

*HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLES  
TO THE CORINTHIANS.*

XVII. LITIGATION IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH, VI. 1-11.

THE subject of chapter vi. had evidently been suggested, not by a formal question addressed to Paul by the Church,<sup>1</sup> but by some information which reached him. For the reasons already stated, we may assume with every probability that the information came to him through Stephanas and his two companions.<sup>2</sup> From them Paul learned that it was usual among the Corinthian Christians to take legal action against one another in the ordinary Pagan fashion, with Pagans to decide the points at issue, and that public feeling in the Church did not regard such procedure as unsuitable or unbecoming.

As before, the fault of the individual here springs from the tone of the Corinthian Church in general; and Paul's remarks are directed more to produce a healthier tone in the community as a whole than to rebuke the action of individuals. In fact, his expression in vi. 1 is put in such general and vague terms as to leave it uncertain "whether any particular case was in the apostle's mind at the time."<sup>3</sup> Dare any of you, having a matter against his fellow-Christian,<sup>4</sup> go to law before the unrighteous (*i.e.* the Pagans) instead of before the saints, the Christians?

Paul's words have not been correctly understood by

<sup>1</sup> It is not till chap. vii. that Paul takes up the questions laid before him by the Corinthians, though he has always in mind their words and arguments, i.-vi.

<sup>2</sup> See above § XIII.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Ellicott.

<sup>4</sup> τὸν ἕτερον, another of the same species or class, therefore a fellow-Christian, a good example of the strict sense of ἕτερος, contended for in *Hist. Comm. Gal.*, § XI. For an example (in addition to those there quoted) of the same distinction between ἕτερος, "a second of the same class," and ἄλλος, "belonging to a different class," see Demosthenes' *Olynthiac* iii. 18 (where Dr. Sandys has the note, ἄλλος, "anyone else," in general, ἕτερος, "a second speaker"). I am indebted to Mr. A. Souter for the quotation.

most commentators. Some seem to think that he orders the Corinthian Christians to appeal to Church courts instead of to the ordinary courts of law. But that is quite out of keeping both with his language here and with the whole tone of his teaching. He never expresses disrespect for the established institutions of the country and the empire, or advises that the Church should create a rival organization. He always teaches his converts to accept and make the best of existing institutions.

Others think that the alternatives in vi. 1 are different in character, and that the process before the Christians would be in the form of arbitration, while before the heathen it would be according to the legal forms then prevailing. But the expressions describing the two alternatives are so exactly parallel—*κρίνεσθαι ἐπὶ τῶν ἀδίκων καὶ οὐχὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἁγίων*, where both Pagans and Christians are designated by terms expressive of moral and religious character—that we cannot fairly think they describe different processes.

Paul here is not thinking of serious questions of crime and fraud so much as of the small matters, which persons of a litigious character—such as the Greeks were—are always ready to make into causes of disagreement and legal action. Now such small cases were ordinarily decided in Greece by umpires or arbiters chosen by the parties themselves. The expressions used throughout the passage suggest rather informal proceedings than formal trials on legal principles before judges (*δικασταί*). The terms used are *κρίνω*, *κρίνομαι*, *κριτήριον*, *κρίμα*, all of which are appropriate to cases tried according to the least strict procedure by umpires whom the parties select (*αἰρετοὶ κριταί*, *διαιτηταί*), and who decide, not according to formal written law (*νόμος*), but according to their own conception of right and wrong.

That Paul is not here thinking of serious and grave

matters, is clear from vi. 4, where, unfortunately, the Revised Version is far from good. (1) The subjects brought up for decision are called "matters of everyday life" (*βιωτικά*),<sup>1</sup> the trumpery details of common life, which afforded many opportunities for the Corinthian Greeks to quarrel about prices and ownership and so on. (2) The litigants set any persons they please as arbitrators to judge the individual cases;<sup>2</sup> the place where the arbitrator takes his position becomes the *κριτήριο*; the proceedings are *ex tempore*. Nothing suggests the "Public Arbitrators," who were chosen by lot in Athens by the magistrate in court from the permanent *Daitetai* (*κληρωτοὶ δαιτηταί*).

Some commentators, who insist that Paul is here referring throughout to formal legal procedure before courts of law, maintain that the word *κριτήριο* in vi. 2, 4 means "courts" or "tribunals." That is inconsistent with vi. 4, *βιωτικὰ κριτήρια ἐὰν ἔχητε*, where the nominative is the litigating parties—"If ye have matters of common life to set before a *krites* for decision, select as arbitrators persons of no account in the Church."

But, Paul proceeds, vi. 7-11, It is quite a fault in you to find provocation to suits among yourselves. You ought rather to acquiesce patiently in (what you consider to be) unfair treatment or inadequate recognition of your rights. And along with that fault there always goes the other fault of unwillingness to recognise adequately the rights of others: "ye yourselves act unfairly and defraud, and that

<sup>1</sup> Modern commentators rightly reject, though in a somewhat hesitating way, the rendering that *βιωτικά* means "matters of this life," "secular," as distinguished from "matters of the other world" (implied, on that view, by the reference to judging angels): *βιωτικά* means trivial, commonplace (Luke xxi. 34).

<sup>2</sup> *τούτους καθίζετε* does not mean "make these (permanent official) judges," but "set these as arbitrators in the various cases, as they arise." Those commentators who hold that courts of arbitration among the Christians are here counselled, speak of such courts as if they were a purely Jewish institution. But Paul is not here trying to induce the Greeks to accept a Jewish custom; he is referring to the ordinary Greek usage, only advising them to choose a Christian as an arbitrator in each case.

your brethren" (vi. 8). In the preceding paragraph I bade you refuse to associate with any one guilty of crime (v. 11). Now I remind you that all such are rejected by God. Those are the sins and faults of your former Pagan life; and in your new life you ought to have risen above them.

The fault to which the Greek nature was and is most prone is that which Paul calls *πλεονεξία* (rendered "covetousness" generally in the Revised Version,<sup>1</sup> and identified with "idolatry" in *Colossians* iii. 5), the tendency to insist on getting at least one's full rights, and therefore often even more than one's fair share. Carried to an extreme and combined with a low moral standard of action, it becomes that grasping, greedy, cunning kind of dealing which is, in modern estimation, associated unfairly with all Greeks, because it is a marked characteristic of some of the race. But even with a higher spirit and principles, the fault is not eliminated, and the Corinthian Christians had not shaken themselves free of it; they still, in their mutual dealings, were apt both to think that others were denying them a fair share, and, in their eagerness to get their full portion, to claim more from their neighbours than they had a right to.

In this passage it is clear that Paul is thinking rather of Greek than of Roman procedure. A similiar custom of using and choosing umpires to decide small cases existed originally in Rome; but in the more developed Roman procedure the umpires (*judices, arbitri*) were appointed by a magistrate, and even very simple cases involved a stage of formal legal procedure. Such was the almost universal rule under the empire wherever procedure was of the Roman type. But, as has elsewhere been pointed out,<sup>2</sup> the Romans never tried to force their own system of law and society on the Eastern provinces,

<sup>1</sup> Extortion in *2 Corinthians* ix. 5 (covetousness in the margin).

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. Comm. Gal.*, p. 206 f.

which had an old-standing civilization of their own ; and doubtless even in Roman *Coloniæ* in the East procedure in unimportant civil cases was more Greek than Roman in the time of Paul.<sup>1</sup> Just as in South Galatia we found that the law presupposed by Paul's letter seemed to be of the Seleucid type (*i.e.* Greek modified by the conditions of an Oriental kingdom), so in Corinth we see that the law in private cases is of the Greek not the Roman character, freer and less formal. The people of Corinth would be likely to know more than most Greeks about Roman imperial law in great matters (see § XI.) ; but the ordinary life of the city at this time was evidently Greek rather than Roman (see § X.).

#### XVIII. SEQUENCE OF TOPICS, V.-VII.

It is characteristic of Paul that often, while treating one subject, he already has the following topic in his mind, and in the treatment of the first he is preparing and paving the way for the next. Thus he passes from one to the other, and even returns to the first after or during the discussion of the second. Every one of his Epistles has an extraordinary unity, as of a living body ; each topic seems to be vitally connected with every other, and they melt into one another, so that the reader feels he cannot treat the Epistle except as a single organism where every part must be studied before any one is fully comprehended. *Galatians* is the most striking example of this ; but all show the same characteristic.

The first Epistle to the Corinthians treats a far greater number of separate and distinct topics than any other of Paul's letters. Much of it is an answer to a series of disconnected questions addressed to him ; and along with these are included a number of topics suggested to him in other

<sup>1</sup> There is a great lack of evidence about such matters in Eastern *Coloniæ* ; but the above statement gives the probable fact. See *Hist. Comm. Gal.*, p. 206 f.

ways. Yet the epistle holds these various topics together by a bond of unity. It becomes a unified whole; and the unity lies in the strong, overpowering, determining idea in Paul's mind of the Corinthian nature and needs. The Epistle has the unity amid variety of Corinthian Church life as Paul saw it.

A good example of this is seen in chapters v. and vi. and vii. In v. the subject is a certain serious crime committed by one of the members of the Corinthian Church; in vi. it is the litigiousness of various members of that Church, and their fault in bringing their cases for decision by Pagans; in vii. the topic is marriage, celibacy, and immorality. But in v. 12, 13, the duty incumbent on the Church of judging the crime is mentioned in such a way as to slide into the topic treated in vi., while v. 9-11 touches the topics of vii. quite as closely as they do the main topic of v. Again, vi. 9 glides into a subject preparatory to the topics of vii. (which were already foreshadowed in v. 9-11), and vi. 12-20 discuss that subject at length.

#### XIX. JUDGING THE WORLD.

When we take these parts together, it is apparent that a certain discrepancy arises between vi. 2 f. and v. 12 f. In v. 12 f. Paul declares that the Church has nothing to do with judging the outer world: it judges its own members, and expels the unworthy from its midst, and it leaves the outer world to the judgment of God. But in vi. 2 f. he asks, "Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, can you not find among your fellow-Christians persons worthy to judge the insignificant matters of everyday life about which you dispute before heathen arbiters? In reality, you should choose the humblest members of the Church to arbitrate in those small matters."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Follow the marginal translation of the Revised Version, taking *καθίστετε* as an imperative.

But the passage vi. 2, 3 is not entirely serious. In vi. 4, 5, the Apostle goes on to say that they ought to choose those who are of no account in the Church to act as arbiters in such insignificant matters, which are unworthy to occupy the time and attention of more important members of the Church. And then he explains that he "says this to move you to shame"; his words are not to be taken as serious advice. The undertone of sarcasm, almost of banter, is to be understood as ruling throughout vi. 2-4.

This becomes all the clearer when we remember the principle already laid down,<sup>1</sup> that we should be ready to suspect Paul is making a quotation from the letter addressed to him by the Corinthians whenever he alludes to their knowledge, or when any statement stands in marked contrast either with the immediate context or with Paul's known views. These criteria mark vi. 2, 3 as an allusion to some very self-satisfied expressions in the Corinthian letter: "Of course you know that the saints shall judge the world, and even angels (is it not written in your letter?)."

The commentators who take vi. 2, 3 as a serious description of the future powers and duties of Christians are hard pressed to find any really satisfactory explanation of the words as expressing a principle to which Paul attached any importance. Any one who works out for himself a connected conception of Paul's views about the place of man in God's universe must either tacitly leave out of sight those two verses, or must say, as we do, that they are not to be taken as a serious philosophic enunciation. It is usual among those who take vi. 2, 3 seriously to quote *Matthew* xix. 28 and *Luke* xxii. 30 in illustration; but those passages only show how impossible it is to attach

<sup>1</sup> See § XIII. p. 207 (Feb.).

any serious importance to this one, though they may have probably been in the mind of the Corinthians when they wrote the sentences which Paul is quoting or alluding to.

## XX. PURITY AND IMMORTALITY, VI. 12-20.

Throughout the letter Paul has before his mind a clear picture of the general position and difficulties and surroundings in which the Corinthian Church was situated. He is never so occupied with any of the details which he successively takes up, as to lose sight of the bearing of each on the general state of the congregation. He sees that the prime necessity is to raise the general standard of moral judgment; and that the correction or punishment of isolated errors and crimes can do little good, until the Church as a whole is placed on a higher moral level. Some members of the Church, at least, had been criminals of the worst kind in their Pagan days (vi. 11), not so very long past; and, though they have washed themselves,<sup>1</sup> and been sanctified, yet the past habit and the pressure of surrounding society make a serious and continual danger.

Especially was the danger great in the direction of purity of life; and to this subject Paul returns time after time. The obligation to a pure life must be constantly urged on the Corinthians. The frankly confessed and universally held theory on the subject in Pagan society was that every requirement of the body was in itself natural and right and ought to be satisfied fully and healthily in whatever way and time and manner the individual found convenient, the only standard applicable for judging the individual's conduct

<sup>1</sup> It is hard to see why Canon Evans and several other commentators should insist that *ἐλούσασθε* cannot mean "washed yourselves," but must be rendered "washed away your sins." One can understand that the Corinthian Christians "washed themselves," but it is not easy to see how any but Divine power could be said to "wash away their sins." That *λούομαι* means *lavo me, lavar*, is a general belief of scholars, and rule in lexicons; and even Canon Evans, excellent scholar as he was, cannot, by a mere dictum unsupported by proofs, overturn it.



lying in considerations of physical health and beauty. The same principle was applied to purity of life as to food and nourishment: in neither case was there any standard according to which the conduct of men should be judged except consideration of the physical health of the individual; so long as any action was pleasant to the individual and did not injure in any way his physical well-being, it was right.

Against this theory, accepted in all Pagan society, and perhaps not quite obsolete in the Church at Corinth, Paul argues in the paragraph before us, and his argument is that of a mystic. It is true that the standard of judgment as regards feeding is purely one of physical health and beauty (vi. 13); but food and the body as an organ for assimilating food are alike transitory and perishable. On the other hand, the body as a vehicle of life and spirit is eternal and imperishable; and its proper function in this respect lies in its relation to God, not in individual satisfaction.

This doctrine must be taken in connexion with the teaching of chapter xv. on the immortality of the body. The physical body is not immortal, but the body as spiritual is immortal. Purity of life is in the closest relation with the spiritual character of the body, and is the prime condition of spirituality: other sins do not affect the spiritual nature of the body, but impurity destroys it (vi. 18).

The doctrine is also closely connected with Paul's conception of true marriage as the most perfect symbol of the relation between Christ and the Church, between the divine and the human life (see Eph. v. 23, 29 f.); and thus the paragraph before us forms the natural transition to the subject of chapter vii. (according to the custom of Paul, p. 277 f.).

That the outspoken naturalism of the Pagan theory against which Paul argues was not entirely abandoned in the Corinthian Church is, perhaps, proved by his opening words, vi. 12: "All things are lawful to me," as you say in your letter, but one should add that it is not true

that all things are advantageous. "All things are under my power," as you say, but one should add that, "I will not let myself be brought under the power of anything." The Corinthians had boldly stated in their letter, and had turned to their own use—of course with a view to full Christian freedom—the philosophic doctrine that "man is the measure of all things," that the individual is master of his surroundings and of his fate. Turned to a Christian application, this doctrine naturally suited their exuberant satisfaction with themselves and with their steady development and improvement. Along with it they had used the other expression quoted by Paul in viii. 1: "We know that we all have knowledge," to which he so often alludes throughout the Epistle.<sup>1</sup>

Paul saw clearly the dangerous extremes to which this doctrine was liable to be pushed; and the fact that he quotes it at this point suggests that he believed it to have been used, or to be likely to be used, by his correspondents in the way indicated and combated in vi. 13 ff. In fact, it is natural to suppose that the words, "meats for the belly, and the belly for meats," are quoted from the mouth of the Corinthians; and the argument is turned aside by Paul thus: "You say that each part of the body has its natural function, and is rightly directed to the performance thereof, but you forget the distinction between what is perishable, and what is permanent in the body." If that be true, then the Corinthians must have mentioned that naturalistic theory, either urging it as true or professing their inability to refute its logical consequences.

The commentators quote various passages from ancient writers to show that Corinth was a specially vicious city. It may be doubted, however, whether there was much difference between the tone there and in the Ægean world generally.

<sup>1</sup> Wherever Paul says "you know," or "know ye not?" the Corinthians would be reminded of their claim to possess universal knowledge.

The serious danger lay, not in any excess of vice there<sup>1</sup>—for excess tends rather to produce a reaction in the opposite direction—but in the low moral standard that was practically universal in society. Paul is not arguing against the criminality of a Nero, but against the naturalistic theories of educated, thinking, and comparatively well-living men.

## XXI. MARRIAGE.

Chapter vii. is difficult and, to the historical student, disappointing. It is disappointing because, though it treats of marriage—a subject peculiarly well adapted to throw light on the state of society in Corinth—yet the treatment is so general as to give little information about the Corinthians in particular. It is difficult, because Paul is here answering a question which had been addressed to him by the Church in Corinth, and his reply and arguments are evidently influenced much by the terms in which the question was stated and the ideas on the subject revealed thereby among the Corinthians; yet the reply gives no very clear evidence as to the terms and tone of the question.

There are not many passages in Paul's writings that have given rise to so many divergent and incorrect views as this chapter. Some of those views relate to the practical conclusions to be drawn from the chapter, as, for example, that celibacy and monasticism were recommended by the Apostle as the ideal system of life for those who are strong enough morally. Others relate to his own situation in life. Was he a widower, or had he never been married? In the course of the chapter he several times mentions his own example and his own condition; and it is still a matter of keen debate whether his words imply that he had been

<sup>1</sup> In all the great centres of travel and trade, the same results were likely to be produced in an age when every inn was also practically a house of ill-fame but that state of things lasted into late mediæval times.

married or not. Now, if Paul had been discussing the question whether it is better to marry or remain single, it is hardly conceivable, in view of his direct, uncompromising and emphatic way of stating his opinions, that he should, in quoting his own example, speak so vaguely as to leave such an issue uncertain. He would either make no reference to his own example, or he would so speak of it as to leave it clear on which side his example told (see § XXII.).

But it is clear that the question which was in his mind was not whether marriage or celibacy is the better way of life, and that he does not quote his own case as an example and pattern whether one should marry. When he mentions himself here, he is not thinking of that, and therefore his words do not permit any sure inference on the point. To treat this chapter as if the question under discussion were the comparative advantages of marriage and celibacy, is to approach it from the wrong point of view, and misinterpretation is unavoidable.

Moreover, on that commonly accepted view, the whole passage, vii. 1 ff., suggests a conception of the nature and purpose of marriage that is very far from lofty or noble, as if marriage were a mere concession to the weakness of human nature, to save mankind from worse evil. But such a conception is irreconcilable with Paul's language elsewhere: such was not his attitude towards marriage. As we have seen in the preceding section, marriage was in his estimation the type of the union between Christ and the Church, and therefore on the highest plane of ideal excellence and purity.

Now, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> we must be disposed to suspect quotation or allusion to views and arguments of the Corinthians, when we find in this Epistle statements that stand in marked contrast with Paul's known opinions elsewhere. He expressly mentions in vii. 1 that he is taking up a topic

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 207 and p. 279.

at the point where the Corinthians had left it; and his words would be so understood by them. We must try to take the subject up at the same point; but it is not easy to restore the words of the lost letter.

The crucial point in the whole passage is the opening statement: "It is good for man not to come into connexion with woman."<sup>1</sup> Evidently this is said in relation to a Corinthian statement or question. In rightly catching the nature of that statement or question lies the key to the interpretation of the crucial point.

Comparison of two other passages will throw some light on this statement, alike through the resemblances and through the differences.

(1) vii. 38. So then both he that giveth his own virgin daughter in marriage doeth well; and he that giveth her not in marriage shall do better.<sup>2</sup>

Here there is a distinct, positive statement, followed by a comparison between two courses of action: one is good, but another is better. But to express the comparison a comparative degree is necessary. Now in vii. 1 there is only the positive degree, *καλόν*: and we must infer that the meaning is not (as many readers assume), "it is better for man not to marry, but by a concession to weakness marriage is permitted." Such a meaning would require the use of the comparative degree. In fact the analogy of vii. 38 would rather suggest that vii. 1 implies "it is good to avoid marriage, but better to marry."

We observe, also, that a wrong meaning is often drawn from vii. 38. Paul does not there say, "it is good for a maid to marry, but better for her not to marry." What he says is very different: "it is good for a father to seek out a husband for his daughter, but better not to seek out a

<sup>1</sup> *καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι.*

<sup>2</sup> *καὶ ὁ γαμίζων τὴν παρθένον ἑαυτοῦ καλῶς ποιεῖ, καὶ ὁ μὴ γαμίζων κρείσσον ποιήσει.*

husband for her : there is no reason why the father should regard it as his bounden duty to give her a husband : he is quite justified if he leaves her in her unmarried state : it is good, it is not wrong, for a woman to be unmarried."

Must we not see here a gentle plea for individual right of judgment? Paul would not interfere with the established rule of society, that it is the parent's place to seek a husband for the daughter ; but he adds the proviso that there is no inexorable duty placed on the parent to find a husband for her : it is even better if the father puts no compulsion on his daughter.

(2) vii. 39, 40. If the husband be dead, the wife is free to be married to whom she will ; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she abide as she is, after my judgment.<sup>1</sup>

Here again we observe that when the two states, second marriage and avoidance thereof, are compared, the comparative degree is used. Also, the avoidance of second marriage is declared to be, not better, but happier. Paul's own judgment—which he believes to be influenced by Divine inspiration (vii. 40)—tells him that such is more likely to lead to true happiness ; but he will place on the widow no shadow of compulsion in the way of duty.

From these cases the inference is clear. In vii. 1 ff. Paul lays down the principle : " it is good, it is permissible, it is not wrong, for man to remain unmarried provided absolute purity is observed." That condition, however, was so difficult in Greek society, that the Apostle is obliged to go on, verse after verse, urging the immense advantage of married life from that point of view, but not at all implying that the essential feature of marriage lies therein.

The point of view, then, which Paul assumes in vii. 1 is that marriage is not an absolute duty, but is relative to

<sup>1</sup> ἐὰν δὲ κοιμηθῆ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐλευθέρα ἐστὶν ᾧ θέλει γαμηθῆναι, μόνον ἐν Κυρίῳ. μακαριωτέρα δὲ ἐστὶν ἐὰν οὕτως μείνῃ, κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν γνώμην· δοκῶ δὲ κατὰ Πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἔχειν.

the individual nature and character. Each individual man or woman must judge for himself or herself whether it conduces to the perfecting of their life to marry. There is no moral principle constraining them to marriage: on the contrary, it is a fine thing, an excellent thing, to remain unmarried (vii. 1-8).

That point of view seems to imply that the Corinthians had put the question whether the view widely entertained alike among Jews and Pagans—that every one ought to marry in the ordinary course of life at the proper age—was correct. Paul strongly discountenances that view: marriage is not an obligation imposed by society and by nature on all persons. The individual is here master of his fate, and ought to judge for himself, and be answerable only to his own conscience. We see here a claim for the emancipation of the individual judgment from the bonds that society had imposed on it. Freedom is Paul's ideal; but he dare not use the word so much to the Greeks—always predisposed to lawlessness, to the over-exaltation of the rights of the individual, and to over-assertion of the principle that “all things are lawful unto me”—as he could to the submissive and slavish Phrygians.<sup>1</sup>

It is not improbable that the Corinthians actually quoted the public law, as it existed under the Roman Empire. It is at least highly probable, and indeed practically inevitable, that they were thinking of that legal duty. The legislation of Augustus had been directed to encourage marriage. By a succession of laws<sup>2</sup> that Emperor had endeavoured to make marriage universal, had imposed penalties of growing severity on the unmarried, and had bestowed honours and privileges on the parents of a family. The Emperor's aim was, undoubtedly, lofty and noble:

<sup>1</sup> See *Hist. Comm. Gal.* p. 443.

<sup>2</sup> Lex Julia b.c. 18, repeated in severer form as Lex Papia Poppaea.

he sought to check the modern tendency to immorality and profligacy, and to restore the old Roman purity and simplicity of family life. Society approved in theory his principle, which in practice it disregarded. His method was that of compulsion.<sup>1</sup>

So also the Jewish practice not merely urged marriage as a universal duty, but attached honours and privileges to marriage; *e.g.*, one could not be a member of the Sanhedrin unless one were both married and a parent.

The theory of the empire was that the Emperor was the father and director and counsellor of all his subjects: the Emperor told them what to do, and it was their part to pay implicit obedience to all his orders. Against that theory Christianity protested: it claimed the right of individual judgment. Paul fully sympathized with the aim of Augustus, and he also entirely recognised that family life is the most effective check to immorality (vii. 2-9). But, as in all his teaching, so here, he advocates freedom. All should judge for themselves, and undertake voluntarily the duties of marriage only after full consideration, if they think it best: no compulsion should be put on them, either by giving superior honours to the married, or by putting discredit on the unmarried: the only discredit lay in profligacy: it is quite honourable to be unmarried, if one lives a pure life.

If we have rightly apprehended the character of the question addressed to Paul by the Corinthians, then it follows that the common view is erroneous. It is commonly said that the section of the Church in Corinth which "was of Cephas" upheld marriage because Cephas was married, while the section which "was of Paul" argued that single life was better, because Paul was either un-

<sup>1</sup> Marriage was a condition, undoubtedly, for the priesthood in the Imperial cultus: man and wife were appointed high priest and high priestess, as is shown by many inscriptions.



married or a widower; and their dispute was referred to the Apostle for decision. We have already seen that much of the theorizing as to the doctrines held by the four supposed parties in Corinth proceeds on a wrong interpretation of Paul's words; and that the parties were not nearly so definitely opposed to one another as those theories assume. Now we find that the question propounded to Paul by the Corinthians was not "is it better to marry or not?" but rather "is it to be regarded as a duty incumbent on Christians to marry, as the Jews and the Roman law maintain?"

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*JOSEPH: AN ETHICAL AND BIBLICAL STUDY.*

IV.

"THE CHOICE OF A SIDE."

(GEN. xxxix. 1-20.)

It is interesting and suggestive to reflect that this picturesque moral story, before it was in any book, would be doing for generations the same work as, within the verses and leaves of our Bible, it is now doing for us. The larger event and the lesser incidents of the life of Joseph were divinely arranged and grouped by time and place, so that the mark of God's presence and purpose in it might be seen plain and indelible. The tale, as it was told from lip to lip, would carry God with it into people's thoughts and lives. It would educate the human soul. Children would receive from it their earliest sense of a world where there is peril and pain, and their "first mild touch of sympathy"; and the youth would be taught by it that goodness and purity and truth are a safe defence. The facts would fall into the memory like seeds, and the spiritual life which they contained would there germinate and strike;