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THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

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We have already seen that the events which happened between the first and the second of our two Epistles, are shrouded in the deepest obscurity. The Book of Acts gives us practically no help at all, and we are left to draw what inferences we can, from the perplexing hints and allusions in the Epistles themselves. A brief sketch has been given of what seemed to be the most probable order of events, and the view has been advocated that we now possess the Second Epistle pretty much in the form in which it left St. Paul's hands.

Fortunately these matters of historical and literary criticism affect to a very slight extent our understanding of the Second Epistle. They will be noted, in passing, where they occur. But the themes with which St. Paul deals and the matters he has so keenly at heart, are largely independent of these detailed considerations and stand out in clear relief from them.

It is generally agreed that the Epistle falls naturally into three clearly defined sections. The first of these is contained in chapters 1-7. It is a peace offering on the apostle's part. The Corinthians had obeyed the stern mandates of his former letter, and had taken steps to remove the stain of impurity which was defiling their church. Their obedience in this matter makes it possible for St. Paul to approach them with open arms and welcome them to his heart. In speaking on the topic of their recent partial estrangement from him, he has occasion to enlarge on his own true apostolic ministry, in terms of sharp contrast with that of the Jewish legalists who were opposing him.

The second division consists of chapters 8 and 9. The subject here is the collection which he was making amongst the Gentile churches for the benefit of the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

The remaining chapters of the Epistle, chapters 10-13, form the third division. Here the atmosphere is one of controversy and keen reproach. The apostle is dealing, at close quarters, with the disaffected minority in the church and with the judaiz-

ing emissaries who have won them from him. He refers, also, to some who, after accepting Christianity are continuing to indulge in the licentiousness of their former heathen life. With such perversion of the gospel and deliberate treachery to it, he can have no compromise and in dealing with these evils his tone is one of sharp and unsparing severity.

CHAPTER I.

The Epistle opens with St. Paul's wonted greeting, "grace and peace"; the former a Christianized form of the customary salutation of the age, the latter the more peculiarly Hebrew form of greeting. The two are blended together to form the characteristic Christian salutation.

After the opening words of address, it seems to have been his usual custom to thank God for those to whom he is speaking,—for their conversion to Christianity or for their progress in the Christian life. In the first Epistle he thanked God for the "utterance" and for the "knowledge" of the Corinthians. Here he keeps to the same practice of thanksgiving, this time, however, not for the Corinthians, but for himself,—for the Divine comfort vouchsafed to him at a time of deep affliction. The thanks, it is true, are indirectly for them also; for he conceives that God has helped and comforted him that he, in turn, may be able to help and comfort them. It is possible that, in stating the matter so, he hoped to appeal to the sympathy and better feeling of his bearers. Some have even suggested that the Corinthians were aware of St. Paul's trouble and interpreted it as a Divine punishment upon him. If this be true, he here delicately puts aside any such suggestion, and indicates that it had not only been a means of Divine comfort to him but would also be the same to them.

He seems to feel that this departure from his usual custom, this mentioning of his own affairs rather than theirs, needs a word of explanation. He therefore alludes more particularly to "our affliction which befell in Asia." Unfortunately the allusion is in such general terms, that we are left uncertain what its precise nature was. It may have been bodily illness,

or it may have been some peculiarly malignant plot of his enemies against his life. Whatever it was, the danger was extreme, for he speaks of it as "so great a death" and speaks of the Divine help of that of "God which raiseth the dead." That God *had* rescued him from this peril is the ground of his hope that He *will* rescue him from similar danger again. For this, he assumes, his Corinthians friends will pray; and when the help is given they will join in thanksgiving for the mercy vouchsafed.

This reference to the gratitude which he hopes that the Corinthians will feel on his behalf, suggests the thought of their own recent relations to himself. His words take a somewhat defensive tone. They may well feel grateful for his preservation, for he has been to them all that a Christian minister ought to be. There has been no insincerity in his behaviour to them, no ambiguity in his letters. The emphasis with which he asserts this, seems to show that he had been accused of uncandid dealing in his correspondence. This he vigorously denies; some of them, he declares, have been convinced of his sincerity throughout. He hopes that *all* will come to share this conviction and will have as great a pride in him as he has in them.

The words that follow enable us to realize more fully still the intensity of ill feeling with which St. Paul was regarded by certain members of the church. That there was *some* hostility he was well aware, and in consequence had altered his plans for visiting them. He had decided on a route which would only involve one visit to Corinth instead of two. It appears from his words, that some of them, instead of merely expressing disappointment at this decision, had used it to asperse his character; it was a mark, they declared, of his levity and fickleness. The apostle simply meets this by an indignant denial, not merely with reference to this particular incident, but to his whole relationship with them. Neither his own conduct, nor his preaching, nor that of his fellow workers, has ever been marked by any such levity as that of which they accuse him. There is nothing wavering or fickle about the gospel of Jesus

Christ which he preached. There is no yes and no in it. It is the positive fulfilment of all the Divine promises, the vindication of the Divine faithfulness; and he claims that his own character and conduct towards them have been as sincere as that of the gospel he proclaimed. By a variety of metaphors—establishing, anointing, sealing—he drives home this thought of the fixity, the unwaveringness, of the dealings of the God whose minister he is.

It was not then, because of any fickle levity on his part, but from a desire to spare them, that he refrained from coming to Corinth. No sooner, however, had he written the words than he imagines some reader saying: "Spare; what right has he to speak of 'sparing' us?" To disarm any such comment he hastens to disclaim the idea of lordship. His only motive is the desire to help their joy.

CHAPTER II.

And because this was his chief desire, "I determined," he says "that I would not come again to you with sorrow."

The right interpretation of these words is one of the historical difficulties of the Epistle. The subject is too complicated for discussion here. The most reasonable inference seems to be that the apostle had already paid them one visit "with sorrow" and that this must have been subsequent to that first visit when the church was founded. *When* the visit occurred, it is more difficult to say. Some scholars hold that it took place between the writing of the two Epistles; others hold that the connection between the two Epistles is so close, that this painful visit must have been paid before the writing of the first one. For our present purpose, it may suffice to express the strong conviction that there had been a visit of St. Paul to Corinth, unrecorded elsewhere, a visit which had caused him the keenest distress. As his one desire was that he and his Corinthian converts might have the truest joy in one another, he had no wish to repeat this painful experience.

The words that immediately follow are also a fruitful source of debate. "I wrote this very thing," he says, "lest I should

have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice." And again, "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you." To what is he referring here? Some say, to our first Epistle. Others, holding that our first Epistle does not answer to such a description as this, say, the reference is to a lost Epistle. Others, as we have seen, identify this lost Epistle with the last four chapters of our present second one. This last suggestion we have seen reason for declining. The rival claims of the other two views need not be discussed here, except so far as to point out, that it may fairly be questioned whether the first six chapters of the first Epistle do not, after all, answer to this description. There are passages in those chapters which it may well have cost him tears to write. The balance of probability seems, on the whole, to incline in the direction of this view—that the reference here, is to one present first Epistle.

In any case there had been a sorrowful state of things, and in the following words we come across an allusion to the prime cause of it all. The conduct of some individual in the Corinthian church lay at the root of the matter, and the church which had at first been careless about his wrong doing had, to St. Paul's great satisfaction, now inflicted disciplinary punishment on him. Who this person was, and what his precise offence had been, form another of the unsolved problems of this puzzling Epistle. Some think that it was a man who had been guilty of personal insolence to St. Paul, or to one of his fellow workers. The more probable view is that the apostle is referring to the case mentioned in 1 Cor. 5, of the man who had married his own step-mother. He had on that occasion sternly demanded the man's excommunication from the church. The Corinthians seem to have been roused by the apostle's sharp words, from their careless attitude, and to have dealt severely with the offender. We may infer that the man had repented of his sin, and that St. Paul had expressed the desire that he should be re-admitted to the church. Those who think that St. Paul could not have expressed himself with such kindness as he here displays, with reference to so

grievous an offender, hardly make sufficient allowance for the change which the man's sincere repentance may have wrought in the apostle's attitude. Whoever the offender may have been, St. Paul here desires that they should now "forgive" and "comfort him," lest he "should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow."

He now returns to the track of the narrative which he had begun at 1.8 and continued at 1.15. He tells how he had left Ephesus for Corinth, but had proceeded no further than Troas till Titus, whom he had sent on before should bring him word of the condition of things at Corinth. There was opportunity for work here, but he could not seize it; he was too full of anxiety. From Troas he went on into Macedonia, and there, at last, he met Titus. He does not actually say this, in so many words, till we come to chapter VII. 6, but the outbreak of thanks here gives a vivid picture of the relief that the arrival of Titus must have brought to him.

The imagery he employs is somewhat difficult to interpret clearly, but it seems to be connected with a Roman triumphal procession. He conceives God as the great conqueror, who is winning the hearts of men, and who leads St. Paul himself as one of the captives in His triumphant progress. The message of the Gospel is fragrant as the incense that burned on altars in streets through which the triumph passed. It is true that the one gospel led to different issues; to those who were yielding to its gracious power it was "from life unto life"; to the hardened and wilfully obstinate it was "from death unto death." And the thought of this solemn alternative leads him to the question: "Who is sufficient for these things?" Who is so utterly divested of all thoughts of self interest as fitly to present this momentous issue to the minds of men? He, at any rate, and his friends, can claim to have presented the message with all sincerity. They have not mingled it with any thought of petty personal interest, as so many of his opponents had done. The message was from God and had been delivered by one who was "in Christ."

CHAPTER III.

St. Paul had been accused at Corinth of "commending himself," and he anticipated that when the above words are read the charge against him will be repeated. It is evident that he keenly resented the imputation for he refers to it more than once in this Epistle. His indignant question here is a sufficient disclaimer that the words are open to any such interpretation. His judaizing foes at Corinth, on the other hand, *had* done this. The "some" to whom he here refers were probably emissaries from Jerusalem who had come to Corinth bearing "Epistles of commendation" from the church in that city. In his relations with the Corinthians, at any rate, the apostle certainly needed no such things. As he had before told them, in the first Epistle, *they* themselves were his "epistle" of commendation, the standing proof of his apostolic office blessed by God. St. Paul was the amanuensis, and Christ was the writer, who wrote "not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." The letter was written on the hearts of the Corinthians, though in a certain sense it was written on St. Paul's heart too.

The contrast here between "hearts of flesh" and "tables of stone" and the reference to the Spirit are premonitions to us that the apostle already has in his mind the contrast, on which he proceeds now to enlarge, between the Old Covenant and the New. The ground for his emphasis on this contrast probably lay in the fact that his judaizing foes at Corinth were, in a certain sense, acting in the spirit of the Old Covenant, were relying on some mere legal and external qualification. The contrast which he draws is sharp and clear; the Old is "of the letter", the New is "of the Spirit." Few men were better qualified to draw this contrast than St. Paul, for he had lived as a faithful and zealous supporter of each. At the same time, in estimating the truth of the contrast drawn, we must bear in mind that St. Paul views the old dispensation with the eyes of one who had been trained in Pharisaic circles, and we must recall the various passages elsewhere, in which he acknowledges its true worth and spirituality. Still, in the last

resort the contrast remains essentially true. The Old was legal and external; the New is inward and spiritual. The issue of the Old, for unaided mankind, could only be death; the issue of the New is life.

And yet, as he goes on to show, the Old had a glory of its own. A visible expression of that glory was the brightness that shone on the face of Moses after his periods of communion with God. It is true that it was a transient glory; but while it lasted it was so great as to dazzle the eyes of those who beheld it. The apostle does not explicitly describe the contrasted glory of the New; he leaves it to be inferred how much greater it will be. But he proceeds to describe the contrast further, by yet another pair of terms, "condemnation" and "righteousness." The very fact that the New is a ministry of "righteousness" rather than of "condemnation" is the measure of its excess in glory. Finally, he makes explicit the contrast at which he had already hinted. The glory of the Old was transient; the glory of the New is better in that it is permanent and eternal.

All these surpassing qualities of the New Covenant cannot fail to inspire its ministers with a confident hopefulness, which in turn will produce in them the most outspoken candour. It may be, that in these words, the apostle is rebutting a charge that he had wrapped his gospel in mysterious obscurity. Such a charge, he seems to say, can be more justly made against the Old. This appears to be the point of his curious allusion to the veiling of the face of Moses, that the children of Israel might not see the fading of the glory on his face. He then proceeds to give a wider interpretation to this symbolic episode. That veil prevented the Israelites from seeing the glory of the older revelation; their minds were hardened. Similarly the glory of their own peculiar Covenant has remained hidden from the Jews; "until this very day . . . the veil remaineth unlifted." It will only be taken away when they shall turn to the Lord; shall turn to the Christ in whom their Covenant finds its end and fulfilment. Then they will enter into that freedom from law and from its condemnation which belongs to the dispensation of the Spirit.

CHAPTER IV.

After these two characteristic digressions on the nature of the Old Testament Covenant, St. Paul returns once more to the topic of the ministry of the New Covenant and of his own behaviour in that ministry. For the whole passage with which we are dealing in his *apologia* for his demeanor towards his Corinthian converts. "Seeing," he says, "we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not." "One" he seems to mean, "who has received such mercy as I have, will not turn faint hearted in the fight. All unworthy forms of weakness are given up; we commend ourselves to the consciences of men by the simple proclamation of the truth".

To this line of thought there is an obvious retort, which he does not fail to notice. Christian ministers may indeed *appeal* to the consciences of men, but what is to be said of those who are not convinced by the appeal? That there are such people, he admits, and in speaking of them he does not mince his words. They are "perishing"; the very fact that they decline to receive the gospel is their own condemnation. They decline to believe because "the god of this world hath blinded" their "minds". The apostle, like his Master before him, describes the forces of evil in personal terms. The great opponent of the gospel is Satan, "the god of this world." It is his work that those who are on the way to perishing reject the gospel of the glory of Christ.

The last word "Christ" is emphatic. He is the sole subject of the gospel. It's ministers are but His servants. He is the true Light of the world, and His advent is only comparable to God's great creative act when, at the first, He commanded light to shine out of darkness. The very grandeur of this conception of Christ suggests, by way of contrast, the weakness of the earthen vessels to which the telling of it is entrusted. St. Paul seems to have in mind, here, the weakness of his own bodily frame,—a weakness with which, perhaps, his enemies were wont to taunt him. And yet this weakness was constantly transcended by the power of Christ within him. In a series of rapid contrasts he shows how that power was ever triumph-

ant. till he says, in final climax, that he bears in his body the "dying" of Jesus. He rejoiced to be a chosen vessel, but he knew that the pressure of the work was killing him. And yet he lived on; and the fact that he did so was a manifestation of the life of Jesus in his mortal flesh.

No one can fail to note in this passage how the apostle repeats and dwells upon the name of Jesus. It is as though the very repetition of his Master's name recalled the Master's love and gave him consolation in his sufferings for the Master's sake.

In spite of these sufferings, he again repeats it, there is no thought of fainting. The outer man may be decaying and wearing out, but the inner man is being daily renewed. And the thought of this contrast, between the fading strength of the body and the growing life of the spirit, raises the apostle's mind to a lofty point where he views the contrast in its grandest, widest form. He sees the contrast between the transient afflictions of the present and the eternal glory that is to come, between the fleeting world of sense and the abiding world of Spirit; and he rests in the strong conviction that the affliction of this present earthly order is working to produce for him a glory that is eternal.

CHAPTER V.

The contrast between the present condition of weakness and the future condition of glory is illustrated in yet further detail. He regards his present body as a tent, a transitory dwelling that can easily be taken down. But if this should happen he is not left homeless. He *has* an abode, not a tent, but a house, made by God, "eternal in the heavens." The glorious prospect of this new and eternal embodiment causes him to sigh longingly for its realization. He proceeds,—in words that have been a fruitful source of perplexity to his interpreters—to define more clearly his yearning desire.

Most probably he means that he hopes for Christ's return in glory before the time for his own death shall come. If *that* were to take place he would be spared from the dread

experience of dying, of putting off the old before putting on the new; he would be "clothed upon" with the new; would pass by rapid transformation from the weakness of the earthly to the glory of the spiritual and eternal.

It is only fair to say that this is but one of many interpretations of his words. Others read the passage as a declaration on the apostle's part that there is no intermediate period of "sleep" for the faithful departed, between death and the second coming of Christ; at the moment of death they are clothed at once with the heavenly body. It is also held by some, that the doctrine here expressed marks a real advance on the views put forth in his earlier epistles, and so constitutes a landmark in the development of his teaching about death and immortality. Whether this be the true interpretation or not, it hardly seems very probable to suppose—as some have done—that this marked change of view was produced by some danger in which he had recently been placed and which had brought him very near to death.

In any case he is supported by the hope of this future glorious abode; and the author of that hope is God. The present possession of the Spirit is the pledge of the future glory. It is true that we are now away from it, and walk in this present world by faith; we walk, as it were, in a realm of faith rather than in one of visible, eternal, reality. Yet faith points to that other realm, and so we walk courageously. Whether here or there it is his aim to be pleasing to Christ before whose judgment seat we must all appear.

The thought of immortality has here passed into that of judgment, with its grave suggestions of eternal destiny. This is the thought the apostle has before his mind as he proclaims the message of the gospel. The purity of his motive, he declares, is known to God; he can only hope that the consciences of his hearers will pass the same verdict on him. In half ironical words, he again repudiates the assumption that the expression of this hope is an attempt to win their favour; he will not, like his Jewish opponents, rest his claim to their favour on any external plea. In all his conduct he is clearly

conscious of devotion to God's service, and to their welfare; he has no motive of self interest to serve. And the secret of this lies here; his life is dominated and guided by one supreme overmastering force, the love of Christ; the love which made Him die for all.

St. Paul, like the other New Testament writers, finds in Christ's death the supreme manifestation of His love. The thoughts which the words before us suggest are too great and far reaching for full discussion here. It must suffice to say that the sentence, "One died for all, therefore all died", can only mean that Christ's death was ours; that in dying he was identified with us in death, and that in some profound and mysterious sense He was not only our representative but our substitute too. And the object of His death was to make us His own; that He should henceforth be the sole end and goal of life for us, that we should be partakers in His risen life.

To share this resurrection life of Christ means complete revolution, means, in fact, rebirth. Christ died and rose for all, and in that great inclusive act, all former distinctions of caste and race and country are gone for ever. The risen life is a *new* life. In the wide scope of this principle St. Paul includes even Christ Himself. "Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more."

These words have been the subject of great discussion. The point at issue is, whether they mean or do not mean, that St. Paul had known our Lord during His earthly life. Some think that it may fairly be inferred from the words that he had so known Him. Others hold that he is putting a purely hypothetical supposition. Whichever of these views be true, the principle enunciated remains the same. It is not the Christ who walked and talked in Palestine, but the crucified, risen and ascended Christ, in whom the Christian hopes and on whom his faith reposes.

This new life in Christ is God's creation. It is He who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ. It cannot be too clearly observed that St. Paul's word here for the work of Christ is "reconciliation." And this does not mean merely a

subjective process in the human heart, while God's attitude remains unchanged. It means that there is an obstacle on God's side too, and the message of the gospel is that God in Christ has Himself dealt with this obstacle. He has provided the reconciliation and it is ours to receive it. And, that reconciliation with God is to be found in Christ in the Gospel Message to the world.

Of this message St. Paul and his fellow workers are the bearers; they are God's ambassadors, and yet they do not bear themselves with the cold and dignified reserve which the name "ambassador" might suggest. They "beseech" men to be reconciled to God; they bring the message of Christ in the Spirit of Christ. He reiterates again the burden of that message in the well known sentence which may be said to summarize the essence of the gospel. "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." To attempt an adequate explanation of these words would carry us far beyond the scope of our present task. It must suffice to indicate that the author of this great transaction is God; that the sinless Christ bore the doom of sin; that His death was the execution of the Divine Sentence on sin; and that this was on our behalf that we might be freed from the power and penalty of sin.

CHAPTER VI.

This is the glorious message that St. Paul, Christ's "ambassador", "entreats" his hearers to receive. The truth he has just set forth are the heart and essence of the gospel. He asks them not to receive it "in vain"; by which he, possibly, means that they must decline the forms in which his foes at Corinth were presenting it to them, forms in which the truths he has just laid before them have no place. Or it may possibly be that the general and more obvious reference is the true one; that is, he bids them remember that they must *live* the new life of the Spirit, otherwise their acceptance of Christ's salvation will be a meaningless thing.

So far as he can contribute to this result, he sees to it that

his own conduct shall put no stumbling block in their path. In a fervent passage, the swift eloquence of which it would be impossible to paraphrase, he depicts the life he has lead and is leading—all on their behalf. He tells of the sufferings he endures, the qualities he displays, the conditions under which he works. These last are set forth in a series of contrasts showing the extremes that meet in his experience, and culminating in the climax “as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”

From the sustained eloquence of this passage he descends once more to friendly personly appeal. He has been frank and unreserved with them; if there is any want of mutual confidence, the reserve is on their part. Not on his. He asks them to show him affection such as he has shown to them.

The passage that follows (vi. 14—vii. 1.) presents many difficulties. It is, apparently, quite detached in meaning from the context. If it were omitted, the words that follow it would join themselves naturally to the words that precede it, giving a continuous passage of straight forward meaning. So strong are these considerations that many hold the passage to be an interpolation. Some support the further suggestion that the paragraph is a fragment from the lost Epistle referred to in 1 Cor. v. 9, and if we once admit that the passage is a fragment of some other Pauline letter, this particular one would have very strong claims to consideration.

The absence of any external evidence however, makes it difficult to believe that we have any interpolation here, and it is not hard, on closer scrutiny, to find links of connection with the context. The strong appeal to keep aloof from unbelievers, may be an instance of the frankness which the apostle has just said that he feels for them, and would welcome from them. The Christian life, he tells them, is one that cannot temporize with any of the world's impurity but must cast it off. He may have been thinking more especially of the worship and sacrificial feasts of heathen Corinth, but the principle is one of universal application. Christians are the temple of God, and God's temple cannot be associated with the impurities of the sinful world.

CHAPTER VII.

After this slight *excursus*—for so, it may fairly be called—the apostle returns once again to his plea for mutual frankness and confidence. They have no reason, he tells them, for any attitude of hostile reserve. He has done nothing to them to deserve such an attitude. It is true, as we shall see later in the Epistle, that some had said he *had* deserved mistrust; it was said that he had made money out of his ministry at Corinth and had ruined some of his converts. At present he does not discuss this charge; he simply denies it. He is too full, for the moment, of joyous feeling to tolerate any such ungracious thoughts.

He tells them now the reason for his joy. Titus had met him in Macedonia and told him of their return to a better mind, of their obedience and renewed allegiance. He is glad now that he did send the severe and reproachful letter; glad, not because it pained them, but because it wrought this change in them. They were made sorry, they repented, they made ample reparation for their fault.

This result had quite fulfilled his object in writing and he was comforted. He had spoken well of them to Titus, and it was an additional element in his joy, that by their repentance and reform, they had justified the praises he had bestowed upon them.

CHAPTER VIII.

In this chapter and the next we come to quite another subject, the collection for the poorer Christians of Jerusalem. It has been well pointed out that although St. Paul is here dealing with the contribution of money, he never actually uses the word. He speaks of the matter as a “grace,” as a “service,” as a “blessing” and by other kindest names. By so doing he lifts the whole subject into a higher atmosphere. The giving of money only has value in so far as it represents some such higher motives as are indicated of these terms.

He begins by telling them of the liberality of the Macedonian churches. They had contributed and the secret of it was, that

their gift was but the outward expression of the inward consecration of their hearts; "First they gave their own selves to the Lord." The spectacle of this generosity had made St. Paul suggest to Titus that he should push on to completion the arrangements for collection which he had before begun to make at Corinth. He is careful to say that he is laying no command upon them; only *suggesting* that their love should express itself in this fashion. For a pattern, he refers them to the example of Christ. He is not only our Saviour but the supreme type of self-sacrificing beneficence. "He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." A third reason, he finds in the effect on the Corinthians themselves. They have begun this good work; it will be to their spiritual gain that they should not let it fail, but carry it out to the end.

He indicates two things for their consideration. Their gift, to have true value, should be marked by readiness and willingness; on the other hand, they must not look on Christian charity as a one-sided thing. A time might come when they too would be in need, and the Christians of Palestine might be expected to render a similar service to them.

The remainder of this chapter is occupied with personal details. He commends to their favorable notice Titus and the two other brethren who had been sent with them to arrange details of the collection at Corinth. Titus, it is to be observed, had made his earlier visit to Corinth with forebodings and misgivings. Now that the Corinthians had come to a better mind, he was returning there of his own accord with the keenest alacrity. Who the other two brethren were, we cannot say. St. Paul does not give their names and we have no certain clue to their identification. Both were his close associates and shared his fullest confidence.

It is evident from the apostle's words here, that unworthy charges of something very like speculation had been made against him by his enemies at Corinth. In this passage he betrays none of the indignation he felt, but merely indicates that he had made arrangements for the collection to be managed in such a way that no suspicion should fall on any one.

CHAPTER IX.

With the delicate courtesy which he could so well display, he presses home the matter of the contribution from a slightly different point of view. He has boasted of them to his Macedonian friends, so much so, that even the generous Macedonians have been stirred to further exertions by his words. He urges them to justify this boast. He points out that when he comes to Corinth, some friends from Macedonia may accompany him. After all he has said about their zeal, it would be disastrous if they were still unready on his arrival. To prevent this, he has sent on Titus and the other two, to hasten on the work.

The remainder of the chapter is a resumption of his earnest plea for a generous contribution to the contemplated collection. They must give cheerfully and must remember that they are giving to God. Such gifts are as seed, and they will produce a harvest of Divine blessing for the sowers. There are other aspects of this harvest too, which must not be forgotten. The collection will not merely relieve the material needs of the poorer Christian brethren, but will produce in them a spirit of joyous gratitude to God. It will have the further effect of reconciling the Jewish Christians to their Gentile brethren; for they will have very practical evidence of the reality of their spirit of brotherly love. They will intercede in prayer for their Gentile brethren and will yearn even to see them in the flesh.

He closes with one heartfelt burst of gratitude for God's gift of Christ—the one supreme gift which makes all Christian giving possible and lends to it its distinctive worth.

CHAPTER X.

We enter here on the third and last division of the Epistle, and in so doing we pass into a wholly different atmosphere. We have already discussed the question, whether these four last chapters are a fragment of the earlier painful letter, and have concluded that there is not sufficient evidence to support this view. We shall assume therefore, in our reading, that

after expressing in the fullest way his reconciliation with those who had obeyed him at Corinth, and after discussing sufficiently the collection for the poor, St. Paul now turns to deal with the insubordinate minority and with the judaizing emissaries whose machinations were the cause of all the trouble. The unpleasantness of the topic with which he has to deal is sufficient to account for the change of tone and temper in the writer. Who these emissaries were and what were their methods of action, will appear more clearly in the course of these chapters.

The apostle has a difficult task. He has to vindicate himself, to assert his own position. And yet he must do so in the Spirit of all who belong to Christ. Hence he grounds the appeal he is going to make on "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." The words that immediately follow are an obvious quotation of the slanderous sneers hurled at him by his enemies, that he was meek when present, but very bold when absent. He does not pause to resent it; he merely prays for them not to give him occasion to use the courage which he certainly will use against the disturbers of his work.

These enemies charged him with walking "according to the flesh," that is, with working for selfish and interested motives. That he, like all other men, was conditioned by the weakness and frailty of his flesh, he is not concerned to deny; but his work among *them* had not been vitiated by any selfish weakness. He had spoken and written with the power of God, a power that would be strong to overthrow all obstacles in the path of God's own work. In this power, when the main body of the church shall have declared its obedience, he will deal summarily with the heads and representatives of the disobedient faction.

We come now to clearer indications of the trouble. There were persons in the church who claimed to belong to Christ in some sense that would discredit St. Paul's relationship to Him. They were probably Jewish Christians who had come to Corinth with letters of commendation from the church at Jerusalem. With these he at once joins issue. He is Christ's as

much as they are. The mere fact that they had seen Christ in the flesh, or were closely associated with those who had, gave them no standing in this matter. To know the power of the risen Christ, and to be blessed in work for Him, is the true criterion of intimate connection with Him. From this point of view he need fear comparison with none.

Still, he does not wish to enlarge on this and so frighten them by his letter. This, again, was a thing of which he had been accused. His enemies had said that he was contemptible in bodily presence, but very terrible in his letters. To this, he merely, replies that those who utter this sneer will find, to their cost, that his presence is as formidable as his letters.

He will not, however, pursue this line of self-assertion further. It is uncongenial to him and resembles too much the methods of his foes. But he does not leave any uncertainty about the fact that he is widely different from them. *They* form a clique in which one compares himself with another; the only standard by which *he* measures himself is the requirement of the gospel message. *They* come in to either reap or spoil the fruit where another had worked; *he* had made it his aim to carry the gospel where no evangelist had been before. In saying so much he has gone as far as he thinks wise in the path of comparison. He recalls the fact that God, after all, is sole arbiter, and that His is the only commendation that has value.

CHAPTER XI.

It is obvious throughout the preceding chapter how distasteful to him has been the idea of parading his own claims. Yet here he now feels driven to do so. It is a role he loathes; he calls it "foolishness" and asks his hearers to bear with him if for a while, he plays this part.

It is only his love for them that makes him willing to do any such thing. He is jealous for their safety and deeply anxious lest any tempter should seduce them, "as the serpent beguiled Eve," from the truth of the gospel he had preached to them. And this was no groundless fear on his part. These Jewish emissaries were preaching *another* gospel. They were, not im-

probably, preaching Christ as the Messiah of Judaism, and not as the directly universal Saviour that St. Paul conceived Him to be. And the Corinthians were tolerating this with the utmost equanimity; while *he* who had proclaimed to them Jesus the Saviour of all, of Greek as well as of Jew, had to plead for their favourable consideration.

The intensity of his deeply stirred feelings makes it somewhat difficult to catch the precise thread of connection in the swiftly hurrying sentences. If such consideration be given to his foes, he seems to say, (for "the very chiefest apostles" here, probably refers to the leaders of his foes at Corinth,) he may claim it too, for he is no whit behind these others.

And yet the Corinthians have chosen to regard him as inferior to them. Can it be, he asks, because he took no support from the Corinthians while he was ministering to them, while the others have exacted recompense for their work? He held indeed, as we have seen in the first Epistle, that the minister might rightly claim to be supported by his flock, and that he himself had as good a claim to this privilege as the other apostles. But at Corinth he had not wished to exercise this privilege; and his enemies asserted that the real ground for this decision was his inward consciousness that he was not an apostle at all.

The insinuation was utterly base. Love for them and a wish to make the gospel free of any sort of cost, alone had prompted his action. If this be a fault, it is one in which he will persist. He will do so, if only for the reason that he may maintain his position of distinction from his enemies; for if he were to yield to these slanders, and prove his apostleship by receiving support, he would be putting himself on the same footing with them. That this should come about would be intolerable; for these men are utter deceivers, members of Satan, posing as angels of light, whose misdeeds will meet with fitting reward.

At this stage he returns again to the idea of boasting. It is as repugnant to him as ever; but, foolish as it is, he craves leave that he may indulge his fancy for a little. The Corinthians are accustomed to put up with overbearing conduct from

his enemies; they need not then decline to tolerate a little boasting from him. Compared with the violence of his foes, his own gentle demeanor might justly be open to a charge of weakness. But whatever ground *they* have for vigorous action, he can, at any rate, show that he too has just as much as they.

And now, at last, after all his lingering aversion, he nerves himself and utters his boast. His foes can make no conceivable claim which he cannot equal or surpass. So far as Jewish standing and privilege are concerned, he is their equal. So far as work and suffering for Christ are concerned, he can show a record such as they can never hope to rival.

The words that follow are unique. They give us a picture of the toil and strain and agony of his life, such as we could have obtained from no other available source; for very few of the episodes he mentions are narrated in the Book of Acts. They tell of toils, of travel, of bitter persecution; and in addition to all this of the ceaseless anxiety for the welfare of his converts. *Their* weakness and *their* trouble went to swell the burden of *his* heart.

Such things, then, as these—his sufferings and his labours—not any privilege earthly or spiritual, shall be the theme of his boasting. Nay, he will even go further, and in telling of his sufferings for Christ, will speak of a thing that the world would count not merely, pitiable, but ignominious. In words of almost startling solemnity, he declares that in this and in what is to follow, he is telling the literal truth. He had to flee from Damascus because of an attempt made by the authorities to capture him, and was let down in a basket by the city wall. To some this might have seemed an episode to be covered up in silence; but he boldly adds it to the tale of what he had suffered for his Lord.

CHAPTER XII.

From this he abruptly proceeds to the matter of “visions and revelations of the Lord.” It is not so much of these that he will glory, but of the weaknesses associated with them. His manner of description is peculiar. He speaks of himself

throughout in the third person. He views what happened to himself as from the detached standpoint of a spectator. He dates the experience as fourteen years ago. This does not enable us to associate it with any other known episode in his life. So far as we can gather from the Book of Acts he may have been at Tarsus or at Antioch. The mode of the rapture remained incomprehensible to him. All he knows, is that he was caught up into Paradise and heard words "unspeakable," "not lawful for a man to utter."

And yet this high mysterious privilege seems to have entailed a penalty. In the Divine providence, to prevent too great an access of spiritual pride on the score of this great and unique experience, there was given him "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet" him.

What this "thorn in the flesh" was, we cannot say. Obviously it was some physical affliction. The apostle's words here, taken in connection with the reference to the same thing in the Epistle to the Galatians, seem to indicate that it was something of a depressing and humiliating character. The view most generally accepted has been that it was a seizure of an epileptic nature, many, however, have found Professor Ramsay's suggestion more acceptable, that the reference is to malarial fever which St. Paul had caught in the lowlands of Pamphylia on the first missionary journey. This complaint was of the recurring kind, and was capable, at any time, by a sudden visitation of reducing its victim to a condition of helpless misery. Whatever the trouble was, it was, to St. Paul, an affliction of a most distressing kind. Though he believed that it fulfilled a purpose of God, he calls it "a messenger of Satan," and he prayed repeatedly that it might be removed from him.

The prayer was answered, not in his way but in God's way. The answer was one that has given Divine comfort to innumerable afflicted hearts. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness." The weakness was not removed; perhaps it had its work to do in keeping the apostle meek and humble. But the Divine strength and grace were given; the very weakness brought him nearer to Christ, that in

Him he might be more than conqueror. He now no longer prayed for its removal. He was content that Christ's strength should have, in his weakness, occasion to show its triumphant power.

He has finished his boast. At the end of it he feels that it has been "foolish"; that is, it is the kind of speech he would never have indulged in, if he had not been driven thereto by the attitude of the Corinthians towards him. If they had only loyally supported him, he would never have had recourse to such a line of defence.

There was every reason why they should have been loyal. He had proved himself amongst them to be every whit an apostle; certainly no less an apostle than those false teachers to whose doctrine they had been listening. The only thing he had *not* done, was to receive support from them. In words of sad irony, he asks them to forgive him for not having laid this burden on them.

He is about to pay them a visit,—the third. And when he pays it, he will still persist in the same principle of action; he will receive no support from them, but will work at his own charges. In so doing he will be true to his position as their spiritual father and will give proof of his parental love.

He knows that in spite of his disinterested motives for such conduct, his enemies have given him no credit for it. When they could not deny that he had taken no support himself, they said: "He has taken nothing himself, but he has robbed you by means of his agents." There is no answer to be given to this but a downright flat denial. St. Paul's companions had shown the same integrity in all their dealings as he had himself.

He knows too that some of them will reflect, with complacency, on the fact that throughout the Epistle, he has been, as it were, defending himself before them. He bids them labour under no delusion on this point. *They* are not his judges. God alone has the right to pass sentence on his work. But though they are not his judges, they are the objects of his love, and all his actions have been done for their welfare. And it is just because of his care for their welfare that he is distressed,

not only at their present misconduct, but at the sternness he will be compelled to show. Their misconduct he describes in a few scathing words. It consists partly of those faults that spring up naturally in a community that is broken up by faction and by party strife, partly of faults that arise from an impure and licentious mode of living. He is sadly apprehensive that he, their teacher and the founder of their church, will be humiliated by finding his converts defiled by vices such as these.

CHAPTER XIII.

And when he comes he will make vigorous and unsparing search. He will make a strict investigation; all shall be done in due order and in accordance with the principles of Jewish law. He will estimate the evidence and exercise his powers of discipline. He had warned them, on the occasion of his unhappy second visit, that he would do so, and he repeats the warning here. It is not merely to establish his own position that he will do this; but to make them feel the power of Christ who works in and through him. In behaving as they do, it is not St. Paul they are bringing to trial, but themselves, their lives and conduct. Let them scrutinize themselves, and see whether Jesus Christ indeed is in them.

If they do this fairly, he hopes they will find that, after all they are true to their Lord and will admit the same of him. He prays them to do it, that he may not have to exercise severity when he comes. He would rather use his Divinely bestowed power for their edification than for their punishment.

In the few short sentences which precede the end, he hints at their fault of party discord, and prays them both in Spirit and in outward act to be at one.

The letter closes with that brief prayer which has become one of the most cherished forms of benediction in our Christian worship. He invokes upon them all that blessing which comes most fitly from each person of the Triune Deity.

The storm and strain and passion of this thrilling letter have ended with the gentle prayer of interceding love.