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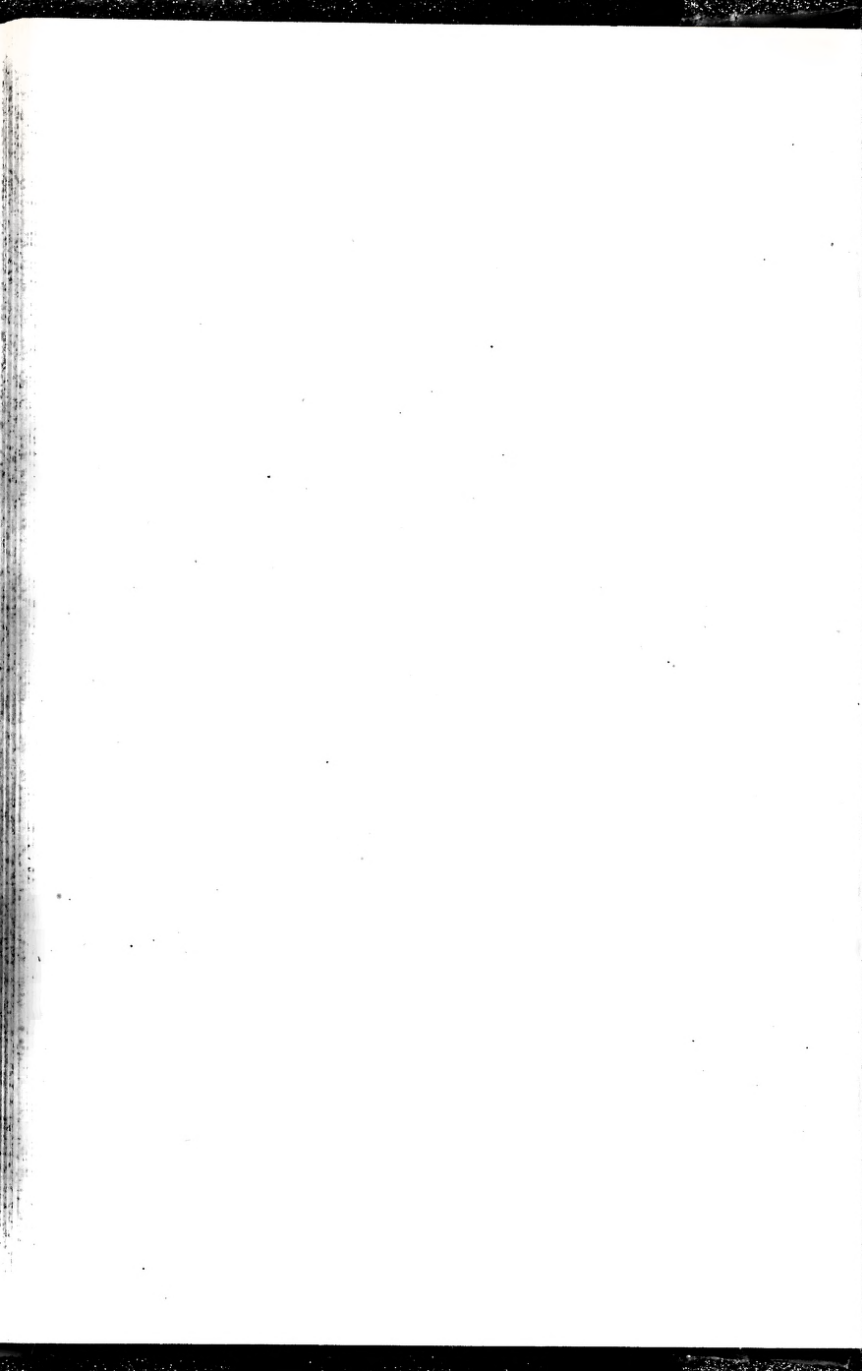
THE  
ADVERSARIES OF ST. PAUL  
IN 2ND CORINTHIANS.

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## THE ADVERSARIES OF ST. PAUL IN 2ND CORINTHIANS.

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**M**OST of the difficulties in this Epistle will disappear if we can succeed in coming to a clear understanding as to the main subject of difference between Paul and his adversaries.

These adversaries are here denounced in the strongest terms as mountebanks and impostors (chap. xi. 13); and the controversy assumes a tone of greater exasperation than in Galatians, where personal authority was less directly at issue, or, at least, was made subordinate to the difference as to circumcision and other Jewish practices.

The first clear reference to the adversaries is in chap. ii. 17, where they are described as "huckstering the word of God," *i.e.*, treating the cause of Christianity in a mercenary mechanical way. It may be remarked in passing that the same word—*κάπηλος* and *καπήλευω*—is often applied by Plato to the Sophists; and, perhaps, a distinct idea of the censure intended in one case may assist the comprehension of the other. The quarrel of the Socratic school with the Sophists arose out of the disparity between mere instruction and true mental education—between scepticism concealed under a mask of showy accomplishment, and the profounder subjectivity cherishing belief in truth and the mind's capacity to reach it. The initial manifestations of sophistry were not the

captious and palpably immoral inferences which eventually resulted from it, but only those first fruits of theoretic scepticism—the conventional and catechetical teaching which either disregarded truth altogether, or else confounded relative truth with absolute. The sins against education and morals with which the Sophists were charged, may not furnish an exact parallel to the delinquencies of the adversaries of Paul, yet there are resemblances traceable to an analogous cause—namely, absence of true principle, and, as we shall presently see, an appeal to estimates merely external.

The censure implied in the word *κἀπηλος* has been supposed to include corruption of doctrine, a fault in the matter as well as manner, which from the sequel must be presumed to have consisted in Judaising practices and tenets; this is to some extent confirmed by the strongly marked contrast of spirit and letter,—of New and Old Testaments in the third chapter, and also by the charge of veiling and sophisticating the word—“*δολοῦντες τὸν λόγον*”—(chap. iii. 14 and iv. 2), compared with the “plainness” and “simplicity” professed by Paul (chap. i. 12; iii. 12; xi. 3). But these indications, though not to be overlooked, leave unsolved the main question,—whence these incidental perversities, and what are we to consider the chief object for which Paul is here contending?

This, there can be little doubt, was the question as to apostolic authority, and the protest of internal principle against one merely external. The older apostles would not recognise Paul's official status as equal to theirs, and their emissaries, who could not expect a directly favourable reception for Jewish doctrines in a Gentile community, found it convenient to lay the main stress of their attack on the admitted absence in Paul's case of personal connection with Christ. The recommendatory letters mentioned in chap. iii. must have emanated from persons in authority; and these

could only have been those "very chiefest apostles," the "highly exalted" according to "outward appearance," to whom allusion is made in the 10th and 11th chapters. In the same spirit of independence which he manifests in Galatians, Paul scornfully disclaims any such help, adding that his doctrine already possessed the best seal of a true mission in the response of the hearts of the converts. The climax of the controversy is reached in the 7th verse of chap. x.—"Ye look to [the person or the] outward appearance; but if any one trusts to himself that he is of Christ, let him of himself consider this again, that as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's." But the "belonging to Christ" contemplated by Paul was quite different from theirs; it was a spiritual connection or "sonship" independent of external vouchers,—an internal light comparable, as he says, to the divine irradiation of primeval darkness, and owing nothing to human intermediation (chap. iv. 6; comp. Gal. iv. 6, Rom. viii. 14, 15); its manifestations implied in many respects a reversal of men's usual estimates—its wisdom appearing to worldly wisdom foolishness;—its evidence was the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" mentioned in the first epistle (chap. ii. 4); in other words, intuitive conviction. There has often occurred a crisis in theological annals, when it became necessary to appeal from the scholasticism of arguments and "evidences" to the internal testimony of reason and conscience, as the sole source of a satisfactory conviction not merely as to the external supports of religion, but also as to its matter and substance.\* But such appeals find an echo only in a congenial state of feeling, and the apostle had many disadvantages to contend with in maintaining his ground against those relying on the more obvious claims of ordinary legitimacy and personal transmission.

\* See Dodwell's "Christianity not founded on Argument;" and Lessing's Works, vol. x. pp. 39, 40, 53, &c.

The position of these is tersely summed up in the 12th verse of the fifth chapter—as that of men “glorifying in conventional seeming and not in heart”—*ἐν προσώπῳ κυχωμένοι καὶ ὄν καρδία*; the latter word denoting, in the apostle’s usual language, the centre of his religious consciousness, as in chap. iii. 3; ix. 7; Gal. iv. 6; the former meaning not “appearance” only, but, as in chap. x. 7, comp. Gal. ii. 6, any pretensions founded on external and personal considerations, and here to be understood as the boast of those claiming to be the only legitimate apostles as actual followers of Jesus. It is, in short, the same contrast as that before indicated between internal and external religion, or Voluntaryism and Establishment; though, properly speaking, the latter being destitute of true principle, and irrespective of intrinsic worth, is not so much religion as party spirit.

The cause of the religion of intuitive conviction or pure idealism advocated by Paul is invariably by him associated with the idea of Christ, considered as a spirit present in the heart (comp. Gal. iv. 6); and, undoubtedly, there is in the human mind and the exercise of reason something mysterious—a combination of finite and infinite—which nominalistic logic vainly tries to explain away.\* But this idea of Christ formed a strong contrast to that of the adversaries, who, holding the Jewish notion of the Messiah, accordingly required the external attestation of those who had attended him in life. The counterpart to Paul’s appeal to Christ as an internal principle is the reliance on personal vouchers—in other words, the principle of apostolical succession on the part of the

\* Mill’s “Logic,” Book ii., chap. 5.—“Allowing that, with our present means, we are unable to explain the antinomy as to the principle of morals being transcendent in regard to man considered as a finite being, while immanent in him as a rational one, still we are not justified in pronouncing an ultimate explanation impossible.” *Philosophische Monatshefte*, by Bergmann and others, vol. viii., p. 176.

adversaries;\* the antithesis being that between human intermediation and immediate spiritual contact or affiliation with God (comp. Gal. i. 12; 1 Cor. iii. 23). The difficult sixteenth verse of the fifth chapter is also thus explained. The expression here used, disclaiming "knowledge of Christ after the flesh," cannot refer to personal acquaintance with Jesus, not merely because it were superfluous so to speak of one dead, but also because this interpretation would be inapplicable to the first clause of the sentence, and also because any personal contact of Paul with Jesus before his conversion could only have been of a hostile character, and, consequently, no way comparable to the sentiments of those whom he is here controverting. The meaning, thus limited, can only be—"if we have ever thought of Christ as the Jewish Messiah;" this thought, as well as the every-day view of man in general, the apostle here declares himself to have abandoned, looking exclusively to the regenerate or spiritual man; he is so thoroughly an idealist that he admits himself to be blind, foolish, and even insane in the world's estimate (chap. v. 13), like the philosophically blinded in Plato (*Repub.* 7, 517); but he retorts the charge of blindness on the spiritually blind (chap. iii. 14; iv. 4).

And corresponding to a different view of Christ's nature and office was the divergency between the two doctrines as to the significancy of his death. To those looking on Christ as the Jewish Messiah, his death was an anomaly and a "stumbling-block"—an incongruous interpolation between the two important Messianic epochs, the earthly career and the coming in glory; whereas for St. Paul it formed the very essence of his teaching (1 Cor. i. 18, 23, &c.), being by him treated not so much as an historical event as a

\* See chap. x. 12, taken in connection with the preceding verses. Personal homage or following is similarly contrasted with spiritual or moral allegiance in Lessing's "Nathan," 2nd Act, Scene 1: "Ye would be Christians, forsooth, not men," &c.

symbol of mental regeneration or a new spiritual life ; and that not merely in individuals, but the race (chap. iii. 18 ; v. 14, 15).

The import of the veil of Moses in the third chapter seems plain enough—it means the ambiguous character of the old covenant with its connected ordinances, as contrasted with Paul's conception of the full, unimpeded light of the new—that hesitation between life and death, concession and retractation, at which the apostle glances contemptuously in the first chapter, and which, it may be added, was inseparable from a system of mere legality (Gal. iii. 12). By virtue of the ministry of the spirit as contrasted with that of the letter, Paul often exercises the right of breaking through this veil, and claims the same right for others ; though it must be admitted that his arbitrary style of proceeding in the way of allegorical interpretation, though strikingly illustrative of his own position and the nature of spirituality as then understood, is not an altogether unexceptionable one.\* It was impossible for any one under the circumstances to abandon entirely the Old Testament revelation ; on the other hand, new ideas and circumstances called for readjustment in the mode of dealing with it : hence Paul's appeal to the promise as paramount to the law, and his fanciful allegorising, not very unlike the quibbling mystifications of scripture which he complained of in the adversaries (chap. iv. 2).

But how are we to understand the singular phrase, τὰ κρυπτά τῆς ἀισχύνης—the hidden things of dishonesty, which in chapter iv. 2 he professes to have renounced ? The words, it need scarcely be remarked, are not to be understood of secret vices, but rather of subtle machinations calculated to support a peculiar theological theory.† It has been observed that

\* See 1 Cor. ix. 9, 10 ; x. 2, 4, 11 ; Gal. iv. 25 ; and still more reckless is the use of allegory in the Epistle of Barnabas.

† Klöpffer's Commentary, p. 222.



κρύπτω and καλύπτω are correlated; and thus renunciation of the κρυπτὰ would seem to be the natural result or equivalent of Paul's ἀπλότης, εἰλικρινεία, and παρρησία (chap. i. 12; iii. 12; xi. 3)—or of the “unveiled face” claimed at the end of chapter iii. for all true Christians. Paul often declares that his gospel was not one to be ashamed of.\* This leaves open the assumption that there was a gospel which could not well bear the light of day or that of general criticism; and such, we must infer, was the character of the rival gospel (chap. xi. 4)—namely, that of those hesitating followers of Moses who clung to the veil, in the sense of those “beggarly elements” and observances of which, however, they were already half ashamed. Those who are but half-convinced of the truth of their own principles are apt to vacillate between old and new—dallying between inconsistent creeds, and uniting with their novel profession the incongruous practices of another. Thus, in Philippians iii. 7, Paul is made to say that the work-righteousness, formerly counted by him as gain, he now found to be loss; the source of his former pride was now his shame, the object of his contempt. The “crypts of shame” may, therefore, refer to trivial mystifications of ritual and subtleties of rabbinical interpretation; and the “walking in craftiness” may be understood of various crafty insinuations by which the adversaries tried to ruin Paul's personal credit, such as those of lightness and vacillation (i. 17), vain-gloriousness (v. 12), sheer insanity (v. 13), self-sufficiency (iii. 5), a craving for lucre (viii. 20; xii. 15, 20), mysticism (iv. 3).

After having in various ways insisted on the superiority of the spiritual or ideal view of things to the common-place or carnal, exposing at the same time the subtrefuges and superstitions of his opponents, the

\* Rom. i. 16; 2 Cor. vii. 11; x. 8.

apostle proceeds in chap. vi. to recapitulate the essential characteristics of that view in a series of striking antitheses,—of the same kind as those which first occurring in the so-called “beatitudes” of the gospel, and repeated in the Epistle to Diognetus, constitute what Bacon terms “the Christian paradox,” and form the subject of Schiller’s noble poem on the contrast of the actual life and the ideal. Then, after adverting to certain practical matters less immediately connected with the subject before us, he continues the vindication of his personal efficiency in comparison with his rivals; and having before referred to the ready welcome with which he was received, and the testimony to his usefulness recorded in the hearts and consciences of the Corinthians, now points to the evidences of a genuine apostleship afforded by his revelations, his signs and wonders, and above all by his labours and infirmities, since there could not be a more striking exemplification of the truth of his principles than the heroic resolve defying bodily disadvantages,\* and even succeeding in spite of them. Some obscure allusions in the first and second chapters will now become more clearly intelligible in their connection with the general argument. The apostle here describes himself as accompanying the triumph of the Almighty in men’s hearts (chap. ii. 14), and as the herald of a uniformly consistent doctrine summing up all prior religious developments (chap. i. 18, 19). Some change of plan in regard to going to Corinth seems to have occasioned ill-natured remarks as to his consistency. In repudiating these he points to the general spirit of his teaching as affording the best evidence as to his character and dealings, saying in effect: “the change of plan was not preconcerted, but a consequence of your own altered demeanour. You

\* Such is indeed the essence of all heroism and of genuine tragedy, as at large explained by Schiller in his “*Essay on the Tragic Art.*”

should judge my conduct from my general principles. The vacillation imputed to me would have been inconsistent with the entire character of a doctrine which, unlike the ill-assorted affirmations and negations of Jewish law, in which life and death, blessing and cursing, incongruously intermingle (comp. Gal. iii.), is simply and clearly affirmative;—an affirmative character, it may be added, which is in accordance with the essential nature of idealism.\*

The tone of exasperation becomes fiercer towards the close, where, in chap. x. and xi., the main subject, the question of personal authority, is more distinctly brought forward. Against the boasters of their own better claims the apostle declares himself compelled to boast in return, asserting his equality as an Israelite, and insisting on a "belonging to Christ" not a whit inferior to theirs, or even that of the very chiefest pretenders to that dignity; bitterly rallying the Corinthians (chap. xi. 4) for their ready servility to the pretensions of foolish vain-glorious men, which no one really understanding the doctrine impugned would have tolerated. Yet he ironically avails himself of this tolerant humour in those he addresses to answer folly with folly, though varying the ground of self-laudation; adding to the rest of his vindication the boast of his more abundant labours, and especially his infirmities, because it was the great aim of the preacher of "Christ crucified" to be like him in suffering as in triumph.

With this latter idea is probably connected the peculiar aspect under which "the adversary" is here represented. In the first epistle (1 Cor. xv. 32; xvi. 9) "beast" is the name not unreasonably given to men acting with brutal malignity and ferocity; for the notion of a literal fighting with beasts is given up

\* Comp. Aristotle's "Metaphysics," 8, 9, and 11, 10, where it is said that there is no absolute evil—no antagonism to the first Cause;—and the scene in Faust's study, where "the denier" is the devil.

by the commentators (*see* Neander's "Auslegung," p. 255), and is excluded by the subsequent recapitulation of the apostle's labours and sufferings, in which no such struggle is named; whereas a desperate struggle of another kind is pointedly here alluded to (chap. i. 8, 9), and may be sufficiently explained by what we read in Eusebius (E. Hist. iii. 23) as to John's succeeding Paul as head of the Church of Ephesus. The animus of the party of John is abundantly manifested by the denunciations of the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse, where the Asiatic churches are congratulated *seriatim* on having detected and exposed certain lying pretensions to apostleship, put forth on the part of persons pretending to be Jews, but not really so, and rather belonging to the "Synagogue of Satan;"—pretenders comparable to Balaam, the well-known type of false and adverse prophecy, who sought to cast a stumbling-block before the Israelites, and to persuade them to eat meats offered to idols. In a similar style of invective St. Paul here (chap. xi. 13, 15) denounces the "false apostles transforming themselves into apostles of Christ;" adding that since Satan himself sometimes assumes the aspect of an angel of light, there need be no wonder if his ministers are similarly transformed. The language here used, and that of the first epistle, will be better understood if we bear in mind that Satan was in Jewish phraseology often termed ἀνημέρος θηρ, a "dragon" or "roaring lion," and that Jesus was himself traditionally said to have contended with those "doleful creatures of the wilderness, in whom the notions of beast and demon intermingled. (*See* Mark i. 13, comp. with Isaiah xiii. 21, and Winer's Dictionary, *art.* Gespenster.)

Does the language here and elsewhere (*see* Gal. i. 8, 9) used by the apostle seem too intemperately violent? According to the well-known saying of Aristotle, the corruptions of the best things are the

worst ; and religion is of so peculiarly delicate a nature that the very means employed to promote its interests are apt to turn into the means of its debasement. "You want a form," says Lessing; "but it so happens that the form does not simply subsist alongside of the essential, it invariably tends to weaken and supersede the essential." It is a common characteristic of all established religions, as well as of the rival "gospel," alluded to in 2nd Corinthians (chap. xi. 4), to treat these accessory forms as entitled to the same deference and permanent authority as the truth, often of a very evanescent and subtle kind, which they seem to accompany ; so that by an easy process of misconstruction the outside is mistaken for the inside, and the human obtains exclusive possession of the homage due only to the divine. Considering the actual wants of human nature, Kant and Fichte admit the utility of such forms in relation to the mental condition of those who resort to them, and the Papacy and the Levitical priesthood have been defended in the same sense ; for there has been, and, unfortunately, still continues a state of things in which these and the like institutions may be said to be beneficial. But then how deplorably low must human nature have sunk to need such expedients, and how questionable even the advantage immediately accruing from them when it is recollected how they tend to perpetuate the degradation which alone authorises their use ! Formalities of observance and other "beggarly elements" are commonly treated as "possessions for ever," instead of imperfect rudiments (æsthetic culture being their true philosophical equivalent) from which it is desirable as soon as may be to escape.

It has been said that Paul was driven out of Ephesus by riots raised against him by the Pagans : a presumption based on the account given in Acts of the riot of Demetrius. But if the book giving this account is elsewhere found deliberately misrepresenting Paul's

character and proceedings as conveyed by himself, and in particular describing him as contending not with the adversaries now tolerably familiar to us, but with Jews and Pagans, we shall be prepared to expect that in this instance also a similar spirit of misrepresentation has been at work, and that the only reliable inference to be drawn from the narrative, in some respects not even plausibly adjusted to existing data (comp. Acts xix. 30 with 2 Cor. i. 8) is, that the apostle's successful career at Ephesus ended in riotous disturbances. But these must be construed according to the writer's general mode of treatment; and if one of his most prominent characteristics be a studied determination to ignore differences among Christians, and, in particular, to throw a veil over the true nature of the antagonism by which Paul's career was obstructed—for, with the exception of the quarrel about Mark, and a vague prediction in Paul's parting address at Miletus, we discover no trace of them—we must infer that his object was not properly historical, especially when considering that the suggestion as to Pagan hostility is rendered improbable by the fact recorded in Eusebius as to John's succeeding Paul at Ephesus, and—with the exception of the exile to Patmos, an event which the fanatically seditious spirit of the Apocalypse may readily account for—continuing there undisturbed to the time of Trajan. No where is it more necessary than when consulting Acts to look to general probability, and, if possible, to compare the particulars questioned with independent authority. Fortunately the Pauline Epistles afford the best means of doing so; and the information given by them, differing as it does so materially from Acts, leaves no option but to infer that the aim of the latter being irenic and not historical, it purposely sacrifices accuracy of fact to the more immediately pressing object of Christian union, endeavouring to conceal by a decent veil of retrospective unanimity the elements of dissension

at their source. But the strong language of this epistle—especially that of the 11th chapter—leaves no doubt as to the true character of the dissentient parties. If the simple arrangement between Paul and the other apostles, as recorded in Galatians, became—as Professor Zeller has shown to be the inevitable inference—the Apostolic Council of Acts xv.—if the gift of “speaking with tongues,” as described in Corinthians in connection with the theory of the “distribution” of the various gifts of the one spirit—expanded into the elaborate details of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost—with all its various carefully adjusted analogies to the giving of the law on Sinai,\*—we need not be surprised if the bare intimation of Acts ix. 29, as to Paul disputing with the Grecians—who answered by endeavouring to kill him—became in the sequel expanded into a formal outbreak of heathen vengeance against him in the metropolis of Asiatic heathenism; a narrative certainly life-like, yet not more so than the humours of the Roman rabble in *Julius Caesar*, or any well-executed imaginative exercise in a Jesuit Retreat. A careful comparison of Acts with the genuine Pauline Epistles† is, indeed, the first step in the critical study of the New Testament.

\* The day of Pentecost was that on which, in Jewish tradition, the “fiery law” was given on Mount Sinai; and to account for its universal obligation, it was said that though pronounced once only, it was heard by every nation in its own language. “When the voice went out from Sinai,” says the Talmud, “it was parted into seven voices, and from seven voices into seventy tongues. Just as from a glowing piece of metal, when struck on the anvil with a hammer, many sparks issue from one blow, so from the one voice of God proceeded a great multitude of voices.” See Wettstein’s Note to Acts ii., p. 463.

† Only Galatians, the two Corinthians, and Romans, are here understood to be Paul’s.