

THE GOSPEL TO THE GREEKS.

John xii. 20-36.

IV.—THE PREDICTION.

“*And I, if I be lifted from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*” (Verse 32.)

THESE sacred words are so familiar to us that in all probability they no longer leave a sharp and vivid impression on our minds, although, however often we read or listen to them, we can hardly fail to be conscious of a certain greatness in them and a certain grace. Taken in their general connection, they are evidently a supreme illustration of that law of *life by death* which our Lord had been enforcing; they remind us that He Himself was about to obey, as He always had obeyed, the law which He had just affirmed to be an inevitable condition of discipleship—to save his life by losing it, to die that He might bring forth much fruit, to pass, by the way of the Cross, to the eternal home of the spirit, to humble Himself that He might be exalted. And, taken thus even, the words are full of power, full of pathetic appeal; for who ever flung away his life so generously as He, or saved it so nobly, inasmuch as He saved not Himself alone, but the whole world? Or from whose death has there ever sprung a harvest so fruitful, so vast, and so enduring?

I. But it is when we come to consider the words in themselves, and in their more immediate context, that we catch some glimpse of the full orb of their meaning; for then we see that they contain, not a single prophecy, but a fourfold prediction. They predict (1) the death of the Cross; but they also predict (2) the ascension into heaven. They predict (3) the extension of the kingdom of God from the Jewish to the Gentile world; but they also predict (4) the final triumph of good over evil throughout the universe. If, therefore, the Gentiles received but one prophecy directly

from the lips of Christ, we may at least say of it that it is *one* which includes *all*, one which sums up the whole series of visions vouchsafed whether to Hebrew or to Christian seers.

(1) These words predict, first of all, *the death of the Cross*, though, instead of parading, they veil and extenuate its horrors; speaking of it as a "mere lifting up from the earth," and so making the Cross itself an instrument of elevation rather than an implement of torture and shame. Now we do not always recognize the prophetic power displayed by our Lord Jesus in foretelling "by what manner of death he should die." He had long known that the Jews would put Him to death. It needed no prophet to forecast *that* perhaps, when once their bitter enmity had been aroused; for which of the servants of God had they not rejected and slain? But *crucifixion* was not commonly inflicted, even by the Romans, except on traitors or slaves; while, among the Jews, an apostate, an offender against the sanctity of the Temple or the authority of the Law, was stoned. There was, therefore, an indubitable element of prediction in our Lord's habitual foreboding that He should be "crucified," that He should be lifted up to bear our sins in his own body on the tree.

(2) Nor was it only his crucifixion which He foretold. Behind and beyond that shameful elevation, He saw a glorious ascension into heaven. Literally rendered, his words run, not "if I be lifted up *from* the earth," but "if I be lifted up *out of*, or *above*, the earth"; and in this peculiar phrase, whatever its first intention may have been, all the great critics find a reference to his resurrection from the dead and his assumption to the right hand of God, as well as to the peculiar manner of the death by which He was to glorify God. There is here, therefore, a splendid example of his faith in the love and justice of his Father, and of his prophetic insight into his Father's will. Must not He have been in very deed a Seer who could foretell an

event so improbable, so incredible to human wisdom, as that One who was so soon to perish on the cross of a slave should rise from the grave in which they laid Him, and ascend the throne of the universe? Must not He have been a veritable prophet who could foresee that death, so far from putting a period to his life, would but enhance the power of his life, and that the obloquy of the Cross, instead of making Him of no reputation, would only minister to and swell his glory?

He who predicted his own death, then, and even the manner of his death, also predicted his triumph over death, and his ascension into heaven; and if the former prediction indicated but a comparatively low measure of the prophetic energy, it must be admitted that in the latter we have a splendid and illustrious proof of his prophetic foresight and energy. Yet even this latter prediction pales before the glory of those that follow it. For our Lord proceeds to foretell the results of his death, and of his triumph over death, the effects of his being lifted up *from* the earth, and of his being lifted up *out of* and beyond the earth.

(3) One result will be, He says, that He will draw *all* men, without distinction of race—both the Jews who had rejected Him and the Gentiles who were ignorant of Him—unto Himself. And what could have seemed more improbable, more incredible than that? Who but He could have seen in the crucifixion of a Galilean peasant, against whom the whole world, Hebrew and heathen, had conspired, the signal of a religious revolution which should cover the whole world, and lift and bind its scattered and hostile races into one new and perfect manhood?

When these Greeks came to Him, when He learned that they had “decided” to cast in their lot with Him, He saw in them the ambassadors of all the Gentile races, and exclaimed, “Now is the Son of man glorified!” for it was his “glory” to be the Saviour not of one nation only, but of all

nations. We have grown so familiar with this "glory" of his that we do not easily realize either how much that incident must have meant for Him, or how much the inclusion of Greeks in his kingdom involved. The whole set of his time was against any such inclusion. The whole course of history had been against it for two thousand years. Through all those centuries God had had an elect people to whom, to whom exclusively, He had confined the direct and immediate disclosures of his will. Was this Divine habit to be changed all in a moment? Could it be that the unique grace so long shewn to the Jews was now to be extended to all mankind? True, God had elected Israel only that Israel might be his minister to mankind, only that in the seed of Abraham He might store up a blessing for all the families of the earth. True, too, that our Lord Himself had never called Himself "Son of Abraham," or "Son of David," though He had not flatly rejected these names when they were conferred upon Him, but had only suggested the qualifications without which they would be inadmissible (John viii. 58; Matt. xxii. 43-45); but, as if with some prevision of the universality of his mission, had habitually called Himself "the Son of man," *i.e.* the Son of Humanity at large, from the first. But, in the pride of its election, Israel had long forgotten the end for which it was elected. And, as we have seen, there had been a time even in the public ministry of the Son of Man when He Himself had thought that He was not sent "save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and had learned with joy and wonder, from the generous and immutable faith of a poor Syrophenician woman in the all-embracing love of God, that even the Gentile dogs under the table of Israel might at least eat of the crumbs which fell from a table so bountifully spread.

Now a conviction so ancient, so deeply rooted and widely spread, as this belief in the incommunicable immunities and

privileges of the elect people, was not to be lightly shaken, however high the authority and however noble the spirit in which it was assailed. If we would measure its strength and inveteracy we must mark how long it resisted even the authority of Christ Himself, and held out against the power and the pleadings of the very Spirit of God. When Peter was convinced that no man was common or unclean, and therefore that no man, or caste, or race could any longer claim special and exclusive privilege in the kingdom of God or any Divine election save an election to serve their fellows, he found it no easy task to convert the Church, or even his brother apostles, to his own new faith in the universal love of God. Some of the apostles—James, for instance—were never more than half converted to it. A large section of the primitive Church—the Hebraists, as they were called—were never converted to it at all, but made the life of the Apostle to the Gentiles bitter to him by their uncompromising hostility to the new generous Gospel he preached. Nay, it may be doubted whether half, and the larger half, of the Christian Church has been converted to it to this day: for how can *they* be said to believe in the Love which holds no man common and therefore no man sacred, no man unclean and therefore no man clean, who pride themselves either on an election unto life from which the bulk of their fellows are excluded, or on possessing, even if they do not themselves pertain to it, a sacred priestly caste which alone can mediate between earth and Heaven and bring men near to God?

All the more wonderful was it that, in the face of this ancient and potent tradition—this claim to be in some way dearer to God than “the rest,” which seems to live in our very blood—the Lord Jesus should predict, even before He died, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw *all men* unto myself,” without distinction of race or caste or function. If, for our sins, the prophecy is only fulfilled in part even yet, we

can only the more admire the penetrating prophetic glance which could look through long centuries to a time still to come, when all the world shall recognize its equal and common humanity, and rejoice in the Love which embraces and redeems us all.

(4) Even yet, however, we have not exhausted this marvellous prediction, have not followed it out to its full scope. For just as behind the death of the Cross Jesus saw the resurrection and ascension into heaven, so behind and beyond the extension of his kingdom from the Jews to the whole Gentile world, he foresaw, and foretold, the final triumph of good over evil.

When He had heard the great voice out of heaven which assured Him that, as God had glorified Him in his work among the Jews, so also He would glorify Him again in his still greater work among the Gentiles, He cried, "Now is a judgment" (*i.e.* "There is now a judicial crisis") "of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out;" while in the next breath He adds, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself." Evidently, therefore, He implies a contrast between Himself and the Prince of this world, and their several destinies.

Who, then, is this Prince? "Prince of this world" was a recognized Jewish title for Satan whom, in their pride of place and election, they regarded as the god and ruler of the Gentile world, in contradistinction to Jehovah, whom they regarded as *their* King alone. And there was sufficient truth in this conception to warrant our Lord in adopting it, though we may be sure that He held God to be the Lord and King of all men, and not of the Jews only. For if "devil" be but "evil" written large, if Satan be the personification of, or the name we give to, the Principle of Evil, then a world so grossly wicked as was the civilized world of antiquity, may be very truly said to have been under his dominion.

It is this evil Prince, or Principle, of whose downfall from the seat of power Jesus finds a signal in the extension of his kingdom to the Gentiles. It is this Prince whom He Himself is destined to replace. Jesus Himself will henceforth be the Lord and Ruler of the Gentiles, in the same sense in which the Jews had held Jehovah to be their Lord and Ruler. But though He is to displace the Prince of this world, He will not be, as the Jews expected Him to be, only another and a better Prince of the world. He is to be lifted out of, and above, the world. To Him the elevation to the cross—the throne of love, is but an emblem of his elevation to heaven—the throne of power. From thence He will *draw* men, draw them by the sweet and healthy influences, by the gentle compulsions, of the love He has shewn for them and revealed to them, until at last they shall “all” come to Him, and be changed into his image, clothed with his righteousness, crowned with his glory. And this word, “*all* men,” is not to be limited in any way by our poor conceptions of what his love and power can do. It does not mean simply—as even Dr. Westcott, one of our most learned and orthodox commentators, confesses—that He will draw Gentiles as well as Jews; but that He will draw *all* Jews and *all* Gentiles unto Himself. It means nothing less than St. Paul means when, having just charged the Jews with their long rebellion against God, and the Gentiles with their long and hardy violation of his laws, he nevertheless concludes that “*the fulness of the Gentiles*” shall be brought into the kingdom of heaven, and that “*all* Israel shall be saved;” what he means when he also affirms that God has convicted all men of disobedience only “that He may have mercy on all.”

So that the scope of this great prediction is very wide. It is charged with the music of an eternal hope. It presses on through century after century, age after age, unfulfilled, or only fulfilled in part, and never tires nor rests until it

closes in the full diapason of a redeemed humanity, a regenerated universe. It conducts us from the travail of the Cross to that supreme moment when, seated on the throne of an universal dominion, Christ shall "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

II. Thus far, then, it has been our endeavour to bring out the immense scope of this prediction, to shew how far it reaches, how much it contains and involves. And though it would be easy to say much more on a theme so vast, perhaps enough has been said to give some inkling of the weight and variety of its contents. But in this prediction an argument is implied which has still to be indicated, however slightly and imperfectly.

We cannot read the verse attentively without asking, What was there in the lifting up of Christ to produce results so vast and so far-reaching as those which He foresees from it and foretells? In reply to that question, we point out, (1) that there is a kind of parable in the words themselves, very simple, indeed, but very suggestive. Christ was *lifted up*, that He might be the better seen; He was raised above the crowd of men, that the crowd might gaze upon Him. He was lifted up *on the cross*, that men might see how much He was willing to do and to bear for them. He was lifted up *into heaven*, that He might be able to bear and to do still more for them. Lifted up above all men by the tragic splendour of his death, lifted still higher by the victorious splendour of his resurrection from the dead, He commands at least the attention, if not the homage, of the whole world.

(2) Before He could hope to draw *all* men to Himself, He must lose the local, the Jewish, form He wore, and assume the form of the perfect, the universal, man; Jesus of Nazareth must be shewn to be the Christ of God. So long as He remained a Jew, a son of Abraham, a son of David, after the flesh, He might be, but He could hardly

be recognized as, in very deed the Son of *Man*. So long as He wore flesh about Him, He could only be seen, heard, felt by as many as gathered round Him, beheld his works, listened to his words. Before He could become a quickening Spirit to the whole human race, He must be released from all these local and national limitations, and assume a form of being which would bring Him at least as near to every man as He was to the citizens of Jerusalem or the peasants of Galilee; a form of being which would make Him as present (and a thousandfold more vital and potent) to the men of every age, as He had been to the men of his own generation. And it was only by dying in the flesh, and rising in the spirit, and carrying his glorified humanity to the throne of heaven, that He could break away from all these local bonds, all these temporal limitations, and shew Himself to be the Lord and Saviour of all.

(3) The rejection of Jesus by the main body of the Jews, of "his own" to whom He came, seems to have been a necessary condition of the deposition of the elect Israel from its pride of place and privilege; while his acceptance by his Jewish disciples and by representatives of the great Gentile world seems to have been a necessary condition of the fulfilment of the great promise to Abraham and his seed, that, in them, all the families of the earth should be blessed, the natural and ordained means of carrying forth that blessing into and throughout the world at large.

(4) But, of course, the great argument in this passage is, that in the Cross we have the revelation of a Love too large and divine to be confined to one race, or even to one world. If in the lifting up of Christ from the earth on the tree we have, as we believe and know that we have, the crowning disclosure and proof of the redeeming love of God for man, of a Love which could be alienated by no sin and would not alter even "where it alteration found," a Love that would stop at no sacrifice by which men could be reconciled to

the Father against whom they had sinned, and brought back to their life in Him, then, surely, the Lord Jesus might well hope that, by revealing such a love as this—a love so generous, so free, so pathetic, so divine—He should draw all men to Himself; and by drawing them to Himself draw them back to his Father and our Father, to his God and ours.

And (5) when He was lifted up not only *from*, but *out of* the earth, when He, who died by and for our sins, was raised from the dead, raised into heaven, was He not declared to be the Son of God *with power*? Did not the God who raised Him up set his seal of approval to his atoning and reconciling work? Did He not authenticate the revelation of forgiving and renewing love which Christ had made, and avow that love to be his own? But if in very deed God so loved us as to give his Son to die for us, that by the power of his death we might be quickened into our true and eternal life, and if that love did not cease at the Cross, but still sheds down its quickening and renewing influences from heaven, ought not that love to reach its end? *Can* a love, “so amazing, so divine,” fail to reach its end? Must not every man, sooner or later, see and feel that love? And can any man who really sees and feels it, any man who really believes that God *so* loved *him*, fail to be “drawn” by it, and to respond to it?

On the whole, then, I do not see how any man is to study this Gospel to the Greeks, to reflect on what is conveyed and implied in the Parable, the Paradox, the Promise, and the Prediction of which it is composed, without acknowledging that it contains “infinite riches in little room;” that into these four brief sentences the Lord Jesus has compressed the whole substance of the Gospel which He preached at large among the Jews, all that is essential whether to faith, to hope, or to charity. S. Cox.