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THE VOCABULARY OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS. II¹

5. *πρόδρομος* (Heb. vi. 20). This arresting figure is as unique in the vocabulary of the New Testament as the companion image of an anchor of hope, not plunged beneath the swirling billows to the unshaken sea-floor, but soaring aloft, or else piercing the veil of the unseen, and fastening hold on the very *adytum* (τὸ ἑσώτερον) of the heavenly sanctuary. In military parlance *οἱ πρόδρομοι* denotes advance or reconnoitring corps moving ahead of the main body, such as the cavalry skirmishers used by Alexander (Arr. *Anab.* i. 12) in his Eastern campaign. We may compare Julius Caesar's *antecursores*, one of whose chief functions was that of selecting and staking out stations for encampment. In the singular the word is rarer, though its metaphorical sense dates from Aristophanes, who terms dizziness the precursor (*πρόδρομος*) of fever (*Frag.* 332). In Euripides (*Iph. in Aul.* 424) the phrase *πρόδρομος ἦκω* is put into the lips of an *avant-courier* despatched in front of an approaching party. It carries the same meaning in Plutarch (*Philop.* 2), and, according to Theophrastus and Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* xvi. 49), was one of the by-names of the early fig. These examples show that it is not speed but precedence that prevails in its conception. As applied to the Saviour, it recalls His own care-quelling utterance: "I go to prepare a place for you." But the errand of this Fore-runner embraces far wider ends than that of preparation. It proclaims an accomplished work of redemption and signalises the firstfruits of a mighty aftercrop. *Precursor* is a relative term implying a sequence. With their glorified Head, the members of His body must in due time be conjoined; and the sublime office of intercession above vested in the Eternal Priest constitutes the indispensable medium of its accomplishment. His advocacy is the safeguard of His Church and the earnest of *her* glorification.

6. *ἀπαράβατος* (Heb. vii. 24). No doubt the old rendering *unchangeable* requires correction to the marginal Revised Version's *inviolable*. The writer has already dwelt on the perpetuity of Christ's priesthood as in keeping with the unprocessionate type of Melchizedek, and stressed its intransmissibility in the

¹ Continued from the January number, pp. 35-38.

ascription of "an indissoluble life" to the ideal Priest he is setting forth. But he now affirms that it is in its very nature unsupersedable, that finality inheres in it. The high-priestly Son, in contrast with mortal intermediaries, is described at the close of the chapter as "perfected for evermore". Perhaps *indefectible* would be a suitable translation; for Epictetus (*Enchir.* 51) urges his pupil to let all that is best be to him a νόμος ἀπαράβατος and Josephus (*Cont. Ap.* ii. 41) asks what is a fairer spectacle than εὐσέβεια ἀπαράβατος; moreover, the adverb=*without fail* in Vettius Valens. In the one flawless Mediator we descry priesthood at its summit-level. His unique endowments exhaust the requisites of the office and invest it with ineffaceable validity.

7. καινῆς διαθήκης μεσίτης. We can scarcely overlook this outstanding appellation of the Redeemer, thrice repeated (viii. 6, ix. 13, xii. 24) with minute variations. It presents an instance of the profound enhancement conferred on expressions already in vogue by the Christian revelation. *Μεσίτης* in the sense of *arbitrator* or *go-between* was a common business term, as the papyri show, corresponding with the old English word *daysman*, retained in the Authorised Version to translate its single occurrence in the LXX (Job ix. 33). The somewhat wider usage for any *internuntius* occasionally met with prepared the way for its loftiest connotation. Thus Moses is styled in Philo as well as by St. Paul *μεσίτης*, the "middleman" of the old covenant. But Christ is the Mediator *par excellence*, not with that merely metaphysical application by which Plutarch (*Mor.* 369) alludes to Mithras as the *μεσίτης* between Ormuzd and Ahriman in Persian theosophy, but in its supreme ethical significance, typified in the "reconciling rainbow" encircling the throne, or in the ladder of Jacob's vision conjoining sundered heaven and earth—one, to borrow a fine coinage of Tyndale, who is the perfect *Atonemaker*, conserving the interests of both parties for whom He acts. Intensely zealous that God's honour should contract no stain, this ideal Mediator, having secured that supreme end, will with equal zeal seek the offender's rescue and reclamation. Such an unique Intermediary evangelical faith recognises in her beloved Lord. Alas that Rome, with her understudy, Anglo-Catholicism, robs Him of the homage which it pays to a Church that "succeeds Him on earth in the exercise of His priestly office" (W. P. Paterson). Surely the *Maria*

mediatrix of the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* is the just Nemesis of that crass aberration !

But what of *διαθήκη*? Shall it be construed *covenant* or *testament*? On this controverted point we incline to favour both sides. That there is an amphibology in the term itself cannot be gainsaid. The LXX's constant recourse thereto to translate *berith* affixes on it the sense of *bond* or *covenant* irrevocably. *Συνθήκη* would be the ordinary vocable ; but since that intimates an agreement between equals, *διαθήκη* is chosen to express more adequately a sovereign or authoritative compact, tendered on the one hand for acceptance on the other. In profane Greek this signification is remarkably rare, and a passage in Aristophanes (*Av.* 440) furnishes the most conclusive example of its currency. But Liddell and Scott recognise "to arrange as one pleases" as one of the standard meanings of the verb *διατίθεσθαι* (cf. Luke xxii. 29) ; from whence doubtless flowed the far more frequent, and at length dominant, acceptation of *will* or *testament*, prevalent alike in Attic and Hellenistic Greek. Thus *ὁ διαθέμενος* (Heb. ix. 17) signifies *the testator*, *ἀδιάθετος* became the technical term for *intestate*, and *ἐπιδιαθήκη* stands in Josephus for a *codicil*. Westcott has sought to preserve the rendering *covenant* unmodified and Deissmann that of *testament* ; but J. H. Moulton, after embracing Westcott's conclusion, felt himself obliged to "capitulate", as he phrases it, to the dual version of the Authorised Version and Revised Version, inconsistent as he deems it to be. But is that the case? If we revert to the teaching of the old theology (Turretin, Witsius, Hodge), the covenant of redemption, viewed as the undertaking of the Son, will rank as the prior phase of the covenant of grace. By fulfilling that divine counsel of peace the heavenly Covenanter has met all the claims of outraged righteousness. His "obedience unto death" fills up the breach with heaven as nothing else could do ; and the covenant of grace in His hands at this stage assumes the aspect of a bequest accruing to His brethren through the death of the Testator, who in this unique transaction lives again to be the Administrator of His own Mediatorial work. Perhaps the term *settlement* comes nearest to *διαθήκη* in actual usage.

8. *ἀθέτησις ἀμαρτίας* (Heb. ix. 26). The verb *ἀθετεῖν* usually means *to cast aside, spurn*, especially when accompanied by a personal object or an obligation attaching to personal relationships. It is employed of contemning God (John xii. 48 ;

1 Thess. iv. 8) and His law (Ezek. xxii. 26 ; Mark vii. 9 ; Heb. x. 28), and of Herod's averseness from treating the daughter of Herodias with contumely (Mark vi. 26). Polybius likewise uses it of Punic perfidy (viii. 36) and the LXX of broken allegiances or covenants. But this Hellenistic term also denotes an act of supersession or setting aside. It was the technical phrase current with the Alexandrian grammarians to signify the obelising of a suspected passage counted spurious (Luc. V.H. ii. 20) and therefore to be expunged from an author's text. In this sense of deletion we find it in the papyri with reference to annulled decrees and even paid-off loans. The Palestinian writer Philodemus (*Rhet.* i. 43) writes of certain locutions "not easily to be discarded" (*οὐκ ἂν ῥαδίως ἀθετηῆσαι*) ; and there are passages such as Gal. ii. 21, iii. 15, in the New Testament, where this translation would be plausible. On the whole, then, the expression *εἰς ἀθέτησιν ἁμαρτίας* appears to be equivalent to Diodati's Italian version of it, *per annullare il peccato*, expressive of the *cancelling* or *elimination* of sin, a little more specific, that is to say, than our version, "putting away". It seems to imply *effacement*. The writer tells us in v. 28 that Christ was "once offered to bear the sins of many" and thus bear them away. For, as an American divine, Thornwell, has strikingly put it : "holiness is God's very life ; He is *glorious* in holiness. And He never appears so holy as when He gives Himself in the person of His Son to die rather than that that holiness should be impugned." Among all the wonders of redeeming love there is surely no greater wonder than the righteousness of divine mercy, the blotting out of transgression without compromise of rectitude, the coalition of a just God and a Saviour.

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Mabvern.