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have ventured to write this paper. And yet, though difficult it may be—though difficult it is—there is One Who can make the weak things of the world confound the things which are mighty; and Who by the powerless blast of trumpets can cast down the strong walls of a fortress. Thank God, help if sought from Him is never withheld!

GEORGE HENRY SUMNER.



ART. III.—SAINTS' DAYS IN THE CHURCH'S YEAR.

I. JANUARY. CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

A. THE LORD'S CHOSEN VESSEL.

"A chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles."—
ACTS ix. 15.

THOUGH the intervals which divide the Saints' Days of our Christian Year one from another are irregular, yet in each month some one of these Saints is definitely presented to us, to claim it as a peculiar possession. In some instances such candidates for our reverent attention are more than one. June is made very rich by the memories of St. Barnabas, St. John the Baptist, and St. Peter; and in December the great Christmas Festival is surrounded by the threefold presence of St. Thomas, St. Stephen, and St. John.

In this first month of the year there is no doubt as to the Apostolic figure that arrests our attention. Our series of "Meditations on Saints' Days" must begin with St. Paul; and one topic will be enough for this beginning. The words quoted above are not the whole of the sentence addressed by the Lord to Ananias at Damascus, when he, who was presently to be Paul the Apostle, was a trembling penitent in darkness and perplexity, and when Ananias, who knew him only as a fierce persecutor of the Christians, hesitated to visit him. But this fragment of the sentence contains quite enough in substance and variety for our first and immediate use.

When Ananias had received directions to go to this man to "put his hand on him, that he might receive his sight," with the assurance that he himself had been prepared, by an explanatory vision, to welcome him as "a brother,"¹ Ananias

¹ See Acts xxii. 13, "Brother Saul." The skilful manner in which Ananias is used in this speech ought to receive the closest attention.

yet ventured to expostulate: "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy Name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake."¹

Now, limiting ourselves to the phrase selected out of this sentence, and omitting all reference to St. Paul's standing before "kings," to his prolonged testimony unto the "children of Israel," and to his manifold "sufferings," we pause in the presence of this lowly word "*vessel*"—this ignominious word, if we will. It is true, as this Apostle himself tells us (and is not his metaphor a reminiscence, a far-off echo, of what was said to him at Damascus by Ananias?) that "in a great house, there are some vessels to honour and some to dis-honour."² Still, the word itself expresses simply what is made for some use, and is absolutely helpless and dead, except so far as it is applied to some use. The "*vessel*" can do nothing of itself. Take the word in one of its popular senses, and this is enough for our purpose; and we are quite safe in keeping ourselves for the moment within the limit of the popular English translation.³ Think of those noble "*vessels*" on the sea, that go from shore to shore, interchanging the products of the earth and associating man with man. Still, except so far as they are moved by the influence of forces quite independent of themselves, and under a control for which they themselves have no responsibility, they are motionless and valueless. And such is the language in which the Lord speaks of His Apostle. He is merely an instrument in Divine hands, and of himself he can do nothing.

And if such language is fit to describe an Apostle, what are we to say of ourselves, and of our own poor place in this world? What can we do for God, except so far as He uses us? What power have we of resisting the circumstances in the midst of which He has placed us? The utmost humility becomes us—the utmost submissiveness—when we read this description of an Apostle, and when we think what *we* are in the presence of God, and with the weight of the duties which He appoints for us.

Yet, though absolute in power, and with His instruments

¹ Acts ix. 13-16.

² 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21.

³ Yet we must remember that we are here only following the line of the English language. In the Greek of Acts xxvii. 17 *πλευρα* is not a ship, but the gear of a ship.

entirely dependent upon Him, He does not select those instruments at random. St. Paul was not simply a "vessel," but a "*chosen vessel*." There were reasons for the choice, some of which are very evident; while, regarding others, we, with our weak human powers of judgment, must not expect to be able to pronounce an opinion. Sometimes, as we are told on the highest authority, God chooses "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty,"¹ so that "no flesh should glory in His presence."² Sometimes, but not always; and in the case of St. Paul, we can see the following qualifications at least for his unique office of bringing in the Gentiles to be combined with the Hebrews in one Christian Church. He was a man of eager zeal, of indomitable energy, of surprising mental power, of quick sympathy, of persuasiveness, of industry and perseverance. In the early days at Tarsus he had been in contact with the habits of thought, and with the social life of the Gentiles of the day.³ He had the benefit of the Greek culture of his native city. Both he and his father were Roman⁴ citizens: the habits of mercantile intercourse were familiar to him, while in the schools of Jerusalem he became thoroughly acquainted with the Hebrew learning,⁵ so that he knew well all the points of contact between the Old Testament and the Heathen world.

And we, too, have our qualifications for the work which God assigns to us, and it is no true humility to be blind to them. It may, indeed, be the qualification of weakness; and to some extent, no doubt, it must be so; but then we have the Lord's strength to lean upon, His strength to help us, His strength to be infused into our weakness; and probably—nay, certainly—there are direct qualifications, in special opportunities, in aptitudes of temperament, and the like, which He intends us to use, and in using which we shall find a very great part of our happiness.

St. Paul's happiness was that he was a "*chosen vessel*," to bear a most precious freight from shore to shore. That freight was the "*Name*" of Jesus Christ, with its rich meaning, its consolation for all sorrow, its pardon for all sin, its promises for all temptation. He, indeed, was only as a "vessel" for a great enterprise across the waters (I believe that this seafaring image is as good as any for our purpose, especially in this our mercantile country), but he was a "*chosen*" vessel; and the breath of the Holy Spirit filled the sails, and the hand of Jesus was on the helm.

¹ 1 Cor. i. 27.

³ Acts xxi. 39.

⁴ Ibid., xxii. 28.

² Ibid., 29.

⁵ Ibid., 3.

And is not this our mission in the world—to "bear" the "Name" of Jesus—not simply to "bear" it passively, as our highest honour, but actively to carry it onward, to convey it to others, so that they may share this privilege; not simply to be "called Christians,"¹ but to make others Christian too? This Festival appeals to us with peculiar force, because, by origin, we are "*Gentiles*." Let us give to it the due place which belongs to it among the sacred voices of the year, so that we may be more conscious of, and may with more faithfulness endeavour to fulfil, the vocation to which our Master has called us after the pattern of St. Paul.

B. THE PATTERN OF MERCY FOR ALL AGES.

"*For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe.*"—1 TIM. i. 16.

What faith this shows in the perpetuity of Christianity! Here is St. Paul writing one of his latest letters, in the midst of disheartening circumstances, and in the midst of a vast heathen world, where, as yet, Christianity was only a spark in the surrounding darkness; and yet he looks forward, without doubt, to generation after generation, in which one after another should be brought, by faith like his own, to an immortal life.

But more than this: he sees clearly that there is a conscious relation, so to speak, between his Conversion and the conversion of those Christians of the future; that between his case and the cases of others there is to be a recognized connection which will never be forgotten. And now, in fulfilment of this prophecy, we are once more called in this present month to commemorate the Conversion of St. Paul.

There are many aspects in which this great event may be regarded; and it is useful to the Church to view those aspects in succession, as the years follow one another and we come to this festival again and again. For the moment let us limit ourselves to this one aspect of it, which St. Paul here suggests. One reason for his conversion, he distinctly says, in the secret counsels of God, was this: that in him "first"—or rather, in him chiefly—in him above all²—a pattern should be given of the whole amount—the infinite amount—of God's "long-suffering," so that no question should arise afterwards concerning His wonderful patience, forbearance, and mercy.

¹ Acts xi. 26.

² "In me as chief" is the translation in the Revised Version.

St. Paul is constantly looking back to his Conversion, so that he is ever ready instinctly to speak about it or to write about it.¹ The great extent alike of his own guilt previously, and of God's goodness in the change which took place in him, is felt by his conscience and kept fresh in his memory. Let us try to realize, under three heads, some part of this guilt; for, as we have seen, this is a matter which very deeply concerns ourselves.

And, first, mark the *cruelty* which characterized his persecution of the Christians. St. Luke's expression, when he resumes the history from the point of the death of Stephen, is that Saul "breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"² It would be hardly possible to employ a stronger phrase. We have read it so often that we fail to see its force. But it describes terribly both the violence of his spirit and the fatal character of his acts. Rage and murder were the very atmosphere which he "breathed." But there is greater force still in St. Paul's words concerning himself; for they show the impression which his persecuting days had left upon his conscience and memory. Describing his Conversion, long afterwards, to Festus and Agrippa, he said: "Being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."³ His bigotry and hatred against the Christians made him like a madman. And he was not content with what he could do in Jerusalem and Judæa; but he went, like a very missionary of persecution, on his murderous errand to foreign cities. Thus it was that, when arrested by Divine mercy, he was travelling to Damascus. But there is one word, alike in St. Luke's account of what he did at this time, and in one of his own accounts, which sets before us the cruelty of which St. Paul was guilty, in a remarkably vivid light. The direct historian says that Saul, "entering into every house, and halting men and *women*, committed them to prison;"⁴ and, again, that when he made preparation to go to Damascus, it was "that, if he found any of this way, whether they were men or *women*, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."⁵ And he says himself, when addressing the angry mob at Jerusalem, and telling, to them the story of his Conversion: "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and *women*."⁶ Here consider what is involved in the special and reiterated mention of women—how this persecutor treated those cruelly who ought, above all others, to be treated gently—what tearing-up of families was involved in this—what misery to children. We

¹ See Acts xxii. and xxvi.

⁴ *Ibid.*, viii. 3.

² *Ibid.*, ix. i. 4

⁵ *Ibid.*, ix. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, xxvi. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxii. 4.

see that it could not have been a happy reflection to him in later years when he thought of these days, after he found out that this Religion of Christ was the Religion of kindness, of mercy, of respect for women, of domestic love. We are clearly right if we set down cruelty as one of the features of his sin, which caused him sad remembrance afterwards, when he became penitent.

But there is a cruelty to the soul far worse than any cruelty to the body. In one of his own accounts of his conversion, he says : "I compelled the saints to blaspheme."¹ This is his own language. On this point, in the retrospect of his sin, he lays great stress. By this I understand that he did his best to cause the disciples of Christ to "blaspheme." He could not actually force them to do this. If they were such as Stephen, they would resist to the death ; and some, we must believe, did so resist, and died martyrs. But others doubtless "blasphemed that worthy Name by which they were called,"² repudiated Christ and became apostates. And thus we are brought face to face with that mysterious problem of human responsibility that some men who obtain a high place in the Kingdom of Christ, and pass gloriously on their way towards Heaven, have in earlier and darker days done spiritual harm to others, and sent them downward on the way to destruction. But, not to pursue that course of thought further, we see what St. Paul felt concerning this particular aspect of his sin during his persecuting days. He had *sinned in causing others to sin*. And of all the various kinds and modes of human guilt, this is one of the very worst. This guilt, moreover, is not limited to persecutors. It is of common and daily occurrence, and an awful retribution awaits it. To draw the young and unwary away from the religious lessons of their childhood and their home—to entice the weak to that intemperance in drink which ruins both soul and body—to pollute by foul language the conscience and mind of others—the repentance for these sins, if repented of at all, will be terrible; and, if they are not repented of, they stand inscribed in the largest letters on the pages of the Judgment Book.

But there is a third aspect of St. Paul's sin, during the period which immediately preceded his conversion, which demands our careful attention. One of St. Luke's expressions is that he "*made havoc of the Church*";³ and his own remembrance of this time was such that he was led to say afterwards : "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God."⁴

¹ Acts xxvi. 11.

² James ii. 7.

³ Acts viii. 3.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 9. Compare Gal. i. 13.

And here I am quoting, not from a Speech, but from an Epistle, a circumstance which gives us a new insight into his vivid recollection of the guilt of this period of his life. Now the word "Church" in such passages has a very sacred and solemn meaning. It denotes the consecrated company—a company at that time weak and scanty—but still the consecrated company of Christ's disciples in a world of unbelievers. This company St. Paul did his utmost to scatter and destroy. He desired to *extirpate* the Religion of Christ. He was in open resistance to Him Who came to found a Church that could never die, Who identified Himself with those feeble believers, and Who called Saul out of his madness by the question: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" This proud rebel came to know that this Church was, to quote our Baptismal Service, "the very Spouse of Christ," that this Religion was the most precious inheritance of all the ages, and the concentrated hope of the world. He himself became the chief teacher of its doctrine. His whole being became devoted to the propagation of this faith. How well we can understand the feelings with which he quoted the wondering words of the Christians, in the earlier days of his Ministry: "He which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed;" and with which he adds: "They glorified God in me!"¹

Thus, placing before our view these three aspects of the sin committed by this Apostle when a persecutor, and without seeking to add anything further, we see how true it is that in his Conversion the Lord Jesus Christ "showed all long-suffering for a pattern to them that should thereafter believe on Him." We see clearly, when reading this history, that there is hope for every man, that there is no blindness too dark to be illuminated, no mistake too serious to be corrected, no sin too bad to be forgiven, no life so utterly wrong but that, through Conversion, it may be made a life of devotedness to Christ and a blessing to mankind.

J. S. Howson.



ART. IV.—MEDICAL MISSIONS IN INDIA.

IF I were asked, What is the Missionary agency in India from which we may hope to obtain most success? I should answer, Medical Missions.

¹ Gal. i. 23, 24.