

worthiness of the covenant. Christ did not shrink from such a pledge, and His death is like a Divine oath, the end of all unbelief, even unto certitude.

The interpretation now suggested is not free from difficulties. One is that *ἐπὶ νεκρῶς* does not naturally yield the meaning of "based upon the death of the contracting parties." The meaning assigned to *ἐπὶ* is, of course, frequent with the dat.; and the use of the plur. adj. in the sense of *θάνατος* seems to be parallel to the use of *ἐκ νεκρῶν*, in Rom. vi. 12, to signify "from a state of death." Nothing more is claimed for the view proposed than that it appears to be surrounded with fewer difficulties than other interpretations of the passage.

T. C. EDWARDS.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

XVI.

TWO FINAL TESTS OF THE FALSE TEACHING.

"If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, Handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; *but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.*"—Col. ii. 20-3 (Rev. Ver.).

THE polemical part of the Epistle is now coming to an end. We pass in the next chapter, after a transitional paragraph, to simple moral precepts which, with personal details, fill up the remainder of the letter. The antagonist errors appear for the last time in the words which we have now to consider. In these the Apostle seems to gather up all his strength to strike two straight, crashing, final blows, which pulverize and annihilate the theoretical positions and practical precepts of the heretical teachers. First, he puts in the form of an unanswerable demand for the reason

for their teachings, their radical inconsistency with the Christian's death with Christ, which is the very secret of his life. Then, by a contemptuous concession of their apparent value to people who will not look an inch below the surface, he makes more emphatic their final condemnation as worthless—less than nothing and vanity—for the suppression of "the flesh"—the only aim of all moral and religious discipline. So we have here two great tests by their conformity to which we may try all teachings which assume to regulate life, and all Christian teaching about the place and necessity for ritual and outward prescriptions of conduct. "Ye are dead with Christ." All must fit in with that great fact. The restraint and conquest of "the flesh" is the purpose of all religion and of all moral teaching—your systems must do that or they are naught, however fascinating they may be.

I. We have then to consider the great fact of the Christian's death with Christ, and to apply it as a touchstone.

The language of the Apostle points to a definite time when the Colossian Christians "died" with Christ. That carries us back to former words in the chapter, where, as we found, the period of their baptism considered as the symbol and profession of their conversion, was regarded as the time of their burial. They died with Christ when they clave with penitent trust to the truth that Christ died for them. When a man unites himself by faith to the dying Christ as his Peace, Pardon, and Saviour, then he too in a very real sense dies with Jesus.

That thought of every Christian being dead with Christ, runs through the whole of Paul's teaching. It is no mere piece of mysticism on his lips, though it has often become so, when divorced from morality by some Christian teachers. It is no mere piece of rhetoric, though it has often become so, when men have lost the true thought of what Christ's

death is for the world. But to Paul the cross of Christ was, first and foremost, the altar of sacrifice on which the oblation was offered that took away all his guilt and sin; and then, because it was that, it became the law of his own life, and the power that assimilated him to his Lord.

The plain English of it all is that, when a man becomes a Christian by putting his trust in Christ who died, as the ground of his acceptance and salvation, such a change takes place upon his whole nature and relationship to externals as is fairly comparable to a death.

The same illustration is frequent in ordinary speech. What do we mean when we talk of an old man being dead to youthful passions or follies or ambitions? We mean that they have ceased to interest him, that he is *separated* from them and *insensible* to them. Death is the separator. What an awful gulf there is between that fixed white face beneath the sheet, and all the things about which he was so eager an hour ago! How impossible for any cries of love to pass the chasm. "His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not." The "business" which filled his thoughts, crumbles to pieces, and he cares not. Nothing reaches him or interests him any more. So, if we have got hold of Christ as our Saviour, and have found in His cross the anchor of our souls, that will deaden us to all that was our life, and the measure in which we are joined to Jesus by our faith in His great sacrifice, will be the measure in which we are detached from our former selves, and from old objects of interest and pursuit. The change may either be called dying with Christ, or rising with Him. The one phrase takes hold of it at an earlier stage than the other; the one puts stress on our ceasing to be what we were, the other on our beginning to be what we were not. So our text is followed by a paragraph corresponding in form and substance, and beginning, "If ye then be risen with Christ," as this begins, "If ye died with Christ!"

Such detachment from externals and separation from a former self is not unknown in ordinary life. Strong emotion of any kind makes us insensible to things around, and even to physical pain. Many a man with the excitement of the battle-field boiling in his brain, "receives but recks not of a wound." Absorption of thought and interest leads to what is called "absence of mind," where the surroundings are entirely unfelt, as in the case of the saint who rode all day on the banks of the Swiss lake, plunged in theological converse, and at evening asked where the lake was, though its waves had been rippling for twenty miles at his mule's feet. Higher tastes drive out lower ones, as some great stream turned into a new channel will sweep it clear of mud and rubbish. So, if we are joined to Christ, He will fill our souls with strong emotions and interests which will deaden our sensitiveness to things around us, and will inspire new loves, tastes and desires which will make us indifferent to much that we used to be eager about, and hostile to much that we once cherished.

To what shall we die if we are Christians? The Apostle answers that question in various ways, which we may profitably group together. "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto *sin*" (Rom. vi. 11). "He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto *themselves*" (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). "Ye are become dead to the *law*" (Rom. vii. 6). By the cross of Christ, "the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto *the world*." So then, to the whole mass of outward material things, all this present order which surrounds us—the unrenounced self which has ruled us so long, and the sin which results from the appeals of outward things to that evil self—to these, and to the mere outward letter of a commandment which is impotent to enforce its own behests or deliver self from the snares of the world and the burden of sin, we cease to belong in the measure in which we are Christ's. The separation is not

complete; but, if we are Christians at all, it is begun, and henceforward our life is to be a "dying daily." It must either be a dying life or a living death. We shall still belong in our outward being—and, alas! far too much in heart also—to the world and self and sin—but, if we are Christians at all, there will be a real separation from these in the inmost heart of our hearts, and the germ of entire deliverance from them all will be in us.

This day needs that truth to be strongly urged. The whole meaning of the death of Christ is not reached when it is regarded as the great propitiation for our sins. Is it the pattern for our lives? has it drawn us away from our love of the world, from our sinful self, from the temptations to sin, from cowering before duties which we hate but dare not neglect? has it changed the current of our lives, and lifted us into a new region where we find new interests, loves and aims, before which the twinkling lights, which once were stars to us, pale their ineffectual fires? If so, then, just in as much as it is so, and not one hair's breadth the more, may we call ourselves Christians. If not, it is of no use for us to talk about looking to the cross as the source of our salvation. Such a look, if it be true and genuine, will certainly change all a man's tastes, habits, aspirations, and relationships. If we know nothing of dying with Christ, it is to be feared we know as little of Christ's dying for us.

This great fact of the Christian's death with Christ comes into view here mainly as pointing the contradiction between the Christian's position, and subjection to the prescriptions and prohibitions of a religion which consists chiefly in petty rules about conduct. We are "dead" says Paul, "to the rudiments of the world,"—a phrase which we have already heard in verse 8 of this chapter, where we found its meaning to be "precepts of an elementary character, fit for babes, not for men in Christ, and moving principally in the

region of the material." It implies a condemnation of all such regulation religion on the two grounds, that it is an anachronism, seeking to perpetuate an earlier stage that has been left behind, and that it has to do with the outsides of things, with the material and visible only. To such rudiments we are dead with Christ. Then, queries Paul, with irresistible triumphant question—why, in the name of consistency, "do you subject yourself to ordinances" (of which we have already heard in verse 14 of the chapter) such as "handle not, nor taste, nor touch"? These three prohibitions are not Paul's, but are quoted by him as specimens of the kind of rules and regulations which he is protesting against. The ascetic teachers kept on vehemently reiterating their prohibitions, and as the correct rendering of the word shows, with a constantly increasing intolerance. "Handle not" is a less rigid prohibition than "touch not." The first says, Do not lay hold of; the second, Do not touch with the tip of your finger. So asceticism, like many another tendency and habit, grows by indulgence, and demands abstinence ever more rigid and separation ever more complete. And the whole thing is out of date, and a misapprehension of the genius of Christianity. Man's work in religion is ever to confine it to the surface, to throw it outward and make it a mere round of things done and things abstained from. Christ's work in religion is to drive it inwards, and to focus all its energy on "the hidden man of the heart," knowing that if that be right, the visible will come right. It is waste labour to try to stick figs on the prickles of a thorn bush—as is the tree, so will be the fruit. There are plenty of pedants and martinets in religion as well as on the parade ground. There must be so many buttons on the uniform, and the shoulder belts must be pipe-clayed, and the rifles on the shoulders sloped at just such an angle—and then all will be right. Perhaps so. Disciplined courage is better than courage undisciplined.

But there is much danger of all the attention being given to the drill, and then when the parade ground is exchanged for the battle-field, disaster comes because there is plenty of etiquette and no dash. Men's lives are pestered out of out of them by a religion which tries to tie them down with as many tiny threads as the Lilliputians fastened down Gulliver with. But Christianity in its true and highest forms is not a religion of prescriptions but of principles. It does not keep perpetually dinning a set of petty commandments and prohibitions into our ears. Its language is not a continual "Do this, forbear from that,"—but "Love, and thou fulfillest the law." It works from the centre outwards to the circumference, first making clean the inside of the cup and platter, and so ensuring that the outside shall be clean also. The error with which Paul fought, and which perpetually crops up anew, having its roots deep in human nature, begins with the circumference and wastes effort in burnishing the outside.

The parenthesis which follows in the text, "all which things are to perish with the using," contains an incidental remark intended to show the mistake of attaching such importance to regulations about diet and the like, from the consideration of the perishableness of these meats and drinks about which so much was said by the false teachers. "They are all destined for corruption, for physical decomposition—in the very act of consumption." You cannot use them without using them up. They are destroyed in the very moment of being used. Is it like men who have died with Christ to this fleeting world, to make so much of its perishable things?

May we not widen this thought beyond its specific application here, and say that death with Christ to the world should deliver us from the temptation of making much of the things which perish with the using, whether that temptation is presented in the form of attaching ex-

aggerated religious importance to ascetic abstinence from them or in that of exaggerated regard and unbridled use of them? Asceticism and Sybaritic luxury have in common an over-estimate of the importance of the material things. The one is the other turned inside out. Dives in his purple and fine linen, and the ascetic in his hair shirt, both make too much of "what they shall put on." The one with his feasts and the other with his fasts both think too much of what they shall eat and drink. A man who lives on high with his Lord puts all these things in their right place. There are things which do *not* perish with the using, but grow with use, like the five loaves in Christ's hands. Truth, love, holiness, all Christ-like graces and virtues, increase with exercise, and the more we feed on the bread which comes down from heaven the more shall we have for our own nourishment and for our brother's need. There is a treasure which faileth not, bags which wax not old, the durable riches and undecaying possessions of the soul that lives on Christ and grows like Him. These let us seek after; for if our religion be worth anything at all, it should carry us past all the fleeting wealth of earth straight into the heart of things, and give us for our portion that God whom we can never exhaust, nor outgrow, but possess the more as we use His sweetness for the solace and His all-sufficient Being for the good of our souls.

The final inconsistency between the Christian position and the practical errors in question is glanced at in the words "after the commandments and doctrines of men," which refer, of course, to the ordinances of which Paul is speaking. The expression is a quotation from Isaiah's (xxix. 13) denunciation of the Pharisees of his day, and as used here seems to suggest that the great discourse of our Lord's on the worthlessness of the Jewish punctilios about meats and drinks was in the Apostle's mind,

since the same words of Isaiah's occur there in a similar connexion. It is not fitting that we, who are withdrawn from dependence on the outward visible order of things by our union with Christ in His death, should be under the authority of men. Here is the true democracy of the Christian society. "Ye were redeemed with a price. Be not the servants of men." Our union to Jesus Christ is a union of absolute authority and utter submission. We all have access to the one source of illumination, and we are bound to take our orders from the one Master. The protest against the imposition of human authority on the Christian soul is made not in the interests of self-will, but from reverence to the only voice that has right to give autocratic commands and to receive unquestioning obedience. We are free in proportion as we are dead to the world with Christ. We are free from men not that we may please ourselves, but that we may please Him. "Hold your peace, I want to hear what my Master has to command me," is the true language of the Christian freedman, who is free that he may serve, and because he serves.

II. We have to consider one great purpose of all teaching and external worship, by its power in attaining which any system is to be tried.

"Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body, *but are* not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh." Here is the conclusion of the whole matter, the parting summary of the indictment against the whole irritating tangle of restrictions and prescriptions. From a moral point of view it is worthless, as having no coercive power over "the flesh." Therein lies its conclusive condemnation, for if religious observances do not help a man to subdue his sinful self, what, in the name of common sense, is the use of them?

The Apostle knows very well that the system which he was opposing had much which commended it to people, especially to those who did not look very deep. It had a "show of wisdom" very fascinating on a superficial glance, and that in three points, all of which caught the vulgar eye, and all of which turned into the opposite on closer examination.

It had the look of being exceeding devotion and zealous worship. These teachers with their abundant forms impose upon the popular imagination, as if they were altogether given up to devout contemplation and prayer. But if one looks a little more closely at them, one sees that their devotion is the indulgence of their own will and not surrender to God's. They are not worshipping Him as He has appointed, but as they have themselves chosen, and as they are rendering services which He has not required, they are in a very true sense worshipping their own wills, and not God at all. By "will-worship" seems to be meant self-imposed forms of religious service which are the outcome not of obedience, nor of the instincts of a devout heart, but of a man's own will. And the Apostle implies that such supererogatory and volunteered worship is no worship. Whether offered in a cathedral or a barn, whether the worshipper wear a cope or a fustian jacket, such service is not accepted. A prayer which is but the expression of the worshipper's own will, instead of being "not my will but Thine be done," reaches no higher than the lips which utter it. If we are subtly and half unconsciously obeying self even while we seem to be bowing before God; if we are seeming to pray, and are all the while burning incense to ourselves, instead of being drawn out of ourselves by the beauty and the glory of the God towards whom our spirits yearn, then our devotion is a mask, and our prayers will be dispersed in empty air.

The deceptive appearance of wisdom in these teachers

and their doctrines is further manifest in the humility which felt so profoundly the gulf between man and God that it was fain to fill the void with its fantastic creations of angel mediators. Humility is a good thing, and it looked very humble to say, We cannot suppose that such insignificant flesh-encompassed creatures as we can come into contact and fellowship with God; but it was a great deal more humble to take God at His word, and to let Him lay down the possibilities and conditions of intercourse, and to tread the way of approach to Him which He has appointed. If a great king were to say to all the beggars and ragged losels of his capital, Come to the palace to-morrow; which would be the humbler, he who went, rags and leprosy and all, or he who hung back because he was so keenly conscious of his squalor? God says to men, "Come to My arms through My Son. Never mind the dirt, come." Which is the humbler, he who takes God at His word, and runs to hide his face on his Father's breast, having access to Him through Christ the way, or he who will not venture near till he has found some other mediators besides Christ? A humility so profound that it cannot think God's promise and Christ's mediation enough for it, has gone so far West that it has reached the East, and from humility has become pride.

Further, this system has a show of wisdom in "severity to the body." Any asceticism is a great deal more to men's taste than abandoning self. They will rather stick hooks in their backs and do the "swinging poojah," than give up their sins or yield up their wills. It is easier to travel the whole distance from Cape Comorin to the shrine of Juggernaut, measuring every foot of it by the body laid prostrate in the dust, than to surrender the heart to the love of God. In the same manner the milder forms of putting oneself to pain, hair shirts, scourgings, abstinence from pleasant things with the notion that

thereby merit is acquired, or sin atoned for, have a deep root in human nature, and hence "a show of wisdom." It is strange, and yet not strange, that people should think that, somehow or other, they recommend themselves to God by making themselves uncomfortable, but so it is that religion presents itself to many minds mainly as a system of restrictions and injunctions which forbids the agreeable and commands the unpleasant. So does our poor human nature vulgarise and travesty Christ's solemn command to deny ourselves and take up our cross after Him.

The conclusive condemnation of all the crowd of punctilious restrictions of which the Apostle has been speaking lies in the fact that, however they may correspond to men's mistaken notions, and so seem to be the dictate of wisdom, they "are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh." This is one great end of all moral and spiritual discipline, and if practical regulations do not tend to secure it, they are worthless.

Of course by "flesh" here we are to understand, as usually in the Pauline Epistles, not merely the body but the whole unregenerate personality, the entire unrenewed self that thinks and feels and wills and desires apart from God. To indulge and satisfy it is to die, to slay and suppress it is to live. All these "ordinances" with which the heretical teachers were pestering the Colossians, have no power, Paul thinks, to keep that self down, and therefore they seem to him so much rubbish. He thus lifts the whole question up to a higher level and implies a standard for judging much formal outward Christianity which would make very short work of it.

A man may be keeping the whole round of them and seven devils may be in his heart. They distinctly tend to foster some of the "works of the flesh," such as self-righteousness, uncharitableness, censoriousness, and they

as distinctly altogether fail to subdue any of them. A man may stand on a pillar like Simeon Stylites for years, and be none the better. Historically, the ascetic tendency has not been associated with the highest types of real saintliness except by accident, and has never been their productive cause. The bones rot as surely inside the sepulchre though the whitewash on its dome be ever so thick.

So the world and the flesh are very willing that Christianity should shrivel into a religion of prohibitions and ceremonials, because all manner of vices and meannesses may thrive and breed under these, like scorpions under stones. There is only one thing that will put the collar on the neck of the animal within us, and that is the power of the indwelling Christ. The evil that is in us all is too strong for every other fetter. Its cry to all these "commandments and ordinances of men" is, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" Not in obedience to such but in the reception into our spirits of His own life is our power of victory over self. "This I say, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

*RECENT FOREIGN LITERATURE ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT.*

THE period which has elapsed since our last summary was submitted has been more than usually fertile. Each of the great departments of New Testament Literature has something good to show. In more than one the contributions which have to be reported are not only numerous, but of exceptional importance. The Germans, as usual, have been the great producers. But French, Swiss, Dutch, Russian and Norwegian scholars have been by no means idle. We shall confine ourselves, for the most part,