THE HISTORICAL CHRIST OF ST. PAUL.

V. Summary.

We have now completed our survey of this momentous subject, though we are still far from having exhausted it. In looking back over our work, we are ourselves conscious of many points which have been omitted or ignored, and are fully persuaded that it will one day be carried to a more satisfactory close by other and abler hands than ours. Our aim has been simply to gather together as many of the Pauline statements as appeared to bear, directly or indirectly, on the historical life of the Christian Founder. In pursuing this aim, we have tried to select typical or representative instances, to choose only such facts as would present different features of the portrait; we have avoided all statements which simply repeated traits of character already gained, and have endeavoured to make each new section exhibit some new trait. On another plan, it would have been easy to have added enormously to the passages we have cited, without, however, in any degree heightening the effect of the portrait it has been our aim to delineate. It is to the consideration of this effect that our labours have now brought us. The analytic portion of our study being ended, the synthesis begins. We have examined the various statements of the Apostle on the historical life of the Christian Founder; but we have examined them without order or arrangement, taking them simply in the sequence in which they occur. It now becomes our duty to reduce them to order, in other words, to blend the several features into a single portrait. We must so group together the facts which St. Paul records that we may see the Founder of our Faith as the Apostle saw Him—a living and life-giving personality. And, as we do so, we must inquire whether the Christ of St. Paul is also the Christ depicted by the Evangelists.

Let our readers bear in mind, then, the portrait of Christ presented in our Gospel narratives, while we gather into one the scattered features of the Pauline Christ; and, as they look on this picture and on that, let them determine for themselves whether the Christ of St. Paul is also the Christ of the Gospels.

Almost contemporaneously with the birth of St. Paul, and therefore in all probability during the reign of Augustus at Rome and of Herod the Great in Judea, there was born, in Judea, the man who was destined to be the Founder of the Christian Church. His birth was not wholly unexpected. It came "in the fulness of the time;" a long historical development had prepared the way for it; and it therefore found men who were "waiting for the Consolation of Israel." In the days of St. Paul it was currently believed that this Advent comprised a twofold birth. It was held that part of his nature came from above, while the other part descended from a human lineage. Yet his "divine part" did not come down on Him as a sudden emanation; like his human nature, it submitted to the limitations of birth and growth. That human nature sprang from a royal stock; He was a lineal descendant of the kings of Israel, "the son of David according to the flesh." But He came into the world at a time when the glory had departed from the house of David; his outward conditions were poor and humble. The humility of obedience was his, no less than the humility of poverty. In all things He became like unto his brethren, submitting or being made subject to all the ordinances of the Jewish law. He was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, and forty days after was presented in the temple. He was educated according to the precepts of the Law, and developed in the two directions aimed at by those precepts—the favour of God and the favour of man. At twelve or thirteen years of age He must

have been called to pass through the probation which awaited every Jewish lad of his years; He must have begun to take on Himself the vows and responsibilities which others had hitherto taken for Him, and to experience that self-questioning which such an experience involves. From the statement that He was "made under the Law," we may infer, with some degree of probability, that He entered on his public work at about the age of thirty. The moment He has entered upon it, we find Him enlisting and retaining the love of his contemporaries. The impression he produces is unique. Though He is in the poorest conditions, He is felt to be greater than the greatest. He gives the impression of having voluntarily surrounded *Himself* with these humble conditions; originally rich, He has deigned to become poor. And this impression of wealth and greatness is created, at least in the first instance, not by what He does, but by what He is. That which first arrests attention is a *moral* miracle—the spectacle of a sinless life. By a nation which held sinlessness to belong to the Creator alone, and to be impossible to the creature, this man is recognized as an exception to the law of humanity, as One who "knew no sin." Yet, strange to say, we are immediately confronted by another, and at first sight, contradictory side of his nature. This sinless soul is seen to be in mysterious contact with sin, a contact so close that St. Paul describes it in the bold phrase, He "was made sin." His absolute purity touches the absolute impurity of our fallen nature; and, in some inconceivable way, takes it up into itself. His stainless spirit comes into contiguity, and therefore into conflict, with that force of moral corruption which is the antithesis of his own being, and He is "tempted" even as we are.

This was the moral impression left by the Christian Founder on the eyewitnesses of his life and mission. What was his own conception of Himself and of his mission?

St. Paul's answer is lucid and direct. He tells us that He was penetrated with the conviction that He had a work to do, and that this work was nothing more nor less than the salvation of mankind. He proposed to save them by a life and death of sacrifice. In the execution of that task He was conscious of two emotions, each of which seems to exclude the other,—a sense of obligation, and a sense of joy. On the one hand, He felt that He was surrendering Himself to a law above that of his own will; on the other hand, He felt that, in obeying this law, He was satisfying his own deepest desire—the desire to express his love; no man was taking his life from Him, He had Himself the power to lay it down. Love was the motive of his mission, and yet his mission itself was sacrifice. The very essence of his historic life is self-denial. He restrained the powers that were in Him. He was able both to bear injury and to refrain from it, to exhibit both the meekness of passive endurance and the gentleness of calm action; He did not strive nor cry.

His converts were drawn, for the most part, from the lower ranks. They consisted, with one or two exceptions, of the poor, the humble, and the unknown; "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, were called." Among these converts there were twelve whom He singled out to be the pillars of the primitive Church. They were called Apostles. The names of three of them have come down to us,—Peter, James, and John. After his death these three constituted an Apostolate within the Apostolate. Of this inner circle Peter was the prominent figure. As he appears in the Pauline Gospel he is a strong bold man, who is nevertheless subject to moments of weakness and vacillation; a man who might very well be conscious, at one instant, of the profoundest and most sincere devotion to his Master, and yet, at another instant, prove utterly disloyal to Him.

These were the men whom the Christian Founder set Himself to teach and train for his service. And when we inquire into the method and matter of his instruction, we are impressed with the fact that He had a twofold method —a method which may be called mystical, and a method which was eminently practical; and that these two methods, so far from being adverse to each other, were really one. He insisted on a personal union between Himself and his followers, and declared that all their power must be derived from the impartation of his essential life: to this extent He was a mystic. Yet this power, so mystically derived, was an eminently practical power, and conveyed the ability to work in the duty and the drudgery of the common day. He had not come to destroy the practical precepts of the law of Moses, but to fulfil them, and to get them fulfilled. He professed to help the Law to accomplish its mission by giving it a higher strength. He claimed to fulfil by transcending it, by spiritualizing it, by reducing all its precepts to the single precept of love.

His attitude toward the Messianic kingdom resembled his attitude to the Law. He professed to be Himself the Messiah, and to be engaged in founding his kingdom. Yet in his hands the Kingdom, like the Law, was spiritualized. He declared that it was not to come with observation, but to have the force of its sceptre in righteousness and peace and joy; and He held that its limits would in no sense be abridged though its members should pay tribute to the Cæsars of this world. He taught men to take no thought for the things of the morrow, to bless their persecutors, to do good to those who injured them, to forgive their enemies, to let their light shine before men, or, as St. Paul puts it, to provide things honest in the sight of all men. And—witness the scene at the Last Supper—He had the power of bringing these precepts home by that symbolic or parabolic style of teaching which is even now so attractive to the

multitude. To enable men to keep these precepts, He promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit was nothing less than the Spirit of God; yet this Man claimed not only to possess but to impart it. He promised his followers that this Spirit should come upon them in the form of certain gifts, or gracious mental and moral endowments, which should multiply by use. The Spirit was to fill many offices, discharge many functions. It was to guide men into all truth by revealing the deep things of God. It was to confer power of utterance, so that the unlettered peasant might speak without forethought. It was to be the advocate and intercessor for the souls of men. It was to breathe peace and joy over the troubled heart. It was to convict the world of sin by the revelation of its own purity. But what is most of all to be noticed is the power it was to exert in identifying the life of the Master with the lives of his disciples. It was to constitute a bond of vital union between them and Him like that which unites the head to the members in a human body. Their interests were to become reciprocal, their sacrifices common, their hopes identical; so vital was to be the union between them that the slightest injury inflicted on the meanest member of his spiritual body was declared to be an injury done to *Him*.

It is not surprising that on men who had thus become one with Him, and therefore one with each other, the Christian Founder should have urged the duty of being of one heart and mind, and of dwelling together in peace and unity, since it was but fitting that those who had been joined by one Spirit to Him should manifest this inward fellowship in their lives. Yet there is another feature of the picture which must not be overlooked. He who identified Himself with his followers, nevertheless claimed the right of empire over them. He spoke to them with an authority no other "master" had ever assumed. His teaching was prefaced

with the words, "Verily, verily," and its substance rang in tune with the preface. It was categorical, unqualified, and, above all, positive. It replaced the "Thou shalt not" of old time by "Thou shalt." His personal claims were of the boldest. He professed to be the Judge of the whole world. He promised his followers that they should sit down with Him on thrones, sharing his seat of judgment and of empire. He sent them out to disciple all nations, and bade them baptize in his Name; and it was by his authority that they coupled that Name with the name of the Father and of the Holy Ghost. He not only wrought miracles, but gave his disciples power to work them. The condition He required for the working of a miracle was faith. To faith He attributed a dynamical power by which it could remove mountains. He possessed, and conferred, the gift of healing diseases. He could discern evil spirits, and cast them out. Above all, as we learn from the opening chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, there was in Him that seed of resurrection which implied an absolute triumph over the power of death.

But, although He shared these supernatural powers with his disciples, it was not on these powers that He wished them to dwell. It was not his will that they should be withdrawn from the light of common day, or that they should shrink from the natural relations and pursuits of the world around them. Hence He insisted on the permanence and inviolable sanctity of the marriage tie. But He had a deeper objection than this to the pride of supernatural endowments. Such a pride was alien to the very spirit of his religion. The spirit He wished to cultivate in his disciples was his own spirit of self-sacrifice. He demanded that they should die to the old life, and be born again into the new; and He evidently meant to express by that figure the putting away of all self-consciousness and the death of all pride. Nor did He wish this spirit of humility to be

exhibited only toward Himself and in the more sacred and transcendent aspects of the new life; He commanded them to carry it out into all their relations and intercourse with their fellow-men. The essential feature of his Gospel was the law of love. He taught in his precepts and enforced by his example the duty of bearing one another's burdens. The burden which He specially wished each man to bear was the moral weakness of his brother, even as He bore the "weakness" of us all. He declared that if any brother fell from the path of rectitude, fell so manifestly as to be actually detected in the fault, it was the province of the good man to restore him. He held that the difference between the spiritual and the unspiritual consisted mainly in the presence or absence of this divine charity. He was Himself the great Burden-bearer. St. Paul implies that He was a Man of Sorrows, and that he himself had become the heir to his sorrows: in the sorrows of the Apostle, therefore, we may find a miniature of those of the Master. In both cases the secret of this divine sorrow was grief for fallen humanity, the loneliness of being debarred from a pure communion with human souls, and the passionate yearning to kindle in these souls a spark of the Divine purity. It was the sorrow which a parent feels in the fall of a child; it was more than pity; it was Love's appropriation of the guilt and misery of its object.

We have said that the Christ of St. Paul was conscious of a divine mission. He felt that He had come into the world with a work to do, and this work nothing less than the salvation of mankind. He was to establish the true Messianic Kingdom, whose foundations should endure for ever; but He was to establish it by a method the very reverse of that anticipated by the Jewish fathers. They had looked for the shedding of the blood of their enemies; He looked to the shedding of his own. He was to conquer by suffering; He was to save life by giving up life; He was

to make rich by becoming poor; He was to give strength through his own weakness. From the beginning He was perfectly conscious of the bitter end; it did not take Him by surprise: He voluntarily went forth to meet it. The hour of death was the hour toward which his life consciously moved. At length He saw this hour to be near. He felt that the time was at hand when He must leave his own; and, before He left them, He desired to meet with them once more. The meeting took place, and bore the character of a love-feast: it was his last supper with his disciples. As He sat with them his words and acts were very marked, very memorable. True to his parabolic style to the end, He predicted his approaching death, and that it would be a death of violence, by distributing to them fragments of the broken bread and draughts of the outpoured wine which He had taken as symbols of his own body and blood. Yet, in his consciousness of impending death, there was not a shade of fear; never were his claims to greatness so strongly announced as in the moments which preceded the Agony and the Cross. He bade his followers keep this ordinance in remembrance of Him, and assured them that the shedding of his blood, which might seem to be the proof of his failure, was in very deed the proof of his triumph. He declared that in this solemn hour He had altered the old relation between the natural and the supernatural, and had established a new covenant between God and man; that his death was to be the birth of a new creation, a regenerated world. Above all, in declaring his blood to be the seal of a new covenant, He laid claim, in the strongest terms, to a holiness without stain, and proclaimed that there was no longer room for any more sacrifice for sin, since the sacrifice of his own immaculate life had once for all taken away the sin of the world. In that claim to absolute sinlessness made by his own lips, and made before men who conceded sinlessness to God alone, He not only asserted his super-

natural power, but also his essential oneness with the Divine Life.

But while the Christian Founder was taking this solemn leave of his disciples, there was a traitor in the camp. He was betrayed into the hands of his enemies on the very night on which He bade them farewell. Who then were the enemies of Christ? How should a life so pure have provoked enmity? St. Paul tells us whence that enmity sprang. It sprang, he says, from a political misconception of the mission of Jesus. He had always professed to be the Founder of a new and permanent kingdom; but He had always declared that his kingdom was not of this world. Nevertheless it was just at this point that his aim was misconceived. The established governments of the day, or, as St. Paul calls them, "the princes of this world," were alarmed at the proclamation of a kingdom which should rule all other kingdoms. They did not see that it was to rule them by serving them. They were afraid of the new Gospel, and treated its herald as an adversary.

But though He was betrayed into the hands of his enemies, the life of the Christian Founder was not clandestinely stolen from him. It was publicly sacrificed, St. Paul tells us; not taken away in a popular tumult, nor filched from Him by a secret execution. He was tried under the form of a State prosecution, and condemned as a political revolutionary. The death to which He was adjudged was that which was reserved for the meanest slave—crucifixion. It was a kind of death admirably fitted to quench any poetical fictions that might have gathered round his name; and doubtless it would have quenched all faith in his claims if those claims had rested on no historical basis. Death, in all forms, was abhorrent to the Jew, as being the mark of an offended God; and St. Paul tells us that to hang upon a tree was deemed the most accursed of all its forms. By reserving the death of the cross for slaves, the Gentile

shewed that he too held it to be the most dishonourable form of death. In the sacrifice of the Son of Man, therefore, there was everything to repel the expectations and hopes of his followers, and to force them to the conclusion that their vision of his glory had been at best a mockery and a dream.

All at once, however, and at the very moment when it seemed for ever extinguished, the Faith of Christ rose from its ashes and spread itself through the world. That, indeed, is a fact of secular history which has never been denied. And when we ask for the secret of this strange recovery of power, St. Paul tells us that, on the third day after his burial, He who had died upon the cross rose from a grave which could no longer hold Him. On that very day there must have been some witnesses of his resurrection. But of these St. Paul says nothing. He simply records the fact as one perfectly well-known throughout the Christian community, and limits his narrative of testimonies to the subsequent appearances of the Master. These appearances were six in number. He first appeared to the Apostle whose very name indicates a strength and vigour of character which qualified him to be the guide and support of the infant Church—Peter, the Rock. Next, He manifested Himself to the disciples in their corporate capacity, probably when they were assembled for worship; though it is possible to gather from St. Paul's words that, on this occasion, some of them were not present. He appeared, for the third time, to a still larger company, numbering at least five hundred souls, and therefore including not merely the Apostolic band, but many of those who, although standing in the outer courts of the Tabernacle, had recognized the Pastor's voice and listened to Him gladly. Then He shewed Himself to a man who had not heretofore occupied a prominent place among his followers, but whose subsequent prominence in the

Christian Church requires, in order to account for it, some such manifestation as St. Paul records. He is simply spoken of as James, without any further designation or description; and whether or not he be the Apostolic son of Alphæus is a question still much in debate. Be that as it may, he was, in St. Paul's days, a pillar of the Church; and this fact alone strongly confirms the assertion that he was held to be a witness to the Resurrection. Once more the Lord revealed Himself to the Apostolic Company as they were assembled for worship; and this time we are told by St. Paul that none of them were absent. From the opening Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans we learn that the effect of these manifestations was to impress the minds of his followers with a deeper sense of his authority; He was thus "determined to be the Son of God *with power;*" "all power was given unto Him in heaven and on earth." From a subsequent Chapter of the same Epistle (x. 6) we learn quite incidentally that, after these appearances, his visible presence was suddenly withdrawn from his disciples, and that He ascended into heaven. Yet, after his ascension, He revealed Himself once more; and this time to a man whose prepossessions were all against Him, and who, at that very moment, was engaged in persecuting his Church: "Last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." This is the Apostle who testified these things, and who wrote these things. The Christ depicted in the Pauline Epistles is depicted by the man who professes to have been turned from a persecutor into a servant of the Christian Founder by a vision of his risen glory.

In thus enumerating the features of the Christ of St. Paul, we have carefully abstained from any attempt at embellishment. We have endeavoured to import nothing into the portrait which is not already there. We have

refrained even from supplying the gaps in the narrative by such probable links of association as would serve to explain the connection of its several incidents. In this respect our method is the very reverse of that adopted by negative critics. The Christ of Renan is a creation of modern Paris; the Christ of Schenkel a creation of modern Berlin. The former is a fair Galilean moulded, by a quick sense of the beautiful, into an æsthetic consciousness of God within him; the latter is a German rationalist struggling against the orthodox bigots of his day. It has been our endeavour to avoid the tendency toward creating a Christ out of such modern atmospheres. We have sought to recover the Christ of the first Christian atmosphere, and to present his portrait without adventitious colouring. We have reproduced an actual portrait drawn within the lifetime of the Christian Founder's contemporaries, and we have asked the reader to compare its lineaments with those of the Gospel portrait which he holds in his hands.

The result of the comparison cannot be doubtful. The two are one. The Christ of St. Paul is substantially the Christ reverenced by Christendom for eighteen hundred years; and therefore this Christ of Christendom cannot be accounted for on any possible modification of the mythical theory. Men may, if they will, assign our Gospels to the first half of the second century; such an hypothesis can only affect the date of their composition, and belongs simply to the province of literary criticism. In the light of St. Paul's Epistles the facts recorded in these Gospels are proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, not only to belong to the first Christian century, but to be the product of the first Christian age, and the objects of implicit belief with the first Christian converts. The questions, therefore, of the genuineness, the authenticity, and the date of our canonical Gospels no longer stand in the foreground; the citadel can be saved apart from them.

The antiquity of these sacred writings is something; but the antiquity of the facts is everything: for it is the facts after all that constitute the real Gospel of Christ. With the historic Christ of St. Paul before us, we can afford to view, without alarm or regret, the discredit thrown upon much of that Patristic literature which our fathers deemed genuine testimony. What would the testimony of all the Apostolic Fathers united be worth in comparison with the fulness of this Pauline Gospel? If all the Scripture references once attributed to a Barnabas, a Hermas, an Ignatius, were proved to be valid still, they would contribute the veriest fragment to our conception of the Founder of our Faith as compared with the Christ depicted by St. Paul.

Let us suppose that these Four Epistles had come down to us, not as portions of the Sacred Volume, but as the works of a Classical writer, or of a Jewish scribe, who had been touched by the power and grace of Christ. In that case we should have held their evidence to be indisputable and overwhelming. Their semi-secular origin would have been assumed to lend weight to their Christian testimony. A corroborative passage of Tacitus, or a confirmatory quotation from Josephus, carries more conviction than the testimony of the Sacred Writers themselves to the truth of their own story. The apologetic value of the Epistles of St. Paul is underrated from the simple fact that they are bound up within the boards of the Bible. Yet the fallacy of this mode of thinking was pointed out by Dr. Chalmers more than fifty years ago. No part of his work on Christian Evidences is, to our mind, so suggestive and so powerful as that which deals with this particular topic. He reminds us that these Sacred Writers all belonged, at one period of their lives, to the hostile ranks. They were secular before they were sacred, disbelievers before they were believers. Their very conversion to Christianity is a Jewish or a heathen testimony to its

truth; and their writings come from a source as impartial as if they flowed from the pen of a Josephus or a Tacitus. St. Paul himself unites, in his Epistles, the testimony both of a Gentile and of a Jew. Up to the prime of manhood he was an adversary of the Christian Faith, and thought that in persecuting that Faith he was doing God good service. But though he was animated by a desire to revive the Jewish theocracy and restore the glory of his fathers, there is evidence to shew that he had caught somewhat of the Classical as well as of the Theocratic spirit, and blended the tendency of the Gentile with the prepossessions of the Jew. Suddenly he passed over into the ranks of his adversaries, and began to preach the Faith which he had striven to destroy. No explanation of the change has ever been suggested beyond his own declaration, that it pleased God to reveal Christ in him. His conversion is a triumph of Christianity; and is his testimony to suffer thereby? Is he to be esteemed a prejudiced witness because, when he wrote his Epistles, he had become a Christian believer? What made him a believer? That is the crucial question, and on the answer to it hangs the value of his testimony. It was not birth; for he was born a Jew. It was not education; for he was bred a Pharisee. It was not the spirit of his age; for that was essentially an anti-Christian spirit. It was not the original bent of his own mind; for we have his own authority for the statement that he long persecuted the Christian Church. It was not the inherent weakness of his intellect; for his Epistles are a standing monument to his intellectual vigour. The only remaining solution of the problem is that which he himself has given us; viz., that in the Gospel of Christ he had found the power of God unto salvation.

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