

Our Contributors.

The Apostle Paul as a Christian Teacher.

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The Christian religion is pre-eminently a teaching religion; its real nature is not shown in a definite moral code, a particular ritual, or an abstract theological system, but in that teaching, which growing out of the life of Jesus Christ, appeals in living forms to the mind, heart and conscience of men who are seeking the truth. It is not in vain that our Lord is called the Great Teacher; he proves himself to be this in the eyes of his disciples and the history of the world. If we ask the question how is it that at the origin of Christianity a few courageous simple-minded men accomplished such tremendous results, the answer is because they were well taught. Jesus of Nazareth could speak with simple dignity and winsome power to the multitude so that "the common people heard him gladly" but after his own life of self-sacrifice his great work was what has been appropriately called "the teaching of the Twelve." The men "who had been with Jesus" were so thoroughly taught that in the strength of their God-given convictions they could face the world, and change the current of its life and history.

If we ask another equally pertinent question, how is it that so many people are at the present day carried away after foolish fads and fashions, the answer will lead us in the same direction. We have been passing through a period of great shaking and radical change, and those who are ill-furnished with intellectual and moral principles are not sure of anything. Hence many kind-hearted people are led to follow movements and believe things which imply that the human race in its long, toilsome experience has learned nothing, that all God's various forms of revelation have been in vain. This simply shows that our generation has not been well trained, and that while the "advanced men" and the "traditionalists" have fought their battles round every subject, a most important work has been neglected or only partially performed. If Christian disciples are to be strong, joyful and influential, their minds must be nourished on true teaching.

Our Lord is the supreme example; in this, as in all else, his teaching is living, concrete, full-orbed. It almost defies analysis by its well balanced symmetry and spiritual perfection. In the Apostle Paul we have not only the first great Christian missionary but also one of the noblest and most successful of Christian teachers. In one brief essay it is little that can be said as to his method and spirit, but that little may be put in a way that is suggestive.

Let us take a threefold view of Paul as a teacher. It may not be exhaustive but so far as it goes it is, we believe, both true and helpful. In doing this we shall venture to apply to the Apostle of the Gentiles words which are often used as terms of reproach. We admit that there may be reason in this, when they can be used separately, but at the same time we maintain that the reproach vanishes when they can all be applied to one man.

Paul was a moral teacher. We shall admit this if we have fathomed the meaning of one of his great sayings, namely this, "Let all things be done unto edifica-

tion." At the present time we are told that the Christian Church has lost its moral power, that it makes men religious without making them good, and that "Ethical Societies" are needed to separate ethics from religion and inspire moral enthusiasm. If "Ethical Societies" can do any good, by all means let them do it, but we have little faith in a morality built upon agnosticism, and we feel sure that if we follow the example of Jesus and his apostles we shall not allow religion to be divorced from conduct. Of Paul we may say that he gave due prominence to moral character and noble conduct, but his ethics grew out of his theology. If we notice the plan upon which his epistles are built, we see that first he presents his great message concerning the relation of the soul to God and the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, and out of these grow his conception of the new life with its loyalty to God and its faithfulness to all human duties. Paul's morality springs from the Cross; it is rooted in the central Christian verities. It is therefore positive in its nature. We do not despise the ten commandments because they are so largely negative; they are important, if elementary; they set needful limits to human lust and lawlessness. But mark the change and advance in these two utterances, "Thou shalt not steal"; "Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour working with his hands that he may give to him that needeth." What a magnificent sweep there is in Paul's demand for a positive moral life, the bringing into society through each believing soul of the life of Christ. This is a morality of principles not of small rules. In an age of casuistry, of Rabbinic hair splitting, Paul gave real moral principles which required intelligence to apply them but which uplift us just in proportion as we make a strenuous effort to live them. "Let all things be done unto edifying" does not mean simply that we are to have pleasant, profitable, devotional meetings where we can speak sweet and comforting words to each other. They suggest the truth which Longfellow has put into simple, beautiful words.

"All the architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornament of rhyme.

"For the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build."

If our young men grasped the truth that we are all character-builders working for eternity as well as time, they would have a living principle which would help them to solve many moral problems and would stimulate their spiritual growth. Many small amusements and dangerous habits would be cast aside under the influence of this Christian thought. Paul in applying this truth remembered that no man liveth to himself, and the strong man, if he is a Christian disciple, will not in all things please himself. While we are not to be in bondage to "the weaker brother" we must consider his claims with delicate tact and in a spirit of tenderness. Thus Paul's morality was individual in this, that it sprang from an inward principle of personal life, but it was social in that the individual was taught to think of himself as part of an organic whole. If the Church to-day can grasp the spirit of such teaching and face the world with

Paul's robust faith, intelligent insight and living sympathy, she will show once more that she is the true "Ethical Society."

Paul was a Rationalist. If we consider the time when it was spoken, this was also a great utterance, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Very often sceptical and irreverent men have claimed to have a monopoly of "free-thinking." Paul would have been the last to admit such a preposterous claim; he proved that a man can think freely while he is receptive towards God's revelation and loyal to Christ. It is true that many regarded the Apostle as dangerous and destructive, but they were profoundly mistaken. He was the great constructive genius of his age. He believed thoroughly in the rights of the individual reason and conscience, while no one preached more powerfully the great truth that we are members one of another. The Church could not rise to his high level, and soon after his time the Church, as a corporation, began to coerce and crush the individual life, and Church-leaders hawked after uniformity of outward life instead of unity of spirit. So there came a time when the Pauline exhortation, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," was foreign to the tone and temper of the Christian community. But the fact remains that Paul's ideal was the diversity of operations from the same spirit. He was not an "individualist" in any shallow atomistic sense, but to him the thought and conscience of the individual man were very precious. He would have men realise their highest life in and through the social order, but this through a willing self-surrender and not by an unwilling slavery. Paul respected and honoured the claims of intellect even when he poured contempt on a perverse philosophy; and though he possessed a revelation he felt called to commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. It may be necessary to reprove "pride of intellect" as well as all other forms of pride, but this may be carried to an extreme and we may create the impression that there is something essentially satanic and dangerous in intellectual activity. We may well learn from the life of Paul that honest thinking is just as pious as earnest praying, and that it is quite consistent with Christian humility to resist arrogant traditionalism and narrow dogmatism. It is important that religion should inspire noble conduct, but to do this it must satisfy intellectual needs. We must be as open and as ready to receive new light and leading as Paul was in his day and if this is "rationalism" it is rationalism of the right healthful kind which will bring the true enlightenment and emancipation.

Paul was a Mystic. He believed in the inward light and life; he could say "I live, yet not I; Christ liveth in me." He was a spiritualist in the true sense. There is a living spirit in man and therefore the capacity for communion with God, Christ in the heart, the hope of glory, the glory of harmony with God, and of realizing the true life. In our own generation we have seen a strong movement towards materialism. We have heard the leading man of science concede that there is something behind the brain, something that his science does not reach, and tell us patronisingly that if we like to call this something "soul" we can do so, but we must remember that we are talking