

*THE TEACHING OF PAUL IN TERMS OF THE
PRESENT DAY.*

IX. THE POSITION OF MAN AND THE PURPOSE OF GOD.

SOME years ago the present writer attempted to summarise in three propositions the Pauline philosophy of history.¹ It helps to clarify our ideas on the subject if we compare those propositions with the fundamental Pauline principles as they are stated in the present series of papers, written from a different point of view.

The first proposition was "*The Divine alone is real : all else is error.*" This is merely a statement of the effect in history and society of the first and most fundamental principle in Pauline and Hebrew thought, "*God is.*" Start from that principle : think as Paul thought, view life as he viewed it : the result of your contemplation expresses itself in that proposition : "*There is nothing real except God.*"

The second proposition was : "*A Society, or a Nation, is progressive in so far as it hears the Divine voice : all else is degeneration.*" Here a new idea is introduced, viz., progress. The writer's object in stating those three propositions was simply to express broadly the observed facts of history. Human history is a history of progress ; but progress depends on one condition, absolutely and wholly, and cannot be achieved without it.

It may here be added, not because the writer wishes to reply to criticism, but simply to make clearer the present explanation of the subject, that objection was taken by some critics at the time to this second proposition, on the

¹ *The Cities of St. Paul, Part I. : Paulinism in the Graeco-Roman World,*
p. 12.

ground that it ignores and denies the development which runs through the history of mankind. The contrary is true. In this second proposition it is stated positively as the normal fact that human history is progressive, if a certain condition is observed. Progress is the law of nature ; it is to be expected ; it ought to take place ; but it is not inevitable and invariable ; on the contrary it is rare and exceptional in history,

There is no necessary contradiction between the two assertions, that progress is normal, and that progress has been rare and unusual. As Paul would put it, God's intention was that progress should be the course of man's life, but His intention has been impeded and prevented by the evil and by the fault of man. What, then, is evil ? Is it stronger than God ? Is it able to thwart the will of God ? It has been in the past able to do so ; but it cannot always do so ; for the will of God must in the end triumph. Here we are brought face to face with the problem of sin ; and to put in our current language Paul's solution of this problem so that it shall not be misunderstood by us is no easy matter, and will need some time and careful preparation.

The general principle, however, is certain ; and has been laid down in Section VIII as the second Pauline axiom, " God is good." He cannot be God, if His will does not triumph. He cannot be good, if His creation is to be a wreck. This second axiom finds its historical solution in development : there is a progressive, though slow, triumph over evil. Thus the law of development stated in the second proposition is implied in the second axiom : the presence of evil, suffering, sin and degeneration in the world which God has created are reconciled with the truth of that axiom through the law that these exist to be overcome in the upward progress of mankind.

The will of God is the soul of history. Such is the philo-

sophic theory of Paul. To him the process of human affairs was the gradual evolution of the Divine Will within those conditions of time and space that hedge man in. Paul presents to us the appearance of the Christ in the world as the culmination of the older period of history and the beginning of the new period: the past leads up to it and finds its explanation in it: the later time starts afresh from it. The purpose of God unfolds itself throughout. That apparently evil seems successful is due to too narrow a view: take a wider view, fetch a wider compass, and you perceive that the Divine will is triumphant in its own way and at its own time.

Hence Paul's thought must always be interpreted as dominated by his conception of the Divine purpose working itself out step by step: "When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law," or "When it was the good pleasure of God, who had marked me out for that end even before my birth, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles."¹ In these and other places, historical events occurring in the succession and process of time, day by day, or year by year, are pictured as steps in the working out of a foreordained purpose.

This is a thoroughly Hellenic way of expressing the truth. Greek poetry and Greek philosophy, in their highest and most characteristic manifestations, always picture history after this fashion, beginning from the opening paragraph of the *Iliad*, where the confused and tangled web of the Trojan War is described as a series of steps by which the will of the supreme God worked itself out to its consummation, *Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή*). The pure Hebrew might content himself with unshakable faith in the principle that *God*

¹ Gal. iv. 4 and i. 15 f.

is good, and that He will give good at His own time ; but the Greek mind seeks to understand the means and to imagine the process.

In the second proposition, then, we meet the Greek-trained Paul : it may be doubted whether a Jew wholly ignorant of Greek thought would ever have expressed himself in this exact way ; the Jewish way is not out of keeping with this, (for both are good attempts to describe the same great truth in more or less figurative terms), but it starts from a different point of view, picturing God as the potter who deals at his will with his vessels and his clay, and advancing from this side towards the same ultimate truth.

Yet, although my purpose was to show Paul as the Apostle who most clearly regards human nature and history as progressive, various critics described me as denying that there has been development and progress in the world. I maintain that there must be, and that there has been ; but there has been very little. And further, I venture to assert that a scientific investigation which starts from the assumption that all history is a history of progress must lead far astray. What of China, or India, or the Mohammedan lands, or the savage degenerates, in short the greater part of the world ? Have they been progressive ? How often in history are we struck with the same phenomenon, a brief period of progress followed by a long time of retrogression and degeneration. Take the religion of Apollo, and the subsequent history of Greek religion. Take the teaching of Aeschylus and the subsequent history of the Attic drama. Take the Mohammedan countries, whose history as a whole has been usually a sudden outburst of moral fervour and enthusiasm, followed by a long period of decay. In every case one finds at first a clearer and stronger perception of the nature of God suddenly acting on a people, and causing a marked improvement, but not able to clarify

itself in a continual progress towards truth. Progress ceases because the nation no longer hears the Divine voice. Or take even European civilisation, which prides itself on its progress ; but it is transforming the world into a series of vast armed camps, and inculcating more and more widely the standard of judgment that a nation ranks as great, not because of its excellence in literature or art or learning or moral rectitude, but because it has trained itself to be able at need to kill the largest number of its neighbours in the shortest possible time. Is that progress ? It is a temporary madness, or it is degradation. A friend, a great Oxford scholar, used to display a beautiful old book, a fine edition of a classical author, and say "They talk of progress." There is much in Europe that is not progress. Yet still progress is the law of nature and the will of God.

Paul stands out in his letters and in history as a man filled with an intense, flaming, consuming passion for "righteousness." To attain this "righteousness" is the true end of man. Righteousness is the nature and character of God ; and to be made one with God, to be in fellowship or communion with God, must necessarily be the true goal of human life. Since *God is*, the single and perfect existence, the truth and reality of the world, man who, by his existence as man, is separated from God sees before him the one straight path whose goal is God ; and to that goal he must either move onwards or degenerate and "die."

Accordingly these and many other various expressions describing the end and purpose of man are practically equivalent : they are rough attempts to express in imperfect human terms, through imperfect imagery and figurative expression, the same thing. To attain unto righteousness, to be in communion with God, to gain everlasting life, is the true career of man ; and this is Salvation. The pagans around were, as has been already said, praying for Salvation,

seeking it by vows and dedications. That is the striking fact of the Graeco-Roman world. Paul preached to those who already were ignorantly seeking what he offered ; or to put the matter from a different point of view, he caught up the term Salvation (*Σωτηρία*) from them, put his own meaning (i.e., Jesus's meaning) into it, and then gave it back to them. They offered to purchase Salvation by vows and to extort it by prayers and entreaties from the gods ; but what they meant by it was largely material and ephemeral good ; in the dedications and vows the word sometimes appears to mean little more than health, or prosperity, or good fortune, or a union of all three. Yet the word never wholly excludes a meaning that comes nearer to reality and permanence : there lies latent in it some undefined and hardly conscious thought of the spiritual and the moral, which made it suit Paul's purpose admirably. The pagans could rarely have expressed in definite words this vague "something more," which they begged from the gods ; and yet probably almost all the dedicants whose records we decipher had a certain dim consciousness of this indefinable good thing which they desired over and above mere safety and health and worldly prosperity.

As Professor H. A. A. Kennedy¹ says excellently : " All these statements [specimens of which have just been given] are certainly justifiable, as expressing each a side of the truth in which the mind of Paul can rest with perfect satisfaction. They are all, moreover, consistent with one another, for they are all closely linked with his personal Christian experience." These last few words are especially excellent ; it is in the final resort always Paul's own life that determines his knowledge, and so it must be with every, Christian. You know nothing really until you

¹ *St. Paul's Conceptions of the Last Things*, p. 6 f.

have lived it, worked it into your nature and life, and made it a part of yourself. All the various expressions of this thought which are found in Paul's writings arise out of his own experience; they are not arrived at by abstract philosophic thought, but forged on the anvil of life and work.

As the aim of life Paul looked for permanence. The Divine nature always *is*: there is for God only the present tense, "I am." The certainty, the permanence, the reality, of God are contrasted with the variability, the transitoriness, the uncertainty of all else. As Professor Kennedy translates the words of Steffen, Paul "sighed, as scarcely any other has done, beneath the curse of the transiency of all that is earthly."¹ He longed for the assurance which lies in union with God.

Here Semitic thought closely approximates to Hellenic philosophical expression. It is one of the central ideas in Greek philosophy that the whole universe and every object in it exist through constant motion and change. Nothing remains the same. Some things change more quickly, some more slowly; but all things are involved in this ceaseless movement. You cannot step twice into the same river, for its water flows by, and new water takes its place. You cannot twice climb the same hill, for it is disintegrating and wearing away by a never-ceasing though slow process of change. There is nothing fixed, nothing trustworthy, and therefore nothing real in these things. Existence which is merely a constant process of change is not in a real sense existence.

Thus Paul's thought comes back always to the first principle that God is, while nothing else is. All other

¹ Ibid. p. 6: Steffen in *Zft. f. N. T. Wissenschaft*, 1901, ii. p. 124, to which I have not access at present.

things seem to be, but they only mock the mind with the illusion of being. The philosophic mind is compelled by its own nature to get back behind them to the permanent and the real. It can acquiesce in God, and in nothing else, for there is nothing but illusion except in Him; and only the superficial and unphilosophic mind can be content with outward appearance without underlying reality.

Of all these expressions for the one truth, however, probably the most suggestive and the one which best seizes the reality is that you must be born again, you must enter on a new life; "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature";¹ "it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me."² Already, in this life on earth, the new life has begun, and one's old self has died: the Divine life has begun; the goal is attained; the man is merged in God and united with God, because his former self has died, and "Christ liveth in me" (as every true Christian can say in so far as he is a true Christian). There is nothing in Paul's words and experience that arrogates anything peculiar to him or anything that differentiates him from "all the saints." There is but one experience, and one true life free and open to all.

This new life begins through the death of the old nature; and the death takes place through suffering, and as Paul figuratively puts it: you must crucify the old self, for "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions thereof."³ This is the law of the universe: the birth of the new is the death of the old: through death we enter on life: in science it is expressed as the transformation of force.

These are figurative expressions, some of which are used by Paul and others by John. They denote the same idea, from practically the same point of view. Nicodemus

¹ 2 Cor. v. 17.

² Gal. ii. 20.

³ Gal. v. 24.

wholly failed to understand what it meant to be born again ; and it is not recorded that the further explanation in John iii. conveyed a clearer meaning to him at the time. The thought was so totally new to him that at first it seemed to him meaningless and impossible. What does it mean to us ? How shall we express it in modern everyday language, seeking for other figures and other forms which come more into harmony with the cast of current thought ?

May we not say that in this series of figures taken from birth and new life, we have the same idea that we call development or rather evolution ?

In this connexion perhaps the most typical and illuminating passage in Paul's letters is Philippians iii. 10 ff.

Having . . . the righteousness which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith : that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death : if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained or am already made perfect : but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold : but one thing I do . . . I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded. . . . Brethren, be ye imitators together of me.

Two apparently contradictory assertions are here brought together, and Paul passes from the one to the other, and back again. On the one hand he has gained the righteousness of God ; he is made perfect : he is worthy of imitation ; that he should be so, was the purpose of God, which worked itself out in its own way through the developing events of his life. Paul is the Christian ; and what he says every true Christian, every *ἀγιος*, every saint, can equally say. His experiences are the experiences of all the Saints. " Christ . . . was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness,

and sanctification, and redemption."¹ The man who calls on others to imitate him is claiming to be the model for them: men are made in the image of God, and only one who has the righteousness of God can be a model to other men; yet every saint can claim to be so.

On the other hand, in the same passage, Paul is also saying that he is not perfect: he has not yet attained righteousness: ² life is the goal towards which he is struggling, and the prize which he is striving to win. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." But the crown lies in front: there is still a way to traverse, hard and trying, before the prize is won. Death must be faced and traversed as the gate of life.

Thus almost in the same breath Paul is saying, "I have attained" and "I have not yet attained." How shall we reconcile the two apparently contradictory expressions? There is no real contradiction: the two unite in one complete idea, and the idea is growth.

If we try to put this idea in the simplest and barest form, man, as he is placed in this world, must either move onward towards the better, or degenerate towards the worse. He cannot stand still. He cannot remain the same, as if he were fixed and unchanging. In the flux of the world, nothing can continue fixed and permanent. Movement towards the better is movement towards God and towards life: in fact, it is in itself really and actually life. Movement towards the worse is degeneration and is already death. In Paul's thought degeneration and death are equivalents.

Now without some power to move him, man degenerates,

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30. Gentiles . . . have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith (Rom. ix. 30).

² The word "yet" is omitted by many good authorities (including B and all Latin); it is needed for the thought, but is naturally supplied from the preceding sentence; and the emphasis and variety are heightened if it is left to the reader to supply. The temptation was to insert it from the influence of the preceding.

and thus comes death. A motive power is needed to start him and keep him on the upward path to the better ; and this motive power Paul found in faith. There is no other force sufficient. Everything else has failed, as the history of man shows.

Thus faith is the power that sets man moving in the right direction ; but this is not an external power ; it is a power that works in and through the mind of the man. It is the Divine power, and yet it resides in the human mind, because it is the Divine fire in the nature of man.

This is a difficult idea, for it seems to involve the contradiction that without external aid man must fail, and yet that he succeeds through a power within himself. Each statement can be made with perfect truth, contradictory as they appear. At every point in the life of man, you find yourself involved in a similar apparent contradiction : you can at every point say, as Paul says here, this is and this is not : he has attained and he has not yet attained. This lies in the nature of growth : at every moment that which is growing ceases to be what it has been ; it does not remain the same for two consecutive moments ; but the change is not merely purposeless or vague or shifting, it is change controlled by a law and a purpose ; and this law of development is the Divine element amid the ceaseless variation.

Thus I find myself driven to assert that Paul is the preacher of development and growth, and that only from this point of view can we at the present day put a meaning on his teaching which is thinkable by people in the special stage of thought on which we now stand, advanced beyond the past, but still far from perfect. The teaching of Paul, i.e., the mind of Christ, seems to assume, in every age and to every person, a form peculiarly adapted and sufficient for the occasion. It has to be rethought (as was said in

the outset) by every one for his own purpose to suit his own need. It is perfectly infinite in its suitability; but each man must see it for himself, and each thinks that he sees something special to himself. The variety however, lies, not in the teaching of Paul, but in the nature of men, who contemplate it through the colouring medium of their own various character.

Whether I have succeeded in making clear my reasons, I know not; but I find myself compelled to begin afresh and to approach the whole problem from another point of view. To Paul human conduct is a problem of growth: it is dynamic, not static. In this view everything is seen in a new light. Righteousness is not a state, but a process of growing or approaching towards the nature of God. Sin is a process of degeneration and deterioration, continuously accelerated, and gathering increased momentum: sin is not simply a fact or characteristic definite and stationary. The sinner is a person driven down a hill;¹ his velocity is constantly accelerated; and it becomes more and more difficult for him to stop his course or to turn back. Yet to turn back is necessary if he is to begin to move towards righteousness. Some tremendous power must be brought into play to arrest the impetus of the degeneration towards evil and cause a movement in the opposite direction towards good and God.

Life means the fulfilment of the purpose of one's existence: to fail and to frustrate that purpose is death. "Sin entered into the world, and death through sin."¹ The double statement is put most emphatically in the form: "The wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life."² Such is the order of God: "whether (servants) of sin unto death or of obedience (to His will) unto righteousness."³ Righteousness and life are here practically

¹ Romans v. 12.

² Romans vi. 23.

³ Romans vi. 16.

convertible terms ; and these sentences would be equally true and equally intelligible, if the words were interchanged.

The question has been asked and seriously discussed whether Paul would have gone so far as to maintain that, if there had been no sin, there would never have been in the world such a thing as death. This is one of those academic questions with which Paul would have had little patience. If the world, and the Divinely ordained course of the world, had been different from what they are, then many things else would have been different. It is profitless, and worse than profitless, to discuss such questions. They approximate perilously to the logomachies against which Paul fulminates in writing to Timothy and Titus.

When death is conceived as the transition of force from one form to another, it has a different meaning from the other sense, in which it is spoken of as the equivalent of sin. In the latter case it is really degeneration, in which every right feeling, right judgment and right impulse gradually become atrophied and cease to exist. The man who has failed to carry into effect the Divine purpose of his being is ceasing to live, and when all hope is lost he is dead. The common metaphor by which we speak of such a man as dead originates from a true instinct. After all, even in the physical sense, how difficult it is to predicate death as final and absolute. In the case of drowning a person may be practically dead ; and yet sometimes, after hours of therapeutic work, the breath may be recalled, and all that can be said is that he would have been pronounced dead hours before, if it had not afterwards been proved that he could still live. I know the circumstances of a case in which a man was pronounced dead by some of the best physicians in Europe after typhoid fever ; and yet was brought back to life after many hours of effort by non-medical belief and activity. Still more difficult is it to

predicate moral death. There are admittedly many cases in which a person who had seemed utterly dead to all moral feelings and hopelessly lost, has been restored to life. He was really dead ; and yet, after all, there is no moral death so absolute and complete as to be beyond the redeeming power of faith and of Christ. All the issues of life and death are under the power of God.

Now comes the question, whether this way of looking at life is justifiable in philosophy or in common practical sense. It is of course admitted by the questioner that the power of a true and noble idea in history has been extraordinarily great. The influence of such ideas can hardly be exaggerated. The history of mankind is made by them and transformed by them through all the stages of its progress. Without such ideas there is no progress, for they are the Divine element in the world, and the Divine within the collective thought of nations responds to the impulse of a noble idea, where the nation is fitted to receive and comprehend it. The memory of every educated person will supply to him countless examples from past history ; and it is needless to linger over this subject, except to say that often a historical process has been in reality originated and impelled by an idea rather than by the more apparent reasons of material advantage or political strength which also may seem to be involved. This may, however, be left to a historical survey.

It will also be admitted that the transforming and impelling and regenerative power of an idea over the individual man is extraordinarily great. In one's own experience every one knows how even the reading of a noble thought can rouse the emotions and quicken the pulse ; and how occasionally the contact of one's mind with such an idea has affected the whole of one's thought and even given a new direction to one's subsequent life.

This is not merely an analogous : it is a slighter example of the same nature and force. In all such cases the Divine nature and truth within us recognises and responds to the Divine without, and grows stronger by taking into itself a new yet kindred element. I believe it is allowable to say that the mind of Jesus embraces the sum and perfection of all great ideas, and His influence on the world operates in the same fashion but to an immeasurably stronger degree, through infinite love, perfect truth, and absolute power, all combined to influence the human mind that it has laid hold upon.

How far it may be right to say that the intensification of that kind of influence to an infinite degree raises it into a higher category I do not presume to decide. Who can gauge the difference between the finite and the infinite power ? But that this is the right way of attempting to understand the process of faith, and that this places a true philosophic interpretation on it, and that this power is vouched for by common and universal experience, I believe. In every case where a great idea impels the mind of one man or of a nation, it works through the belief which it rouses, and this belief and confidence strengthen the human nature to the daring and achieving of what otherwise lay far above and beyond the human powers.

Those who have studied the remarkable book of Nevius on "Demonic Possession" will be inclined to say that this is far from exhausting the phenomena under consideration, and will be inclined to claim for the name of Jesus an immeasurable and limitless power over man. Nevius, a trained medical man, who had no belief in the reality of demonic possession, but regarded all cases so classed as examples of obscure phenomena of a nervous or hysterical character, found himself obliged by the facts that came within the range of his own observation, and were corrobor-

ated by the observation of many trustworthy colleagues, to change his opinion. He came to believe that there was such a thing as real obsession or possession by diabolic power ; and he recognised that in numerous cases—almost every case where it was tried—the appeal to the name of Jesus exercised a soothing and more or less curative influence even on obstinately or ignorantly pagan minds. Here we trench on the sphere of the miraculous, i.e., of what has not yet been properly understood.

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