

CHRIST AND ESCHATOLOGY.

AN attempt has recently been made (see Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 353 *sqq.*) to bring the *μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ* in St. Mark iv. 11 (comp. St. Matt. xiii. 11 ; St. Luke viii. 10) into close and stiffly dogmatic connexion with certain sharply defined eschatological ideas with which our Lord is credited by a number of New Testament critics. On the exact nature and inter-relation of these conceptions there must necessarily be a certain variety of opinion. In Schweitzer's own view, Jesus regarded the preaching of John the Baptist as belonging to a definitely determined series of eschatological acts. He similarly regarded Himself with conscious deliberateness as called to work out the continuation of the same series of eschatological occurrences. Each important act in the ministry of Jesus thus becomes "eschatologically conditioned" in a precise predestinarian and almost fatalist sense. Jesus adopts a certain line of action because He believes such a course to be eschatologically necessary in order to bring about certain definite results. It is with this theory in his mind that Schweitzer writes as follows:—

"The secret of the Kingdom of God which Jesus unveils in the parables . . . amounts to this, that in the movement to which the Baptist gave the first impulse, and which still continued, there was an initial act which was drawing after it the coming of the Kingdom in a fashion which was miraculous, unintelligible, but unfailingly certain, since the sufficient cause of it lay in the power and purpose of God" (p. 356).

The "initial act" spoken of in the passage just quoted is, in Schweitzer's view, identical with "the sowing" of the seed which is the starting point in three out of the four

parables (if the simile of the lamp and the bushel be counted among the parables) recorded in the fourth chapter of St. Mark. The final stage is the harvest, and it is hence held that "Jesus must have expected the coming of the Kingdom at harvest time" in the very year in which He uttered the parables. "And that is," continues Schweitzer, "just what He did expect. It is for that reason that He sends out His disciples to make known in Israel, as speedily as may be, what is about to happen" (p. 356).

Schweitzer fortifies this theory by a reference to St. Matthew x. 23, where our Lord is reported to have said to the twelve, when sending them out to preach the approach of the Kingdom, that they shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come. But Jesus, continues our learned theorist, finding that this expectation, with all its preceding tumults and woes, was not fulfilled, and that the disciples returned to Him without anything special having happened, felt constrained to adopt an entirely different course of action. He practically abandoned the Galilean ministry, and after a short interval of time spent in the farther north, He set His face towards Jerusalem, in order to bring about the Parousia in a different way, but still according to certain sharply defined eschatological conceptions. In place of "the pre-Messianic tribulation" in which, according to His former conception, as indicated in the tenth chapter of St. Matthew, the world in general was concerned, He now dwells exclusively on "His own passion and death at Jerusalem." "That was the new conviction," continues Schweitzer, "that had dawned upon Him. He must suffer for others . . . that the Kingdom might come" (p. 387).

This is in brief the theory of Schweitzer on this part of the great subject. Everything is determined by the mechanism of eschatological dogmatics. The secret of the Kingdom

of God in the parables is the eschatology of the Parousia in a veiled form, and the subsequent development of the idea of the Parousia is also grounded in definite, though greatly modified eschatological conceptions.

Now let us in contradistinction to this theory bring before our minds once more the view to which, in its general outline, we have all been more or less accustomed, though each of us would probably fill in the outline in his own way. I will venture to put it in the following form :—

The secret of the Kingdom of God in the parables is not a veiled form of stiff eschatological ideas, but the innermost spiritual character of the Kingdom. That all the sayings and acts of our Lord found their unity in the general conception which He had of His great mission, is, of course, perfectly true. But the *μυστήριον* of the parables was not specially centred in the Parousia, but in the great spiritual principles underlying the laws of the Kingdom as laid down in the sayings of which the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of St. Matthew is the fullest known collection. Closely connected with the secret of the parables is the saying that “the Kingdom of God is *within* you.” The Parousia was to be an outward manifestation by which the Kingdom was to be planted, or rather developed, in the hearts of large numbers of men ; but the secret of the parable itself is not the great outward manifestation that was expected, but the deepest principles of the inner spiritual life at which Christ before all things aimed. The parables contain the spiritual ethic—if such a combination of words may be used—of the Kingdom of God. Schweitzer denies that Jesus preached an ethic of the Kingdom at all, turning even the Sermon on the Mount into a form of predestinarian dogmatics. But we are, I think, right in treating this opinion as a mere paradox. Christ did develop an ethic of the Kingdom, the Sermon on the Mount representing

this ethic as law, and the parables dealing with the spiritual principles underlying this law.

Let us, by way of illustration, glance for a moment at the parable of the sower. A husbandman sowing seed into a field represents a physical and mundane act. But transfer the idea into the spiritual sphere, that is to say the sphere of innermost being which transcends immeasurably not only the physical and mundane forms of existence, but even the intellectual side of our nature, and what a secret, what a veritable *μυστήριον* it is in face of the ordinary world of phenomena on which our minds customarily run! What a *μυστήριον* in the fullest sense of the word, which the unspiritual "seeing do not see, and hearing do not hear," but which to those who have the Kingdom within them becomes the highest and most important reality of existence! And does the same kind of contemplation not apply to the other parts of the parable of the sower as well as to all the parables? We are surely right in thinking that something like this thought, and not a stiff eschatological dogma, lies at the base of the *μυστήριον* (Hebrew *סוד*, Aramaic *סוד*) as used by our Lord in addressing His disciples on the deepest principles of the Life which He was endeavouring to implant in the hearts of men. It is to these things that the saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," refers, and not to eschatological dogmatics.

But supposing it be granted that the close connexion which Schweitzer seeks to establish between the *μυστήριον* of the Parables and the Parousia be given up, would he still be right in his view of the eschatological basis of the Parousia itself? It is, I think, safe to say that his opinion on this point will have to be greatly modified before it can be accepted, and that when it is so modified, it will be found to differ very little from the view to which we have more or less been accustomed.

If Schweitzer is right in thinking that Jesus originally expected the Parousia before the return of the twelve from their mission to the cities of Israel, and that in St. Matthew x. 23 we have a record showing that He actually told them so, one should have expected the disciples' faith in their Master to have suffered a great shock, when they found that the prediction was not fulfilled. But we find nothing of the kind. On the contrary, they not only came back to Him as full of confidence in His leadership as ever, but it was after their return, when they were on their way to the villages of Cæsarea Philippi (St. Mark viii. 27-30; St. Matt. xvi. 13-20; St. Luke ix. 18-20), that Peter made his great confession of the Messiahship of Jesus. It is surely mere trifling on the part of Schweitzer to say that the disciples returned "full of a proud satisfaction" because "one promise had been fulfilled—the power which they had been given over the demons" (p. 362). If they went forth fully expecting, on the faith of their Master's word, nothing less than the great cosmic catastrophe to happen immediately, the entire failure of the expectation would surely have caused them to pause and—to say the least—waver in their faith, whatever other satisfaction they might have derived from their undertaking.

But there is another still greater objection to Schweitzer's view. It is impossible to admit that Christ's spirit was tied and bound with the eschatological fetters which our German critic has so cleverly forged for Him. The Master-mind which could address His generation with such words as: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time . . . but I say unto you," and which could with such wonderful ease brush aside the many sophisms and see through the cunningly twisted questions with which both Pharisees and Sadducees tried to entangle Him, could surely not have been warped by the eschatological illusion ascribed to Him

by our twentieth century German critic.¹ No, Christ's spirit—I mean even the human spirit, apart from the Divinity within Him—was, we are sure, higher, greater, freer than that. He indeed knew the prophecies, and He no doubt often reverently dwelt on them; but we must not forget that Christ Himself is greater than the Scriptures which speak of Him, and that all the best Messianic expectations of the past, whether taken from Isaiah, Daniel, the similitudes of the Book of Enoch, or other spiritual sources, were raised by Him into the higher sphere in which He Himself moved and had His being. This is something quite different from the eschatologically conditioned Christ whom Schweitzer places before us. It is true that the scholar whose ideas we are criticising assumes that Jesus, instead of merely following up the traces of ancient eschatology, Himself “set the times in motion by acting, by creating eschatological facts” (p. 318). Jesus, according to Schweitzer, created, as did John the Baptist before Him, a living eschatology of His own. But even so, the fetters remain, only they are very largely fetters of Christ's own making. “Jesus' purpose,” we are told, “is to set in motion the eschatological development of history, to let loose the final woes, the confusion and strife, from which shall issue the Parousia, and so to introduce the supra-mundane phase of the eschatological drama” (p. 369). But we are accustomed to think, and we still hold that we are right in so thinking, that it was the supreme

¹ Orthodox believers, who may be inclined to accept Schweitzer's view on this point, would of course call in the doctrine of the Kenosis which may in a case like this be described as the self-restraining of God the Son from preventing error to influence the intent, ardent, and expectant human mind of Christ. But before the Kenosis is carried to such length, there must be clear evidence to show that the erroneous expectation attributed to Christ by Schweitzer actually existed. The argument of the present paper is that in reality the evidence points the other way.

and all-absorbing purpose of Jesus to implant the Kingdom of God in the heart of humanity. We further hold that—as the parables indeed imply—He contemplated a period of growth and development in connexion with the Kingdom, and that eschatology itself was in His mind transfigured into something much freer and much grander than Schweitzer imagines. It is true that some parts of the Gospel narrative do give us the impression that certain acts were done just in order that Scripture might be fulfilled. But are we not right in estimating the real tone of Jesus' mind from the sayings which strike a higher note than that? To continue the musical simile, Christ's own higher eschatological notes must have assumed a somewhat different sound when transposed to the lower key on which alone some of the disciples could play. Scripture, to put it in another way, was ideally fulfilled in the ideal Christ; but when the story came to be written with the less ideal—though still in its degree truly inspired—pen, the fulfilment of the ancient expectations occasionally assumed a stiff and mechanical setting.¹

But if Schweitzer is wrong in thinking that Jesus expected the Parousia before the return of the twelve from their mission, how are we to explain the verse (23) in St. Matthew x., where our Lord is reported to have said: "Verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come"? The answer is that we must range ourselves on the side of those critics who see in St. Matthew x. and in other sections of the Gospels, notably in the great eschatological discourse reported in St. Mark xiii., St. Matthew xxiv., and St. Luke xxi., not

¹ In the case of the expected coming of Elias, St. Luke (i. 17) caught the true meaning of the event; it was to be one who will come "in the spirit and power of Elias." But the cruder eschatological belief required the personal reappearance of that ancient prophet (see e.g. St. Mark ix. 11).

an eschatological problem pure and simple, but a problem that is partly eschatological, and partly literary.

Concerning the composition of the Gospel of St. Mark, we have the important testimony of Papias, known through excerpts of his work preserved in the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius, that "Mark, having become Peter's interpreter," wrote "accurately . . . *though not in order*, what was said or done by the Christ." But if St. Mark's account, though fully trustworthy as to facts, suffers from a lack of order, or arrangement of the different parts, in the composition, one is justified in assuming that the other Evangelists are similarly subject to a lack of order. To take but one instance—the great eschatological discourse, already referred to, was delivered in answer, not to a single, but a multiple question. This is clear from St. Matthew xxiv. 3, where we read: "Tell us when shall these things (i.e., the destruction of the Temple) be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" In St. Mark and St. Luke the question, though double in form, is not so explicit; but there seems to be no reason for doubting that in the discourse as variously given by the three Evangelists, we have a combination of answers to the different questions, in which the want of order spoken of by Papias clearly appears. To take again but one instance: in St. Mark xiii. 10 (comp. St. Matt. xxiv. 14) we are suddenly confronted with the far off vista of events spoken of in the sentence: "And the Gospel must first be preached unto all the nations" in the midst of predictions clearly relating to the sufferings through which the disciples will have to pass personally.

But to return to St. Matthew x., Schweitzer bases his theory that Christ expected the Parousia before the return of the twelve from the mission on which they were sent two by two, on the report of Christ's address as given in the

Gospel of St. Matthew. But neither St. Mark (vi. 7-12) nor St. Luke ix. 1-6) knows anything about a prediction of the Parousia in the same address. An even superficial examination of St. Matthew x. will, moreover, reveal the fact that in that chapter we have a combination of discourses, part of it apparently belonging to the great eschatological discourse already touched upon.¹ St. Matthew, therefore, appears here to exhibit the lack of order which Papias found in St. Mark, and we thus find ourselves accepting the theory of "composite structures" (p. 361) in St. Matthew's Gospel, rather than going with Schweitzer, who uncritically disregards the entire silence of an expected Parousia before the return of the twelve in both St. Mark and St. Luke.

How St. Matthew x. 23 assumed its present form, and what its exact original context was, we may no longer be able to discover with a sufficient degree of certainty; but it is, in view of the combined negative testimony of St. Mark and St. Luke, powerfully supported as this testimony is by our general view of Christ's clearness of vision and paramount spiritual greatness, as well as by the continued and even increased trust reposed in their Master by the returning disciples, certain that we are right in rejecting the notion that Jesus expected the Parousia, with all its precedent tumults and woes, to happen within the space of time during which the twelve were engaged in their mission of preaching and healing in the towns of Palestine.

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¹ So far as St. Mark ix. 1 is concerned (the prophecy that some of the persons then addressed "shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power"), there seems to be no valid ground for rejecting the view that the fulfilment of it took place on the day of Pentecost.