

as in the passage before us and in 2 Corinthians viii. 9, a very close and compact parallel, and to His death for the sins of the world, as in 1 Peter ii. 21, iv. 1. That we cannot in the least degree imitate directly these mysterious acts of the Eternal Son, increases their value as an example. For the impossibility of direct imitation concentrates our attention upon the inner thought of which these are the outward expression. This inner thought of Christ, we are bidden by the great Apostle, himself a wonderful example of the imitation he desires in us, to make our own. And this inner thought of Christ, breathed into our hearts by the living presence of the Spirit of Christ, will mould our entire thought, and will change and raise and glorify our entire life.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

XXV.

SALUTATIONS FROM THE PRISONER'S FRIENDS.

“Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments; if he come unto you, receive him), and Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision: these only *are my* fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, men that have been a comfort unto me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, saluteth you, always striving for you in his prayers, that ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness, that he hath much labour for you, and for them in Laodicea, and for them in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas salute you.”—COL. iv. 10-14 (Rev. Ver.).

HERE are men of different races, unknown to each other by face, clasping hands across the seas, and feeling that the repulsions of nationality, language, conflicting interests, have disappeared in the unity of faith. These greetings are a most striking, because unconscious, testimony to the

reality and strength of the new bond that knit Christian souls together.

There are three sets of salutations here, sent from Rome to the little far-off Phrygian town in its secluded valley. The first is from three large-hearted Jewish Christians, whose greeting has a special meaning as coming from that wing of the Church which had least sympathy with Paul's work or converts. The second is from their townsman Epaphras; and the third is from two Gentiles like themselves, one well known as Paul's most faithful friend, one almost unknown, of whom Paul has nothing to say, and of whom nothing good can be said. All these may yield us matter for consideration. It is interesting to piece together what we know of the bearers of these shadowy names. It is profitable to regard them as exponents of certain tendencies and principles.

I. These three sympathetic Jewish Christians may stand as types of a progressive and non-ceremonial Christianity.

We need spend little time in outlining the figures of these three, for he in the centre is well known to every one, and his two supporters are little known to any one. Aristarchus was a Thessalonian (Acts xx. 4), and so perhaps one of Paul's early converts on his first journey to Europe. His purely Gentile name would not have led us to expect him to be a Jew. But we have many similar instances in the New Testament, such, for instance, as the names of six of the seven deacons (Acts vii. 5), which show that the Jews of "the dispersion," who resided in foreign countries, often bore no trace of their nationality in their names. He was with Paul in Ephesus at the time of the riot, and was one of the two whom the excited mob, in their zeal for trade and religion, dragged into the theatre, to the peril of their lives. We next find him, like Tychicus, a member of the deputation which joined Paul on his voyage to Jerusalem. Whatever was the case with the others, Aristarchus was in

Palestine with Paul, for we learn that he sailed with him thence (Acts xxvii. 2). Whether he kept company with Paul during all the journey we do not know. But more probably he went home to Thessalonica, and afterwards rejoined Paul at some point in his Roman captivity. At any rate here he is, standing by Paul, having drunk in his spirit, and enthusiastically devoted to him and his work.

He receives here a remarkable and honourable title, "my fellow-prisoner." I suppose that is to be taken literally, and that Aristarchus was, in some way, at the moment of writing, sharing Paul's imprisonment. Now it has been often noticed that, in the Epistle to Philemon, where almost all these names reappear, it is not Aristarchus, but Epaphras, who is honoured with this epithet; and that interchange has been explained by an ingenious supposition that Paul's friends took it in turn to keep him company, and were allowed to live with him, on condition of submitting to the same restrictions, military guardianship, and so on. There is no positive evidence in favour of this, but it is not improbable, and if accepted helps to give an interesting glimpse of the prison life, and of the loyal devotion which surrounded Paul.

Mark comes next. His story is well known—how twelve years before, he had joined the first missionary band from Antioch, of which his cousin Barnabas was the leader, and had done well enough as long as they were on known ground, in Barnabas' (and perhaps his own) native island of Cyprus, but had lost heart and run home to his mother as soon as they crossed into Asia Minor. He had long ago effaced the distrust of him which Paul naturally conceived on account of this collapse. How he has come to be with Paul at Rome is unknown. It has been conjectured that Barnabas was dead, and that so Mark was free to join the Apostle; but that is unsupported supposition. Apparently he is now purposing a journey to Asia Minor, in

the course of which, if he should come to Colossæ (which was doubtful, perhaps on account of its insignificance) Paul repeats his previous injunction, that they should give him a cordial welcome. Probably this commendation was given because the evil odour of his old fault might still hang about his name. The calculated emphasis of the exhortation, "receive him," seems to show that there was some reluctance to give him a hearty reception, and take him to their hearts. So we have an "undesigned coincidence." The tone of the injunction here is naturally explained by the story in the Acts.

So faithful a friend did he prove, that the lonely old man, fronting death, longed to have his affectionate tending once more; and his last word about him, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for *the ministry*," condones the early fault, and restores him to the office which, in a moment of selfish weakness, he had abandoned. So it is possible to efface a faultful past, and to acquire strength and fitness for work to which we are by nature most inapt and indisposed. Mark is an instance of early faults nobly atoned for, and a witness of the power of repentance and faith to overcome natural weakness. Many a ragged colt makes a noble horse.

The third man is utterly unknown—"Jesus, which is called Justus." How startling to come across that name, borne by this obscure Christian! How it helps us to feel the humble manhood of Christ, by showing us that many another Jewish boy bore the same name; common and undistinguished then, though too holy to be given to any since. His surname Justus may, perhaps like the same name given to James, the first bishop of the church in Jerusalem, hint his rigorous adherence to Judaism, and so may indicate that, like Paul himself, he came from the strictest sect of their religion, into the large liberty in which he now rejoiced.

He seems to have been of no importance in the Church, for his name is the only one in this context which does not reappear in Philemon, and we never hear of him again. A strange fate his! to be made immortal by three words—and because he wanted to send a loving message to the Church at Colossæ! Why, men have striven and schemed, and broken their hearts, and flung away their lives, to grasp the bubble of posthumous fame; and how easily this good “Jesus which is called Justus” has got it! He has his name written for ever on the world’s memory, and he very likely never knew it, and does not know it, and was never a bit the better for it! What a satire on “the last infirmity of noble minds”!

These three men are united in this salutation because they are all three “of the circumcision;” that is to say, are Jews, and being so, have separated themselves from all the other Jewish Christians in Rome, and have flung themselves with ardour into Paul’s missionary work among the Gentiles, and have been his fellow-workers for the advancement of the kingdom—aiding him, that is, in seeking to win willing subjects to the loving, kingly will of God. By this co-operation in the aim of his life, they have been a “comfort” to him. He uses a half medical term, which perhaps he had caught from the physician at his elbow, which we might perhaps parallel by saying they had been a “cordial” to him—like a refreshing draught to a weary man, or some whiff of pure air stealing into a close chamber and lifting the damp curls on some hot brow.

Now these three men, the only three Jewish Christians in Rome who had the least sympathy with Paul and his work, give us, in their isolation, a vivid illustration of the antagonism which he had to face from that portion of the early Church. The great question for the first generation of Christians was, not whether Gentiles might enter the Christian community, but whether they must do so by

circumcision, and pass through Judaism on their road to Christianity. The bulk of the Palestinian Jewish Christians naturally held that they must; while the bulk of Jewish Christians who had been born in other countries as naturally held that they need not. As the champion of this latter decision, Paul was worried and counter-worked and hindered all his life by the other party. They had no missionary zeal, or next to none, but they followed in his wake and made mischief wherever they could. If we can fancy some modern sect that sends out no missionaries of its own, but delights to come in where better men have forced a passage, and to upset their work by preaching its own crotchets, we get precisely the kind of thing which dogged Paul all his life.

There was evidently a considerable body of these men in Rome; good men no doubt in a fashion, believing in Jesus as the Messiah, but unable to comprehend that he had antiquated Moses, as the dawning day makes useless the light in a dark place. Even when he was a prisoner, their unrelenting antagonism pursued the Apostle. They preached Christ of "envy and strife." Not one of them lifted a finger to help him, or spoke a word to cheer him. With none of them to say, God bless him! he toiled on. Only these three were large-hearted enough to take their stand by his side, and by this greeting to clasp the hands of their Gentile brethren in Colossæ, and thereby to endorse the teaching of this letter as to the abrogation of Jewish rites.

It was a brave thing to do, and the exuberance of the eulogium shows how keenly Paul felt his countrymen's coldness, and how grateful he was to "the dauntless three." Only those who have lived in an atmosphere of misconstruction, surrounded by scowls and sneers, can understand what a cordial the clasp of a hand, or the word of sympathy is. They were like the old soldier that stood on the street of Worms, as Luther passed in to the Diet, and clapped him

on the shoulder, with "Little monk! little monk! you are about to make a nobler stand to-day than we in all our battles have ever done. If your cause is just, and you are sure of it, go forward in God's name, and fear nothing."

If we can do no more, we can give some one who is doing more a cup of cold water, by our sympathy and taking our place at his side, and so can be fellow-workers to the kingdom of God.

We note, too, that the best comfort Paul could have was help in his work. He did not go about the world whimpering for sympathy. He was much too strong a man for that. He wanted men to come down into the trench with him, and to shovel and wheel there till they had made in the wilderness some kind of a highway for the King. The true cordial for a true worker is that others get into the traces and pull by his side.

But we may further look at these men as representing for us progressive as opposed to reactionary, and spiritual as opposed to ceremonial Christianity. Jewish Christians looked backwards; Paul and his three sympathisers looked forward. There was much excuse for the former. No wonder that they shrank from the idea that things divinely appointed could be laid aside. Now there is a broad distinction between the divine in Christianity and the divine in Judaism. For Jesus Christ is God's last word, and abides for ever. His divinity, His perfect sacrifice, His present life in glory for us, His life within us, these and their related truths are the perennial possession of the Church. To Him we must look back, and every generation till the end of time will have to look back, as the full and final expression of the wisdom and will and mercy of God. "Last of all He sent unto them His Son."

Then that being distinctly understood, we need not hesitate to recognise the transitory nature of much of the embodiment of the eternal truth concerning the eternal

Christ. To draw the line accurately between the permanent and the transient would be to anticipate history and read the future. But the clear recognition of the distinction between the Divine revelation and the vessels in which it is contained, between Christ and creeds, between Churches, forms of worship, formularies of faith on the one hand, and the everlasting word of God spoken to us once for all in His Son, and recorded in Scripture, on the other, is needful at all times, and especially at such times of sifting and unsettlement as the present. It will save some of us from an obstinate conservatism which might read its fate in the decline and disappearance of Jewish Christianity. It will save us equally from needless fears, as if the stars were going out, when it is only men-made lamps that are paling. Men's hearts often tremble for the ark of God, when the only things in peril are the cart that carries it, or the oxen that draw it. "We have received a kingdom that cannot be moved," because we have received a King eternal, and therefore may calmly see the removal of things that can be shaken, assured that the things which cannot be shaken will but the more conspicuously assert their permanence. The existing embodiments of God's truth are not the highest, and if Churches and forms crumble and disintegrate, their disappearance will not be the abolition of Christianity, but its progress. These Jewish Christians would have found all that they strove to keep, in higher form and more real reality, in Christ; and what seemed to them the destruction of Judaism was really its coronation with undying life.

II. Epaphras is for us the type of the highest service which love can render.

All our knowledge of Epaphras is contained in these brief notices in this Epistle. We learn from the first chapter that he had introduced the gospel to Colossæ, and perhaps also to Laodicea and Hierapolis. He was "one of you,"

a member of the Colossian community, and a resident in, possibly a native of, Colossæ. He had come to Rome, apparently to consult the Apostle about the views which threatened to disturb the Church. He had told him, too, of their love, not painting the picture too black, and gladly giving full prominence to any bits of brightness. It was his report which led to the writing of this letter.

Perhaps some of the Colossians were not over pleased with his having gone to speak with Paul, and having brought down this thunderbolt on their heads; and such a feeling may account for the warmth of Paul's praises of him as his "fellow-slave," and for the emphasis of his testimony on his behalf. However they might doubt, Epaphras' love for them was warm. It showed itself by continual fervent prayers that they might stand "perfect and fully persuaded in all the will of God," and by toil of body and mind for them. We can see the anxious Epaphras, far away from the Church of his solicitude, always loaded with the thought of their danger, and ever wrestling in prayer on their behalf.

So we may learn the noblest service which Christian love can do—prayer. There is a real power in Christian intercession. There are many difficulties and mysteries round that thought. The manner of the blessing is not revealed, but the fact that we help one another by prayer is plainly taught, and confirmed by many examples, from the day when God heard Abraham and delivered Lot, to the hour when the loving authoritative words were spoken, "Simon, Simon, I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." A spoonful of water sets a hydraulic press in motion, and brings into operation a force of tons weight; so a drop of prayer at the one end may move an influence at the other which is omnipotent. It is a service which all can render. Epaphras could not have written this letter, but he could pray. Love has no higher way of utterance than prayer.

A prayerless love may be very tender, and may speak murmured words of sweetest sound, but it lacks the deepest expression, and the noblest music of speech. We never help our dear ones so well as when we pray for them. Do we thus show and consecrate our family loves and our friendships?

We notice too the kind of prayer which love naturally presents. It is constant and earnest—"always striving," or as the word might be rendered, "agonizing." That word suggests first the familiar metaphor of the wrestling ground. True prayer is the intensest energy of the spirit pleading for blessing with a great striving of faithful desire. But a more solemn memory gathers round the word, for it can scarcely fail to recall the hour beneath the olives of Gethsemane, when the clear paschal moon shone down on the suppliant who, "being in an agony, prayed the more earnestly." And both Paul's word here, and the evangelist's there, carry us back to that mysterious scene by the brook Jabbok, where Jacob "wrestled" with "a man" until the breaking of the day, and prevailed. Such is prayer; the wrestle in the arena, the agony in Gethsemane, the solitary grapple with the "traveller unknown"; and such is the highest expression of Christian love.

Here, too, we learn what love asks for its beloved. Not perishable blessings, not the prizes of earth—fame, fortune, friends; but that "ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God." The first petition is for steadfastness. To stand has for opposites—to fall, or totter, or give ground; so the prayer is that they may not yield to temptation, or opposition, nor waver in their fixed faith, nor go down in the struggle; but keep erect, their feet planted on the rock, and holding their own against every foe. The prayer is also for their maturity of Christian character, that they may stand firm, because perfect, having attained that condition which Paul in this Epistle tells us is the aim of all

preaching and warning. As for ourselves, so for our dear ones, we are to be content with nothing short of entire conformity to the will of God. His merciful purpose for us all is to be the goal of our efforts for ourselves, and of our prayers for others. We are to widen our desires to coincide with His gift, and our prayers are to cover no narrower space than His promises enclose.

Epaphras' last desire for his friends, according to the true reading, is that they may be "fully assured" in all the will of God. There can be no higher blessing than that—to be quite sure of what God desires me to know and do and be—if the assurance comes from the clear light of His illumination, and not from hasty self-confidence in my own penetration. To be free from the misery of intellectual doubts and practical uncertainties, to walk in the sunshine—is the purest joy. And it is granted in needful measure to all who have silenced their own wills, that they may hear what God says: "If any man wills to do His will, he shall know."

Does our love speak in prayer? and do our prayers for our dear ones plead chiefly for such gifts? Both our love and our desires need purifying if this is to be their natural language. How can we offer such prayers for them if, at the bottom of our hearts, we had rather see them well off in the world than steadfast, matured and assured Christians? How can we expect an answer to such prayers if the whole current of our lives shows that neither for them nor for ourselves do we "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"?

III. The last salutation comes from a singularly contrasted couple—Luke and Demas, the types respectively of faithfulness and apostasy. These two unequally yoked together stand before us like the light and the dark figures that Ary Scheffer delights to paint, each bringing out the colouring of the other more vividly by contrast. They bear

the same relation to Paul which John, the beloved disciple, and Judas did to Paul's master.

As for Luke, his long and faithful companionship of the Apostle is too well known to need repetition here. His first appearance in the Acts nearly coincides with an attack of Paul's constitutional malady, which gives probability to the suggestion that one reason for Luke's close attendance on the Apostle was the state of his health. Thus the form and warmth of the reference here would be explained—"Luke the physician, the beloved." We trace Luke as sharing the perils of the winter voyage to Italy, making his presence known only by the modest "we" of the narrative. We find him here sharing the Roman captivity, and, in the second imprisonment, he was Paul's only companion. All others had been sent away, or had fled; but Luke could not be spared, and would not desert him, and no doubt was by his side till the end, which soon came.

As for Demas, we know no more about him except the melancholy record, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world; and is departed unto Thessalonica." Perhaps he was a Thessalonian, and so went home. His love of the world then was his reason for abandoning Paul. Probably it was on the side of danger that the world tempted him. He was a coward, and preferred a whole skin to a clear conscience. In immediate connexion with the record of his desertion we read, "At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all men forsook me." As the same word is used, probably Demas may have been one of these timid friends, whose courage was not equal to standing by Paul when, to use his own metaphor, he thrust his head into the lion's mouth. Let us not be too hard on the constancy that warped in so fierce a flame. All that Paul charges him with is, that he was a faithless friend, and too fond of the present world. Perhaps his crime did not reach the darker hue. He may not have been an apostate Christ-

ian, though he was a faithless friend. Perhaps, if there were departure from Christ as well as from Paul, he came back again, like Peter, whose sins against love and friendship were greater than his—and, like Peter, found pardon and a welcome. Perhaps, away in Thessalonica, he repented him of his evil, and perhaps Paul and Demas met again before the throne, and there clasped inseparable hands. Let us not judge a man of whom we know so little, but take to ourselves the lesson of humility and self-distrust !

How strikingly these two contrasted characters bring out the possibility of men being exposed to the same influences and yet ending far away from each other ! These two set out from the same point, and travelled side by side, subject to the same training, in contact with the magnetic personal attraction of Paul's strong nature, and at the end they are wide as the poles asunder. Starting from the same level, one line inclines ever so little upwards, the other imperceptibly downwards. Pursue them far enough, and there is room for the whole solar system with all its orbits in the space between them. So two children trained at one mother's knee, subjects of the same prayers, with the same sunshine of love and rain of good influences upon them both, may grow up, one to break a mother's heart and disgrace a father's home, and the other to walk in the ways of godliness and serve the God of his fathers. Circumstances are mighty ; but the use we make of circumstances lies with ourselves. As we trim our sails and set our rudder, the same breeze will take us in opposite directions. We are the architects and builders of our own characters, and may so use the most unfavourable influences as to strengthen and wholesomely harden our natures thereby, and may so misuse the most favourable as only thereby to increase our blameworthiness for wasted opportunities.

We are reminded, too, from these two men who stand before us like a double star—one bright and one dark—that

no loftiness of Christian position, nor length of Christian profession is a guarantee against falling and apostasy. As we read in another book, for which the Church has to thank a prison cell—the place where so many of its precious possessions have been written—there is a backway to the pit from the gate of the Celestial City. Demas had stood high in the Church, had been admitted to the close intimacy of the Apostle, was evidently no raw novice, and yet the world could drag him back from so eminent a place in which he had long stood. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

The world that was too strong for Demas will be too strong for us if we front it in our own strength. It is ubiquitous, working on us everywhere and always, like the pressure of the atmosphere on our bodies. Its weight will crush us unless we can climb to and dwell on the heights of communion with God, where pressure is diminished. It acted on Demas through his fears. It acts on us through our ambitions, affections and desires. So, seeing that miserable wreck of Christian constancy, and considering ourselves lest we also be tempted, let us not judge another, but look at home. There is more than enough there to make profound self-distrust our truest wisdom, and to teach us to pray, “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.”

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON.

THE OLDEST PETITION FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.

M. RENAN has called the Epistle to Philemon a *note*. It is indeed a letter in few words, but this very brevity only enhances the greatness of its contents.