

Very great and glorious that past has been, but that past will have failed to teach its lesson to us, that past will have failed to fulfil its mission in the will of God, if it binds men for ever in the chains of its institutional forms, if it has not made them ready for larger and completer things, and led them on to such a unity as Christ Himself, we must believe, longed for while He was here, and waits for now where He is gone.

The younger men—and I know their heart well—have their own day coming, and when their own day comes you may believe that that unity will be near. They do not believe that loyalty to their fathers who went before them means disloyalty to their sons who are to come after them. They believe in ringing out an old that has fulfilled its end, and ringing in the new and the larger things which are in God's will for His Church, if, like the path of the just, it is to shine brighter and brighter unto the fulness of the day.



## The Day of Atonement and the Vanished Ark.

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THE great atonement for sin under the Mosaic Law was the ceremonial of the Day of Atonement, which took place once a year on the tenth day of the seventh month. On that one day only of all the year was the high priest permitted to enter into the Most Holy Place, within the veil, before the mercy seat,<sup>1</sup> which was upon the Ark, where, shrouded in a cloud of incense, he was to sprinkle on the mercy seat the victims' blood, and make atonement for himself and all the people.

Now, this fast of the Day of Atonement is not mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel in connection with his ideal Temple, nor by

<sup>1</sup> A plate of pure gold forming the top or cover of the Ark. At each end of it were the two cherubims, their faces bowed over the mercy-seat, and their wings overshadowing it from on high (Exod. xxv. 17-21).

Nehemiah in chaps. viii. to x., where, as Dr. Driver says, "We possess a fairly circumstantial account of the events of the seventh month, B.C. 444,"<sup>1</sup> and from these silences the critics argue that the fast did not come into existence until some period after the Exile. But, so far as Ezekiel is concerned, it is a curious fact that if he does not mention the Day of Atonement, he is equally silent as to the Feast of Pentecost. In chap. xlv. 21 we find the prophet ordaining that in his ideal State and Temple the Feast of the Passover should be kept on the fourteenth day of the first month, and in ver. 25 he ordains that the Feast of Tabernacles should be kept for seven days in the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month; but he omits all mention of the third great feast—the Feast of Pentecost. But as the Feast of Pentecost is mentioned in what the Critics call "the earlier codes," they fully acknowledge that that feast was undoubtedly in existence in the time of Ezekiel. The silence, then, of Ezekiel as to the Feast of Pentecost would deprive his silence as to the Day of Atonement of any such significance as the Critics seek to put upon it.

In regard to Neh. viii. 9 even Dr. Driver himself writes :

"Whether, however, Neh. viii. 9 can be taken as showing that the Day of Atonement was not yet introduced in B.C. 444 must be regarded as uncertain. It is remarkable that in a detailed account of the days within which the rite, if observed, must have fallen, there is no mention of it; but the argument *e silentio* is always to be used with reserve."<sup>2</sup>

To the present writer it seems that it would be a most probable and a most natural supposition to make that the fast of the Day of Atonement temporarily ceased to be observed during the Exile and at a subsequent period was revived again. The observances of the Day of Atonement consisted of two parts: The high priest performed in the Temple the ritual of atonement for the people's sin, whilst the people on their part put themselves in touch with those ceremonies of atonement by fasting—the sign of penitence. But when, during the Exile, the atoning ceremonies in the Temple could no longer be

<sup>1</sup> Art. "Day of Atonement," Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible."

<sup>2</sup> "Leviticus" (1898), p. 80.

performed, the fast may well have been discontinued also, having lost its whole significance. The probability of this is heightened by the fact that no less than four new fasts were instituted during the Exile, commemorating some of the saddest of the events which occurred in the downfall of the nation—viz., the fast of the fourth month (17th Tammuz), commemorating the capture of Jerusalem; the fast of the fifth month (9th Abib), in memory of the destruction of the city and Temple by fire; that of the seventh month (2nd Tisri), commemorating the murder of Gedaliah; and that of the tenth month (10th Tibeth), in memory of the commencement of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. With such a wealth of fasts, so appropriate to their condition as exiles in Babylon, it may well have been that the fast of the Day of Atonement, which had for the time lost all its peculiar significance, ceased to be observed.

But what shall be said of the theory of the Critics that the ritual of the Day of Atonement, contained in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus, was drawn up for the first time in the period after the Exile? That ritual was much concerned with the mercy seat, the covering of the Ark; but in those post-exilic days both Ark and mercy seat had long vanished.

In the article on the word "Temple" in Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible" Professor T. W. Davies writes:

"It is inferred from Ezra iii. 12 and Haggai ii. 3 that the second Temple was greatly inferior to the first. But when these words were uttered the Temple was not finished, and the inferiority may refer to the absence of the Ark and other sacred vessels, which were for ever lost after the destruction of the first Temple. According to Bab. Talmud (Yoma 226), the second Temple wanted five things which were in that of Solomon: (1) The Ark, (2) the sacred fire, (3) the shechinah, (4) the Holy Spirit, (5) the Urim and Thummim. There was nothing in the *Debir*, according to Josephus ("Wars," v., v. 5), except that, according to the Mishna, the stone of foundation stood where the Ark used to be. Upon the Day of Atonement the priests used to put their censers on this stone. . . . Tacitus applies the words *inania arcana* to the *adytum*, or *debir*, of the Temple."<sup>1</sup>

The Ark, then, it would seem, was lost for ever when the

<sup>1</sup> "Hist.," v. 9.

Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C., and the Critics say that the fast of the Day of Atonement had not come into existence even as late as Ezra's time—that is to say, 444 B.C. In such case a period of more than 150 years would have elapsed between the time when the Ark was lost in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and the time when the ritual of the Day of Atonement was drawn up.

And yet that ritual, in its most solemn and essential part, was mainly concerned with the Ark and its covering, the mercy seat. The high priest was to enter the Most Holy Place with a censer of burning coals from off the altar and with incense in his hand, and at the moment when he passed within the veil he was to fling the incense on the censer, so that the sweetly-scented cloud of smoke might cover the awful mercy seat upon the Ark, lest he should die. And then he was to bear the victims' blood within the veil, and sprinkle the blood upon the mercy seat and before the mercy seat with his finger seven times. But in the days after the Exile neither Ark nor mercy seat were there; they had both vanished together.

What the Critics, then, expect to be believed is this: That after the Ark had ceased to exist for more than 150 years the priests of post-exilic times deliberately invented a novel ceremonial so closely connected with the Ark that, in the absence of the Ark, the most important points of its ritual could not possibly be observed. And it is to be particularly noted that this, according to the Critics, is not an instance of some old, disused, time-honoured institution being in later days revived. No; on the contrary, it is held to have been an institution perfectly novel, previously unknown. Kuenen writes:

“The Day of Atonement was a new institution, unknown alike to Ezekiel and P<sup>1</sup>, regulated, for the first time, in Lev. xvi.”<sup>1</sup>

How was it intended, we may ask, that the regulations prescribed in Lev. xvi. should be carried out? There was no Ark with its mercy seat which the cloud of incense should

<sup>1</sup> “Hexateuch,” p. 312.

cover ; no mercy seat upon which the high priest should sprinkle the blood of the victims.

We have seen from the passage quoted from Hastings' "Dictionary" that the Jewish tradition is that the priests in the times after the Exile used to make the best attempt in their power to comply with the ritual of Lev. xvi., by laying down their censer of incense on the stone within the Most Holy Place, which was supposed to mark the hallowed spot on which the Ark used to be. This would seem most natural, as the nearest possible way of complying with an ancient ceremonial, ordained when the Ark was in existence and the ritual could actually be carried out. But to suppose, in accordance with the critical theory, that the priests after the Exile should in cold blood deliberately institute a novel ritual, which, in consequence of the Ark having perished, they would only be able to pretend to comply with by a hollow subterfuge, would seem to be supremely unreasonable.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that the ritual of the Day of Atonement would appear of necessity to imply that the Ark was in existence at the time it was ordained ; for without the Ark its regulations could not be observed. We have seen also that the Ark would undoubtedly appear to have been lost for ever when the Temple was destroyed and the Jews were carried away into captivity in Babylon ; and hence it would result that the ritual of the Day of Atonement, which the Critics attribute to the latest period after the Exile, must have really belonged to pre-exilic times.

Needless to say, the "traditional" view maintains that the ritual goes back to the Mosaic Age.

<sup>1</sup> It is worthy of remark that the prophet Ezekiel—conscious, no doubt, that the Ark had vanished for ever—in prescribing the ritual for his ideal Temple, says not one word of Ark or mercy seat.

