

THE PURPOSE OF THE TRANS- FIGURATION.

THIS event in our Lord's incarnate life has so little place in the consciousness and liturgical system of the Church that all who have realized its importance cannot but welcome any discussion of it as tending to win for it due prominence in our dogmatics.

The two papers which have appeared in the *J.T.S.* (Jan. and July, 1903) presented but one aspect of the event, for whilst differing from each other on certain points, they both were concerned with the effect of the Transfiguration upon the minds of the three selected witnesses and ignored the probability of purpose in relation to our Lord Himself, and to the Old Testament saints who were present. Mr. Holmes professed only to treat of 'one of its purposes', and we may assume that Dr. Kennedy would agree that neither view, if established, would be exclusive of some other and, possibly, higher purpose.

In order that the theory here presented may be put briefly I do not propose to traverse the arguments so far adduced, or to repeat at length what the former writers have so well said of the 'setting' of the event. It will be seen that if the theory here given is acceptable, it not only does not evacuate the purposes already described, but carries their force and effect still deeper.

Comparison of the Transfiguration with other events in the same life brings out its unique position as a meeting-place of old and new, the old finding its fulfilment in the new departure. We can hardly estimate the force of this until we think ourselves into the position of one to whom the Mosaic system was the only formulated truth with undeniably divine authority on earth. That the older, the husk, should pass away without some other sign than the ruin of Israel is incredible. Certain devout souls, as Simeon and Anna and the Baptist, had had their faith rewarded; was there no such reward for those who in older days had

laboured for the preparation of His coming? In the two who were manifested all the past in respect of organized spiritual life was represented. The law of continuity was thus observed as in no other event. Living priests and prophets might deny and crucify, other living authorities should testify and rejoice.

But let us turn to the Mount itself. The persons present visibly were our Blessed Lord, Moses, Elias, and the three principal disciples. There was also vocal, sensible evidence of the presence of the Eternal Father as the principal and immediate operator in what we may reasonably consider the main purpose of the Transfiguration.

Of our Lord, we know that, as has been shewn, two lines of thought had just been presented to the disciples, His Sonship, and His Passion and Death; the one His eternal prerogative, the other His own willing act as Son of Man giving Himself in sacrifice for the sons of men. At the Transfiguration we know also (from St Luke) that the subject of the conversation between Him and Moses and Elias was His coming death. The subsequent incidents include an act of healing (one requiring special grace), preluded by reference to the work of Elias; and then further discourse on the Passion, and on priority in the Kingdom of God. Sonship, sacrifice, and power are the three dominant ideas in the narrative as a whole.

'His exodus' being what it is, namely, the means of our delivery from the bondage of sin, the presence of Moses is easily understood; but there was another reason. Moses was the founder of the Aaronic priesthood, the consecrator of the first high priest of that order, and one to whom it had been said that to the same Aaron he should be 'as God'. (Aaron was the mouth-power, the word of Moses.)

Elias was pre-eminently the Old Testament prophet, the one destroyer of false prophets, the restorer whose name symbolized the work of the Baptist, whose word made straight the way by which the true Prophet of humanity should come.

So far, therefore, the functions of priesthood and prophecy seem to be the most prominent on this occasion.

In the next place, passing over the suggestion of three tabernacles, made, to what intent is not clear, by St Peter, we have some evidence to shew the impression which the incident pro-

duced on the minds of the three disciples. As to St Peter, it would be acknowledged by all that, if 2 Pet. was his composition, he is the one of whose impressions we know the most. The 'tabernacle', the 'exodus', the voice of the Father, and the power of the prophet are all in evidence. But there is proof of this also from 1 Pet. The connexion of ideas in ch. i of that epistle is, if more veiled, still to be traced as it is in 2 Pet., and not accidental are the verbal reminiscences in e.g. ch. v 9, 10 of 1 Pet. Is it then a mere fancy that whereas the root subject in 1 Pet. is priesthood, ministerial and general, and in 2 Pet. the prophetic work, we should conclude that St Peter saw in the Transfiguration nothing less than the assumption before selected witnesses of both offices, priest and prophet, by the Son of Man? Assumed, we may rightly say; but at the voice of the source of all authority and power, the Father Himself (cf. Heb. v 4-6). There was no other recorded occasion in our Lord's life when His consecration to the priesthood can be without question asserted to have taken place. And if it took place then, may we not see why silence was imposed upon the three witnesses? The Priesthood must be established by the Sacrifice: the Prophetic office manifested on the Cross in declaring and fulfilling the mind of the Father towards all human error: when these were accomplished the investiture might be announced, not until then. Priestly power without self-sacrifice is a snare to man: prophetic power without personal submission entire and complete to the message-giver's will is a source of hypocrisy. Our Lord would have the disciples learn by His Sacrifice and submission the perfectness of His Priestly and Prophetic character. Suffering first—then glory. The disciples were to see before many days how both functions might be degraded and the institutions of divine appointment made to subserve the lowest temporal ends. By contrast they were to learn wherein true priesthood and prophetic power differed from the false. How but for the Transfiguration could they have known Him at all for Priest and Prophet? Moses and Elias were there for the teaching of the three as well. Moses saw the Priest there whose office he had been instrumental in prefiguring. Then he knew for the first time the meaning of the glorious vesture with which his hands had arrayed his mouthpiece, then he understood all that the bloodshedding of countless lambs

had symbolized. At such a consecration who of all the great men of God in old time could assist with more befitting presence? On this Mount met old and new, symbol and reality, the temporal and the eternal. Granted that some help was intended to disciples whose hearts were to be tried by desolation, or grant any other theory of the kind, the heart of the subject has not been reached until the Person of Christ Himself in that event has been studied and His office therein defined.

Elias, too, saw the Prophet of whom his own wonderful career had been but a faint shadow, saw Him whose School of prophets of a new Israel should outnumber his largest dream, saw Him whose still, small voice should strengthen and comfort the hearts of the wearied with conflict of evil, saw Him whose word should be recognized as The Word of God unerring, impassionate, swift as lightning, sure as death, but life-giving.

Does St John give sign of the impressions received on the Mount? We see it in his later vision of the Son of Man girded as Priest eternal: we have also to help us his thought of the two witnesses whose dead bodies (he had seen their living spirits) were lying in the streets of the city where their Lord was crucified, a significant description of an effete priesthood and a degraded prophetic ministry (see Rev. xi 1-13). To the mind of St John the germ of all is the Incarnation; granted that, all else follows. Herein he differed in apprehension from the more active, more governing mind of the chief of the apostolic body. The difference in mental characteristic explains the difference in attitude towards the Transfiguration. The Petrine tabernacles of differentiated powers become one to the vision of the seer, '*the Tabernacle of God*' which is 'with men'.

If there is anything in the theory here briefly set forth, does it not provide reason for desiring a fuller recognition of the scene on the Mount in our worship and teaching? We own Christ as Priest and Prophet, let us own with due solemnities the day of His consecration.

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