

on the grass, He works a stupendous miracle just to satisfy their bodily wants; and altogether forgetful of his own weariness, He breaks the bread for his five thousand guests! And by the shore of this same sea we have an exact counterpart of this, though it is the Christ of the Resurrection who now appears. Just as a mother spreads the table and prepares the meal for her sons as they come home wearied with their bread-winning, so does He who comforts "as a mother comforteth." And as the Seven pull ashore, faint, weary, and disappointed, they see the smoke rising from the beach. Is it the smoke of the morning sacrifice? Yea, verily, but a sacrifice of a new order. The beach is the altar, the burning coals the fire, while the bread and fish are the sacrifice that the risen Christ is offering upon it to the needs of humanity.

The cross did not change the nature of Christ; it did not end his mission; it only lifted it up into a higher sphere. The outer dress, the humanity, was transformed, but the inner soul remained, as it will do through the æons of eternity—"this same Jesus.

HENRY BURTON.

A CHAPTER OF GOSPEL HISTORY.

5.—COMPLAINT AGAINST THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN.

(*St. Matt.* xi. 20-24.)

THE complaint of Jesus against the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done probably owes its place here to the First Evangelist's habit of grouping his materials topically. We cannot determine precisely when these words of upbraiding were

spoken ; for though the Third Evangelist also records them,¹ he does not assist us to fix their proper historical place. Uncertainty as to this point, however, is of no great consequence. Matthew's topical arrangement is in this case very acceptable ; for it brings together diverse judgments of our Lord upon the men of his time which are most profitably studied in one group. All that we need to know in reference to the historical connections of the complaint is its relation to the Galilean crisis, whereof an account is given in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. We may assume with great confidence that Christ uttered the words we are about to comment on after that crisis had occurred. This seems plainly implied in what is said concerning Capernaum in verse 23, whichever of the various readings of that text we adopt. On this assumption the preliminary description we gave in our first paper of Christ's judgment on the towns by the lake was correct. The words before us contain "severe reflections on the fickleness and instability of quondam believers in the cities of the plain, who had seen his mighty works, and for a time followed Him as the Christ." This remark applies chiefly to the people of Capernaum, concerning whom we know most ; but we cannot err greatly in assuming that the people of the other towns named more or less resembled their neighbours in their attitude towards Jesus and in their general religious character. For practical purposes the foregoing statement might be taken as a sufficient account of the remarkable utterance here recorded ; but there are some special points suggested by

¹ Luke x. 13-15.

a close inspection of the passage which it may not be without profit to consider a little more minutely.

1. The reference to Chorazin and Bethsaida as respectively the scene of many mighty works calls for a passing notice. It is curious to find recorded in two Gospels such a complaint as that made against these two towns, without any account of even so much as one of the mighty works on which the complaint was based. The fact suggests a variety of reflections—one very obvious one, which must occur to every mind, being the fragmentary character of the Gospel history. Here is Jesus complaining bitterly of certain towns where He had wrought many miracles, and doubtless preached the gospel of the kingdom; yet of all He said and did, not a single memorial remains—one of the towns complained of, Chorazin, being not even so much as mentioned again. How absurd, in presence of such a fact, to be sceptical regarding the historical character of narratives peculiar to the Fourth Gospel, such as the raising of Lazarus, because, forsooth, they are not found in the Synoptical Gospels; or to assert positively that the Synoptists knew of no visits to Jerusalem but the last, because they pass over in silence all previous visits, and the incidents connected therewith. Surely, if the first three Evangelists give us but a very fragmentary account even of the *Galilean* ministry, their chosen theme, we need not wonder that they entirely omit the *Jerusalem* ministry, with the exception of its closing scenes. That there was such a ministry even their records prove, and prove in the same way as they prove the ministry in Chorazin and Beth-

saida ; viz., by preserving a saying of Jesus relating thereto, a saying, moreover, like the one now under consideration, of the nature of a complaint. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"¹

2. A second point worthy of note in this passage is the precise nature of the complaint which our Lord is represented as making against the cities of the plain. It is that "they repented not." We should rather have expected it to have been that they believed not, or that they did not receive the kingdom as they ought to have done; for whereas the Baptist's great word was *Repent*, Christ's great word, on the other hand, was *Believe*; the difference being not accidental but characteristic, answering to the two eras to which the two great ones belonged respectively—the era of law and the era of grace—and to their respective ways of conceiving the kingdom: the Baptist conceiving of admission to the kingdom as the reward of obedience to the commandments, Jesus conceiving of the kingdom as a gift of grace to be conferred on all who were simply willing to receive it. We might evade the difficulty by ascribing the legal style of expression to the Evangelist rather than to Christ, regarding it simply as a convenient

¹ Matt. xxiii. 37. On the reflection suggested in the text, see Bleek's "Introduction to the New Testament," vol. i. p. 287, Clarke's translation.

phrase by which the narrator seeks to convey a general notion of the offence complained of, a phrase probably suggested by the use of the verb "repent" by Jesus Himself in speaking of Tyre and Sidon. But while this may be true as a matter of fact, we cannot go the length of saying that Christ could not or would not have used such language to characterize the sin of the people living by the lake; for we do not find that He eschewed the word repentance absolutely, though He certainly more frequently spoke of faith, and summoned men to believe when John would have summoned them to repent. According to the Second Evangelist, He began his ministry with a message calling men both to repentance and to faith. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom is at hand; repent ye and believe the good tidings."¹ Instead of throwing the responsibility for the expression, "They repented not," on the Evangelists, it is more satisfactory to try to form a right idea of what such a complaint would mean in case it were made by Christ Himself. We offer the following observations with this view.

The word *μετανοια* denotes a change of mind, and the change may either be radical, in reference to the chief end or aim of life, or in detail, in regard to this or that department of life. When Christ called men to repentance, He assumed that they were neglecting their chief end, and were living for subordinate, if not for intrinsically evil, ends as chief ends; and his call was essentially a summons to reconsider

¹ Mark i. 15; comp. Luke xiii. 3-5. In Matt. ix. 13 the reading *εἰς μετάνοιαν* is rejected by critics as a gloss. The original form of the saying was, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

the great question of the chief end and chief good of life, with a view to a radical change of mind thereanent. The call implied on his part a definite conviction as to what the chief end and chief good of man was; and if we ask what his idea was, the records of his teaching leave us in no doubt as to that point. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said to his hearers, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," or, according to another reading, "the righteousness and kingdom of your Father." Therefore his exhortations to repentance did not signify merely, Alter your ways wherever they are amiss; for, behold, the kingdom is at hand; but more definitely and precisely, Make the kingdom now at hand your *summum bonum* and first concern, in place of the things which heretofore have principally engrossed your attention. The former vaguer meaning corresponds more nearly to the sense in which the Baptist called men to repentance. His call signified, The King and the kingdom are near; I, as forerunner, announce to you their approach; set about mending your manners, that ye may be able to give them a worthy entertainment on their arrival. It was like a summons to the population of a great city, to which a monarch is about to make a royal visit, to have all nuisances removed, and to put on holiday attire, and to turn out into the street by way of demonstrating their reverence and loyalty. But when the King Himself came, his call to repentance did not mean, Put this or the other detail right; correct this or that bad habit. It was rather a summons to a radical change of mind, consisting precisely in this—a recognition of the kingdom as the most import-

ant matter that could engage their attention. Thus understood, Christ's call to repentance was simply the indication of an indispensable condition of citizenship arising out of the nature of the case. If the kingdom of God be the *summum bonum*, the highest conceivable object of human hope, and so Christ represented it,¹ and hence He called the proclamation of its advent a gospel, then it ought to be treated as such; and if men have not hitherto done that, to ask them to do it is, in other words, to summon them to repentance. But it is equally and at the same moment to summon men to faith. For faith meant just making the kingdom, as the Father's best gift, welcome, and he who did that, *ipso facto* repented of having made anything else his chief good and chief end. Hence we understand why Jesus said so much less about repentance than about faith. Faith, receptivity, is the proper state of mind in reference to a gift, boon, or gospel. Repentance is of course required, but it is involved in faith, and does not need, therefore, to be insisted on much as a separate and independent factor. It was otherwise in the case of the Baptist. He did require to insist on repentance, because he conceived of the kingdom not as a gift, but as a demand, and the proclamation of its coming by him was not *good* news but *awful* news, and the mental attitude required by such a proclamation was not receptivity, but fear and trembling, and penitential self-humiliation.

We can now see what the complaint against the

¹ Mark i. 15. "The kingdom of God is nigh; repent and believe in the good news," viz., that the kingdom is nigh. *Vide* also Luke viii. 1: "Shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God," *εὐαγγελιζόμενος τῆς βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.*

cities of the plain—that they repented not—if made by Jesus, must have meant. It did not imply that they were guilty of the sensual vices of Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, for it is evident that these cities are referred to as the *ne plus ultra* of wickedness, in comparison with which the people of the towns by the lake might deem themselves most exemplary. It need not have meant anything more or anything worse than that they did not give the kingdom of heaven that place in their hearts which was due to it—did not welcome it as the *summum bonum* and chief end of man. They had no doubt been very much interested in the “mighty works,” and had run after the Worker with eager curiosity and ardent admiration. Still, they remained what they had been before, greatly more concerned about food and raiment than about the kingdom in the true idea thereof. *In the true idea thereof*; for they had been greatly interested in a kingdom, the creature of their carnal worldly imagination, and had been enthusiastic about Christ so long as they fancied He was going to set up such a kingdom, and were even bent on *storming* the kingdom of heaven in the objectionable sense of establishing a secular kingdom and calling it the kingdom of heaven;¹ but when they found out their mistake, and learned that Christ had no such intention as they hoped, they lost all interest in Him and his movements, and turned away from Him in disgust. *In short, the state of matters there was just such as is depicted in the sixth chapter of*

¹ Dr. Reynolds, in his instructive work on John the Baptist, thinks it was stormers of this sort Jesus had in view when He uttered the words recorded in verse 12. *Vide* p. 429 of that work.

John's Gospel, where Jesus is represented as saying to his admirers who followed Him from the wilderness to Capernaum: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the signs, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled;" and addressing to them an exhortation which amounted to a call to repentance: "Busy not yourselves about the food which perisheth, but about the food which endureth unto everlasting life."¹

3. The main interest, and also the chief difficulty, of the passage we are now studying, lies in what Jesus said concerning *Capernaum*. There is a difficulty first as to the correct reading, some MSS., instead of the reading in the T. R. rendered in our English Testament "which art exalted unto heaven," giving a reading whose meaning in English is, "shalt thou be exalted to heaven?"² Modern critical editors generally prefer the latter reading, so that in their view what Christ said was, "And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted to heaven? (nay, rather) thou shalt be cast down to hades." Whichever of the two readings we prefer, the main fact of the case remains pretty much the same. Both versions of Christ's saying imply that Capernaum had undergone a very remarkable experience, presenting to view a striking contrast; first a great elevation or excitement of the religious feelings; then a marked and melancholy lapse into indifference. The only difference is that, if we take the received text, Christ made a categorical statement to the effect that Capernaum had undergone an exaltation, as it were,

¹ John vi. 26, 27.

² T. R. has ἡ ἕως οὐρανοῦ ὑψωθείσα. The other reading is μὴ ἕως οὐρανοῦ ὑψωθείσῃ. So also in Luke.

into heaven, in thought and feeling, in a temporary enthusiasm about the kingdom, and about Himself, the King; whereas, in the other reading, his words contain only an implied reference to a state of spiritual fervour, which, had it continued, would have led its subjects to heaven. The received text seems at first view the more natural; but perhaps if all the facts were known the feeling of strangeness connected with the other form of the saying would pass away. For example, what if in the question, "Shalt thou be exalted to heaven?" there be an allusion to a thought cherished and even expressed by the men of Capernaum in the time of their fervour, when the now neglected and forgotten One was popular with them, the idol of the hour in whose light they rejoiced? The kingdom of heaven is coming in its glory; Jesus of Nazareth is to be its king. He lives among us, He loves us, He has selected our town as his home; Capernaum is highly favoured already by the presence of the Great Prophet and Miracle Worker, and ere long it will be still more highly favoured. Low though it lies at the foot of these hills on the shore of the lake, it will be exalted to the position of metropolis in the new kingdom, holding the same place therein that Jerusalem occupied in the ancient kingdom of Israel. Yes, we shall be exalted even to heaven, as the city of the great King who has come to found the kingdom of heaven. Does this seem too wild a thought? Is it wilder than the *deed* ascribed to these same men by the Fourth Evangelist,¹ when he represents them as purposing to take Jesus by force to make Him a king? And if it seem ques-

¹ John vi. 15.

tionable whether Christ could thus go back upon a past idle dream of quondam disciples now turned apostates, in order to treat it with solemn irony, we can point to an instance of a somewhat similar procedure, in the manner in which He treated the guest who uttered the sentimental reflection, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."¹ Immediately after the guest had delivered himself of that pious commonplace, Jesus proceeded to speak the parable concerning a feast to which many were bidden, and which all the first invited excused themselves from attending; the connection of thought being: Say you so? Let me tell you what most men think of the kingdom of God and the bread which it supplies. The sentimental guest flattered himself that he appreciated the good things of the kingdom; and Christ, knowing how apt men are to deceive themselves in such matters, went on to shew him how little reliance could be placed on the interest in things divine which he and others took credit for. And that sentimental guest was in his spiritual state very like the men of Capernaum. They, too, thought and said: How blessed to eat bread in the kingdom of God; and prayed: "Lord, evermore give us this bread;" but when they understood that the bread of the kingdom consisted in the words of eternal life, "they went back and walked no more with him." If the men of Capernaum, flattering themselves that they sought the kingdom of God with all their heart, said, "We be, or we are about to be, exalted to heaven, happy people we," how natural that when events had shewn the hollowness of their

¹ Luke xiv. 15.

zeal, Jesus should say: "To be exalted to heaven—was that the object of your hope and ambition? Behold, ye shall be cast down to hades."

4. But was not that an awful thing to say, even of apostates? It was; and naturalistic writers on the Gospel history, who cannot believe in a miracle physical or moral, and therefore not in a sinless Jesus, can easily make plausible use of these woes and denunciations to establish against the Holy One a charge of passionateness and hardness or inhuman severity.¹ Some who may be able to bear the stern Philippic against Pharisaism recorded in Matthew xxiii. may be scandalized by the extreme bitterness of these woes against the cities of the plain, and ask, Was it not inhuman thus to denounce poor ignorant villagers for an instability in religious affection which is all too common a fault of frail human nature? But before rushing to such a conclusion, one would need not only to read the words, but to hear the tones in which they were spoken. We know with what heart-melting accents of pity the lament over Jerusalem was uttered. What the objective import of those woes on the cities of the plain may be we presume not to determine, but of this we are sure: they are not more awful than the words of doom pronounced upon the holy city: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" Yet Jesus wept when He uttered this fate-fraught sentence; and is it too much to assume that the *woes* were spoken with the

¹ Keim (*Geschichte Jesu*, iii. 649) charges Jesus with these faults of temper, quoting in proof of passionateness the invectives against the Pharisees, and in proof of hardness his bearing towards his mother (John ii.), towards John the Baptist (Matt. xi.), and towards the Syro-phenician woman (Matt. xv. 21).

same infinite sadness of a heart filled with divine love that would have saved, and with divine pity over those who would not be saved? What difficulty is there in believing that Jesus, on some unknown occasion, stood on the heights above the lake of Gennesaret, and looking down on the scenes of his recent ministry, felt just as He afterwards felt when, from the summit of Mount Olivet, He looked down on the Holy City?

But why then, is it asked, those comparisons between the cities of the plain and the cities of the Dead Sea and of the Mediterranean coast? Why, we reply, those comparisons at another time between the men of Nineveh and the men of that generation?¹ The purpose of all these comparisons was not deliberately and in cold blood to enhance the guilt of the persons complained of, but to express the grief and vexation and keen disappointment of patriotic love. It gave the Saviour no pleasure to speak such words. Fidelity to his vocation as a prophet required Him to speak the word of doom, but the word of the Lord was a heavy burden to his spirit. Fidelity, we say, required Christ to utter these woes, just as at other times fidelity required Him to hold up to reprobation the vices of hypocrisy, pride, and tyranny, characteristic of Pharisaism. For He was the Incarnation of Truth as well as of Grace; and it *is true* that apostasy is a damnable sin, and sinks those guilty of it into lowest depths of depravity and wretchedness. All prophets and apostles agree

¹ A similar comparison occurs in Matt. x. 15, "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for that city." The repetition of such phrases suggests the idea of a proverbial usage.

in declaring this truth. See, *e. g.*, in what terms the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of those who have been enlightened and have fallen away. He declares that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, and that their end is that of the land which beareth only thorns and briars. And observation and experience justify the statement. It is matter of fact that, the deeper religion has gone into a man, the more hopeless is his state if he apostatize. The brighter the light in the soul, the deeper the darkness when the light is put out; the sweeter the manna of God's Word to the taste, the more loathsome it becomes when it loses its relish; the brighter the fire on the hearth while the fuel lasts, the more certainly when it goes out it will leave nothing but ashes.¹

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¹ Another point that might excite some surprise is the importance attached to miracles (*δυνάμεις*) as persuasives to repentance, a fact all the more surprising when it is considered what convincing evidence had been supplied in the cities of the plain of the impotence of miracles to produce a radical moral change. But our Lord's words merely imply that the abundance of miracles wrought among the men of Capernaum sufficed to shew what sort of men they were. Remaining unimpressed in presence of such mighty works, they were tested and proved to be men of worldly unbelieving heart. In asserting that miracles would have had more effect in Sodom, Jesus indirectly taught that the persuasive power of miracles is not of the highest order. Miracles would probably have produced a greater effect in Sodom than in Capernaum, just because the men of Sodom were in a ruder moral condition, even as, for the same reason, they had a greater effect in Samaria than in Jerusalem.
