

*THE LIFE OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.*¹

XIV. THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND, III. 1-6.

THE sayings of Jesus as to the Plucking of the Ears of Corn show that He was not merely a mystic or a popular orator, but a careful thinker and skilful in dialectic. He acted on rational principles, and could justify Himself to inquirers, critics, or opponents. They also bring out another fact which is still more forcibly illustrated by the present incident: although Jesus was attacking the tenets of the Pharisees, He thought He might convert them to His views, and subdue them to His authority.

It was already clear that Jesus was an enemy of the Law as it was interpreted by tradition; but, in order that they might take action against Him with the assurance of success, the Pharisees needed convincing evidence of some notable breach of the Law on His part. Accordingly, they chose a Sabbath when Jesus would be in the synagogue, and arranged that there should be present a man with a withered hand; they themselves also attended to see what Jesus would do. It was a public challenge, which shows how completely Jesus was understood to have committed Himself to lax views on the Sabbath. There was no urgency about a withered hand that seemed to call for a relaxation of law. Probably, under ordinary circumstances, Jesus would not have chosen the day of rest for healing this man. But now the sufferer might cherish hopes of immediate relief, and Jesus would not disappoint him. Moreover, if He had declined the challenge, He would have seemed to

¹ These studies do not profess to be an adequate historical and doctrinal account of Christ, but are an attempt to set forth the impression which St. Mark's account of our Lord would make on a reader whose only source of information was the Second Gospel, and who knew nothing of Christian dogmatics.

endorse the authority of the Pharisaic tradition, and He was more concerned to break the bondage of ritual than to draw fine distinctions as to what might or might not be done on the Sabbath. Accordingly, he bade the man stand forth, and turned to the scribes, and said :

“ Is it right on the Sabbath to confer a benefit, or to inflict an injury, to save life or to kill ? ”

His critics were silent ; the synagogue was crowded with devoted followers of Jesus, and it is waste of breath to argue with a popular hero surrounded by his admirers. He looked round on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, astonished and grieved to the point of anger that there should be men so callous as to set the exact observance of a ceremonial law above the happiness, even for a few hours, of a fellow-creature. But this was not all ; Jesus would hardly have been so astounded at the familiar callousness of fanatics. His words were a personal appeal, tender with chivalrous sympathy, burning with righteous enthusiasm, and energized by the indwelling Spirit of God ; and against all these the scribes had hardened their hearts.

The Pharisees had made their challenge ; Jesus had replied by His appeal ; and this had been rejected. So, without further delay, Jesus accepted the challenge ; He bade the man stretch forth the withered hand, and as he did so it became natural like the other. The Pharisees were satisfied ; they had an overt act of disobedience to the Law, committed in the presence of many witnesses ; and forthwith they went out to consider how they might use this advantage. They now called to their councils a party of whom we read for the first time, the Herodians, or partisans of the Herods. Usually the Pharisees and the Herods were at variance with each other ; but by this time the influence of Jesus in Galilee was a danger to the government, and the Herodians were ready to ally themselves with the Pharisees against the common enemy.

XV. THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF JESUS, III. 7-12.

To avoid the dangers threatened by this alliance, Jesus and His disciples left the town and withdrew to the shores of the lake. The next few verses give a brief account of the influence and activity of Jesus ; crowds flocked to Him, not only from Galilee, but also from Judaea and Jerusalem, from Idumaea, from the regions east of the Jordan, and from the territory of Tyre and Sidon. The great attraction was His gift of healing. The sick and the demoniacs "fell upon Him," hustled and jostled Him, so that in order to continue His teaching, He was obliged to address the crowds from a boat on the lake at a little distance from the shore. The demoniacs continually hailed Him as the Son of God, in spite of constant attempts to silence them.

XVI. THE CALLING OF THE TWELVE, III. 13-19.

The success of Jesus involved Him in many difficulties ; the hatred of His enemies was rendered more violent, and He was hampered by the inconvenient importunity of His admirers. The multitudes that constantly gathered round Him and followed Him were a danger to public order, and a hindrance to the preaching of the Kingdom. Jesus now sought to lessen this embarrassment, and at the same time to provide for more effective preaching on a larger scale. He had already specially called five disciples ; He now chose twelve, to whom He gave the special name of Apostles ; they were to follow Him, and also at times to go forth and preach and cast out demons. No doubt, at the same time, Jesus dismissed His miscellaneous followers to their homes, there to live according to His teaching, and to be ready to obey any further instructions they might receive from Him. His personal following, indeed, would not be always limited to the twelve, nor would all the twelve always be with Him ; fresh crowds gathered from time to time. But the twelve were the official representatives of the Kingdom ;

they limited the responsibility of Jesus, and enabled Him to promulgate definite teaching.

The list includes the four fishermen who were first called; and, although the tax-gatherer Apostle is not mentioned as Levi, we should naturally suppose, even without any additional information, that he is present in the list under another name. Of the four original disciples, three receive new names, partly to mark the solemnity of their vocation, partly to distinguish them from new members of the brotherhood who bore the same names. Simon was surnamed Peter, *petros*, "rock," in token, as we should suppose, of his strength, firmness, and determination, and to distinguish him from another Simon, the Cananaean or Zealot, one of a class of patriotic fanatics eager to peril life and liberty for Israel and the Law. The sons of Zebedee, James and John, were surnamed Boanerges, which, according to St. Mark, means "Sons of Thunder," perhaps men of a fiery and impetuous spirit, endowed with the eloquence natural to their character. The original four stand at the head of the list, and, first of all, Peter, but his brother Andrew is placed fourth; clearly he was less important than James and John, whose names intervene. Last of all comes Judas, the Man of Kerioth, branded as the Traitor, but as yet no shadow of coming treachery had fallen upon the mind of Judas, or of his fellow-Apostles, or of his Master.

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(To be continued.)