

ciples. Now this is practically done in what we call the historical method. To study the facts as they really were by patient weighing of evidence, to approach them in a teachable spirit, ready to catch the least hint which they give spontaneously from within, and careful not to force upon them conclusions brought from without; this is a method which carries with it a promise of sound advance. Not least among its merits is this, that

by its help we may hope to acquire a better understanding of the supernatural. Not crudely rejecting it as too many have done, and not crudely accepting it, as if the simple pronouncing of the name rendered any further explanation unnecessary, but reverently studying the laws by which it acts, we shall be enabled in some degree to enter into the counsels of God, and obtain some further insight into the method of His dealings with men.

## Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

BY THE REV. D. A. MACKINNON, M.A., MARYKIRK.

### Romans viii. 28.

'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.'

THIS verse contains a glorious truth. Like some bright star shining from heaven on a dark world, it sheds light on God's people—His lovers and loved ones—during gloomiest hours in the night of time.

1. The promise is made to those who *love God* and are the *called according to His purpose*. A twofold cord is not easily broken. Such a double cord binds Christians to God in Christ. From the human side, love goes up and lays hold of God. From the Divine side, God's purpose stretches down and holds men with iron grip. When the first railway was made across the Rockies, the engineers wrought from both sides. At a certain point the two lines met, and the iron road was complete. The Cross of Christ is that point at which, in the middle of the great barrier of sin, human love and Divine purpose met to unite a sinful man to the holy God.

(1) *Them that love God*.—Hate is strong. Devils hate; and were hate the champion passion, Satan and sin would triumph. But love is stronger than hate—the David that can slay Goliath. And God is love.

Love to God is a genuine human affection. The lover of God loves Him, not because he has heard his name called on the muster roll of the chosen, but because peace, purity, and deep

satisfaction are found in God. He has seen a vision of the King in His beauty.

This love may run in various channels. One with an eye for beauty of form and figure in nature is constantly saying, 'My heart leaps up when I behold.' It flows with largest volume in the river-bed of the Incarnation. We love Him, because He first loved us.

(2) Those lovers of God are also the *called according to His purpose*. Here a corner of that veil is lifted which hides the mysteries of redemption. Each lover comes to God in Christ with free will and heart, and yet has to thank God for the coming. The act of man and the grace of God coincide. That track on which the lover of Christ has freely entered is the track of the eternal purpose. His *I will* answers to the Divine *thou shalt*.

A youth becomes a soldier, and finds that besides satisfying his own ambition, he is a recruit of Government. It nurses him when sick; compels him to serve, should he wish in a fit of disgust to leave; and puts him into the field, irrespective of his own will. In the Christian warfare it is the same. God enlisted, cares for, disciplines, promotes, and pensions His soldiers. As a writer on this Epistle has said very beautifully: 'I ought to have loved God always. It is of His mercy that I love Him now.'

2. In the case of those who love God and are the called according to His purpose, *all things work together for good*. No wonder! for God is behind the scenes.

Every man is fearfully and wonderfully made;

a Christian man the finest piece of work turned out of the Divine Creator's workshop.

It takes time to evolve the good. While all things are working together, like leaven in dough, pain, sorrow, and perplexity are inevitable. And one reason why a Christian should bear these more bravely than others, is that the good lies ahead. Each detail is part of God's great plan necessary for the final good. His shaping hand will spare no pain that is required to perfect the new creature's symmetry. A thorough soldier is the product of wise discipline and drill.

3. *We know*—just as a child knows that his mother loves him.

Love is the gateway to knowledge—'Love God and thou shalt know.' Such knowledge is an instinct of love. You cannot explain instinct to an outsider any more than a scientist can define argon. So with regard to this knowledge we can only say 'We know,' because we have it on the word of the trustworthy God. He who gave His Son will with Him also freely give us all good.

### Romans i. 16.

'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.'

PAUL, himself a Roman citizen, fascinated by the spell of Rome's greatness, knew that all its powers would be pitted against the Cross. He anticipated its contempt and ridicule, as illustrated by a famous graphite in the Museo Kircheriano. This rude sketch represents a slave doing homage to the figure of a man with an ass's head, hanging upside down on a cross. Underneath, this inscription is scrawled, 'Alexamenos worships his god.'

But just because Paul knew how forceful was the truth which he could bring to bear against it, he was ready even for that terrible Rome—'I am not ashamed' etc.

1. The gospel of Christ is God's message of mercy to sinners. Isaiah called it glad tidings of good things; John, God's love in giving everlasting life to the perishing through His only begotten Son; Paul, the record of Christ's advent to the world to save sinners.

Men are under the condemnation of a broken Divine law, which Christ in our nature has satisfied.

Through the Holy Spirit's application of this truth, repentance, regeneration, and holiness result—union to Christ in this world, and in the world to come everlasting life.

While to the Early Christians this was great joy, Paul knew that Rome's proud philosophers would despise the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ. Yet even in Rome, the centre of paganism, he determined to preach only the despised gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

2. Paul asserts that the gospel is God's power unto salvation—the instrument fashioned by God for this purpose.

In the material world we are slowly learning how to harness electricity as the strongest of forces. So also in the moral and spiritual world the conviction is surely gaining ground that the gospel is that power to deliver men from the ills of life which patriots and philosophers have elsewhere sought in vain. No *man* can create a power like this Divine one, any more than a man can dress the trees for their long summer day or undress them for winter's night, as God does.

The gospel used by the Holy Spirit (1) delivers sinners from their guilt, and gives them a right to heaven; (2) cleanses sinners from sin's pollution, and makes them fit for heaven.

On the human side this power constrains by love. They slandered human nature, who said that men would go on to sin because grace abounded. Even with fallen man, 'love is Lord of all.'

3. To every one that believeth—

But to the Cross He nails thy enemies,  
The law that is against thee, and the sins  
Of all mankind: with Him these are crucified,  
Never to hurt them more who rightly trust  
In this His satisfaction.

To every one that believeth. Due emphasis must rest on both members of this clause: (1) *every one*. Every one has sinned and needs God's righteousness (what a carnival of evil was imperial Rome the scene of), so the salvation offered must be as wide as the sin with which it deals; (2) *faith* is the avenue up to this righteousness—*that believeth*. Chapters iii. 21 to v. 11 are taken up with unfolding this.

Faith is personal reliance on Christ. Faith is trust, 'the opening of a mendicant hand to receive the gold of heaven: the opening of dying lips to receive the water of life.' Yet faith has no merit

in itself. It has nothing to do with *earning*, though everything to do with *taking*, God's gift. Christ is the end of all faith.

4. The apostle declares, '*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.*'

Strange that while 'prone to glory in our shame,' we are so ashamed of that which ought to be our glory. Paul had experienced the scorn wherewith Jewish Pharisee and Athenian philosopher had greeted the doctrine of the Cross. And the offence of the Cross was painfully real as he turned to imperial, all-devouring Rome. How dare he assert that the obscure Galilean peasant whom they had crucified was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world? But when he turned in thought from the *mistress* of the world to the martyred *Saviour* of the world, the temptation to be ashamed of Christ was trampled under foot. He was ready to go everywhere, with the gospel in his heart and on his lips—'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.'

Christ needs such heroes still to carry on the crusade against sin. Will you be one of them?

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## Ephesians vi. 10.

'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.'

By this bugle note of battle, Paul, the hero of a hundred fights, summons his Ephesian brethren to prepare for the holy war against sin.

All life, as we know it here, is a struggle—keener in one age and place than another—against calamities, inseparable from existence. This holds good of the religious life. In a real sense Christ came not to send peace but a sword. Even with peace within, there is an enduring conflict without.

The Christian soldier needs a stout heart and an effective weapon. The powers of good and evil, with Christ and Satan at their head, struggle for possession of every man, woman, and child in his or her whole being—body, soul, and spirit. One who forgets this, and thinks that the conflict is simply between reason and conscience on the one side, and evil passions on the other, is apt to trust in his own strength. We belong to the spiritual, as well as to the material world, and so we need spiritual armour and weapons.

I. BE STRONG.—(1) No finer forms exist among British athletes than those preserved in marble of the beautiful youths whom Paul watched with keen delight, as they ran or wrestled, in the Isthmian games. But good though strength of body be, it is not enough for a Christian soldier. (2) Neither is intellectual strength. Paul's own genius was the finest flower in the intellectual garden of the first century; yet he never once puts intellect in the foreground as a qualification for apostleship. (3) Higher than these is the moral and spiritual strength that comes to us through God revealed in Jesus Christ. If the Christian soldier be strong in muscle and intellect, well. But of far greater importance is spiritual might—the pure heart and strong will to obey the dictates of an enlightened conscience. A spiritual milksop may be able to play football or edit a clever newspaper, but he is not fit for the arena of which Paul writes. God's soldiers need not only the piety that can pray to God on Sunday, but the piety that can fight the world, the flesh, and the devil from Monday to Saturday.

A great hindrance to spiritual strength is doubt and indecision. We may afford to wait the settlement of some questions on which Christians differ. But with regard to the broad issues between right and wrong, Christ and Satan, no man dare to doubt. Am I to be honest, temperate, pure, reverent? If you are open to conviction either way, you must be weak; and here 'to be weak is to be wicked,' an easy prey to the devil. That strong fiend laughs at the ease with which he can destroy those who re-echo the cant that there is good in all religious principles, and who do at Rome as the Romans do. Such fireside soldiers of the Cross are more contemptible than the honest fanatic—faithful to grip the little truth which his heart can hold.

2. THE SOURCE OF THIS STRENGTH.—Paul does more than exhort the Ephesians to be strong. He tells them where strength is to be obtained: 'Be strong *in the Lord, and in the power of His might.*'

The union between Christ and His church is such, that they are members of His body, branches of the vine of which He is the stem. A Christian, therefore, separated from Christ is like a limb severed from the body, a twig cut off from the vine.

Christ and the power of His might is the true

source of spiritual strength. One who trusts to his own strength when he may have Christ's at his back, is like a soldier confronting the artillery of modern times with the bows and arrows used at Agincourt. It is folly to enter on this conflict without trusting in Christ, thinking of Christ, following Christ, praying to Christ, realising that Christ is on our side—fighting for us, encouraging us, giving us life and vigour. Without such strength you will go down in every encounter with Satan. You can only be truly strong by being in the Lord, having His power to reckon and fall back upon, everywhere and always.

To realize more fully than we do this soul-stirring truth would make us more valiant in fighting the battles of the faith. We are not the adherents of a forlorn hope. Christ's kingdom shall certainly come. Let us be strong in Him—strong in faith, strong in patient endurance, strong in prayer, in self-denial, and hopeful earnest effort.

### 1 Peter iv. 7.

'Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.'

'Be ye therefore of sound mind, and be sober unto prayer' (R.V.).

THESE two injunctions are based on the statement that the end of all things is at hand. The apostle urges that under such circumstances a certain mental attitude became Christians, namely, soundness of mind; and then he gives an illustration of one department in which soundness should be manifested—prayer—'Be sober unto prayer.'

At critical times, in emergencies, soundness of mind is commendable. Whatever that end which the apostle had in view, there are periods in the history of nations, families, or individuals, old and young, when the apostle's advice is particularly appropriate. As day fades into night, closing an epoch, actually ending existence to many insects, so in our lives. Their old order is always breaking up, to give place to a new order wherein things are changed. Leaving school, beginning work, change of home, marriage, death—each of these is at once a beginning and an end to us. If we look on these with levity, if we lose our heads and are thrown off our balance when they come, the result is disastrous.

I. BE YE THEREFORE OF SOUND MIND.—IN

prospect of trial have your wits about you, be self-controlled.

In the various passages where this attitude is commended, it implies wisdom and moderation in our estimate of things, *i.e.* a well-balanced attitude of looking at things—the power of seeing them in right proportions—true perspective in your mental picture. Extravagance and excess are tokens of weakness and not of strength. 'Let us then be up and doing' needs to be balanced by 'Be ye therefore of sound mind.'

David showed soundness of mind when he declined to wear Saul's armour, and resolved to fight Goliath with his familiar shepherd's sling. Peter, slashing wildly at the Roman soldiers who arrested Christ, illustrates the want of it. Some of the Thessalonians lost their heads over the information that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night, and became idlers and busybodies. When the approach of the day of the Lord was urged by them as an excuse for the meanness of living on others, Paul bid them work in quietness and eat their own bread.

Young and old alike need to remember that the cause of Christ is often hardly spoken of, because Christians forget the value of proportion in relation to truth. Though God makes us the steward of all the sevenfold graces of the Holy Spirit, yet each should foster them all on behalf of others.

2. BE SOBER UNTO PRAYER.—The Apostle Peter has happily chosen prayer to illustrate the advisability of studying soundness of mind—sobriety. Prayer is a case of general application. All must pray.

Alertness, mental activity—the opposite of that state of stupor which intoxication induces, is required in prayer. To pray well demands activity of understanding, heart, and will.

Sobriety and awakefulness should characterize the subject-matter, as well as the spirit of our prayers. Supplicants sometimes ask unreasonably and unwisely of God. When the Corinthian Christians became mentally intoxicated, through the possession of certain gifts, they gave way to extravagance in their approach to God. Paul rebuked them by pointing out that the ignorant and unbelieving would on these occasions regard them as madmen. James thus marked a common defect in prayer: 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss,' *i.e.* yours is no true prayer, you ask what your own hearts desire to have or do. Your

prayers are mere demands, having no regard to God's will.

Let Christ in this as in all things be our pattern. How sound of mind, how sober He was, even in the agony of Gethsemane. 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.' But though every nerve in His quivering body protested against the cross, this reasonable prayer was qualified almost as soon as uttered. The vision of a world unredeemed, if

He shrank, braced Him for the awful ordeal. The eager spirit soon conquered the weak flesh, and so He added, 'Not My will, but Thine be done.'

Seeing that time is short and the end near, let us cultivate all round a mind sound, well balanced, sober, and apply it to other duties as well as prayer. So only can we use the world and not abuse it—suffering the loss of all things that we may win Christ.

## Contributions and Comments.

### On 'Belial.'

IN REPLY TO PROFESSOR V. BAUDISSIN.

PROFESSOR V. BAUDISSIN will be sure of the friendly regard with which any production of his pen will be greeted by me. Having already elsewhere gone over the ground which his article in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for October traverses, I need not again discuss the subject at large. I must however (1), with regret, express my conviction that the etymological interpretation 'worthlessness' is both modern and improbable, and that the new tradition which at present defends it will not long hold its ground. On some other points raised by Professor v. Baudissin it would be easy to make plausible remarks, but I abstain. The truth is, that we are at a great disadvantage in tracing the history of terms like בלעל, owing to the fragmentariness and predominantly late character of our literary sources. We are thankful for the relatively early occurrences of the בלעל which exist, but we should be glad of still earlier ones. It is therefore as yet not more than probable that the mythological person called Bilili became a moral symbol = הוֹתֵה, insatiable and malignant destructiveness) in Canaan. I will (2) ask leave to guard against one supposition which some readers of Professor v. Baudissin's paper may form, namely, that I claimed to have proved the theory of the mythological origin of Beliyaaal. My words are: 'Some such theory (for I do not claim that this theory is more than very possible) seems absolutely necessary to account for the facts' (THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, June 1897, p. 424). I must (3) beg permission to express my regret that Professor v. Baudissin did

not refer to the Assyriological works quoted by me in my original article, especially those of Jensen, and to remark that it was Professor Hommel, not I, who described Bilili without qualification as 'the Babylonian goddess of the under-world' (THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, July 1897, p. 492). Professor Hommel knew perfectly well that Bilili was originally an earth goddess, the sister of Tammuz, and that Bilili had become thoroughly identified with the under-world, and he inferred, legitimately enough, that she could be taken as a representative of it. Nor has Professor Jensen (from whom, and from Jeremias, my own knowledge of Bilili was originally derived) shown the least inclination to deny this in his communication to Professor v. Baudissin. Indeed, he distinctly says that, unlike her brother Tammuz, Bilili 'appears to be unable to come forth again from the world of the dead,' בלי העלה, as the Hebrews would say.

It is much to be regretted that so many O.T. scholars should still remain comparatively unsympathetic to what I may call the new archaeological school of criticism. It is but a trifling contribution which I have made, but I am still unacquainted with any theory which goes so far to explain the phenomena of the history of Beliyaaal as my own and Professor Hommel's.

I did not think that my preparations for leaving England would have allowed me to say more. But I find it otherwise, and out of respect to Professor v. Baudissin I add some supplementary remarks. I beg that he will keep his mind open; the subject may pass into a new stage, and he may himself approach more nearly to my own point of view. His article is pleasant to read, and will