

*“ALL THINGS ARE YOURS.”*

(1 COR. III. 22.)

IN the section of the Epistle which is closed with these words, St. Paul is dealing with two subjects not apparently connected, which he weaves together in an interesting and characteristic way. These subjects are, the factions which had arisen in the Church at Corinth, and the allurements of Greek philosophy. To both he applies the principle summed up in the words “all things are yours.” It is a principle which should rule out the spirit of faction from the Church; and which should make philosophy subservient to the higher wisdom, which is the endowment of the Christian.

The factions, which had arisen in the newly planted Church, must have caused the deepest concern to the Apostle. At the same time it might have been thought that his earnest appeal to his converts to be of one mind, to say the same thing, would have sufficed to stamp out this evil from the Christian community. Indeed the Apostle does certainly seem to dismiss this subject, and to proceed to another subject of vital importance to the theology of the Church, the danger namely of being drawn away from the simplicity of the gospel of Christ by the subtlety and pride of Greek philosophy. The transition is made in this way. In considering the question of schism, the thought comes to the Apostle's mind that he had not laid himself open to the charge of gaining adherents by baptizing the converts to the faith in Corinth. He might by so doing have created a distinction between those whom he had personally baptized and the rest. So he thanks God that with few exceptions he had baptized no one. The subject of baptism suggests the subject of preaching, and the subject of preaching leads the Apostle to state the basis

of the gospel which he taught, and the simplicity of it in contrast to the pagan philosophy with which he had come in contact in Athens, and on which he had failed to make much impression by the line of argument there adopted.

But in dealing with pagan philosophy and its dangers St. Paul does not forget the subject with which he started, the spirit of faction. He revives it in the course of the argument directed against a human philosophy.

He says at the opening of chapter iii., "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual"—as to men possessing the *πνεῦμα* or Spirit of God—a gift which far transcends the highest attainment of the Greek philosopher—a gift too which ought to make impossible such party strife as now divided and humiliated the Church of Corinth.

It is a lofty argument which is pressed more closely still, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (iii. 16).

This immeasurably great and precious possession lays the world at the feet of the followers of Jesus Christ. "Let no one glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (iii. 23). As applied to Greek philosophy this principle is the foundation of a new and distinctively Christian philosophy which is free to use the best results reached hitherto by the human mind, but at the same time is able by Divine illumination to penetrate more deeply into the secret meaning of life. It would have been a happy thing for Christian thought and dogma if this principle had been observed, and if human speculation had been used, but not allowed to dominate the beliefs of Christendom and to mould its doctrines.

Even more important for the future of Christianity is the application of this principle to the spirit of faction.

Although the divisions which existed in the Church in

Corinth were serious enough to be a source of danger and to call forth the warnings of the Apostle, it is possible that almost unconsciously we exaggerate in our own minds their character and importance. Certainly the contentions were not of a kind to threaten the Church with heretical teaching. To see this we have only to compare the language of the Apostle in this Epistle with that which he uses in the Epistle to the Galatians or in the Epistle to the Colossians, when great and vital truths of Christianity were at stake. To the Galatians he writes: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you unto the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. i. 6-7). And to the Colossians: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (ii. 8).

In the first Epistle to the Corinthians there is no language approaching that in severity of tone or in presentiment of danger. Nor indeed, if we think of it, could there be. For however foolish and mistaken the Corinthians might be in ranging themselves in separate factions under the shelter of great names, there could be no suspicion of heresy or false teaching attached to the names of the chosen leaders; St. Paul himself, St. Peter, or Cephas, and Apollos, of whom St. Paul says at the end of his letter: "I besought him much to come unto you with the brethren; and it was not at all his wish to come now; but he will come when he shall have opportunity" (xvi. 12). No one of these great teachers could be accused of bringing false doctrines into the Church of Christ.

But one of these parties claimed in some exclusive way the right to call itself by the name of Christ Himself. In what sense this high claim was made, or what significance it had, we need not now inquire. But in all probability no

intentional error was involved as to the nature or character of the Christ. For in that case the Apostle would certainly have corrected such false teaching in express terms.

On the whole St. Paul had reason to be thankful for the spiritual condition of this newly founded Church in Corinth. He says at the beginning of his message to it: "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus; that in every thing ye were enriched in Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift" (i. 4 foll.). These are words of high commendation hardly compatible with any deep-seated error or perversion of the gospel of Christ.

Still the Apostle's words convey a rebuke and warning needful for every age, and every branch of the Christian Church. And the words in which he sums up the argument, "All things are yours," enshrine a great principle widely applicable to our own lives and conduct, and to the solution of many questions, besides its immediate reference to the *σχίσματα* at Corinth.

The Apostle reminds his converts of the immense privilege which they enjoy—the inestimable gift which they possess by their union with Christ (i. 30), which places them on a level not only far above the uninspired wisdom of Greek philosophy, but also above all questions of faction or party in the Church of Christ. For the two arguments run concurrently through the first three chapters of this Epistle; and the same determining principle is brought to bear on each. That principle is the implanted gift of God's Holy Spirit; it is the indwelling Christ, who is made unto us "Wisdom from God" (i. 30); it is "the Spirit that searcheth all things" (ii. 10); it is "the mind of Christ" which as Christians we have (ii. 16); it is the Spirit of God dwelling in us, which makes of every Christian a

sanctuary of God, the innermost shrine of the temple in which God dwells (iii. 16). This is the great possession, which enables St. Paul to say to these young Christians : "All things are yours." This was the wonderful new truth revealed in Christ which was destined to revolutionize the world. It was the hidden manna, and the secret name in possession of which and in the knowledge of which all the glories and splendours and wisdom of that beautiful and refined Greek world, in which the Apostle and his converts lived, counted for nothing except so far as they could be used for Christ. The Christian is taught to look on all things as his own, and himself as Christ's ; all this vast inheritance therefore is to be used by him in the service of Christ, and consequently in the service of God.

As an argument addressed to a small and outwardly insignificant community, a large proportion of which were probably slaves, incapable of holding property, it is one of astonishing significance. The terms in which St. Paul reveals the secret of this possession indicate how wide and distant its influence would be ; "whether things present or things to come ; all are yours" ; the Christian slave held in his hand the future of the world's history. There is therefore no limit to the application of the principle.

For the moment the Apostle brings it into relation with the divisions in the Church. He is blaming his converts for the wrong use they had made of their teachers. They had placed themselves under those teachers ; they had become their disciples and followers, or at least had used their names, and had made them guides and leaders instead of claiming them as their possession to be brought into the service of Christ. And many a time in Christian history has the same mistake been made. Christians have forgotten the greatness of their endowment, and regarded men as masters, who were in reality their servants in Christ. Paul, Cephas and Apollos had each one gospel to preach,

and one only. But each taught the gospel in his own way, in accordance with his own individual gift, and his own religious experience. One laid greater emphasis on one truth, another on a different truth. Such difference is of course traceable in the books of the New Testament. It is the same gospel throughout, but there are different modes and aspects of teaching. St. Paul emphasizes the need of faith, St. James the need of work; St. Mark paints a vivid picture of the external life of the Saviour, St. John conveys to us the depths of His spiritual teaching. Different types of mind are attracted by different aspects of the truth.

And yet how indispensable is each sacred writer, and each record of our Lord's life and teaching. What a mistake it would be to say: "I am of St. Mark, and I am of St. John; or I am of St. Paul, and I of St. James." But this seems to have been what the Christians of Corinth did in their early enthusiasm for particular teachers. And over and over again it has been done in the Christian Church in despite of the Apostle's warning. Great teachers have arisen; a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a St. Dominic, a Luther, a Calvin, a Wesley, a Pusey; and men have classed themselves under their names with enthusiasm and devotion and not without much spiritual profit in special ways and in special cases but on the whole to the detriment of the Church of Christ, as the Apostle foresaw through his divinely inspired intelligence.

What then would the Apostle have us do? Would he have us turn away from these great lights as they shine forth in successive ages, as guides in dark places, and true beacon towers in the Church of Christ? Far from it. St. Paul would say to us, "All things are yours"; use them in the name and in the service of Christ. Use these varied ministries for your soul's health; but remember you are Christ's; you do not belong to any preacher however

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famous, or to any leader however prominent in the Church of Christ. You are the servant of Christ; and so far as any teacher helps you to serve Him better, so far as he enlightens your understanding of divine mysteries, so far as he suggests or practises a godly rule of discipline, use him for your soul's health, but do not be his blind follower or his slave, for "all things are yours."

The clearness of St. Paul's intuition is seen in this early warning against party feeling as distinct from erroneous teaching. And in view of what has happened in the history of the Church of Christ the precept which he applies to that feeling is of unspeakable value. For when men once take sides the tendency is to disparage all who do not agree with them, and to reject the whole of an opponent's teaching because they dissent from a part. But because all things are ours, we should try to bring all things into the service of Christ. And very often it is possible to learn much from a teacher, a Church or a system from which we have been accustomed to sever ourselves. Christians are beginning to discover or to re-discover this happier law in the religious life. There is far less of mutual recrimination than there used to be, and a far greater desire on the part of the different communities of Christians to understand one another; and for each to appropriate, and absorb that which is best and holiest in another's system. This is the more excellent way. It is a step towards the unity which the Apostle sets before us; and it is to put to practical use the lofty claim which the Apostle makes for us that, through Christ, "all things are ours."

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