The Christian Year

The Finality of Gospel Truth

(FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT)

ST. MATTHEW AND ST. JOHN.

R. J. Mozley, in one of his usually able articles on the excellence of the first Gospel, claims for St. Matthew first place among the four evangelists in the Revelation of the "inward purposes of Jesus of Nazareth, and the development of His mighty plan for the redemption, renovation and exaltation of this earth on which we live." St. Matthew alone, among other things, gives an account of Peter's confession of faith, which at the time, and in the light of the difficulties with which our Lord was confronted, was indeed one of the most determining events in His earthly career; but as a record of our Lord's teachings, and of the unfolding of His self-consciousness as to His relationship to the Father, and His mission in the world, St. John has a claim, at least, to equal recognition.

What could be more important than the two statements which are recorded in the Gospel for Passion Sunday, and which are supplied only in St. John's Gospel? One tells of Jesus' self-consciousness as to His own sinlessness which emerges as a fact in the synoptic account of the great triumph of the forty days,—"Which of you convinceth (or convicteth) me of sin?" He knew within Himself that He was free from sin, and that only one who was sinless could redeem a sinful world. He was not afraid to challenge His adversaries to prove anything against Him, knowing full well that the success of His mission for the world would depend upon the absolute purity and rectitude of His life. The other statement is equally important for its teaching as to His Person, for it is the key to the eternal generation of the Son as the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity—Christ's self-revelation as the Logos, or eternal Word of God: "Before Abraham was, *I am*." Let it be noted that this statement is introduced with the emphatic, "Verily, verily, I say unto you,"——

TWO OTHER GREAT SAYINGS.

It was a great saying of Jesus, as reported in St. Matthew, when He cried out to the people, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He knew Himself to be the answer to a toiling and distressed world, and that the spirit of man would find in Him the refreshment necessary to live on hopefully and joyously. He must, therefore have known Himself to be the living stream which flowed from the life-giving fount of God the Father; so that weary ones might drink of the water that He should give and never thirst again.

St. John furnishes an equally striking saying in to-day's Gospel, one which tells of His sense of Divinity, and that His words are indeed the very words of God: "If a man keep my saying he shall never see death." The finality of Jesus' message rested upon the fact that it was a revelation of God, and beyond God there is none other. All the wisdom of the world cannot reach unto Him. Hence Jesus could say, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away."

GOD'S WORD SOVEREIGN AND ABSOLUTE.

If the teaching of Jesus is a revelation of the Word and will of God it ought to apply, and must be made to apply, to all conditions of life. No relationship of human society can be healthy or right until it conforms to that which is the mind and will of God. Social and industrial salvation, as well as personal, waits upon the acceptance of this principle. In an able sermon preached recently by Rev. Provost Macklem, of Trinity College, it was pointed out that twice during the last three centuries has the application of the golden rule of Christianity saved Great Britain from inevitable disaster and bloodshed, in recurring epochs of social evolution. In the act which terminated the regime of feudalism she escaped the terrors of the French revolution, and in the abolition of slavery she accomplished by peaceful legislation that which cost America untold loss in life and treasure. Now again for the third time will the application of Christian principles and ideals, if put into effect before it is too late, save society. It was the revelation of God's will in Christ, and His own consciousness of it, that made it possible for Him to say, "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death," and "My Word shall not pass away."

The Lord's Prayer

Prophetically Interpreted

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IN making this Divine composition the theme of my remarks, I do not purpose to consider it in its personal reference. So far as it bears upon the individual in the way of comfort or of duty or of need, this precious portion of Holy Writ has been thoroughly studied and expounded. What I desire to attempt in this paper is to look at this prayer in a light in which it is rarely regarded, that is to say, in its prophetical aspect. That it has such an aspect I fully believe. I believe its simple petitions, so easily uttered and so deeply felt by the oldest as well as by the youngest believer, not merely breathe the feelings and desires of each Christian soul for the glory of God and for his own spiritual and bodily wants, but I believe that our blessed Lord designed this prayer to run parallel with prophecy, and to voice the longings of the collective Church for the fulfilment of God's purposes of love towards mankind and the earth in the ages to come.

Before commencing my observations on the subject in hand, I should like to say a few words on the question of the derivation of this Divine prayer. It has often been asserted upon the authority of certain men of learning, our own Lightfoot among the number, that our blessed Lord collected nearly every clause of the prayer from existing Jewish formularies. But the proof of this is slender, and its truth is vigorously disputed by the late Rev. M. Margoliouth, D.D., an Anglican clergyman of Jewish lineage, an author of repute on Semitic subjects, and thoroughly versed in the Hebrew language and literature and especially in Rabbinical lore. In a book of his, which I happen to have, entitled "The Lord's Prayer no adaptation of Jewish petitions," he undertakes to show that, so far from our Lord borrowing from Jewish liturgies, the Jews appropriated sentences from His prayer, and incorporated them in some of their later compositions for the use of their synagogues. "Is it probable, is it even possible?" he asks, "that our Lord culled a sentence here and a phrase there from Jewish prayers, so full of vain repetitions, supposing even those prayers existed in our Lord's time on earth, in order to produce that concise and marvellously comprehensive prayer, known in the Churches of Christ as *His prayer*? In my work on the plan and development of post-Biblical Judaism," he says, "I have clearly proved that those sentences and a multitude of others are not only post-Biblical, but also post-Apostolic."

Turning now to the contents of this matchless composition, what brightness and warmth do the words of invocation throw over the whole prayer. Some, like the Plymouth sect, would tell us that it is a Jewish rather than a Christian prayer. But the invocation is distinctively *Christian* and stamps it at the outset as belonging to the new dispensation, wherein the characteristic gift from above is, not "the spirit of bondage again to fear," the Jewish spirit, but the "spirit of adoption," whereby we approach God with the happy, confident cry of children, "Abba, Father," "Our Father which art in heaven."

HALLOWED BE THY NAME.

And now, what is the first dictated sentence in this prayer? "Hallowed be Thy Name"—the Name of *Father*. Throughout our Lord's earthly life, was not His every thought, feeling and energy unreservedly devoted to the maintenance of His Father's honour and glory? And when He drew near the close of His ministry, did He not surrender Himself to His last sufferings and His death with the cry, in which His filial heart wholly poured itself out "Father glorify Thy Name?" And His desire was that His Church should, above all things, take up this cry, and therefore He made it the primary petition of His prayer. And in the first place He expected His Church to strive herself to fulfil it by going forth into the world and "letting her light so shine before men that they might see her good works, and glorify the Father Who is in heaven," and also by her prayers and missionary efforts to bring larger and larger circles of mankind of every nation and tribe to hallow the name of the Father, by becoming obedient to the gospel of His Son Jesus Christ.

And in the second place our Lord would have His Church apprehend the prophetical meaning of the petition, that it embodies a supplication that God would fulfil His ultimate purpose regarding our fallen race, which is, according to the prophet *Habakkuk*, "that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Now this promise so exactly and truly answers to the thing we pray for that we may lift up our hearts with full assurance that our prayer, that God's name may be hallowed by mankind at large, will surely come to pass. Let me take you to another prophecy in Ezekiel: "I will hallow my great Name which was profaned among the heathen, and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord God when I shall be hallowed in you before their eyes." And in Philippians, St. Paul, referring to a prophecy in Isaiah, declares, that "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." When these prophecies and many others of similar import are fulfilled, as they will be *blessedly* in the age to come, and *completely* in the final age, then all the families of the earth shall be able to unite their hearts and voices in the words of the sixty-sixth Psalm, "O be joyful in God all ye lands, sing praises to the honour of His Name, make His praise to be glorious, for all the world shall worship Him, sing of Him, and praise His Name."

THY KINGDOM COME.

But the Lord's people not only earnestly desire that every soul of man should be turned unto the Lord and know Him as his Father, and hallow His name as such, but they long as ardently to see a peaceful, happy, holy, well-governed world. And so, taught by their Saviour, Who is waiting at His Father's right hand for the time when He shall receive the kingdom and return, they pray, in the words of the second petition of His prayer, "Thy Kingdom come," and they even voice their longings in the hymns of the Church, as, for example, when they sing:—

> "Thy Kingdom come, O God,
> Thy rule, O Christ, begin,
> Break with Thine iron rod
> The tyrannies of sin."

I often wonder what meaning those who sing those words attach to them as they leave their lips. Perhaps by the majority of Christians they are understood to mean the expansion of the kingdom of grace—the kingdom in the heart—till it takes in the whole world. But while such a sense may be allowable as an accommodation, it obviously falls far short of the full import of the petition. For not only does the kingdom within the soul "*Come*" as often as the Spirit converts and renews a man, while the kingdom of the petition is in its entirety yet *to come*, but such a kingdom would be realized *without the presence of the King*, whereas all the lines of Old Testament prophecy, from the first promise of final victory given in Eden, are focused upon the return of the Messiah in His glorious majesty to reign. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself referred to His transfiguration as a picture of the "Son of Man coming in His Kingdom," and later on He tells His disciples that, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the Holy Angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory." Similarly, St. Paul speaks of our "Lord's appearing and Kingdom," coupling these two events together. If, therefore, we would pray aright for the coming of the *Kingdom*, we must link it in our thoughts with the coming of the *King*.

Scripture testimony regarding the nature of this Divine Kingdom is uniform and abundant, and it is to this effect that, at the termination of the present age, the Lord Jesus Christ, with His risen and glorified Saints and holy angels, shall descend from heaven to the Mount of Olives. Thence, having dashed in pieces all ungodly governments and wicked systems, and "punished the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity," He will establish a universal world-wide kingdom of righteousness, in the government of which the glorified Church shall participate. To Israel will be granted supremacy among the nations, and Jerusalem will become the centre of the world's religion and government. "In that day," says Zechariah, "the Lord shall be King over all the earth." "At that time," saith Jeremiah, "they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it." "For out of Zion," Isaiah saith, "shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The prophets teem with references to this golden era of the World's history in which peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety shall be established among all nations, under the righteous sceptre of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

(To be continued.)