

THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

That a heresy existed in these churches need not for our present purpose be discussed. A very cursory reading of the Epistles will be sufficient to convince any one of the existence of a heresy. It will soon become quite evident to the reader that the Apostle, while giving his instruction to the Colossians, to Timothy, and Titus, is constantly guarding against some enemy of their orthodoxy and spirituality. This enemy is not a mere metaphysical or doctrinal proposition, but an actual living personality, or personalities, dangerously at work among the Christians of Crete, Ephesus and Colosse. The Apostle, conscious of the presence of these foes, deals out to them in these Epistles strong blows of argument and denunciation.

Taking the existence of a heresy in all the churches concerned as admitted, we proceed to the work of endeavoring to find out the relationship between the heresy in the Colossian church and that in the churches of the pastoral Epistles. In order to get at this in a systematical manner let us consider the subject under the divisions, 1. Form. 2. Character. 3. State of Development. 4. Possible Source.

1. Relationship of the Heresies as to Form.—The consideration of this division of the subject will require much care, as the other main divisions will be largely inference from this. Accuracy of observation and co-relation here will be of a great assistance in insuring correctness in the last three.

As the phenomena with which we have to deal is scattered throughout four different Epistles, our first step must be to classify these phenomena according to seeming resemblances. In looking over the matter to be classified, we find four main types of phenomena. These, for convenience sake, we shall call A,B,C,D.

The phenomena falling in group A are in Colossians: "In whom ye also were circumcised," II. 11. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances, etc.," II. 14. i.

"Let no man judge you in meat or drink, etc., II, 16, f.; in pastoral Epistles: "Desiring to be teachers of the law," II, 7. "Especially they of the circumcision," Tit. I, 10. "Giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men, fightings about the law," Tit. III, 9. "Commanding to abstain from meats," I, IV, 3.

The following phenomena, having certain points of resemblance differing from those in A, we put in a group B. In Colossians many statements respecting certain forms of Asceticism, such as "will worship," "humility," and "severity of the body." In pastoral Epistles, "Forbidding to marry."

Again, as we look over the field, we find another class of phenomena quite distinct from both of the above, but still having such a close resemblance to each other as to warrant us in putting them in a group by themselves. Group C contains the following: In Colossians the Apostle, while defending the supremacy of Christ, uses such terms as "mystery," "treasures of wisdom and knowledge," "deluding with persuasiveness of speech." Again he directly warns the people against "philosophy, vain deceit," "the rudiments of the world." In the pastoral Epistles there are "The oppositions of science falsely so-called," the "giving heed of fables and endless genealogies," "the doctrines of devils," "doting about questionings and profane babbling."

In the pastoral Epistles we find one phenomena, on which seems to have nothing in Colossians to which it is directly related. There was a section of the church at Ephesus, three of whose members are named, which spiritualized the resurrection, saying that it was past already. This case we put under class D.

In looking over these groups, we find in them features sufficiently distinct to warrant us in making these different classifications, and in each group the parts are closely enough connected to be put in one class. In the first division we have in both Epistles attention called to ordin-