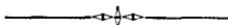


Our conclusions may be summed up as follows: While the Church in her human relations is not altogether free from abuses or exempt from failure, she nevertheless retains as a body all the conditions of a Divine Vitality, and has at her disposal all the means for fulfilling her great mission of evangelizing the people. Her abuses are not inherent, but incidental; her failures are not general and permanent, but occasional and temporary. The ordinances of the Church are only formal to those who use them formally; the work of the Church is only fruitless to those who follow it aimlessly and heartlessly. The sincere and devout Churchman can hardly fail to regard the Church as the only body completely fitted to continue the work of Christ among the people. In the faithful ministration of the Word and Sacraments, in the careful instruction of the young, in the diligent visitation of the sick and dying, in the active prosecution of every crusade against sin and unbelief according to the methods of the Church of England, lies, in our opinion, the only well-grounded hope of maintaining the greatness of the nation by preserving the people in the fear of God.

JOHN M. BRAITHWAITE.



ART. II.—NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS NOT
COMMEMORATED.—EPAPHRAS.

THE name of Epaphras occurs only three times in the New Testament; twice in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians, and once in the Epistle sent by him, at the same time and by the same messengers, to Philemon at Colossæ. In none of the three places does the mention of him extend beyond one or two verses. In one of them it consists simply of his name, with a significant epithet attached to it, as the sender of a salutation. Yet out of these three brief notices an interesting and instructive memoir of an uncommemorated Saint may be constructed, by an attentive and thoughtful reader.

I. The first mention which we have of Epaphras presents him to us as, in all probability, the chief if not the exclusive founder of one or more Christian churches; while at the same time it gives us an insight into the manner, in which the Gospel was carried in those early times into regions beyond the reach of the personal agency of the Apostles. At the

commencement of his Epistle to the Colossians,¹ St. Paul speaks with commendation and thankfulness of their fruitfulness and growth in "the word of the truth of the gospel," "since the day they heard and knew the grace of God in truth;" and then, with obvious reference to the Teacher from whom they first heard and knew it, he adds, "Even as ye learned of Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant." Now even if, with our Authorized Version, we retain the word "also" ("as ye also learned")² in the clause last quoted, we are not driven to the conclusion that St. Paul intends to affirm that the Colossians had only heard the Gospel from Epaphras *as well as* from himself—from him "also," as ye did from me. We may still, even in that case, believe with Calvin³ and others, that St. Paul had never been at Colossæ when he wrote the Epistle, and that Epaphras was the proper founder of the Church. But if, with the Revised Version, we omit the word "also," against which the weight of manuscript authority greatly preponderates, and which is rejected by the principal critical editors, and read "even as ye learned of Epaphras,"⁴ the honour of having first preached the Gospel in Colossæ is even more clearly assigned to this uncommemorated Saint. That St. Paul is writing this Epistle to those to whom he is personally unknown seems certain, from the contents of the Epistle itself. Not only does he tell them more than once that he has "heard"⁵ of their faith and progress, and add that their love to him "in the spirit" (with a possible contrast to that love "in the flesh"⁶ which personal intercourse would have awakened) had been "declared unto him by Epaphras;"⁷ but he appears distinctly to include them and the Christians of the neighbouring Church of Laodicea in the number of those who "had not seen his face in the flesh."⁸ And if this be so, we may reasonably conclude that, in referring to Epaphras as he does, he intends to distinguish him, as one, at least, of the most prominent introducers of the Gospel into Colossæ.

Have we, then, any reliable data for determining the time at which this introduction took place, and the manner in which it was probably brought about? If St. Paul did not visit the valley of the Lycus, when he "went through the

¹ Colossians i. 3-8.

² *Ibid.*, i. 7.

³ Colossensibus nunquam visus fuerat.

⁴ καθὼς ἐμάθετε, instead of καθὼς καὶ ἐμάθετε.

⁵ Colossians i. 4, 9.

⁶ Philemon 16.

⁷ Colossians i. 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, ii. 1. "There would be no meaning in singling out *individuals* who were known to him, and then mentioning comprehensively *all* who were unknown to him. Hence we may infer from the expression here that St. Paul had never visited Colossæ."—Bishop Lightfoot, whose note is worth consulting.

region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, stablishing all the disciples,"¹ we may suppose that it was because there were as yet no disciples in that part of the country, and that therefore it did not fall within the scope of his journey. It was not a missionary tour, but an Apostolic visitation. We must look therefore to a later date for the founding of the Colossian Church. And this date may be fixed, with a high degree of probability, as falling within the three years of the Apostle's subsequent sojourn at Ephesus.² During that interval we learn from St. Luke that, "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks,"³ while an enemy of the faith confirms this testimony, by complaining that "not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people."⁴ Doubtless from Ephesus St. Paul may have made occasional short missionary tours (as we have seen reason, in a former paper, to think that he did from Corinth) into the neighbouring districts. But in addition to and beyond his personal activity, his work was multiplied and increased, in accordance with the unfailing law of the Gospel, by his converts and coadjutors. Thus it may well have been that Epaphras—converted himself to the faith of Christ by the Apostle, with whom he had come in contact on some visit to Ephesus—returned as the first herald of the Gospel to his own city of Colossæ.⁵ Some twelve miles lower down the Lycus, which flowed through the town of Colossæ, stood opposite to each other, on the rising ground on either side of the river, the more important towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis. In them also the good tidings were proclaimed, and Christian churches were founded.⁶ Philemon and his son Archippus helped greatly in the work.⁷ But Epaphras was the leader and chief. From him it was, as St. Paul testifies, that they heard "the word of the truth of the Gospel," and learned "the grace of God in truth." He it is whom the Apostle acknowledges as his own representative, "a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,"⁸ in his work at Colossæ.

¹ Acts xviii. 23. That St. Paul did not probably come near Colossæ, either on this or his previous journey (ch. xvi. 6) is shown by Lightfoot, "Colossians," Introduction, pp. 23-25.

² Acts xx. 31. ³ *Ibid.*, xix. 10. ⁴ *Ibid.*, xix. 26.

⁵ "Epaphras, who is one of you." Colossians iv. 12.

⁶ Colossians ii. 1; iv. 13, 16. For an interesting description of these towns, and of the valley of the Lycus, a tributary of the Mæander, see Bishop Lightfoot on the "Colossians," Introduction, p. 1 *seq.*

⁷ "Philemon, our fellow-worker;" "Archippus, our fellow-soldier." Philemon i. 2. Comp. Colos. iv. 17.

⁸ The reading of the Revised Version, instead of "for you" (*ὑμῶν* for *ὑμῶν*) of the Authorised Version.

II. But the portraiture of Epaphras in this Epistle is not yet completed. In few but forcible lines another side of his character is also brought out. He is with St. Paul at Rome as he writes the letter. The Churches which he had helped to found, and in which he took so deep an interest, were in danger, as the Epistle shows, of being drawn away from the simplicity of their first faith by that strange admixture of Judaism and philosophy which afterwards developed into the eclectic heresy of Gnosticism.¹ It may be that his anxiety for his converts took him to Rome to seek counsel and aid from the Apostle, from whom he himself had first heard the Gospel, and who counted all the churches of the Gentiles his peculiar charge. But whether that were so, or whether being in Rome on some other errand he availed himself of the opportunity thus afforded him, it is clear that he called in the great Apostle to stem by his authority, and by his loving admonitions and powerful arguments, the rising tide of error. This, however, was not all he did for them. Though debarred for a time by absence from active effort on their behalf, there was still one way open to him, in which to labour for their good: he could pray for them. And this he did, with a constancy which knew no intermission,² with a fervency like that of St. Paul in his pleadings for absent brethren, and akin even to the Great Agony of the Lord Himself in its earnest "striving."³ His "much labour"⁴ for them, by which he won for himself the honourable title of a "servant of Christ Jesus,"⁵ and called forth the high encomium of his spiritual father, lay no less in the sphere of prayer than it did in that of active exertion. In the combination of the two are to be found at once the secret of his success and the force of his example. All the energy that he would have expended in warning and exhorting them, had he been with them, against the errors which threatened to corrupt their faith, was now thrown into his prayers for them that they might "stand perfect and assured in all the will of God."⁶

¹ "That Judaic form of incipient gnosticism," as Archdeacon Farrar calls it. Observe how St. Paul sets in contrast to this the teaching of Epaphras: "The word of the truth of the gospel," "The grace of God in truth." Colossians i. 5, 6.

² "πάντοτε, always." Colossians iv. 12.

³ ἀγωνιζόμενος. *Ibid.*, Comp. ἡλικὸν ἀγῶνα, ch. ii. 1; and γεόμενος ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ, Luke xxii. 44.

⁴ πολὺν πόνον, Colossians iv. 13. A word of rare use in the New Testament, occurring only here (where it is the best supported reading) and in the Apocalypse.

⁵ δοῦλος.

⁶ Boni pastoris exemplum, cui locorum distantia ecclesiæ oblivionem minime inducit quin trans mare ejus curam secum deferat. Et notanda vis orationis, quæ exprimitur in verbo certandi.—Calvin.

III. The remaining brief notice adds a single particular to our knowledge of Epaphras. In his Epistle to Philemon, St. Paul bestows upon him the honourable title of his "fellow-prisoner."¹ The word literally means a "prisoner of war."² But assuming it to have here a spiritual and not a literal signification, we are struck by the way in which in two Epistles, written almost at the same time, this title is given alternately to two different persons. In the Epistle to the Colossians it is, "Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner;" "Epaphras, a servant of Christ."³ In the Epistle to Philemon it is, "Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner;" "Aristarchus, my fellow-labourer."⁴ It has been suggested that the difference may be accounted for, either by their having changed places, in the short interval between the writing of the two letters, in a *voluntary* imprisonment, undertaken by them in turn, to comfort and minister to St. Paul; or else that "as the result of some trial" in the meantime, the one had been incarcerated and the other set at liberty. The evident anxiety of Epaphras for the Church at Colossæ might seem to be inconsistent with voluntary absence, even for so worthy an object as ministering to the Apostle in his bonds, and to point rather to compulsory incarceration. But other considerations, personal to himself or connected with the Churches—the refreshing of his own spirit or the quieting of some irritation on their part—may have made his prolonged absence from Colossæ desirable. And in the lack of further information we must content ourselves with the undoubted fact that, whether willingly or by constraint, he shared the Apostle's imprisonment at Rome.

To the minister of Christ first, and then to every true servant of His, the lesson of the life of Epaphras is clear and weighty. *Ora et labora*. Pray and labour. In fervency of zeal, in purity of doctrine, in watchful solicitude, in wise precaution, let this uncommemorated Saint be your example in working. In constancy of intercession, in energy of supplication, in singleness of aim, let him be your example in praying also. Labour as he laboured. Pray as he prayed. And your prayer and labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

T. T. PEROWNE.

¹ ὁ συναϊχμάλωτός μου, verse 23.

² "Designat hastâ superatum et captum."—Davenant, quoted by Ellicott.

³ Colossians iv. 10, 12.

⁴ Verses 23, 24.

