fully admitted that the eschatological argument could not be used against the authenticity of the Epistle, but he pointed out again, with increased clearness, that if we accept the eschatological section in chap. 2, the rest of the Epistle affords the most extraordinary series of parallels to 1 Thessalonians, so arranged, however, as to create a wholly different impression of the relation between Paul and the Church at Thessalonica, as well as of the nature of the community. The First Epistle is clearly written to Gentile converts, for whom Paul has the warmest feeling of personal affection, and on the whole the letter is remarkable for its absence of Old Testament colouring. The Second Epistle, on the other hand, seems to imply Jewish converts, is distinctly colder in tone, and has perhaps the most markedly Jewish colouring of any of the Epistles. Now, argues Wrede, there may be nothing in this which St. Paul could not have

<sup>1</sup> *Das Problem des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs*, von Adolf Harnack. Sonderabdruck from the Sitzungsberichte der kon. preuss. Akademie, 1910.

written, but inasmuch as it is admitted that 2 Thessalonians can only have been written, if it be Pauline, immediately after 1 Thessalonians, because of its extraordinary resemblance to it, the theory of its authenticity leads us to the impossible conclusion that the Church at Thessalonica possessed at the same moment contradictory attributes; and that Paul's relation to it was both warm and cold at the same moment. The Epistle, he concluded, cannot have been written by the same person to the same community at the same time as 1 Thessalonians. He therefore rejected the Pauline authorship of the Epistle, and put forward the hypothesis that it was forged by some one who felt that the Church at Thessalonica had too vivid an expectation of the immediate coming of the Messiah, and wrote 2 Thessalonians as an antidote, enclosing the eschatological section, which it was really his purpose to promulgate, in, as it were, a frame of Pauline phraseology. No one could read Wrede's book without feeling that he had produced serious and reasonable arguments, and von Dobschütz, the latest editor of the Epistle, though he does not accept Wrede's position, admits that he cannot wholly answer his arguments. The result has naturally been that increased doubt also has been felt as to the authenticity of the Epistle. Probably many were inclined to regard it as more doubtful even than the Pastoral Epistles, and the only reason which influenced them to think that it might after all be genuine was the feeling that it was much too good to be a forgery. Under these circumstances one is especially grateful to Professor Harnack for coming to the rescue with a brochure on the subject which throws a new light on the matter, and not only rescues the Epistle from the suspicion which had fallen upon it, but gives us an altogether clearer outlook on the circumstances of the Church in Thessalonica.

Harnack fully admits that Wrede was right in thinking that it is impossible to believe that the Second Epistle was sent by the same writer to the same community at the same time and under the same circumstances as the First Epistle; but he also admits that those who have defended the authenticity of the Epistle were right in thinking that it must have been written by Paul. If, therefore, we combine these two concessions, we are driven to the conclusion that the difference in tone between the two Epistles must be sought for not in a differ-

ence of authorship, but in a difference between the recipients. Is it possible, asks Harnack in effect, that the truth is that the Second Epistle was not written to the same persons at Thessalonica as the First? In reply he shows that all the conditions of the problem seem to be satisfied if we assume that the First Epistle was written to the Gentile converts in Thessalonica, and that the Second was written, either simultaneously or very soon afterwards, for the Jewish converts whose existence had been practically ignored in the First Epistle. This hypothesis is supported both by the internal evidence of the Epistles and by the precise statement of the Acts. The most important point in the Epistle for this purpose is 2 Th 2<sup>13</sup>, 'But we must thank God for you, brothers beloved of the Lord, that God took you as a first-fruit for salvation,' etc. Here it must be noted that for the first time it is possible to adopt the text of the Codex Vaticanus and other good authorities which read 'first-fruits' (*ἀπαρχήν*), and not 'from the beginning' (*ἀπ' ἀρχῆς*). This reading has been hitherto rejected, in spite of the textual evidence, because it seemed impossible to find any sense in which the Thessalonians could be described as 'first-fruits,' for they were neither the earliest of Paul's converts, nor were they the first Christians in Macedonia; but it obtains a new and very pertinent sense if we take it in connexion with the suggestion that 2 Thessalonians was written to the Jewish Christians in Thessalonica, as distinct from the whole community, for 'first-fruits' is precisely what these were, as compared with the Gentile Christians in the city.

The same conclusion is supported by a comparison of 2 Th 3<sup>17</sup> with 1 Th 5<sup>27</sup>. In the former Paul says, 'The salutation of me Paul with my own hand, which is the token in every letter; so I write'; and in the latter passage, he says, 'I adjure you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the brethren.' Obviously, argues Harnack, Paul recognized that the Jewish and Gentile Christians saw but little of each other; what he meant by 'all the brethren' was really 'including the Jewish Christians,' and the reason why he drew attention to his signature was to avoid the danger which he foresaw of one of the two parties in the Church impugning the authenticity of the other's Epistle.

Turning to the Acts, it will be found that Harnack's new hypothesis fulfils what is required

of a new theory, in that it illustrates, and is illustrated by, the statement of Luke. According to Acts, Paul preached for three weeks in the synagogue and persuaded a few of the Jews to become Christians. He also (or possibly afterwards, for this is one of the points on which the exegesis of the Acts is doubtful) met with far greater success among the 'God-fearing' Gentiles. It is clear that this statement can for the first time be properly appreciated on Harnack's theory, which postulates, exactly as Acts does, the existence of a Jewish minority which was nevertheless the 'first-fruits'

of Paul's preaching. Without Harnack's theory, Luke's statement that there were Jewish converts is left uncorroborated, for there is nothing in 1 Thessalonians to suggest that the community was anything but Gentile in origin.

It will be seen that this suggestion of Harnack's really introduces a new period in the history of the criticism of 2 Thessalonians. Whether it will answer all objections time alone can show, but at first sight it certainly seems to comply with all the conditions of the problem in a manner which has not been done by any previous hypothesis.

## The Pilgrim's Progress.

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### The River of Death.

THE figure is a classical one, and leads us back at once to the Acheron of Virgil, whose words are so familiar, 'This flood, all turbid with its muddy stream and dreary rapids, rages along, and belches forth into Cocytus all its sand.' The same rivers had been already Christianized in a way by Dante. The poem *Pearl*, already alluded to, has very fully and beautifully worked out the metaphor. In that *Pèlerinage de l'Homme*, which general conception is a forerunner of Bunyan's work, the river to be crossed flows at the beginning of the journey, and signifies baptism.

The *Pilgrim's Progress* is singularly wholesome in its imagination, and though the thought of death occurs frequently, it casts no shadow of gloom upon the reader until the close. Now, when the end is reached, the fact of death is unflinchingly faced, but in so vital a fashion that it produces the effect (as it ought to produce) simply of an incident in life, a trying moment in the career of pilgrimage.

This is all the more remarkable when we take into account those times in European history when the imagination of the community has been absolutely mastered by the *macabre*, and the very atmosphere of the time has been full of spectral lights and graveyard exhalations. After the great plague of 1487 this took place, and the *Dance of Death* pictures and literature are the expression

of horror mingled with a kind of wild and consciously futile defiance: as if while men shuddered they also laughed back their hoarse laughter at the enemy. That morbid spirit lingers through centuries by reason of its sinister fascination, especially in remote country places. It taints and infuses itself into religious thought, until the ghastly realism of ancient gravestones forces upon the living the crudest and most repulsive of representations. It revives at times when, through political crisis or raging epidemic, men's lives become peculiarly uncertain. Such a time was it at which the *Pilgrim's Progress* was written. The Plague of 1665 had not yet appeared, but other epidemics were frequent and fatal; while, in the times of Charles I. and Charles II., life was uncertain enough for any British man. The austere gravity of the Puritan spirit found the darker and sadder things but too congenial. In Nathaniel Hawthorne we have one of the most interesting proofs of this, for in him this aspect of the Puritan spirit recurs in the corpse-candle light by which he writes his tales and sketches. John Bunyan, with the horrible biography of the dying Spira in his hand, would be peculiarly sensitive to this sort of obsession, for his was a fearful imagination, and one which knew too well the power of the ghastly. He seems to have had forebodings of a painful death-bed experience, for we read that when he was a prisoner, 'Satan laid hard at me, to beat