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period. The current theory is that from the time of Deuteronomy any but a single sanctuary at Jerusalem was unlawful. The Levitical law is supposed to assume and proceed on the idea of the single sanctuary. As yet a divinely authorized ritual—a Law—did not exist. The existence of shrines elsewhere than at Jerusalem in the pre-Josianic period is held to prove that Deuteronomy was not yet promulgated. Yet here is a colony of Jews in Egypt in Nehemiah's time who long have had their sanctuary, priesthood, and ritual—a ritual evidently closely akin to that in the priestly code—yet appeal to their brethren in Judah for aid in its rebuilding, apparently without the least offence to conscience. There are problems here which the critics of the newer school may find it hard enough to solve.



Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

BY THE BISHOP OF DURHAM.

XIII.—HEBREWS XIII. 15-25.

THE connection of ver. 15 with the antecedent context is suggestive. We have been led to a contemplation of the Lord Jesus in His character as antitype and fulfilment of the holocaust of the Levitical Atonement. Even as the chief victim of the old covenant, the symbolical bearer of the sins of Israel, was carried "outside the camp" to be consumed, so our sacred Victim was led "outside the gate" of the city to His death, there by His blood-shedding, by His absolute and perfect self-immolation in our stead, to "hallow His people," to bring them forgiven and welcomed back to God. The point of the dread ritual of Calvary specially emphasized is just this, that He "suffered outside the gate." The old Israel, guiltily unknowing, fulfilled the type in the Antitype by refusing Him place even to die within the sacred city. He, in His love for the new Israel, that He might in every particular be and do what was foreshadowed for Him, refused not to submit to that supreme rejection.

From this the apostolic writer draws two messages for his readers. First (ver. 13) they are to follow the Lord outside the walls, willing to be rejected like Him and because of Him. They are to be patient, for His sake, when they are "put out of the synagogues," and reproached as traitors to Moses. They are by faith to conquer the cry of their human hearts as they crave perpetuity for the beloved past; they are to remember (ver. 14), as they issue from the old covenant's gate into what seems the wild, that "Jerusalem that now is" was built for time only, and that they belong to the city of eternity, where their High Priest sits on His throne to bless them now and welcome them hereafter. Then, secondly and therefore (ver. 15), they are to use Him now and for ever as their one sacerdotal Mediator. By Him, not by the Aaronic ministry, they are to bring their sacrifices to God. They are to accept exclusion and to turn it into inclusion, into a shutting-up of all their hopes and all their worship into their blessed Christ. And what now is their altar-ritual to be? It is to be twofold; the offering of praise, "the fruit of lips that confess" the glory of "His name," and then the sacrifice of self and its possessions for others for His sake (ver. 16); "doing good, and communicating" blessings; for these are "altar sacrifices (*θυσίαι*) with which God is well pleased."

Such, if we are right, is the connection. The Lord, rejected that He might die for us according to the prophetic type, is to be the Hebrew disciple's example of patience when he too is rejected. And such rejection is only to unite him the more closely to the Christ as his way to God, his Mediator of all the praise and all the unselfish service which is to fill his dedicated life.

The lesson was special for the believing Hebrew then. But it has its meaning for all time. In one way or another the true follower of the crucified and rejected Redeemer must *stand ready* for cross and for exclusion, so far as he is called upon by his faith to break with all ultimate and absolute allegiance, save to "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He has to recollect, on one

account or another, that he too belongs to the invisible order, to the "citizenship that is in heaven," and not to any earthly polity as if it were final and his spirit's goal. But then he too is to make this detachment and separation only a fresh means to unite him to his great High Priest for a self-sacrificial life in Him. He is to be no frowning sectary, saying, "I am holier than thou." He is to be simply a Christian, to whom, whatever the world may say, or the world-element in the Church, Christ the crucified is all.

Following these appeals, in a connection which we can trace, the thought passes (ver. 17) to the Christian ministry. "Outside the gate" of the old order, the disciple finds himself at once not an isolated unit, but in a *new order*. He is one of a spiritual community, which has of course its system, for it has to cohere and to operate. It has amidst it its "leaders," its pastoral guides and watchmen, a recognized institution, which always as such (though always more as it is more true to its ideal) claims the obedience, the loyalty, the subordination, of the multitude who are not "leaders." These "leaders" are set before us as bearing a divine commission, for we read that they "must *give account*." So qualified, not as assertors of themselves, but as servants and agents of God, they watch for souls, with a vigilance loving and tender, asking for response.

Such an ideal of the Christian ministry is as remote as possible from that of a sacerdotal caste, or indeed of anything that has to do with a harsh and perfunctory officialism. Its position is totally different from that of an agency of mediation between man and God, between the Church and her Lord. We have one passing note of this in the fact, present in other Epistles as in this, that the ministry is addressed and greeted through the Church rather than the Church through the ministry. See below, ver. 24: "Salute your leaders." If we may put it so, so far are the Christian clergy from being the sole deliverers of the apostolic writings to the people that the people rather have to deliver messages to the clergy.

Yet, on the other hand, this passage is one of the many which

set the Christian ministry before us as a factor in the life of the Church, which has its life from above, not from the will of the community, but from the gift of God. In their anxiety to avoid distortions and exaggerations of the ministerial idea many Christians have failed to give adequate place in thought to its essentially divine origin and commission. A passage like this should correct such a reaction. There is in the Church, by the will of God, a "leadership," recognizable, authentic, not arbitrary yet authoritative, not mediatorial yet pastoral. It is given never for one moment to come between the believing soul and the ever-present Lord. Yet it is appointed as the normal human agency by which He works for the soul, not only in the ordered and solemn ministration of His great ordinances of blessing, but in spiritual assistance and guidance. It will be the pastor's folly if he so insists upon the imagery of shepherding as to forget for one moment that the "sheep" are also, and in a larger aspect, his equal brethren and sisters, "the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." It will be his folly, and the ruin of his true authority, if he forgets in any part of his service that he is not master but servant of the Church. If in his "guidance" he dares to domineer, and in his teaching he takes the tone of one who can *dictate* any point of faith or duty on his own authority apart from the Word of God, he is mistaking his whole function. Nevertheless he is called to be a "leader," with the responsibilities and duties of a leader. This thought is to keep him always humble and always on the watch over his own life first. But it is to be present also to the members of the Church, to remind them always to *tend towards* that generous "obedience" with which Christian freedom safeguards Christian order. The Church is never to forget the responsibility of the ministry, and to assist the ministry in its true discharge. For in this also "we are members one of another."

The closing sentences of the great Letter (ver. 18 and onwards) call for little detailed explanation, with one great exception. The writer asks for intercessory prayer for himself and his colleagues, in the accent of one who knows his own

unreserved desire (ver. 18), to keep his whole "life-walk honourable" (*καλῶς ἀναστρέφεισθαι*). He asks specially for this help, with a view to his own speedier return to his disciples (ver. 19), an allusion which we cannot now explain for certain. At the very end (vers. 22-25), with a noble modesty, in the tone of the true Christian leader, drawing, not driving, he asks for "patience" over his "appeal" (*παράκλησις*), his solemn call to be true to the Christ of God under all the trials of the time.

He has "used brevity" (*διὰ βραχεῶν*) in writing; he might have expanded the vast theme indefinitely; he has only given them its essentials. Then he makes his one personal reference, abruptly, as if speaking well-known circumstances; Timotheus (ver. 23) has been released from prison, and is on his way to join the Writer; and the two may hope to visit the Hebrews together again. Then follows the greeting to the clergy through the Church. Then a message of love sent by "those from Italy," that is to say, as the familiar idiom suggests, brethren resident in Italy, who send their greeting from it; an allusion over which endless conjectures may gather but which must always remain uncertain. The last word is the blessing of grace; "Grace," the holy effect upon the Church and upon the saint of "God for us," and "God in us," "be with you all."

We have now followed this last passage to its end, but, as the reader will have seen, making one great omission. The twentieth and twenty-first verses stand by themselves with such an elevation of their own, with such a tranquil majesty of diction, with such pregnant depth of import, that I could not but reserve my brief comment on them to the very last in these attempts to carry "Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews."

"Now the God of peace, who hath brought again from the dead the Shepherd, the great Shepherd, of the sheep, with blood of covenant eternal, our Lord Jesus—may He perfect you in all good unto the doing of His will, doing in you that which is acceptable before Him, by means of Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory to the ages of the ages. Amen."

This is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the benedictory prayers of the Bible. At every turn it sets before us truths of the first order, woven into one wonderful texture. It presents to us our God as "the God of peace," the God who has welcomed us to reconciliation, and is now and for ever reconciled; at peace with us and we with Him. It sets full in view the supreme fact upon which that certainty reposes, the resurrection of His Christ, recorded here and only here in the long Epistle, as the act and deed by which the Father sealed before the universe His acceptance of the Son for us. It connects that resurrection with its mighty antecedent, the atoning death, in words pregnant with the truths characteristic of the Epistle; the Lord, the great Shepherd, was "brought again from the dead" (the phrase is reminiscent of Isa. lxiii. 11, with its memories of Moses and the ascent of Israel from the parted waters), "*in the blood*," as it were attended, authenticated, entitled by the blood, "*of covenant eternal*," that compact of divine love of which twice over (chaps. viii., x.) the Epistle has spoken, under which, for the slain Mediator's sake, God both forgives iniquity and transfigures the will of the forgiven. And then the prayer follows upon these mighty premisses. It is asked, with the authority of an inspired benediction, that this God of peace, of covenant, of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, would carry out the covenant-promise to the full in His new Israel. May He "perfect" them, that is to say, equip them on every side with every requisite of grace, for the supreme purpose of their being, the doing of His will in everything. May He so inhabit and inform them, through His Son, by His Spirit, that He shall be the will within their will, the force beneath their weakness, "working in them to will and to do for His good pleasure's sake" (Phil. ii. 13). To Him, the Father, be glory for ever. To Him, the Son, be glory for ever. Who shall decide, and who need decide, to which divine Person the relative pronoun (*ὃς*) precisely attaches? The glory is to the Father in the Son, to the Son in the Father.

One closing word remains. Observe this designation just

here of the Lord Jesus ; “ the Shepherd, the great Shepherd, of the sheep.” It is noteworthy, because in this Epistle it stands quite alone. We have had the Christ of God presented to us almost throughout under the totally different character of the High Priest, the great Self-Immolator of the Cross, now exalted in the glory of His High Priesthood to be the Giver of Blessing from His throne. To Him in that sublime aspect the thought of the Hebrew believer, so sorely tempted to look away from Him, to look backward to the old and ended order, has been steadily directed, for spiritual rest of conscience and loyalty of will. But here, true to that habit of the Bible, if the word may be used, with which it accumulates on Him the most diverse titles in the effort to set forth His fulness, the writer exchanges all this range of thought for the one endearing designation of the Shepherd of the sheep. It was as such that He went down to death, giving for them His life. It was as such that He is “ brought again,” to rescue, to watch, to feed, to guide His beloved charge “ in the power of life indissoluble.”

It is not without purpose surely that the Lord is left thus pictured in the view of His tried and tempted followers. In the region of conviction and contemplation He was to shine always before them as the High Priest upon His throne, the more than fulfilment of every type and shadow, the goal of Prophecy, the “ end of the Law.” But He was to be all this as being also, close beside them, their Shepherd, great and good. He was to be with them in the pasture, and in the desert, and in the valley of the shadow of death. They had followed Him indeed as their Sacrifice without the gate. But there He took to Himself His resurrection-life, to be their companion and their watcher for evermore. The Lord was their Shepherd ; they should not want.

