

## ST. PAUL ON THE TRINITY.

EPHESIANS ii. 18.

IN all inductive sciences, the tendency of knowledge is to run up into the simplest and most comprehensive truths. It may be questioned whether theology is in any degree, and if so in what degree, inductive; but at least it has this in common with other sciences, that its most fruitful and most universal are also its simplest truths. "The Lord thy God is one Lord," "One God and Father of all men,"—all the creeds and confessions of Christendom cannot soar above that highest simplest truth. And yet the doctrine of the Divine Unity needs to be—not supplemented, but—built up out of other and independent truths, if it is to stand complete and foursquare. For notwithstanding the natural recoil from the excessive technicalities of mediæval theology, whether Catholic or Protestant, which has been so conspicuous of late years, yet Unitarianism, though confessedly it embodies a supreme truth, has failed to satisfy the religious needs of the vast majority of Christians; in the words of Dr. Rowland Williams, "It is the affirmation that saves men, and not the negation"; and though in a teacher like Channing the affirmative side stands out clear and prominent, yet in ordinary Unitarianism, especially in England, the negative has seemed the most characteristic and essential. The doctrine of the Trinity is probably seldom taught now in the bare and technical form in which it stands in the Thirty-nine Articles, the Westminster Confession, and the trust-deeds of the older Nonconformist churches; and yet to the student of church history the gradual emergence of this doctrine from the confusion of

the Arian, the Eutychian, and other controversies, presents itself as an instance of the "survival of the fittest." And it would be no unworthy undertaking for the theologians and expositors of the present day to enquire what in the traditional doctrine is accidental and transitory, and what has its roots in the unchanging truth of the Divine Nature.

It is a far humbler task that I propose to myself in the present paper; I wish simply to discuss one of those brief but pregnant sentences of St. Paul, in which, while speaking with a purely practical view, he lets us see incidentally what are those theological first principles on which his mind works, and so teaches us Christian doctrine far more forcibly and more convincingly than if he conveyed it in the form of abstract dogma. St. Paul nowhere lays down in any express form a statement of doctrine respecting the relations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity was elaborated or developed as a formal and technical statement suited for a controversial age; and probably its best defence is to say that it harmonizes better than any other systematic formula with the unformulated view which St. Paul's utterances imply as the substratum of his spiritual life. It may be said that this method of extracting the doctrine from the ore of the Apostolic writings is only thrusting the difficulty one step farther back; that as Catholic theology rested on an infallible church, and Reformed theology on an infallible Book, we are now trying to fall back on infallible Apostles: but is it not more true to say that in trying to get to the mind of the Apostles we are falling back from the letter upon the spirit, from the authority of an infallible book upon the authority of inspired men? Cardinal Newman, with that wonderful art of meeting an objection by an objection in which he is so great a master, says:<sup>1</sup> "It is a less difficulty that the Papal supremacy was not formally

<sup>1</sup> Newman on "The Development of Christian Doctrine," ch. iv. § 4.

acknowledged in the second century, than that there was no formal acknowledgment on the part of the church of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity till the fourth." But to this it may be replied, on the principle we are now maintaining, that, if you exclude the Papal supremacy, no passage in St. Paul's writings is in the least affected by its absence ; but if you exclude the doctrine<sup>1</sup> of the Trinity, there are many passages which would lose their *motif*, and would sound out of tune.

It is time to turn to the special passage by which these thoughts have been suggested.

The keynote of the Epistle to the Ephesians seems to be the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose of love, in gathering together in one—summing up under one head—all things in Christ. The church, the mystical body of Christ, which He loved and for which He gave Himself, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle, this is the dominant thought ; a thought which to us is not difficult to grasp, if once we have received the revelation of the universal fatherly love of God, but which to a Jew presented the crucial difficulty that it ignored the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, that it made the Gentiles no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, members of God's household ; that it taught the Gentiles that they were fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body. The solution of this difficulty St. Paul found in the Incarnation, a belief which we may almost say is the key to all his theology and all his anthropology. As he told the Galatians that there is neither Jew nor Greek, for Christ is all and in all, so he tells the Ephesians that in Christ Jesus they, Gentiles, who were once far off, are now made nigh by the blood of Christ ;

<sup>1</sup> By the doctrine of the Trinity I understand not only the highly technical detail in which that doctrine is presented in the ancient formularies, but the belief in the Godhead of the Father, of Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.

that He is their peace, who hath made both one, having broken down the middle wall of partition; that He has abolished in his flesh the enmity between nations, religions, classes; that He has reconciled both unto God in one body through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; "for through Him we both," Jew and Gentile alike, "have our access in one Spirit unto the Father."

In our creeds and doxologies we observe the order of the baptismal formula, and speak of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. St. Paul observes a different order; most commonly he puts the Son first, as in the conclusion of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians he speaks of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ before the love of God; and here, as is natural, the mention of the Son through whom, and the Spirit in whom, precedes the name of the Father to whom, we have our access. In like manner, in 1 Corinthians xii., where he is speaking of spiritual gifts, the mention of the Spirit leads on to the Son and the Father: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all in all." In each of these cases two obvious remarks suggest themselves; first, that as St. Paul is not defining the mystery of the Godhead, but writing to men of their relation to the Divine, he naturally puts first those Persons of the Trinity, or, to speak in less technical language, those sides of the Divine Perfection, which are in immediate contact with humanity; and secondly, that these undesigned and therefore all the more weighty indications of St. Paul's theology justify us in asserting that for him the relations of God to man found their natural and adequate expression in "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." How far it was inevitable, and how far it was justifiable, for the Church in the exigencies of later controversies to precipitate into definitions a belief thus

held in solution in the Christian consciousness, is a question on which there may well be different opinions; certainly in an age like the present, which is even unduly impatient of anything like dogmatic definition, it would be well if our theology could begin to assume once again the more primitive forms under which it first appeared, and could become, as at first it was, devotional and practical rather than controversial.

That it is through Christ that we have our access to the Father is a root-truth more generally acknowledged than taken up and digested by the spiritual organs. It rests upon the words of the Lord Himself, "I am the way . . . ; no man cometh unto the Father, except through me:" the way, as Dr. Westcott excellently puts it, "by which the two worlds are united, so that men may pass from one to the other." A way implies the establishment of communication between two points previously separated. That man's sin has separated between him and God is what no one who believes in a righteous God can deny; that through Christ communication has been established would be denied by no professing Christian. Thus far there would be general agreement; but then there arises the question, how and in what sense is our access to the Father through Christ? It may be well to note, first, that it is said to be through Christ Himself—not through his atoning death, nor through faith in Him, though these statements also would be true, but through Himself—that we come to the Father. There is a passage in the Athanasian creed which stands out conspicuously above much that is hard and technical, much that is mediæval in tone, in that much debated symbol; the passage which states that Christ, "although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one, Christ; one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh" (not, that is, by lowering the Divine Nature), "but by taking of the manhood into God" (by

raising and ennobling human nature).<sup>1</sup> It is, then, by his incarnation, by his taking upon Him humanity to deliver it, that He became our way of access to the Father. And this has an important bearing on the question, much debated some twenty years ago, whether the effect of Christ's sacrifice is to reconcile man to God or to reconcile God to man. In so deep a mystery there must be many sides to the truth, and therefore one would be slow to pronounce dogmatically that no truth is expressed by the words of the second Article, that Christ died "to reconcile his Father to us"; but assuredly the deeper and more Scriptural view is that He lived and died and rose again not to bring God nearer to us, but to bring us to God. As it has been strikingly expressed by Bishop Ewing, "In the first aspect" (viz. that of man reconciled to God) "God is shewn in the character of one coming forth to save others; in the second He is only shewn forth in the character of one coming forth to save Himself." A recent re-perusal of Anselm's "*Cur Deus Homo?*" a book which seems to have formulated the atonement-theology of the middle ages, leaves on one's mind the impression that the Almighty is regarded as having got into a legal difficulty from which He was extricated by the intervention of the Son, and that the "scheme of redemption" was a happy idea<sup>2</sup> such as might have occurred to a subtle lawyer. But to treat the Incarnation as an afterthought, a skilful arrangement,<sup>3</sup> may even—for so it is described by early writers<sup>4</sup>—as a trick practised

<sup>1</sup> Compare the phrase in the *Te Deum*. "*Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem,*" translated in the English Prayer-Book "When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man," but which means "When Thou wouldest take upon Thee *man*, for his deliverance." See the exactly parallel sentence in Augustine, *De Vera Religione*: "*Ipsa enim natura suscipienda erat, quæ liberanda*": a parallel which seems necessarily to connect Augustine with the *Te Deum*.

<sup>2</sup> It would be an interesting question to investigate how much of mediæval theology arose from the intrusion of feudal ideas into the relations between God and man.

<sup>3</sup> τὸ σοφὸν καὶ τεχνικὸν τῆς οἰκονομίας. Greg. Nyss.

<sup>4</sup> ἀπάτη τίς ἐστι τῶν τῶν. Greg. Nyss. Rufinus speaks of it as a hook

upon Satan, is surely an unworthy account of that great mystery. In speaking of the deep things of God, it is wise to go no farther "than Scripture doth lead us by the hand"; but we ought not to forget that St. Peter speaks of Christ as "foreordained before the foundation of the world, but manifested in these last times for us"; that St. John writes of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"; that St. Paul speaks of the Incarnation as "the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest," "the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God," "the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest"; "his purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ"; and so again, "eternal life<sup>1</sup> which God promised before times eternal." The Apostolic writers, therefore, seem to have regarded the Incarnation not as a consequent but—in purpose at least—as an antecedent of human sin; as<sup>2</sup> "the natural or predetermined end of all God's ways in the creation; . . . not an afterthought of the Creator, but a possible work of God's love prepared for in the very nature of things." And so through Christ we have our access to the Father, because in Him God and man are in contact, because He is the eternal manifestation of God's gracious purpose in relation to his creatures.

Further, this access we have not "by," as in the Authorised Version, but, as the Revised Version has it, "*in*, one Spirit."

baited with the flesh of Christ, by which Satan was caught and drawn up from the deep to his own destruction.

<sup>1</sup> Titus i. 2. The antecedent to *ἡν* is evidently *ζωῆς αἰωνίου* not *ἐλπίδι*. So De Wette, Alford, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Newman Smyth, "Old Faiths in New Light."

There is a phrase frequently found in early Christian writers, as early even as Origen and Cyprian, "*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*": a phrase which has its parallel in the statement in the Catechism of the Church of England, that the two sacraments are necessary to salvation. These two statements are so diametrically opposed to modern sentiment that it may probably cause to some readers a shock of surprise if I say that, rejecting them utterly in the letter, I yet accept them in the spirit as expressing a most essential truth. It is not true to say that no man can be saved unless he is in professed union with an organized Christian society; it is not true, it would be contrary to the whole idea of the kingdom of God, to say that no man can be saved unless he has been baptized in the name of the Trinity, and is accustomed from time to time to receive the bread and wine at the Lord's table. Such views substitute the material for the moral and spiritual, and make religion to consist in things outward and not in the allegiance of the heart to Christ. But it is quite true to say that the spiritual, like the bodily, life is the life of an organism; that from the Head all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God; that the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, when "they were all with one accord in one place," is an expression of the ordinary law of our spiritual life; that "in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, and were all made to drink of one Spirit;" and that a Christian who "separates himself," "having not the Spirit," though he may have his access to the Father through Christ, yet falls short of the fulness and completeness of the Christian life, because he knows nothing of that "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" which ought to result from the grace of Christ and the love of God. And thus, when St. Paul says that we have our access to the Father in one Spirit, he means that our



relation to God involves a very real and definite relation to each other; that by one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body. And as the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, so accordingly our access to the Father depends on our entering heartily into that relation of mutual helpfulness and co-operation which St. Paul speaks of in connection with spiritual gifts: "That the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it: or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." "Nulla salus extra ecclesiam"; the appointed way of access to the Father is by the mutual help and comfort, the life of unselfish effort, the "vivre pour autrui," in which, and not in any merely selfish object, the gifts of the Spirit find their true use.

In the order of the Divine counsels, it was first revealed to man that his access to the Father must be through the Son. Before Christ came, men had been under tutors and governors, by whom they were to be educated for higher things. By wasting their spiritual substance in riot, by serving vain gods, by wandering in the wilderness of heathenism, or again by the gradual glimpses of light given to nobler souls, they had been led on to a thirst for God, until at last human nature began to come to itself, and to say, I will arise and go to my Father. Then, in the fulness of time, Christ came, that men might receive the adoption of sons. And for awhile this was enough. When He said "I go unto Him that sent Me," sorrow filled his disciples hearts. They could not understand that there was anything better than his personal presence, that it might be expedient for them that He should go away. They were learning to know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God;<sup>1</sup> they knew nothing of the communion of

<sup>1</sup> "He, the Firstborn of the whole creation, became the Firstborn of his church, and went up into heaven to be the Head and Ruler of that church.

the Holy Spirit until Christ had been by the right hand of God exalted, and had received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost. Thenceforth their access to the Father was in the one Spirit, the Giver of corporate and individual life, by whom they had all been baptized into one body, and by whom the whole body of the church was from that time forth to be governed and sanctified.

And as it was in the beginning of the gospel, so it has been in a measure since. Whenever there has been any time of special spiritual awakening and revival, the first effect has been to concentrate the thoughts of sinners upon the Saviour. The cry "Jesus only" is the natural expression of the feelings of a newly awakened soul, as it finds itself alone in the wilderness with the Good Shepherd. But when such feelings are recognised as a permanent religious condition, they result in a meagre and inadequate theology. And thus the great Evangelical revival, while it gave due prominence to Christ as the way of access to the Father, failed to proclaim with equal force that this access must be in the one Spirit. It produced a religion of individualism. Not that the men whom it influenced failed to work for their fellow-men; the name of Wilberforce is but one among a host of instances to the contrary: but they failed to grasp the idea of the Spirit working in and through the Christian society, and so the church life of their day was somewhat weak and meagre. It may be that it is the special work of our day to supply this defect; to lay hold on social problems, social reforms, and to claim them boldly as the sphere of the Church: to declare that Christianity, far from having nothing to do with politics, is really the essen-

and to that church He, in the unity of the Father, gave, and evermore gives his Spirit, to be the Source of her life and power, of her faith and wisdom and holiness. Upon that church the Spirit bestows all the graces of the kingdom of heaven, sanctifying that blessed communion of the faithful, who have found the forgiveness of their sins through the atoning sacrifice of the Saviour." —Hare's "Mission of the Comforter," p. 32.

tial factor in all political relations : to assert boldly that all public work is church work. If so, it is well that we should remember that such an aspect of religion has its special danger ; that if the broad free work of the Spirit is in any way made independent of, or a substitute for, the individual allegiance of the heart to Christ, it will not bring us to the Father ; for no man cometh unto the Father but by Christ.

To the Father. This is the only true end. Any system of belief or of worship which stops short of this, which does not bring the believer or the worshipper to the Father, which regards the mediation of Christ or the operation of the Spirit as more than means to the great end, is substituting the temporary in place of the eternal. For the time will come when the work of Christ shall be finished, when the dispensation of the Spirit shall be completed, and when "the Son also Himself<sup>1</sup> shall be subjected to Him that did subject all things to Him, that God may be all in all."

R. E. BARTLETT.

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THE VEIL AND WEB OF DEATH DESTROYED  
BY CHRIST.

ISAIAH xxv. 7, 8.

WE have yet much to learn as of all other branches of Biblical study, so also in that of Prophecy, and especially as to its mode or modes,—how the afflatus fell and worked, how it was induced, how it acted on the mind of the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 28. Much has been discussed as to the subject of *ὑποταγῆσθαι*, whether it is the Humanity of Christ, or the Divine Son by "communicatio idiomatum," predicating of his whole nature what strictly refers only to his Humanity. Comp. Liddon's Bampton Lectures, p. 310; Stanley's Corinthians, ad loc. Also a striking and characteristic passage in Irving's sermon on "God our Father," Works, vol. iv. p. 268-9.