

HARD SAYINGS OF CHRIST.

V.

"And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge His elect which cry to Him day and night, and He is long-suffering over them? I say unto you that He will avenge them speedily. Howbeit, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" Luke xviii., 6-8.

To most readers these queries at the close of the parable of the unjust judge probably appear to come in somewhat abruptly without much point, as if a fragment of some other discourse had been interpolated here by accident. The difficulty as to the connection, however, arises solely from mistaking the point that is intended to be illustrated by the parable. It is commonly read simply as an encouragement to perseverance in prayer. If by her importunity the poor widow prevailed upon the unjust judge to attend to her case, much more may the good God be expected ultimately to hear those who continue to plead with Him, even if He may seem to delay an answer. With our division of the chapter, this view of the parable is natural enough, especially when we take into account the sentence with which it is introduced. "He spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray and not to faint." But the theme is really much more specific. The whole passage stands in the closest connection with the preceding chapter, in which Christ discusses the second advent. Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God cometh, He gives in reply a description of His own coming for judgment. It would be sudden and unexpected like the coming of the flood or the overthrow of Sodom and it would sever between the right-

cous and the wicked, however closely linked together. But whether it would be soon or late He gives no hint, beyond the fact that to the wicked it would seem all too soon, while to the righteous it might seem too late. Despised, oppressed, and persecuted by the world they would be weary for its arrival and pray that it might be hastened, since it meant their deliverance. Yet, however slow in coming, let them not despair but keep on praying. He would certainly avenge them in due time. In His long-suffering He bears with wicked men in the hope of their repentance, so far that the faith of the righteous might fail; but when things should come to the worst and hope be ready to die, He would stretch out His Hand to help. As He puts it elsewhere, "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." The lesson of the parable finds a close parallel in the words of II. Peter iii., 9-10. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some count slackness; but is long-suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief." The prayer in which they are encouraged to persevere, is prayer for the coming of the Lord to judgment and vengeance on their oppressors, and so the rhetorical questions fall naturally into their place. The doubt as to the existence of faith has no reference to any possible defection of the Church in the last days, only to the heartsick weariness of hope deferred until they could endure no longer.

But if this explanation of the connection relieves one difficulty felt about the passage, it only creates another. The idea of praying for the speedy coming