

even in Europe. Germany has at times been accused of indifference to the science of Comparative Religion, but that reproach, if it exists, will soon be done away. Dr. Bertholet, we are glad to

observe, is one of the principal organizers of the International Congress for the History of Religion to be held at Basel in the end of August of this year.

A Prophet of the New Israel.

A STUDY IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER.

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ONE of the most striking proofs of the devotion of the early Church to Jesus as Messiah is the fact that those who had been Jews, inheriting intense national pride, were willing to transfer the promises of Israel to Gentiles. A rabble without national, social, or moral conscience becomes aware that it is a chosen race, a holy nation. Slaves to inherited evil instincts, swept on, not unwillingly, in a current of Gentile profligacy, they exchange an irresponsible individualism for the moral obligations of a brotherhood scattered over the world, and became the new Israel, heirs of the divine covenants. The terms on which this transference was made were simply absolute devotion to Jesus Christ. He was of such transcendent worth that faith in Him obliterated all distinctions of race or station.

No Epistle of the New Testament illustrates this religious revolution better than 1 Peter. For it was written by a Jew, and its readers were Gentiles. Indeed, they were so predominantly Gentile that the stock problems caused by the two sections of early Christendom do not emerge. Their former life seems to have been on the average low level of morality in Asia Minor, with more or less drunkenness, impurity, and idolatry. Their conduct as heathen may have justified the criminal charges which were brought against them as Christians (2¹² 4^{15, 16}). Nor was this confined to such as were slaves, for there were among them many who enjoyed the rights of citizens and of regular family life. Naturally, the reserve of ethical power upon which Christians with such antecedents could draw was small, and there is no reason for surprise at the constant appeals for what we have come to regard as axiomatic morality. *Noblesse oblige* would be an impotent motto. Even the sense of brotherhood seems to have been weak.

Paul's letters to Galatia, Corinth, Rome, and Ephesus have the same type of Christian in view. Indeed, it is in the practical treatment of conduct that 1 Peter agrees most obviously with Romans and Ephesians. In matters, for example, of marriage, slavery, obedience to state authorities, and common morals, we can trace some literary connexion between these Epistles. There were, of course, common Christian life and manners created by no individual apostle. The drift from accumulated Jewish morality had for years been cast upon the inhospitable shores of heathenism, and in all the Gentile churches there was a large number of Jewish-Christians and proselytes, who, when the gospel was first preached, spontaneously accepted Christianity as the ideal for which they had been longing. The new spirit carried on its genial current much fruit of a brighter world, but like the Gulf Stream creating a new spring, it also forced into blossom the hardy stranded seeds of Jewish life. It is, however, quite probable that under the direction of Paul a normal standard of Christian conduct may have been worked out for the Gentiles. In Asia Minor, at least, his estimates on practical issues would be precedents. The First Epistle of Peter, directed to churches within similar geographical limits to the Pauline missions, faces almost the same ethical situation as Paul's, and handles it in the same way, though there was probably a common Christian ideal behind them both. By the time of the Apocalypse new factors have come in.

The churches were suffering for their faith. Whatever the persecution was it was universal (5⁹). The same sufferings were endured by the brotherhood throughout the world, and were incidental to the confession of Christianity (4¹⁶). Though Rome has grown hostile, and is known to the

brotherhood as Babylon, it is quite improbable that there are in this letter signs of an official persecution, for by obedience to emperor and governors the Christian may hope to silence the prejudice of enemies, who are unable to comprehend the new life. There seems to have been a systematic campaign of slander, prompted in many cases by the hatred of former comrades, to whose excess the conversion of their old friends was a constant rebuke (4⁴⁻⁵). In other instances it was excited, we may suppose, by haughty bearing on the part of Christians, who used a freedom superior to conventional restrictions, and who may have exercised a self-constituted censorship on the morals of their neighbours, or have become too inquisitive of their affairs (2¹⁶ 3¹³ 4¹⁵). Doubtless many suffered death on false charges, the figure of the lion ravening for his prey being suitable for a persecution that was often fatal, though the affliction of the Christian in general was an anxiety which he was to cast upon God (5⁷). Slaves seem merely to have suffered the common lot of slavery under perverse masters, aggravated by their religious convictions. The one remedy is to continue in well-doing, and to commit their lives to a faithful Creator.

It was to this distressed company acquainted with the new experience of suffering for conscience' sake, with no glorious ancestry of moral heroes like those of Hebrews 11 to inspire them in the evil day, to whom this prophet sends his message of hope, his appeal for obedience, and his interpretation of their source of power. A prophet was needed for such an hour. The brotherhood might lose their faith at a moment when calmness and sobriety were essential to salvation. They must be alert. The established moralities must be maintained. By a purer life they must exhibit the virtues of God to the heathen world in the face of severe opposition.

A melodious note of exultation, not so defiant as in the Apocalypse, rings through the Epistle. There has been a great deliverance, partly enjoyed in the present, but on the eve of full accomplishment. The revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ is not far distant. Some tremendous facts lie behind this conviction, for the hoped-for salvation is no new thing, but is so important that all history has been converging upon it (1¹⁰⁻¹²). These facts constitute the Gospel, which is the Word of the living God. There has ever been but one Word of

God, whether in old Israel or in the new (1²³⁻²⁵), and as it had come to the prophet in days past, so the gospel was preached to these Gentiles as a living power. This gospel is the Word of Truth instinct with life. The Hebrews of the prophetic age had a conception of the living or spoken word which was not unlike that of the Greeks; but the Jewish, or especially the Pharisaic, view had dominated religion by its worship of the written letter. Precisely as does the author of Hebrews, Peter speaks of the eternal and abiding Word of God. It goes down into men's hearts, making them face spiritual issues (He 4¹²⁻¹³). This gospel is a body of living truth quickened by some personal quality that enabled it to adjust itself to its new environment. It was truth just because it could fit itself into the situation of each individual. The truths of the gospel were practical truths, but they were also intellectual convictions, facts demanding obedience which may be summarized as 'the faith.' Faith on one side is obedience to moral convictions; it consists of spiritual truths towards which one may not assume an attitude of reserve (1²² 5⁹⁻¹²). The gospel was proving itself to be the Word of God by the way in which it met the needs of the heathen world. Doubtless its success was an immense confirmatory evidence of its universal truth to the first missionaries. Their words took wings and fled fast and far, and found lodgment in strange hearts. To make the Peter who preached to the Samaritans and to Cornelius the rigid standard whereby to judge all his after-life, is to overlook the fact that a man learns vastly by preaching his gospel. He does not know its scope and depth till he has tested it in new worlds. And we cannot doubt that the glad response of the Gentiles disclosed to Peter something more of its range as the abiding and living Word of God, which is the Truth.

It is not difficult to gather from this letter some of the pregnant facts, primary or confirmatory, which constituted the living and abiding Word of God preached to them with regenerating power.

1. There was the primary fact of the life and death of Jesus Christ. He has become for these Gentiles their pattern and their Redeemer. It is evident from this Epistle that the life and teachings of the Lord were essential elements in the gospel of Peter. In this respect he differs from Paul, whose letters lay more stress on the risen Christ. The favourite term for his Master

is 'the Christ' or 'Christ.' Unlike the author of Hebrews, he does not say 'Jesus'; unlike Paul, he does not use 'Christ Jesus.' Three times the favourite Pauline phrase, 'in Christ,' occurs, but only twice in the Pauline sense, and then in such a way as to suggest that it was a stereotyped Christian expression (3¹⁶ 5¹⁰).

(a) *Reminiscences of the teaching of Jesus Christ.*—He is pre-eminently the Messiah, and as such is to be obeyed. They must follow in His steps. The great command of Jesus to renounce everything in order to follow Him, even to taking up the cross, might be the keynote of this Epistle. As Jesus pronounced blessings on those who are reproached or persecuted for His sake, so does Peter. Echoes of the words of Jesus, 'Fear not those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul,' may be heard in 1 P 3¹³⁻¹⁶ 5⁶⁻⁹; and when the apostle bids them cast all their anxious care upon God and entrust themselves in well-doing unto a faithful Creator, we catch memories of the Sermon on the Mount; as again its words, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven,' seem to run like an undertone through 1 P 2¹² 4¹⁶. Readiness to give an answer concerning their Christian hope is not unlike the state in which Christ exhorts His disciples to be in their day of trial (Mt 10¹⁹). As in the Parable of the Sower, the good seed is sown in the heart; and Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of the new birth, as Peter does of having been begotten again. There is no trace of the Pauline doctrine of sonship through adoption.

No book outside the Gospels touches more finely than 1 Peter on the duties of the Christian brotherhood: none has caught more of the Master's Spirit, who was so earnest that the disciples should fulfil the new law of love one to another. Christianity is not thought of as an organized Church, though apparently in 5¹ the elders are officials. It is a band of brothers among whom, as Jesus taught, service and humility give rank. The warnings against 'discontent with their office, greed and ambition' (5² 3), together with the pastoral figure employed, are strongly suggestive of the warning of Jesus to His disciples not to follow the ways of the world's lords, nor to allow themselves such honours as the Pharisees accepted; and especially of the parting command of Jesus to Peter to feed His sheep. In regard to their con-

duct under worldly governments the incident of the tribute-money may have been the source of Peter's advice (2¹³ 14).

The certainty of Christ's return to reveal His glory and to judge the world was, of course, a Christian commonplace, as also the warning to watchfulness, but it is peculiarly emphatic in this Epistle, the cause perhaps being Peter's vivid memories of Christ's words. The rejection of Jesus by His people, bringing with it their own rejection, the rise of a new Israel and a new Temple, was a frequent theme of the Master's discourse, but the disciples learned it reluctantly with hard experience. However, by the time that this letter was written the apostle has thoroughly assimilated His Lord's teaching (2⁶⁻¹⁰).

(b) *The life and death of Christ.*—The memories of far-off days cluster round a Person of marvellous character. He was the Righteous One. He had perfect trust in His Father; when reviled He reviled not again, nor threatened under suffering. The Christ whom he knew was the Suffering Servant. The memory of the sinless Sufferer constantly rises to the surface of his thought. Such agony completing such a spotless life could be nothing but the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy of the Servant of the Lord. That perfect endurance becomes the perfect ideal for every Christian under trial; but it is more. Steeped in prophetic thought, a Hebrew whose nation's history is typical, he believes that the new Israel is also delivered from the bondage of its Egypt by the death of its paschal lamb. By His blood a new covenant has been ratified. By His bruise we are healed. There are undoubted similarities in this view of Christ's death both to the conceptions of Paul and of Hebrews, but the prophetic ideas rule.

We may do well to estimate the impression produced by Jesus Christ upon the mind of Peter. He claims to have seen Jesus in the flesh, to have been an eyewitness of His sufferings—the reproaches, the buffetings, the marring. Yet he now assigns to Him the attributes of Jehovah, places Him at the right hand of God, with whom also He existed before the world (1²⁰). He finds Him moving in the mind of the prophets (1¹¹); declares that His death only set Him free for a wider mission (3¹⁸); makes Him the Sovereign of His heart (3¹⁵), and is convinced that He will return in glory. That a man who knew Jesus on earth could invest Him with such majesty is a wonderful fact.

But stranger still, the gospel preached to these Gentiles had awakened in them a passionate love to Jesus as a living Person whom they had never seen. How deep must have been the debt they owed Him as their Redeemer to call forth such affection. He is also a living Person, to whom they come in order to form with Him in their brotherhood a new Temple, wherein sacrifices of the best they have to give are offered and accepted by God for His sake. His sacrifice removes for ever the ritual of an official priesthood, and the brethren become priests in the service of a King. Whence issued the dynamic of their faith in this Person?

2. It came, in part at least, from another tremendous fact, to which the first disciples testified as of the essence of the gospel—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. By this fact a new belief in God has been made possible (1²¹). It also gave validity to the assurance they received in Baptism of a good conscience (3²¹). A loyal trust in God and a living hope in His power have been created in Gentile hearts. Their future has become real and assured; for the Resurrection brought with it the conviction of Christ's Return. Glimpses of the coming glory of Christ had been vouchsafed to Peter, and his testimony had so impressed the common Christian mind that a living hope had sprung forth. The believer is heir to an inheritance free from ravage, pollution, or decay.

3. There was also a confirmatory fact in the experience of these Gentiles, which enabled them to share the conviction of early Christendom, that Jesus Christ was risen, and had become the Lord on whom they lavished their devotion. This was the presence of the Holy Spirit. They enjoy even here a foretaste of divine glory that defies expression. The Spirit was sent to them from heaven, consecrating them as the new Israel, and fulfilling in them the promise of the Messianic age (1^{2.12}). In their ability to endure suffering, also, they feel that they have divine grace coming from the Spirit of God, which had been foretold by the prophets as one of the endowments of Messiah (4¹⁴, cf. Is 11²).

It is very evident that Peter regards Christ from quite an original point of view. For Paul, Christ was the end of the Law. In this Epistle there is no mention of the Law. Nor is there any formal likeness to the favourite Pauline thought of the mystical union of the believer with Christ, com-

bined with that of His Spirit reproducing in each the graces of the divine character. For Peter, Christ is of course a living Person; but He is thought of chiefly as the exalted Messiah, who has made divine salvation and grace effective. On the other hand, there is much similarity to Hebrews, whose author looks to Jesus as the Captain and Perfecter of faith, the great Intercessor introducing His brethren to God. Relatively, as compared with the Pauline Epistles, the name of God occurs oftener in 1 Peter than that of Christ. He has introduced the believer to God, in whose presence he henceforth abides. Thus two fundamental religious ideas lie side by side in this Epistle. Christ is alive; believers come to Him; He is sanctified in their hearts, though He will be only fully revealed at the last day. But it is under the shadow of the Almighty, in the secret place of the Most High, that the Christian dwelleth. Peter speaks like an Old Testament prophet who has drunk deeply of the teaching of Jesus. God is the faithful Creator, but also the Holy Father of the new Israel. His name is to be hallowed. His strong hand guides every event (1⁵ 4¹⁹ 5⁶), and on Him His children should cast every care. Out of His infinite mercy He forgives sins. He is the Shepherd of lost sheep. His presence is over every soul. On Him faith and hope are fixed. He is the Judge who will judge righteously. Holiness is as essential to the God of Peter as to the Jehovah of Isaiah. These words of Isaiah might be used by Peter: 'Jehovah your Holy One, the Creator of Israel your King. . . Jehovah, God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.'

The prophetic conception of the Day of the Lord received reinforcement from the teaching of Jesus, and is prominent in this Epistle; but, like an Israelite of old, Peter finds the divine retribution now at work in the world, as when he completes his threat, 'It is time for judgment to begin at the house of God,' with words taken from the verse, 'Behold even the righteous shall be recompensed on the earth: how much more the wicked and the sinner.' His teaching as to the purpose of trial also (1⁷) might well contain reminiscences of these words, 'Who may abide the coming of the Lord of hosts, for He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. . . I will try them as gold is tried: they shall call upon my name and I will hear them: I will

say, It is my people : and they shall say, The Lord is my God.'

Like the writer of Hebrews, Peter believes that the people of God have always been one. So the experiences of Israel in Canaan are paralleled with those of the new Israel, who as pilgrims and strangers on earth press forward to their heavenly inheritance. Faith is, as in Hebrews, the strong conviction of the reality of that invisible realm, and trust in God as the one who makes their hope valid. Such faith and hope in the grace that is coming to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ enable them to endure present sufferings. Meantime they must obey. This is the world of Hebrews rather than of Paul.

There is, however, one remarkable omission from the old prophetic ideal. I refer to the kingdom of God. The prophets counted the Law, whether in code or ritual, as secondary, and it need not occasion surprise that Peter has little to say of the Pharisaic or the ceremonial conceptions of religion. But the kingdom of God was for the prophet the final issue. Probably this omission is due to the fact that the promiscuous throng of Gentiles, many of them slaves, to whom Peter is writing, would associate no worthy ideas with a term which signified to them oppression rather than freedom. National and patriotic sense was dead in these variously assorted provincials. All the blessings they knew had come to them first in a fellowship of brethren, in which a new love had given them a new life. In a hostile world they had found a home where they had learned to call God Father. This was to them a higher conception than King. Nor would any sacred or holy memories gather round temple or altar, seeing that their worship had been either the imperial cultus or abominable idolatries. The Christian brotherhood becomes the Christian Temple. Curiously enough believers are not called 'saints,' as in Paul and in Hebrews, though holiness is the essential quality in their character. Like the Israelite, Peter thinks of the brethren collectively as a 'holy nation,' a 'holy

priesthood'—an entity compacted not by organization but by 'true grace,' a living temple held together by one Person.

The death of the Suffering Messiah has not only ransomed the new Israel, but becomes within it the possibility of a new life of righteousness. His resurrection brings new hope. Christ Himself is the ideal. Love is the law of the brotherhood. Because of the Christian facts moral enthusiasm awakens to more earnest endeavour. It puts forth strenuous effort to cut through the tough overgrowth of old heathen customs, so that the light and warmth of grace may cause the seed of the gospel to blossom into the virtues of God, turning a wilderness into an unfading inheritance. No Epistle of the New Testament glows with a purer moral fervour. Whatever opinion may be held as to other books, there is not in 1 Peter the slightest trace of the deteriorated conception of Christianity as a new Law, a bundle of precepts and doctrines—that persistent idea which can only be dissipated by faith at a white heat, and which encrusted its surface after the cooling draughts of worldliness had played upon it for some generations. Christianity is still a living power. While Peter does recognize that a normal outward conduct is approved by the conscience of his readers, his purpose is to set forth the true grace of God (5¹²). He grounds precept in religious motive. And withal from an irreversible conviction of the truth of his gospel. It is not for Peter to theorize, but to obey with a loyal soul. His steadfast hope does not kindle a glorious imagination like John's, but it vitalizes his message of comfort to those in suffering, of encouragement to the hopeless. To love the Lord with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind is for him the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it—to love thy neighbour as thyself. Life is obedience to a holy Father. Peter speaks gently, as a shepherd to his flock, but in the old presbyter there slumbers prophetic fire ready to leap forth and consume should sin desecrate the house of God.