

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY.

CHAPTER III. VERSES 15 AND 16.

MANY Commentators have placed a full stop before the last clause of verse 15, and have supposed that in this clause St. Paul characterized the "mystery of godliness," not "the Church of the living God." Chrysostom inclined to this view; and Irenæus twice over speaks of the *Gospel* as "the pillar and ground of the truth." Mosheim, Bengel, Rosenmüller, Lange, and others have maintained that we should read thus: "A pillar and foundation of the truth, and confessedly great, is the mystery of godliness." This arrangement is, according to De Wette and Ellicott, "hopelessly artificial, abrupt, and illogical." If this can be established, let the punctuation be relinquished; but it is unnecessary to condemn the motives of Protestant exegetes who, by adopting it, have avoided the inference that has been unwarrantably drawn from the received punctuation, to the effect that the Church, as a specific organization, is the fountal source, infallible organ, and sole depository of the truth. It is certainly not contrary to the apostolic style in this very Epistle to accumulate predicates of high significance before some great assertion. *E.g.*, chap. i. 15 would provide a very similar collocation of words.

Others—Gregory of Nyssa, Erasmus, Chillingworth—have supposed that *Timothy* was addressed as a "pillar and ground of the truth." This would be "artificial" indeed; and pillars and foundations do not "know" and cannot "conduct themselves in the house" of which they form a part.

Doubtless the reference to the Church of the living God is the most simple and direct construction. But in what sense? Suicer¹ has given a very exhaustive treatment of the words, quoting abundantly from Dio Halicarnassus, Plautus, Varro, and many others in proof of the use to which "pillars" were put, shewing how the laws were engraven or suspended on them, for warning, menace, or instruction. Temples, as we know, were richly adorned with pillars. The famous Temple of Artemis was enriched with costly monoliths, the gifts of kings; and the Temple of Jerusalem with the columns of Jachin and Boaz, at the spot where the kings were customarily proclaimed. Moreover, to these columns were sometimes due the stability as well as the beauty of the fabric. If this were in the writer's mind, the image here used represents the Church to be the stability and beauty of the truth, not the truth to be the stability and beauty of the Church. The assertion amounts to this,—that the Church is the "resting-place" and the "support" of the truth, that it provides the noblest means of exhibiting the truth to the world. Now, in the previous verse, the Church of God has been described as a dwelling-place of the living God; and, according to the construction of the old temples, there was a house within a house. Just as the *ναὸς*, or shrine, gave all its meaning and sanctity to the larger enclosure called the *ἱερόν*, so the Apostle treats "the truth" as a beautiful fabric, a vast temple, which is strengthened and supported and adorned by "a pillar and foundation," which is in itself a "house of God."

¹ "Thesaurus," art. *στύλος*, vol. ii.

The illustration not only gives a lofty function to the Church, but supplies a test for its every claim. Truth is not the objective fact itself, but the experience and expression by true men of such facts. Truth cannot ultimately reside in the form of texts or creeds, in dead languages, symbols, or formulæ; it must enter into human consciousness, be a living experience, find expression in character and action, and reveal itself in worship, love, and obedience. If scientific truth, as the sum total of what is known of Nature, were looked at as a great temple of beautiful and complicated form, the entire congregation of scientific men would be the pillar and ground of such a temple. If science were buried in formulæ, and did not live in active thoughtful men, it would soon become utterly corrupt and valueless. If those who professed to embody it and develop it became unfaithful to the truth, were actuated by false motives and selfish ends, or party-spirit; if some close corporation of *savans* should profess to monopolize all truth, and repudiate every method of reaching it except that which has received their own imprimatur; then those who are more faithful to it than they would become in their turn "the pillar and ground of such truth."

We have the means of knowing what the truth of God is independently of the decisions or developments of any particular society. Should any community defile, overlay, undermine, emasculate "the truth," then such a community is not the Church of the living God. The Church of God as a distinct organization was, alas! unfaithful to God's truth in the days of the Apostles, and such unfaithfulness to her high function has not been confined to the apostolic age.

Verse 16.—AND: the *καὶ* brings forward the climacteric expression, by which a full reason is offered for Timothy's faithfulness. The truth to which the Church is the witness is nothing less than the sublime Fact and Person, in whom all things consist, who is *the Truth and the Life* of all things.

And confessedly great is the mystery of godliness. The word *ὁμολογουμένως*¹ is positive in its meaning, and neither suggests nor repudiates "controversy." High above the strife of parties and the jangling and follies of false teachers, "confessedly great," admitted by all alike to be of prime importance, is this "opened secret of the Divine life," this mystery of godliness.

The next word in the Greek text has occasioned much discussion. The theological heat with which this purely palæographical question was discussed has passed away, and we are learning to deal more patiently and scientifically with the elements of textual criticism. It would far exceed my present purpose or limits to discuss the history or process of the famous controversy, as between *OC* and *ΘEOC* in the uncial manuscripts.

The care with which the manuscripts have been examined, to determine the actual reading, amounts, in some instances, to a romance. There can be no doubt now, after the researches of Griesbach, Tischendorf, Alford, Tregelles, Ellicott, and Birch, that *OC* is the original reading of the Alexandrian Manuscript. This is affirmed by the majority of the uncial manuscripts, including the Sinaitic.

The reading *ΘEOC* is found in I and K, and in

¹ Suicer, "Thesaurus," *sub voce*, shews, by great accumulation of evidence, this usage in the later Greek writers.

the majority of cursive manuscripts, and seems to have been the text read by Hippolytus, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Damascenus, and other Greek Fathers; but supposing it had been in the original text, it is remarkable that it was not advanced in the Arian and Nestorian controversy, in proof of the Divinity of our Lord. Wettstein, in his elaborate treatment of the text, leans to the reading δ , which is found in D', and he justifies it with great acuteness and learning from the use made of it in Latin versions and Latin Fathers. Alford and Ellicott urge that this reading is a correction from $\delta\varsigma$, to make it agree with *μυστήριον*. However, it was not "the mystery" which was manifested and received up into glory: and if δ be the true reading, the Apostle says, "that that which was manifested in the flesh was seen by angels," &c. (Cf. 1 John i. 4; John i. 4, 46; iii. 26, 34.)

If we are to be governed by internal considerations, δ seems to throw the greatest light on the passage; but it cannot stand before the evidence in favour of $\delta\varsigma$, which may be considered as finally determined. Dr. Davidson has recently translated it—"in him who was manifested in the flesh." We prefer a certain abruptness, and would render it thus: "*He who was manifested in the flesh.*" Ellicott objects to giving this force to a relative pronoun, which is not emphatic, and regards it as a relative to an omitted antecedent, such as CHRIST, or, SON OF GOD. The whole verse is thought by Heydenreich and Mack to be a portion of a rhythmical or responsive hymn, akin to that which we find in Ephes. v. 14. This might account for the difficulty of the construction; as the fragment quoted would be gram-

matically ruled by its original reference, and would be left unaltered. This hypothesis furnishes us with another pregnant hint of the truths and mutually accredited ideas and sentiments which appear continually to be underlying, and therefore preceding, the composition of the earliest fragments of the New Testament.

These words, or words like them, may already have been sung in the churches and homes of the Christians in Ephesus and Rome.

A few words only of detailed exposition. If Christ was "*manifested*" in the flesh," those who said or sang of this manifestation must have believed in his pre-existent glory. The "flesh" sometimes means (1) the human body (1 Cor. xv. 50; Rom. ii. 28); sometimes (2) "the body" as distinct from the "spirit" (Luke xxiv. 49); often, however, (3) as "the body, soul, and spirit," the whole of humanity, without insisting on the contrariety between the Divine and human (Matt. xxiv. 22; Luke iii. 6; John i. 14; xvii. 2). It has another and frequent usage for (4) humanity without God (John iii. 6; Rom. vii. 5, 18, 25); but here it is obviously used in the third of these meanings. As the Logos became flesh, or "humanity," so He who was from the beginning was manifested in the flesh, and, concealed by the veil of his humanity, was *justified as such in the Spirit*. The Spirit was given to men to open their eyes to the meaning of this manifestation. He was declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit, by or from his resurrection. The eye of the flesh saw Him to be wounded, bruised, and reckoned among trans-

gressors. The Spirit convinced the world that "he was wounded for our transgressions," and that its greatest sin was the rejection of his claims. *He appeared to angels.* The words are confirmed by the analogous assertion that, "unto principalities and powers in heavenly places was made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." He who was thus vindicated to angels and to men *was preached among the nations.* The grand peculiarity of the Royalty of Christ is that his claims have been admitted by opposing and divergent nationalities and various types of civilization. The empire of Buddhism is vast; but it is among peoples that have had much in common. Christianity from the first gained its victories over Barbarian and Athenian, over the Roman, the Jew, the African, and the Oriental. He was *believed on in the world, and received up into glory.* There is a sublime contrast drawn here between the "world" and "glory." Though He is hidden in God, though He is seated on the right-hand of the Majesty on high, the world has yet come to believe in this supersensuous and supernatural fact. There is a clear reference here to the historic ascension of Jesus.¹ The session in heaven was the close of his manifestation in the flesh and the beginning of his glorious reign over the world of men. All these terms are prophetic, and a higher fulfilment of them all is awaiting the Church. But we have enough in the history of the risen Christ to help us to blend our notes of praise with the triumphant song of the early Church.

H. R. REYNOLDS.

¹ Cf. ἀνελήμφθη with Mark xvi. 19; Acts i. 2; Luke xxiv. 51.