

ISRAEL'S SIN AND MESSIAH'S LOVE.

Matt. xxiii. 35, 36.*

Three times in the one verse does Christ mention blood, and now, from that point of view in which God regards the whole human race, lays to the account of this Jerusalem and Israel all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, just as His Spirit again does to the future Babylon (Rev. xviii. 24.) The first righteous person upon earth murdered through hatred of God and fraternal hatred is Abel; of his murder also is Israel guilty, for they have done worse to Christ than Cain did to his brother.

The great collective guilt of all the blood shed on the earth, as it is represented and shadowed forth in the history of the Holy Scripture from Abel to Zacharias, will break forth in vengeance upon this generation in a collective punishment, as well typical as real; this evil and adulterous generation, which speaks as at ver. 30, and acts as at ver. 34. Therefore the measure of sin against the long-suffering of God is full to overflowing. That is, indeed, first of all the last generation of this people, the wicked and adulterous generation, which is possessed by the return of seven worse devils along with the first, which, in its sins, repeats and sums up all that went before; yet, in so far as the fathers are represented as only meeting their full punishment in their children, "this generation," here includes at the same time the entire people of whom it is said (verse 35) "Ye have slain."

It may be asked, finally, Does not the blood also of the crucified Son of God, in and with all the others, come upon this generation? If this question means, Wherefore does Christ not expressly or chiefly specify this here? the first answer is easy, for even as regards outward propriety it would be highly unsuitable openly to say such a thing at this farewell.—For this would be more than the word of Zacharias: "The Lord will see and seek it." But the reason lies still deeper: partly in the Saviour's feeling of love and compassion, which makes it impossible for Him to express this threatening of vengeance; partly in the truth corresponding to this feeling, that in fact the blood of Christ, although His crucifiers call it down upon their heads, yet even to the last judgment of the world continues to speak better things than the blood of Abel—viz., grace, and not vengeance; so that, in the restored Israel at last, this blood-guiltiness is yet cleansed away (Joel iii. 21). and the

vengeance, on account of the rejected blood of reconciliation, extends to quite another sphere, belongs to quite another judgment, than that which is first of all historically represented in Israel.

Did Christ himself say (ver. 37.) Behold here a greater than Jonas? then may also his interpreter say to the generation of this time, Behold here is something incomparably greater than, and different from, aught that has ever been uttered in accents breaking from the heart, and penetrating to the heart, in poems or histories. "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" Thus exclaims the Messiah, the God and Lord, and Saviour of Israel in the flesh, who sent all the prophets, who is Himself come, and will again send apostles, who will soon, by the hands of his enemies, hang upon the cross—by His own and the Father's Divine power will rise from the opened grave, and sit upon the throne of heaven—thus calls Jesus over the sinners who will not have Him and His grace, but their sin and their judgment. What a tone and sound for the hearers must this word have had when it came from the mouth of Christ! the already filled up measure of all Divine grace and Saviour-love, in opposition to the measure of sin, now soon to be filled up by the children who, centuries long, had been nourished and brought up in vain—that first call of the Creator, "Adam, where art thou? whither wilt thou?" breaking forth inconceivably intensified from the heart of the Son of Man moved with human passion—the most perfect unity of alluring love and judging wrath in this doubly complaining. "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" Hear, ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for—the Lord speaks! And are we to take away these words from this place in His farewell, which alone is their proper place? are we to believe here that the Evangelist has presumed to elaborate and improve the Divine drama? Rather would we believe that Christ had already uttered three times—ten times before (which would not at all be so wrong)—this word which He now utters for the last time with most striking emphasis.

The word, as a whole, is a prolepsis of the decisive judgment, stretching beyond the preaching of the apostles, the rejection of which Christ already knew beforehand: the Jerusalem which he means is the entire people, those also of past times viewed in their centre. Vers. 34 and 35 are now partly connected together, as also already ver. 36; therefore the apostles, as opposed to the former prophets, are the new messengers who shall yet invite the guests to the marriage in vain, the first of whom was at once stoned (Acts vii.), as Moses commanded that the false prophets should be stoned. Between

* From the third volume of Stier's admirable work, "The Words of the Lord Jesus."