

STUDIES IN THE LANGUAGE OF ST. PAUL

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PREFACE

THE following expositions are an attempt to elucidate the teaching of St. Paul by means of a careful scrutiny of his vocabulary. They are in effect studies of his words and phrases. He composed his letters in a style of marked individuality, using the language of his day as a medium for conveying to his fellow-Christians his personal experience of the new faith, with an emotional intensity and with a depth of conviction peculiarly his own. Let no one imagine that his Greek is not literary because he wrote in the idiom of the popular or 'common' tongue current from 300 B.C. in the lands bordering the Mediterranean. Christianity created new terms and at the same time imparted to old and familiar words a freshness born of an original vision of truth. It is with reluctance that I have decided to transliterate the original words instead of printing them in their own noble type, but I have had in view the needs of students who have no knowledge of Greek. Yet I am not without the hope that these studies may assist readers of New Testament Greek, whose duty it is to ascertain the etymology, meaning and usage of the terms used in the text. Occasionally the terms are peculiar to St. Paul, though not for that reason always to be considered his coinages and are often

susceptible to various interpretations. Lexical study, especially in the light of recent papyri discoveries, is a fascinating side of the student's task, although its value is not always realized, and for the convenience of those who engage in it, I have given in an appendix a list of the Greek words discussed in these pages.

Some of the studies appeared originally in a volume entitled the *Poetry of the Upward Way*, and were republished in a cheap form under a title which I am repeating, *Studies in the Language of St. Paul*. This latter edition was speedily exhausted and the demand induced me to undertake a further series of studies on the same lines, which, owing to the encouragement of the late Dr. James Hastings, found a home in the *Expository Times* and which have never been republished in book form. Thus the present volume is, to a considerable extent, a new collection with the addition of the older studies revised and rearranged.

Having been in contact for many years with young people and adults, who have been induced to learn Greek in order the better to understand the New Testament, I can bear witness to the new and vivid interest which even an elementary acquaintance with the language can impart to the study of these great writings. Hence my hope is that the following experiments may be a guide to students and preachers, and further may stimulate in not a few a desire to master a language which a recent writer, Dr. B. F. C. Atkinson, in his *Study of the Greek Language*

(p. 291), has described as 'the language of humanity . . . because it speaks to and satisfies the deepest needs of humanity'; while the New Testament is 'the monument that carries the Greek language and the Greek mode of expression into the heart of the world and its power was never so apparent as it is to-day.'

It is hardly necessary to add that only a corner of a large field is here explored, but what has been attempted may inspire others to engage in the work and incidentally may serve to show that the preacher, who must ever be an expositor, can find in his textbook a treasure from which he can bring forth 'things new and old.'

I have endeavoured to record in the text or footnotes my obligations to interpreters of St. Paul and other writers who have thrown light on the subjects discussed. In particular, my thanks are due to Messrs. Macmillan & Co., the publishers of F. W. H. Myers' *St. Paul*, for permission to quote freely from that poem in two of the chapters, and to Messrs. George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., the publishers of the translation of the *Bacchae* of Euripides by Professor Gilbert Murray, for permission to quote the three extracts on p. 21.

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CHAPTER I

THE PEACE OF GOD

ST. PAUL never begins an epistle without a salutation containing the word 'peace' (*eirēnē*). And in the body of his teaching 'peace' plays a conspicuous part. God is a 'God of *peace*.' The Christian has '*peace* with God.' 'To be spiritually minded is life and *peace*.' It is obvious that he lays much stress on the possession of this golden treasure of inward peace. With him it implies the removal of the guilt that separated us from God, the assurance of pardon, and the conformity of our will with His. He never uses the word to imply that peace in the sense of being in harmony with our surroundings is attainable here. Indeed, he startles us by bringing the word 'peace' into associations with which at first sight it appears to be incongruous. There are two passages which are especially worthy of our attention by reason of the beauty and unexpectedness of the metaphors used by the Apostle. In one of them he speaks of peace as an *arbitrator*; in the other of peace as a *sentinel*. The atmosphere is that of a conflict, yet peace lives on in the strife. It can, therefore,

be no earthly product. It cometh from above. It lies exposed to all the shocks and invasions of earthly things. It is not exempt from the blows of sorrow, hardship, persecution, and death. But it survives all these things. It is—to use Wordsworth's well-known words—

A central peace subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation.

1. Peace is an *arbitrator* (*brabeus*): 'Let the peace of God rule (*brabenetō*) in your hearts' (Col. iii. 15). But the colourless word 'rule' becomes 'arbitrate' in the margin of the Revisers. The expression suggests an umpire who decides in a contest and awards the prize to a victor. There were ten judges in the Greek Olympian games, where the winners received a wreath of the sacred wild olive. But, according to Alexander Maclaren, we may give a more familiar shape to the figure if we turn to medieval days and conceive of peace as the queen of the tournament, whose eyes 'rain influence, and judge the prize.' Thus the soul of the Christian is an arena. Two forces—flesh and spirit—contend daily for supremacy. Desire and conscience, passion and duty, the knowledge of the right and 'the vain-glory of life'—these are in constant conflict within us. The best and the worst, motives noble and ignoble, fight for possession, for mastery. The pain of bearing a cross and a burden, which means the deepening of love and patience and purity, strives

against the joy of self-indulgence, which issues in callousness, incompetence, and hatred. Now, the peace of God sits on the throne of our hearts to decide between the combatants, to close the strife, and to deck with the victor's crown triumphant fortitude.

Let it be noted, it is not the peace of man; for the peace of man, as Chrysostom reminds us, is begotten of self-preservation, of shrinking back, of suffering nothing grievous. The peace of man inevitably favours the lower elements of character. It stops the inward strife by the concession of the flesh. It urges us to throw away our shield and to trample on conviction. It is a cowardly spirit, abhorring the pains of sacrifice and the taking up of the cross. The peace of God awards the prize only to the noblest self. It urges to heroic self-conquest, and rewards the victory of light, truth, sincerity, and the forces that make for righteousness. When sin gains possession, then we know that the peace of God has been dethroned. The storm has begun which is to wreck the fair beauty and happiness of the soul. It dashes the flowers to the ground, and strips the forest of its green leaves. 'The overflowing scourge' passes through, and 'the crown of pride is trodden under foot.' How swiftly the shadow of the coming unrest falls when the careless word has been spoken, bringing pain to a sensitive spirit, or when the hasty temper has left its wounds, or when the selfish deed has darkened the sunshine

of others. Then we know that the peace of God has not been arbitrator. The joy of self-conquest has been forfeited. No laurel crown has been granted to the daring and to the beauty of holiness.

There is a line in a well-known hymn which conveys, through quite different associations, the same lesson as St. Paul's figure. The hymn is an invocation to the Holy Spirit, and speaks of His work as

Thy halcyon rest within,
Calming the storms of dread and sin.

Halcyon—so goes the legend—in despair at finding the body of her drowned husband on the shore, throws herself into the sea and is changed with him into a kingfisher. And the story further shows that for seven days before and after the shortest day, while the kingfishers build their nests, the sea is calm. Hence Milton, in his ode on the Nativity, speaks of the 'birds of calm' that 'sit brooding on the charmed wave.' Thus is the 'halcyon rest' none other than the peace of God. For on the wintry days of the soul, days of storm and stress, of snow and sadness, the mystic bird of calm is to spread his wings over us and to charm the waves into stillness. Let us enthrone the peace of God within as the arbiter of our hearts. Then shall our false ambitions and desires be subdued. Then shall our base passions, our harsh moods, our high aspiring thoughts, be brought into the obedience of Christ. Then shall

the Christian's longing for 'a calm and heavenly frame' be fully satisfied.

2. But the peace of God is also a *sentinel*: 'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall *guard* (*phrouresei*) your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus' (Phil. iv. 7). The soul is no longer an arena, but a garrison ringed by battlements, posted within some high yet not impregnable castle. The sentry at the castle gate keeps watch. Who is he? Is he some warrior spirit, grey and stormbeaten, with face and form scarred with wounds? Is he some veteran, grim and terrible of mien, with an iron will and an iron heart? No, he bears no warrior's name. His name suggests no weapon and no strife. His name is—peace! Yes, peace is the protector spirit, the alert guardian, the watchman of our souls. Clad not in dented armour but in white robes, mystic, wonderful, is this heavenly sentinel, the peace of God. When the Apostle adds 'which passeth all understanding,' he does not mean, as is commonly supposed, that this peace transcends all powers of human intelligence, every conception of human minds. But he means that the peace surpasses all human cleverness and device. Neither natural wit, nor skilfulness of resource, nor clear foresight can usurp the place of the peace of God and do for our inner life what it does. For within the garrison of the soul is a motley crowd of mutinous thoughts, of vain imaginings, of foolish and unholy desires. Can we, dare we take over the

guardianship of our thoughts, our whims and fancies? Are we able to give ourselves charge concerning our heart—so weak in its resolution, so wavering in its convictions, so ready to part with its best possessions, so quick to descend from its high ideals? We cannot ensure another's salvation, though we toil with unwearying effort and watch with tear-stained eyes; we cannot deliver another from sin or keep the tempter out, however tender and tireless our shepherding be. And we cannot unaided keep order within the citadel of our own soul. Take our thoughts—the thoughts of a single hour. What a strange phantasmagoria! Sordid, base thoughts succeed in a moment holy and beautiful thoughts. The sky of the soul is clear, when lo! the black cloud of evil desire sweeps over it and dims its purity. A shifting kaleidoscope of darkness and light, of love and hatred, of heaven and hell, is this inner world of a man's soul.

What power can drill this army of thoughts into order, into harmony with the Highest? What, indeed, but the sobering oversight, the tender yet stern dominance of the sentinel peace of God? Standing at our heart's gate, it is He that keeps the foe outside—the foe with ill suggestions of treachery and rebellion. It is He that pronounces the watchword before which the evil one sinks back ashamed and slinks into his native darkness. Nor is He our defender only. Within, under His watchful rule, the confusions and rebellions of the spirit settle