

Our Contributors.

A Suggestive Salutation

Phil. 1: 1, 2.

BY REV. PROF. JORDAN D.D.

Paul, speaking of some of his converts, describes them as "living Epistles known and read of all men;" the phrase may well be used to describe the letters that came from his own pen, they carry lofty thoughts and they are alive with spiritual feeling. This is a real letter, it is not a great theological treatise like the Epistle to the Romans, or a controversial tract such as was sent to the Galatians; it is suffused with strong personal feeling; at the same time it is rich as a presentation of Christian truth and a record of Christian experience. As he poured forth these burning words, the writer never dreamed that they would play such a large part in the future life of the world; he did his work with all the enthusiasm of a fully consecrated man, and God has given to him an immortality of usefulness.

Philippi is interesting to Christian people not because it was a chief city of Macedonia and a Roman colony, not because here was fought the great battle when Octavius and Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius "the last of the republicans" but rather because it was the first place where Christianity made its appearance in Europe, so that here was decided the first contest between the simple gospel of Christ and the superstitions which ruled the common people in Greek and Roman lands. The sixteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is a wonderful record of missionary enterprise, and it is the proper companion to this Epistle. The missionaries were providentially guided in this new direction and the opening of the campaign is closely packed with those stirring incidents which are familiar to all readers of the Bible, and which make Philippi a classic spot in Christian history. It is not a matter of surprise that Paul kept up communication with a place so memorable.

Paul had often longed to see Rome and preach the gospel in the centre of the Empire, and in a strange way he was taken there; to save his life and maintain the continuity of his work he had been compelled to appeal unto Caesar. Two years of weary waiting did not crush him but brought out in clearer light his restless energy and victorious faith. Through sorrow, the bold fearless man was only made more thoughtful and tender.

Paul in prison and Nero on the throne is a striking contrast. Nero could play both the cruel tyrant and the contemptible fool; his black crimes we do not care to mention, yet he wore the purple and sat on the imperial throne while the noblest man of all that age languished in a dungeon near the palace. That contrast did not trouble Paul for he did not expect a present reward or think that sacred service could be paid for in this world's coin. It need not trouble us when we think of Nero's shameful end and everlasting disgrace or of Paul's good fight and crown of righteousness.

The large generosity and dignified freedom of the man is seen in the first words "Paul and Timothy bond slaves of Christ Jesus." There is no mock humility and no straining after supremacy. In some

cases Paul was compelled to assert his apostolic dignity but he disliked that kind of self assertion and he carefully avoided it in addressing those who had shown to him both love and loyalty. To them he can adopt a simpler tone and this allows him to join with himself the youthful Timothy. Timothy is in a sense his servant and pupil but they are both "slaves" of Christ. Paul was sensitive as to his authority when the question involved the originality and power of his message but no man cherished a keener contempt for petty jealousy. He saw clearly that each real man will take his own place and do his own work while recognising the significance of the work done by others (1 Cor. 3: 1-9). This word "slave" is often used by Paul and with him it has real meaning; it is no affectation of extreme humility; it speaks of full surrender to Jesus as Saviour, teacher and king. He resists the tyranny of tradition and the bigotry of the elders but when Jesus speaks he is ready to obey. He is a splendid example of the fact that the slave of Christ is God's free man, that intense discipleship is consistent with strong individuality. When the proud Pharisee, the prejudiced Jew was led captive by love and bound in its golden chains, he entered into a freer atmosphere and breathed a larger life.

Paul addresses the Christian Church at Philippi and then refers to the office-bearers of the congregation. This is a peculiar form of salutation found only in this place; we cannot be quite sure of the reason that led the Apostle to use it, unless it was that in the letter from the Church special prominence had been given to the bishops and deacons. Paul applies to the general body of disciples the noble name "Saints." There is something tragic in the way great words are misused and then pass out of use. This word "Saint" which did such honourable service in the apostolic times has almost ceased to be used in a living, practical way. The word is now too often used in an artificial sense, or spoken in a sarcastic tone. It does not here claim that the disciples are faultless or that they have attained their full growth in the Christian life but it indicates the calling, the hope and the destiny of the true believer. The hope of purity, the longing for perfection moved the heart of the Christian man, it was the new and high ambition that Christ had kindled in his soul. To become like Christ is the Christian's destiny, it is God's decree for those whose faith links them to the source of eternal life.

When we leave the words which speak of the deepest life and come to those which refer to ecclesiastical organization, we are in danger of being seized by a strong sectarian spirit and carried into regions of fierce controversy. At the present both historical science and Christian charity protest against such a course. Those who need and desire elaborate discussions on these matters can easily find them; they would certainly be out of place in these brief notes. Paul was living in the free formative period of the Church, he was scarcely the kind of man to place supreme value on a cast iron organization, he thought of the Church as a living body possessing elasticity of

movement and power of adaptation. It is difficult to show that the "orders" of ministry existed in the Church then exactly as now. Paul seems to use "bishop" and "elder" in substantially the same sense; in his speech to the elders at Ephesus he says: "that God has made them overseers or bishops, and when he instructs Titus to ordain elders, he immediately calls those elders bishops. The word elder (presbyter) came from the Jewish synagogue, the word bishop (Episcopos) from a Greek secular office; in the earliest days they were both applied to men who preached, ministered and administered, in later times they were distinguished and the bishop became a ruler of the clergy. The first book of Christian Church history, "the Acts of the Apostles," tells of the appointment of "deacons," but it is possible that different duties were afterwards denoted by the name. Here, however, the reference to Church officers is quite incidental. The question of organization was not prominent in the Apostle's thought; he is dwelling in a sphere where he sends this greeting of grace and peace. It is a salutation and a prayer. Paul links together in his thought, the disciples and their Lord. Paul places old words in new combinations and gives them a higher tone. "Grace" was the salutation of the energetic, cultured Greek and "peace" that of the devout, disciplined Jew. The Greek appreciated the beauty of the world and the glory of life, he wished for his friends intense active joy; the Hebrew revered the divine law and prayed to be at peace with God and man. The Christian religion had a spirituality of tone that was lacking in that of the Greeks and a clear communion with the Father to which the Jew had never attained. Jesus was to the disciple "the ideal man" for whom the noblest Greeks had hungered and the manifestation of God for which the prophets had personally prayed. It is the fashion now to prescribe "the Greek ideal of life" as a cure for narrowness and a Source of "Sweetness and light," and when that is really a counsel of breadth and charity there is no need to despise it. Neither ought we to despise the reverence and restraint symbolised by the old Hebrew discipline and its practical view that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. "Grace and peace" do not come by painful penance or continuous self culture but by accepting God's mercy and trusting His great love. The Christian life is inspired by the revelation of love and hence it is equal to the high demands of law. It is through the Cross that law and love find their highest meaning and most real reconciliation. The blessings that Nero with all his wealth could not buy and Scuenca with all his learning could not discover, Paul found through self surrender to the rejected Nazarene; losing himself he found a higher life, finding God in the lowly life of the gentlest man he came to the possession of grace and peace, of inward satisfaction and restless aspiration, depth of experience and breadth of view, strength of character and nobility of conduct, zeal for God's righteousness, and tender care for the needs of men.

Kingston.

Utilizing the Ruling Elder.

DEAR SIR:—Some years ago I wrote the Presbyterian Review on the more general and extended use of the Ruling Elder in preaching—something after the manner of