

*THE PASSOVER AND THE LORD'S SUPPER.*

It is quite conceivable that the counsels of the Father might have determined that Jesus Christ should die at some other time than in the midst of the Passover celebration, and that some other part of the Jewish ritual should have been moulded into a permanent memorial of human redemption. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews sees in the impressive events of the great Day of Atonement a prefiguration of the sacrifice and priestly mediation of Jesus Christ in the presence of His Father, and the theology of sacramentarianism would have had stronger analogies to sustain it if the solemnities of that day had been adjusted to Christian uses and perpetually bound upon the Church of the future. From the very beginning of His ministry Jesus seems to have had a presentiment of the fact that His death was to link itself with the celebration of the Passover, and that the institution by which that death must be kept in perpetual memory amongst His elect people would bear a clear paschal imprint. The glimmering the Baptist had of the fact, when he described Jesus as the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, may have only confirmed our Lord's own forecasts upon the subject. It was at the Passover following the commencement of His public ministry that the first signs of mortal hostility appeared. The discourse on the bread delivered in the synagogue at Capernaum was delivered whilst the Passover pilgrims to Jerusalem were crowding the highways of Galilee, and the special occasion colours the similitudes in which Christ predicts His coming sacrifice. It was in obedience to the inward voice calling Him to His supreme act of obedience at the Feast, that He stedfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem and spoke once and again of all that was to befall Him there. And on the eve of His death He felt a

constraint to celebrate the Festival with His comrades, and grafted the Holy Supper upon this primitive foundation rite of a redeemed Israel. Before He suffered, with desire He desired to eat the Passover with His disciples, finding therein solace, strength, courage, hope in the hour of His passion. Why did Jesus give the preference to this rite over others, and find in it a special fitness for the age-long celebration of His death? What was there in its history, analogies, and associations to lend itself to His purposes? Why did He transplant into the New Testament Church this solitary part of a ritual that was about to vanish away and make it a sign of His dying that should outlast the world?

It could not have been without significance to the mind of our Lord that this celebration with which His death was to be now and hereafter identified was older than the temple sacrifices. Whatever view may be held of the composite character of the Passover sections in the Book of Exodus, the great rite itself obviously took its rise on the borderline of two dispensations, and belonged equally to both. For the decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem Jesus tacitly claimed the double witness. His death was no accident of the after times. Some of its principles had been anticipated and foreshadowed in the foundation of the Jewish state. The first Passover was celebrated long before Levitical rites and offerings were prescribed. The ceremonies akin to it in some of the primitive religions of mankind seem to give colour to the idea that the impressive solemnity enjoined by Moses on the night of the Exodus was an adaptation of a pre-existing observance. Perhaps the Passover touched with its associations a world that was broader than the Jewish election, and had a catholic suggestiveness lacking in rites which had become entirely identified with the narrowness of the nation. Whether that may have been so or not, the paschal lamb

was a connecting link between the rude altars of the patriarchs and those on which the Levites offered their sacrifices to God, and spoke more impressively of those eternal counsels He was to fulfil by His death. There is an implicit appeal in our Lord's association of His death with the Passover to an authority dating back beyond that of temple or even tabernacle.

The Passover offering had a many-sided significance lacking in the sacrifices prescribed by the more elaborate code of later days. As the life of the race became more complex, and priests and sacrifices were multiplied, a tendency shows itself to differentiate the meaning of the various sacrifices, parallel to those divisions of function which take place in physiological evolution. Specific sacrifices represent the expiation and removal of sin, either in the individual or in the nation. Other sacrifices represent the consecration of the worshipper to God and His service; and yet other offerings which were eaten in the courts of the temple express devout and glad-hearted fellowship and communion with God. To find a rite for the observance of His followers that combined all these ideas in one, Jesus Christ had to pass by the offerings of the temple and to go back to the Passover. The blood sprinkled upon the doorposts, as an appeal to the destroying angel and a protecting sign, was perhaps a more impressive object-lesson of propitiation than any of the sin-offerings of the temple. It was to give emphasis to this aspect of the observance that the lamb in after centuries was slain in the temple courts where its blood could be presented to God. The Passover at the same time was a covenant of separation to God, and it was predominantly a Feast of grateful love and of reverent friendship with the Most High.

When instituting the Holy Supper, our Lord could not have been unmindful of the fact that the Passover rite of which it was an adaptation was a rite of the home rather

than of the temple. For the perpetual celebration of His redemptive death He desired the atmosphere of simplicity and love that suffuses the household rather than the pomp and frigidity and even corruption imported into the place that was once God's sanctuary. It was a sad and all but incredible thing that it should be so, yet as a matter of fact the worst part of Jewish life had the temple for its sphere of activity. Here was the stronghold of pride, greed, cruelty, cunning. It was an imposing scene of caste distinctions rather than of brotherhood and religious equality. The ideal conditions for the vivid, believing, heart-felt remembrance of his soul-ransoming sacrifice and compassion, were not those of pomp, rigour, spiritual terrorism, austere ceremonial; but tenderness, unfeigned simplicity, unsophisticated emotion. The circle in which the voice of childhood was allowed to speak, where ties of blood held the members of a household in gracious oneness with each other, where sympathy was as pure and perfect as nature could make it, was the circle most consonant with the spirit He wished to foster by the perpetual celebration of His death. The Passover festival was essentially that of the home, and at the Last Supper our Lord must have surely been casting forward a prophetic glance through the early generations of the Christian faith, and have foreseen that the New Covenant Passover, like its Jewish predecessor, would be the glad and reverent feast of the home rather than the imposing function of a stately ecclesiastical building.

If it had been the express intention of our Lord to affront and stultify the extreme sacramentarian, He could not have done it more effectually than by taking for the distinctive rite of the Christian faith an observance that in point of time preceded all official priesthoods. The Christian Passover fits in more gloriously with the common priesthood of all believers than could any sacrificial act in connection with the services of the temple that he might have adjusted

to Christian uses. When this festival of redemption from Egypt was founded, every home was theoretically a shrine of worship and every father a priest in his own family. It is said by many that there can be no valid sacrament unless bread and wine are consecrated and dispensed by one who is related through an unbroken outward series of ordinations to the apostles, and so endowed with the powers and prerogatives of a priest. How consciously or unconsciously Jesus Christ mocks this assumption when He transforms a Passover, which was originally slain within the home, and the authorised celebrant of which was the father in the midst of his own children, into the memorial of His death! If it be denied that the Lord's Supper must be interpreted by the analogies of the Passover, we attribute to the Lord an incongruous and a limping logic. The rite has no sacerdotal associations; and if any portion of the Passover narrative was edited by priestly influence, as the higher criticism contends, we only see how impossible it was for Jewish priests to find an indispensable place for themselves in the rules of the celebration. The question whose hands shall break the bread and bless the cup at this holy supper is one of expediency. As a rule the communities of Christ's disciples have thought it best to commit the administration into the hands of a separated ministry. That, however, is not of the essence of the sacrament. The man who claims that in virtue of his order he is the only dispenser of a valid sacrament forgets that Jesus Christ passed by the priests and their sacrifices. The sacerdotalist shows himself as contemptuous of the principles of true exegesis as he is of the rights and privileges of his fellow-believers. In the early Church the primitive custom of the Passover seems to have reappeared for a time, and the solemnity was presided over by the oldest and most honoured disciple.

The Passover was chosen as the basis of the great sacrament of human redemption because the participation in its

gladness was all but national in its breadth and comprehensiveness. The rite was more catholic than the genius of the Jewish worship for centuries. The stranger who sojourned amongst the Israelites, and for whom in after ages an inferior court of worship was provided in the temple, was to be one of the elect family and welcomed to this festival of redemption. Those who had defiled themselves by ill-timed breaches of the ceremonial law, and who would have been disqualified from entering for the time being into the tabernacle, might take part in the solemn and friendly feasting. The privilege was to be generous and all embracing. And this characteristic of the Passover was maintained to the very end, for it was the most numerous attended of all the Jewish feasts. It is true that the centralization of worship in Jerusalem, which of course was a part of the providential plan for the preservation of its purity, and the slaying of the lamb in the temple courts, tended to contract to some extent the numbers represented in the celebration, but it never ceased to be a festival which enlisted the great mass of the nation in its observance. Some of the sacrifices of the altar were for the offending individuals who had presented them, some were for the priests, and some for the collective nation. But every family kept the Passover, and it became a type of redemption upon the broadest possible scale. It must have comforted the heart of our Lord, as his thought went back to Egypt and he saw every family celebrating the great redemption that was working itself out through the hours of the midnight, or as He watched the vast Passover crowds in Jerusalem overflowing the streets and covering the slopes of Olivet, to think that the day should yet come when vaster crowds should know and honour and love their new Deliverer, from the least even unto the greatest. The Passover brought together the largest number of individuals to claim and consciously recognise their part in God's redeem-

ing grace and power, and because of its sense of all-embracing victory, millennial gladness, universal salvation, was better fitted to become the distinctive and enduring symbol of redemption, and express the mighty hopes of Jesus as He stood on the threshold of His passion, than any of the sacrifices of the altar.

What a peculiar attractiveness the thought must have had for Him that the Christian no less than the Jewish Passover would yet become a festival of undivided families! In this aspect it was a sublime and soul-solacing prefiguration of His hope. Not many hours ago he had spoken of Himself as one of the divisive and upturning forces of human life, setting a household against itself and unwittingly bringing about within the family, feuds bitter as death itself. But He looked beyond that, and saw all the families of the earth gathering together in tender joy and unbroken concord to celebrate His redemptive compassions and enter through His death into a higher and more unbroken fellowship even than that of the home. The picture is not always and everywhere realized. A grey-headed father is sometimes the only representative of his family at the Paschal feast. A wife or mother obeys the Lord's last request, but her husband and her sons and daughters are in very different scenes. When unbroken families present themselves at the table of the Lord, His eye is turned upon them with a benign approval which seems to say, "It was that upon which My heart was set when I made the Passover the sacrament of My death." To the thought of Jesus Christ this Jewish rite was a prophecy and an earnest of the salvation of households. If we belong to His circle and yet absent ourselves from the feast, we belittle the solemnity and postpone His magnificent hope. Jesus chose the Passover for adaptation to the uses of His Church because it demands from all who belong to the true Israel a glad and undivided confession of faith and love.

The Passover too was the sign and seal of covenant friendship between the people and their deliverer. In the background possibly there was some faint survival of the old Semitic idea of blood-kinship through common food. Eating and drinking are more than the signs of fellowship, for there may sometimes be fellowship that is superficial and not determined by deep-hidden affinities of thought and life. Whilst the Paschal blood offered before God in the temple is assumed to take away sin, the flesh from which that blood was spilt consecrates the participant for God's indwelling, and makes him a part of the very temple life which is enshrining God. By contrite and believing reciprocity Jesus Christ assures His disciples in this solemnity that they will come into true communion with Himself and His Father, and possess His unchanging presence in their pilgrimage.

The original celebration of the Passover was with shod feet, girt loins and staff in hand, so as to be ready for the sudden midnight call. These features of the rite disappeared in the after ages of Jewish history, but the temper of expectancy they represented is stamped upon the Christian Passover, for the Lord's dying must be celebrated till He appear the second time without spot unto salvation. Possibly, like the Jews of the after centuries, we have allowed the spirit of expectancy to disappear, and our celebration looks only to the past and forgets the future; but faith and love are always expectant, and we keep but a maimed and defective Passover when we forget the eager outlook of those who are called to "show forth the Lord's death *till He come.*"

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