

THE LEADING SCRIPTURAL METAPHOR.

THE WAY.

It is proposed in this paper to follow up one of the clearest and most characteristic of those figures in Holy Scripture which serve to reveal the conditions and experiences of the spiritual life. That there is in the Bible a wealth of such illustrations every student readily admits, but the admission is one thing, patient investigation and acquisition is another. Few careful readers of the Scriptures are now content to regard its imagery as due merely to the imaginative colouring of Eastern minds, but if they do not regard it as quite superfluous, their tendency is to regard it from the wrong standpoint, viz., as if types and figures were designed to conceal and obscure, and not to illuminate and make manifest truths which could not, from the nature of the case, be otherwise conveyed. But as the written revelation is so largely presented in this parabolic method, it seems an imperative duty that those who value it should enquire into this characteristic presentation of its truths. It will therefore help to serve this purpose if a first selection is offered of the most persistent and most striking of the Scriptural metaphors, and an attempt is made to mark its underlying significance. On what principles, it may be asked, will this selection be made? The importance of a metaphor is indicated not so much by its frequency as by the following considerations.

(a) By the fact that all the greatest and most suggestive figures of the spiritual life are seen to be common to both Testaments, *i.e.*, they are equally applicable to the circumstances of Jewish polity, or to the life and conditions of the Universal Church. Of these figures there is not only a persistent and continuous employment, but they have a catholic character about them. Their suggestiveness is not for one time or people, but eternal and universal.

(b) As a consequence of this, such metaphors appeal to the general experience of mankind. The moment a metaphor is used, the force of which could only be appreciated by a Jew, or a Greek, or a Roman, then, however interesting it may prove to the student, it is seen not to be of a supreme and commanding significance—it falls into the lower and less important category of figures.

(c) The careful student of Scripture metaphors will soon observe that those which are at once most persistent and most striking have a historical character about them. Their antecedents lie far back, and are engraven upon the annals of the people of Jehovah's choice. The way, the warfare, the building—who is not aware of the pre-eminence of these figures? and who is there who cannot see them already writ large in the history of Israel? They are no more accidental in the literature of Scripture than were the crises of the Exodus and the Exile, or the struggles with the aborigines and the nations around, or the erection of the first and second temple, in the long discipline of the Jewish people.

(d) It is not too much to infer design in the employment of the greater metaphors. Metaphors are common to all literature; but in that which is uninspired, even in the Epics of Homer or Vergil, or in the *Divina Commedia*, they appear with whatever felicity of employment, or grace of usage, without any consistency of design. They serve their turn—to arrest attention, to charm the ear, to catch the eye, but their presence is accidental, the impression is momentary. Not so with the great figures of the spiritual life in Scripture. They do more, and are designed to do more, than arrest a casual attention; in their proportions and character they insist upon permanent recognition, they claim intimate acquaintance, and as an integral part of the written revelation their earnest study becomes not only a delightful intellectual pursuit, but a fruitful method for the

discipline of the heart and will and of the whole human character.

(e) There is yet another note of these greater figures of Holy Scripture. They are germinant. Out of them spring other lesser metaphors—offshoots from a parent stock. Or, to put it otherwise, there are branch lines which stretch away in different directions from the main lines of metaphor, serving for communication of a subordinate importance, not passing boldly and directly from one end to the other of the revelation, but traversing portions of its vast expanse, and thus not of universal scope and tendency.

It follows from these considerations that to trace any main line of Scripture metaphor cannot prove a mere word study. The act must become such a reverent lifting of the veil as is permitted from man's side. If a revelation is in its essential character parabolic and figurative, then the more these images and types are apprehended in their proportion and mutual relation, the farther the open eye will be enabled to see the wondrous things which are finally to be discerned in all their completeness. There will remain mysteries still, but it is a comfortable assurance that there is a human stewardship of such mysteries, that there is given to men, however unequal they may be to the responsibility, the sacred charge of their administration. Who can doubt that it will be a part of the ampler revelation of the life of heaven to discern the full significance of that which is conveyed, in a riddle, by the imagery which characterises through and through the written Word?

The humblest contribution to such an enterprise must, however, bring its own sad misgivings. For this unusual task is not merely hindered by diffidence of the enquirer's intellectual capacity to carry it through, but by the deeper hesitation as to spiritual gifts. For here scholarship fails, and mental power fails, and the revelation denied to these is given to the childlike heart. Yet in this spirit the venture

may be taken, and a reverent consideration be invited of the first and most striking of all Christian metaphors, viz., the Way.

An examination into the words which stand in the Old and New Testaments as its equivalents need not detain us long, for this is a very simple undertaking.

There are two general terms in Hebrew, "derech" and "orach," which signify respectively a trodden or ordinary path, a pathway. Practically interchangeable expressions, they stand distinguished from other terms, which mark a "via munita" as the national or public road—the king's highway. Of these two terms "derech" is one of the most common in the Hebrew vocabulary, and is employed in the Old Testament at least five hundred times. It has three stages of meaning: first, the action of walking; then, by transference, a pathway; then, by further transference into the metaphorical sphere, a mode, a course, a method, or discipline.

The common equivalent in the LXX. for דֶּרֶךְ is ὁδός, and this again stands almost uniformly in the New Testament whenever the Hebrew word is in reference.¹

'Oδός starts in its significance at one stage nearer the metaphorical sense. It is first a way, then a course, method, or mode of thinking and living; with this exception, the two words stand, as it were, linked together in primitive meaning and after application. This close *rapport* between the two words, Hebrew and Greek, added to the frequency of their employment in the Old and New Testament, is of importance as suggesting an underlying idea wide enough to attract and claim the attention of the Jewish or Hellenic mind. The Way is a metaphor with the mark of catholicity about it. If it only bore the impress upon it of its historical antecedents, then the Jewish idea would have been lost

¹ Cf. the quotation in all four Evangelists of Is. xl. 3: St. Matt. iii. 3, St. Mark i. 3, St. Luke iii. 4, St. John i. 23.

to the Greek ; if it only bore the conception of some swift passage from point to point, then it would not have been so readily assimilated by a Hebrew. It is singular indeed that in the New Testament we have in this capital instance an illustration of one of those branch lines of metaphor extending off the main line. Thus the Pauline figure of a race may be noted as a development of the figure of the way ; but while the former is graphic and picturesque in the highest degree, its suggestions are not for Jews, but for those Greek, and Latin, and Teutonic races to whom the games and the racecourse meant and mean so much. The metaphor of the race is by comparison accidental, temporary, local ; pertinent and suggestive as it is, it is not on the main line.¹

One cannot fail to observe the historic ancestry of the metaphor of the Way. It lies embedded in the records of Israel when it first emerged into national existence. It is sufficient to recall the name of the second book of the Old Testament. The idea of the Way was burnt into Jewish consciences as often as they recalled, or as the national festivals recalled the experiences of the forty years in the wilderness. The attendances of pilgrims at these festivals impressed them continually afresh upon the mind—and then, as if the nation could never be suffered to lose sight of the idea, the second great crisis in the national life, the captivity at Babylon, and the returns, once more forced the idea of the way into the prominence it claimed.

Pari passu with the impress wrought upon the idea by historical association is seen a growing ethical significance. The Way was ever towards a Divine presence, undertaken by a Divine invitation, and under Divine guidance, with a divinely promised blessing in store. Israel under Moses,

¹ The teaching of our Lord on the "broad" and "narrow" way is itself a development of the original figure. Students of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* will remember its reproduction there.

the faithful and happy pilgrim to the house of his God, the worn-out exile returning to the ruined home of his sires, all these must have felt the way to be symbolic. This ideal route became to them significant of the spiritual life, of its trials and discipline, of its claims and responsibilities, of its fears and hopes, and its triumphant issue. References to the Old Testament might be given, but they are too numerous to make quotation necessary.

The employment of this figure, stands alone by position and in suggestiveness in Biblical literature. It is indeed true that the teaching of Mahomet has some fine moral hints—in the doctrine of the four ways. But while the underlying idea seems borrowed from Scriptural source, it is weakened in its presentation through the Koran by artificiality and lack of directness. To see it presented anywhere else than in Scripture one must turn to the immortal allegory of John Bunyan.¹ The fame of this masterpiece of literature rests simply on the fact that the author had the fine spiritual instinct to fasten upon the leading Scriptural metaphor and to present it to his readers with marvellous vividness, and suggestiveness. When another Bunyan appears to do like justice to other Scriptural metaphors, they too will be adequately impressed upon the human conscience and heart.

In the *Pilgrim's Progress* the Way indeed becomes luminous. With extraordinary fidelity to Scripture, it runs right through the narrative; it is not crudely forced upon the attention, but it claims the soul's clear vision; and as we tread the path with Christian and his brave comrades from the city of destruction to the celestial home awaiting them across the river, every step in the journey appeals to the heart, reminding it, if it be tender and loyal, of the danger of straying from the right way and of the glorious recom-

¹ Much of the power as of the picturesqueness of the *Purgatorio* surely is due to this same standing figure of a way.

pense following upon the nearer, closer walk with God. Bunyan's work might at least assure those who have studied and love it of the great gain which comes from realizing the spiritual life and experience as a pilgrimage from earth to heaven. His imaginative power is of course extremely rare, but there is no manner of reason why Christian people should not remind themselves more often of the teaching of the Way. As they undertake some commonplace journey, or better, as they walk in some fair country scenes like Clopas and, it may be, St. Luke, his companion, not merely "looking up through nature to nature's God," but full of thought, now serious and sad, now bright and brave, an effort to picture this as a metaphor of the soul's progress need become no mere idle flight of fancy, but a bracing cheering conception for life, one full of high and holy teaching.

It remains to consider this main line of Scriptural metaphor as it stretches across the pages of the New Testament. The student will be aware that the figure is rarer in occurrence than in the Old Testament. It has also lost somewhat, from the nature of the case, of the strength of its historical association, but it is more important to observe that a fresh turn is given to the metaphorical sense of *'Οδός*. An examination into the passages in which the expression occurs in the earliest history of the Church shows that it was the popular term for describing the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.¹ The term, it will be noted, is now in use in this sense, not only by Christians themselves but by those who were indifferent, or strongly antagonistic to the faith. There must be some cause adequate to account for the new departure in sense. Why was the Christian life and discipline now termed by friends and foes alike as the Way? The answer lies in the

¹ Cf. Acts ix. 2, xiv. 23, xvi. 17, xviii. 25, 26, xix. 9, 22, xxi. 4, xxiv. 14, 22.

record of the Gospels. It is sufficient to quote the enquiry of St. Thomas and the answer of the Lord.¹ There once for all in reply to him, who not here alone appears as the representative of the doubt and anxiety of Christians, Christ declares Himself the fulfilment of the great figure of the ancient Scriptures. I am the Way.

It is not for a moment to be supposed that this sublime interpretation was given on this occasion alone, but the saying sank deep into the hearts of the Apostles, and so passed by natural communication from lip to lip, from letter to letter—to the instruction and comfort of the Church of the first ages. The saying did not seem “hard” to those who had walked with the Master by the shores of Galilee or had passed with Him on the upland slopes of Judæa, or had followed His feet in the streets of Jerusalem. But their anxieties were to vanish and their doubts to be presently cleared. The Way was to be made luminous through His passion, His resurrection, and by that crowning event by which the kingdom of heaven is opened still to all believers.

Life lies at the root of the Christian faith, and life must be the key to all its symbolism. In the life beyond, the Church triumphant shall discern the truth which the Church militant still strives to reach, that Christ is the living Way. Yet even now no patient pursuit in our earthly pilgrimage of His adorable example shall be without its final reward in the rest that remains for the people of God; every hope is summed up in Christ—every fear is calmed by Him. What the Old Testament saints dimly foresaw the Church universal joyously accepts—He is the Way.

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¹ St. John xiv. 4, 5, 6.