

THE LORD'S PRAYER III.

"The Kingdom of God, I."

By Rev. Professor Jordan, D.D.

Thy Kingdom Come: Matth. VI. 10.

What this petition means to us depends upon our conception of the Kingdom of God, so that we can only understand the prayer and enter into full sympathy with it by gaining something like a clear idea of our Saviour's teaching on this sublime subject. Very often in the first three Gospels do we meet the phrases "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven." But St. John never mentions the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the words "Kingdom of God" only occur twice in his Gospel, that is in the memorable conversation between our Lord and Nicodemus. Yet it seems to me that the beloved disciple teaches us very simply and clearly the spiritual truth which we ought to realize when we speak of "the Kingdom of God." If this is so the explanation is not far to seek. John had passed through many years of changeful experience and intense thought. His outer life had been varied and his inner life had been progressive, so that he had gradually come to have a clear spiritual comprehension of the Master's sayings. The words "Kingdom of God" always meant the same to the Teacher, but the thoughts of the disciples on this central theme were at first confused and only became clear through many spiritual struggles. But is this statement correct? There are those who say that Jesus when he began his life hoped to set up a Kingdom in Palestine and become on earth a ruler of the Jews, but that when he saw himself rejected he turned His sorrowful gaze upon the unseen and proclaimed the need of a new spiritual life. A man who can believe this prefers fancies to facts. He clings to a theory that explains nothing and is quite out of harmony with the real state of the case. We know that our Lord Jesus Christ was a man of vigorous intellect, capable of viewing a great truth in all its bearings and of presenting it to others in an astonishing variety of forms, but we are assured that he was the Son of God and that he had ever before him the same grand truth of a Divine Kingdom which He had come to reveal more clearly and establish more firmly. Look at the wonderful discourse out of which our text is taken; whether it is one sermon or many is not of present importance; sufficient for us to know that these creative words were uttered at a time when the popularity of Jesus was growing and the people were looking eagerly to Him that they might learn the nature of this new kingdom. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"; "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"; "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." Is there any hankering after worldly dominion, is there even the hope of regenerating the world by setting up a visible kingdom in Palestine? No! Our Master dealt with these questions when he passed through the forty days of terrible struggle in the wilderness solitude. He has now come to his work fully prepared as Son of God and Son of Man. His work was not to provide the pomp which panders to human passion and pride. It was not to set up again the Jewish system which had had its day and was ceasing to be. It was rather to mark a new departure in Divine Providence, to carry the world's education to a higher stage by revealing in clearer light the Kingdom of the Father. Only from this position can we gain a consistent view of our Saviour's ministry. His life and his death reveal that heavenly kingdom which our beclouded senses fail to find. Those who think that Jesus Christ went about not knowing what to do, that there was no constant purpose running through his life, fail to grasp the greatest revelation that has been given to

the world. When once a humble soul has caught even a passing glimpse of the high and holy purpose which transforms the life of Jesus, making it resplendent with Divine glory, that soul bows in adoration and marvels at its own spiritual blindness.

The Apostle Paul tells us that the Kingdom of God is not meat or drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the "Holy Ghost," and if someone would interpret that text fully and wisely for us he would help us to a clearer faith. Our purpose is to discuss the meaning of this short prayer and realize what feelings ought to stir our hearts when these words tremble upon our lips. Hence we cannot follow out all the Apostle's suggestions, but we can adopt his method of looking at the subject; that is, we can begin by showing what the Kingdom of God is not. To deal with this side in a superficial manner is all that the brief time at our disposal will allow. This may serve a practical purpose, for we often cling to false ideas concerning God's kingdom and cherish vain hopes in the name of God. To consider the negative side of God's kingdom may have a very direct bearing on our spiritual life, for if we are real seekers after God we shall be willing to lay aside those prejudices which dim his pure truth.

1. The kingdom which Jesus Christ came to reveal is not a worldly kingdom. To many of the first disciples it was a very difficult matter to grasp the thought of a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom which should be real but invisible. All their early education had run in a different direction; they had been taught to look for a second David who would rule the world and have the centre of his government at Jerusalem. We can never realize how real this belief was to many of the simple Jewish people. In Galilee especially this faith was fresh and strong. The people there did not know so much about legal technicalities and trivial traditions, but they were familiar with Moses and the prophets. Their souls were inspired with a living expectation of the coming Christ. A certain class of these people were called Zealots. We find one of them among the faithful band of Apostles—Simon called Zealotes. They were called Zealots because they were red-hot men, chafing under the Roman yoke and longing for a new Kingdom of God. The cold time-serving priests of Jerusalem could come fawning into the presence of Pilate and say, "We have no king but Caesar." These fiery men would have scorned to utter such a lie. They inscribed upon their banners the heart-stirring words "No Lord and Master but God." We cannot help admiring these enthusiastic men who hated idolatry, longing to be a free and peculiar people, serving the Lord in the land he had chosen; but we are compelled to believe that there was much raging zeal with little clear knowledge. All they knew was that they wanted a kingdom, and they were willing in mad despair to dash themselves against the Roman spears if only some Christ would offer to lead them to victory. Our Lord dealt tenderly with them, but he must be faithful even when it meant destroying their most fondly cherished hopes. While giving his life for them he must find sharp, striking words which would carry home the unwelcome truth. Their conception of the kingdom was radically wrong. In their moments of heated passion they had dreamed a dream of worldly dominion; revenge upon their enemies and pride in themselves were mingled with the fire of patriotism and the aspirations of piety. This they baptized with a sacred name—they called it the Kingdom of God. To these people after the first wonder of

the miracles had died away Our Saviour's spiritual teaching seemed tame. He made no movement towards founding a national kingdom, and the thought of a silent, unseen realm was too fine for their perception. Some of them, however, were won to the new faith; their zeal was purified and their knowledge enlarged so that bigoted, intolerant fanatics were transformed into intelligent, loving martyrs. Others, enraged at the disappointment of worldly hopes, became the easy dupes of cunning priests and helped to swell the cry "Crucify him, crucify him." Men of this class might pray and doubtless did pray to the God of Israel saying, "Thy Kingdom come," but the coming of Christ showed that with all their eager anticipations and enthusiastic hopes they did not desire that God's kingdom should come in spiritual power, turning every one of them from His iniquities. Their prayer might more appropriately have been, "O Lord of Heaven, who didst scatter the heathen and exalt our fathers, let our kingdom come." Someone spoke to President Lincoln about God being on their side. He replied, what we have to do is to take care to be on the side of God. That is a practical saying; it goes to the root of the matter. It meets the case of the ancient Zealots and it comes right home to us. Let us beware of thinking that God's Kingdom is manifest in worldly pomp or human pride. Our desire should be to see the Heavenly Kingdom and enter into it as faithful, loving subjects. We must not imagine that the Eternal God will become the patron of our selfish little schemes. We must rather seek to know His will so that we may be found on the side of everlasting right.

Let us learn a lesson from the history of England. In that country about two hundred and fifty years ago there was an attempt to set up a kingdom of Heaven by military force. It failed as every such attempt must fail, and the failure was a great blessing. We ought to speak well of the Puritans. They are in a sense our forefathers; to them we owe our religious liberty and many blessings which we now enjoy. If then we have to speak of their mistakes it will not be in any harsh, carping spirit, but with reverential, kindly sympathy. They were goaded into rebellion; they rose against tyranny; they vindicated the right of Englishmen to live and think and speak; their virtues were not of the aesthetic sort but were characterized by strength and manliness. Some of the best of them, disgusted with the tyranny and corruption of the old country, crossed the Atlantic Ocean to begin a new life in an unknown land. America today can trace much of its best blood, its purest life to those godly, patriotic souls. "They left unstained what there they found, freedom to worship God." Those who stayed at home were not men to be easily crushed, they set to work and played the grandest drama of English history. Cromwell was a great man, no sane man can deny that. As to his goodness there may be difference of opinion. Some think that he was an ignorant fanatic; others that he was a consummate hypocrite. I believe that with all his rudeness and imperfection he was a man of God. He tried to form an army of men where there should be psalms and hymns instead of oaths and curses, and promotion should go according to depth of spiritual experience. To some extent he was successful; he brought together the most sober and orderly body of soldiers the world has ever seen, men who were fighting not for money but for "the good cause." Tennyson makes the knight (Sir Galahad) say:

"My strength is as the strength of ten
Because my heart is pure."
Cromwell's soldiers proved this. With all the hypocrisy that crept into their ranks they were sound at the core. They showed that there is a close connection between a clean conscience, a quick eye and a steady arm. They showed how godly men can fight when the time comes; and