

## THE FIRST INDICATIONS OF GNOSTICISM IN ASIA MINOR.

### THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

FOUR years had passed away since Tertius, Paul's amanuensis at Corinth, had laid down his pen, after writing, at Paul's dictation, the last words of the Epistle to the Romans. Grave events had taken place in the interval. The Apostle had been arrested in Jerusalem. For two years (59-61) the Roman governor had kept him prisoner in his house at Cæsarea. In order to escape from this captivity, which threatened to be prolonged, the Apostle had been constrained to have recourse to his privilege as a Roman citizen, and to appeal to Cæsar's tribunal. In the autumn of the year 61 he had embarked for Rome with other prisoners and a detachment of the Roman legion. Two faithful friends had accompanied him of their own accord, Aristarchus of Thessalonica and Luke the physician, who had both been his fellow-workers in the latter part of his sojourn in Greece. The story of their escape from shipwreck is well known, and how, after spending the winter in Malta, they arrived in Rome in the spring of 62. Although a prisoner, Paul enjoyed much greater liberty in Rome than at Cæsarea. His military imprisonment was exchanged for what was called *custodia libera*. He was allowed to hire an apartment at his own charge, and he was free to receive there any who wished to visit him. He also maintained constant communication with all the Churches of Greece and of Asia.

In the course of the two years which the Apostle passed in Rome in this position, he one day received a visit from

an evangelist named Epaphras, who had come from Asia Minor, and who had preached Christ with much success in southern Phrygia. There, a few days' journey to the east of Ephesus, in the basin of the Lycus, an affluent of the Meander, is a mountainous region of great beauty. Above it rises Mount Cadmus, massive, picturesque, covered with eternal snows. At its feet runs the Lycus, near which formerly stood the city of Colossæ or Colassæ. A little more to the west were the cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis; all three forming a triangle, of which the last named occupied the northern apex. At the present day the site of the two larger cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis, is only marked by a few ruins, while the vestiges of Colossæ, a league distant from Chonæ (χῶνας, the funnel shaped cavities in which the Lycus loses itself at intervals), are still less considerable.

This was the field of labour of the zealous and faithful Epaphras. He had probably been one of Paul's converts during his stay in Ephesus. For, whatever may be said, it is certain that Paul had never himself been in this region (Col. ii. 1). When, at the commencement of his third missionary voyage, he had gone from Antioch into Galatia and from Galatia to Ephesus, he had passed through northern Phrygia, but the basin of the Lycus lay on his left.

It must have been about the same time that Epaphras arrived in Rome that a great earthquake occurred in this district, and was felt with peculiar violence in the city of Laodicea. The exact year in which this catastrophe occurred is not known. Tacitus places it in 60-61; Eusebius in 64; according to Orosius it was still later, in 68. As the Apostle makes no allusion to it, we must conclude either that it did not take place till after the arrival of Epaphras in Rome and the writing of the Epistle to the Colossians, or that Colossæ did not materially suffer, and rapidly re-

covered from the shock. Laodicea rose again from its ruins in the very year of its overthrow (*eodem anno*), and that by its own exertions (*propriis opibus*), as Tacitus tells us.

What we have just said rests upon the supposition that it was in Rome and about the year 62-63 that Epaphras came to visit the Apostle, with what special object we shall have to enquire presently. But many scholars place this visit of Epaphras to Paul at a much earlier date, namely during the captivity of Paul at Cæsarea, from the summer of 59 to the autumn of 61.

The reasons alleged in favour of this opinion are some of them very weak and some simply absurd, and cannot, as it seems to us, weigh at all against those which can be urged in favour of the view we have taken. We call attention, in the first place, to the marked correspondence of style, thought and circumstance between the Epistle to the Colossians and that to the Philippians, in which the Apostle frequently alludes to his state of captivity. Timothy, of whom there is no mention during the captivity at Cæsarea, has a share in both these epistles. The reference which Paul makes (Col. iv. 11) to his fellow-workers of Jewish origin, corresponds with what he says to the Philippians on this subject (chap. i. 15-17). Now it is quite certain that the Epistle to the Philippians was written from Rome and not from Cæsarea. For the Apostle says in it that he hopes soon to visit Macedonia, while during his captivity in Cæsarea he had no thought, either before or after his appeal to the emperor, of going anywhere but to Rome and the West.

His whole position, as implied in the Epistles to the Colossians and the Philippians, is one of much greater freedom than was permitted by the more severe form of imprisonment at Cæsarea. There he was chained by the wrist (Acts xxvi. 29), and was only allowed to receive

his relations or friends. Under these circumstances, instead of asking the Churches to pray for him that he might be able faithfully to preach the Gospel, as he does in writing to the Colossians, he would have been more likely to ask them to seek first that he might be set at liberty. In Rome, he was simply guarded by a soldier, and free access was allowed to all who liked to visit him. Thus he was able to discuss for a whole day with the elders of the Jewish synagogue. Now this position of Paul which is described towards the close of the Book of Acts, corresponds exactly with that which we gather from the Epistles to the Colossians and to the Philippians. It could only be in the world's capital that Paul could write thus: "The word of the truth of the gospel which is come unto you, even as it is also in all the world, bearing fruit and increasing as it doth in you also" (i. 6). We know from these epistles that Paul's apartment in Rome was what his prison-cell in Cæsarea never could have been, the head-quarters of the army of evangelists who were going forth under his directions to the conquest of the Gentile world.

But to return to Epaphras. For what purpose did he come to Rome? Did he simply wish to testify to Paul the love and concern of the Churches of Phrygia for the Apostle whom they had never seen in the flesh, but whom they loved in the spirit? Undoubtedly this was part of his mission, and it brought comfort to the heart of Paul (i. 8; ii. 1). But there were more urgent reasons for his undertaking so great a journey. The Churches which Epaphras had founded were troubled at this time by a doctrine which shook the very foundations of the Apostle's teaching as they had received it through Epaphras; and if this new school were to prevail, it would not fail to affect deeply the religious and moral life awakened in these young Churches. In order to understand the greatness

of the danger which had led Epaphras to seek counsel of the Apostle, we must call to mind the particular circumstances of the district in which these Churches were placed. On the one hand, Phrygia had been from the most remote antiquity the seat of the worship of Cybele, the goddess of nature, or "the Great Mother"; a worship of a very wild and enthusiastic character. On the other hand, Judaism had taken a strong hold of the people of these districts. Two centuries earlier, the king of Syria, Antiochus the Great (224-187), had caused two thousand Jewish families to remove from Babylon into this region, in order to secure the submission of the inhabitants, who were disposed to revolt (Jos., *Ant.*, xii. 3, § 4).

It is easy to understand that the combination of these two elements must have peculiarly predisposed the people to the adoption of doctrines at once legal and mystical, Jewish and superstitious. These are the very features of the doctrine against which Paul is arguing in the Epistle to the Colossians. On the one hand it presents a certain analogy with the Pharisaic Judæo-Christianity which, seven years before, had threatened to undermine the Churches of Galatia. It perpetuates the Jewish feasts, the observance of the new moons and Sabbaths, and of certain rules relating to food (ii. 16), possibly also of circumcision (ii. 11), as obligatory on all believers. But at the same time it is evident that, since the contests in Galatia and at Antioch, Judaising heresy had assumed quite a new character. We have already seen, in studying the Epistles to the Corinthians, that in attempting to reach the Greeks, Judæo-Christianity had stooped to unworthy and carnal allurements, and had attempted to clothe itself in a speculative garb, appealing especially to the craving for knowledge, and attempting to introduce a new Christology (2 Cor. xi. 4-6; 1 Cor. iii. 17-20). This tendency we note also in the Epistle to the Colossians. Paul calls the new teaching

“philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ.” It is an attempt to solve the problem of human life in a new way, leaving Christ out of the solution.

From this it would appear that the Judaizing teachers who had come to the Church of Phrygia, while remaining attached to the observances of Mosaism, attempted at the same time to give them a higher bearing and to amalgamate them with a philosophic system. How was this? We can perhaps gather the answer from the words of the Apostle, in which he accuses them of taking pleasure in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into things not intended for their knowledge, vainly puffed up as they were by their fleshly mind (ii. 18). This verse, which some of the latest critics (Holzmann and von Soden) try to prove is an interpolation, is really the key to the whole epistle. It is objected that there is no connexion between the worship of angels and the legal side of the system. But from a Jewish point of view the connexion is obvious. Did not Stephen exclaim before the Sanhedrim, “Ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels and kept it not!” (Acts vii. 53). And Paul himself in writing to the Galatians, says, “The law was ordained through angels” (Gal. iii. 20). To revere the institutions of Moses was then to revere the angels by whom they had been delivered to the people, and consequently to assure the favour of those higher powers, to place themselves under their protection, to render themselves worthy of their heavenly communications and of the more sublime revelations of which they were the mediators. By means of the angels, Christians were to be initiated into that Divine world with the mysteries of which angels were familiar, and were to receive strength adequate to raise them to the standard of perfect holiness. By not rendering to the angels the worship due to them, and not observing

their ordinances, Christians might be deprived of their assistance and have to remain in the position of Gentiles—a position very inferior to that to which Israel had been raised by means of the law.

There is another consideration of still greater weight. In the opinion of the Jews, the Gentiles were under the sway of diabolic powers, the angels of darkness, to whom the idolatrous worship was offered. How could they be delivered from the dominion of these maleficent spirits? There could be but one way of escape; to place themselves under the leading of the angels of light, who alone could vanquish these unseen enemies of man. But for this end these heavenly spirits must be propitiated by scrupulous obedience to their precepts and by the worship which was their due.

Thus these two apparently diverse tendencies in the doctrine of the Judaizing teachers at Colossæ are easily reconciled; and the attempt so often repeated to prove that we have in this Epistle two heterogeneous elements, falls to the ground. The argument has been, that the part of this epistle really written by St. Paul deals with a legalising Judæo-Christianity, differing somewhat from that of Galatia, but resting on the same basis. The other part of the epistle is said to be from the pen of a writer of the second century, and merely an interpolation. It is intended to refute the gnostic dualism of later times. The close relation which Judaism established between the giving of the law and the ministry of angels—a relation recognised by Paul himself (Gal. iv. 1-3)—forms the bond (disregarded by these scholars) between the legal and speculative elements of this new form of Judæo-Christian heresy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Holtzmann considers that out of the 95 verses in the Epistle to the Colossians, only 48 belong to the original letter sent by Paul. Von Soden thinks that only nine and a half verses (i. 15-20; ii. 10, 15, 18 b) are interpolated.

It will naturally be asked whether, as Pharisaism was unquestionably the basis of the old Judæo-Christianity antagonistic to Paul, so there was also a latent tendency in Judaism to produce this new form under which Judæo-Christianity manifested itself at Colossæ? The question suggests itself the more forcibly, because certain elements in the doctrine of the new teachers at Colossæ do not seem to arise naturally out of the law of Moses taken by itself. Thus Paul speaks of scruples in relation to certain drinks (ii. 16). Now there is no prohibition of this kind in the law, except the prohibition to priests to drink wine when about to perform their duties. We must suppose then that these Judæo-Christians at Colossæ, like those in Rome (Rom. xiv.), were under other influences than those of the law of Moses alone. And it is interesting to inquire whether at this period we shall discover in Judaism ascetic tendencies, like those which, as we have just shown, prevailed among the Judæo-Christians at Colossæ.

The most remarkable development of Judaism in this direction is Essenism. The sect of the Essenes took its rise probably in the middle of the second century before the Christian era. At the time of Paul it had become a powerful body. It would be erroneous to conclude, from the passage of Pliny referring to this sect, that it was confined to the solitudes around the Dead Sea. The Essenes who, as Philo tells us, numbered at that time 4,000, were spread all over Palestine, and were found in large numbers in the cities and villages of Judæa. They must have been very numerous in Jerusalem, for Josephus speaks of a gate which was called "the Gate of the Essenes," probably because it adjoined the house belonging to the order.

The Essenes formed in fact a caste apart. They lived together and had all things in common. The products of each one's labour belonged to the order, which provided for his wants. There were three principal degrees among the



Essenes, entered by successive stages of initiation. They bathed many times a day, particularly before meals, and after contact with any object regarded as impure, or even when a member of a higher degree had been touched by one of the lower. The food was prepared by superiors designated for the work, and partook of the character of an offering to God. The Essenes might not eat of viands not prepared in this way and sanctified by prayer. It is not certain whether they abstained altogether from wine and meat,—some writers hold the one view and some the other. That which *is* certain is that they held in abhorrence sacrifices of blood such as men offered in the Temple at Jerusalem. Hence they were excommunicated. But they maintained, nevertheless, the bond of union with their nation and with its worship, and sent every year offerings to the Temple. They abstained, as a rule, from marriage, though there were a few married men among them. They took no oath except the vow by which they entered the order. By this they were bound under the most terrible sanctions to fulfil all their duties towards God and their fellow-men, not to reveal to the uninitiated the things which they had been taught, and particularly to keep silence about their books and the names of the angels. They were very scrupulous in the observance of the Sabbath, and revered the name of Moses as the most sacred after that of God. Any one who spoke evil of Moses was to be punished with death. Like officiating priests, they were generally clothed in white linen. Just as the Pharisee was a development of literalised Judaism, so we may say that the Essene was the quintessence of Pharisaism, but with an added element of mysticism which seems to indicate some other influence at work than that of Judaism. The morning invocation addressed by the Essenes to the sun, their numerous lustrations, and the large development given by them to the doctrine of angels might suggest that

they had come under Parsee influence. The rejection of sacrifices of blood is in harmony with the Hindoo spirit. The wearing of white garments and the repudiation of marriage and of oaths, are features of the school of Pythagoras. It is difficult to decide between these various influences, which may indeed all have made themselves felt at this time on the life of the Jewish nation.

Somewhat later other off-shoots of Judaism give similar indications. Thus the doctrine of Cerinthus, who lived in the apostolic age, was a blending of Oriental theosophy and Jewish legalism. Some say he attributed to angels the creation of the world. In any case, he regarded Jesus as the son of Joseph, a pious Jew, with whom the Divine Christ was momentarily united. Cerinthus taught the permanent obligation upon Christians of the Jewish ceremonial law.

Still later, at the commencement of the second century, we note the appearance of a strange sect bearing clearly the impress of its Oriental origin, but arising out of the midst of Judæo-Christianity. Its leader, Elxai (God hidden), brought from Persia a new doctrine contained in a book which had fallen from heaven. Christ Himself had appeared to Elxai as a gigantic angel, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, His sister. This Christ is, according to Elxai, a creature. He becomes incarnate again and again. Men are united to Him by baptism, calling to witness the seven elements (*ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν στοιχείων ὁμολογίᾳ*), namely, heaven, water, the holy spirits, the angels of prayer, oil, salt, and earth. There are auspicious and ill-fated days; good angels preside over the one and bad angels over the other. The Sabbath and the third day of the week are to be observed, and nothing must be begun on the days ruled over by the evil angels. The Elkesaites used incantations by means of chanted formulas (*ἐπωδαί*), also invocations to demons (*δαιμονίων ἐπικλήσεις*). They had a profound contempt for the Apostle Paul.

The appearance of this sect at the beginning of the second century reveals, like those of earlier date, and others which we might mention, the existence of tendencies at once legalising and mystical in the midst of the Judæo-Christianity even of the first century. Consequently we cannot wonder at the intrusion into Asia Minor of a doctrine such as that described in the Apostle's polemics as we have sketched them.

Let us now follow the thread of the epistle itself, and see how the Apostle fights the old enemy under the new mask. He has now to contend with legalism not as a meritorious ground of salvation, but as an ascetic means for attaining a state of sanctification and higher illumination. That which would strike the Apostle most painfully in this new doctrine was the absence of Him who should be all in all—of Jesus Christ, who in the Apostle's eyes was Himself *Salvation*. By their doctrine of the mediation of angels, the new teachers at Colossæ set aside Jesus the one Mediator. As the Apostle says, they did not hold *the Head*, the vital principle of the whole body (ii. 19). We can understand how, in this epistle, he directs all his attention to this central point—Christ; what He is, what He has done, what we have in Him. Christ being once reinstated in His true place, the false doctrine will naturally fall to the ground.

Hence it is that after giving thanks for the work done by Epaphras at Colossæ (i. 1-8), and referring to the intercessory prayer which he is constantly offering to God for his converts that the work may be carried on unto perfection by Him who had translated them out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love (9-14), Paul passes on at once to his main subject—the person and work of Christ; the supreme dignity of the one, the boundless extent of the other. This passage (15-23) opens

the first, or what might be called the didactic part of the epistle, which goes on to the end of chapter i.

Christ, regarded in His relation to God, is He in whom God reveals Himself, as the soul of a man comes out in his face. Christ, regarded in His relation to the world, was before all things, for He was the Son begotten not created. And not only was He before all things, but He was the *Author* of all things. "For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created by Him and for Him, and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (15-17).

That which He is to the universe He is, in a special sense, to the Church, with which He stands in a still more intimate relation. It is by His death and resurrection that the Church has been called into being, and from the bosom of His glory He imparts to it His glorious life, as the head gives life and leading to the body (18, 19).

And He thus in all things, material and spiritual, has the pre-eminence, because it pleased the Father that in Him should all the fulness of created things dwell and be consummated. God has made all things by Him, because He would that all things should be for Him. This leads Paul to set forth the work of Christ, by which this bringing together of all things in Him is made possible. He speaks here of the reconciliation not only of things on earth, but of things in heaven, by the blood of the cross. Does he mean then to teach that Christ died for the reconciliation of the fallen angels also, or for the justification of angels not fallen but imperfect in the eyes of the Holy, Holy, Holy God?

Paul does not add here  $\tau\hat{\omega}$  Θεῶ, *with God*, as he does in 2 Cor. v. 18-20, but says only  $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  αὐτόν, with or in relation to Him. The thought thus expressed may therefore be

understood without necessarily going beyond the sphere whether of Biblical teaching in general or that of the Apostle in particular. The angels, as we have seen, were the Divine mediators in the giving of the law. How then could they have beheld without deep sorrow the countless transgressions both of Israel and of mankind at large? How could they have acquiesced in a general amnesty which would set at nought the Divine threatenings unless it were accompanied by a solemn tribute paid to the holy law of God by the shedding of atoning blood? As it is the blood of the Son of God which makes it possible for a holy God to pardon, so it is the blood also which reconciles the holy angels both with a pardoning God and with the pardoned sinners, and brings them into harmony with His plan of Divine mercy. Thus the cross brings together in one all these divergent wills in heaven and on earth, and inaugurates the return to the final unity which is God's design for the universe. By it the first and the second creation are blended in one and the same work (21-23). Thus those orders of angelic beings whom the teachers in Colossæ prided themselves on knowing, whom they perhaps, like Cerinthus, regarded as the creators of the universe, to whom they assigned the part of mediators between God and man, thus derogating from the sole mediatorial prerogative of Christ, were, in Paul's argument, reduced to their true position as His creatures, existing only for Him, who were reconciled to men through His atoning death and brought into harmony with the purposes of God. How significant this reversal of the parts!

This is the groundwork of the whole epistle. To it the Apostle adds two very important though subordinate thoughts. First, that the Colossians and the Gentile Christians in general have their own place in the great whole of a world made new by the cross, and that this place will be perpetuated to them if they continue in the faith which has

brought them into it (21-23). Second, that it is by the ministry of Paul who now writes to them, that the portion of this glorious plan which concerns the Gentiles at large and them in particular is to be wrought out. To the sufferings by which Christ accomplished their salvation, it is given to him to add, as a complement, those which at the time of his writing and throughout his whole life he is enduring in order that he may carry this blessed message to the ends of the earth, and may bring the Church, the body of Christ, to the measure of His perfect stature (24-29). In the words "if ye continue in the faith" grounded and stedfast, we have an indication of the danger that threatened the Colossian Church. This apprehension takes still more definite shape from the commencement of chap. ii., and forms the natural transition to the second or polemical part of the epistle (ii. 1-iii. 4).

Paul has just reminded the Colossians of what Christ is and what He has done. It only remains for them to apprehend what they possess in Him and in His work, that they may see the futility of the things which some are urging them to add to this great and perfect salvation.

The Apostle begins by expressing his concern for them, for though he has never seen them, he is nevertheless their apostle. He has heard that a doctrine is being preached to them which is called philosophy, but which is in reality only vain deceit; for it is based upon the traditions of men, and points to outward observances as of saving efficacy, instead of to the work and teaching of Christ (ii. 1-8).

These outward observances Paul calls by a name which we shall meet with again in the second century, in the doctrine of the Elkesaites. He speaks of them as the rudiments or elements of the world. This term he had already used (Gal. iii. 9) with the epithets "poor and beggarly," and the following verse, in which Paul speaks of the Jewish feasts, of the observance of "days and months and seasons

and years," shows to what he was referring in the word *elements*. He means that these were outward and earthly things upon which these teachers were trying to build up the religious life. The meaning is obviously the same in the Epistle to the Colossians. In Col. ii. 16 he refers to feast days, such as new moons and Sabbath days. Then in ver. 20 he again uses the same expression, "*rudiments*," applying it to the minute regulations of the false doctors: "Touch not, taste not, handle not." This leaves no doubt as to the thought that was in his mind in ver. 8. The philosophy against which he would put the Colossians on their guard is false in two aspects. First, in its origin. It does not confine itself to re-introducing the ordinances of Moses; but enforces also the arbitrary and purely human prescriptions which had been added by the rabbis, and of which Jesus speaks in almost the same terms as the Apostle: "Ye have made void the word of God because of your traditions. Well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. xv. 6-9). Then this philosophy is false as to its *substance*. It connects salvation with external rites of a material nature, without relation to the moral life of man. Not so with the true gospel, the wisdom of which is "after Christ." This Paul shows when he sets forth all the fulness of that salvation which is given us in the person and by the work of Christ, described in chap. i. (ii. 9-15). All the *fulness* of life and of divine perfection dwells in Christ under a bodily form; if then we are united to Him we have all fulness in Him, and have no need to seek anything from those principalities and powers, of whom He is Himself the Head (ver. 9, 10). The consecration which the Jew received through the circumcision of the flesh, the Colossians received in a more excellent way, through baptism, which by uniting

them to the death and resurrection of Christ, made them die inwardly to sin and live again in Him with a new life (ii. 11-13). What folly to wish after that to bring them back to circumcision! Who would circumcise a man who had died and risen again? There are three characteristics of this new life possessed in Christ—the forgiveness of sins, which the old sacrifices could never procure; freedom from the threatenings of the law—the handwriting which God has Himself annulled, nailing it to the cross of Christ; lastly, deliverance from the power of the evil spirits which ruled the pagan world, but which were despoiled by Christ of their power and glory, He triumphing openly over them in His cross (ii. 13-15). The first of these verses shows the reason for the abolition of ceremonial worship; the second shows the uselessness, as far as the believer is concerned, of all legal institutions; the third is intended to free the believer from all superstitious fear of the maleficent power of the angels of darkness. As he has nothing to seek from the good angels, so he has nothing to dread from the bad. Paul now contrasts this description of the glorious standing of believers in Christ with the method of the spiritual life set before the Colossians by their new teachers.

To these men pardoned, enfranchised, endued with a new life, divinely kept, are now presented as saving ordinances, certain sumptuary regulations and the observance of sacred days—things which had some sort of value before the coming of Christ, but which are empty and meaningless since His manifestation and the living union of believers with Him (ii. 16, 17). The new teachers enjoin the worshipping of angels; they dazzle the Christians with the suggestion of new revelations to be obtained through these celestial spirits. They pretend to have access to a higher world by visions which are only the effect of carnal excitement (18); and they do not cherish the union with the glorified Christ, that Head of the body who alone imparts



a power of vital growth to all the members (19). But, says Paul, *you* who have been raised together with Christ, are no longer under the dominion of material elements. Your spiritual life no longer depends on the things you touch, taste and handle. These three prohibitions laid upon them: "Handle not, nor taste, nor touch," apply probably, the first to marriage, the second to the use of certain foods, the third to contact with material objects. We find various examples of such prohibitions among the Essenes. But all these petty regulations which deal only with the perishable element of our nature are after all but a tribute, such as ill becomes the believer, paid to the powers of the flesh (22, 23). Being once risen with Christ you have but one thing to do, to live as men raised from the death of sin, seeking only those things which are above in that higher world in which you already live with Christ, while awaiting your own manifestation with Him in glory (iii. 1-4).

Hence instead of enforcing these purely outward observances which are of no avail, the Apostle urges the Colossian Christians to mortify all sinful inclinations. Instead of an imaginary rapture with the angels, he urges them to share the risen life of Jesus by the holy aspirations of a heart at one with him. This leads him on to the third and practical part of the Epistle (iii. 5-iv. 1).

However real is this death unto sin and union with the glorified Saviour wrought in the Christian soul, it is but a beginning, and the task of the faithful through the rest of their earthly life is to labour for the perfecting of this work, both by putting off more and more the evil tendencies of the old corrupt heart (5-9) and by putting on the new nature which makes them all one in Christ (10-14).

This is the twofold task of the individual Christian. But the Colossians have also a duty as a Church. They are to be at peace one with another, and to promote each

other's edification and joy by psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (15, 16). The bondage of fear under which their heretical teachers would have placed them, certainly could not have conduced to this end.

Lastly, from the life of the individual and of the Church, Paul passes to *family* life. This is the first time we have found him touching on this subject. In the Epistle to the Romans he had spoken of the duties of the Christian as a member of the State (Rom. xiii.); doubtless because he was addressing himself to the Christian community which inhabited the political capital of the world. In the Epistle to the Colossians, he sets forth the duties of family life, probably because the new teachers with their false spiritualism had spoken doubtfully of the sacredness of marriage. He begins by laying down in ver. 17 a general principle which includes all he has to say. "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." He then proceeds to apply this principle to the various relations which constitute family life, and first of all to the central relation—that of husband and wife (18, 19). Next to the inner circle of parents and children, and lastly to the outer circle of the home life, the relation of masters and servants (iii. 22–iv. 1). This concludes the Epistle. All that remains is the sending of special messages of remembrance and greeting (iv. 2–18).

He enjoins the Colossians to be stedfast in prayer, and specially to intercede for him. He urges them to be wise and considerate in their dealings with the unconverted around them (2–6). He tells them that Tychicus his beloved fellow-labourer is shortly about to visit them, and that Onesimus will come with him. He calls Onesimus his "faithful and beloved brother," being anxious to assure a welcome for him. He does not say much of himself or of how he is placed, because all this these two messengers will tell them by word of mouth (7–9). Then follow

messages from his fellow-labourers, and first from three who were Jews by birth and the only ones among his countrymen who had remained faithful—Aristarchus, who had accompanied him from Cæsarea to Rome; Mark, who had come thither to join him; and Jesus Justus. Mark was cousin to Barnabas, who out of love to this kinsman had separated from Paul. Mark was now on the point of leaving again for Asia Minor. Paul next mentions three evangelists of Gentile origin—Epaphras, the pastor of the Colossians, who never ceases to pray for them and for the Christians at Laodicea and Hierapolis; Luke the beloved physician; and Demas, to whose name he joins no honourable epithet, as if he already had a presentiment that he would be unfaithful (see 2 Tim. iv. 10; ver. 10-14).

Three commissions follow—a salutation to the Church at Laodicea, and to Nymphas in whose house it met; then a direction to forward this letter to Laodicea and to receive from thence the letter written by the Apostle to that Church; lastly a charge to Archippus, who was probably the son of Philemon and was taking the place of Epaphras during his absence.

The Apostle concludes with his own salutation, reminding them touchingly of his captivity, and desiring that grace may be with them all.

There is perfect logical unity in this epistle. As the Epistle to the Galatians groups itself entirely around the idea of Christian liberty, in relation to the law, so the central idea of the Epistle to the Colossians is the perfect sufficiency of Christ for our salvation. As the Epistle to the Galatians contains, first an apology in which Paul proves the complete independence of his mission and of his teaching (the apostolate of liberty); then a didactic portion in which he shows the agreement of his doctrine with the Old Testament (the doctrine of liberty); and lastly a practical part which gives the picture of the life of the

believers under the holy discipline of love (the life in the liberty); so the Epistle to the Colossians divides itself also into three parts, the first didactic, in which Paul sets forth the divinity of Christ and the greatness of His work; the second polemical, in which he shows the Colossians all the fulness of the salvation which is theirs in Christ, and as a consequence the futility of the miserable makeshifts for sanctification and higher illumination which have been offered them; lastly, a practical part, in which he draws the picture of human life, especially family life, renewed and sanctified by the life of Christ. The objections to the general authenticity of this epistle are now altogether abandoned even by those who think that it has been more or less interpolated. If the Apostle's vocabulary differs considerably from that of the previous epistles this is not to be wondered at where there was a mind so creative as that of Paul; and it is indeed accounted for by the entirely new nature of the heresy he had to combat. He had to deal with new dogmas—the mediation of angels and their supposed hierarchy; legal ordinances regarded as an ascetic method by which the faithful might be prepared to receive new revelations to supplement those given by Christ. In dealing with such errors the Apostle was constrained to employ a new vocabulary largely derived from that of his adversaries. Any forger attempting to pass off this Epistle as written by St. Paul, would have scattered it thickly with expressions taken from his known epistles, such as "works," "justification," etc., which never occur in this letter. Do we not feel, moreover, as we read the personal references at the close of the epistle, which are so free from any attempt at legendary amplification, that they would have no meaning in an apocryphal writing, composed long after the death of the Apostle? In fine, it would be hard for any writer to counterfeit so happily an epistle of St. Paul's, and to reproduce the

vigour of thought and terseness of style which make his writings so powerful.

All that the critics of to-day venture to do then is to impeach the integrity of this Scripture. They grant that the Apostle really wrote a letter to the Colossians, and that this authentic epistle is contained in the canon of Scripture. But they say that some interpolator of the second century got hold of the epistle and introduced into it arguments against the gnostics of his day, so as to lend to his polemics the authority of St. Paul. They dispute, for example, the authenticity of the passage in chap. i. on the divinity of Christ; of the passages relating to the invocation of angels, etc. But it would be difficult to explain how an interpolator could have so skilfully woven his thoughts into the tissue of those of St. Paul, that the hiatus is nowhere to be discovered. Beside, the apostolic writings were not at the mercy of any chance writer. They were deposited with the archives of the Churches to which they were addressed, and we fail to conceive how the interpolator could have disguised his fraud. If he had made his interpolations on the original manuscript, they would have been obvious to the first reader. If he had substituted a new and enlarged MS. for the old simpler one, the Church which read and re-read the writings of the Apostle, and passed them on to any Churches which asked for them (Col. iv. 16), would have quickly discovered it. Again we ask, What is it that the critics propose to omit? The grand passage on the divinity of Christ in chap. i.? But this is to the rest of the epistle what the head is to the body. If we remove that we leave but a torso. Or are ver. 10, 15, 18 of the second chapter to be eliminated? We have seen what a necessary part they are of the whole argument of the epistle, and how closely connected with its fundamental thought.

At the basis of these criticisms, whether of the whole letter or of some of its more striking passages, there lies, I admit, one very just observation. The world in which the thought of the Apostle is moving is no longer the same as that to which he was addressing himself in the previous epistles. In them he dealt chiefly with the method of justification, the way in which sinful man might attain to reconciliation with God. Now the subject is altogether different. Paul is addressing himself to Christians already rooted and grounded in Christ (i. 23), those who have died and risen again with Him (ii. 20, 21), and he unfolds before their view the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are in Christ (ii. 3). He traces His Divine personality to its source. He shows the vast future consequences of His work, which after binding together Jews and Gentiles upon earth, is one day to bind together men and angels under the same headship. This universal operation of the work of Christ is connected with the supreme dignity of His person. He is the Alpha because He is to be the Omega. The foundation of the Church by the Risen Saviour is the commencement of a spiritual work by means of which the history of the universe is to be consummated. Christ and the Church; this is the key to the Divine plan in the government of the universe.

It is sometimes asked, were these sublime ideas, of which we get only glimpses in the earlier epistles, new discoveries to the mind of the Apostle? Assuredly not. The divinity of Christ was from the very first an integral element of his teaching. It was as the Son of God that Christ had been revealed to him on the way to Damascus (Gal. i. 16). To this Christ, Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, had attributed the creation of all things, and the conduct of Israel through the wilderness. Of this Christ he had said in his second Epistle to the

same Church, that He had emptied Himself of His Divine riches to enter into human poverty (2 Cor. viii. 9). Paul understood the Old Testament too well not to know that the appearance of the Christ was looked for by the prophets as the supreme manifestation of the *Angel of the Face*, the Adonai Himself (Mal. iii. 1).

But he was led to expand these truths by the new ascetic and mystical, we might almost say gnostic form which Judæo-Christianity was assuming at this time in Asia Minor. This treasury of sublime thoughts as to the relation sustained by Christ, first to the Church and then to the universe at large, was so present with him when he wrote his earlier letters that he distinctly alludes to it in the first Epistle to the Corinthians. What else can be the meaning of the declaration (ii. 16), "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect"? Paul means to say that when he finds himself with believers who are strong and settled in the Christian life, he is not afraid to unfold before their eyes the higher wisdom contained in the appearing and work of Christ.

Such an occasion had arisen when he was called to write to these Churches in Phrygia, which false teachers were trying to bewilder with the glamour of a wisdom higher than that revealed in Christ. It is interesting to observe how St. Paul, as he rises to these heights in his Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians, stands on the same glorious summit as the Apostle John, and joins in the same anthem with him, though in other words. For after all, has not the figure of the head and the body precisely the same significance as that of the vine and the branches? As he stands on this lofty height, St. Paul reaches up to, but does not go beyond, that which is most sublime in the teaching of Christ.

Would it be difficult to find among Christians of to-day, men who are eager for revelations of things behind

the veil, higher than those which Christ has been pleased to give us, and who seek for them by methods which Paul would have described as the rudiments of the world? Would it not be easy to find many Christians who make their salvation hinge on things which affect only the perishable part of our being, and interpose between themselves and heaven other mediators beside the One in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead?

The letter to the Colossians was sent from Rome. Would it not be well to send it back to its cradle?

F. GODET.

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SOME GLEANINGS FROM ST. PETER'S  
HARVEST-FIELD.

ST. PETER'S EPISTLES.

II.

ST. PETER IN SACRED HISTORY COMPARED WITH HIS  
OWN SELF-DELINEATION IN HIS EPISTLES.

"The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ."—1 PETER v. 1.

I HAVE no intention at present of dwelling upon any of the ecclesiastical questions which no doubt underlie the opening part of this verse. The question of *Episcopacy* is one of *principle* and of *fact*, not of *name*. For all the sweet humility of tone and language, there is nothing inconsistent with apostolic majesty. For all the unconscious dignity, there is nothing of a pontiff's arrogance. Yet, as the voice rings out, gathering strength as it rises, we feel that no mere teacher of a congregation could have issued such a charge. Behind the idea of the pastoral life which he describes with such nervous brevity, is the consciousness of