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THE GENTLEMANLINESS OF ST. PAUL.

“RELIGION,” says Coleridge, “is the most gentlemanly thing in the world. It alone will gentelize, if unmixed with cant.” No one who has read the writings of St. Paul, or his life, as described by St. Luke in the Acts, will suspect him of a tendency to cant. The sincerity of his religious convictions is one of the most striking traits in the Apostle of the Gentiles. Even M. Rénan, though he does have a low estimate of St. Paul in other respects, admits that he was a man of deep religious convictions, “a powerful soul, progressive, enthusiastic, a conqueror, a missionary, a propagator.” To the ordinary mind, the reading of St. Paul probably shows him as a man possessed of great courage and tireless activity. Occasionally there is a streak of pathos and tenderness, hardly looked for in such a character. If he corresponds in any way to the common idea of a Christian gentleman, it is rather to that of the rough-diamond sort, which belongs more to the rustic gentry than to men who form their manners through the influence of refined feelings. Nevertheless St. Paul presents the character of the true gentleman as Thackeray and Cardinal Newman have, each in his separate way, described

him. We find in his life the evidence of high culture and varied knowledge, an elevated sense of truth and right, as well as that delicate appreciation of what is due to the personal character and social position of others, which at once points out the gentleman in feeling, no matter under what disadvantages he otherwise appears. Such is Paul, the impassioned lover of Christ crucified, although it is not at once apparent behind the principal purpose of his mission.

In order to appreciate the real character of the Apostle who styles himself "the least," although he had labored more than all the rest, we must not forget his origin. He was a gentleman by birth. His parents, who had emigrated from Giscalis in Palestine, were well-to-do citizens at Tarsus, and Roman citizens, not by purchase or residence, but by inheritance. According to Strabo's account, Tarsus outranked even Athens and Alexandria in point of culture. The learned men of Asia-Minor, Syria, and Egypt, and many from Greece, met in the schools of this great city, which was beautifully situated in a fertile plain, close to the sea. It was even more noted for its marts, where the merchant princes of the surrounding countries gathered to exchange and purchase rare produce of the East and West. His family being descended from the tribe of Benjamin, whence the first king of Israel had been chosen, it is easily understood why the boy should have been called Saul, that being the name of his royal ancestor. Whatever the value of the education he received at Tarsus before the age of twelve, we cannot but suppose that his youthful intellect, his vivid imagination, and fiery disposition received strong impressions from the scenes that surrounded him there. If he developed, as has been said, his knowledge of the classics at a later date, when in the school of Gamaliel, it can hardly be doubted that the teachers of the child at Tarsus, whoever they were, laid the foundation for such a taste. His parents were, of course, thoroughly attached to the Hebrew law and traditions. His grandfather had been a

Pharisee, and so was his father. St. Paul himself, later on, belonged to this school, which was at the time probably the most respected of all the Jewish sects. The desire on the part of the parents of keeping alive in the boy the religion of his forefathers, and perhaps his own inquisitive and earnest nature, making him anxious to roam and to learn, were the cause why at an early age he was sent to Jerusalem. It appears that an elder sister resided there, who was married; for in later years we find one of her sons saving St. Paul's life, by secretly informing him of a design which the Pharisees at Jerusalem had of killing him.

At the feet of Gamaliel, the most celebrated Rabbi of his day, the youth learned to expound the sacred text. Barnabas, whom many years afterwards he met as a Christian, and who introduced him to St. Peter and to St. James, Bishop of Jerusalem, was a fellow disciple with him at the Temple school. But young Saul's education seems not to have been confined to the study of the sacred books and the Halacha of the great synagogue. He gives evidence of his familiarity with the old classics, quotes from Menander, Aratus, and Epimenides, the Rip Van Winkle of ancient Greece. Gamaliel was of a liberal tendency and inclined to foster these studies. According to a Rabbinical law every Hebrew boy was obliged to learn some trade. Scholars were not exempt from this obligation, and St. Paul adopted the occupation of rope or tent maker, an industry for which Tarsus was noted. Later on he became a member of the Pharisees, who had the name of being superior in learning as also in the observance of the Mosaic ordinances. Such are the accounts which we receive partly from himself, partly from traditions handed down by men like Alexander, the Cyprian monk, in the sixth century, and others.

That St. Paul soon became a notable figure and enjoyed the respect of the educated classes is evident from many circumstances in his life, even if his previous education and associations did not lead us to infer this. When St. Luke describes

him as a sort of guard at the scene of St. Stephen's martyrdom, he speaks of him as "a young man." Not long after, we meet him with an armed squad, on his way to Damascus, in the capacity of commissioner, authorized by the Sanhedrin, and with letters from the High Priest. He was only converted a few days when he at once turns about and argues with the Pharisees in the synagogue of Damascus and confounds them, showing that they had misinterpreted the Messianic prophecies.¹ This no man could have attempted with impunity unless he possessed learning and authority at least equal to those with whom he disputed. And St. Luke expressly states that he did so immediately, that is, without much time passing in which he might have acquired a certain superiority by the preparation of his arguments. We notice a similar intellectual as well as social ascendancy throughout. At Athens he disputes openly with the philosophic sects, or rather they "disputed with him," which seems to imply that he had been sought out by them as an opponent with no mean reasons. They were, as we are told, Epicureans and Stoics, possibly the hardest people to convert, if we judge them by their principles.² But St. Paul tells them frankly; "I perceive that you are in all things, as it were, too superstitious."³ Dionysius the Areopagite is converted. At Ephesus we find St. Paul disputing daily for two years in the famous school of Tyrannus, besides preaching in the synagogue. Many of those who had followed curious things brought their books together and burned them. Men who possessed books in those days did not ordinarily count among the democracy, and we may take for granted that it took considerable show of learning, with wisdom, to convince them of their errors. Even the taunt of one of the governors, that much learning had made the Apostle mad, is not without its significance in pointing out St. Paul's ability.

We always find him in what might be called superior company, and we might suppose that there was a certain refinement

¹ Acts iv. 20.

² Ibid. xviii. 18.

³ Ibid. 22.

in his manner which especially fitted him to be that vessel of election which, as God had destined, should carry the name of Christ before the Gentiles and kings.¹ Thus at one time he has as his traveling companion a foster brother of Herod, tetrarch of Gaul. The rulers of Asia everywhere seem to have been friendly inclined towards him, in spite of the accusations against him and his own manly assertion of his rights, when he saw his opponents were transgressing. In one place we find the town-clerk making an harangue to defend him against the angry crowd.² St. Luke seems to lay special stress in different places upon the fact that St. Paul made many converts among the noble women of the Gentiles. This was the case not only among the Thessalonians,³ but among the Bereans, who, even as citizens, boasted of greater nobility than the former.⁴

One trait strikes us more than the rest, perhaps because it is characteristic of the American gentleman above all other nationalities. It is the principle well expressed by the dogmatic phrase "Mind your business." The great saints in the Church, who were also great organizers, have always made it a favorite rule of action. "We entreat you, that you use your endeavor to be quiet, and that you do your own business."⁵ Further St. Paul puts the maxim "Honesty is the best policy" on a very sound basis, when he enjoins upon his people, "that no man overreach nor deceive his brother in business: because the Lord is the avenger of all things."⁶ He does not want them to have anything to do with people who meddle, and he uses some strong language about gossiping idlers.⁷ As for Timothy, he reminds him that the clergy have no business to implicate themselves in worldly affairs.⁸

However, he knows his own business, and will not allow any one uncalled for to interfere with it. This is brought out by the manner in which he asserts his rights. A tribune commands him to be scourged. As they have bound the Apos-

¹ Acts ix. 15.² Ibid. xix. 35.³ Ibid. xvii. 4.⁴ Ibid. 12.⁵ I. Thessal. iv. 11.⁶ Ibid. 6.⁷ II. Thessal. iii. 10-12.⁸ II. Tim. ii. 4.

tle, he turns to an officer standing by and asks with a certain conscious superiority: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman?" The proceedings are stopped, and the centurion hastens to tell the judges what Paul has said. The tribune had purchased his own citizenship at a great cost of money, and he wondered if Paul could be so wealthy as to have procured the same advantage. So he asks him about it and tells his own story of how he became a Roman citizen. Paul listens, and then simply says: "But I was born so."¹ With equal manliness he avows that he is a Jew, the son of a Pharisee and a Pharisee himself, "the most sure sect of our religion." Yet he would have them understand that he laid claim to patriotic dignity apart from his Jewish descent: "I am indeed a Jew, a man of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city."² On this ground he asks the right to speak to the people. When a paltering judge, bidding for the popular favor, wishes to delay sentence and send him to another court, St. Paul breaks forth: "I stand at Cæsar's tribunal, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no injury, as thou very well knowest.—I appeal to Cæsar." What a shock it must have been to the Pharisees, who had come down to Cæsarea, all the way from Jerusalem, to watch the issue of that trial and to testify.

In singular and beautiful contrast with this courageous and intelligent demeanor is his deportment with regard to his superiors civil and ecclesiastical, when they exercise their just authority. "If I have injured them (the Jews), or have committed anything that deserves death, I refuse not to die." All the Gentile judges, in every court in which he is tried, bear witness to the truth of what he himself asserts before his accusers: "I study to have always a conscience without offence towards God and men." Once the high-priest Ananias takes the judgment seat. When St. Paul is brought into the council hall he pleads "not guilty." The arrogant priest bids some one strike him on the mouth, as a first ar-

¹ Acts xxii. 25-28.

² Ibid. xxi. 39.

gument. The accused, not knowing or recognizing Ananias, turns about, addressing him: "God shall strike thee, thou whited wall. For, sittest thou there to judge me according to the law, and contrary to the law commandest me to be struck?"—And they who stood by remind him that it is the high priest of God whom he is reviling. O touching humility of the manliest yet the gentlest of men! "I knew not, brethren," he answers meekly, "that he is the high priest. For it is written: Thou shalt not speak evil of the prince of thy people."

We find a similar disposition of reverence and even courtesy of manner and speech in his conduct towards King Agrippa and his other judges: "I think myself happy, O king Agrippa, that I am to answer for myself this day before thee." This is the same Paul who would not, as he distinctly says, use words of flattery. It was his sense of the proprieties to the person whom he addressed. And Agrippa feels this. He forgets the charges of the Jews and his character of judge, touched by the manner of the accused. "In a little while you would persuade me to become a Christian," he says. On an earlier occasion, after having traveled over the Island of Cyprus, he comes to Paphus. We meet him at the house of the Proconsul Sergius Paulus. The latter had invited him and Barnabas, and became the first notable convert of St. Paul. It will be noticed that up to this time the Apostle is invariably called Saul. The Holy Ghost calls him by this name, when He appoints him to the special mission among the Gentiles. He is called so for a long time after his baptism at Damascus, and not until we hear of the conversion of Sergius Paulus, does any one call him Paul. Was it in deference to the habits of the Romans, who sometimes assumed the name of some benefactor or illustrious friend? Some writers have given this reason for the change of name. At all events, it may have been one of the reasons. We know that the two became great friends afterwards, and that Sergius Paulus accompanied the Apostle to Spain, before being