THE FIRST LOVE AND HOPE IN THESSALONICA.

(FIRST AND SECOND EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS.)

A FULL-GROWN and living Church established in the course of three or four weeks,—this is doubtless a unique fact in missionary annals; such success astonishes St. Paul himself, and he sees there the undeniable proof of God's special intervention. "Knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election, because our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much fulness, even as ye know what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sake." The Apostle had distinctly felt God's power working amongst them through him, and their election had been revealed to his heart in the very fact of that powerful co-operation.

It was now at least fifteen years since St. Paul had been called both to the personal acceptance of the Gospel and to the preaching of that Gospel to others; he had thereby become an apostle, and during three years he had taught his new creed at Damascus and in Arabia. In so doing he had become strengthened in his attachment to Jesus, and had grown in his close communion. After these beginnings, he went to Jerusalem, re-entering for the first time the city which he had left as a zealous Pharisee and persecutor of Christ. His stay there was but short: obedient to a Divine dispensation and to the advice of the other apostles, he returned for a time to Tarsus, his native town. It has often been denied that the quotations from Greek poets which are to be found in St. Paul's writings, are proofs of

his having had a certain degree of Greek culture, and to support this denial, it has been asserted that he was too young when brought to Jerusalem and there educated to have previously imbibed the elements of profane literature. But those who maintain this view forget this sojourn of St. Paul's at Tarsus, when he must at least have been considerably over thirty, since before the age of thirty he would hardly have been sent on a mission to Damascus as delegate of the Sanhedrin. During the few years which he now spent with his relatives, waiting until God should call him to his work among the Gentiles, he had time to acquire a good knowledge of literature, and no doubt tried to do so, in order to be more fit for the work which lay before him. The literary resources of his native town, at that time a rival of Athens and Alexandria, would therefore, no doubt, be made use of by him as far as this was possible for a Jew. This period of waiting was, however, soon brought to a close by Barnabas coming to claim St. Paul's services in favour of the recently founded Church of Antioch. This Church was the first Christian community composed for the greater part of converted pagans, and seems to have been destined to become the starting-point of the activity of St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles. The Divine call to begin a distinctly missionary work was not, therefore, long wanting in the midst of this flourishing Church, and about the year A.D. 45, Barnabas and Paul were ordained as missionary apostles by the laying on of hands, and sent on their first errand into the pagan world. Their travels in Cyprus and in the southern provinces of Asia Minor appear to have detained them some years. On their return the two missionaries had to go to Jerusalem in order to have an important question settled, namely, whether Christian communities formed of newly converted pagans were to be subjected to the law of Moses. The apostles and the mother Church having decided in favour of the liberty of pagan

converts (Gal. ii. 1–10), Paul again left Antioch for a second missionary voyage, accompanied this time by Silas, a prophet of the Church at Jerusalem. They began by visiting together those Churches in Asia Minor to which St. Paul's first journey had given birth, taking with them Timothy, a young member of one of these Churches, and, without remaining long anywhere except in Galatia, where an illness obliged St. Paul to stay some time, they arrived, compelled as it were by God Himself, at Troas, at the western extremity of Asia Minor. There they found a physician named Luke, probably already a believer, which fact can easily be accounted for if, according to an old tradition, he was really a native of Antioch; at the Divine summons, all four crossed the channel which divides Asia from Europe, and, arriving at Philippi, founded there the first European Church. This probably took place in the autumn of the year A.D. 52. St. Paul did not stay long at Philippi; he, together with Silas and Timothy, soon left this city, bearing in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus, and went on to Thessalonica, three days' journey to the west of Philippi, and capital of the second district of Macedonia. Instead of being, like the former, an entirely Roman town, peopled by veteran soldiers, Thessalonica was a rich and commercial Greek city, and, situated as it was, at the end of the gulf formed by the peninsula of Mount Athos, possessing an excellent harbour, it might be considered, as it were, the Trieste of that period. A flourishing colony of Jews were settled in the midst of this commercial Greek population, and, enjoying many more advantages than did their poorer and less numerous brethren who lived at Philippi, they had built for themselves a synagogue. Hither, according to the mode of action which he had adopted from the first, St. Paul at once came in order to begin his missionary work in Thessalonica. Not only were the Jews of the place to be found assembled there,—those Jews whom he considered

as having a right to be first offered the blessings of the Gospel,[1]—but with them came many heathens who, disgusted with their ancient superstitions, had found in the Jewish monotheism the purer religious atmosphere they had longed for. This interesting part of the population formed, as it were, a bridge providentially placed as a help to the Apostles in spanning the abyss which separated paganism from Judaism.

The success of the Apostle's preaching at Thessalonica was wonderful, especially among those proselytes, and among their still heathen fellow-citizens. Not only did some of the poorer classes accept the Gospel, but many belonging to the wealthiest families of high rank were, by baptism, admitted into the Church, and not more than three sabbaths had elapsed before a numerous and flourishing Christian community was formed. Such success provoked violent irritation on the part of the Jewish population, who, bribing some men of the very lowest class, contrived to excite a tumult in the city. Having failed in their object of possessing themselves of Paul's person, they dragged his host, a Jew named Jason, before the rulers of the city, who obliged him to give security for the tranquillity of the town, since the Jews accused Paul of setting up another king in opposition to Cæsar, because he had spoken of Christ's second coming; as though they themselves had not been anxiously awaiting the coming of the Messiah!

Being anxious to avoid bringing his Thessalonian friends into trouble, St. Paul left the city and its beloved Church after a stay of about four weeks; and, going thence towards the south, stopped first at Berœa, then at Athens, and finally fixed his abode for the time being at Corinth. He had left behind him his two companions, as they were to visit once more the young Churches at Philippi and Thessalonica and bring back an account of how they were pros-

[1] Rom. i. 16. "To the Jew *first* and also to the Greek."

pering. We can easily imagine the anxiety and impatience with which St. Paul was awaiting their return at Corinth, and the joy with which he welcomed them and gathered from their lips all they had to tell of the steadfastness, activity, and perseverance of the Macedonian converts. We seem to hear, as it were, the joyful report of Silas and Timothy, and the Apostle's ejaculation of thanksgiving, when we read these words in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians iii. 6–8, "Now, when Timothy came unto us from you, and brought us glad tidings of your faith and love, we were comforted over you, brethren, in all our distress and affliction, through your faith; for *now we live*, if ye stand fast in the Lord." The long, anxious waiting had been to him as a cessation of life, but on hearing the words, "all is well, our Thessalonians stand fast," life had resumed its natural course. It was then, no doubt, that he wrote his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, in the spring of the year A.D. 53, a few months after he had left their city. Traces relating to this precise period can be found in the 18th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, at the 5th verse: "And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the word, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ;" he had gained new strength for his apostolic duties.

Under these circumstances what would St. Paul's letter be most likely to contain? An answer to Timothy's report. Why do not we say, and why does the Apostle not say: "the report of Timothy *and of Silas*"? Doubtless because the latter had not returned, as the former had done, from visiting the Thessalonians, or at any rate, not so recently.

The epistle begins as though coming from the three men who had together laid the foundations of the Church at Thessalonica, for St. Paul always behaved with the greatest tact and delicacy in regard to his fellow-workers, never failing to let those who had shared with him the labour and

the peril, share the honour also. This juxtaposition of the three names of Paul, Silas or Silvanus, and Timothy, at the beginning of the epistle, is precisely what prevents our fixing any other period than the one we have mentioned for the writing of this letter, as, after this sojourn at Corinth, these three men never happened to be together again, Silas having left St. Paul in order to help St. Peter in his missionary work (1 Peter v. 12).

The first three chapters are an outpouring of the Apostle's heart and of those of his two fellow-workers towards that young Church so full of strength and courage, but exposed to so many kinds of persecution and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. As usual, St. Paul begins by giving vent to the feelings of thankfulness which fill his heart to overflowing whenever he recalls the wonderful results of his short stay at Thessalonica, the rapid development of a Church in which abound faith, hope and charity, those blessed fruits of the Gospel (i. 3). This reminds him of the two facts which can alone explain so extraordinary a success: the marvellous power which possessed him while he was preaching the word to them (ver. 4 and 5), and the joyful eagerness with which they accepted that preaching (ver. 6).

Their election has thus become a fact of his own personal experience, and they are now a pattern to the other Churches, so that in this city of Corinth, where he is now staying, he has no need to publish the Divine work wrought amongst them, for their opponents (the Jews) have themselves spread abroad the report from synagogue to synagogue even unto Achaia (ver. 7–10).[1]

But as St. Paul is well aware of the calumnies these very men have been circulating against him, he goes on

[1] The pronoun *they themselves* is related to no substantive in the preceding verse; but the readers were sure to understood who he meant by that word: *they themselves.*

to remind the Thessalonians of what his own life has been amongst them, and speaks freely of his unselfish and loving conduct of which they have been witnesses (ii. 1–12). Then he joyfully describes how their faithfulness, and especially their patience, have answered to his devotedness, as their conversion had before answered to his preaching (13–16). Therefore his love for them has not varied since the day of his departure from among them, in proof of which he tells them that he has once or twice tried to visit them again, but that, not having been able to do so, he sent Timothy unto them, although he himself had thereby remained alone in Athens. Now, since Timothy's return, new life has gladdened his spirit at hearing the good report given of them, and he beseeches God incessantly that he may be permitted to see them again (ii. 17–iii. to end). Truly, no father could write more tenderly to his absent children! After this out-pouring, which is a thanksgiving from beginning to end, the Apostle goes on to treat of those matters which are the real object of his epistle, and which were certainly suggested to him by Timothy's report. First come three exhortations, bearing on the three special dangers to which the young community might be exposed in the midst of a corrupt and commercial Greek city: on purity of life (iv. 1–5), on honesty and good faith (6–8), and on brotherly love (9–12). In the last two or three verses, St. Paul alludes to a rather uncommon sin, that of an idle life, in which a man, instead of working for his livelihood, is content to wait for whatever help may come to him from others. This is rather strange; does it mean that even at that early period abuse was made of Christian charity? Perhaps; yet this warning will doubtless be best understood if considered, by a natural association of ideas, as a transition introducing the next subject. In the chapters iv. 13–v. 11 St. Paul passes on from exhortation to teaching, and speaks of the second coming of

Christ from two different points of view; first, as it regards a special preoccupation of the Thessalonians (iv. 13–18); secondly, in a more general acceptation (v. 1–11); and if this portion be read together with the last verses of the preceding exhortation, it will appear likely that the carelessness with which many attended to the affairs of this life was due to the religious effervescence created by their expectation of the Great Day.

In iv. 13–18 St. Paul answers the anxious thoughts which were saddening many, and which Timothy had certainly mentioned to him: viz. At the Lord's great advent, should those amongst them who had died before be deprived of participating in the Church's joyful and triumphant union with its Head? For this would certainly take place on earth where Christ is to appear again. The Apostle is not opposed to their entertaining this glorious expectation, but he explains more precisely the way in which the event will take place, so as to dispel all anxiety in his readers' minds. Together with the signal of the Lord's reappearance, those who have died in the Lord will, first of all, rise from their graves; after that, those who belong to Christ and are still alive on earth will be caught up to meet Him, and together they shall remain with Him eternally. This answer leaves many questions unsolved, and St. Paul evidently does not mean to touch upon any other point than the one which especially interested the Thessalonians. And this is consistent with his usual mode of treating every subject; he never carries it further than the precise need requires. In 1 Cor. xv. he gives a further particular by announcing a transformation of the body which will take place in the living members of Christ on earth at the same time as the resurrection of those already dead. But this detail is there closely connected with the subject treated in that chapter, that of the resurrection of the body. It would seem as though

he meant that the contact of the glorified Saviour with the earth will be but for an instant, and that, as the consequence of this sudden apparition, His reunion with the elect will be perfected in a sphere above this visible world. The Apostle declares at the same time, that what he says here is not as coming from him, but from the Lord. Does he mean to allude thereby, as some have thought, to words which were uttered by Jesus Christ on earth? If so, it could only be to the verses in Matt. xxiv. 30, 31; but nothing is here said of what St. Paul specially bears upon, the distinction between two classes of believers—the dead, which are raised up, and the living, who are caught up. We think therefore that St. Paul rather alludes to a special revelation which has been vouchsafed to him, in the same way as when he speaks of a special mystery having been revealed to him (1 Cor. xv. 51; Rom. xi. 25).

After this, he enlarges the circle of his teaching on the Lord's second coming, and speaks in the next verses of Christ's advent in a more general acceptation. He reminds his readers that he has already instructed them upon this matter, and this time only urges earnestly upon them the duty which must result from this solemn expectation; namely, that of living continually in the light of holiness and of Divine life, this being the light which will illumine the earth at Christ's reappearance. They need not then be afraid of the Great Day taking them by surprise, as it will the rest of the world plunged deep in carnal security. Perhaps St. Paul here alludes to the state of the world as described by our Lord in Luke xvii. 26–37; compare this with Matt. xxiv. 37–44.

The Apostle ends his twofold teaching by exhorting his readers to watch over each other, to honour those who are in authority over them, to keep alive in their hearts the flame of spiritual life (joy, prayer, constant thanksgiving), not to quench the manifestations of the Holy

Spirit in their assemblies, and finally to work at their own perfect sanctification, body, soul, and spirit, trusting the while in God's faithful help.

It will be seen that the Church's constant thought was of the Lord's re-appearance, which was believed to be very near at hand, and that this expectancy even caused some of its members to stray out of the sober, austere path of their earthly duties. St. Paul alludes to these people both before and after his treatment of the subject (iv. 11, 12, and v. 14) for the term of *disorderly* in this last verse, precisely designates people of that sort (compare 2 Thess. iii. 6, 11). It even seems to me probable that when, in v. 19, 20, he exhorts the Thessalonians not to "despise prophesyings," and not to "quench the Spirit;" these warnings were prompted by the sort of discredit which was thrown on unusual manifestations of the Spirit by the irregular and not entirely honourable conduct of those enthusiasts who, while desirous of acting the part of prophets and of privileged instruments of the Holy Spirit, neglected the simplest duties of their earthly calling. St. Paul feared that such conduct might create a feeling of repulsion on the part of the majority in the Church and might lead to their depriving themselves of the blessings resulting from a normal use of these spiritual gifts. But how are we to consider his doctrine on the second coming of Christ? He, as well as the Church, appears to consider it as being close at hand; he even seems to think that he, Paul, will be among those surviving believers who are to witness the event. "We," says he, "that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord . . . shall, together with them (those risen from the dead) be caught up in the clouds" (iv. 15, 17).

The whole primitive Church, including the apostles, certainly expected this event to take place sooner than has proved to be the case in reality. Christ had foretold that

it was to be, but not *when* it was to be; He had expressly declared that He did not Himself know the day of His return, and this is the more striking from its contrast with the words by which He announced that the destruction of Jerusalem should happen in the time of the generation then living. See Matt. xxiii. 35–37, and Luke xi. 49–51, where none of the difficulties can be found which have been adduced with regard to Matt. xxiv. 34, and Luke xxi. 32. Our Lord had often spoken of the Bridegroom as "tarrying," as perhaps only coming "in the morning" when no one would be expecting Him any longer (Mark xiii. 35). But in order to describe the moral state of the Church during that period of waiting, he had added that, by reason of the very uncertainty about the day, His disciples were to hold themselves in readiness *every* day; that they were to be like unto a servant waiting for his master, having his loins girded and his lamp burning, and ready, when he knocketh, straightway to open unto him (Luke xii. 35, 36). By a not unnatural mental process, the primitive Church turned this spiritual state of expectancy into an actual awaiting of an event that was soon to take place. She was naturally led to that by the prophecies of the Old Testament which, in descriptions telling of the end of days, always showed the judgment of the pagan world as following close on that of Israel, so that it seemed impossible to fancy a new epoch in history beginning after the judgment on Jerusalem,—a heathen world Christianized and having nothing more to do with Israel. Prophecies only see the future foreshortened as it were, the great epochs being brought near to each other and the intervals between left out. For prophecy is not history, and sometimes appears guilty of chronological mistakes which are, nevertheless, deep moral truths. As to the words by which the Apostle seems to rank himself among those still living at the time of Christ's advent; if, while attributing that

sense to the expression "*we* that are alive, that are left," we were to take the word literally, we should have to apply it to all the believers who were living at the time when St. Paul wrote the epistle, and maintain that he expected none of them to die until our Lord's return, which would be making him guilty of an absurdity. In this expression "*that are alive,*" the words must evidently be applied, not to the Christians *living* (at this present moment) but to those who *will be alive* (then); that is what St. Paul still further explains by adding the words: "*that are left*" (at that time). Therefore these words "that are alive, that are left," must not be considered as qualifying, but rather as explaining, the pronoun *we*: "We," I mean those "that are alive, that are left" at that time. In other words: Those among *us*, Christians, who will be alive at that supreme moment. Otherwise, how could the Apostle, in other epistles, rank himself (eventually) among those who will be raised from the dead (1 Cor. vi. 14, and 2 Cor. iv. 14, and Phil. iii. 11), and again, in other places, use an undecided mode of expression (2 Cor. v. 6–10; Phil. i. 21 and following verses; Phil. ii. 17). He is evidently only sure of one thing: that there will be two classes of believers—those that shall be raised from the dead, and those whose body shall be changed at the same moment; but to which of the two classes he will belong, of that he knows nothing, nor could he decide the question without determining what, according to his belief, is to be left undetermined. For, to speak of himself positively as forming part of either the one or the other, would be, in the one case, to fix the day of Christ's second coming within the space of his own lifetime, or in the other to declare that it would *not* take place within that period. He would consequently be himself doing what he forbids others to do (v. 1–2).

It was probably only a few months later that St. Paul

completed this first epistle by a second, which has also been preserved to us. It is addressed to the Church at Thessalonica, in the same way as the first one, by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, which proves it to have been dated from the same visit to Corinth during which the first was written, since only then did these three men happen to be together. Some have tried to prove that the second Epistle to the Thessalonians was really written first; but this critical fancy has not met with approval, and in fact, the Apostle expressly mentions his first letter in this second one: "Hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or *by epistle of ours*" (ii. 15). Moreover, in the second epistle hardly any allusion is made to St. Paul's stay at Thessalonica, while the first teems with such recollections (chap. i. 3.) and is therefore surely the one which followed most closely on the Apostle's departure from that city. Finally it must be evident to all, that the situation referred to in what we consider the second epistle, is in every way aggravated. Persecution has grown more vehement, for during the whole of the first chapter the Apostle encourages the young Christians by showing them, in the very sufferings they are called upon to endure, the pledge of their glorious deliverance at "the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven." The religious enthusiasm or excitement, of which the first symptoms were discernible in the former epistle, has now taken a more alarming character. There St. Paul neither asserted nor denied the *proximity* of the Lord's return; he only declared that its *suddenness* would take the world unawares, and drew from thence the conclusion that incessant vigilance was one of the Christian's first duties. But in the meantime people's minds had become more excited. Prophets, in discourses which seemed to be dictated by the Spirit (ii. 2), had announced that the great catastrophe was not only imminent, but, in some sense, already taking place. Words were

repeated which were attributed to St. Paul; a letter was even circulated amongst them which was said, perhaps only by mistake, to have been written by him, and which expressed the same thoughts. Religious effervescence had come to a sort of paroxysm; an ever-increasing number of Christians gave up all their worldly concerns and duties for the sake of living a life of contemplation, inquisitive idleness, and begging (iii. 7–13). In order, therefore, to abate the intensity of this carnal, rather than spiritual flame, the Apostle is obliged to make use of all the means at his disposal, and the two principal of these are instruction and discipline. He uses the first in chapter ii., and the second in chapter iii.

In chapter ii. he reminds the Thessalonians of what he had already taught when amongst them, namely: that the glorious return of Christ must be preceded and provoked by an appearance of a directly opposite nature, that of *the Man of Sin.* This is evidently the same person as the one spoken of in other parts of the New Testament, and especially in the writings of St. John, as "the antichrist." *Wrong* must have attained its very apex by the uniting of human wickedness with diabolical malice, for *right* to be able also to assert its final power by the manifestation of holiness at once human and Divine in the person of Christ glorified (ii. 3–5). But the appearance of the man of sin itself pre-supposes two facts which have not yet been realized: *first,* the great falling away of humanity from God who has revealed Himself both in the Jewish and the Christian dispensations; *secondly,* the overthrowing of a power which St. Paul mysteriously designates by the expressions, "*that which restraineth*" (neuter), and "*he that restraineth*" (masculine term). Apostasy is at work already, no doubt, but it is only beginning, and as for the restraining power, only after its overthrow can antichrist appear and take its place. Nevertheless there is

reason enough for the believer to be watching continually, for the *mystery of iniquity* or *lawlessness* which is finally to give birth to antichrist, being already at work, none may consider themselves safe from the temptations and seductions about to assail them (iii. 7, 10–14).

Who is this "Man of Sin" of whom St. Paul says that he will "set himself forth as God, sitting in the temple of God," and that he will exalt himself against all that is called God, while calling himself God? (ii. 4), and what is this power which restraineth him and which must previously be overthrown? It has been supposed that when he spoke of "the man of sin," the Apostle meant Nero, who was preparing to ascend the imperial throne, and that *he who restrained* was none other than the old emperor Claudius, whose prolonged life was preventing his successor from taking possession of the supreme authority. But Nero was at that time a young man of the greatest promise, therefore the Apostle's words must be considered, either as mere human foresight, and in that case how could he know beforehand of the change for the worse which was to take place in the prince's character, turning him into a persecutor of the Church; or else this is an actual prophecy, and then how could St. Paul have ascribed to him actions of which he was never guilty—for Nero never set himself in the temple of God either in Jerusalem or in a Christian Church. Others again, more numerous than the first, have believed the words to allude to papal power; in that case, who would be the restrainer? It might be the Roman empire, whose overthrow allowed of the development of the new and unexampled power taken by the bishops of Rome. But the description given by St. Paul of the "Man of Sin" cannot, without the sense of the expressions being forced, apply to the Pope, at least such as history has as yet shown him to us. Never has a Pope called himself God, or set himself above God or even above Christ. Up to the

present time the Pope has merely claimed to be the representative of God on earth, Vicar of Christ, and governor of the Church in the name of her Lord. It may be otherwise in times to come, but the nature of papal power must then have changed, and we cannot argue upon such a possibility. The "lying wonders" which St. Paul attributes to antichrist, have been thought to correspond with those miracles boasted of by the Roman Catholic Church; but we must not forget that, in the text, St. Paul's expression "lying wonders" does not mean false miracles, but real wonders produced by diabolical agency and destined to support falsehood. It appears to me that the term antichrist, given elsewhere to the "Man of Sin," puts us on another track. This denomination is essentially Jewish, as is also that of "Man of Sin," taken from Daniel; it may be translated as either the *Messiah's adversary* or as *Rival-Messiah*, and this second meaning seems the most natural. Whence is such a being most likely to come? Evidently from the midst of the same people among whom the Messiah Himself appeared. It therefore seems to me probable that the false Messiah will be an outcome of degenerate Judaism, and that the Jewish nation, putting itself at the head of the great falling away or apostasy of Christian humanity, towards the close of its existence, will then give birth to its false Messiah, the very ideal of man's natural heart, which has rejected the true Christ. With a daring impiety such as can only belong to him who has turned his back on a holy destination, a Jew wonderfully gifted will, by raising the standard of atheistic pantheism, proclaim himself the incarnation of the Absolute, and draw after him the great mass of mankind by promising a golden age; for he will have no trouble in obtaining credit, in the midst of the dissolution and anarchy then prevailing in the world. And how will this state of things have been brought about? Doubtless by an interior social revolution, which

will be no other than the overthrow of *the restrainer*. We know what the opposing force was which annihilated every attempt on the part of the Jewish false Messiahs at the time when the Apostle was living; it was the strength of the Roman legions which crushed every appearance of revolt among the Jews. Since that time, the laws which regulate society have maintained themselves on much the same basis as the one imposed by the Roman power; but should this present order of things come to be overthrown, room would thereby be made for the despot who could turn to advantage the anarchy which would be the natural result of such a revolution. One glance at the course pursued nowadays by mankind in general is sufficient to convince us that the fatal term, prophetically spoken of by St. Paul, is fast approaching.

The Apostle adds to his teaching, in the last chapter, a measure of discipline. He knew there still existed in the Church of Thessalonica a sound majority on which he might rely for support in his endeavours to put down the effervescence of the *disorderly*. Already in his first epistle, he had called upon all true believers to admonish those enthusiasts, and to bring them back to the life of work and duty from which a Christian ought never to depart. He now advises them to go still further, and if there remain some who, after having been exhorted, return not to a quiet, sober life; to note those men and to withdraw themselves from them. They must not, however, neglect to admonish them as brethren from time to time, and to urge their return to orderliness within the Church. The Apostle ends by giving a token whereby the Thessalonians may ascertain in future the authenticity of the epistles attributed to him, so that the case alluded to at the beginning of chapter ii. might not occur again.

We shall not, here, touch upon those objections raised for the first time by a modern school against the authenticity of these two epistles. They are quite insignificant

and are recognised as such by several theologians belonging to that very school. The characteristic feature of these epistles compared with those written afterwards by St. Paul, is the preponderance of the eschatological element, that is to say, of subjects relating to the end of the present order of things and to the final triumph of the Church. This has been explained as an instance of the progressive nature of the development of the Apostle's conception of Christianity. It has been said that at first, St. Paul was still under the dominion of the Jewish ideas about the Messiah which so greatly influenced the hopes of the primitive Church, and that his attention had not yet fixed itself on the relation existing between law and grace. This would be the reason why the word *law* occurs in neither of these two epistles; and the first character of "Paulinism" would be here revealed to us, serving as a transition between the apostolical teaching from which St. Paul had started, and the original conception at which he finally arrived.[1]

But those who speak thus forget one thing, which is that both the Epistles to the Thessalonians belong to the *second* missionary journey, and must therefore be dated later than the great dispute at Antioch and the assembly called Council of Jerusalem, where the question relating to the freedom of the Gentiles with regard to the Mosaic law was fully discussed and solved with the participation of St. Paul. More than this, the altercation between Paul and Peter when the former expounded before the latter and before the whole assembled Church of Antioch (*before them all*, Gal. ii. 14), what he considered the truth with regard to the inefficacy of the law, and the free gift of salvation by the death of Christ, can only have been separated by a very short interval from the time when these epistles were written; for this scene is related by St. Paul to the Galatians about the autumn of the year 54 as a bygone event,

[1] Sabatier: *St. Paul*, pp. 101, 102.

and both our epistles were written in the year 53. At the time when St. Paul wrote them he had therefore arrived at the entire possession of the evangelical conception which is developed in his subsequent letters; and if he does not speak of it to the Thessalonians, it is not because a full understanding of it has not yet been granted to him, but because here, as usual, he keeps strictly within the limits of the question to be treated, and of the distinct and providential need which has caused him to take up his pen. St. Paul has often been represented as a fiery steed, clearing the roadside hedge and galloping over hill and dale to return at length on to the straight road;[1] but this is mere fancy. Never was a mind more master of itself and strict in keeping its thoughts well in hand, than was the mind of him whom we call St. Paul. At Thessalonica, Judaism had not yet tried to penetrate within the Church, to appropriate the Gospel to itself, and to alter it so as to suit the Jewish ideas. What has been called "Judæo-Christianity" did not therefore exist as yet in this city, and there was no need for St. Paul to attack it. The question of the means of grace not having been raised, and the Apostle's teaching being accepted just as he gave it, it seems natural that the subjects relating to Christian hopes should have been those most discussed, and should have rendered necessary some further teaching on the part of the Apostle, which he gave by means of these epistles. This teaching evidently presupposes a general knowledge of the Gospel truths, which must have been given by St. Paul during his stay at Thessalonica. St. Luke, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (xvii. 3), thus sums up the Apostle's teaching given by word of mouth: He "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead." These are also the truths of which St. Paul reminds them, as

[1] Lately, Mr. Beecher, of Brooklyn, in the *Homiletic Review*.

being well known to them, in his first epistle (iv. 14), "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Thus he had not exclusively taught Christian eschatology; salvation, obtained by the blood of Christ, had been then, as it was afterwards, the central-point and leading idea of his preaching. The verses (i. 9–10) which are frequently quoted to prove the contrary and to restrict St. Paul's teaching in this city to the two Jewish elements of monotheism and the coming of the Messiah, prove nothing, because this summing up of the faith of the Thessalonians is made by the Thessalonian Jews themselves whose report is here quoted by St. Paul.

Modern thought oscillates between two contrary currents. According to some, the world, overruled by evil, is hastening onward to its ruin; it would have been better for it never to have existed; the *being* ought never to have prevailed over the *non-being*, and the best thing humanity can do for itself is to labour at its own destruction and that of the universe. This pessimist current is opposed by another, which believes everything to be for the best, dreams of nothing but progress, and imagines that only a defective social organization prevents the world from enjoying a golden age. Brightly indeed does the prophetic elevation of thought, contained in both our epistles, shine forth when compared with these human intuitions or imaginations. It certainly does not ignore evil, but, on the contrary, penetrates it more deeply than our darkest pessimists, and sees it resulting in a general revolt against moral law—a revolt which will give birth to the man who is to concentrate in himself all the venom of evil dwelling in degenerate humanity, and who will be the most perfect incarnation of sin. It sees this man establishing for a time his sovereignty over the world, even to the extent of being worshipped as God. But if prophetic revelation paints the future in

colours as dark as the sternest pessimist could desire, it none the less gives full satisfaction to the most brilliant hopes of the optimist. The reign of the Man of Sin (the last effort of evil) will be immediately succeeded by the reign of Christ (the last effort and triumph of right) and by the absolute sovereignty of the will of God, good, acceptable, and perfect. So does God's purpose, whose mouthpiece St. Paul is, embrace both the opposite poles between which the double movement of contemporary thought is divided; though far surpassing them in elevation and breadth, it reconciles what there is of truth in each; and this knowledge is not for the Apostle a mere subject for prophetic contemplation. The mystery of iniquity is already working, says he, speaking of his own times; he sees the final apostasy preparing, he evidently does not know how long a time will be needed for its full development, but he sees it beginning and he points how it will terminate.

What does he mean by this? He has no idea of satisfying idle curiosity, he has a moral, practical end in view, which is that, from this time forward, each believer should take care not to give way to his every impulse. As a man, mindful of the thunder of a still distant waterfall, takes heed that his boat be not carried away by the force of the current; so is there no single hour in the Church's existence during which its children can afford to be heedless and not keep a strict account of the nature of the spirit they are influenced by in their conversations, their books, their life in general. The two goals, dark and light, holy and profane, are both pointed out. It may therefore be seen that although these two epistles were composed in view of local and temporary circumstances, they nevertheless soar over the course of history from beginning to end. The one says, "wait and hope" the other "watch and fear." The one describes the dark midnight of human existence; the other, its glorious mid-day!

F. GODET.