

NOT PEACE, BUT A SWORD.

THE following observations are intended to suggest reasons for believing that a Saying of Jesus, which grates on the modern ear as a specially "hard" one, conveys in reality a message of strength to all whose hearts fail them "for expectation of the things which are coming on the world." The Saying is that recorded in Matthew x. 34, "Think not that I came to send peace on the earth : I came not to send peace, but a sword."

The personal characteristic of our Lord's human nature that has most impressed the imagination of mankind is His gentleness. His gracious invitation, "Come unto me"—reinforced by the assurance "for I am meek and lowly in heart"—has always appealed to those "that labour and are heavy laden" as having in it a ring of sincerity; few, even of those that reject the Speaker's call, deny the truth of His claim.

When St. Paul would repress the self-assertion of the Corinthians, he entreats them "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ," a sure proof that the Gospel story current then reflected the same character of Jesus as that current now. More than this, the life and teaching of Jesus has revolutionised the ethical standard of the most advanced nations. What had been thought a slavish vice—long-suffering, forbearance, meekness—is, according to St. Paul, the one and only means of advance towards the perfection of the human family designed by God; and the power of gentleness is recognised by the most honoured of the world's ethical teachers. This point need not be dwelt on further; enough has been said to shew that there is a contrast which demands explanation, or which is at least worth consideration, between the manner in which Jesus, in His ministry

on earth, dealt with men personally, and the tone of this Saying.

The solution of the problem raised by this utterance will be found, I believe, in a recognition of the necessary difference which is reasonably to be expected between the manifestation of the Christ in His life as a Man amongst men, and the manifestation of the Christ as a force in the life of the world, a force which we commonly call Christianity, or Christian principles, but which is concretely the Church, the Body of Christ, through which the Person of Christ influences the world, the medium chosen by Him for His self-expression.

No examination of the Saying in *Matthew* can be considered complete or satisfactory that does not take account of the form given to it in *Luke* ; the saying belongs to the very ancient Gospel source used independently by *Matthew* and *Luke*, a tradition of primordial antiquity.

In *Luke* we read: "I came to cast fire upon the earth ; and what will I, if it is already kindled ? [*or*, how I wish that it were already kindled !]. But I have a baptism to be baptized with ; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished ! Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth ? I tell you, Nay ; but rather division." And then follows, as in *Matthew*, the detailed account of family strife, taken from the Book of Micah.

We shall use, as we are entitled to use, the fuller form of the Saying as given in *Luke* to explain the shorter form as given in *Matthew* ; and, when we compare them, we are at once struck by the indications in *Luke* of the humanity of the speaker, of humanity in both senses of the term : His possession of natural human instincts, and His sympathy, His sharing in the sufferings of which He is the agent. Neither of these indications of humanity is expressed in *Matthew*.

Taking up these points seriatim, we may note in the first

place that there is no cause for wonder if One who perfectly shared our nature also felt, as we feel instinctively, in regard to a horrible and inevitable future experience, a longing to have it over : How I wish that the fire were kindled ! How I wish that My own baptism of agony and blood were accomplished !

Again, we observe that whereas in *Matthew* we hear only of the consequence to the earth of the casting on it the sword of division, in Luke's version we see that the Lord clearly foresaw that the same future hour which would bring sword and fire to the earth would bring to Himself the baptism of the death of the body, that baptism and cup which on another occasion He set before the two disciples who were ambitious of high place in His kingdom.

We have here no demagogue firebrand, no agitator for anarchy blinded by the intoxication of power to the misery and ruin he has been permitted to effect ; but we thankfully learn how the true Prophet, with kind wisdom and wise kindness, dispels His disciples' delusive hopes of peace, and declares His own share in the educative sufferings of men, His brethren.

Furthermore, we learn from *Luke* that the casting of fire upon the earth, the sending of a sword or division into human society, was not an action of the earthly ministry of Jesus ; it was to be coincident in time with that baptism of death which was to set Him free for a larger and wider exercise of power than was possible to " the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee " : " How am I straitened," He says, " till My baptism be accomplished ! " How I am held, hemmed in, by the temporary limitations of the first phase of the Incarnation !

This last consideration is in harmony with the solution which I suggested at the outset, viz., that the Saying is relative not to the earthly ministry of Jesus, but to His sub-

sequent work in human society, a work in present operation, a work continuous from the day of Pentecost until that day when "the kingdom of the world shall have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."

This is in fact one of the sayings of Jesus which have no meaning if He were a prophet and nothing more. The words are spoken from the standpoint of Him who said, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"; of Him who said, "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Here the Christ of the Church makes an announcement about the manner of His working in the world until the end of time.

But some one will say, Is not the promotion of peace the special function of the Christ? Is not peace and tranquillity in the world of nature and in human society the characteristic of the Messianic age on which the prophets most lovingly dwell? Is not the Messiah styled the Prince of Peace? Did not the angelic host in their song connect His nativity with "peace on earth"? Is it not then somewhat of a shock and a disappointment to hear Him say, "Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword"?

This line of thought is natural enough; but as an argument against our acceptance of this hard saying it is only plausible because of common misconceptions as to the nature of peace.

Peace is relative to life, not to death. "They make a desert and they call it peace," was the bitter sarcasm of the German chieftain on the civilising operations of the Roman Government. Stagnation is not peace. The brook that runs chattering through a daisied meadow is more suggestive of peace than is the scum-covered pool which no ripple stirs. The silence of death is not peace. Rather we feel peace in the hum of orderly life, in the harmonious work-

ing of forces, the conflict of which is a conceivable possibility. And this suggests the bracing thought that struggle and conflict of some sort are necessary conditions of peace, just as the activities of a wakeful day are the normal pre-conditions of a night of health-giving sleep.

So that our Lord's words in this Saying are to be taken as a caution against indulgence in that shallow, weak, optimism which confidently expects as a right the immediate enjoyment of agreeable experiences ; which resents as intolerable the doctrine of the Cross. The sword ever precedes true peace. Peace is relative to life ; and life means progress and advance ; and progress involves the overcoming of opposition, passive or active, conscious or unconscious.

Now we Christians believe that the coming of Christ was the introduction into the world of a force, a new regenerative force, " the power of God unto salvation," as St. Paul calls it. If we were compelled to give a brief definition of the Gospel, we might say that it is the at-one-ment of all things ; that is to say, the reconciliation of things which the natural man deems irreconcilable ; the consecration of that which is material by that which is spiritual, the making available of that which is spiritual through that which is material ; and this involves a new relation of man to God, and of man to man ; the Fatherhood of God means the Brotherhood of man.

This—the brotherhood of man—is the Gospel for nations and for races ; and the introduction of this force or practical principle into human society, the members of which have the power of choice, marked what St. John calls a *κρίσις*, a time for each man to make a choice, and to have judgement passed on him according to the choice he has made : " This is the judgement, that the light is come into the world ; and," while some " came to the light," those, that is, who had been

“doing the truth,” others “loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.”

This *κρίσις* is part of the experience of every man in every age. We take a wholly inadequate view of the matter if we limit the repelling and attractive power of Jesus—His challenge to men to accept Him or reject Him—to His earthly ministry or to the doctrines taught by Him, as though He were no more than a great, even the greatest, ethical teacher.

Christ is more than a test of character, though He is that; Christ is a force which in its onward and upward movement incorporates, draws in, men and women, multiplies indefinitely thereby their strength and influence, and, I may add with reverence, its own, and breaks down the opposition of all that will not be assimilated to it.

The earthly life of Jesus was the necessary preliminary to the cosmic energies of the Christ; a fundamental fact forgotten or ignored by those who make a factitious contrast between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Christ of the Church. We Christians take our stand upon the apostolic interpretation of the Christ and upon the confirmation of that theory by the experience of history.

It is this that keeps us steady in periods of unrest—unrest in society, uncertainty in religion—such as the period through which we are now passing. As we read history and chronicle our own experiences, we note the application of the force of the Christ ever extending; and His triumphs in the past give us a sure and certain hope of His triumphs in the future. We look back and we see how the old religions—revealed and unrevealed—the Roman Empire, Feudalism, Mediævalism, Slavery, have all in turn gone down before the Christ; and we cannot think that the industrial system of the nineteenth century will exhibit greater powers of endurance than did those giants of old.

We Christians have had in fact no reason to doubt the truth of our Master's assurance, "Lo, I am with you alway"; we believe, in spite of difficulties, that He acts in and on the world through the Church, His Body; our belief in this stimulating truth is not shaken because some men in the Church do their best to thwart the work of Christ by their selfishness and sin, not knowing what they do; our belief is not shaken because men without the Church fail to see Christ in the Church, through the selfishness and sin of Christians, and their own sin and selfishness.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
 He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
 He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;
 His truth is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
 He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat;
 Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him; be jubilant, my feet,—
 Our God is marching on.

Meanwhile, as "our hearts muse on the terror" and we strain our eyes for peace, we must have faith and we must have patience, both as individuals and as Society. In particular, we must not lose sight of Christ as controller of the movements of men and director of them to ultimate issues of good.

Let us remember that men may be the hand of God, even though we see plainly by their dishonesty, falsehood, reckless malice, and contempt of God's commandments that they do not believe in God.

God is strong and patient; He uses men, but He does not hurry them into belief in Him. It needed the experience of countless generations to teach our fathers that the commandments of God are the foundations of human society. If a man does not believe in God, it is useless to speak to him of God's commandments. The forgotten lesson will have to be learnt all over again by long and bitter experience.

The proved need for God's law will lead men to God. It may be a long time before God brings us to the haven where we would be ; but the sword will not devour for ever, and though the vision of peace tarry, we may confidently wait for it ; because it will surely come.

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*SOME FRESH NOTES ON THE TEXT OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT.*

It was the fate of the present writer for some thirteen years to read with students of Theology the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. When one considers that the Hebrew Bible has been read and studied in its minutest details for over two thousand years, it will be obvious that very little that is fresh or new can be said about it. Hence recent expository work done upon it has too often consisted of the wildest extravagances and conjectures which have no basis in the text itself. Whilst, on the one hand, some scholars have attempted to reconstruct a new text for themselves in keeping with their own ideas of grammar and syntax, as well as of the progress of history, others have conceived schemes of metre into which they would force the poetical portions. In all this one thing alone is beyond doubt, and that is, that, if the Hebrew books were written in prose of a literary and classical standard and in verse of a regular number of syllables or accents, then both prose and poetry are lost to us, and to attempt to recover them at this time of day is wasted labour. In the following notes some possible renderings or readings, which seem to have escaped the notice of scholars are offered for the consideration of students, though to those accustomed to modern methods they may seem insignificant and unimportant.

1 Sam. i. 9 : " So Hannah rose up after they had eaten