

" WILL THE SON OF MAN FIND FAITH ON THE
EARTH? "

It seems to be the uniform idea of all commentators that this question, concluding the parable of the Importunate Widow in Luke xviii. 1-8, is " a sorrowful one," implying in Jesus the " painful consciousness what a want of faith He would meet at His *Parousia*." It is understood to be " pessimistic," to be " added by an editor who had xvii. 26-37 in mind," with its description of a wicked world suddenly overwhelmed in the midst of its sin.

If so, it is entirely unique in the New Testament, and quite out of harmony with its context. The parable to which it is attached is an encouragement to importunate prayer for the righteousness (*i.e.*, vindication, *ἐκδίκησις*) and salvation of God promised in Isaiah lvi. 1. This salvation, in spite of delay, is near, and sure to come. The argument is *a fortiori*. If even an earthly judge, careless of justice, will avenge a widow merely to be rid of the annoyance of her importunity, how is it conceivable that God should remain deaf to the entreaties of His own chosen people that cry to Him day and night? The framer of the parable ends with a triumphant: No; this is inconceivable. The heavenly, righteous Judge cannot possibly refuse His own people's entreaty for justice. " I tell you He will avenge them, and will do it speedily."

At this point comes in the half verse (8*b*) that, according to all interpreters to whom we have access, introduces the plaintive if not pessimistic note that grates so discordantly. We need scarcely wonder at the conclusion of one of the

latest and best interpreters of the eschatological sayings of Jesus, who, in spite of a very laudable conservatism, feels constrained to

regard these closing words as a sombre reflection suggested by some apostasy amid persecution, a grim comment on the speedy (*ἐν τάχει*) vindication just spoken of, expected in the Kingdom's advent, in contrast with what the glorified Lord would actually find at His glorious appearing after the prolonged delay had damped the early enthusiasm.¹

If Dr. Winstanley's interpretation of verse 8b could be granted, we too could hardly avoid his conclusion that it looks very like an appendage by way of a preaching or reading "aside," and rather dismal at that, for it contradicts the hopeful stimulus of the story to persevering prayer.

But surely the burden of proof is on those who adopt this interpretation if any other be admissible.

Our objection to amputation is not on general principles merely, but specifically because suppression of verse 8b will leave the parable deprived of its natural conclusion. It is not in accordance with the teaching of Jesus to inculcate importunity in prayer *without* the complementary duty of bowing to the wiser will of God. In particular it accords neither with His teaching nor His contemporaries', to omit this limit upon importunity when the cry is: "Avenge me."

By analogy of a long series of contemporary treatments of the same problem, the difficulty to be met here is the delay of the *Parousia*. End the parable with verse 8a, and you leave nothing but a bald reassertion. The real objection remains unmet. The speaker reassverates with stronger emphasis than before the conviction that God certainly will fulfil His promise of "righteousness and salvation" (Isa. lvi. 1). But he keeps silence on the main point, which is: *Why*, then, does the cry for justice of God's ill-treated saints remain so long unanswered?

¹ Winstanley, *Jesus and the Future*, p. 136.

The objections to leaving the parable in this truncated form have double force from the fact that other contemporary treatments of the question—and a long series can be cited, both Jewish and Christian—are by no means without an answer. Indeed the answer is almost stereotyped. In substance it is always the same, whether the theodicy be Jewish or Christian in origin. With sundry variations of form it amounts always to this : “ God is not slack, as some think, to fulfil His promises of vindication, but is longsuffering (*μακροθυμεῖ*), not willing that any should perish, but desirous that all should come unto repentance.”¹ In the later Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic writings this doctrine of the “ forbearance ” (*ἀνοχή*) of God takes the form of the eschatological expectation of the Great Repentance. In order that the Day of Yahweh may not smite the earth with a curse, He will send before His own Coming that Elijah, who in the days of Ahab “ turned the heart of Israel back again ” (1 Kings xviii. 37). Elijah will turn the heart of the children to the Father (God) and the Father to the children (Israel), so that the Coming may indeed be light and not darkness.² In 2 Esdras a still more specific explanation is given for the delay on the same general basis. Sick with hope deferred the prophet reminds God of His promise to deliver Israel from its ill-treatment and oppression :

All this have I spoken before thee, O Lord, because thou hast said that for our sakes thou madest this world (Gen. i. 26 ff.). As for the other nations, which also come of Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing, and are like unto spittle (Isa. xl. 15) . . . And now, O Lord, behold, these nations which are reputed as nothing, be lords over us and devour us, while we, thy people, whom thou hast called thy Firstborn, thy Only-begotten, and thy fervent Lover, are given into their hands. If the world now be made for our sakes, why do we not possess for an inheritance our world ? How long shall this endure ?³

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 9.

² Mal. iv. 6, reading the singular as in Eccclus. xlviii. 10.

³ 2 Esdr. vi. 55-59.

The answer given to the impatient seer is in substance the same as that long before given to his predecessor Enoch :

The hearts of the holy were filled with joy that the number of righteousness had drawn nigh (i.e., the required number of the elect was nearly complete), and the prayer of the righteous was heard, and the blood of the righteous required before the Lord of Spirits.¹

This required number of the elect is determined in *En.* lxi. 1-5 by actual measurement, as well as by numbering. Angels are sent with "cords and ropes of the righteous" to ensure that even

those who have been destroyed by the desert and devoured by the fish of the sea or by wild beasts may return, for . . . none can be destroyed.

In lxii. 8 it is a harvest of "the holy and elect," all of which must be reaped.

In like manner with Enoch, Esdras is comforted for the delay of "the day of vengeance of our God"² by the assurance that the "chambers of good souls" must be filled up before the world prepared for them can be brought in.³

The nearly contemporary Christian Apocalypse of John has a similar answer to the cry: How long, how long? The souls of the martyrs from beneath the altar in heaven plead like "the righteous" of Enoch for the "requiring of their blood":

How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The answer is an exhortation to patience until the completion of their number:

It was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little time until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course.⁴

Where the line is less sharply drawn than in the apocalypses between the people of God and a hostile world, the delay is

¹ *Eth. En.* xlvi. 4.

² *Isa.* lxi. 2.

³ *2 Esdr.* iv. 35 f.

⁴ *Rev.* vi. 10 f.

explained by analogy of the slow processes of husbandry. Fig-harvest cannot be until the swelling twig has matured its fruit (Mark xiii. 28 f. and parallels). Wheat-harvest cannot be until “ four months ” (John. iv. 35), and the wise husbandman has patience, not demanding harvest activities before the time (Mark iv. 26–29 ; cf. Jas. v. 7 f.). In Matthew we have two parables in each of which this general lesson of patient waiting for the *Parousia* is given special application to the problem of “ the things which offend.” The parables of the Tares and the Worthless Fish (Matt. xiii. 24–30, 36–43, 47–50) give practically the same answer as *Enoch* and Second Esdras to the question : Why does not God give judgment now ? The answer is : First must come the *completion of the number of the elect*. In Christian sources the desideratum mainly in view is sometimes, as in Matthew x. 23, Acts iii. 19–21, the ingathering of the still salvable remnant of Israel. More often it is the ingathering of the Gentiles. For a long and important series of passages, of which we must speak more particularly, make the main reason for the delay of the *Parousia* the ingathering of “ all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call.”¹ These wanderers include not merely, nor even primarily, the scattered sons of Israel, but the remnant of the Gentiles. For the great theme of Deutero-Isaiah, the conversion of the Gentiles, had no more disappeared from Jewish than from Christian thought. In a whole series of passages from Synoptic tradition this doctrine of the ingathering of the Gentiles is applied specifically to the question of the delay of the *Parousia*, so that we may fairly call it the normal and even stereotyped answer to the irrepressible question : “ Where is the promise of His Coming ? ”

Thus in the so-called Apocalyptic Discourse, or Doom Chapter, of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. xxiv. 14 = Mark xiii. 10)

it is interjected into the warning of suffering and persecution which must be "endured to the end." For, says Matthew,

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the Gentiles, and then shall the end come.

The same utterance is given in earlier and simpler form by Mark :

First must this gospel be preached to all the Gentiles.

Luke, it is true, in his version of the Doom Chapter substitutes a prediction of the

treading down of Jerusalem by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.¹

But Luke also employs the doctrine of the 'forbearance' in the opening of his second treatise in the form of an answer to the disciples' question : "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Their impatience is rebuked by the reminder that "to know the times and seasons" is something reserved to God alone. The part for disciples is to be "witnesses" for the gospel :

in Jerusalem and all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

So, finally, in the fuller form of the early Longer Appendix to Mark, now accessible in the recently discovered Washington Manuscript :

And they began to make excuse for themselves, saying, This world of lawlessness and unbelief is under the power of Satan, who will not permit things which are unclean under the spirits to receive the true power of God. Therefore reveal thy righteousness (i.e., vindication; cf. Isa. lvi. 1) even now. So said they to Christ. And Christ answered them saying, The limit of years of Satan's power is fulfilled, but other terrible things are near to happen, and the sinners, for whose sake I was delivered up to death that they might turn to the truth, and sin no more, so that they might inherit in heaven the spiritual and imperishable glory of (i.e., belonging to) righteousness. . . .

The sentence is incomplete. It requires a verb signifying "must be evangelised." The ordinary text continues :

¹ Luke xxi. 23.

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

The foregoing instances are surely enough to prove that neither Synagogue nor Church was at a loss for an explanation of the delay of the *Parousia*. By the date to which we must certainly bring down the Gospel of Luke there could be no question as to the nature of the answer any normal Christian would render to the objection : Why does the heavenly Judge so long defer the intervention for which His people entreat Him day and night ? The answer would inevitably be in line with the theodicy of Romans ix. 11 : “ A hardening hath in part befallen Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.” The Coming of the Son of man cannot be until the “ witness ” has been effected before all the world. As for this “ witness ” we are not limited to canonical documents. A Christian writing approximately contemporary with our Book of Acts represents the apostles as sent out because condemnation of the world without opportunity for repentance would not be just. For the first twelve years they are to preach to Israel that if any of Israel repent and believe in God, through my name, his sins may be forgiven. After twelve years go forth into the world that no one may say : We did not hear it.

The mission is as in Mark xvi. 16 :

That they who hear and believe may be saved, but that they who hear and believe not may bear witness, having no opportunity to make the defence “ We did not hear.”¹

In view of all this evidence we may fairly speak of the doctrine that the Coming of the Son of man must be deferred until the “ making ready for the Lord of a people prepared for Him ”² as a fixed element of Christian doctrine in the period of the Lukan writings. Indeed the doctrine is

¹ *Kerygma Petri*, Fragments 6 and 7 *ap.* Preuschen, *Antileg.* p. 53 f.

² Spoken of the work of Elijah redivivus in Luke i. 17.

scarcely more than a Christianised form of that which forms the very nerve of Pharisaism, that the divine intervention only awaits an obedient people. We encounter it under the form of various rabbinic sayings promising the Coming of Messiah so soon as all Israel has once performed a given commandment, or so soon as the Day of Atonement has once been perfectly observed, or the like. It is certainly what we should expect to find in some form at the close of a parable dealing like that of the Importunate Widow with the question: Why does God delay to avenge His elect?

But we must return from our protests against excision to the question of interpretation. A rendering for which no exegetical authority can be cited must in the nature of the case be proposed only with diffidence, and subject to correction by the recognised masters of New Testament grammar and philology. Under this reserve, however, it is permissible to point out that the accepted rendering and interpretation of Luke xviii. 8 is not the only admissible one. Our conviction is that the verse is in substance an equivalent for the checks upon impatient clamour for the divine judgment already cited, a reminder that "first must the gospel be preached" and must be "believed on in the world."

Classical Greek grammar would call for a Potential Optative with *ἀν* (corresponding to the English Potential) to express this sense; but it is notorious that the Optative, particularly the Potential Optative, is extremely rare in the New Testament.¹ The usual practice of the New Testament writers, who are more or less affected by Semitic usage, is to employ a simple Future Indicative (corresponding to the Semitic Imperfect) where the Greek (or English) employs the Potential. Thus in Matthew xxvi. 53 we have

¹ Burton, *Moods and Tenses of N.T. Greek*, § 178f., knows of but ten instances, all in the Lukan writings and all but one or two in indirect discourse.

“ My Father *shall* even now send me (*παραστήσει*) more than ten legions of angels.” Here Greek—or English—usage requires “ My Father *would* send me ” ; for the condition is implied : “ *if* I should beseech Him.” An equally marked case appears in John vi. 68 : “ Lord, to whom *shall* we go (*ἀπελευσόμεθα*). Here it is perfectly clear that Peter is not proposing an actual, but only a supposititious forsaking of Jesus. Again, Greek and English require the Potential : “ to whom *should* we go ? ” for the condition is tacitly implied : “ *if* we should forsake thee.” These instances make it abundantly clear that we have no right to expect the nice distinctions of Greek (or even those of English) syntax in Luke xviii. 8, which, as Dr. Winstanley observes, is not Lukan in style or vocabulary, but (as we are disposed to think) reflects the characteristics of a Semitic source.¹ Plenty of analogies exist for rendering : Howbeit if the Son of man came (*ἔλθων* expressing condition) would He find faith (or the faith) on the earth ?

We see at once that this rendering, instead of leaving Luke xviii. 8 in hopeless contradiction both with its immediate context and with the whole attitude of the age, brings it directly into line with the whole series of passages we have been quoting. The form of the sentence is of course elliptical. We must either take the participle *ἔλθων* as expressing the condition of the protasis, or else supply it in some such form as : “ If there were no delay,” or the like. But ellipsis is just what we should expect. It characterises every instance but one out of the ten Potential Optatives in Luke-Acts. These are all the instances known to the New Testament,² and in every case save one we have

¹ We may venture to suspect the clause *καὶ μακροθυμῆ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς*, which concludes ver. 7. Elsewhere the “longsuffering” of God is always adduced as a reason for the delay of the Judgment. Here it is longsuffering toward the righteous (*ἐπ' αὐτοῖς*). May not the translator have confused the pronouns ?

² See Burton, *ubi supra*.

ellipsis of the protasis. The only Potential Optative of the New Testament where the protasis is expressed is Acts viii. 31: "How should I be able (*πῶς γὰρ ἂν δυνάμην*) if no one guides (*ὁδηγήσει*) me?"

But turn rather for a complete parallel to the passage already cited from Matthew xxvi. 53.¹ There we have not only the Future Indicative used for the Potential in the apodosis, but also ellipsis of the protasis, "if I should beseech Him." And not only so, but in the very next clause we have an even closer parallel: "How then (*sc. if the legions of angels did rescue me*) should the Scriptures be fulfilled?"

By analogy it would seem an admissible paraphrase of Luke xviii. 8 to render:

I assure you He will avenge them speedily. Howbeit (*if there were no 'forbearance of God'*) the Son of man, when He came, would not find the faith established on the earth; and how could that be?

To justify this paraphrase we may cite Liddell and Scott *s.v.* on the force of *ἄρα* interrogative, as implying "impatience on the part of the questioner," and Lightfoot's comment on the word in Galatians ii. 17: "*ἄρα* expresses bewilderment as to a possible conclusion." Here the insupposable conclusion is that the Son of man should come, and find no "people prepared for Him." The reasoner demands to know whether this would not be the case if the importunate had their way. His "impatience" is with those who show their own lack of patience by the murmur: "Where is the promise of His Coming?" The tone of the utterance, consequently, is not "pessimistic," but optimistic; not faithless, but believing. It stands in line with all the other rebukes of impatient importunity by reminding the clamorous of "God's husbandry, God's building."

If it be further objected to our rendering that "the faith" (*ἡ πίστις*) would hardly be employed at so early

¹ Above, p. 297.

a date as equivalent to "the brotherhood of believers," it should suffice simply to refer to Galatians i. 23.

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PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES.

SOME fifty years ago the question of the Pharisees and Sadducees was discussed by Geiger and J. Wellhausen. Geiger was first to show that it was not justifiable to characterise the Pharisees and Sadducees as hypocrites and indifferents, as was usually done by Christian scholars, who referred to the New Testament and to Jesus. Geiger defended the theory that the Sadducees were the Jewish aristocracy and the Pharisees the democratic scholars and the lower classes supporting them. The Pharisees were supposed to have desired to educate the people by their religious teaching and the aristocratic Sadducees were said to have objected to this kind of religious emancipation, as they wished to rule on the ancient lines.

Wellhausen held the same view. His study *Pharisäer und Sadducäer* appeared in 1874. It influenced the opinion of scholars in various countries and his thesis, that the Pharisees were the party of the Scribes and that the priests and the aristocratic circles of Jerusalem were the Sadducees was assumed with the same readiness as his views about the analysis of the Hexateuch. This opinion disagrees with the New Testament.

In the New Testament the Pharisees and Sadducees are called "sects." St. Paul says in Acts xxvi. 5, "After the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." It is generally accepted that the term "sect" is not well chosen, as "sect" implies a doctrine, a certain number of members and an organisation. The Pharisees and Sadducees, how-