

religion, but with the absence of religion. In some cases we seem to have not the witness which even the worship of an idol bears to the original work of the Spirit. Yet in speaking even to the most degraded in our slums, we are speaking to those in whom the Spirit has implanted capabilities of receiving the truth. However much the work of the Spirit in them may have been defaced, and their capabilities filled with sin, these still exist, and we may always speak to them as to those who can understand us, and who have deep in their nature a divine principle to which we can appeal.

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,  
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore.

This constitutes the ground of hope that the most degraded may be raised and the most abandoned

reclaimed. And if it is only the Holy Spirit Himself that can accomplish this restoration, we may hope that He will accomplish it. His creative work is there already, and it is this work of His own that He has to restore. The creative work of the Spirit is the basis of our appeal in teaching men the truth; His renewing work is the power to which we look to bless our words.

Thus it is that in man we find traces of the working of the Holy Spirit; but they are broken, confused, perverted. We see aspirations which fail to find their object, powers diverted from their true sphere. A life which constantly fails of its original purpose. What was this purpose? How does the Holy Spirit restore it? These are the questions we have yet to consider.

## The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus.

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. H. H. WENDT, D.D., JENA.

(*Christliche Welt*, May 4, 1893.)

V.

JESUS therefore describes—such is the result of our inquiries so far—in some passages the future heavenly state of blessedness, which will begin with His second Advent in superhuman glory, and in other passages the blessed state, in which He Himself and His disciples are united with God as their Father already on earth, as the kingdom of God, as the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises of the last days. Does this then involve a notable contradiction in His mode of view and speech?

I have already (see No. III.) pointed out the inner connexion, which unites the conception of Jesus of the present filial relation of men to God with His expectation and promise of the future heavenly state of blessedness. This connexion of thought gives us at once the real explanation of the juxtaposition of ideas apparently so strange, that the kingdom of God is present, and that it is future. In the thought of Jesus the present was inwardly and inseparably united with the future.

The certainty that God will one day in the future set up a kingdom of eternal, heavenly bliss has as its postulate the certainty that God during men's earthly life will enter into an ideal blissful relation with them, in which they will be prepared and matured for the heavenly state. The will of

their heavenly Father cannot be to bestow on them His salvation and love merely in the future, withholding them at present from the men who trust in Him. Nor can men in the future be made partakers in the heavenly life, unless here on earth they have stood in living fellowship with God. Moreover, the converse is true, if God's promised kingdom finds a present realisation in the filial state in which Jesus and all who follow Him stand in relation to the heavenly Father, this present experience demands a future consummation in the heavenly life. Without this future even the present state would not be what it yet is, a state of happy filial fellowship with the heavenly Father.

Thus Jesus gives us the idea of a *development* of God's kingdom, and indeed not merely of its growing development during the present æon, but also of its development out of this present state to a future one quite different in form, out of earthly preparation to heavenly consummation. Although God's kingdom in the present and the future is so different in outward form, it retains its inner unity. Hence He could describe by one and the same expression, now the future state beginning with His second Advent, now the present state of filial relation to God in Himself and His disciples.

But then on this account, in many of the important utterances of Jesus concerning God's kingdom, we cannot say definitely, Jesus means *either* this present *or* that future state. Rather He means *the kingdom of God as a whole*, as it is developing at present and will be perfected hereafter. We must hold fast this sense, when He calls us to seek the kingdom of God (Matt. vi. 33; Luke xii. 31) and expresses the confidence that it is His heavenly Father's goodwill to give the "little flock" the kingdom (Luke xii. 32); further, when He describes the conditions of entrance into God's kingdom in different respects (Matt. v. 19 f., vii. 21; Mark x. 14 f. 23, 25; Luke ix. 62; John iii. 3, 5), and speaks of some being nearer God's kingdom than others and entering it before them (Matt. xxi. 31; Mark xii. 34); finally, when He preaches the coming of God's kingdom to men in general or to particular men (Mark i. 14 f.; Luke x. 9, 11; Matt. vi. 10). He himself brings God's kingdom near to men, inasmuch as by His gospel He gives them the possibility of entering into a state of blissful fellowship with God, a state beginning already during this earthly life, but finding its continuance and perfect form in the new æon, which God will miraculously inaugurate. But men also must seize this possibility as soon as it is given them; otherwise it will be withdrawn from them for ever (Luke xiv. 15-24). They must accept His preaching, in penitence and trust (Mark i. 15), must set their desire in the kingdom of God, and indeed on its entire present as well as future contents, must prize the blessings to be obtained from God in this kingdom above all earthly blessings (Matt. xiii. 44-46), and must practise the conduct befitting the children of God. In the degree in which they fulfil these conditions they come and are near to the kingdom of God.

In this comprehensive sense also the idea of God's kingdom is to be understood in the prayer, "Thy kingdom come." We must not here be led to think mistakenly, that the prayer for the coming of the kingdom proves, that "to Jesus and His disciples the kingdom did not yet exist, even in its beginnings; for it can only either exist or not exist" (cf. Weiss, as before, p. 176). The union of the ideas of existence and non-existence lies in the idea of growth, development, coming. To the conception of Jesus the nature of God's kingdom involves that it is coming, and nevertheless is already present. For this blissful state of filial

fellowship with God must not only reach a more and more perfect form in those who have already entered into it, but it must also be realised in wider and wider circles of mankind, where it has hitherto had no existence; and it must at last pass into a state of blessed heavenly consummation, when in accordance with God's decree the period of earthly development, which is necessary and salutary, although full of difficulty and temptation, is concluded. These are different respects in which the kingdom of God, although it has already found realisation, must still be ever "coming"; and in all those respects must its "coming" be an object of desire and prayer to the true disciples of Jesus. When Jesus, as in Mark ix. 1, means more precisely the beginning of the heavenly consummation of God's kingdom, He uses the specialising expression, "the coming of God's kingdom *in power*." I regard it as caprice and prejudice to think that the epithet "in power" can be robbed of its force by being explained as "Paulinising." When Jesus speaks of the coming of God's kingdom in general, He means not *merely* the future coming "in power," but *also* the present coming in growth like a mustard-seed on earth.

Therefore, in all our Christian teaching founded on the revelation of Jesus Christ, scientific as well as popular, we must use the idea of the kingdom of God with this breadth of meaning. If our teaching about God's kingdom is to agree with the conception of Jesus, it must embrace the following elements:—

1. The kingdom of God must signify to us the *state of ideal fellowship of men with God, which contains the fulfilment of the Old Testament hopes and promises referring to the last days*. In this acceptance of the idea Jesus agreed with His Jewish contemporaries; it forms the fundamental significance of the idea founded on history. In the nature of this ideal fellowship between God and men we must include the thought, both that God gives His full salvation to the members of His kingdom, and that they fulfil His will in perfect righteousness. Neither the one element nor the other can be wanting. The idea of a special fellowship of men with one another is to be included in the idea of God's kingdom, in so far as God stands in that ideal fellowship with a number of men, and all these men have in their relation to God a close connexion also with each other and an obligatory motive to exhibit it in their conduct to each other.

2. We must hold, that *the kingdom of God has attained an initial realisation and gradual development already in the present world-course, and that by the earthly work and suffering of Jesus Christ which were devoted to the preaching and establishing of this kingdom.* Our judgment, that Jesus in His earthly activity *was* the Christ, the Messiah, and is not merely one day *to become* the Messiah, is only another expression of the judgment, that by His earthly work He already gave real existence to God's kingdom, and did not merely preach or prepare beforehand a future realisation. But we must find the present realisation of God's kingdom in this, that the true disciples of Jesus Christ already stand in *filial relation* to God. Just as Jesus did, we must derive the essential nature of God's kingdom not from the idea of "kingdom," or "regal dominion," but from the right view of God's *fatherly nature*. Now certainly the nature of our filial relation to God differs very materially from the Old Testament hopes and promises referring to the last days, both in regard to God's saving gifts and in regard to the religious practice of men. But, nevertheless, we must abide by the position, that the kingdom of God founded by Jesus Christ is the true, supreme fulfilment of those promises, and we have no other fulfilment of a different nature to expect *upon earth*. We must explain the difference between the promise and the fulfilment by the fact, that the promise was given on the soil of an imperfect divine revelation, and therefore included imperfect conceptions of God's salvation and of true religion, whereas Jesus gave the promise such a complete and perfect fulfilment as was in harmony with the Son's complete and perfect knowledge of the fatherly nature and will of God. We must abandon the Old Testament Jewish ideal of a dispensation of earthly power and unbroken earthly prosperity and wellbeing for the pious, to be set up by God's miraculous power, not because this ideal is too great, but because it is too small. For we may indeed see a proof of God's perfect fatherly love to men in His placing them in this earthly life with its toil and sorrow, its temptations and conflicts, that they may grow in the spirit of God's children; but we could not regard it as an evidence of God's supreme fatherly love that He should set up for His people a long period of earthly life in unbroken prosperity and glory, which yet would not minister to their training and inner growth. Such a period of prosperous

earthly life would rather seem to us just as long a postponement of the heavenly communion with God, to which we are called. Moreover, we must not yield to the illusion, that later Christendom has only gradually advanced by its own strength to the perception of the truth, that the chiliastic ideal must be given up, whilst Jesus Himself was still entirely entangled in this ideal. On the contrary, Jesus was the first perfect teacher of the mode of view, which carried with it the inner refutation of the chiliastic ideal. Only from Him did Christendom learn this mode of view. And if we know historically, that not only the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus, but also the Christians of the first apostolic age cherished hopes of a Messianic kingdom of earthly glory, this can never prove that Jesus also cherished similar hopes, but only indicate how high He stood above His age, and how little His revealing ministry was influenced by the prevailing current of beliefs.

3. But, while maintaining the present realisation and development of God's kingdom upon earth, we must just as definitely maintain its *future consummation in heaven*. To understand by the kingdom of God merely a moral religious state, which continues to develop during the present course of the world among mankind, would be just as un-historical a limitation of the idea (*i.e.* different from the normative conception of Jesus) as to understand by it merely the future heavenly state of consummation. To our view also, the idea of God's kingdom must include the element of the inner connexion of a period of earthly development with a period of heavenly consummation.

Here there is a difference between the conception of Jesus and ours, inasmuch as Jesus assumes that the transition from the period of earthly development to the heavenly consummation will take place at a comparatively early period in the contemporary generation, whereas we know that almost nineteen centuries have passed away since, and now also we no longer certainly assume that the end of the world will come with Christ's second advent in our generation.<sup>1</sup> On this difference two observations

<sup>1</sup> It is strange that, on the strength of a single passage, Dr. Wendt should ascribe to Christ the same mistaken expectation which many ascribe to the Apostle Paul. It is surely a rule of interpretation that any exceptional phrase or passage should be explained by the entire teaching of Scripture. The application of this rule would have precluded the view here expressed as contradicting the general doctrine

are to be made. On one side, to the individual Christian the position is practically the same as Jesus assumed, because to the individual the ceasing of his own earthly life takes the place of the ceasing of the earthly world as a whole, and indeed within the limit of time fixed for human life, but quite uncertain whether early or late within this space of time. The instructions of Jesus to His disciples about the certainty of His second coming, and the uncertainty of its exact time, about the necessity of constant readiness for it, and about the blessedness it will bring to those who are ready and the judgment to those not ready, are to be referred by individual Christians in the after centuries of the world's course immediately and practically to the death which lies before every one at an uncertain hour, and will carry him to eternal salvation or to destruction. Every man really has such an experience as Jesus described as taking place at His second coming. On the other hand, the view of Jesus of the ceasing of the world's course and of His own second coming to judge the world of the wicked, and to introduce the heavenly consummation, loses nothing in truth and value for the good from the fact that the interval between the earthly life of Jesus Christ and His second coming is much greater than He foresaw. Our practical reference of the sayings of Jesus about His second coming to the earthly death of individual men can never mean that this ever-recurring experience of death in individuals can altogether take the place of the future advent of Christ and the final dissolution of the entire earthly world. We must, on the contrary, abide unreservedly by the view of Jesus that this earthly world is not of eternal duration, but will one day be dissolved by God, when, in accordance with His decree, its time has expired; and that the judicial decision as to who among men will participate in the heavenly consummation

of God's kingdom and who not, will be determined by the attitude taken by individuals to Jesus Christ and His gospel. Like the period of the earthly development of the individual in the kingdom of God, so the period of the earthly development of the kingdom of God, as a whole, is not indefinitely permanent; for the one as for the other, the goal lies in the transition to the heavenly consummation.

A material deviation of our view of the kingdom of God from that of Jesus would only exist if Jesus, in connexion with His assumption of the comparatively near end of the present world, had given scope for such eschatological feelings and demands as we, in view of the probable duration of the world's course, could not entertain. But this, as I hope I have shown, is not the case. All Christians must cherish eschatological beliefs in the right sense, so far as they must be constantly mindful of their own earthly death and the transiency of the world as well as of their heavenly goal on the other hand, and must pursue no course of conduct out of harmony with this view of life and the world. But Jesus by no means gave this eschatological mood such a practical form as to require from His disciples an ascetic avoidance of the world, and passive exclusive attention to the impending future. On the contrary, He taught them to regard the present earthly life also as a state of true blessed fellowship with God, and to pass through this life full of trust in God and full of brotherly love, because herein consists the right preparation for the future attainment of heavenly blessedness. We can find no higher motive to a thankful and useful employment of our earthly life than Jesus gave by His doctrine. The application of His doctrine of the kingdom of God to the special circumstances in which we live must, in many respects, take a very different outward shape from His in the circumstances in which He taught and acted. But in the general principles our doctrine of the kingdom of God must agree with His, and we must know that we can never reach a higher general view of that kingdom than He has revealed to us.

of the New Testament about Christ's nature and person. Dr. Wendt entirely ignores other interpretations given of the passage in question, and relies solely on the bald, literal sense. One is surprised to find so able an exegete taking such a course.—TRANSLATOR.