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high order intellectually. Nothing could be more admirably fitted to restore in the student mind that respect for Christian dogma without which religion is apt to evaporate in vague and formless sentiment.

Mr. McEwan Lawson is known as the writer of certain very vivacious sermonettes 'and other curly tales for young and old.' His new book, *Is Christianity Done For?* (S.C.M.; 3s. 6d. net), gives us a further supply of the same appetizing provender. It contains over a score of short papers, some of which have already appeared in the 'London Evening News' and 'The Christian World.' In these the writer discourses with lively wit and wisdom on such themes as 'The Folly of the Foot-Rule,' 'New Spectacles,' 'Luck or Providence,' 'What does the Cross Mean?' and 'Over the Hills and Far Away.' There is no formal apologetic or systematic argumentation, but all is written from the Christian standpoint and abounds in suggestions that there are 'reasons and reasons' why a man should believe.

Amicitia Corolla (University of London Press; 10s. 6d. net) is a volume of essays presented to James Rendel Harris, D.Litt., on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. An excellent portrait of Rendel Harris forms the frontispiece. The editor, Herbert G. Wood, writes a dedicatory letter in which it is claimed that these studies, whether or not directly connected with themes that Dr. Rendel Harris has made peculiarly his own, all reflect in a measure his joy in discovery, his delight in extending the bounds of knowledge, and his belief in the duty of playing the long game and pursuing research into remote quarters that may not seem to be immediately important or likely to be fruitful.

The volume includes studies, appealing to the professional rather than the general reader, in the

fields of New Testament and Old Testament research, and also in the realms of Church history and classical literature. Some particular avenues in which, as Mr. Wood says, Dr. Rendel Harris has been the pathfinder are here further explored—the character of the Western Text, for example, the influence of Testimonies, and the ramifications of Twin-lore. There are twenty-two essays in all, and the writers are from America, Holland, and Germany as well as England, not to speak of Armenia. Perhaps the best-known among them, in Great Britain at any rate, are (taking them in the alphabetical order in which Mr. Wood has arranged them), J. Vernon Bartlet, Henry J. Cadbury, F. J. Foakes-Jackson, Robert S. Franks, Kirsopp Lake, Hans Lietzmann, and Theodore H. Robinson. There is a 'Homage' by Adolf Deissmann.

Bewilderment and Faith, by the Rev. F. E. England, Ph.D., B.D. (Williams & Norgate; 3s. net), is a clear and able exposition of the religious situation in our day, with some suggestions as to how it should be met. As is usual in such books, the diagnosis of the disease is fuller than the description of the remedy. The writer is persuaded that men and women are not feeling their need of grace and forgiveness 'because another need is more pressing and more clamant. What we all need to-day is the power to maintain our peace, our courage, our joy, in the face of all menaces; to meet life's uncertainties with an even confidence; to rise above anxiety.' This may be so. But obviously these are not new needs peculiar to our time, but are fundamental human needs which have pressed sore on every generation since history began, and perhaps the most wholesome thing that could happen would be that this generation, which imagines itself and its problems unique, should learn that after all it is a world of ordinary sinful men and women needing to be saved in the ordinary way.

The Message of the Epistles.

I Thessalonians.

BY PROFESSOR W. F. HOWARD, M.A., D.D., HANDSWORTH COLLEGE, BIRMINGHAM.

'TAKE three orthodox Christians, enlightened according to the standards of their time, in the fourth, the sixteenth, and the twentieth centuries respectively, I think you will find more profound differences of religion between them than between

a Methodist, a Catholic, a Freethinker, and even perhaps a well-educated Buddhist or Brahman at the present day, provided you take the most generally enlightened representative of each class.' So wrote Professor Gilbert Murray twenty years

ago. The reason given to support this highly disputable proposition is that men are far more profoundly influenced by their general environment than by religious creeds. In these a man merely states those articles which he feels he ought to assert positively against those who think differently. But his standards of thought and conduct, the practical beliefs on which he acts without question, are part of the general view of life which he shares with his contemporaries, and which has often but the smallest relation to the formal profession of his faith. Now there can be no question that the world of thought in which Paul and his converts lived is entirely foreign to the modern mind. Nowhere is this contrast of prevalent beliefs more startlingly obvious than in the Thessalonian Epistles with their shortened perspective. It is almost impossible for one who lives in this century to imagine himself living in a society in which conduct was seriously affected by the expectation of the approaching end of the world. But if we think of the bizarre speculations of Jewish apocalypticism as the determinative factor in the faith of an early Christian community, we are missing the true meaning of the force which gave to the preaching of Christ its conquering sway in the Mediterranean world. In that same chapter from which the quotation given above is taken, Professor Gilbert Murray makes this acknowledgment: 'It is strange to reflect, and it shows what queer stuff we humans are made of, that it was these obscure congregations, superstitious and over-emotional, mostly ignorant and often the prey of charlatans, who held the main road of advance towards the greatest religion of the western world.'

It is for us to try to find out what it is that links us by a common interest with those traders and dock-labourers, slaves and freedmen, Jews and Greeks, opulent citizens and women of honourable estate, who formed the earliest Christian community at Thessalonica.

There is a sense in which every letter of Paul's is an occasional writing, called forth by a local or temporary situation, or by the stress of a sudden and critical emergency. The main theme of such an epistle is not for us of primary importance. We listen for those diapason undertones, the groundwork of the apostolic faith. It is what is assumed and implied in every letter, rather than the laboured argument, that conveys to us what is most essential in the Christian gospel. It is certainly of the greatest historical interest to know what were the questions which agitated the minds of primitive converts, or what were the speculative pitfalls into

which their untutored minds blundered, or what were the peculiar moral perils against which recent recruits from paganism had to be continually warned. We may admire the dialectical skill with which the Apostle meets his Jewish antagonists on their chosen ground, we may recognize the sympathy that leads him to solve the perplexities of those simple hearts at Thessalonica by dwelling on the familiar figures of apocalyptic imagery. But these are not the things which give us kinship with Paul or with those men and women of a far distant age to whom these letters were first addressed.

First Thessalonians is probably the earliest extant letter written by Paul. When he wrote it, however, he was no novice, but a missionary of many years' experience. We can learn from it something of the way in which the earliest evangelists brought home the stupendous meaning of Jesus Christ to those who had sought with varying success to find religious reality in the ethical monotheism of the Jewish religion, or in the mystery cults of Hellenism, or in the austere precepts of the Stoic preachers of righteousness.

A community had been formed and, in spite of subtle and malignant persecution, was carrying on a social life of joyous fellowship in the name of Jesus Christ. The Thessalonian Church originated in a visit which Paul, together with Silas and Timothy, paid to the city in the course of his second missionary journey, when the good news was proclaimed, 'the word of the Lord.' This was no mere philosophy of life, however noble in conception or attractive in presentation. It was a personal revelation, energetic, vitalizing, self-authenticating. The apostolic preaching was marked by three 'notes'—power, holy enthusiasm, assurance (1⁵). The same 'notes' are found in the description which Luke, in the early chapters of Acts, gives of the effects of the primitive apostolic message. For if these qualities marked those through whom the good news was proclaimed, corresponding results appeared in those who received the Word. Paul here writes of the force, of the spiritual quality, of the inward conviction, of which he and Silas were conscious while delivering the Word entrusted to them. The emphasis in Acts is upon the supernatural effects of the Word when received, of the enthusiasm which animated the holy fellowship, and of the boldness in character and speech which stamped the members of the Christian society.

There are, therefore, three elements in the creation of that Divine society which we call the Church. First there is the living word of God.

Then there is the preacher, who is the active medium through which Divine truth is offered to the hearers. Finally there are the recipients who must accept and appropriate the word of life. 'And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe' (2¹³). (a) The word of God is the self-communication of God. It is not only spoken by God, it also tells about God. Above all, it is the revelation of God in the life and words of Jesus Christ, in His death and resurrection (Ro 10^{8, 9}). This 'word of the message' (2¹³; cf. He 4^{2, 12}) is living and active, awakening conscience, and quickening spiritual desire and purpose. The revelation of the purpose of God in the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again was made that those who respond to the message should be delivered from the inevitable tragedy that awaits a Godless course of life, and be brought into fellowship with God (1¹⁰ 5^{9, 10}). (b) But preaching, as Phillips Brooks taught us, is 'the bringing of truth through personality.' Nowhere does Paul lay greater stress than in this letter upon the character of the preacher as the medium of the Divine message. 'Ye know what manner of men we shewed ourselves toward you for your sake. And ye became imitators of us, and of the Lord' (1^{5, 6}). The message would have suffered grievous contamination if the messengers could be justly charged with delusion, impure motives, cunning, obsequiousness, flattery, avarice, self-seeking. They were gentle, affectionate, considerate towards their converts, imparting to them not only the gospel of God, but also their own souls (2³⁻¹⁰). In this way God had attested their fitness to be entrusted with the gospel (2⁴). If we are thoughtless enough to attribute this emphasis upon the apostolic character to egotism on the part of Paul, it is well to remember how in such a community as that at Thessalonica, as indeed on the mission field to-day, the religion of Christ is imparted by example as much as by instruction. 'Christianity is caught rather than taught,' as the Dean of St. Paul's is so fond of reminding us. (c) The revelation so conveyed by the apostolic messengers found lodgement in the hearts of men and wrought out its positive results in changed lives. It was no abstraction, it was not information about a life once lived but now past and over. It was *saving* truth (cf. 1 Co 15²). Upon receiving the word of life the Thessalonians turned from the unrealities of their past worship 'to serve a living and true

God' (1⁹), and began to 'walk worthily of God, who called them into his own kingdom and glory' (2¹²). The result was seen in the adoption of the way of life which the apostles showed them according to the pattern of the Incarnate Life, which they in turn set forth as an example to other Christian groups in Macedonia. The hall-mark of this religious reality was the joy inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Thus the group was formed, one of the innumerable cells which together form the Christian Church, the body of Christ. For however little we are told of the rites and constitution of the Ecclesia, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is 'the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' to which the letter is addressed. It is perilous to argue from silence, so we must lay no stress upon the absence of any reference to baptism or eucharist. As this letter was written at the very time when Paul was founding the Church at Corinth, we may assume from such a passage as 1 Co 11²³ that the Lord's Supper was celebrated in accordance with the 'tradition' that Paul had received and handed on to his converts. There is abundant evidence in the Pauline Epistles that baptism was the normal rite of admission into the Church. That there was some kind of church government is clear from the appeal at the close of this letter, 'We beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you' (5¹²). But it is deeply significant that their title to respect is character and service, 'and to esteem them highly in love for their work's sake.' Even in the earliest and simplest of Paul's letters there is no thought of the solitary Christian. The word of God must be heard and accepted by the individual, but it is through the society that this opportunity is first given to him, and it is in that society that the Christian character is formed and must grow to maturity.

This distinctive character is mentioned at the very beginning of the letter. For here we first meet with the three qualities which, in a later letter (1 Co 13¹³), Paul was to twine together into a chaplet of Christian graces—the three abiding virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love. But they are not mere adornments of the Thessalonian Christians. They are energies of the redeemed life. 'Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and endurance of hope' (1³). They are also regarded as the sure defence of the Christian character: 'putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation' (5⁸).

1. *Faith* is a term of such cardinal importance

in the Pauline theology, and more particularly in his dialectic throughout the Judaistic controversy, that we may well consider its use in this earliest occurrence in the Epistles of Paul, where controversy seems to be out of sight. The idea is inherited from the Old Testament, where the word (with its cognates) stands for an attitude of reliance upon the Divine character, a belief that God's word holds good. This leads to a steadfastness of purpose persisting through every threat and experience of adversity. Human faith was the correlative of the Divine faithfulness. Now for Paul religious faith received an immense reinforcement when he accepted Jesus as the Christ of God. Loyalty to a tradition passed into personal devotion. The very name of God was filled with a new meaning. The sense of awe which it evoked had not vanished, but it had lost its associations of servile fear, and had assumed the form of wondering adoration. Paul now writes of 'our God and Father' (1³ 3¹¹). His status with God is that of sonship, and, though that word is not found in this Epistle, the Fatherhood of God is a leading thought throughout. All that the Lord Jesus has done is an expression of God's grace. Faith is the human response to the Divine initiative. It is the complete and grateful submission of the soul to the love of God made known in Jesus Christ. This faith is, of course, a sentiment. It is a complex of emotions, conceptions, interests, and desires. It is intensely personal, for its essential quality is found in a relationship of devotion on the part of the individual soul to the risen Christ. None the less it expresses itself in conduct. It is a faith that works. Whenever faith is reduced to a merely intellectual assent to propositions about religious truth, or to a sterile orthodoxy, it has manifestly lost that driving power which makes every letter of Paul's palpitate with a spiritual energy.

2. Even if the famous hymn in praise of *love* in a later letter had never been written the character of the Lord Jesus had left so deep a mark upon the heart of Paul that every epistle of his would still bear witness to the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. This had created a new standard of conduct and was the bond of Christian fellowship. 'But concerning love of the brethren ye have no need that one write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another' (4⁹). Yet there are two dangers which always lie in wait for a community whose members are united by a common emotion and are animated by mutual interest. The group may easily degenerate into a clique. A selfish exclusiveness then banishes the

spirit of neighbourliness, and men give to a party what was meant for mankind. Against this inverted charity Paul directs his prayer: 'The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men' (3¹²). Another peril is that love, degenerating into an easy-going sentimentality, should lose its piercing moral vision, and tolerate in the name of charity such lapses on the part of friends as true love would rebuke. Francis Paget has reminded us of the note of severity which is found in all love that is worthy of the name. There may well be, he says, a need for more severity towards others, 'just that pure and calm severity which comes of realizing how great are the issues of life—the severity which will never escape from trouble, or anxiety, or loneliness by glossing over things.' This is not the severity of the censorious or of the quick-tempered, but the patient vigilance which spares no effort and is discouraged by no disappointment. This is part of the labour of love. 'Wherefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as also ye do' (5¹¹). 'And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all' (5¹⁴). This mutual discipline of love is a safeguard against personal laxity, as well as against a lowering of the ethical standard in the community.

3. *Hope*, that neglected virtue in the message of the New Testament, is as prominent in the letters of Paul as in that of Peter. The love that believes all things is the love that hopes all things. If, as the writer to the Hebrews says, faith endures as seeing Him who is invisible, then we may say that hope endures by laying firm hold of the future. It is not the easy optimism which builds castles in the air and refuses to face the stern realities of the immediate present. Nor is it the blithe cheerfulness of the sanguine temperament. Its incarnation is found neither in Mr. Wilkins Micawber nor in Mark Tapley. There is grim determination as well as victorious certainty in hope, as that grace is presented to us in the New Testament, for its setting is a world in dire distress, and the Christian knows that it is only through much tribulation that he must enter into the Kingdom of God. Inspiration is drawn from the powers of the age to come. A new world is called in to redress the balance of the old. Those who serve the living and true God 'wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come' (1¹⁰). It is well to observe that the endurance of hope is more than mere patience in expectation. Endurance is

an active energy which carries on the appointed task in spite of all the hostile influences of the present evil world. It is significant that Paul condemns severely all who allow the Advent hope to be an excuse for slackness, who await the parousia with folded arms. 'Keep a check upon loafers' is Moffatt's happy rendering of 5¹⁴ (cf. 2 Th 3⁶). Patience is to play its part in the development of the Christian character, 'be patient toward all' (5¹⁴), for quick-tempered intolerance of timidity and of infirmity of purpose is the besetting temptation of the more virile natures. But Paul would have us learn how to combine this gracious forbearance with a heroic fortitude.

Endurance is the crowning quality,
And patience all the passion of great hearts.

So far the message of First Thessalonians is one of timeless value, and meets the present situation as fully as it answered the spiritual needs of those men and women who were trying long ago in Macedonia to order their lives according to the Spirit of Christ Jesus. But when we look into the nature of this hope which inspired both the missionary and his converts we seem to have passed out of the realm of the actual into a region of delusive speculation. How can the modern reader find anything, I will not say profitable, but even intelligible in the long since abandoned conceptions and expectations of Jewish apocalyptic? 'For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord' (4^{16, 17}). The exquisite comfort of the last words may soften for us the shock with which the earlier sentences fall upon our ears. The language may not offend our sense of reality when it meets us in a familiar hymn. Imagery is in place in poetry where a freer standard of interpretation is available. But Paul was not writing poetically. He was drawing upon the conventional vocabulary of Jewish-Christian religion to describe an event in time towards which he and his fellow-apostles at that stage of Christian history looked forward with sober expectation. In course of time the return of Christ was viewed in a different light. After writing 1 Corinthians, Paul himself never again employs such imagery. Indeed, his teaching about the future life in 2 Corinthians and in Philippians shows a marked advance upon the outworn symbolism of the Thessalonian eschatology.

Nevertheless, before we lightly fling aside this element in our Epistle, let us consider with care what value there may be even yet in these strange words and in the hope which they partly enabled Paul to express.

(1) They serve as a link with the actual life of Jesus upon earth and the way in which He often talked to His disciples about the future. It is probable that Schweitzer and his school have over-emphasized this aspect of our Lord's teaching about the Kingdom of God. But they have at least forced us to recognize that no honest study of the portrait of Jesus given in the earlier Gospels will allow us to reduce Him to the measure of the genial socio-ethical Teacher of the Fatherhood of God which Harnack set before a wondering world in his brilliant lectures, *What is Christianity?* It may well be that current conceptions and familiar forms of thought were sometimes repeated by disciples who failed to recognize with what a changed meaning old terms were used by the Master. But at least such words as those just quoted (4^{16, 17}) help us to see how true Paul is to the tradition of the primitive Church. Paul and the other apostles may have been mistaken in their expectation. They were certainly in error in the actual form which their hope assumed. Jesus did not return to earth in visible form on the clouds of heaven. But their emphasis was right. To Jesus the future belongs and not only the past. The once despised Jesus is to receive His vindication on earth, and His beloved disciples are to share with Him the life of the blessed hereafter.

(2) Even though we reject the thought of the physical return of Jesus, we may recognize that the Pauline hope of the return of Christ stands for the principle that the Kingdom of God will only be established on earth by the emergence of supernatural forces. The old complacency of pre-war days which assumed the automatic progress of civilization by natural evolution to millennial perfection has broken down irretrievably. Climax and crisis, visitation and judgment, mean more to us than once they did. It may even be that some stupendous cataclysm in our social order may be needed to wean us from our inordinate trust in the material benefits of the present evil age. Some very relevant words under this head were spoken at the recent Edinburgh Conference on International and Missionary Questions. Dr. Hanns Lilje, General Secretary of the German Student Christian Movement, speaking about Christian Community and Communism, used these words: 'The second thing which Communism is teaching Christianity is

the fact that there is no real religion without a clear eschatological element in it. It is completely hopeless to think that the high expectations of the coming classless society in Communism could be met by a Christianity which dares not believe in the eschatological elements of its own creed. Both things are equally true in Christianity: that the Kingdom of God shall come on earth, that there will be new tidings of forgiveness and all the gifts of God in Jesus Christ in this world, and on the other hand that the disciple of Jesus Christ always is waiting for the coming of his Master. Only a this-worldly Christianity could forget the genuine power of the eschatological expectation of the early Church.'

(3) Another way of regarding the present value of the Advent hope has been taught us by that fine scholar, Dr. Edwyn Bevan, in his essay, 'The Problem of Eschatology,' republished in *Hellenism and Christianity*. If the literal presence of Christ upon the earth nineteen hundred years ago is a fact of great spiritual importance, why should the belief in His presence upon earth at some future age be unspiritual? But how are we to make this thought real to ourselves? Not in the way that first-century Jews, with their totally different cosmogony, would naturally picture their Lord's return. Dr. Bevan reminds us of the two cases recorded in the New Testament of people seeing the Heavenly Christ, the case of Stephen and the case of Paul. Right down through the Christian centuries there have been those who could claim some similar vision of Christ. 'Now supposing these appearances were all, or some of them, the real perception of the living Christ, and suppose in some future state of mankind, its spiritual education having gone much further than it has gone to-day, such a sensible presence of Christ to men were not something occasional and rare, but something normal and common in the lives of all, would not that indeed be the Return of the Lord?'

(4) But however speculative these may seem to some, judged as attempts to find a present value in the eschatology of this Epistle, no one can question the ethical application which was given to this teaching both in the Pauline letters and in the gospel records of our Lord's admonitions to His disciples. 'But concerning the times and seasons, ye . . . yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, . . . and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake

you as a thief: for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of the darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. . . . For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as also ye do' (5¹⁻¹¹). How faithfully this warning against 'the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin' recalls the Master's continual call to moral alertness and vigilance: 'Watch, for ye know not the day nor the hour!'

There are still two other things that ought to be said about the treatment of the Advent hope in this Epistle.

(5) Its introduction into this letter is occasioned by sorrow on the part of some Thessalonian Christians, and the Apostle's desire to give them abiding comfort. The Lord is mindful of His own. Our pledge of this is the power of the risen Christ. The Resurrection and the Advent are regarded as correlative terms in the Pauline thought. 'For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him' (4¹⁴).

(6) The integrity of the Christian character is bound up with this eager hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus. The Apostle is conscious in all his prayers for these converts of 'toil co-operant to an end.' They are waiting for 'his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus' (1¹⁰). They are to 'walk worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory' (2¹²). 'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming?' (2¹⁹). 'To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus' (3¹³).

And to crown all, at the end of those terse, penetrating, ethical exhortations with which the letter closes, we have this confident prayer for integrity of character, 'And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it.'

So, after all, the Pauline eschatology is less concerned with the trumpet blast, and the clouds of heaven, than with the risen Christ and His power to prepare His faithful servants for the crowning experience of rejoining Him that they may be 'for ever with the Lord.'