

The Captivity of the Mind to Christ.

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THE phraseology of this passage of St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians¹ shows that his mind was full, as so often elsewhere, of military scenes and exploits, of camps and campaigns, of siege and battlefield, of conquest and defeat. Illustrations such as these were not only very real to the apostle, but had the advantage of being very readily apprehended by those to whom he wrote. When he used such figures, his language was bound to be understood, and by none more easily than by these members of the Church of the city of Corinth.

These he has in his mind's eye here, earnest and devout, striving in concert for the faith of the gospel. The enterprise before them, defensive and offensive, was no light one.

In Corinth the enemies of the faith were strong in numbers, diverse in character and method of assault; but while all were bitter, some were plainly hostile, others were crafty and insidious. Here were those of Jewish antecedents, with all the prejudice of class and race; here the philosophers, falsely so called, with their inconsistent refusal to address themselves to the consideration of a fresh basis for ethics; and here those who detested the gospel because its message of peace was only for men of God's good pleasure, and offered no terms with moral evil. What an enterprise was implied in the imperative duty of the Corinthian converts to bring all such into Christ's service, to win them or restore them to God through Him! Here it is that the apostle emphasises a suggestion made not infrequently elsewhere. The very minds of such aliens to the faith were to be recovered and enlisted into the one great service. Every idea and conception, every intention and mental purpose was, as it were, to be caught, arrested, and then pressed into the new allegiance. The very minds of men once so hostile to Christ were to be captured, and to render to Him in sacred tasks and holy efforts a willing, glad obedience.

In this passage St. Paul is not so much regarding that internal conflict, with which he has made us elsewhere² so familiar, which lies in the desire

¹ 2 Cor. x. 5: *αἰχμαλωτίζοντες πᾶν νόημα εἰς τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ.*

² Cf. Rom. vii. 21-25.

to do good amid the constraining presence of evil impulse, as that external struggle and warfare in which Christians worthy of the name must share when men have to be won to the Master's cause. He speaks of a discipline of the mind to be strenuously undergone by all who would themselves be Christ's faithful soldiers and servants.

In this way St. Paul's teaching addresses itself primarily to a truth perpetually in danger of being forgotten. What more common assumption is made by men of the world than that the Christian religion is concerned only with the emotions? The consequent implication is that the faith is something apart from reason, and separate from its processes. And this misinterpretation (the cruel mischief of which it is impossible to estimate) is sometimes unhappily emphasised, by Christians, teachers and preachers who address themselves simply to emotional appeals, and from whom you look and listen in vain for any solid reason for that hope which no doubt truly possesses them. And yet there runs throughout the Pauline teaching the constant reminder that Christ claims the whole allegiance,—body, soul, and spirit,—that the message of the gospel addresses itself to the mind as well as to the heart, and as a consequence invites while it transcends the power of the human understanding. It follows as a corollary from this, as the apostle is not slow to indicate, that there is a characteristic loyalty of the mind and its processes to Christ—that Christians are bound to discipline every single mental effort, so as to obey unreservedly their Master. They must, in a word, bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

An attentive study of St. Paul's letters will show that he has three types of mind which he regards as not yet loyally submissive to Christ the Lord. There is (*a*) the philosophic mind, (*b*) the evil mind, (*c*) the foolish mind.

I. With the first of these three types the apostle found himself in an inevitable sympathy. It could not be otherwise with him. Without entering upon the still open question whether or not he possessed an adequate training in Greek philosophy, its terminology was not unfamiliar to him. He boldly adopts

its phrases even when their employment might seem open to misinterpretation in Christian context. Had it served any purpose with his converts he could surely have quoted as readily from the philosophers as he does from the poets. Be this as it may, he has had a more profound influence upon human thought than even the arch-philosopher himself. It is no wonder, therefore, that his spirit was deeply moved¹ on any occasion when he perceived that men who gave themselves up to the serious consideration of such tremendous problems, as those of the world and its origin, human existence, death, happiness and misery, justice and injustice, the best life for individuals and communities; that philosophers who could earnestly and patiently investigate such issues should not yet be brought, mind and thought and all, to render a willing service to his Master.² And the same jealousy will be felt, the same sadness will be shared still in measure by every Christian thinker. It is almost impossible to take up any modern book, the outcome it may be of a powerful mind written out of sympathy with the Christian position, without this sense of deep regret that the writer's talents were not placed freely and unreservedly at the disposal of the Master. And yet there remains the happy assurance for Christian people that the highest and purest human thoughts find their freest expression in the upper air of the Christian faith; that such writers and thinkers are seekers after God, feeling painfully after Him if haply they may find Him. There can be no more noble enterprise, because there is none more difficult, than the task of winning and enlisting such minds to the allegiance of Christ.

II. But next, utterly removed from this type, and absolutely estranged from God in Christ, is the carnal or wicked mind. St. Paul, when the painful duty was laid upon him, did not shrink from painting it at its blackest and its worst. The first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is at once a demonstration of his own fearlessness, and of the terror of the gospel itself in the presence of moral evil. His bold denunciation seems to anticipate the latter-day Antinomianism, when men were found, and are found, by teaching and in life, making their easy separations between faith and morals. St. Paul does not mince matters in describing this evil mind. It is dominated by

the flesh, it is indeed the outcome of the flesh, and is its very expression. By consequence it wears an attitude of determined hostility to God.³ These are its essential characteristics and features. It is a mind which is known by its thoughts. Whatsoever things are false, whatsoever things are unholy, whatsoever things are unjust, whatsoever things are unlovely, whatsoever things are of evil report, it thinks on these things.⁴ And as it is a mind apart from God, so it is inevitably possessed by a deep and secret despair.⁵ If it is to be recovered for Him, it can only be after some awful and convulsive effort by some correspondent bestowal of life and light, of which the only adequate symbols are Death and Resurrection.⁶

III. Thirdly, there is the frivolous or foolish type. It is not quite so disassociated from the wicked mind as some may flatter themselves. The teaching of the Psalter in its practical identification of folly and wickedness supplies a needful caution to those who are bold to declare that they find no reflexion of the evil mind in themselves. The like identification is freely implied in St. Paul's language — the passages indeed are too numerous for reference. But in the case of the frivolous mind, as the estrangement from God is not absolute and complete, and the opposition to His will and purposes not so violent, so the type is infinitely more common. It is *en evidence* everywhere—the mind and its thoughts, idle and vain. If one may venture to take the standpoint of an outside critic, and regard the foolish mind in others, it will be observed at once how difficult a temper it is to deal with. There is nothing harder than to convince and convict anyone of frivolity. There is nothing harder than to read, mark, and avoid it in ourselves. The charge is resented with a warmth proportionate commonly to its truth. It seems to threaten a man's intellectual position, and to strip the light-hearted critic of men and things of his pretensions to be regarded as a serious thinker; and even irresponsible persons do not wish to be considered merely silly. But the foolish mind survives, if it cannot always evade, remonstrance. It is here, it may be if the voice of the conscience is suffered to speak out, it is within us, and the necessity is laid upon us to discern its temper and character. In this task St. Paul is again the

³ Rom. viii. 7 : φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς Θεόν.

⁴ Cf. Phil. iv. 8.

⁵ Cf. Eph. ii. 11, 12.

⁶ Cf. Col. ii. 1-11.

¹ Acts xvii. 16 : παραζήνιστο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ.

² For this, cf. I Cor. i. 19, iii. 19.

best teacher. For him the foolish mind is a standing note of the heathen world;¹ hence, by its nature and in its essence, it is alien from the mind of Christ. It is a prey to chance influence, and as it is always open to what is easiest, is ever receptive of evil suggestion.² On the other hand, the foolish mind is neither wholly irresolute, nor entirely unoccupied. It is absolute in its refusal to address itself to any grave consideration, and since there is no such thing as a really vacant mind, it is constantly filled with trivial, senseless subjects, with idle thoughts finding voluble expression in idle words. Thus gossip is not so much the language of the foolish as their pursuit and profession.³ It is impossible to exaggerate the disastrous moral consequences which ensue from the misdirected activities of the foolish-minded.

Let a man be sufficiently frivolous, and sympathy and service for others will soon degenerate into slander and interference.⁴

Let a man be sufficiently frivolous, and the religious life will quickly become a thing of manner, gesture, or phrase, in due course utterly insincere.

Let a man be sufficiently frivolous, and he will straightway discover a growing estrangement from goodness and love, purity and truth.

For this temper what might be considered the appropriate remedies are seen to fail strangely when applied. Sorrows and losses, the customary trials of humanity, seem not to touch this mental disease. These, as experience shows, come and go, but the moment of relief and release is the

¹ Cf. Eph. iv. 17.

² Cf. throughout for this the character of the Galatians as described in that letter.

³ 1 Tim. v. 13: ἀργαὶ μανθάνουσιν.

⁴ Cf. 2 Thess. iii. 11, 12.

signal for relapse into folly. There is but one remedy, and this must be directly from the Great Physician Himself.

It is time, however, to draw these considerations to a close. On each of these counts Christian people need a stern review of the endowments and processes of their minds.

It is not all that have to accept a grave responsibility on the first count. The problems which have occupied philosophers, ancient and modern, are after all familiar only to a few, and the deeper thoughts of most Christians have no conscious element of disloyalty to Christ. Yet even so He claims the best of that intelligence which is His own gift, and this for the sake of the faith of others, as well as for their own, and there is many a Christian who fails in its exercise, just when an answer to some sober inquiry is deeply needed.

If, again, on the second count, some may with a courageous humility speak of a victory won over that carnal mind which is enmity against God, there still remains for most the needful caution against the foolish mind. It surely has to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Does this aim which the apostle indicates appear too high? Yes, a thousand times too high if truth be reposed on human strivings alone; yet not hopeless, because, according to the persistent assurance of the Christian faith, there are channels of a grace divine from which men may draw, and there is a Rock set higher than themselves upon which feet may be planted. So, as they learn more of the mind of the Master, there comes not merely an assurance, but the possession of what is sublimely His alone—His lowliness, His purity, and His awful seriousness.