

A certain mystery broods over his obscure and lonely death, through which we dimly discern an unsteady attempt at suicide, a treacherous knot or a cord that breaks, a heavy fall into the hollow whence the potters had long since dug out the clay, and last of all a hideous mass, the strange antithesis of that undesecrated Body which even then perhaps was being reverently laid in a new tomb, and which saw no corruption.

G. A. CHADWICK.

THE CHRISTIAN SECRET.

IN a former paper I have endeavoured to reproduce a beautiful episode of church life in apostolic days, the gift from the Church at Philippi to the Apostle Paul in prison at Rome. Of this gift, the priceless Epistle to the Philippians is an acknowledgment. The acknowledgment contains, as a corrective, a casual remark which embodies and reveals some of St. Paul's deepest and most characteristic thoughts, thoughts frequently reappearing and giving a marked colour to his writings. This casual remark and these thoughts I purpose in this paper to expound.

In Philippians iv. 10 St. Paul has expressed his great joy at the gift from Philippi. That this was no ordinary or selfish joy, he has already suggested by speaking of it as a joy *in the Lord*. But this indication was not sufficient to guard his words against possibility of misinterpretation. They might seem to be the gratitude of a starving man for relief of his deep need. The Apostle therefore places his meaning beyond reach of doubt by adding, *Not that I speak in respect of want*. This phrase describes a result corresponding to its cause. St. Paul's words have nothing in common with those of a man whose possessions *fall-short*

of his need. They are not a beggar's thanks for charity. The same Greek preposition in the same sense is found in Acts iii. 17, *ye did it by way of ignorance*; Titus iii. 5, *according to His mercy He saved us*; Ephesians i. 5, *according to the good pleasure of His will*.

In order to dispel utterly the thought that want lay at the root of his gratitude, St. Paul goes on to explain how to him want is an impossible motive: *For I have learnt to be content*, or literally, *to be self-sufficient*.

Of this last word, the latter part is found in the famous words of Christ, *Sufficient for thee is My grace*. And the meaning is at once evident. Having the smile and favour of Christ, the suffering Apostle had all he needed for his highest welfare and happiness. In a similar, though much lower sense, the same word is used in Matthew xxv. 9, *lest there be not sufficient oil for us and you*; and in John vi. 7, *bread worth two hundred denarii is not sufficient for them*. In these passages the word denotes an objective and actual supply of a need. In other places it denotes a subjective consciousness that what we have is equal to our need; or usually a subjective limiting of our desires to our possessions. So in Luke iii. 14 the Baptist says to soldiers, *Be content with your wages*. And in Hebrews xiii. 5, the readers are exhorted, *Be content with such things as ye have*. These senses, objective possession and subjective consciousness of possession, are psychologically closely related.

The stronger term used by St. Paul in the passage before us is not uncommon in the best Greek writers; and conveys always a noble sense. Aristotle, in book i. 7 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, says that no one chooses happiness as a means to something else; and supports this by saying that happiness is *self-sufficient*. He then defines the self-sufficient to be that which "even by itself alone makes life worthy of choice and needing nothing." This definition we may accept. That is self-sufficient which has in itself

whatever is needful for its highest well-being, and is therefore independent of everything external to itself.

The actual possession of all needful good is objective contentment or self-sufficiency. The same word also describes appropriately the state of mind of one who knows that he has all he needs, or of one whose desires are limited to his possessions, be these what they may. This use corresponds with the verb found in Hebrews xiii. 5, adding to it the idea that the satisfaction with one's circumstances has its root in the inner life of the contented one.

In the passage before us these senses are combined. The word denotes a subjective state of mind corresponding with an objective reality. The prisoner at Rome is satisfied with his surroundings, because he knows that for him these are the best possible. The prefix *self-* tells us that this sufficiency is within him. He is independent of his environment because he has in himself whatever is needful for his highest welfare and happiness. We at once understand that this self-sufficiency has its source and root in Christ. But Christ dwells in Paul. Therefore sufficiency in Christ may, in contrast to dependence on external good, be called self-sufficiency. The smile of Christ, which fills Paul's inner life, makes him independent of everything outside himself.

This Christian contentment or self-sufficiency is worthy of careful study. It is not, like what we may call philosophic contentment, a narrowing down of our desires to our poor possessions. For in Christ there is no narrowness. It is a consciousness of infinite wealth. It is a knowledge that we are children of the great King, and that all He has is ours; that amid the storms of life we are safe in our Father's arms; that the mysterious and tumultuous forces of the material world and of social life, which seem to toss us about at their will or whim, are completely under the control of our Father in heaven, and are working out His purposes of mercy towards us. It is not merely the hope

of heaven. For hope implies the absence of that which is hoped for. It is a knowledge that all things are already ours; that even this rough world is the divinely erected and governed robing room for the eternal banquet. He who knows this is independent of his environment. For his sufficiency is in himself. And he is independent of the uncertainties of to-morrow. How complete is this present sufficiency we see in the joyful light which illumines every page of this epistle, undimmed by the gloom of a dungeon and by the shadow of death.

This joyful acceptance of his lot was not natural to St. Paul. He says, *I have learnt to be content*. The word *learnt* implies that it had been acquired. And it suggests gradual acquirement with some effort and difficulty. The Apostle had been to school. The school had been hardship and toil. But the training had been effective: and the lesson had been learnt.

The aorist *ἐμαθον* must be rendered, as must a similar aorist in chap. iii. 12, by the English perfect: *I have learnt*. This needful rendering does not imply any inaccuracy in St. Paul's use of Greek tenses; for a similar rendering is frequently needful in the best classic authors. It is caused by an essential difference between the Greek aorist and the English preterite. The former covers the whole ground occupied by our preterite and perfect. The English preterite is used only when we refer to a definite time in the past or to an event altogether past. The Greek aorist is used for any past event, even though it happened a moment ago, or at some indefinite time, or took place once or many times, or lasted for a moment or for ages. To translate here, *I learnt*, would suggest or imply that St. Paul learnt this lesson at some one definite time. He merely says that he had learnt it, gradually or quickly, at some time or times previous to the moment of writing. And this sense is conveyed by the English form, *I have learnt*.

We now pass to ver. 12. Having learnt, St. Paul can say confidently, *I know*. He goes on to set forth in detail the knowledge he has acquired.

The word rendered *to-be-abased* is often contrasted with the word *exalted*. So Luke xiv. 11 : *Every one that exalteth himself shall be brought low*. Similarly, in a local sense, in Luke iii. 5, *Every mountain and hill shall be brought low*. In 2 Corinthians xi. 7 St. Paul says that, by refusing monetary support, he *abased* himself that his readers *might be exalted*. In the passage before us the word denotes, in its widest sense, any form of adversity; *e.g.* going down into reproach, into poverty, into sickness, into bereavement, into the grave.

How to descend into these depths, not a few Christians do not know. They do not know how to suffer outward adversity without receiving inward loss. To many, the loss of money has led to doubt and fear and sin. In some Christians, even an insult arouses a vindictive spirit, and thus causes spiritual injury. But this need not be. If the path of duty leads down into poverty, or loneliness, or sickness, or the shadow of death, this is the Sacred Way to closer fellowship with Him who was acquainted with grief. And again and again, to His servants, this path has been illumined by a brightness never seen before. But this is only for those who *know how to be abased*, who know how to descend without slipping. This difficult lesson St. Paul had learnt. He had learnt it in the school of Christian contentment. He knew that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come could separate him from the love of Christ, and that therefore they could do him no harm. And knowing this, they were powerless to injure him.

Another lesson St. Paul had learnt. Its equal value is marked by a careful repetition : *I know also how to abound*. This last word, instead of *exalted*, the precise counterpart

to *abased*, enriches the verse with a new thought. *To abound* is literally to have something to spare, to have more than we need. It therefore throws into prominence the specific kind of abasement which St. Paul has been enduring, *viz.* poverty. In prison, before the coming of Epaphroditus, he had been in want. But now, as he tells his readers in ver. 18, using the same Greek word in the same present tense, having received the gift from Philippi, he has abundance. The same word is used in Matthew xiv. 20, xv. 37, John vi. 12, 13, for the fragments left by the thousands after their miraculous feast. It is also frequently used by St. Paul for spiritual abundance. An instructive example is found in 2 Corinthians ix. 8.

If poverty and adversity have destroyed the spiritual life of not a few, wealth and success have been still more fatal. But even this need not be. Wealth honestly obtained is a precious gift of God, designed in the hands of faithful men to advance His kingdom. He who gave the wealth will preserve those who cling to Him from the perils of His own gift, and thus make them rich indeed. Their gold will be laid upon His altar, and will thus be a means of nourishing and developing their spiritual life. It has been so again and again. And there are no grander men on earth than some who, once poor, have become rich, and in their wealth are humble followers of Him who became poor that they might be rich.

This lesson, like the other, must be learnt in the school of Christian self-sufficiency. They only who know that the real wealth is that within can ascend with safety the giddy heights of material good. All others will lean upon a staff which will pierce their hand and heart. And the gold in which they trust will rivet them to a world which is passing away.

Inasmuch as life itself consists of little else except ups and downs, he who is prepared for these is prepared for all

the events of life. We see then that the lesson learnt so well by the prisoner at Rome includes all that man most needs to know.

So important is this lesson, that St. Paul goes on, in the latter part of ver. 12, to expound it more fully. And, while doing so, he tells us how he has learnt it. The contrast, *to be abased and to abound*, is expanded into the double contrast, *to be filled with food and to be hungry*, and *to abound and to be in want*. *In whatsoever state I am*, literally *in what things I am*, becomes now, *in everything and in all things*. And the words *I have learnt, I know*, attain their climax in *I have learnt the secret*.

To-be-filled-with-food is a specific case under the more general term *abound*. The present infinitive, conspicuous by its use six times in this verse, denotes a process now going on or a present state. In the case before us it describes the process of receiving food in contrast to the aorist infinitive of the same verb, which in Luke xvi. 21 describes the relief of hunger resulting from taking food. The word *to-abound* reascends from the particular to the general, repeating the word used in the earlier part of the verse. *To-be-in-want* or *to-fall-short* is the exact opposite of *to-abound*. The one is to have more, the other is to have less, than we need. The latter recalls the cognate substantive in ver. 11: *Not that I speak in respect of want*.

The phrase *in everything* looks at the various circumstances of life one by one: *in all things* looks at them collectively. In each new environment and in life as a whole, St. Paul knows how to act.

The most interesting word in this verse is that which the Revisers render *I-have-learnt-the-secret*. It is cognate to a word frequently found in the New Testament and always rendered *mystery*, this last being an English form of the same Greek word. From the same family of Greek words are derived our English words *mystic* and *mysticism*.

All these have a definite reference to one of the most remarkable institutions of the ancient world. And only in the light of this definite reference can we understand the full significance of the passage before us.

The mysteries of Greece were secret religious rites and teaching, forming the chief part of festivals celebrated at regular intervals in certain places. The most famous were those held annually, with great pomp, for nine days, at Eleusis, twelve miles from Athens on the way to Corinth. After six days of public ceremonies, those who had previously undergone a preliminary initiation, and were now called in Greek *μύσται*, which we may perhaps translate *mystics*, were led, under the darkness of the night, bound by strict vows of secrecy, into the sanctuary of the goddess Demeter, where they saw and heard things forbidden to all others. So well was the secret kept, that we know but little of what then took place. But scattered references of classic writers suggest that these secrets included religious teaching, perhaps the noblest teaching of the heathen world. So Plato, *Phædo*, p. 81a: "Whither having come, it is given to the soul to be happy, being made free from error and folly and fears and coarse passions, and the other human evils, as they say about the initiated [same word as in the passage before us] in the mysteries, in truth spending the rest of their time with the gods." And Cicero, himself initiated, says in his *Laws*, book ii. 14: "Though Athens seems to me to have produced and brought into the life of men many excellent and divine things, yet nothing better than those mysteries by which from a boorish and wild life we are trained to humanity and are softened; and just as they are called initiations, so in truth we have learnt the first-principles of life: and not only have we received a way of living with joy, but also of dying with a better hope."

In Daniel (LXX.) ii. 18, 19, the forgotten dream of Nebuchadnezzar is called *this mystery, the mystery of the kingdom.*

And in ver. 28 we read, *There is a God in heaven that revealeth mysteries.* In the Apocrypha (Wisd. viii. 4) the technical term for the initiated is given to wisdom: *She is a mystic of the understanding of God.* In a looser sense, in reference to any confided secret, the word *mystery* is used in Sirach xxvii. 16, 17: *He that revealeth mysteries hath destroyed confidence.* Similar use in Tobit xii. 7, Judith ii. 2.

In still closer accord with classic use, our Saviour is recorded, in Matthew xiii. 11, Mark iv. 11, Luke viii. 10, as saying, in reference to the truths underlying His parables, *To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.* His words imply that in the gospel there are secrets not to be learnt by mere human research, known only by those to whom God reveals them. Similarly in Matthew xi. 25: *Thou hast hidden these things from wise and prudent ones, and hast revealed them to babes.* Here, as more definitely in Sirach xxvii. 16, Romans xvi. 25, 1 Corinthians ii. 10, Ephesians iii. 4, 5, the word *reveal* is the exact counterpart to *mystery*.

The thought thus expressed by Christ, which does not seem to have arrested the attention of the other New Testament writers, took firm hold of the mind of Paul. This may perhaps be accounted for by his closer contact with Greek thought and life, which would naturally make him familiar with the technical use of the word now found in the Greek records of the teaching of Christ. Not that our Lord referred to the Greek mysteries. But these were a conspicuous concrete embodiment of a truth underlying His teaching in whatever language given. It is quite possible that this concrete embodiment might shed light on the truth underlying the words of Christ. And it is worthy of note that the word *mystery*, in the sense in which Christ used it, and teaching practically identical with His, frequently reappear in the teaching of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

How deeply inwoven into the thought of St. Paul was the conception of the gospel as a secret hidden during long ages, but now revealed by special illumination from God, and revealed only to those who have attained Christian maturity, we learn from 1 Corinthians ii. 6-11: *We speak wisdom among the full-grown: . . . wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom: . . . which not one of the rulers of this age knew: for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. . . . But to us God revealed it through the Spirit.* So in Romans xvi. 25: *Revelation of a mystery kept in silence during eternal ages, but manifested now.* So Ephesians iii. 3-5: *By way of revelation He made known to me the mystery; . . . which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as now it has been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.*

What are these secret truths? They are those profounder views of God, of His love to man and His ways with man, of Christ and His salvation, which in all ages have been the blessed privilege of those who dwell in the nearer presence of God and look most deeply into His mind and purpose. This is the beatific vision of Christian life on earth. It eludes the keenest glance of mere intellect. None behold it except those whom God takes by the hand and leads, often amid storms and darkness, along a path known only by Himself, to the secret place in which He reveals to His chosen ones a light Divine unseen by all others.

In a somewhat lower sense, as a truth not generally known, the same word is used in Romans xi. 25, 1 Corinthians xv. 51.

Notice carefully that this inner light shines upon men only through the recorded words of Christ and the teaching of the Apostles. The revealing Spirit opens our hearts to understand the Scriptures. What we cannot read there

by application of the strict rules of historical and grammatical criticism we have no right to assume to be from God. For the written Word is the only standard by which we can distinguish eternal truth from the vagaries of our own imagination. Upon this solid objective basis must rest man's thoughts about God. But mere scholarship can never learn the deeper truths of the gospel. To reveal these, frequently through the avenue of scholarship, is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit. But, although He expounds, He never adds to the written word. Possibly to this the Saviour refers in John xvi. 13, on the night of His betrayal: *He will not speak from Himself, i.e. from His own prompting; but so many things as He shall hear will He speak.* In the alliance of exact and broad scholarship with spiritual light we have the true place and the sufficient safeguard of Christian mysticism.

Notice also an essential difference between the mysteries of heathendom and those of Christianity. The teaching at Eleusis was entrusted under pledge of secrecy. Every mystic was solemnly bound never to divulge it. Thus classic paganism hid its best teaching under cover of darkness. But the secrets of Christianity, every one who hears is bidden to proclaim. For the good news brought by Christ is designed for all men. Yet, strange to say, they are secrets still. Proclaimed from the housetops, they are understood only by those whose ears and eyes and heart God opens. Well may St. Paul say in 1 Corinthians ii. 6, 7, *We speak wisdom among the full-grown: . . . God's wisdom in a mystery.*

We now understand how the Apostle had learnt to be content even in his dungeon at Rome, and had learnt with safety to sink into the gloom of adversity and to rise into the sunshine of prosperity. He tells us that he had been initiated into the mysteries of the gospel. He had been into the secret chamber of God, and had learnt there all that

he most needed to know. He had seen the hand of God marking out for each of His children a wisely chosen path, and 'guiding and sustaining them along it. That path he could not but joyfully accept. Along it, up or down, grasping his Father's hand, he walked safely. And now all is well. The dungeon has lost its horrors and the grave its terrors. For on his path and in his heart hath shone eternal light.

Of the wonderful experience described in vers. 11, 12, ver. 13 forms the more wonderful climax.

It has often been said that knowledge is power. In the Christian life this is absolutely true. Spiritual strength is a constant result of spiritual knowledge. For he who knows God is armed with the omnipotence of God. Therefore he who knows the Christian secret is able to surmount every obstacle in his path and to do everything he needs to do.

We may perhaps reproduce the exact sense and emphasis of St. Paul's words by translating or paraphrasing: *for all things I have strength in Him who gives me power.*

The word here rendered *I-have-strength* denotes primarily physical strength, then metaphorically something analogous to physical strength. The corresponding adjective describes in Matthew xii. 29 the strong man who must be bound before another can enter his house and plunder his goods. In Luke xv. 14 we have *a mighty famine*; and in Revelation v. 2, xviii. 21, *a strong angel*. Its use in the passage before us suggests the reality of St. Paul's spiritual strength. It was as real to him as muscular strength to a strong man.

The accusative *all-things* gives the measure of this strength. This all-inclusive term needs, and will tolerate, no modification. The writer is conscious of unlimited power. It is true that there are many things he does not wish to do. And some of these he could not do if he would. But inability to do what we do not wish is no real limitation of our power. God is none the less omnipotent

because He *cannot lie*. For the ordinary objects of human ambition, St. Paul cares not. They therefore lie outside his mental horizon. But he earnestly desires to go along the path marked out for him by God, to lay hold (Phil. iii. 12) of that for which Christ has laid hold of him. Now this path is beset by obstacles which human strength cannot surmount. It leads over impassable mountains, and is occupied by powerful foes. But before the advancing step of the prisoner at Rome the foes retreat and the mountains sink into a plain. The words before us mean that to him there is no longer in the Christian life a question of *can* or *cannot*. He has no need to measure the strength of his enemies or the steepness of his path. *All things are possible to him that believeth*. This consciousness of infinite power demands, as its only fitting expression, the strong words we are now considering.

That this unlimited strength is not human, but Divine, is at once evident. Its source St. Paul has no need to mention precisely. He merely notes that it comes from some one other than himself: *in Him who gives me power*. The constant teaching of St. Paul assures us that he refers to his life in Christ. But some early copyists thought fit to add to the sacred text a single word explaining that which needs no explanation. Probably the inserted word, *Christ*, was first put in the margin. Indeed we find it there in the earliest existing copy of the epistle in which it is found, *viz.* the Sinai manuscript. The original scribe wrote simply, as the last words of a paragraph, *in Him who gives me power*. A corrector, two or three centuries later, added, perhaps by way of explanation, after the words given above the word *Christ*. So suitable did the explanation seem that later copyists inserted it in the text of their copies; and the reading soon became practically universal. It thus found its way into our Authorized Version. So confident of its spuriousness were the Revisers that they have not

noted its existence even by a marginal note. In the existing manuscripts of the works of Origen the explanatory gloss is enlarged into *Christ Jesus*,¹ and in one place² into *Christ Jesus our Lord*.

The phrase, *in Him who*, etc., and the equivalent phrases, *in Christ*, *in the Lord*, are a conspicuous feature both of the language and of the deep thought of St. Paul. Christ was the home, the bulwark, the surrounding element, the vital atmosphere, of his soul. And He dwells in those who dwell in Him, as their life and wisdom and strength. Therefore in Christ, *i.e.* in virtue of his inward union with Christ, Paul was strong. Similarly, in Ephesians iii. 16-19, he prays that *with power* his readers may be *made strong*; and explains his prayer by adding *that Christ may dwell in your hearts; . . . that ye may have strength to comprehend . . . the love of Christ*. An important coincidence is found in the words of Christ recorded in John xv.: *He that abideth in Me, and I in him, beareth much fruit: for apart from Me ye can do nothing*.

Notice carefully that ver. 13 states plainly one of the deepest secrets of the Christian life. In outward appearance the path of duty is rough and steep, and seems to be held by mighty foes. The Master bids us advance. In view of our felt weakness and of the strength of our enemies, His command seems almost cruel. But it implies a promise of His presence and help. This promise is one of the severest tests of our faith. Some dare to believe. Or rather, they dare not doubt the word of Him that promiseth. And in His strength they go forward, more than conquerors.

The verses which in this paper I have endeavoured to expound, and many others in which St. Paul describes his own personal religious experience, are a most valuable ele-

¹ So *De Oratione*, sect. 5.

² *Contra Celsum*, bk. viii. 70.

ment of Holy Scripture. They reveal to us the immense importance of the human element of the Bible. We have here a man born in sin as we are, inheriting a depraved nature, guilty of personal transgression, yet saved from sin by the grace of God, and describing in words taught by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. ii. 13) the work of the Spirit in his own heart. His words thus reveal to us the possibilities of sinful yet redeemed human nature.

The experience thus described may be ours. Frequently, while contemplating the achievements of others, we feel that their superior endowments place them far above anything to which we can aspire. But these grand words of St. Paul reveal a purpose which God is able and ready to work out in each of us. Whoever hears the gospel feels therein the gentle pressure of the hand of God. That hand seeks to lead him along a divinely chosen path into closer fellowship with Christ, in whom lie hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. As we follow that guiding hand these treasures are disclosed to our wondering gaze. In that light all earthly things are seen in their relation to Christ, and the hand of Christ, which guides and sustains us, is seen controlling and directing all things. And the Spirit of Christ in our hearts makes us sharers of His infinite strength. They who have seen that secret vision and have felt the life-giving touch of that hand can tread safely the most dangerous steps in the path of duty. The glitter of prosperity cannot dazzle them; for its feeble flicker pales before the brightness within. The darkness of adversity cannot terrify; for they walk in the light of life. They are independent of the vicissitudes of fortune and of the uncertainties of to-morrow: for the smile of Christ supplies their every need; and He changeth not.

The path of duty leads sometimes to the edge of a precipice, and there yawns before us an abyss which seems ready to engulf all that we have and are. He who once

asked the sons of Zebedee, *Can¹ ye drink the cup which I drink?* asks now, *Can ye descend into this abyss?* Trembling we reply, in words which shock us by their audacity, but which are really words of faith, *We can.* As of old to the early disciples, the Master confirms the daring reply: *Ye shall.*² And supported by the everlasting arms, step by step, we safely descend the awful path. Sometimes the Master points to the heights of earthly success, and asks, "Can ye climb that perilous path?" Himself has taught us the reply. Grasping firmly the guiding hand, we mount the marked out path. And whether we descend or rise, as men describe the lot of men, our life is one long march of triumph; for *in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

XIII. THE PRIEST AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHISEDEC (CHAP. VII. 11-28).

THE didactic significance of this section is, that in Jesus Christ as the Priest after the order of Melchisedec the ideal of priesthood is realized. The truth is established by the method of comparison. That Christ is the best possible Priest is proved by showing that He is better than the familiar Levitical priest. The emphasis of the passage lies now on the inferior, unsatisfactory nature of the Levitical priesthood, now on the supreme, absolute worth of the Messianic Priest.

Having demonstrated the superiority of the Melchisedec priesthood over the Levitical, by setting forth the personal

¹ Mark x. 38.

² Ver. 39.