

Misunderstood Texts of the Bible

by Robert Anderson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the Bible and its themes, particularly the kingdom of heaven, and highlights the significance of the First Gospel in revealing Christ's relationships with the earthly people.

Scripture: Genesis 18:6, Psalm 139:23, Matthew 11:28, Mark 9:24, John 14:1, Acts 2:22

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "Divine Purpose"

Description

Robert Anderson preaches about the misunderstood texts of the Bible, emphasizing the importance of looking intently at the words of God to understand His divine scheme and purpose. He highlights the need to comprehend the Bible as a whole to read it intelligently, debunking common misconceptions about Adam's sin, Noah's dispensation, and the Abrahamic covenant. Anderson delves into the significance of surrendering to God, acknowledging the limitations of human writings, and the need for a proper understanding of prophecy and the coming of the Son of Man.

Transcript

MISUNDERSTOOD TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

THE NEW TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

"I TELL YOU earnestly and authoritatively (I know I am right in this), you must get into the habit of looking intently at words, assuring yourself of their meaning, syllable by syllable - nay, letter by letter." These words of Ruskin's glaringly exaggerate the worth of mere human writings, but they might fitly be inscribed on the flyleaf of every Testament and Bible. For the words of God are like the works of God, in that we often need the microscope to enable us to appreciate them. And yet at times this element is of secondary importance. For, unless we understand the Divine scheme and purpose of the Bible as a whole, we cannot read even the New Testament intelligently.

The following travesty of the teaching of Scripture is a fair statement of the views - beliefs we can scarcely call them - which are commonly held. "Adam's sin so thoroughly depraved the nature of his descendants, that God destroyed them in the Flood, and began again with Noah. But the Noachian dispensation was as great a failure as that which it succeeded. In the Babylonian apostasy, indeed, the corruption of the

primeval revelation was so radical - and permeating that even the Christian religion is leavened with its distinctive errors. So God then resorted to another plan. He singled out Abraham and his race to be His "peculiar people," and unto them were committed the oracles of God."

But if previous dispensations collapsed in failure, the Abrahamic ended in disaster. For the covenant people crucified the Messiah when He came to fulfil to them the prophecies and promises of all the Scriptures. Therefore the Divine purposes for earth, so plainly unfolded in those Scriptures, have now been jettisoned; and in this Christian dispensation - "the last great aeon of God's dealings with mankind" - earth is a mere recruiting-ground for heaven, and it will be given up to judgment-fire as soon as the number of the elect has been completed.

Is it any wonder that the Bible is neglected by the profane, and that so much of it is accepted by the devout on the principle of "shut your eyes and open your mouth" ? For this sort of Biblical interpretation leaves the Old Testament an easy prey to the German "Culture " of the infidel Higher Criticism crusade. And in the case even of the New Testament, not only isolated texts but considerable portions must needs be explained in the sense of being "explained away." Very specially does this apply to its opening and closing books. The loss of either of them would destroy the unity and completeness of the Bible. And yet the Apocalypse is regarded as a mere appendix, provided for the delectation of people of leisure with a taste for mysticism. And the First Gospel is too often used to modify, if not to "correct," the teaching of the Epistles. But the closing book of the Canon might fitly be described as the stocktaking book of the Bible; for the unfulfilled prophecies and promises of the Hebrew Scriptures are there traced to their consummation. And Matthew supplies the link which binds the Old Testament to the New.

For the purpose of these pages, however, it will suffice to explain the place which the First Gospel holds in the Divine scheme of revelation. Our theology is largely based on the teaching of the Latin Fathers, and with them it was an accepted fact that God has "cast away His people whom He foreknew." The prophecies relating to Israel, and to God's purposes of blessing for earth, have therefore to be "spiritualised" to make them, applicable to the Church. But the simple prose of Matthew will not allow of treatment of this kind. And so that Gospel is regarded as a sort of poor relation of the others; whereas to the student of prophecy it is in some respects the most important book of the New Testament.

The Gospels are not, as infidels suppose, imperfect and often conflicting records of the life and ministry of "Jesus," but separate portraits, as it were, of the Lord Jesus Christ with reference to His various relationships and offices. This appears very strikingly when we compare the First Gospel with the Fourth. For the Fourth is the revelation of the Son of God, who came not to judge, but to save the world (John xii. 47); whereas the First records His advent and ministry as Israel's Messiah ; and we scan it in vain for words of the kind we value in the Fourth - words which we, as Gentiles, can take to ourselves without reserve. This notable fact is not to be explained by suggesting that the Apostle Matthew was a narrow-minded Jew who refused to identify himself with the teaching of his Lord whenever it passed beyond the sphere of Jewish hopes and interests. And the only alternative to this is that, writing by Divine inspiration, he was so guided and restrained that nothing came from his pen, save what was strictly germane to the special revelation entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." Thus it is that the Fourth Gospel opens; while the First begins by recording His birth and lineage - not, indeed, as infidels would tell us, as the descendant of an Arab sheikh and a petty tribal king, but as the promised "Seed" of Abraham, and as "David's greater Son" - the glories of whose coming reign over this earth of ours fill so

prominent a place in Hebrew Scripture.

To that reign it was that the Baptist's testimony pointed, when he came "preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The same testimony was afterwards taken up by the Lord Himself, and in due course entrusted to His Apostles. The popular belief that it was meant to herald what we call the "Christian dispensation " is utterly mistaken.

"The kingdom of the heavens" (for such is the right rendering of the Greek words) occurs three-and-thirty times in Matthew, and nowhere else in the New Testament. What are we to understand by the phrase? It cannot mean that God would soon begin to rule the heavens! And the only possible alternative is that the time was near when He would assume the government of earth.

Much that is true of our island-home may be predicated of every land on which floats the "Union Jack": but England is not the British Empire. And there is a like distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. They are not synonymous; for the kingdom of heaven relates exclusively to earth.

But here a strange fact claims notice. By untold millions of lips the prayer is daily uttered: "Thy kingdom come." And yet, with the unbeliever who uses that prayer, the suggestion of Divine government on earth would be scouted as a dream of visionaries; and among believers there is not one in a hundred who would not be shocked at the suggestion that the kingdom has not already come. Does not Scripture tell us (they would indignantly exclaim) that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" ?

And it was not the crucifixion that postponed the fulfilment of the Lord's words. For His prayer upon the cross secured forgiveness for His murderers - witness the amnesty proclaimed at Pentecost by His inspired Apostle (Acts iii. 19 - 24). But the preaching of that Pentecostal Gospel, first in Jerusalem, and afterwards throughout all Jewry and round as far as Rome, evoked never a response from even a local synagogue. The Acts of the Apostles contains the record of it ; and it closes with the "Ichabod" pronounced upon that obdurate and guilty people. Instead, therefore, of sending "the Christ foreordained unto them," God sent the awful judgment that so soon engulfed them; and the times of the Gentiles, which had seemed about to end, have lingered on for nineteen centuries. Though the purposes of God cannot be thwarted by the sins of men, the fulfilment of them may be thus postponed. And just as the wilderness apostasy of Israel prolonged their wanderings for forty years, although Canaan was but a few days' march from Sinai, so the far more gross apostasy of Christendom has prolonged for nigh two thousand years an era which the Lord and His Apostles taught the early saints to look upon as brief.

Not that "the times of the Gentiles" are co-terminous with "the Christian dispensation." The subjection of the Jewish nation to the supremacy of Babylon was the epoch of that era; and it will continue until the restoration of their national polity - an event which awaits the return of their Messiah. According to words familiar to every Jew, " His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zechariah xiv. 4). And when upon the day of the Ascension the disciples saw Him standing there, forgetful of the warning He had given them so recently,¹ they put to Him the question "Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And the Lord's reply implicitly accredited the question as Scriptural and right, albeit it was not for them to know "times or seasons " (Acts i. 6, 7).

Here, then, is a principle to guide us in studying the Scriptures. Divine promises and prophecies are not like bank-cheques that become invalid by lapse of time. Every word "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" about "the times of restitution of all things" - that is, the times when all things shall be put right on earth - shall be fulfilled as literally as were the seemingly

incredible predictions of Bethlehem and Calvary. And when the Lord proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, He meant that the time was near when these "times of restitution" would bring peace and blessedness to this sin-blighted world.

Let us then apply this to His teaching at the close of His ministry, as recorded in the First Gospel. No one could have imagined that between the fulfilment of the great prophecy of Isaiah liii. and of the prophecy which immediately follows it, there would be an interval of twenty centuries; or that a like period would intervene between the fulfilment of the prophecy of Matthew xxiv. and the event which the Lord foretold in the second verse of that same chapter. But the explanation of this will plainly appear if we bear in mind, first, that all Messianic prophecy relating to earth runs in the channel of Israel's national history and therefore, so to speak, the clock of prophetic time is stopped while their national history is in abeyance. And secondly, that Israel's rejection during this Christian dispensation is a New Testament "mystery."

It was not that our Lord spoke in ignorance. But though His Divine knowledge was full and absolute, His use of that knowledge, during all His earthly ministry, was subject to definite limitations. For He never spoke save as the Father gave Him to speak, and "times and seasons" the Father had kept in His own exousia (Acts i. 7).

As we read these Scriptures, we must bear in mind that the kingdom of heaven is for earth, and that the earthly people of the Abrahamic promise are the Divinely appointed agency for the administration of it. And Matthew is the Gospel that speaks of it, because it is the Gospel which reveals Christ in His relationships with the earthly people. And if we are to understand that Gospel aright, we need to give a first reading to much of it as from the standpoint of the disciples to whom it was specially addressed. For the man of God "all Scripture is profitable," and therefore none may be neglected. But we must distinguish between interpretation and application. And, above all, we must clear our minds from the ignorance of Latin theology. "God hath not cast away His people whom He foreknew"; and in His own good time "all Israel shall be saved." Not, as the Apostle explains, that every Israelite shall be saved, but that Israel as a nation shall be restored to the place assigned to them in Holy Scripture (Romans xi. 2, 25 - 29).

The scheme of the First Gospel is as definite as it is simple. It opens, as we have seen, by recording the birth of Christ as the "Seed" of the Abrahamic covenant, and the King of Israel. Then we have the Baptist's ministry, which was a provisional fulfilment of the promised advent of Elijah (see ch. xi. 14). Then, after the Temptation, the Lord Himself proclaimed the same Gospel of the coming kingdom, and accredited His testimony by that marvellous display of miraculous power recorded at the close of chapter iv. In the three succeeding chapters He unfolded to His disciples the principles of the kingdom. In chapter x. He commissioned the Twelve to take up the kingdom ministry; and the following chapter chronicles a series of typical acts and utterances of power, and mercy, and judgment. In chapter xii. we reach a crisis in the ministry.

Just as by "spiritualising" all the prophecies relating to His earthly kingdom glories, the "Christian Church" has either perverted or ignored them, so by a like process the "Jewish Church" perverted or ignored the prophecies relating to His earthly sufferings and death. And therefore the abundant proofs of His Messiahship had no voice for men who were looking only for the Son of David to deliver them from the Roman yoke; and the Sanhedrin decided that "the Galilean" was an impostor, and they decreed His death (ch. xii. 14).

His ministry forthwith entered upon a new phase. Till then, His teaching had been open and plain but now it became veiled in parables (ch. xiii.). As those evil men had scorned His testimony, they were now to hear without understanding, and to see without perceiving (V. 14). None but His disciples were to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven - mysteries, namely, a phase of things till then unrevealed. The Hebrew Scriptures spoke of a king coming to reign, the Lord now speaks of a sower going forth to sow. This was not merely an enigma to the Jewish leaders, it must have deepened their hostility ; and the meaning of it was explained to none but His own disciples (v. 11).

An analysis of the succeeding chapters would point the same moral and be no less important ; for across every section of the book may be inscribed the words. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." But for our present purpose a further notice of "the second Sermon on the Mount" will suffice and even this will involve some repetition.

To understand the Lord's teaching in these twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters, I repeat with emphasis, we must give them a first reading from the standpoint of those to whom they were addressed - Hebrew disciples, who were rightly looking for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Messiah had come, and was in their midst. But, in some way that is not told us, they had learned that there was to be yet another "Coming" to wind up the age of Gentile supremacy, and to bring in "the times of restitution of all things." And these chapters record the Lord's reply to their inquiry, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the winding-up of the age?" (Not its telos, but its sunteleia.) It seems extraordinary that any student of Scripture should fail to distinguish between the coming of the Lord to call His people away to heaven at the close of this Christian dispensation, and His coming as Son of Man to establish His kingdom upon earth. But the writings of the Fathers have such a dominating influence upon the theology of Christendom that this confusion is enshrined as truth. The various Scriptures which tell of the future appearances of Christ have all been "thrown into hotchpot" (as the lawyers would say), and the doctrine of " the Second Advent" is the result.

These Scriptures have nothing in common, save that they speak of the same Christ. I will not deal here with the last great coming at the end of all things. But the language of the Epistles respecting that coming which Bengel calls "the hope of the Church," gives colour to the figment that it will be entirely secret; whereas Scripture is explicit that His coming as the Son of Man to earth will be open and manifest. And in foretelling it, the Lord emphatically warned the disciples that it would not take place until after certain notable events and movements foretold in Hebrew prophecy; whereas, in marked contrast with this, the early saints of this dispensation were taught by the inspired Apostles to live in constant expectation of His coming. And there is not a word in the Epistles to suggest that any event foretold in prophecy must intervene before the fulfilment of "that blessed hope." And the long delay in its fulfilment is amply accounted for by the hopeless and shameless apostasy of the professing Church on earth, even from the earliest times.

The world-war now raging is not the fulfilment of Revelation xvi. 16. For "a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" is not situate in either France or Flanders, but in Palestine; and the future of the land and people of the covenant will be a main issue in the great battle yet to be fought on that historic plain. And yet the present war may result in preparing the stage for the resumption of the drama of Hebrew prophecy. For if the Turk should be expelled from the Holy Land, it seems reasonably certain that Palestine will become a protected Jewish State. A protected State, I say advisedly, for until the end of "the times of the Gentiles" the Jews are to remain subject to Gentile suzerainty.

The Lord's words in Matthew xxiv. 15 refer explicitly to the seventieth week of Daniel (ch. ix. 27). Some future "Kaiser" will make a treaty with the Jews, guaranteeing the free observance of their religion. And his violation of that treaty after three and a half years. - "in the midst of the week " - will be the epoch of "the great tribulation," a persecution unparalleled in all the past (v. 21). And as the Lord tells us in verse 29. the tribulation will be followed "immediately" by the appalling convulsions in the sphere of nature which are to usher in the day of the Lord (Isaiah xiii. 9, 10 ; Joel ii. 31).

This exposition of Matthew xxiv. is strikingly confirmed by the Apocalyptic visions. For under the fifth seal we have the martyrs of the tribulation (Revelation vi. 9); and the events of the sixth seal (v. 12) are identical with those which the Lord declared would immediately follow the tribulation (Matthew xxiv. 29).

So far all is clear. But owing to the ambiguity of a minor word in the thirtieth verse, the sequel is commonly misread. The Greek *tote* has a meaning as elastic as our English "then." And here, as in the first verse of chapter xxv., it covers the whole period between the end of the tribulation and the coming of the Son of Man. And the signal change in the Lord's teaching at this point claims very special notice. He had warned the disciples to watch, not for His coming, but for the events which must precede it. But now, the tribulation past, these events are all fulfilled, and His word is, "Watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (v. 42).

The duration of that waiting period we cannot estimate, save that apparently it will be within the lifetime of that generation (v. 34). But it will be sufficiently prolonged to make the world forget the preceding terrors (vv. 38, 39), and to make His people need repeated exhortations to continued watchfulness. For though signs and portents mark the *sunteleia* of that future age, the coming of the Son of Man will be unheralded and sudden (v. 44). This is the event foretold by the Lord in xxiv. 30, 31. and again in xxv. 81; and the intervening passage contains His teaching relating to the waiting period between the end of the tribulation and His actual coming. For here, as so often in the prophetic Scriptures, after the ultimate issue is declared, a prophecy is intercalated leading up to the same goal. The Lord's second and fuller statement of it is as follows: "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, and before Him shall be gathered all nations . . ." (xxv. 31, 32).

This is indeed a "misunderstood text" For under the influence of Patristic theology, eminent commentators would have us believe that it describes "the great and universal judgment, in which all the dead, small and great, shall stand before God. Revelation xx. 11 - 15." The editor of the Speaker's Commentary declares that "it is hardly possible" to regard it in any other light. But Revelation xx. and Matthew xxv. have absolutely nothing in common save that both relate to sessions of Divine judgment. The one is a judgment of the dead, in a vastly remote future; the other is a judgment of living nations upon earth, and, for aught we know, it may fall within the lifetime of the present generation. For the Lord's words imply that, but for the intervention of the present mystery dispensation, the disciples to whom they were addressed might have witnessed their fulfilment. And, as already suggested, the hands of the clock of prophetic time will again begin to move after His coming to bring this dispensation to an end.

We have no definite data by which to measure either the interval between that Coming and the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel, or the interval between the end of that week and His Coming as Son of Man. We know, however, that before His Coming to His earthly people "the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations " - not the gospel of this age of grace, but the gospel of the kingdom. And the last fourteen verses of chapter xxv. are explicit, that the question at issue in the judgment will be the treatment of the messengers accredited to proclaim that gospel to the world.

This is no novel principle. As the Lord had already said to His disciples, " He that receiveth you receiveth Me." And wherever the gospel comes, it is receiving or rejecting Christ that fixes the destiny of men.

But it may be asked, How could hundreds of millions of people appear before the Son of Man on earth? Just in the same way that, in the ages succeeding this very judgment, they will go up to Jerusalem year by year to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah xiv. 16). Their accredited leaders will represent them. To read Scripture aright we need both spiritual intelligence and common sense. If the spiritual fitness be lacking, we shall refuse to believe anything that seems to go beyond our ordinary experience; and a want of common sense will often betray us into an excessive literalness that may make the language of Scripture seem impossible. But is not this narrative so incredible that we are reasonably justified in refusing to take it literally? If that is to be the test, we may at once reject the great truths of revelation - the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension. For in the wildest superstitions of false religions there is nothing so incredible as these truths. But our spiritual being is by nature so depraved that we are ready to believe anything, whether it be a seemingly transparent lie, like transubstantiation, or a seemingly impossible truth, like "the virgin birth," provided it is acclimatised in our religion! But there we draw the line. And the great "mystery" truths of this Christian dispensation, including the Coming of the Lord, as revealed in the Epistles, and also the truths of the kingdom, including the Coming of the Son of Man, as foretold by the Lord Himself, have not been thus acclimatised ; and so they are either rejected or ignored.

True it is, no doubt, as already noticed, that Christendom, million-mouthed, uses the Divinely-given words, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." But with the mass of men this is merely a meaningless incantation. For such is "the covert atheism" of our nature, that though we are willing to believe in a "Second Advent," provided it be too remote to affect us in any way, we are slow to believe in a "Coming" that is a present hope, to influence our daily life. And just in the same way we are willing to believe in a kingdom of heaven beyond the stars. But when the infidel intelligently argues that, if our God were not a myth, He would establish His rule upon this earth of ours ; instead of making the reply which ought to be ready on our lips, we throw into "hotchpot" all that Scripture teaches about the kingdom of God, and the Church of God, and the kingdom of heaven; and over the incongruous mass we indulge in feeble platitudes about Divine wisdom and goodness!

And in an age of keen, intelligent activity, this method of "handling the Word of God" has done more than aggressive infidelity to undermine faith. It has driven multitudes to scepticism. To its baneful influence is due the success of the infidel crusade which masquerades as " Higher Criticism - a movement that has degraded Germany to its present level of barbarism, and has so corrupted "organised Christianity" in Britain that there is not one of the Churches of the Reformation that would hold together if called upon to give corporately an unequivocal and explicit testimony, such as in other days they gave with united voice, to the Deity of Christ and the Divine origin, truth, and authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

Though the follies and falsehoods of this movement have been thoroughly exposed and refuted, it has taught men to shake free from traditional beliefs, and to study these subjects with an open mind. And it is because our Divinity Schools and Theological Colleges teach the theology of the Fathers, instead of teaching the Bible, that so many of their alumni are either the dupes of medieval superstition or the exponents of a half faith which is near allied to scepticism.

Plain words are needed here. In the interval between the Apostolic age and the era of the Patristic theologians, the main truths of the distinctively Christian revelation were lost in the Early Church and they

were never fully recovered until the Evangelical Revival of the nineteenth century. But our commentators ignore the Revival, and continue to trade upon the writings of the Fathers. And the results are disastrous. For while an intelligent study of Scripture always tends to faith, the Christianised infidelity which now prevails in our churches is largely due to a revolt against the traditional exegesis of Scripture. And so, as Adolph Saphir wrote, "It is out of the arsenal of the orthodox that the very fundamental truths of the Gospel have been assailed." For, he added, this traditional interpretation "paved the way for Rationalism and Neology."

If Christians fail to distinguish between what the Scriptures teach, and what men teach about the Scriptures, it is not strange that unbelievers should be thus misled. And so it comes about that the orthodox of one generation sow seeds of scepticism for the next. Some of us remember, for example, when it was taught as "Bible truth" that the reign of righteousness and peace on earth would come automatically by the preaching of the gospel. But people who had a better knowledge, both of the Bible and of human nature, gave no heed to a delusion so baseless and so foolish. Nor did we need the horrors and infamies of German Kultur to teach us that earth can never be the home of peace and happiness, save under the stern and righteous government of Heaven.

And in the same way a misuse of Matthew xxiv. is now sowing seeds of scepticism to be reaped in the near future. For it is asked, Is not this world-war the fulfilment of the Lord's words recorded in that chapter? Some are thus led to infer that a supreme crisis in earth's history is so near, that efforts for the extension of missionary enterprise may be relaxed. And others again are clear that the war will be followed by an era of millennial peace. And the champions of these rival errors appeal to Scripture with equal confidence. But while the second Sermon on the Mount may throw much light on events and movements of our own day, both on the battlefield and in the Professing Church, the fulfilment of that great prophecy belongs to a future age. And Christians who, ignoring this, declare *ex cathedra* that they, forsooth! have acquired a knowledge of "times and seasons," denied to the Apostles of the Lord, are recklessly sowing evil seed which may hereafter choke the faith crop of many fields.

Scripture warns us that "in the last days perilous times shall come"; and proofs are many that those times may be close upon us. But we seem to be blind to their significance and their perils. In wartime the decks of our battleships are ruthlessly cleared of everything that might imperil safety. And though "the children of this world are wiser than the children of light," they are not wiser than Divine Scripture; as witness the Apostle's words in view of the incipient apostasy of the Early Church, "I commend you to God and the word of His grace." But in these days, when the apostasy has developed with a force and subtlety unknown in all the past, instead of taking heed to the warning and the exhortation, and falling back on Holy Scripture, we refuse to jettison the "tophamper" of traditional exegesis. And as the result of this, and of thus ignoring the great "mystery" truths revealed in the Epistles, the whole scheme of the Biblical revelation is dislocated, all sense of its Divine unity is lost, and faith in its Divine authority is undermined. Those of us who have watched the course of the German infidel movement ever since it gained a foothold in Britain, must recognise that it is energised by a sinister spiritual influence which makes it indifferent to controversy. But to some of us that movement has proved "a blessing in disguise"; for it has taught us to study the Bible with a mind untrammelled by Patristic exegesis. And as the result we have attained a more intelligent, and therefore a firmer, faith in Holy Scripture as the Word of God.

A personal experience is sometimes helpful to others. When I became a Christian in the truer sense of the word, I supposed that sceptical difficulties respecting the Gospels would no longer trouble me. But I was distressed to find that the more closely I studied them, the attempt to harmonise them seemed to become

more hopeless. While in this state of mind I heard a lecture which ran somewhat on the lines indicated in the preceding pages. The effect of it was electrical. It was a revelation to me ; and I began to study the First Gospel with fresh intelligence and new interest. Every section of it seemed to glow with new light, a light that threw its rays back upon the Hebrew Scriptures, and forward to the Apocalypse. And I came to realise, as I had never realised before, the " hidden harmony " of the Bible as a whole. The headmaster of Eton's "Love your enemies" sermon, preached in St. Margaret's, Westminster, on 25th March 1915, gave striking proof how a misreading of the First Gospel may bring Holy Scripture into contempt. His purpose was to urge that the conduct of our war with Germany should be governed by the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. If such a proposition had emanated from a secular publicist, it might have passed without notice. But it was put forward, ex cathedra, as the teaching of Scripture, by an officially accredited exponent of Scripture. And as the result, it was assumed by the secular Press, and by men of the world generally, that this folly had Scriptural sanction.

"Love your enemies" is the last in a group of precepts which the Lord enjoined upon His disciples in view of their mission as ministers of grace. They were not to resist evil. If struck upon one cheek they were to turn the other cheek. If a thief took their coat they were to let him take their cloak also. They were to give to every applicant, and to turn away from no would-be borrower (Matthew x, 39 - 44).

Could a country be governed on the lines of these precepts? or a public school? Why, if even a shopkeeper in a village street were to conduct his business in this way, he would be bankrupt within a month! And yet these were the words of the Lord of Glory; and, like all His words, they are Divine and eternal. But He prefaced them by the warning that they were not to be taken as destroying "the law and the prophets " - a phrase which every Hebrew would rightly understand to mean what we Christians call the Old Testament Scriptures. And with still greater definiteness He declared that not "one jot or one tittle" of the law was abrogated by His teaching (vv. 17, 18). And yet both in his sermon and in his letters to the Press in defence of it, Dr. Lyttelton assumed that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount has entirely superseded the Old Testament Scriptures; whereas it is mainly by these very Scriptures that we ought to be guided in our conduct of affairs in every sphere of public life.

But in fulfilling their ministry of grace, His disciples were not to appeal to law. While He was with them they were to act as He acted. And at the close of their mission He asked them, in view of His leaving them, "When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything?" "But now (He went on to say) he that hath a purse let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one "(Luke xxii. 35, 36). In other words, they were to fall back on their position as citizens. Peter, Oriental though he was, took these last words literally; but we understand them better. Living in a civilised community, we carry the sword by proxy. If any one strikes us on the cheek, or steals our coat, we hand him over to the police; and the magistrate awards a fitting punishment, to which the gaoler gives effect. But if, instead of seizing and punishing the law-breaker, these officers of the law treated him in accordance with the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, they would "bear the sword in vain," and utterly fail in their duty as "the ministers of God" (Romans xiii. 4).

But the police and the criminal courts can deal only with crimes committed within the realm. In the case of crimes committed by an alien enemy, recourse must be had to the naval and military forces of the Crown. But here the same principle applies. And with a far greater definiteness ; for in the case of crimes committed by a nation, there is no room for sentiment. or pity, which might claim a hearing in the case of individual offenders. And the crimes which are now crying to heaven for vengeance have been instigated by the Government of Germany; and they have been condoned and justified by the German nation, not

excepting the " Christian " churches of that land. If then God should give the victory to the Allies, and the Governments of the Allies should decide to rifle and destroy every national building in Berlin, and utterly to crush the power of Germany, the Christian must not forget that law is as Divine as grace. And, moreover, our chief purpose in this war is not to punish Germany for flagrant and hideous atrocities and crime, but to secure the future peace of Europe.

My purpose here, however, is not to discuss the conduct of the war, hut to expose and refute a flagrant misuse of the Sermon on the Mount. And let no one suppose that this involves our ignoring its application to ourselves. Though, in common with not a little of the Lord's teaching recorded in the First Gospel, its full and final purpose will not be realised until the future age of the kingdom, its words of grace ought to have a special voice for His people in this dispensation of grace. If, for example, some Christian who is mourning the death of a dearly loved relative or friend, wantonly butchered in cold blood in this ghastly war, could come face to face with the German murderer, grace would teach him to show his love for his enemy by telling him of gospel pardon even for a crime so heinous and so hateful.

But this has nothing in common with that illadvised sermon. A notable commentary upon it was supplied by sermons preached last Christmas in Berlin and other German towns. Here are typical extracts from published reports of them: Pastor Zoebel, speaking in the great Lutheran Church in Leipsic, referred to the German guns beating down the children of Satan, and to German submarines as "instruments to execute the Divine vengeance," to send to the bottom of the sea thousands of the non-elect. "There ought to be no compromise with hell, no mercy for the servants of Satan - in other words, no pity for the English, French, and Russians; nor, indeed, for any nation that has sold itself to the devil. They have all been condemned to death by a Divine decree."

Professor Rheinold Seeby, a teacher of theology in the Berlin University, preaching in the Cathedral of the city, said that in killing their enemies, burning their houses, and invading their territories, the Germans simply performed a work of charity.

Pastor Fritz Philippi, of Berlin, preaching from his Protestant pulpit on the Divine mission of Germany, said that as the Almighty allowed His Son to be crucified that the scheme of redemption might be accomplished, so Germany was destined to crucify humanity, in order that its salvation might be secured. The human race could only be saved by blood, fire, and sword. "It is really because we are pure that we have been chosen by the Almighty as His instruments to punish the envious, to chastise the wicked, and to slay with the sword the sinful nations. The Divine mission of Germany, oh brethren! is to crucify humanity; the duty of German soldiers, therefore, is to strike without mercy. They must kill, burn, and destroy, and any half measures would be wicked. Let it then be a war without pity."

He must be a poor sort of Christian who can regard such men, and their countless sympathisers of the pews, without feelings of aversion, deliberate and deep. Do we not well to remember the Lord's emphatic commendation of the Church of Ephesus: "Thou canst not tolerate evil men"? (Revelation ii. 2; cf. Matthew xviii. 17). It is not for us to anticipate the Divine judgment respecting the eternal destiny of these men. What concerns us has regard to our attitude toward them here and now; and to recognise them as Christians would betoken disloyalty to Christ.

Chapter Two

"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature? " (Matthew vi. 27 Luke xii. 25).

ALL the Lord's words were the expression of Divine wisdom, but the words here attributed to Him savour of human folly. During "the great war" many a would-be recruit has longed to be an inch or two taller; but no one except "a freak dwarf " ever wished to add half a yard to his height ! Moreover, no sane person could imagine that this might be attained by "taking thought" ; and yet. according to our text, the Lord represented it as a mere trifle in comparison with the ordinary cares of life.

The primary and common meaning of *hêlikia* is age. But as growth in years brings physical development, the word acquired the secondary meaning of stature and it is used in that sense in Luke xix. 3. In Luke ii. 52. also, it is thus translated. But Bloomfield there renders it age, "as being more agreeable to classic usage" (Greek Test.); and in his note on Ephesians iv. 13. the same eminent Greek scholar writes, " *Hêlikia* here does not mean stature. but full age"; that is, the maturity of our spirifital being - a correction that throws new light upon the passage. So, also. in John ix. 21 and 23 the parents of the blind man to whom the Lord gave sight said, " He is of age, ask him." In Hebrews ix. 11, the only other passage where the word occurs, it means " the time of life" in a special sense.

In the R.V., the phrase "taking thought" rightly gives place to "being anxious." The Christian should be always thoughtful, but never anxious always careful, but never full of care. The Lord's words then might be freely rendered, " Who of you by giving way to anxiety can add a single step to the length of his life path ? " Reasonable care may extend it by many a cubit, but corroding anxiety can only find to shorten it. When writing his father's memoir, the late Sir .James Paget, the eminent surgeon. used the striking phrase that his death was due to "that rarest of all causes of death, old age" And it is not the aged only who undesignedly commit suicide through failing to "take thought."

Enter ye in at the strait gate Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it "(Matthew vii. 3, 14).

We are told that in Eastern cities there are small gates in out-of-the-way corners, which are approached by straitened (R.V.) and little-used paths, which would be noticed only by those who seek for them. And, of course, such gates and paths are in striking contrast to the great city gate and the main road which leads to it. The allegory of these verses would be understood by all to whom the Lord was speaking. But Westerners seem to miss its meaning.

As the "wide gate," to which the broad way leads, symbolises destruction, the narrow gate must symbolise life. And therefore the usual exegesis., that the ' straitened way " symbolises a holy walk, is in direct opposition to the teaching of the passage and of the truth of the gospel. For there can be no holiness of walk until we receive life as God's gift in grace. Moreover, the warning which immediately follows, beginning with the words. "Beware of false prophets," plainly indicates that the contrast which the Lord intends is not between an evil life and a holy life, but between "religion " and Himself. No sane man believes that Divine favour can be won by an evil life. But that it is to be won by a religious life is the creed of the human heart the wide world over.

And this perverted instinct of human nature leads many real Christians to misread any passage of Scripture that can be perverted to indicate that the seeming simplicity and "trueness" of the Gospel must be taken with reserve, and that its words are not to be trusted in the way we can trust the w'ords of honourable men. For the sinner must needs seek for the way which leads to life, and knock at the door when he finds it ; and this we are told is not so easy as the words would lead us to suppose! If any reader of this page should harbour such a thought, let him mark the words which preface the invitation of verse

13, "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened " (v. 8).

"The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matthew viii. 20).

This is the first occurrence of this Messianic title in the New Testament, and in Scripture a first occurrence is often significant. In the Old Testament - as, for example, in Ezekiel - " Son of Man " is often used as an emphatic Hebraism, for man: but John v. 27 is the only New Testament passage where it occurs in this sense. Because He is man, all judgment is committed to the Lord Jesus. The English reader misses the significance which the Greek article lends to the words elsewhere; but it is recognised by scholars. And there can be no doubt. as to the significance which the Lord Himself attached to this, His favourite title. When, for example, He here exclaimed, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, hut the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head," it is clear that the contrast His words were intended to enforce was between the highest and the lowest. The humblest creature has a home, hut He, the Son of Man, descended from heaven, was an outcast wanderer. And on the last occasion on which He used the title, when on His defence before the Sanhedrin, his purpose in declaring Himself to be the Soti of Man of Daniel's vision (ch. vii. 13) was to assert His personal and inherent right to heavenly glory.

For it was not His human birth that constituted Him the Son of Man. That birth was indeed the fulfilment of the promise which the name implied but, as He declared explicitly, the Son of Man "descended out of heaven" (John iii. 13) ; and He added, who is in heaven," which, as Alford notices, certainly implies "whose place is in heaven." And again He said, "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where lie was before ? " (John vi. 72). When, therefore, He proclaims that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost " - " came to give His life a ransom for many " - faith responds in the language of that noble hymn, "When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb." For the virgin-birth was but a stage in the fulfilment of His mission. And tins throws light upon the words of the creation story, " Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Genesis i. 26). For the " type" - using the word in the biologist's sense - is not the creature of Eden, but He after whose likeness the creature was fashioned.

One point more. Though the title "The Son of Man" occurs so frequently in relation to the earthly people of the covenant, the Lord is never so designated with reference to the heavenly people of this Christian age. Never once, therefore, is it found in the Epistles - - a fact that exposes, and ought to bar. the error which is so generally accepted as truth, that "the coming of the Son of Man" of Matthew xxiv., and elsewhere in the First Gospel, is the same event as the Lord's coming to bring this "Christian dispensation" to an end, and to call His heavenly people home.

"Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come" (Matthew x. 23).

This statenient must apparently be dismissed as a hopeless enigma, or rejected as a sheer blunder. But to the Christian who has learned to recognise the dispensational and prophetic character of the First Gospel, its meaning is clear ; and a. peruusal of the preceding introductory chapter will render further explanation unnecessary. "The hope of the Church - to use Bengel's phrase - is not "the coming of the Son of Man" to earth in fulfilment of Messianic prophecy, but the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to call up to heaven His people of the heavenly election of tlme present dispensation. And this dispensation, and the distinctive truths relating to it, were "mysteries" till revealed until the earthly people were set aside. But these, and other similar words, will be received and acted on by Hebrew disciples in days to come, just as they would

have been received and acted on by the disciples of the Lord's earthly ministry if the Christian dispensation had not intervened.

"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew xi. 11).

As the R.V. margin reminds us, the Greek is the comparative, not the superlative. But "he that is lesser" is intolerable as an English rendering. We might read it "the little one," a word that the Lord uses of His disciples in chapter x. 42. Although the great Chrysostom adopted it, the gloss that the Lord was thus referring to Himself is really unworthy of consideration. "For such an interpretation is surely adverse to the spirit of the whole discourse. We may certainly say that our Lord in such a passage as this would not designate Himself as 'he that is least' compared with John, in any sense" (Alford). And it is certain that "the little one in the Kingdom" is not personally greater than the greatest of the prophets. It is clearly a question of dispensational position. The prophets were heralds of the coming kingdom; whereas, now, even the humblest disciple was a citizen of the kingdom. And the same applies in principle to the heavenly election of the Body of Christ. The least of its members is greater than the greatest of a bygone economy not personally - far from it - but dispensationally.

Some of us who are inclined to think highly of ourselves, here and now, will appear very small indeed personally in comparison with the faith heroes whose names are enshrined in the bead-roll of Hebrews xi.

"And from the days of John the Baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew xi. 12).

This verse is a veritable crux; and expositors generally convey the impression that they are not satisfied with the explanations they give of it. The rendering of our English versions clearly suggests the thought of a hostile, aggressive movement against the kingdom of heaven. But this is quite foreign to the context. And surely the way in which the main word, on which the exegesis of the verse depends, was used by the Lord in a kindred passage ought to guide us here.

In Luke xvi. 16 we read, "The law and the prophets were until John since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." Now, the word here rendered "presseth into it" is identical with that which is translated "suffereth violence" in our present verse. And one of its Lexicon meanings is, "to carry a point by obstinate perseverance." Can there be any doubt then that the Lord was here referring, not to a hostile movement against the kingdom, but to the forceful impetuosity of His nominal disciples? For example, the thousands of men whom He fed to satiety with a basketful of bread and fish were so eager to proclaim Him King that He had to hide Himself from them. And that this was His meaning here is established by the fact that the word rendered "take it by force," is that which occurs in John vi. 15, "When Jesus perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a King, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone."

The attitude and conduct of the Jewish leaders toward him were marked, not by violence, but by mingled hatred, cunning, and timidity. Again and again they would have seized Him, but that they feared the people. And if the Lord hid Himself from the provincial Jews, it was not because they were hostile, but because, knowing what was in man, He would not "commit Himself unto them," for they were merely miracle-made disciples (John ii. 23 - 25). Or, to use the Apostle's phrase in Galatians ii. 15, they were merely "Jews by nature." Just as now, "all who profess and call themselves Christians" are nominally the people of God, so was it then with Jews. And every Jew was looking for the Messiah. But the "Jews by

nature" wanted a Messiah who would free them from the Roman yoke. And they rightly judged that a man with seemingly unlimited miraculous powers could win their deliverance. Their hopes were carnal, and they were ready to attain the realisation of them by carnal means. Thus it was that "the kingdom of heaven was suffering violence."

"So shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew xii. 40).

Some people find here a clear proof that Scripture has erred ; others that the Lord was crucified on the Thursday. But in this both critics and "reconcilers " merely display their ignorance. "Three days and three nights" was a familiar idiomatic phrase to cover a period that included any part of three days. We need not go outside Scripture to exemplify this. The Egyptian mentioned in 1 Samuel xxx, 11 - 13 had had neither food nor drink for "three days and t.hree nights," and yet it was only three days since he had fallen sick. So, again, in 2 Chronicles x. 5, 12, we read that Rehoboam said to the Israelites, "Come again unto me after three days . . . so they came to him on the third day." And in Esther iv. 16 and v. 1, we see told that the queen ordered a fast for three days, and yet she held a banquet on the third day.

But Matthew xxvii. 63, 64 would settle the question. even if it stood alone. Four-and-twenty hours after the Lord's burial, the Jews came to Pilate and said, "We remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day." And if that Sunday had passed, leaving the seal upon the tomb unbroken, the guard would have been withdrawn, and the Pharisees would have proclaimed their triumph. In nine passages do the Gospels record His words that He would rise "on the third day"; and in 1 Corinthians xv. 4 the Apostle Paul proclaimed the fact as an integral part of the gospel.

Though this may puzzle a theological college, no prison chaplain would need to explain it to his congregation. For our law reckons time on this same system. Though our legal day is a day and a night - twenty-four hours beginning at midnight - any part of a day counts as a day. Therefore, under a sentence of three days' imprisonment a prisoner is usually discharged on the morning of the third day, no matter how late on the first day he reaches the prison. Under such a sentence a prisoner is seldom more than forty hours in gaol, and I have had official cognizance of cases where the detention was, in fact, only for thirty-three hours.

And this mode of reckoning and of speaking was as familiar to the Jews as it is to our prison officials and the habitués of our criminal courts. In his *Horae Hebraicae*, Dr. John Lightfoot quotes time Jewish saying, "A day and a night make one Onah, and a part of an Onah is as the whole." And he adds, "Therefore, Cimri may truly be said to have been in the grave three Onoth." To object that as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, the Lord must have been in the grave for that full period is a transparent blunder; for, of course, the period intended in the Jonah narrative must be computed in accordance with "the dialect of the nation" (Lightfoot).

"Lest they should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matthew xiii. 15).

These words are misunderstood by many a Christian; and to not a few they are a real trouble. For they seem strangely out of keeping with the spirit of the Lord's ministry. But His words should always be studied in relation to their context and to the circumstances in which they were spoken. The " text-card system " of Bible study is a fruitful cause of misunderstanding and error.

During the early period of the Lord's ministry His words of grace and works of power were abundant, and they were open and free to all - witness the narrative of chapter iv. 23 - 25, a passage which attracts but little notice. It had been a time of noontide sunshine in the spiritual sphere, such as even that favoured land had never experienced before. But the religious leaders of the people closed their eyes against the light; and, as chapter xii. 14 informs us, their obduracy and hate culminated in their summoning a council to compass His destruction. And the latter section of that chapter records the awful words in which He pronounced their doom. Their day of visitation was over, and a sentence of spiritual blindness and deafness was pronounced upon them. From that time, therefore, His public teaching became veiled in parables (ch. xiii.).

The change was so startling that the disciples came to Him with one accord to seek an explanation; and the passage from which time above words are taken gives His reply to their inquiries. Darkness was now to fall upon those who had despised the light.

But, as when darkness covered the land of Egypt, the Hebrews still had light, so was it here, for His parables were fully explained to the disciples.

The principle involved in this passage, therefore, is neither exceptional nor novel. Though the gospel amnesty which grace proclaims makes no exceptions, for Divine grace has no limits, there are limits to the time within which the amnesty avails. And if sinners despise grace there is nothing for them but judgment, stern and inexorable. And the word goes forth, even in this age of grace, albeit judgment waits, "Ephraim is joined to idols ; let him alone." This is an awfully solemn truth which explains the mystery of many a life.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened " (Matthew xiii. 33).

The accepted interpretation of this parable takes the leaven to symbolise the good influence of Christianity in the world. It is admitted, however, even by the exponents of that view, that everywhere else in Scripture leaven is "symbolic of pollution and corruption." The question arises then, What meaning was the parable intended to convey to those who heard it ? And having regard to the religious beliefs and deep-seated prejudices of the Jews, can there be any reasonable doubt as to the answer? Suppose that when time Lord had finished His teaching, some Rabbi had explained to the hearers that the leaven in the parable represented a Divine purifying agency, the amazement his words would have excited would have been such as a Christian congregation today would feel if their minister - a staunch "teetotaller," withal - exemplified the spread of the gospel by the "permeating influence" of a glass of brandy smuggled into the family coffee-pot. "Smuggled," I say advisedly, for a specially significant word in the parable is entirely ignored in the received exegesis. When making bread in the course of her household duties, a woman would naturally put leaven into the meal. But here the woman conceals the leaven in the meal, the inference being an obvious one, that she does it surreptitiously, and with a sinister purpose. Now a parable is defined by theologians as a fictitious story, invented to illustrate a truth."

But why "fictitious" ? It has been supposed that some of the parables narrate real and not fictitious events. And if this very reasonable supposition be well founded, a case may at that very time have engaged public attention, where some evil woman had thus corrupted the "three measures of meal" that had been set apart for an offering.

But, it is urged, the alternative reading of the parable is vetoed on two grounds. First, by the very fact that the kingdom of heaven is said to be like leaven, and therefore the leaven must symbolise good and not

evil. Here the theologians forget their definition of a parable. For a parable must be read in its entirety as presenting the truth which time Lord intends it to teach. Were this remembered, Scripture would not be brought into contempt by such puerilities of exegesis as that the Good Samaritan's two pence represent the two Sacraments ! or that, here, the three measures of meal symbolise either "body, soul, and spirit," or else "the descendants of the three sons of Noah " ! Tradition tells us that, from earliest times, this was the usual amount of meal prepared for a baking (Genesis xviii. 6). And it may have been on this account that it was the quantity prescribed for a meal-offering.

The second ground of veto is that the alternative reading of the parable would make it conflict with the teaching of Scripture respecting the course and issue of this Christian dispensation. But so far from this being the case, it is in fact the accredited exegesis of it which brings it into flagrant opposition to Scripture. Many a standard treatise might be cited in support of this statement. But having regard to the space limits of this note, a single testimony must suffice ; and it shall be that of a distinguished theologian who is an uncompromising champion of the "orthodox" exposition of the parable.

In his commentary upon Matthew xii. 43, Dean Alford, after explaining "the direct application of the passage to the Jewish people," writes as follows

"Strikingly parallel with this runs the history of the Christian Church. Not long after the apostolic times, the golden calves of idolatry were set up by the Church of Rome. What the effect of the Captivity was to the Jews. that of time Reformation has been to Christendom. The first evil spirit has been cast out. But by the growth of hypocrisy, secularity, and Rationalism, the house has become empty, swept, and garnished : swept and garnished by the decencies of civilisation and discoveries of secular knowledge, but empty of living and earnest faith. And he must read prophecy but ill who does not see under all these seeming improvements the preparation for the final development of the man of sin, the great repossession when idolatry and the seven worse spirits shall bring the outward frame of so-called Christendom to a fearful end."

Is it possible to reconcile Dean Alford's exposition of the leaven parable with these pregnant and solemn words about the long-drawn-out apostasy and coming doom of the professing Christian Church ?

"I will give unto thee (Peter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew xvi. iv).

But little need be added here to what has been said in the Introductory Chapter about "the kingdom of heaven." The great Apostasy which claims to be the keeper of Holy Writ is so ignorant of Holy Writ that it confounds the kingdom of heaven with the Church of this dispensation. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of Hebrew prophecy rebating to earth and the earthly people of the covenant. And Peter was "the Apostle of the Circumcision." To him it was, therefore, that the Pentecostal proclamation to Israel was entrusted (Acts ii. 22, iii. 12). And when "the word which God sent unto the children of Israel " was to be carried to Gentile proselytes, he was the appointed messenger (Acts x. 36). For among the Twelve Peter held the foremost place, and it was because there were twelve tribes of Israel that the Apostles of the Ministry were twelve in number (Matthew xix. 28).

Throughout what theologians call the Hebraic portion of the Acts, the Apostle Peter is the foremost figure, and his ministry is pre-eminent. But Israel remained impenitent; and in the thirteenth chapter the Apostles Paul and Barnabas were divinely " separated" to preach to the Gentiles, and the name of the Apostle of the Circumcision disappears from the narrative. In the first twelve chapters of Acts it occurs no less than fifty-six times, but, save in chapter xv. 7, it is never found once in the last sixteen chapters of the book.

"There be some standing here which shall not see death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matthew xvi. 28).

The following is the most approved exposition of this passage, and lest any one should suspect me of mis-stating a view which I reject, I give it in Dean Alford's words

"This declaration refers in its full meaning . . . to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the full manifestation of the kingdom of Christ by the annihilation of the Jewish polity." Was there ever a more amazing example of "nightmare exegesis" ? Did the disciples know that this was what they were asking for when they uttered the words the Lord had taught them, "Thy kingdom come"? They prayed that prayer with knowledge of the truth so plainly revealed in Scripture, that "the kingdom " would bring the restoration of the Jewish polity and relief from the Roman yoke. If, therefore, there be no other explanation of the passage open to us, let us humbly confess our ignorance, and leave it unexplained.

But before we yield to a "counsel of despair," let us clear our minds of all preconceptions, and study afresh the whole passage from chapter xvi. 28 to chapter xvii. 8. And reading it unbroken by the chapter division, let us consider whether it does not afford us the solution we seek.

Most great commentators agree that the Lord was pointing to some definite event which would occur during the lifetime of some of His disciples. But they urge, not without some show of reason, that the words "shall not taste of death" imply a somewhat remote event. Suppose, then, we omit these words, and read the passage thus, "Verily I say unto you, there are some standing here who shall see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." Should we need the words of 2 Peter i. 16 - 18 to convince us that it was fulfilled at the Transfiguration?

There was one other event, and only one, in the life of the disciples which might claim consideration if a drastic "spiritualising " of the Lord's language could be allowed, namely, the Day of Pentecost. But that would leave equally unexplained the words above omitted. The question remains, therefore, how can they be accounted for? I would answer boldly that if we must make choice between leaving this difficulty unsolved and adopting an unscriptural "nightmare" exegesis of the passage, we shall do well to adopt the former alternative. I venture to suggest, however, that we might possibly find a very simple solution of it if we knew what was working in the minds of the disciples at the time.

Certain statements in the Gospels indicate that they were "dull of hearing" about much of the Lord's teaching. And if they treated the truth of the kingdom in its spiritual aspect in th

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