

EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

Romans xvi.

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:

2 That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus:

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give

thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

6 Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us.

12 Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.

13 Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

15 Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.

CENCHREA was the seaport of Corinth, where a separate church was founded. Phebe was a deaconess, and was probably employed in visiting the sick and in teaching the women in the doctrines of the Church. She appears to have been a woman in good circumstances, and probably had more than ordinary intelligence and education. Even Paul acknowledged himself under great obligations to her. Aquila and Priscilla had risked their lives in protecting the Apostles at Corinth and Ephesus. So Paul sent his affectionate salutations and good wishes to all the women who had helped to build up the churches and spread the Gospel of Christianity.

In good works men have always found a reserved force in the women of their generation. Paul seems to have been specially mindful of all who had received and hospitably entertained him. The men of our times have been equally thankful to women for serving them, for hospitable entertainment, generous donations to the priesthood, lifting church debts, etc., and are equally ready to remand them to their "divinely appointed sphere," whenever women claim an equal voice in church creeds and discipline. Then the Marys, the Phebes, and the Priscillas are ordered to keep silence and to discuss all questions with their husbands at home, taking it for granted that all men are logical and wise.

E. C. S.

Martin Luther had good cause to declare: "There is something in the office of a bishop which is dreadfully demoralizing. Even good men change their natures at consecration; Satan enters into them, as he entered into Judas, as soon as they have taken the sop." But to return to the primitive Church, a famous Apostle of that simple era was Priscilla, a Jewess, who was one of the theological instructors of Apollos (the fellow-minister, or fellow-servant, to whom Paul refers in his first letter to the Corinthians). There is strong reason to believe that the Apostle Priscilla, in co-operation with her husband, the Apostle Aquila, performed the important task of founding the Church of Rome: for Paul, writing to the Christians, admits that he himself has not yet visited that city; there is no proof whatever that Peter ever went to Rome at all (but, on the contrary, much proof that he wished to confine Christianity to Jewish converts); and yet Paul, hailing Priscilla by the current term which specially active Apostles and bishops used in addressing other specially active workers in the Apostolate, "Helper in Christ Jesus," eulogizes her as one known, gratefully, by "all the churches of the Gentiles," and recognizes a Church of Rome as established in Priscilla's own house (see Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 16). It is highly probable that that was the tiny acorn from which has grown the present great oak—the Roman Catholic Church, which would profit much by more remembrance and imitation of the modest and undogmatic women who helped to give it being and who nursed it through its infancy.

The inability of modern men to comprehend the position of women in the primitive Church, is strikingly shown in Chalmers' commentary on the fact that Paul used exactly the same title in addressing Priscilla that he uses in greeting Urbane. Although conceding that Priscilla had shared the work of an Apostle in teaching Apollos "the way of God more perfectly," and, although he knows nothing whatever of Urbane's work, yet Chalmers unhesitatingly concludes that Urbane's help to Paul *must* have been in things spiritual, but that Priscilla's *must* have been in regard to things temporal only: and, as Aquila and Priscilla were an inseparable couple, poor Aquila, too, is relegated to Priscilla's assumedly inferior position! There is not,

however, the slightest reason for such a conclusion by Chalmers. It is manifestly due to the modern prejudice which renders the Paul-worshipping male Protestants incapable of comprehending that "Our Great Apostle," Paul, was not a great Apostle at all, in those days, but a simple, self-sent tent-maker with a vigorous spirit, who gladly shared the "Apostolic dignity" with all the good women he could rally to his assistance. Chalmers conjectures that if Priscilla really did help Paul, it must have been as "a teacher of women and children," even while the fact stares him in the face that she was a recognized teacher of the man whom Paul specially and emphatically pronounces his own equal. (Compare Acts, chap. 18, v. 26, with 1st Cor., chap. 3.)

To one who uses unbiassed common sense in regard to the New Testament records, there can be no question of women's activity and prominence in the early ministry. Paul not only virtually pronounces Priscilla a fellow-Apostle and fellow-bishop (Romans, chap. 16, verses 3-5), but specially commends Phebe, a Greek woman, as a minister (*diakonos*), which, as we have seen, may be legitimately interpreted either presbyter, bishop, or Apostle. That it was well understood, throughout the whole Church, that women had shared the labors of the Apostles, is evidenced by Chrysostom's specific eulogy thereupon. Phebe was the bishop of the Church in Cenchrea, and that she was both a powerful and useful overseer in the episcopate, Paul testifies in affirming that she had not only been a helper to him, but to many others also. (Romans, chap. 16, verses 1-2.) Addressing that first Church of Rome (which was in the house of Priscilla and Aquila before Paul, or Peter, or the barely-mentioned Linus, are heard of in Rome), Paul indicates the equality of male and female Apostles by mentioning in one and the same category Priscilla and Aquila, Andronicus and Junia, Mary, "who bestowed much labor among you," Amphis, Urbane, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, Rufus and Hermas.

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