

The Old Age of Saint Paul.

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The only trustworthy sources of information of the life and works of Saint Paul are the Acts of the Apostles and the few inspired epistles which Paul wrote to the early Church. The sacred historian does not seek to heroize this noble man; personal references are incidental; and, indeed, it seems but accidental that we have any particulars of the great apostle's individual life.

In every age God has not been without some living incarnation of His infinite purpose. Men who respond to God are drawn up into higher stature than their heedless fellows. As the lofty mountain wraps its exposed shoulders in snowy mantles, and seizes from the higher altitudes the secret of life, and then permits its treasures to be opened in the spring-time by the soft sunbeams which slip aside the icy bolts, hurrying rivulet and torrent into the beautiful valleys below, so some men communicate God to mankind. Paul was a Mount Hermon in the topography of life.

We rarely think of Paul as having reached old age. He was permitted to come almost to the seventies; but not in courage, or in mentality, or in optimism, or in eloquence, or in holiness, are there any indications of infirmity. When the officer comes to inform Paul that the hour of his execution has arrived, the brave warrior lays aside his armour and hurries a line to his dear son, Timothy: "I am now ready to be offered; I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith." He falls before his foe; his zeal unflagging, his vigour unwasted, his hope undimmed; he may have come to advanced years, but to senility never; he was seventy years young!

The final years of Paul's life were spent in Rome awaiting the judgment of the authorities. In chains he established in the imperial city the Gospel which was to emancipate the world. From his imprisonment he wrote many of his epistles; phenomenal letters, profound, logical, poetical, revealing marvellous insight into the Master's mind.

There is little doubt but that Paul enjoyed a release of perhaps three years from imprisonment, during which time he returned to his former fields of la-

bour, but it is certain he was again apprehended and returned to Rome. He was not now, however, treated as an honourable state prisoner, but as a common felon, for all Christians rested under public condemnation because of the false and treacherous charge of the diabolical king. Notwithstanding wily Nero's villainy and conflagration, Paul and the early Christians sanctified their convictions with their own blood and declared undying truths which, at length, seized the scepter of the Caesars and numbered the days of the long-boasted eternal city. Error is never eternal. Paul was imprisoned, despised, slain, but not until the conquering influence of love had commenced its noiseless but always victorious assault against the supposed impregnable walls and palaces and temples of this ancient capital. The tent-maker became a builder of nations!

During Paul's old age he became fondly attached to a sincere and studious young man of Lycaonia, a Grecian Jew, who was a convert to Christianity. Between Timothy, young, pious, ambitious, and Paul, aged, wise, confident, a beautiful friendship ripened into the holiest devotion. Through Timothy, Paul organized a true apostolic succession, which includes the Chrysostoms, the Savonarolas, the Luthers, the Wesleys, the Simpsons, and the William Taylors.

Nor was the doomed prisoner left entirely alone in those last days, for grateful Onesiphorus left his home in Ephesus and searched the charred city of Rome until he found Paul chained to a soldier. Luke the faithful physician was there also, not only to prescribe for physical ailments, but to pour oil of sweetest flavour into the infirmities and loneliness and privations of the last years of his friend.

Outside the present city of Rome stands a superb basilica which is supposed to mark the site of Paul's martyrdom. No temple of worship equals this one in the exquisite finish of its columns and in the refined taste and artistic skill of the architect and sculptor. So does the peerless character of Paul stand unparalleled.

Paul and Nero! Nero, selfish, bestial, devilish; Paul, generous, holy, Christ-like. Nero, the degraded representative of a dying age; Paul, the morning star of a brilliant era. Nero quenching inordinate appetites with the innocent blood of the dying; Paul pleading with men to drink of the fountains of life eternal.