

Dr. Paul Feine on the Apocalyptic Teaching of Jesus.

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. J. G. TASKER, D.D., HANDSWORTH COLLEGE, BIRMINGHAM.

THE publication of Tyrrell's *Christianity at the Cross Roads*, and of the English translation of Schweitzer's *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, has forced into prominence a question of which all careful N.T. students have felt both the difficulty and the importance, namely, 'The Apocalyptic Element in our Lord's Teaching: Its Significance for Christian Faith and Ethics.' In the last sentence use has been made of the programme for the Church Congress which meets next October in Cambridge; for in this form the subject is down for discussion. Reviews of Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* have rightly directed attention to his avowed 'onesidedness' in forcing the Gospels into accord with his view that in the teaching of Jesus the eschatological element is primary; the negative character of his results has also been commented upon by critics of all schools of thought. The problem is ably dealt with in the most recently published Handbook of New Testament Theology.¹ Its author is Dr. Paul Feine, favourably known by his earlier work, *Jesus Christus und Paulus*, as a scholar at once modern in his methods and positive in his conclusions.

The first part of Feine's work is entitled 'The Teaching of Jesus according to the Synoptists,' and the references in this article will be to chapter v., 'The Kingdom of God,' and chapter viii., 'The Ethics of Jesus.' All that can be attempted is to indicate the author's position in regard to subjects now in the forefront of the discussion. As regards the different forms of expression used, 'The Kingdom' is treated as a *terminus technicus* used without further definition because the context makes its meaning plain (Mt 25³⁴, Lk 22^{29f.}). Jesus also speaks of *His* Kingdom, thus showing that He was conscious of His calling as Messiah (Lk 22³⁰ 23⁴²). The Jewish people saw the coming of 'the kingdom of our father, David,' when they saw Jesus make His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In later Judaism 'heaven' was a possible substitute for 'God' in certain phrases;

its employment arose from hesitation to utter the Divine name. The phrase, 'the kingdom of heaven,' may be due to Matthew's adoption of this usage, but it is also possible that Jesus Himself spoke of the kingdom of heaven, and that in the sources which underlie Mk. and Lk. the expression was avoided as likely to be misunderstood by the Greeks, to whom, without an explanation, it would not be intelligible.

In the section which deals with the origin of the phrase, 'the kingdom of God,' in the Old Testament and in Jewish literature, stress is laid upon the substitution in the Targums of abstract expressions referring to the Divine dominion for the Biblical descriptions of God as the King of Israel. His rule belongs to this æon; His dominion is upon earth, although His kingdom has no spatial limitations. The transcendent God manifests Himself in the world. This is the faith of Jesus, but He departs from the Jewish Messianic hope in that He looks for the ideal kingdom of David, that is to say, a spiritual, and not a political kingdom. The description of the kingdom in the Book of Daniel influenced Jesus; He adopted the title 'the Son of Man,' and the conception of a kingdom in which God's will should be supreme. Hence His teaching that the time had come for the establishment of the eternal kingdom; it was the kingdom of heaven, because it was the rule on earth of Heaven's eternal King.

In the teaching of Jesus Feine discovers no warrant for the contention of extremists who maintain that the kingdom of God is to be understood *either* eschatologically *or* ethically, and that if these two points of view are not mutually exclusive, the eschatological or supernatural is primary and dominates the religious or the spiritual. 'Both groups of expressions are found in the Gospels, and to neither may violence be done in the interests of the other.' Passages are examined in which Jesus speaks of the kingdom, sometimes as future, and sometimes as present. On the one hand, the kingdom is to come with power in the immediate future; 'the whole faith of the early Christians in the speedy ushering in of the kingdom of God would be inexplicable, unless it had

¹ *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*. Von D. Dr. Paul Feine, ordentlichem Professor der evangelischen Theologie an der Universität Breslau. Pp. xii, 714. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.

some foundation in definite sayings of Jesus.' On the other hand, He claims that His mighty works signify that the kingdom has already come. Justice is not done to this side of the teaching of Jesus by those who 'speak of the breaking down of the kingdom of God—the kingdom is already a reality.' The disciples of Jesus are reminded of their blessedness in that it is their privilege to see the days for which the Old Testament saints longed in vain. The context of Lk 17²¹ is held to determine the meaning of ἐντός ὑμῶν. Jesus is refuting the conception of the Pharisees who looked for an outward appearing to be heralded by apocalyptic signs; He reminds them, therefore, that 'the kingdom is within,' not, however, assuming that it is in *them*. The Syriac rendering of Ephraem—'in your hearts'—gives the true explanation. 'What is meant is the state of heart which characterizes the subjects of the kingdom of God.'

How is this twofold element in the teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom to be accounted for? Some say that both aspects are presented ideally. In this sense 'the kingdom is, and it is not yet.' But Jesus was no idealist, whose thoughts oscillate between an incomplete reality and an anticipated completion. To say that Jesus accepts the diverse statements found in the Old Testament and in later Apocalyptic literature may be true; but, even so, only an external explanation is suggested. We are left in the dark as to why Jesus came to teach that the ideal had a present realization. The unity, accounting for the twofold presentation of the kingdom, is found only in the Messianic consciousness and mission of Jesus. Where *He* is making the will of God to be done on earth by virtue of His indwelling Divine powers, there is the kingdom of God. As Origen beautifully says: 'He is the kingdom itself' (ἀνροβασιλεία). Forgiveness of sins and communion with God are blessings of the kingdom experienced in the present. But during His earthly activity Jesus sees only the beginning of the realization of these blessings; His divinely appointed task is to complete the work He has begun, and that completion lies in the future.

It depends, therefore, upon the meaning assigned to 'Eschatology' whether the eschatological element in the teaching of Jesus should be described as primary or as secondary. In the form in which it appears in the Synoptic Gospels

and in the early Church it is secondary, inasmuch as it is associated with contemporary ideas. But in so far as it has reference to ethical and religious perfection, which is to have an outward manifestation, eschatology is a primary and essential element in the gospel of Jesus. Feine notes that in the teaching of Jesus, lines, which do not run parallel, can be traced; also that, in the Pauline and in the Johannine writings respectively, each of those lines is drawn out at length. Hence the discussion as to whether Christianity is a religion of hope for the future or of experience in the present. 'Christianity is not rightly understood unless both are included. To the Christian salvation is a present blessing, and yet he must look to the future for its completion.'

What Feine means by saying that Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God in the language of His contemporaries appears in such passages as those which refer to positions of honour in the kingdom (Mt 20²³), the hundredfold reward (Mk 10^{29f.}), and the not-eating of the Passover until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Lk 22¹⁶). Such statements are neither to be spiritualized, nor interpreted transcendently. Nevertheless, agreement is expressed with Wernle's words: 'The later theology which transferred blessedness to the future, *i.e.* to heaven, understood Jesus better than modern archæologists who so fix their thoughts on the present world as to forget heaven.' What Jesus means by such descriptions of the glory of the kingdom of God is a condition of blessedness to be attained now by all who enter the kingdom. The blessings of the forgiveness of sins, of purity and righteousness, of the satisfying of the soul's hunger and thirst for God, are set forth in concrete imagery in which use is made of language which would appeal to the hearers of Jesus. Abstractions are avoided, because they would have been less forcible; but there is an entire absence of the grotesque exaggerations which abound in Jewish theology, and in early Christian literature (*e.g.* Enoch 10¹⁷; cf. Papias, as quoted by Irenæus, v, 33⁵). 'The religious conceptions of undisturbed communion with God and of eternal life dominate the thought-world of Jesus.'

In brief, Feine's position is that Jesus only partially adopted the traditional conception of the kingdom of God; to a large extent He filled it with new content. Like His contemporaries, Jesus thought of the kingdom as descending from heaven

to earth. It was the kingdom of *heaven*, because it was the kingdom of the transcendent God who, on earth, was setting up the rule of heaven. Like His contemporaries, Jesus also taught that the kingdom was to be ushered in by God's power in the future. To this extent His conception was eschatological, but there was an essential difference between His idea and those of His Jewish contemporaries. Jesus eliminated all political hopes of a world-kingdom with Jerusalem as its metropolis. The eudæmonistic expectations of an age of extraordinary fruitfulness and of earthly enjoyment had for Him no value. Now and then He makes use of current forms of expression; but His own view is purely religious and ethical. Moreover, this eschatological element in the teaching of Jesus is accompanied by, and interwoven with, an ethical element. The kingdom of God is not only to be anticipated as coming in the future; it is also already established. When men are drawn to Jesus and learn from Him to do on earth the heavenly Father's will, the kingdom is extended. In the person of Jesus the eschatological and the ethical ideas of the kingdom are seen to be not antagonistic, but complementary. To Him belongs the throne of the future Kingdom, but in Him and in His work the powers of the Kingdom are already manifesting their might; hence His parables regard the Kingdom as already spreading in this world.

To the practical consequences of the theory which eschatologically conditions 'the Ethics of Jesus,' Feine returns in a later chapter. In the former part of this section he supplies a necessary corrective to Schweitzer's work which pays little attention to the modifications which Johannes Weiss introduced into the second edition of his book, *The Preaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God*. To the statements in his first edition (1892) exception was taken on the ground that his interpretation led to 'an altogether too negative and world-despising ethics.' In his second edition (1900) he acknowledged that 'part of the ethical teaching of Jesus is unaffected by His eschatological ideas.' Nevertheless, it remains true that to Weiss

an important part of the ethical teaching recorded in the Gospels is incomprehensible, unless it is regarded as exceptional and as suggested by thoughts of the coming crisis. Just as in time of war special laws are proclaimed applicable only for a period, so the moral injunctions of Jesus are to be understood as referring only to a state of affairs which was about to pass away; he taught 'ethics for the interim.'

Examining in detail the expositions of Johannes Weiss, Feine shows that the eschatological interpretation unduly narrows the significance of the moral teaching of Jesus. For example, the command to love one's enemies is, in the Sermon on the Mount, connected not with thoughts of an approaching crisis, but with the revelation of the Heavenly Father, whose ethical perfection is displayed in the impartial bestowal of His gifts on the evil and on the good. Not 'ethics for the interim,' but ethics for all time are inculcated by Jesus when He gives an inward application to the commandments of the law, and condemns angry passions and base desires. Feine is of opinion that the eschatological interpretation may most legitimately be applied to the demand of Jesus that His disciples should, for His sake, give up earthly possessions and family life. But even of these passages he rightly says: 'Not only does eschatology earnestly warn us not to set too high an estimate on the things of this world, but the transitory nature of all earthly good also enforces the same lesson.' These hard sayings have an abiding meaning, as Luther perceived when he wrote, 'And though they take our life, goods, honour, children, wife,' etc. The main part of the following sections of this chapter is occupied with an exposition of the ethics of Jesus from a non-eschatological point of view. Feine holds that 'this earth is God's handiwork; that every individual, every class, every nation has its place as an instrument in God's hand for the carrying out of His world-plan; and that this plan, although we may not understand it as yet, is furthering the blessedness which is the goal of the Kingdom of God.'