

THE LORD'S PRAYER IV.

"The Kingdom of God, 2."

By Rev. Professor Jordan, D.D.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done: Matthew vi., 10.

When we ask the question, what is the Kingdom of God? at once the answer springs to our lips, "All Kingdoms are His for He is the ever present Universal King." This answer is true and beautiful, for in the broadest sense the divine Kingdom embraces the vast domain of the universe, as well as the varied spheres of human life. I remember reading, some years ago, a splendid sermon which made a good and lasting impression on my mind. It was by a thoughtful, earnest preacher, who took for his text the words "And on His head were many crowns." My heart thrilled with loyalty and joy as the preacher unfolded the glorious promise that Christ shall be supreme in all kingdoms of human action. That in the realm of science, where men struggle for clear certain knowledge; in the sphere of art, where men aspire after never-fading beauty; in the arena of politics, where men toil for liberty and righteousness, and in many other kingdoms, Christ shall be crowned, so that on His head there will be many crowns. Surely this is a glorious promise and one that we ought to remember when we come to offer this wonderful prayer. If there lies behind the prayer the glorious thought that somewhere God has been dethroned, let us not lose the hope of that glorious future, when every knee shall bow to Christ.

We may, however, dwell upon the thought that to our God the universe is one vast Kingdom; that with Him the words ordinary and extraordinary, natural and supernatural, have no meaning, for they simply speak of human weakness, and mark out the limits of human action. It is a grand fact, though we can scarcely hope to realize it in all its fulness, that there is one God, and that all varied forms and subtle forces are subject to His sway. The latest science teaches us that even in this world the division between what we have called the various kingdoms of nature is not so sharp as we have supposed. What if God's action is more gradual and regular than we thought; what if you can scarcely tell where the vegetable life ends and animal life begins; what if man is nearer the brutes than he is willing to admit; what if the action of the spirit upon the body and the body upon the spirit is more subtle and real than ever human imagination has conceived. All these things should only help us to realize more clearly the all-embracing, ever-acting government of God. Until we can conceive of thought without a thinker, law without a law-giver, and force without a Strong One who sends forth His living energy, every real revelation of science should only make us feel more keenly that the whole world pulsates with the presence of God. But this general idea of God's kingdom is not one that we must meditate upon now. On this subject it is sufficient to say that if men would sincerely pray "Thy Kingdom Come" their eyes would be opened to see that the divine Kingdom is nearer than they thought, even around them and within them.

What did our Saviour mean when he declared "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you," and taught that God's kingdom is not heralded by startling sensational signs? We may take His words to mean that the Kingdom of God is within. It is not at all a matter of political power or ecclesiastical organization, but it belongs to your personal spiritual life, so that when God is set upon the throne of our hearts, and love becomes the ruling power in our souls, you have entered into the kingdom; that kingdom which is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Or we may put it in another form: The Kingdom of God is among you in the person of its King, and if we can so far overcome our prejudice and pride as to accept the divine power, which manifests itself in human weakness, the divine sympathy which shows itself in human suffering, you may even now enter into the kingdom for which you have looked in vain for so long. So our Lord spoke to the Jews, and so He speaks to us. Thus we gain one broad truth concerning this kingdom. It is small enough

to be realized in a single soul, grand enough to include all that God has ever done for the salvation of the human race. Peter presents the same truth when he says God sent His Son not to set up a worldly Kingdom, not simply to create a new church, but to turn every one of you from his iniquities "to offer Himself a sacrifice so that you might be converted and receive rich times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." We believe, then, that what our Master especially meant, when he spoke of the Kingdom of God, was the divine action on the human soul; or, in other words, the influence of truth and love on the heart and life of men. I do not say that this is all the meaning; it may require eternity to reveal all the truth that was hidden beneath such simple words. But for us now this is the first and most important meaning. If I desire the coming of God's kingdom I must not sit idly waiting for some hidden revolution. I must not simply speculate about schemes of church government, or of church effort. I must ask is that kingdom firmly established in my soul? Is it a glorious reality with me? Such questions sincerely put probe the soul. They will touch the heart in its secret places and test the hidden motives. That is one direction in which these words should lead our thoughts. Then, on the other hand, the words "Kingdom of God" suggest the grandest ideal the world has ever known. It stretches the most powerful imagination to picture the promises of beauty and blessing which it contains; it carries our thoughts into the future, when Christ shall come in glory and complete His kingdom. Still it is not a shadowy dream; it brings thoughts that are intensely personal and practical. The first revolution must be in the heart; let that be changed then life will be new, and the world will be transformed.

We seem to have drifted away from the prayer out of which the text is taken; but we must come back if, instead of fancies of our own, we wish to have the pure light of the Saviour's teaching. The words "Thy Kingdom" must be interpreted in the spirit of this prayer.

It is the kingdom of "Our Father."

We read, "Our Father;" Thy Kingdom Come," hence we pray that the Father of all flesh may rule in our spirits and that His love may be so spread that every weary heart may soon find rest in Him. The word "kingdom" may suggest the thought of a king; but kings, such as the majority may have been, are not fit symbols of the Divine King. Think of them; they will only mar our conception of God, instead of making it pure and glorious. But the word "kingdom" itself will tell us much if we use it rightly. In its proper sense it means a state governed by righteous laws and enjoying real freedom, whereas a state ruled by one man was called a tyranny. The despot might be wise and good, but the thought of government by a changeful, capricious will was called tyranny; while government under just laws, which recognize the eternal right and an appeal to conscience, was called a kingdom, so God bases His kingdom on the desires and affections which he has implanted. Further, in translating the word, it is not necessary to use the word "kingdom," "rule," or "dominion" but do just as well. The father who will do just as well. The father who exerts his household in a righteous yet kindly sympathetic spirit is in this sense a king. He rules, and in proportion as he is just and loving in his exercise of authority, he is a fit though imperfect symbol of the Heavenly King. The present age has produced some remarkable books; whether many of them live or not is a point upon which I decline to prophesy. However, if they do not survive they will certainly not be killed by excessive modesty. Looking over one sometime ago, I observed that the writer had set before him the task, gigantic it seemed to be of providing a scientific basis for morality. Thinking that the authority of Divine commands and religious sanctions is quickly passing away, he comes forward to put morality on a sure and lasting basis. I am not going to tell how this is done, neither is it my business to criticize His theories, but I must point out that he uses a good, though not original illustration

bearing on our present subject. He remarks that if a father is stern and repulsive, always frowning upon his children and harshly urging to do what he calls duty, these children will probably learn to hate duty and swing right away from it. But a genial, sympathetic father will win the hearts of his children, and with all the might of love move them towards righteousness. This is the illustration as briefly and plainly as I can put it, meant to show that morality has often been made repulsive when it might have been set forth in an alluring form. Very true. But this is not a discovery, and can scarcely be called scientific. Eighteen centuries ago Paul said, "Fathers provoke not your children that they be not discouraged," and Jesus Christ taught that God's kingdom is the dominion of the Fatherhood; that the Creator is a pure and perfect Father who is ever seeking the good of His children. All joy that is pure and permanent we may have; but from impure, withering, degrading pleasures Our Father seeks to save us. Can morality rest upon a firmer, more scientific basis than upon the will of such a Father? If men are to love aright, and attain both beauty and strength of character, they must believe in such a father and call it religion. Let us have that which is more certain than any science, more beautiful than any poetry—the glorious reality revealed in the Christ, the Father made manifest. He that hath seen the Christ among the fever-stricken poor, in the wilderness solitude, in Gethsemane and on the cross, hath seen the Father. "I came not to do mine own will but the will of Him that sent me." Some honest enquirers may find it hard work to believe in such a truth; they may think it too good to be certain, but such manifestations of mercy cannot be repugnant except to the impure heart and wicked life. If any church had ever lived and taught this revelation in all its heavenly radiance it would have been the mightiest spiritual force the world has ever known. Too often the Christian Church and its disciples have distorted the highest revelation which God has given; but we must not lose hope, for in spite of misinterpretation and imperfection this Kingdom is still coming. Weary souls cannot rest until they know the fulness of the Father's love. Would a man be less loyal to his King because that King was his Father? No. If he had the spirit of a son, loyalty would be swallowed up in filial love. So, when we really learn that the King who controls all Kingdoms is "Our Father," we enter upon a new life of sonship and service.

Only to the childlike can this Kingdom come.

Except we become converted and become as little children we shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." To the rebel God appears as an offended King; to the careless God is afar off; to the childlike spirit God is a father full of tenderness and forgiving love. God is revealed to our weakness and lowliness. The heart hardened by prejudice or inflamed by hatred has often despised this truth for its very simplicity; but the humble rejoice in it and find here their only hope of salvation. We need to be converted, we have lost the unselfish childlike spirit, and if we are ever to regain it it must be through the spirit of Christ. He lived it before our eyes, showed it in His atoning sacrifice, and has promised to reproduce it in our hearts. Well may we bow before Him and say "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief." Conquer my selfishness, show me how steady my faith, so that through the glow I may see my Father's face. Grant that even to me Thy Kingdom may come with rich spiritual power. When Our Lord moves thus upon our hearts He shows us that the essence of this kingdom is the surrender of the individual soul to God. Worldly kings govern by imperfect laws, which act upon masses of men, but Our Father approaches each soul saving. "My son, give me thy heart." This Kingdom of God is, then, a personal matter between the human child and the Divine Father. At first we do not know Our Father, and in our ignorance we fancy ourselves independent and make self the centre of our being. In that way we never find real life, the higher life; for we are far away from the true centre away from Our Father's love. Human morality bases itself upon the instinct of self-preservation. The divinest life calls for the surrender of self. "He that seeketh his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." A Father