

## PAUL AND NERO.

Paul before Nero! if indeed it was so, what a contrast does the juxtaposition of two such characters suggest—the one the vilest and most wicked, the other the best and noblest of mankind! Here indeed, we see two races, two civilizations, two religions, two histories, two *erms* brought face to face. Nero summed up in his own person the might of legions apparently invincible. Paul personified the more irresistible weakness which shook the world. The one shewed the very crown and flower of luxurious vice and guilty splendour; the other the earthly misery of the happiest saints of God. In the one we see the incarnate Nemesis of past degradation; in the other the glorious prophecy of Christian sainthood. The one was the deified autocrat of paganism; the other the abject ambassador of Christ. The emperor's diadem was now confronted for the first time by the cross of the victim before which, ere three centuries were over, it was destined to succumb. Nero, not yet thirty years of age, was stained through and through with every possible crime, and steeped to the very lips in every nameless degradation. Of all the black and damning iniquities against which, as St. Paul had often to remind his heathen converts, the wrath of God forever burns, there was scarcely one of which Nero had not been guilty. A wholesale robber, a pitiless despot, an intriguer, a poisoner, a murderer, a matricide, a liar, a coward, a drunkard, a glutton, incestuous, unutterably depraved, his evil and debased nature—of which even Pagans had spoken as “a mixture of blood and mud” had sought abnormal outlets to weary, if it could not sate its insatiable proclivity to crime. He was that last, worst specimen of human wickedness—a man who, not content with every existing form of vice and sin in which the taint of human nature had found a vent, had become “an inventor of evil things.” He had usurped a throne; he had poisoned, under guise of affection, the noble boy who was its legitimate heir; he had married the sister of that boy, only to break her heart by his brutality, and finally to order her assassination; he had first planned the murder, then ordered the execution of his own mother, who, however deep her guilt, had yet committed her many crimes for love of him; he had treacherously sacrificed the one great general whose victories gave any lustre to his reign; among other murders, too numerous to count, he had ordered the deaths of the brave soldier and the brilliant philosopher who had striven to guide his wayward and intolerable heart; he had disgraced imperial authority with every form of sickening and monstrous folly; he had dragged the charm of youth and the natural dignity of manhood through the very lowest mire; he had killed by a kick the worthless but beautiful woman whom he had torn from her own husband to be his second wife; he had reduced his own capital to ashes, and buffooned and fiddled and sung with his cracked voice in public theatres, regardless of the misery and starvation of thousands of its ruined citizens; he had charged his incendiaryism upon the innocent Christians, and tortured them to death by hundreds in hideous martyrdoms; he had done his best to render infamous his rank, his country, his ancestors, the name of Roman—nay, even the very name of man.

And Paul had spent his whole life in the pursuit of truth and the practice of holiness. Even from boyhood a grave and earnest student of the Law of God, he surpassed in learning and faithfulness all the other “pupils of the wise” in the school of the greatest Doctor of the Law; and of the impetuous ardour of his nature, and that commonest infirmity of even noble minds—the pride of erroneous conviction which will not suffer itself to be convinced of error—had for a time plunged him into a course of violent intolerance, of which he afterwards repented with all the intensity of his nature, yet even this sin had been due to the blind fury of misdirected zeal in a cause which he took or for a time thought that he took—to be the cause of God. Who shall throw the first stone at him? Not even these learned and holy men whose daily lives shew how hard it is to abdicate the throne of infallible ignorance, and after lives of stereotyped errors to go back as humble learners to the school of

truth. But, if for a moment he erred, how grandly, by what a life of heroic self-sacrifice had he atoned for his fault? Did ever man toil like this man? Did ever man rise to a nobler superiority over the vulgar objects of human desire? Did ever man more fully and un murmuringly resign his whole life to God? Has it ever been granted to any other man, in spite of all trials, obstructions, persecutions, to force his way in the ver, “ceth of “clenched antagonisms” to so full an achievement of the divine purpose which God had entrusted to his care? Shrinking from hatred with the sensitive warmth of a nature that ever craved for human love, he had yet braved hatreds of the most intense description—the hatred not only of enemies, but of friends, not only of individuals, but of entire factions, not only of aliens, but of his own countrymen, not only of Jews, but of those who professed the same faith with himself. Shrinking from pain with nervous sensibility, he yet endured for twenty years together every form of agony with a body weakened by incessant hardship. The many perils and miseries which we have recounted are but a fragment of what he had suffered. And what had he done? He had secured the triumph, he had established the universality, he had created the language, he had coordinated the doctrines, he had overthrown the obstacles of the Faith which is the one source of the hope, the love, the moral elevation of the world.

And now these two men were brought face to face—imperial power and abject weakness;—youth cankered with guilt, and old age crowned with holiness; he whose life had consummated the degradation, and he whose life had achieved the enfranchisement of mankind. They stood face to face the representatives of the two races—the Semitic in its richest glory, the Aryan in its extremest degradation. The representatives of two trainings—the life of utter self-sacrifice, and the life of unfathomable self-indulgence; the representatives of two religions—Christianity in its dawning brightness, Paganism in its effete despair; the representatives of two theories of life—the simplicity of self-denying endurance, ready to give up life itself for the good of others, the luxury of shameless Hedonism which valued no consideration, human or divine, in comparison with a new sensation; the representatives of two spiritual powers—the slave of Christ and the incarnation of Antichrist. And their respective positions shewed how much, at this time, the course of this world was under the control of the Prince of the Power of the Air—for incest and matricide were clothed in purple, and seated on the curule chair, amid the ensigns of splendour without limit and without control; and he whose life had exhibited all that was great and noble in the heart of man stood in peril of execution, despised, hated, fettered and in rags—*Farrar's St. Paul.*

## DRIFTING.

Some years ago there was graduated from an eastern college a young man of wonderful promise, whom we will call Mr. X. His mind was scholarly, his talents varied, his intellect profound, sagacious, penetrating. Socially he occupied a most desirable position. Early drawn to the ministry, his progress in theological knowledge was rapid. While young in years he was a successful preacher in a large and important city. At this time his religious opinions began to converge strongly towards those entertained by the Broad Church school. Indeed, his mind being characteristically speculative in its tendencies, it is not strange that the ground held by this party should prove attractive. Had he chosen to remain here he would have found saintly lives and godly fellowship. But soon restlessness thought carried him further on until his late associates were left in the background. He could not now conscientiously continue in the Church. He therefore withdrew from its ministry. All the authority of traditional homage to Christ's heritage was thus removed, and buried in thought, pantheistic, materialistic and scientific, the subject of our sketch drifted out upon the sea of unbelief.

Abundant wealth was at his disposal. Art, literature, history, philosophy, all departments of knowledge, were eagerly absorbed. Choice paintings adorned the

walls of his home. The best and latest books were on his study-table. God had generously bestowed all that could make life sweet. But as the months rolled on, faith in God became more and more obscure, until at length the childish fables of Providence and Immortality were dismissed as delusions of the human mind. What was left? An acceptance of that form of materialism which Lewes and Frederic Harrison have expounded to the world. Herein this man rests to-day. Strange to say, he is not unhappy in this belief. His nature is as royal as ever. Generous, sympathetic, charitable, he has many friends. Pure as virgin snow, sincere as sinnerity itself, and stainless in all the relations of life, no man breathes suspicion on his name. A master of logic, evangelical neighbours cross lances with him in vain. An unflinching memory commands the arguments and facts of infidel science with unerring skill. His influence is subtle, direct and powerful.

Sad is the picture I have drawn. Will it serve as a warning? The writer is acquainted with many who stand where this one stood when he began his career as a thinker. Without fully sharing in some opinions which the Orthodox Church jealously sustains, they are yet believers in the grand truths of revelation. What is needed to keep them where these truths will continue to be the profound convictions of the heart? The answer is plain: A habit of conservative thought, coupled with absolute avoidance of the snare which has detained so many intelligent minds, viz., a disposition to demand mathematical proof of spiritual facts. A leader in thought once advised the writer “to cultivate a wise radicalism in all things.” In the present state of theological belief the advice does not apply, for in the tug of war between faith and no-faith men gravitate toward the latter side with ease and readiness. Brethren, who are on the verge of that gulf of spiritual negations whose fogs have rolled across the Atlantic from German universities, make no unwise haste toward so-called liberal standards. To be in harmony with the age is not to be *out of* harmony with God and revelation. Feverish desire to keep in the van of advanced religious thought leads men to ignore the evidence for the faith once delivered to the saints. More than this, it often leads men to downright infidelity, when speculation usurps the place of knowledge promised in 1 Cor. ii. 9. When we aspire to the attainment of truth alone, we are on safe ground, if devoutness accompany the searching. Carlyle says: “Thought without reverence is barren.” Will those who are beginning to tread the path that leads a little beyond the received evangelical view profit by the lesson of this sketch, and save themselves from drifting, by anchoring to the rock of faith, on which are ever-burning lighthouses of intuition and spiritual consciousness?—*Root.*

## “SAY IT AGAIN.”

A lady called upon a young man wasting away in consumption. The shadows of death were already darkening his face. He was not a Christian. Like a poor wanderer, he was about journeying into eternity with no House of Refuge for his soul.

The lady sat kindly down by his side and talked of heaven, the bright, beautiful home beyond. He felt that he was not fit for that home. Then she comforted him with the assurance that though our sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow.

“Say it again,” he said. It was the cry of a soul in its fever-thirst that eagerly clutches at the cool and cold water offered him. The lady repeated Calvary's sweet, sweet invitation and assurance. That night, while the death shadow was creeping nearer and nearer, covering him at last, he repeatedly referred to the subject, saying, “The lady told me so,” dying in peace and hope.

I have thought of these words, “Say it again!” They come to me and stay with me, echoing repeatedly in my ears as a ringing motto of duty, as a stirring battle cry, with which God's hosts may fittingly go into the fight against sin.

“Say it again” in the pulpit. It is an old truth with a constantly new power. No doctrine so wins men as that of Calvary. No Gospel so comforts and