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1 *CORINTHIANS XV. 29–34: AN ARGUMENT AND AN APPEAL.*

At the close of the First Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul finds it necessary to recapitulate his gospel, laying especial stress on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (*ἀπέθανεν . . . ἐτάφη . . . ἐγήγερται*, xv. 3), on the significance of that death (*ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν*, *v.* 3) and on the correspondence of the death and resurrection of Christ with prophecy (*κατὰ τὰς γραφάς*, *vv.* 3, 4). This recapitulation is enriched by several particulars of surpassing interest —the appearance of the risen Christ to Cephas, to the Twelve (strictly of course to the Eleven), to the five hundred brethren at once, to James the Lord's brother, and to all the Apostles (*τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν*). This, as distinct from His appearance to the Eleven, may imply a wider meaning of the word "Apostle."

The Apostle then proceeds to argue from the proved fact of the resurrection of Christ the resurrection of the dead generally. It is surprising that the argument should have become necessary. To us it seems inconsistent to believe in the resurrection of Christ and yet to disbelieve in the resurrection of the dead. But through all the ages inconsistency has been a note of unbelief.

St. Paul rests his argument in its first stages on the proved and acknowledged fact of the resurrection of Christ. From that fact to a general resurrection of the dead is a necessary inference. The truth of the one stands or falls with the truth of the other. This is what St. Paul presses in a passage of sublime Christology, which is one of the most precious possessions of the Church.

It is, however, in regard to the next step in St. Paul's great argument (*vv.* 29–32) and on the short digression which follows (*vv.* 33, 34) that we desire to offer an explanation.

I. Up to this point, as we have seen, the Apostle has been establishing the truth of the resurrection by the testimony of accredited witnesses to external facts. He now proceeds to prove his thesis by a different kind of evidence which does not lie on the surface. Consequently the two statements of fact used in support of it seems to interrupt and break into the argument instead of helping to build it up. Rightly regarded, however, these words are an appeal to the deepest and most convincing source of proof, and the digression which follows is valuable as indicating both the cause of the lapse in faith and the character of the lapsed.

In verse 29 the much disputed words occur respecting baptism for the dead, which have been discussed in a previous paper.[1] Here it will suffice to remark that whatever interpretation of the words be accepted the argument rests on a deduction from the Christian rite of baptism.

The Apostle then proceeds in further proof of the resurrection to refer to his personal experience. He describes a life of hourly danger, of hardship and self-sacrifice. He does not suggest that this is the best possible life, but he suggests that with the motive which inspires him it is the only possible one. Side by side with his own plan of life, and in contrast with it, he places the Epicurean life-formula, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die" (*φάγωμεν καὶ πίωμεν αὔριον γὰρ ἀποθνήσκομεν*, *v.* 32), as a conceivable alternative.[2]

But here it may be asked, How does baptism for the dead, or how does this life of sacrifice, hardship and danger endured for Christ's sake, and in faith of the resurrection, prove the fact of the resurrection? The truth is that in both cases the strength of the argument is suggested and

[1] See EXPOSITOR for May, 1901.

[2] With this phrase descriptive of the worldly life of pleasure compare what the unwise rich man says to his soul: "Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke xii. 18).

not expressed. It lies in the deep consciousness of the candidate for baptism or of the Apostle reviewing his life that he is not mistaken. The Apostle's argument rests on the instinctive conviction which impels him to believe that he is right and wise in sacrificing everything for Christ, and the truth of the resurrection. And in such matters the argument from instinct affords the strongest possible evidence. It is one from which there is no appeal. Instinctive action is divinely guided action, and is never at fault. Wherever verification is possible it is found that the end suggested by instinct is a right end, often an end necessary for the preservation and development of life, and that the means suggested by instinct for achieving the end are the best adapted for the purpose. It is therefore a reasonable inference that where verification is not possible the end suggested by instinctive consciousness is right and the means true. This is not of course the only passage in which St. Paul appeals to this infallible test of spiritual facts. Compare, for instance, "But unto us God revealed them (i.e. Divine mysteries) through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God. . . . But we received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. ii. 10–12). And in a passage still more nearly akin to the subject of the resurrection he writes: "Now He that hath wrought us for this very thing (i.e. eternal life) is God, who gave unto us the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. v. 5); that is, God gave us an inner witness and premonition that death is not an ending of life, but the passage to a higher life then beginning.

St. Paul then argues for the truth of the resurrection, not only from the fact of Christ's resurrection, which can be attested by many witnesses, but from that inward evidence of the Spirit which he speaks of in the strictly

parallel passage, which we have quoted from the Second Epistle.

St. Paul then advances one step further in his argument. The same instinct that proves the resurrection proves that it is the very basis of life, and that the hope of the resurrection is the one thing that makes life worth living, in consideration of which distress, pain, death are matters of indifference. If this motive and basis of life be removed let the Epicurean or any other scheme of life be adopted, it matters not. If the dead be not raised, the Apostle says in effect, I grant you that that life of sensual enjoyment may be justified in a way. If you have not the Christian motive, I cannot expect you to lead the Christian life.

Here, then, St. Paul makes pause in his argument in order to warn those of his recent converts who had lapsed into the old Epicurean life, or at least had tried to find the two lives compatible. It is this departure and digression from the train of his argument—or, more strictly, this change from argument to appeal — that gives a certain abruptness to these two verses, which disappears only if the connexion is thoroughly understood.

We trace that connexion in the Epicurean formula, already alluded to, which the Apostle uses to express the antithesis to the hard life of the Christian soldier: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

It is hardly necessary to explain that in using this phrase St. Paul does not intend to argue that for those who have abandoned the Christian ideal the only alternative is a life of pure self-indulgence. Even Epicurus himself and his school maintained that happiness consisted in a moderate use of pleasure. What St. Paul does is to place in contrast the life in Christ and the life of paganism.

II. With the thought of that contrast the true underlying cause of the denial of the resurrection against which he is contending flashes into the Apostle's mind. Hence

this digression from his argument is only apparent. The earnest compressed sentences which follow betray the emotion with which the warning is given. It is a direct appeal to conscience—to that God-given sense already illuminated by Christian teaching and the power of the Incarnation. It is impossible, he tells these wavering disciples, for the high and spiritual thought of the resurrection and the resurrection life to exist in the heated atmosphere of Epicureanism. There must be a complete severance between the old life and the new. It is the Wordsworthian scheme of "high thinking and plain living" deepened, hardened and spiritualized. The Christian ideal must be nurtured in a brighter and purer air; that "atmosphere of moral and religious influences which surrounds every man's existence, of which he is often as little conscious as of the air he breathes, but without which spiritual life would be just as impossible as physical life under an exhausted reservoir" (W. R. Smith's *Prophets of Israel*, p. 2).

"Do not," he says, "go on deceiving yourselves" (*μὴ πλανᾶσθε*, note the middle voice and present tense). Do not continue in that fatal mistake of expecting to live the old sensual life and still to keep your souls pure and your hope of the resurrection bright and open. "Evil associations corrupt a good character," or, as we might paraphrase it, "Pagan companionships and consequently pagan words and ideals corrupt and lower the higher life which you have learnt to live in Christ." The last words are an iambic line—*φθείρουσιν ἤθη χρήσθ' ὁμιλίαι κακαί*—from the Thais of Menander.[1] The citation is peculiarly interesting, for

[1] In citing this line among the fragments of Menander, Meineke (*Menandri et Philemonis Fragmenta*, p. 79) refers to this passage alone of 1 Cor. as the source of the quotation. Its ascription to Menander appears to rest on the authority of Jerome in notes on Tit. i. and Gal. iv. The evidence that it was a line in the Thais of that poet is derived from a marginal note in a MS. of the New Testament in the possession of H. Stephens.

Menander, a poet of the New Comedy, was a contemporary and close friend and disciple of Epicurus[1] himself, of whose philosophy he was the poetical exponent. It is therefore not without a touch of irony that St. Paul cites the Epicurean poet against his own followers, infusing, as he does, a Christian interpretation into the pagan advice. Learn a lesson, the Apostle says in effect, from your own favourite poet; give up the low companionship, which must mar and ruin the acquired Christian character.

The expression which follows—*ἐκνήψατε δικαίως*—is not adequately rendered either in the Authorized or the Revised Version. But "awake to righteousness" of the A.V. is certainly preferable to the bald and inaccurate "awake righteously" of the R.V., which could hardly convey a definite meaning to the English reader. In the first place *ἐκνήψατε* does not mean "awake." *Νήφειν* is to be sober (see 1 Thess. v. 6; 1 Pet. v. 8); *ἐκνήφειν*, "to be sober from or out of"; i.e. to return to sobriety out of the dissipation into which you have plunged. *Δικαίως* presents some difficulty, which is not overcome by the literal "righteously" of the R.V. It implies that the life of soberness is the rightful and true life of a Christian believer. *ὁ δίκαιος* is the man who satisfies or fulfils all the claims upon him, who is right in what he does. *Δικαίως* means rightly or befittingly, and the clause may be rendered: "Return to the sobriety which befits the higher Christian life." Compare Titus ii. 11, 12, a passage nearly akin to this in thought: "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and godly in this present age" (. . . *παιδεύουσα ἡμᾶς ἵνα ἀρνησάμενοι τὴν ἀσέβειαν καὶ τὰς κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας,*

[1] Menander and Epicurus were born in the same year at Athens, and spent their youth together as sharers in the same exercises (*συνέφηβοι*). (*History of the Literature of Ancient Greece*, Muller and Donaldson, ii. 69.)

σωφρόνως καὶ δικαίως καὶ εὐσεβῶς ζήσωμεν ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι). Καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε. This clause expresses the argument negatively. That life of self-indulgence and dissipation which had resulted in scepticism is characterized as an ἁμαρτία. For the Christian such a life was a mistake, a blunder, implying want of true spiritual insight.

The need of this apostolic warning thus early in the history of Christianity is abundantly affirmed by the experience of succeeding generations. The social life of paganism, with the cruelty and open vice of amphitheatre and stage, was for long a formidable and grave hindrance to the Christian disciple. But perhaps, as the Apostle seems to foresee, the greatest danger of all lay in the excess and vicious talk and unwholesome atmosphere of the pagan banquet: "Difficile inter epulas servatur pudicitia," says Jerome.

In the next phrase, ἀγνωσίαν γὰρ θεοῦ τινὲς ἔχουσιν, the Apostle has probably definitely in view the Epicurean associates whose companionship had a corrupting influence on the higher life. The Vulgate rightly renders τινές by *quidam*, persons whom the Apostle does not care to designate more particularly, but who would be recognized. He says in effect to his lapsed converts, "Those Epicurean friends of yours are really ignorant of God notwithstanding their pretence of knowledge." Here, as earlier in the Epistle, St. Paul claims the true philosophy and the capacity of knowing God for the Christian faith (comp. chap. i. 21–25). And here it is perhaps possible to trace the way in which this affectation of γνῶσις (knowledge) had disturbed the faith of the new disciples in the doctrine of the resurrection. Menander, whose words are here quoted, belonged, as we have seen, to the New Comedy, which, "even more decidedly and more exclusively than the Middle Comedy, was rich in ridicule of the Platonic Academy, of the newly revived sect of the Pythagoreans,

and of the orators and rhetoricians of the day." [1] We can well believe that this critical tone was characteristic of the society to which St. Paul alludes in *κακαὶ ὁμιλίαι*. Nothing is more probable than that at the Epicurean *symposia* into which the new converts were drawn difficulties connected with the resurrection of the body would form the subject of scornful criticism to which the Christian neophyte would not find it easy to reply. We may imagine one of these discomfited disciples laying before the Apostle the difficulty which has given occasion for the victorious answer with which the chapter concludes.

This then suggests a link of connexion, and enables us to see a reference to the *ἄφρων* (thou fool) of verse 36 to the *ἀγνωσίαν* (ignorance) of verse 34.

It is not perhaps a mere coincidence that in refuting his Epicurean opponent the Apostle should use the same expression, *ἄφρων*, which our Lord applies in His parable to that other follower of the lower life (St. Luke xii. 19).

In this passage then, as we have shown, three characteristic points of St. Paul's theology are brought into relation with his great argument for the resurrection: (1) The appeal to instinctive conviction; (2) The claim for the supremacy of the Wisdom of Christ; (3) The need of severance from the world for the spiritual life.

But there is another point which does not appear on the surface of the argument of too great practical importance to be overlooked. If we have rightly conjectured the genesis of the question on which St. Paul's final argument is based, we have here a very early instance of an "insuperable" objection to the faith of Christianity dispelled by a single word from an Apostle. But for that authoritative word a false conception of Christian teaching on the momentous subject of the resurrection might have con-

[1] *History of the Literature of Ancient Greece*, Muller and Donaldson, ii. 60, 62.

tinued to disturb the faith of uninstructed converts, such in type as those who fell easy victims to the philosophic criticism of the Corinthian *symposia*. The question might still be asked in scorn or doubt, "How are the dead raised, and with what manner of body do they come?" Throughout her history the Christian Church has suffered from such misconception of her faith as is implied in the question. Time after time the attempt has been made to proclaim as vital truths of Christianity tenets and dogmas which the wiser criticism of a succeeding age has found to be groundless, and not Christian truths at all. The Calvinistic doctrine of election; an *a priori* theory of accuracy in the Bible narrative resulting in forced explanation of discrepancies; the necessity of a literal and unconditional fulfilment of prophecy; the doctrine of verbal inspiration; misinterpretation of particular texts—all these have in turn furnished "insuperable" difficulties in the way of accepting Christianity. Some have been dispelled by a truer religious instinct and a deeper knowledge; some are still with us, either slowly vanishing in the growing light; or else remaining only to be dissolved in a flash of spiritual insight at the final revelation.

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