

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

CHAPTER ii.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

As this was the birthday of the Christian Church, so the transactions of it are here recorded with a picturesque simplicity and fulness of detail befitting the august occasion. The historian carries us away, as it were, in the spirit, first to the Upper Room, there to witness the opening of the astonishing scene; we are then led forth with the newly-gifted company into the streets of Jerusalem, to listen to the memorable address of Peter to the wondering multitude; we seem to behold the thousands that bowed under it and were forthwith baptized, the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb; and following these raw converts, we see them disposed into groups under the care of the Twelve, to be further instructed and consolidated into the Infant Church of Christ; and, finally, we leave them rejoicing in a new-found salvation, eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. Let us look at these things in detail.

1. *The Descent of the Spirit.* The time is marked, we think, with a precision which our Version scarcely expresses. It was "when the day of Pentecost was (only) being fulfilled"¹ — not "fully come." Meyer, and perhaps most critics, including our translators, take the sense to be merely 'during the currency of the Pentecostal day,' or some part of it. But when we find that it was "but the third hour of the

¹ Ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι.

day," or nine in the morning, after all that passed in the Upper Room, after the company had gone forth into the street, after their strange utterances, spreading through the city, had gathered thousands around them, and Peter had risen to address them, is it likely that a historian so precise in dates would describe the opening scene by so loose a phrase as one meaning that it occurred simply *during* that day? But let it only be borne in mind that from the morrow after the first Passover Sabbath seven Sabbaths *complete* were to be reckoned, and that not till the fiftieth, or Pentecostal day, did the "feast of weeks" commence (Lev. xxiii. 15, 16); and the meaning, we think, will be seen to be, rather, 'when the seven intervening Sabbaths were just getting *completed* which were to usher in the Pentecostal day,'—or, as we should say, 'when the hour of six in the morning was about to strike.'¹

The Apostles had been expressly told that not many days would elapse after their Lord's ascension ere they received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Day after day, however, had they waited for this mysterious gift in prayer and supplication, and the ninth day found them still waiting. Yet knowing that the tenth day would find Jerusalem full of Jews out of every country under heaven, who on that day would begin the celebration of the great festival, we can well believe that, on that morning, the whole company would be in their places ere the day began (at six), and that the still expectation of all would be at its utmost tension, when—just as the

¹ So the Dutch Revision of the New Testament: "When the day of Pentecost was dawning" (*aanbrak*).

hour struck (as we should say)—“suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind that filled all the house where they were sitting.”¹ Like the trumpet tones announcing the approach of some great one, this sound would thrill and hush into awe the whole company, completing their preparation and begetting an expectation of instantly receiving the promised gift. But it was more than this. Just as *water* and *fire*, so also *wind* was the well-known symbol of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit;² while the rush of sound “coming from heaven” would assure them that this was indeed the expected gift. What was thus expressed to their *ears* was next placed before their eyes, and that more significantly: “There appeared unto them, parting asunder (or “distributing themselves”³), tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.”⁴ The thing seen was ‘flame-like and tongue-shaped’ appearances, visibly resting upon every one of the company, rising from a common centre. *Water* here would have been an unsuitable symbol; *wind* had already been employed, to express the *rushing force* with which the gift was to come upon them; but *fire* is now used, or rather the appearance of it, to denote the *burning energy* of the Spirit which was now descending

¹ From the received reading of verse 1 (“they were all *with one accord* in one place”), one would infer that there had been some previous arrangement as to their meeting that morning. But the true reading is simply “they were all together in one place,”—ὁμοῦ (SABC 61, Vulg. *pariter*), not ὁμοθυμαδόν (which has only slender support).

² *Water*, Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26; Isa. xii. 3, compared with John vii. 37-39; iii. 3-5. *Fire*, Luke iii. 16. *Wind*, Ezek. xxxvii. 9-14; John iii. 8; xx. 22.

³ Διαμεριζόμενοι.

⁴ Ἐφ’ ἑνα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν.

upon the Church; and whereas these flame-like appearances "*sat* upon each of them," this was to signify that the Spirit, pouring its full tide over every tribe and into every tongue of men, was to *abide* in the Church universal for ever.¹

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." This subject of speaking with tongues has occasioned much learned discussion—not a little of it as worthless as it is wearisome. That these utterances were no articulate languages at all, but incoherent shouting sounds uttered in a state of religious phrensy, or, that it was only their mother tongue, but spoken in so excited a way as to seem a jargon of foreign languages, has been argued ingeniously by critics well affected to the supernatural character of the whole scene. To us, however, such exegesis seems (to use the words of Dean Alford) far-fetched and indefensible. In our view, the only unforced sense of the historian's language is, that the disciples "spake the mighty works of God" in real articulate tongues, unknown to themselves, but recognized at once as their own by the various nationalities who heard them. Two things seemed to have caused much of the difficulty which has staggered some persons. The one is, the groundless supposition that the chief intention of any such gift must have been to enable preachers to go to foreign lands and proclaim the glad tidings

¹ Under the ancient economy the descent of fire from heaven upon the sacrifices was the recognized symbol of the Divine presence and favour (Gen. xv. 17; Lev. ix. 24; 1 Kings xviii. 38; and *cf.* Exod. xix. 18). Even the heathen poets so interpreted that symbol (Ovid, *Fast.* vi. 35; *Æn.* ii. 682).

in the languages of those nations, all unknown to themselves; whereas there is no evidence of that being done or even contemplated. There is no ground to suppose that the Pentecostal utterances were a permanent gift of speaking in foreign languages, or that they had any other design than that of arresting the attention and opening the ears of the thousands in Jerusalem from every land¹—a purpose which they most completely served—and, by the explanation given of it to the eager multitude, to convince them that the effusion of the Spirit predicted in their own Scriptures had now taken place; that, by resting on the disciples of Him whom they had crucified and slain, God meant to glorify Jesus, under whose wing alone the blessings of Messiah's kingdom would be experienced; and that the spectacle now witnessed in the streets of Jerusalem would have its proper design realized by the unsearchable riches of Christ being proclaimed with *burning* power in all the *tongues* of men. The other thing that has caused some difficulty is what is said in 1 Cor. xiv. about the gift of tongues in the Church of Corinth. But though what we read of this gift at Corinth undoubtedly resembled, it so considerably differed from that which took place at Pentecost, that we only confuse both by mixing up the one with the other. It is by marking the import of each independently that we shall best see at what points they meet and part.

II. *The Effect.* "Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem" (staying there to keep the festival²) "Jews,

¹ Compare 1 Cor. xiv. 22: "Wherefore tongues are for a *sign*."

² The word *κατοικοῦντες* seems here = *ἐπιδημοῦντες*. (*cf.* v. 14).

devout men from every country under heaven. And when this sound was heard"—not the *rumour* of what had happened,¹ as our translators took it, and still less does it mean the sound of the unknown tongues; it can only mean therefore "the *sound* from heaven as the rushing of a mighty wind," which, being heard probably to a considerable distance, would startle every one, and cause a rush to the spot—"when this sound was heard, the multitude came together and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and marvelled, saying,² Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?"—referring rather to the despised *region*, than to the notoriety of the *sect*, which few of the foreigners would as yet know by that name—"And how hear we every man in our own language wherein we were born?" Here is introduced a long list of the nationalities present, evidently inserted by the Evangelist himself for the information of his readers.³ "We do hear them speak in our tongues the mighty⁴ works of God"—perhaps in some of those evangelical strains of the Old Testament which were familiar to Jewish ears, but in a tongue foreign

¹ For the word is not *φημῆς*, but *φωνῆς*.

² *Πρὸς ἀλλήλους*, of the Received Text, is wanting in *ⲚABC 61*, *Vulg.* and *Ægg.*

³ One of these nationalities, "Judæa," has occasioned some difficulty, since no surprise could be caused by the language of Judæa being spoken in Judæa itself. A various reading has been suggested by some; but all MSS. and versions read Judæa here. Perhaps it refers to foreigners permanently settled in Judæa. As for the "strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes," the one mean Jews by birth, the other Jews by religion—then residing at Rome.

⁴ The word is not *θαυμαστά*, as in *Apoc. xv. 3*, but *μεγαλεία*.

to the speakers themselves. Now for the effect: "And they were all amazed and were perplexed,¹ saying one to another, what meaneth this?" This is just such a question as would be welcome to Peter, who, with the company from the upper room, around whom the multitude were crowding, was standing eager to explain all, and impatient to proclaim the truths which had newly burst upon himself. But there was a class of hearers who took a very different view of the matter. For "others, mocking, said, They are full of new wine"—just such an impression as would be made upon the frivolous and indifferent on seeing a crowd of radiant faces, male and female, and hearing the unintelligible sounds ecstatically uttered by them.

III. *The Explanation.* "But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spake forth unto them,"—the word used expressing the solemnity of the utterance²—"Ye men of Judæa, . . . these are not drunken, as ye suppose. . . . But this is that which is spoken by the prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days,³ saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." As the *copiousness*

¹ Διηποροῦν, or rather διηποροῦντο.

² Ἀπεθόγγισατο. So xxvi. 25, "I *spoke forth* the words of truth and soberness;" and ver. 4, "as the Spirit *gave them utterance.*" In the LXX. the word is used of inspired utterances (1 Chron. xxv. 1), and those falsely claiming inspiration (Ezek. xiii. 19; Micah v. 12; Zech. x. 2).

³ More indefinitely in Hebrew and LXX. 'afterward,' or 'in the futurity;' but the meaning is the same, as is evident from Isa. ii. 2 and Micah iv. 1, where "the last days" denote the time of Messiah—so called as closing up the ancient economy, terminating all preparatory arrangements, and bringing in the final dispensation of God's kingdom upon earth (cf. Heb. i. 1; ix. 26, "the end of the world" or "ages," and 1 Cor. x. 11).

of the gift is expressed by its being "poured out" (*Cf.* Prov. i. 23; Zech. xii. 10), in contrast with the mere drops of all preceding time, so its *universality* is denoted by its being for "all flesh," not as heretofore restricted to certain privileged persons and classes. Accordingly, we have it next in detail. (1) No distinction of *sex*: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (or speak by Divine inspiration and with Divine authority)—as in the men and women alike before their eyes; (2) nor of *age*: "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams"—the stress here being not upon the "visions" and "dreams" (which were not the most usual mode under the New Testament), but upon the age of the inspired; (3) nor of *rank*: "Yea, and on my bondmen and on my bond-women in those days will I pour out of my Spirit and they shall prophesy"—as no doubt would be seen in some of those present. "And I will shew wonders in the heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath, . . . before the great and notable day of the Lord come"—the day (beyond doubt) of Jerusalem's destruction, which was the "day of judgment" that closed the day of grace for the chosen nation, when, "the judgment being set and the books opened," they were adjudged to lose their standing as God's visible witness upon earth, and to have their whole civil and ecclesiastical polity swept away. "And it shall be that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"—prophetically announcing the permanent establishment, on the dissolution of the Jewish State, of an enduring economy of salvation, not confined to a peculiar people, but embracing

“whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord,” or believingly invoke that Name at which every knee shall bow.

Next comes Peter’s comment on all this, in the form of a narrative of the leading events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, a narrative remarkable for a number of things, particularly the following : (1) the courage that could venture to charge upon an immense miscellaneous street audience the death of God’s Messiah, and this in the most naked terms, and by a man who had himself but a short while before, quailing before a servant-maid in the high priest’s palace, denied Him thrice :¹ (2) the tenderness which tempered this awful charge with the announcement of an eternal purpose of God in that very death—so paving the way for holding forth this Crucified One as their own now exalted Christ and Lord : (3) the dread harmony with which one and the same event is here presented, as on men’s part a crime of unparalleled atrocity, and on the part of God the result of an eternal decree of saving mercy : (4) the description given of that death itself—by a word signifying “travail-pangs,”² as the throes of a death which was to give birth to a new life. But since the same word is used in the Old Testament (by the LXX.) in the sense of “cords” or “bands,” the apostle avails himself of that idea to express the impossibility of these cords *holding* our

¹ It may be well to observe that the genuine reading of ver. 23 is “Whom ye by the hand of wicked men did crucify and slay ;” the “hand” being that of the Roman soldiers under Pilate’s direction, but all at their instigation. (*λαβόντες* should not be in the text at all, and *χειρὸς*, in the singular, read.)

² *ὄδυνας*.

Lord in the grave: "Him ye crucified and slew, whom God"—gloriously reversing your sentence—"raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it;" impossible, in Peter's meaning, not so much because of the incongruity of the Living One being kept a prisoner among the dead (Luke xxiv. 5), but because the scripture which said that He should rise again from the dead (namely, Psalm xvi., on the last three verses of which he gives a remarkable comment) could not be broken. The closing words of the address, so far as reported, are a summary of the whole (ver. 36), which, while it repeats the dreadful charge already laid at their door, consoles them with the assurance that even in this God had a gracious design.¹

IV. *The Fruit.* This address carried irresistible conviction to the vast multitude. He whom they had so lately crucified they now see to be the Christ of God, risen from the dead, exalted to the right hand of power, and the Giver of that wondrous gift of the Holy Ghost, whose undeniable presence they had then witnessed. "Pricked in their hearts," they put themselves with beautiful simplicity into the hands of those by whom their eyes had been opened and their hearts broken, ready to do whatever they might direct them for the relief of their awakened conscience. Indeed the very way in which they addressed them—"Brethren,² what

¹ It is worthy of notice that in this verse (36) the most cutting part of the statement is put last:—"Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know assuredly that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, [even] this Jesus whom ye crucified."

² "Men and brethren" (as in the A.V.) is not the sense of *ἄνδρες*

must we do?"¹—shews how completely they had been won. "Not so" (says Bengel) "had they spoken before." It is as when Saul of Tarsus said to his new-found Lord, "What wilt thou have me to do?" To such "babes" it is that divine things are revealed, while from the "wise and prudent" they are hidden (Matt. xi. 28). How instant now and glad was Peter's response: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins,² and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." "Your past views of the promised Deliverer were all fundamentally fatally wrong; those things in Him that caused you to stumble were Heaven's signature to his rightful claims; but ye knew them not, "for had ye known them ye would not have crucified the Lord of glory;" but this was his ordained gateway to the throne, from which He hath now sent down that which ye now see and hear; repent, then, of those fatal misapprehensions and of the deep guilt into which they plunged you, of "killing the Prince of Life;" and since remission of sins is now the free gift of God in his name to all who believe, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ; so shall your own pardon be visibly sealed to you, and ye also shall receive that gift of the Holy Ghost whose manifestations in the company now before you have filled you with such

ἀδελφοί, for there is no "and." But though in English it must be rendered simply "brethren," it means more than *ἀδελφοί* alone: it expresses the respect which the speaker cherishes for his hearers. Thus (in Xen: *Anab.* i. 6, 5) "ἄνδρες φίλοι, not "men and friends," but "friends," yet in a cordial sense.—*Meyer*.

¹ Ποιήσωμεν (*delib. subj*)—not the simple future—is the true reading.

² The true reading here is τ. ἁμαρτιῶν ἑμῶν.

amazement.' A good deal more than this we learn that he said ; but of all that the historian gives no more than the general import—"And with many other words did he charge and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked¹ generation."

Now for the result. "They then that welcomed his word² were baptized : and there were added in that day³ about three thousand souls." What a change from the morning when this same Peter, after a whole night's fruitless fishing, let down his net once more for a draught, at his Master's bidding, and then was not able to pull it to shore for the multitude of fishes which it enclosed. In this he saw such a blaze of glory, that, as unable to live in its lustre, he fell down in his boat at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But, "Fear not, Simon," was his Lord's reply ; "from henceforth thou shalt catch men." And now came this capture, beggaring the former miracle both in the preciousness of the freight and the overpowering multitude wherewith his net was weighted. And just as before, "they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them," so here there was found immediate and urgent need of all the Twelve—as we are now beautifully to see.

¹ Σκολιᾶς.

² The word ἀσμένως ("gladly"), in the Received Text, has scarcely any authority ; but it is implied in the verb ἀποδέχομαι, which means not "received" merely, but "welcomed." So in Luke viii. 40, and Acts xxi. 17, our translators have rendered it "gladly received," and so it should be in Luke ix. 11 ("he welcomed them"), Acts xv. 4 ("they were welcomed by the Church") ; and so in xviii. 27, and xxviii. 30 ("welcomed all that came").

³ For the omission of ἐν before τ. ἡμέρα, there is next to no authority.

How raw these three thousand converts must have been immediately after baptism, is sufficiently obvious; knowing, as they did, no more of the gospel than they had heard that day, and little able, probably, to enter into the details even of that. Had the Apostles, then, contented themselves with their mere conversion, they had soon—if we may judge from all we know of such cases since—have withered away like spring-blossoms before the frost. But the Apostles were not so unwise. Their Master had charged them, just before his ascension, when they had “made disciples,” and “baptized” them, to “teach them to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them;” and his promised presence was conditioned by their obedience to these instructions. Here, accordingly, we find them putting these three thousand to school.

V. *The Beginnings of Church Life.* This is very imperfectly exhibited in our Authorized Version of the first clause of ver. 42—“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” It should be, “And they gave themselves continually to the teaching¹ of the apostles, and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread, and to prayers.” Let us try to conceive of this state of things. Three thousand had to be “taught which be the first principles of

¹ Τῆ διδαχῆ here does not mean “to the doctrine,” or *matter* of the Apostles’ teaching, but to their instructions—for they could not continue in what they had not received. Indeed, in many other cases our Version has given the same wrong turn to this word. Thus, after the Sermon on the Mount, the Evangelist says, “the multitude were astonished”—not at his *doctrine*, or the *matter* communicated, but —“at his teaching,” as is plain from what follows, “for he taught them as having authority, and not as their scribes.”

the oracles of God." But, having no large places of meeting, they must have been distributed into such small groups as each meeting-place would hold ; and as in this way they could all be reached only by each of the Twelve holding meetings of his own several times a day from week to week—and the numbers were continually increasing—we have here a spectacle of much interest. But this is only one feature of the picture. For they gave themselves also "to fellowship ;" in other words, besides what they drank in of apostolic teaching, they had, as we understand it, exercises of mutual fellowship,¹ implying that the converts themselves engaged in these—meeting, probably, in knots together while their apostolic teacher was otherwise engaged, to talk over the wonders into which they had been introduced, and to give vent to their new feelings in songs of praise and cries to their Father in heaven in the name of their new-found Lord. But they gave themselves further "to the breaking of bread," which we cannot doubt to mean the Eucharistic feast, which in this case would be celebrated in each meeting-place—how often is not said. But since to them it would be a visible teaching of the doctrine of the cross, familiarizing them with what to the Jews was a stumbling-block, and thus helping gradually to endear to them what at first would bring up only repulsive associations and heart-breaking recollec-

¹ Because the word *κοινωνία* is used in such passages as Rom. xv. 26 and Heb. xiii. 16 in the sense of pecuniary contributions—where the sense is obviously that—it is surprising that Olshausen, Baumgarten, and Humphry should think that to be meant here. Meyer takes it in the same sense of brotherly fellowship as we have done, though the mode of it which we have expressed above is our own.

tions, it may not improbably have been at first a daily celebration. Finally, it is added, "and to prayers." This is usually understood of the Temple prayers, which they certainly joined in. But in this connection, we think the reference is to what we now call public worship.

What a lovely picture have we here! No wonder it is added, "And fear" (or awe) "came upon every soul" outside the new Christian pale, as they witnessed the fruits of this astonishing day (compare Mark iv. 41; Luke i. 65), especially in view of the "wonders and signs" "which were done by the apostles." We cannot go into the community of goods next described (ver. 49), nor into their daily attendance at the Temple service, and their "breaking bread at home"—taking their meals together, as if of one family. But when we read how "they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people," while daily accessions swelled their number till it soon reached five thousand, we have before us a picture of young Church-and-Christian life as beautiful as can be imagined in this chequered state.

We have left too little room for what remains to be said. Beyond doubt, if Peter is to be credited, every one who then believed received the baptism of the Holy Ghost—manifestly not the gift of tongues, which was but the outward and temporary evidence of the possession of this gift by the hundred and twenty, but such an indwelling of the Spirit as gave them an immediate sense of reconciliation, and begat in them the new spirit of adop-

tion, and liberty, and love, and power for universal newness of life—the grand characteristics of the new economy—as contradistinguished from the comparative darkness, and bondage, and distance of the old. Nor was it the converts only that experienced this. The Apostles themselves experienced a change almost as marvellous as that which passed upon their converts. Witness the perfect clearness of Peter's views of Christ and His whole work—his soul all at once brought out of comparative darkness into marvellous light, and, what is even more remarkable perhaps, his former timidity turned into lion-like courage, ready to face his countrymen, whether in a popular mob or clothed in official authority, and claiming his right to bring the heaviest of all charges against them. It was the faith that overcometh the world; and in this the converts, rude and raw as they yet were in knowledge, were not a whit behind the chiefest Apostles.

Such was the first day of the Christian Church.

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