

Master, these long past signs of His power and His pity will seem to be reflected in the grace which He still offers to those who have their faces set towards the heavenly way. They will no longer seem a cruel tax upon faith; they will be recognised as the signs of a Deliverer who can now as of old deliver from all that is base and cowardly and impure. And though we may not see them with our outward eyes, yet we are content that it should be so. The strongest faith seeks no sign, for it has the assurance of personal devotion, of grace given and received. We shall seek no sign, but the sign of the power of the risen Lord, who left that parting legacy of beatitude to His Church, *Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.*

J. H. BERNARD.

THE FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM.

A GREAT deal has been made of the distinction between two conceptions of the Kingdom which some find in the teaching of Jesus. On the one hand, a certain class of writers hold that during the earlier period of His ministry Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God as a present good to be consummated in this world. On the other hand, stress is laid on the eschatological nature of the Kingdom as a blessing to be bestowed in the future. Neither opinion gives a complete or correct interpretation of the gospel narratives. Jesus applies the term Kingdom of God to a condition of life partly present, but ideally complete only in the future, though His most frequent reference in the employment of the term is to the progress of the Gospel in this world. Indeed, except for a few obvious cases of what may be called the transcendental Kingdom, we are safe in interpreting it of the life of the Christian society here on earth.

When we speak of the future, we may have one or other of two quite different ideas. We may mean the life of humanity, including of course individuals on this earth; or the hereafter, when our world has come to an end. This distinction is usually denoted in writings of the New Testament by the words *ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος* and *ὁ αἰὼν ὁ μέλλων*—a usage sanctioned by Jesus Himself. In the synoptic gospels Jesus, when setting forth the nature of the Kingdom of God, refers almost entirely to the former of these two periods. His instruction as to the future world-age is much less full. It is sufficiently detailed, however, for us to recognise that the future Kingdom will differ widely from that which is at present working itself out on earth. In Matthew xix. 28 it is termed the *παλιγγενεσία*—the renovated world. What is told us of the new order is highly figurative. It will be a condition of spiritual fellowship when the patriarchs shall appear (Luke xiii. 28, Matt. viii. 11) and Israel shall be complete. It will be the ideal condition of humanity. Not that it will be in any way a development from the present. Our world is to be transfigured, renewed by a divine act, which will bring to an end the period of struggle and inaugurate the new age. For the Kingdom as we now know it men strive, suffer, endure reproach, work to win it as a moral blessing. The future comes to them with attainment, glory, rest. These two æons are separated by the coming of the Son of Man. When He appears, the Kingdom as a sphere, in which human life, with its stress of winning good in the face of evil, its triumph over obstacles, temptation, failure, defeat, is closed, to be succeeded at the end of all things worldly by a new and glorious era ushered in by His manifestation. Such also in general was the belief of the Apostolic Church.

In the Synoptists the term Kingdom of God is a description of blessings for the individual as well as for an

aggregate membership, so that it is necessary to consider whether instruction and warnings as to the future are meant for the individual or for the Church itself. The Coming of the Son of Man is the moment when the present age closes and the old order of the Kingdom changes. In the case of the individual this change comes at death (Luke xii. 40). For the race the change will be when the Son of Man appeareth to wind up the present system. Three distinct applications of the term Kingdom being therefore possible, *i. e.*, to the individual, the Church in this world, or the ideal future, we must carefully consider in each case whether Jesus is speaking of the fortunes of definite persons before Him, or of the wider history of the Church on earth, or of the Coming Age.

1. It will be well to refer very briefly to what Jesus says of the future of the individual member of the Kingdom. This is to be gathered chiefly from parables, *e. g.*, Matthew xxiv. 42-51, xxv. 1-30; Luke xii. 16-48. In none of these parables is the advent of the Son of Man said to be with glory. This expression is reserved for the final display to the wondering universe. But since at his death every one is just as really face to face with the Son of Man as the world will be at its close, His word of warning for all is, Watch. The Lord may appear at any moment, and the Kingdom has come for those to whom He is made manifest.

We have to explain the frequent warnings to watchfulness and to preparedness, which consist in doing faithfully the duties of an ordinary life, along with the distinct evidence that Jesus looked for a prolonged future for His Church on earth. While, of course, the Church also must be watchful and obedient, yet the emphasis to look for His final coming cannot be till the preparatory conditions are fulfilled, and for that reason it is better to interpret these parables of the experience of the individual, especially as at that time they applied more exactly to definite persons

than to the final coming for the establishment of the Kingdom in glory. Nearly all Christ's teaching as to the Kingdom holds true of the individual, inasmuch as the life of God in the individual is the Kingdom in miniature. Paul also states in Ephesians that each individual will move in the perfect rhythm of the final organism of perfect man, humanity, with its head Christ. Hence we need not be surprised that it is often difficult to say when Christ is referring distinctly to the individual or to the Church, *e.g.* Luke xii.

The keynote of the above passages is, Watch. His disciples are servants with assigned duties, posts to keep, tasks to perform, not knowing when their Lord will come to receive their account of faithful and just work. In the Gospel of John, Jesus also tells His orphaned children to obey the commands of their Lord in a life of loving service towards one another till the day when He will return to take them to Himself. We receive from the gospels the uniform impression that Jesus constantly instilled into the minds of His followers that they might look for their Lord at any moment, lest, like the foolish virgins, they should allow the drowsiness of a life in this world so to overcome them that they would be taken at unawares.

2. (a) In accordance with His general purpose of devoting Himself especially to the education of the apostles, Jesus gave most of His attention to the future of His Church as represented immediately by the Twelve. Of the distant future He has less to say, His method being to instruct those sent forth by Himself, allowing the Holy Spirit to direct the expanding Church in her new experience. So much so indeed does the immediate future of the Church and of individual members of His personal retinue loom up in His vision of the coming days, that the distant ages are but as a fringe to His picture of the nearer years.

This was partly due to the fact that the new experience

of persecution would prove more dangerous to the young and untried life of the Church than any that might follow when its strength had grown more stalwart. But especially because Jesus, while dealing with men who had a definite trial to face in a strange future for which they required nerve, could in His instructions to them leave guidance for His Church, His exhortations at once serving an immediate purpose, and being the normal encouragement for every other day of trouble yet to come.

The apostles were Jews surrounded by influences emanating from Jerusalem. This gives local colour to the warnings of the Gospels, John as well as the Synoptist. It is probable that Jesus did not devote much of His teaching to the future outlook of the Kingdom till He had turned His face to Jerusalem, for the arrangement of Matthew's material, which might seem to show otherwise, really affords no secure marks of time. According to Mark viii.-ix. 1, the reference to the future experience of His disciples is first coupled with the announcement of His own death. They must follow the road He travelled, take up their cross, acknowledge Him in a sinful and adulterous generation, even should it lead to loss of earthly life, rather than, by disowning His name, add a few years to their worldly existence and lose their own souls. Indeed, He continues with emphasis, the lot of some present before Him will be that they shall not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God coming with power. According to the analogy of New Testament usage, to taste of death cannot be a somewhat insipid term for expressing ordinary decease, but it implies that the cup will be bitter; and the connection shows that it is closely related to the coming of the Kingdom with power. The obvious similarity between ix. 1 and the foregoing suggests that Jesus intended to teach His followers that some of them must share His fate, being doomed to martyrdom just by reason of the great and successful ser-

vice they are to render to the Kingdom. This we know to have been verified by history, for, though there may have been others present besides the apostles, yet it was mainly to them that these words were addressed. And, in all probability, most of them suffered death in persecutions that were intensified by the very progress of apostolic missions.

A general idea of the teaching of Jesus as to the future of His disciples, exclusive of that in the great synoptical discourses, can be formed by comparing Matthew x. 16-end, Luke xii. 2-12, Luke xvii. 20-23. In Matthew x. it is difficult to determine exactly how much treats of the mission of the Twelve in Galilee and how much of the more distant future, though we may take as a standard that it is improbable that on their first missionary journeys in Galilee they had to suffer the extremity of distress here depicted. Persecution will arise as the progress of the Gospel excites bitter opposition. Its small beginnings spoken in secret will soon be proclaimed from the housetops. Families will be divided. There will be tumults and wars. The disciples will suffer chiefly at the hands of their own countrymen, the Jews, who will drag them before courts and heathen tribunals. Then will be the danger of apostasy. The Holy Spirit will be their power; but if they are untrue to His witness, and are ashamed to confess that their Lord is the Messiah, they will be guilty of an unpardonable sin. In the midst of all this turmoil they must cling to their posts, invest their talents, be faithful to their trusts.

Jesus forewarns His disciples of the very evils that threaten the churches to which the author of Hebrews, 1 Peter, and James write. The word, My Lord delayeth His coming, will be in many a mouth. Arrogance, worldliness, vice, will encrust and corrode a faith which will thus be in danger of snapping in the storm and stress of perse-

cution. How vividly Jesus had this before His mind is measured by the strenuous terms in which He speaks of it. Days will come when they will long for one of the days of the Son of Man to relieve them from their strain, but in vain (Luke xvii. 22). Their rest is not yet.

His most explicit warnings, those of the great discourses in Matthew xxiv., Mark xiii., Luke xxi., are uttered in Jerusalem, the centre of the woe to come. Jesus the true Hebrew had read from the beginning the tragedy of His city and His people. On that day when His righteous zeal for the sacredness of His nation's worship was faced by the stolid demand for a sign of His authority (John ii. 19), He had traced the beginning of a hatred that would do Him to death, but also drag Jerusalem and its temple to their fall. How intense is the pathos of a patriot weeping over the city, and bidding her daughters lament for themselves! Was there ever sorrow like to His sorrow, Who, as He looked on Jerusalem, the joy of all the earth and the glory of Mount Zion, which had been sung with transport for generations, knew that part of the tragedy of His death was that it marked the doom of a spot most sacred to Him of all on earth, and crowded with holy memories? Yet this was His choice in the desert some years before.

He reiterates constantly that the breach between His followers and the Jews must widen, and that the former must not entangle themselves in the destruction of the city. There is no promise given of any special help at that time, as though the Son of man would appear to succour His followers. The one warning is to escape with all haste. Vivid as is the description of the impending ruin it is by no means an exact detail of what happened, a proof in itself that the narrative was not composed *ex eventu*. A note in the Gospel of Mark repeated in Matthew, which probably belongs to the original stratum of our Gospels, runs, Let him that readeth understand, as though added in after

years to warn the Christians that the foretold storm is gathering.

In Matthew xxiv. there are two questions asked, for the fact that the article is not repeated seems to show that the evangelist connected the Parousia with the completion of the world-age. The first was almost as important a question for those disciples as the second, inasmuch as the Fall of Jerusalem, though not introducing a new epoch in church life, delivered the Christians from much suffering and was an objective proof that the old dispensation was at an end. It is not very difficult to separate the material of the replies to the two questions, which run side by side. Matthew xxiv. 4-13, 15-26, 32-35 deal with the future of the Church in the years that culminate in the ruin of the Jewish capital.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of determining the limits of the figurative in the discourses of Jesus we can get a generally consistent meaning for these verses. Times of great distress are approaching when the Christian name will be universally hated. Sin and lawlessness will increase and the love of many wax cold. Believers will be in danger of being led astray by false Christs, a prophecy evidently fulfilled in those false teachers, who in the time of Paul, and later of John, were to be by their spirit incarnations of Antichrist. Under the Jews growing in arrogance persecution will become intense. Wars, tumults, the very forces of nature, will seem to be in league for their ruin. But let them not succumb to alarm. As surely as summer is nigh when the fig-tree puts forth her leaves, so certainly do these things portend the ruin of the city, all prophecy to the contrary notwithstanding. But when the Gentile army occupies and so desecrates what was once the Holy City, that is the sign for them to flee with a haste so urgent as to render unnecessary their religious duties. So powerful will be the wickedness of that time that to shield the

elect from the danger of apostasy the cataclysm of the nation will come with a fell swoop (*v.* 22).

From these descriptions we see how Jesus bore on His heart the terrible time of sifting that was awaiting His Church, when physical suffering, however severe, would be aggravated by the danger of spiritual declension through error, false doctrine, worldliness—precisely the temptations against which Paul in his later letters and John in anguish of soul warn their readers.

Jerusalem fallen, persecution is over, and His followers have rest. But let them not think that in all this the Son of man has yet appeared (*Matt.* xxiv. 26, 27).

(*b*) Having seen that Jesus does not connect His second coming at all with the destruction of Jerusalem, we shall proceed to arrange the hints that He gives as to the future progress of the Kingdom in the world, apart from its experiences with the Jewish people.

We have not space to discuss the parables which set forth the comparatively slow development of the Kingdom, such as, *e.g.*, the parable of the sower, one of the objects of which is to warn the disciples that they must not expect too much from enthusiasm, and that the Kingdom will not be accepted permanently and at once by all.

Several sayings of Jesus suggest that He expected a long future for this earth. When the Pharisees ask Him (*Luke* xvii. 20) when the Kingdom will come, doubtless having in mind their apocalyptic hopes, He replies that it will spread in an unobtrusive way in the hearts of men. His farewell injunction to His followers is, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations." We have a difficult verse (*Matt.* x. 23) in which Jesus tells them, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come," a statement that at first sight seems to point to an appearing of the Lord in that generation. What does our Lord mean by the cities of Israel? It can hardly be taken in a literal

sense, as is shown by Matthew xix. 28, Luke xxii. 29, 30, where the twelve apostles are promised authority in the Kingdom over the twelve tribes of Israel, *i.e.* the Christian Church in its ideal form. So this passage should probably be interpreted as meaning, when persecution comes, you are not to remain in Jerusalem nor in any other place to court destruction, but the gospel must be carried elsewhere. Persecution will not wipe you out of existence, nor until the final appearance of the Lord will there cease to be a place of refuge for the missionaries of the Cross. In the same chapter Jesus, while forbidding His disciples to go to the Gentiles during His life-time, warns them that days will come when they shall be brought before heathen rulers for testifying of His gospel to the nations.

Mark xiii. 10, Matthew xxiv. 14 has often been misinterpreted to give an approximate date to a period which Jesus expressly leaves undetermined. The verse simply points to the fact that the gospel of Jesus is for humanity, that all men will be judged by it, and that therefore the final issue, which involves this judgment, cannot come before the race has made full trial of the teaching of our Lord.

Jesus looks to a future of the Kingdom on earth very similar to the fortunes of the early years—silent growth, much persecution, spiritual accomplishment in the hearts of men. He never indicates that in this present order of things His gospel will so captivate the hearts of men, that by the ordinary development of moral human life this world in which we live will be transformed into the final Kingdom of God.

3. Indeed, before the appearing of the Son of man the progress of the Kingdom will seem to be retarded by a degeneracy setting in during the last days of the world of such crass materialism that as in the times of Noah and of Lot it will be difficult for even the few righteous to escape.

The synoptic discourses connect the final event with a time of great tribulation, and in Luke xviii. 7, 8, Jesus seems to be in doubt as to whether the Son of man will find faith on the earth at His coming.

When night is darkest dawn breaks, and the glory of the new day of the Son of man shall be revealed with transcendent grandeur, and swift as lightning from the sky (Luke xvii. 24-37). Men will be taken at unawares, surprised in the ordinary duties of their life, those in whom the Kingdom had come without observation leaving their old home to be gathered into the train of the Son of man, their neighbours, fathers, brothers, it may be, abandoned to the ruin of the world now breaking upon them as the prelude to the fearful impending judgment. The wheat and the tares are ripe for the harvest, which is gathered in as the Son of man appears. In the final judgment the latent principles of life will be made manifest, to be judged by simple lines of conduct according to the standard of human duty embodied in the Son of man (Matt. xxv. 31-46). Coincident with this is the close of the present system described in the three Synoptists, Mark xiii., Matthew xxiv., Luke xxi., in figurative language derived largely from Old Testament conceptions of the Day of the Lord. Of that final day and hour knoweth no man, and curious enquiry as to its season is forbidden.

A distinctive phraseology is employed to express this final event. It is the *παρουσία, ἀποκάλυψις*, the Coming of the Son of man with power, or glory, or on clouds of heaven. The language and symbolism will not admit of its being identified with the coming of the Paraclete promised in the Johannine discourses, which finds its synoptic parallel in the promise of the risen Saviour, "Lo, I am with you always." Many critics maintain that the whole description of the future as given in the Synoptists is coloured by current ideas of the Jewish apocalypses, a short

one indeed, it is said, being embodied in our sources.¹ Without discussing what I think will soon be regarded as one of the curiosities of literary criticism, it is sufficient to say that unless we wish to make the Gospels absurd, it will be impossible to interpret literally much of the discourse of Jesus. He spoke to orientals in pictures, but even as He transformed in adopting from Daniel the term Son of man, we must also give a spiritual interpretation to the imagery which He borrowed from the Old Testament.

The final grand pictures in Matthew xiii., xxiv., xxv. of the old world and its freight of sinful men being swept off to its own place, from which the tumult can never disturb the peace of the redeemed, and the universe sinking into ruins as the very stars of heaven go out in blackness, are relieved from the desolation of silent night by new heavens descending with the fresh beauty of the ideal apostolic Church, in the midst of which the glorified Son of man appears in power (Matt. xix., xxiv.).

R. A. FALCONER.

¹ Pfeiderer, Weizsäcker, Holtzmann. For a discussion of the subject see Haupt's *Die eschatologischen Aussagen Jesu*, to which I am much indebted.