

THE MANY MANSIONS IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE.

DEEPLY to be deplored is the current conception of the Father's house as

“ a lordly pleasure-house,
Wherein at ease for aye to dwell,”

to win a place in which is at best an aspiration for *the future*, an aspiration only *after death* to be realized, and ever intertwined in those who cherish it with a morbid self-pity for the intermediate discomfort and labour and lack of enjoyment. This idea has been embodied in so many hymns whose literary grace or apt musical setting has won them popularity, that the underlying interpretation of our Lord's discourse in John xiv. has become instinctive now and stereotyped, dominating the minds of even the most thoughtful, learned, and suggestive commentators. The following well-known hymns may be taken for examples :

“ When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.

“ Let cares like a wild deluge come,
And storms of sorrow fall,
May I but safely reach my home,
My God, my heaven, my all.

“ There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast.”

“ Mansions ” being placed in the skies, earth is excluded from the “ Father's house ” ; “ my home ” is conceived as out of present reach ; and the “ heavenly rest ” is an elysium of lotus-eaters.

“ One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er, —
I am nearer my home to-day
Than I ever have been before :

“ Nearer the great white throne,
Nearer the crystal sea,
Nearer my Father's house,
Where the many mansions be ;

“ Nearer the bound of life,
Where we lay our burdens down ;
Nearer leaving the cross,
Nearer gaining the crown.

“ But lying darkly between,
Winding down through the night,
Is the deep and unknown stream
To be crossed e'er we reach the light.”

Here, again, "my home" is described as at a present distance from us; "My Father's house" as beyond the bound of life, with the stream of death "lying darkly between." Life meanwhile on earth is irksome, dark, and melancholy, filled with longing to escape "the cross," and exchange it for an easeful "crown." Can "the cross" and "crown" be thus distinguished, separated, and contrasted?

"Thou art gone up on high
To mansions in the skies,
And round Thy throne unceasingly
The songs of praise arise.

"But we are lingering here,
With sin and care oppressed:
Lord, send Thy promised Comforter,
And lead us to Thy rest."

Again:

"As when the weary traveller gains
The height of some o'erlooking hill,
His heart revives if 'cross the plains
He eyes his home, though distant still;

"Thus when the Christian pilgrim views
By faith his mansion in the skies,
The sight his fainting strength renews,
And wings his speed to win the prize."

There is a strange tendency in this class of hymns to substitute the vague and impersonal "skies" for the tender image of "My Father's house"; to place the "many mansions" there, and tacitly assume them to be the destined abodes of the redeemed in the blissful hereafter.

Hymns are largely responsible for moulding and fixing theological conceptions in the popular mind, and it is through their influence that a certain definite meaning has been stamped upon our Saviour's words in John xiv. 2 *et seq.*, and the question is if that meaning is the true one.

A suspicion of its correctness must be instantly aroused on recollection of the words of St. Paul: "So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and *of the household of God*" (Eph. ii. 19); and this suspicion is confirmed when we mark the words which St. John has recorded, and the connection in which they are given.

The connection is with a warning to the disciples as to their present inability to follow the Saviour to the goal, now so close at hand, of His complete self-sacrificing love (xiii. 33); a charge to deepen their capacity of loving, and so to win their escape from those hesitating, shrinking, and calculating emotions of self which caused their present inability to follow Him fully to the end (vers. 34, 35); a promise, in answer to

Simon Peter's question, that the as yet lacking ability should at length be bestowed upon them (ver. 36); a crushing reply to the boastful self-confidence of Peter (vers. 37, 38), the severity of which was immediately alleviated by the cheering bidding that they look away from themselves up to God and His Christ. There was no need to sink into despair because "the flesh," through that weakness so soon to be realized by all of them, could thwart for the present the willingness of "the spirit": "Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in Me."

Then follow the words which are so generally and so deeply mistaken: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you," the true purport of which is a gracious, reassuring explanation of their present incompleteness of character, and of the method by which it would be remedied.

The rendering of *oikía* as "house" gives far too definite and limited a meaning. *Oikía* is distinguished from *oikos* as an entire *household*, or establishment, from a simple *house*, or dwelling-place. It is a word not intended to suggest the idea of an edifice, but rather what is termed in law *an estate*. It must not, therefore, be taken as "the spiritual and eternal antitype of the transitory temple." Neither is the image derived "from those vast Oriental palaces in which there is an abode not only for the Sovereign and the heir to the throne, but also for all the sons of the King, however numerous they may be." Allusion is not made to either temple or palace. To introduce any thought of a building is to make difficulty when mention is presently made of "the way," which is surely most inadequately explained as a passage from chamber to chamber, or ascent from court to court, in the Temple at Jerusalem. It is true that we read elsewhere in this Gospel (ii. 16) of "My Father's house," where the reference is undoubtedly to the material temple; but there the word employed is *oikos*. And the rendering of *μοναί* as "mansions" has had a mischievous effect on exegesis. The idea conveyed is wholly false. *Μονή* occurs again in the New Testament only in ver. 23. But *μένειν* (one of the characteristic words of St. John, in whose writings it appears more frequently than in all other books of the New Testament together) occurs with marked and exceptional frequency in this and the following chapter.

The connection of these frequent verbal forms with the twice used substantival is very suggestive. It leads one to suppose that each act of "abiding" that is mentioned will throw light on the meaning of the "abodes" in the Father's house, and why those abodes should be "many." This con-

nection has been obscured for English readers by the variety of rendering—*mansions* and *abode* for the substantive in the Authorized Version, *abide* and *dwell* for the verb. The revisers have brought little relief; for, while retaining the faulty word *mansions* in the text of xiv. 2, they give in the margin “or *abiding-places*”; but in ver. 23 they repeat, without alternative, the *abode* of the Authorized Version. *Abode* and *abiding-place* are not even equivalent terms.

The Latin version is consistent throughout in the use of *mansio*, *manere*. The *mansions* of our versions is a direct importation from the Latin, and a singularly unhappy one, for the English word has accumulated a meaning widely different from that of its Latin original.

It has been generally noticed, but the full value of the clue does not seem to have been appreciated, that *mansiones* is the word used in the Vulgate to denote *the camping-grounds* of Israel in the wilderness: “*Hæ sunt mansiones filiorum Israel, . . . quas descripsit Moyses juxta castrorum loca, quæ Domini jussione mutabant*” (Num. xxxiii. 1, 2).

Alike in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the word employed signifies no more than a halting-place, a stage of a journey. Very different is the English word “mansion,” with its acquired suggestion of solid endurance, permanence, and stately repose. No thought of the *μοναὶ πολλαὶ* as mere halting-places, breaks in a journey, stages of the soul’s progress, points whence fresh departure must be made, is conveyed by the English “many mansions,” and the very opposite of the true meaning is unhappily conveyed. A beautiful connection has also been lost between these *stations*, only temporarily occupied, and the mention immediately made of “the way,” which reminds us of “the way” by which Israel went to possess the Land of Promise—that way which was marked out by resting-places (*mansiones*), whose positions were determined by the pillar of fire and cloud, which controlled the host as to all its marchings and encampments (Exod. xl. 36-38; Num. ix. 17-23; Deut. i. 33); that way in which no long tarrying was at any time permitted, for ever, after a sufficient breathing space, another stage was set before them, until the final goal was reached. They were not led by the shortest or the easiest way, and though they were at times “discouraged” (Num. xxi. 4), there was a disciplinary purpose in their wanderings, which could only be accomplished by such diversified experience as from that of Elim, with its wells and palm-trees, where they “encamped by the waters,” to that of the wilderness of sin, and “Rephidim, where was no water for the people to drink”; and they were bidden to “remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee

these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep His commandments or no." There was a certain character to be formed in them, and to shape that to completeness was the object of their Divine Guide in leading them from one point to another; not always forwards, but sometimes also backwards, so that, under varied or repeated conditions, what was strong in them might be strengthened, what was faulty be corrected, what was weak be detected and exposed. It would all have been in vain if they had suffered the lessons which they thus had been taught to escape them, lessons of their strength and their weakness, and of their privilege of dependence on One who had ever proved Himself adequate to supply their every need, and deliver them out of all their distresses.

And to this school of the wilderness there answers now the school of Christ. For "the wilderness" the "Father's house" is substituted; but in the Father's house, as in the wilderness, there are "many halting-places." There is point after point to be reached by the soul in its progress; and for the untroubled ease, the unbroken rest, suggested by the "mansions" of the English versions, we are given really the thought of continual movement, a constant passage from one set of conditions to another, for the enrichment of life by experience, the clothing of the soul with fresh graces, and an ever deepening knowledge both of self and of God.

It is with us in the Father's house as with children in a school. It is not enough to be members of a school—mere enrolment makes them that, makes them heirs of all the school's traditions, subjects of its discipline, and all to be equally schoolfellows. But in each such school are many forms—forms through which to *pass*, not in which to *stay*, and which answer exactly to the so-called "mansions" in the Father's house. As there is a way to be made through the school, so there is a way through the Father's house, a constant going to be made from strength to strength (Ps. lxxxiv. 7), from grace to grace (John i. 16), and from glory to glory (2 Cor. iii. 18; see Rom. v. 3, 4, and 2 Pet. i. 5-8).

And so the halting-places are many, not "because men are many, and that there may be room for them all," nor yet because of the vastness of heaven, of the richness and variety of the life we are to live in it, but because the grace of God is "manifold" (ποικίλη, 1 Pet. iv. 10), and answers to the "manifold trials" (ποικίλοις πειρασμοῖς, 1 Pet. i. 6) by which the life is trained and disciplined, for the very sake of encountering which it is led, as was Israel, from station to station, from joy to sorrow, from poverty to plenty, from

security to trouble and anxiety, making at each stage a discovery of deficiency, and thus compelled to "grow in grace," until at length it be "perfect and entire, lacking in nothing."

It is surely a mistake to regard the phrase "My Father's house" as descriptive of the final, everlasting abode of the redeemed, for which they are now in a state of probation. It seems rather to refer to the here and the now, and mainly, but perhaps not exclusively, to those now in the flesh upon earth. And with this agree the words which follow, though they be generally, if not universally, taken as of totally different meaning: "I go to prepare a place for you" (*πορεύομαι ἐτοιμάσαι τόπον ὑμῖν*). We read again of this "place" in Rev. xii. 6, with an express declaration of its reference to the present position of the Church: "The woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God (*τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ*), that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and three score days." And for a strictly parallel passage in the story of the wanderings of the children of Israel, see Deut. i. 32: "The Lord your God went before you in the way, to seek you out a place (*ἐκλέγεσθαι ὑμῖν τόπον*) to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in the cloud by day."

But it may be thought that the words which next follow determine the reference to the eternal hereafter. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." It must, however, be observed that the coming promised is in the present, and denotes, therefore, not the final advent, but the continued, age-long, spiritual coming, which is promised again, and more fully described in vers. 15-21.

And "*where I am.*" Does this refer to the heavenly glory? It seems to be so taken in the popular hymn:

"Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
My Saviour, my eternal Rest;
Then only will this longing heart
Be fully and for ever blest."

But where was the Saviour *at the time of making this promise?* Was He not on earth, and beneath the very shadow of the cross? That, then, was the place where the disciples should be when the promised "power from on high" had invested them, and enabled them for the "fellowship of Christ's sufferings." That was where as yet they could not be (see Mark viii. 31-35, x. 32-39, xiv. 27-72. We may note also and specially the passage John xiii. 36-38, where the self-confidence of Peter and the predicted defeat of it seem to

give its immediate occasion to this present discourse. That was where, in His High-priestly prayer, Christ prayed that they might be (xvii. 24); that was where it was promised that they at length should be (xiii. 36); and where we find them to be in their subsequent history, able to endure all things for His Name's sake (Acts ii. 14 *et seq.*, iv. 16-21, v. 17-42, vi. 9-vii. 60, viii. 3, 4, xviii. 12-18, xx. 22-24; Rom. i. 14-15, vi. 6; Gal. ii. 20, v. 24; 2 Tim. ii. 9-13).

Nothing can be more clear than the witness that we cannot be with Him where He *now* is, unless we shall first have been with Him where He *then* was, when He held it out to His disciples as the prize of a higher attainment of grace that "where I am, there shall ye be also."

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THE JEWISH CLERGY IN ENGLAND.

DIFFERENT aspects of Jewish life in England are described from time to time in our periodicals, but there is one phase of the subject that has not yet received treatment anywhere. Its omission is all the more surprising considering the importance that attaches to it. The clergy is an institution inseparable from every civilized community, and the Jewish clergy of England has many points of interest, not only for the student of ecclesiastical affairs, but also for the social historian. The duties of the Christian minister are practically confined to religious activity. The fact that this is a Christian country is an advantage to the Christian cleric that he is perhaps unconscious of, for all its being so obvious; though, doubtless, in his pessimistic mood he will say that it is becoming an un-Christian country. He will, therefore, be able to appreciate to some degree the difficulty of the Jewish minister who works in an environment that does not tend to the preservation intact of Jewish religious life. But before we deal with the activity of the Jewish minister it will be best to describe the preparatory stages of his career, and the various species—so to speak—of which he consists.

The Jewish minister in England is a man either of English or foreign birth, who has received a special training at a theological seminary, and who, of course, employs English as his medium of speech; or a native of some foreign country, chiefly Russia, who ministers to his fellow-countrymen here with little knowledge of English, and therefore uses Yiddish, the language of the Pale, as his vehicle of communication.