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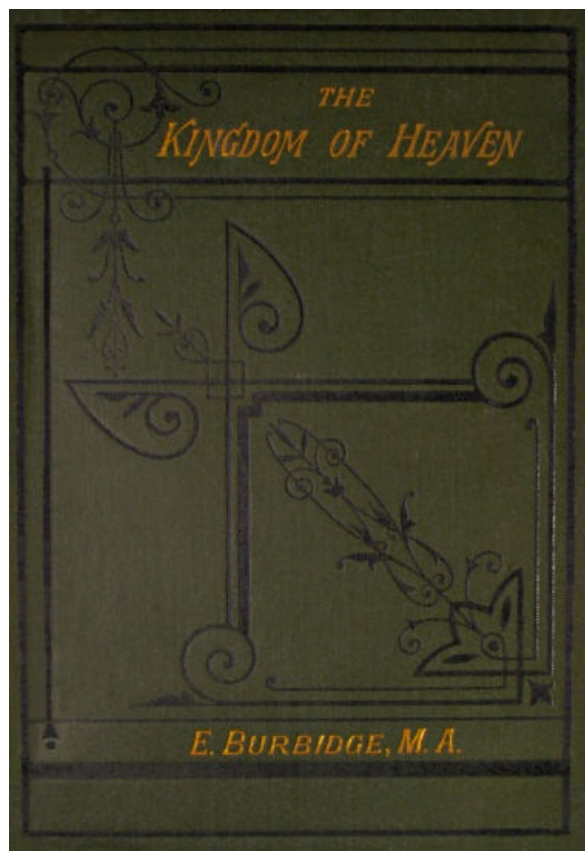
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN; WHAT IS IT?



THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN;

WHAT IS IT?

BY

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PREFACE.

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There is nothing new in the following pages; except it be that they call popular attention to facts which have been commonly recognised only by scholars.

But I am aware that their contents will appear novel to many; and to remove this idea some extracts are here given from the Commentaries in general use.

1. Bishop Wordsworth on S. Matt. xiii. 3; "This chapter may be described as containing a Divine Treatise on the Church Militant here on earth."

2. Dean Alford on S. Matt. xiii. 52; "The seven Parables compose in their inner depth of connexion, a great united whole, beginning with the first sowing of the Church, and ending with the consummation."

3. The Speaker's Commentary on S. Matt. iii. 2; "It—the Kingdom of Heaven—signifies the promised Kingdom of the Messiah. Hence the expectation of the Messiah is spoken of as a *waiting for the Kingdom of God*. Our Lord, adopts the expression and frequently employs it to denote His Spiritual Kingdom the Church."

4. Bishop Walsham How (S. P. C. K. Commentary) on S. Matt. iii. 2; "It—the Kingdom of Heaven—is generally used to signify the Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Kingdom of the Gospel, the Church of Christ."

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I desire also to remove by anticipation a fear that some may feel, lest, in regarding the Gospel as being the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven, the great doctrine of the Atonement should be forgotten. Such an idea is refuted by the words of Holy Scripture. For not only is the Preaching of our Blessed Lord, before He suffered, thus described—see S. Mark i. 14—but also the teaching of S. Paul, in later years, who gloried in knowing only "Jesus Christ and Him crucified"—see Acts xx. 25.

My object has been to provide an answer to two questions.

1. What did our Blessed Lord teach about His Church in His discourses?

2. What is meant by the words of the Creed, "The Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints?"

May these pages help men to gain an intelligent knowledge of that Kingdom, into which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has called us. May they lead many to desire the fulfilment of His last prayer for us before His Passion, "That they all may be one." And may every word in this little book, which is not in accordance with God's will, be pardoned, and overruled to His Glory.

BACKWELL, August 1879.

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“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on ME through their word; that they all may be one; as THOU FATHER art in ME, and I in THEE, that they also may be one in US; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent ME.”—S. John xvii. 20, 21. [Pg 6]

“When THOU hadst overcome the sharpness of death: THOU didst open the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN to all believers.”—Te Deum.

“THY KINGDOM come.”—S. Matt. vi. 10.

CHAPTER I.

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THE KING’S HERALD.

“On Jordan’s banks the Baptist’s cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King....”

When the Saviour of the world was about to enter upon His public ministry, the Jewish nation was startled with the cry, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (S. Matt. iii. 2).

Such was God’s call to His people of old time, to prepare themselves to take part in the fulfilment of the promises, on which their faith and hopes were founded. The fulness of the times had come; and Christ, the long-promised and long-expected Saviour and King, was nigh at hand.

And ever since that day, as the good news of the Kingdom has spread from land to land, it has been the portion of the Lord’s people to endeavour to realise their high position in that Kingdom, and to discharge their duties loyally to their Heavenly King. [Pg 8]

But the words—“The Kingdom of Heaven”—are apt to lead away the thoughts from the present to the future, from this world to a better one. And since men are not in Heaven now, but are surrounded with earthly cares and troubles, there is danger lest they should forget or be ignorant of the intimate connection which these words have with their daily life as Christians, and with its duties, privileges, and blessings.

And yet the practical importance of this subject to Christian men and women will be seen clearly after a moment’s consideration. For any one, who is at all acquainted with the words of Holy Scripture, will recall to mind at once the frequent reference to “The Kingdom of Heaven” in the Gospels. And though it will probably seem a somewhat startling assertion to most persons, yet it is nevertheless a true one, that from the day when our Lord began His public ministry, until He ascended into Heaven, His teaching was almost wholly occupied with this one subject—“The Kingdom of Heaven.” And it is the purpose of the following pages to bring together the various statements about it, in such a way as to lead to a clear understanding of “The Kingdom of Heaven”—what it is—and of our position in this Kingdom, with its present blessings, privileges and duties, and its future glories. [Pg 9]

“The Kingdom of Heaven”—What is it?

There are three things which are necessarily included in the idea of a Kingdom—a King to rule over it; subjects to be ruled; and a place where they dwell. And since it is necessary, if we would enquire into the nature of “The Kingdom of Heaven,” first of all to understand clearly who is the King, and who and where are His subjects, let us begin with taking a general view of these chief points; and then afterwards enter more fully into the consideration of the various passages of Holy Scripture which describe the details of the Kingdom.

The Jews expected the Messiah as their King. And when the Wise Men came from the East, and asked “Where is He that is born King of the Jews” (S. Matt. ii. 2), we read that King Herod referred their enquiry to those who were learned in the Scriptures, in this form, “He demanded of them where Christ”—i.e. Messiah, The Anointed One^[1]—“should be born” (S. Matt. ii. 4). And [Pg 10]

that there should be no doubt at all about the person of the King, so long expected, God in His providence had arranged that one should go before Him to announce His coming. For John the Baptist acted as a herald going before a king, proclaiming his approach. And this was the proclamation, "Repent ye; for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (S. Matt. iii. 2). And then the Herald declared that he was come as foretold by the prophet Isaiah, and that the people must prepare at once to receive their King, saying, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias" (S. John i. 23; Isaiah xl. 3).

The proclamation of "The Kingdom of Heaven" by John the Baptist defined the exact time in the world's history when this Kingdom took its rise. And our Lord afterwards called express attention to this, saying, "The Law and the Prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it^[2]" (S. Luke xvi. 16). And because John was only the Herald going before, and was not himself enrolled as a subject of the Kingdom, He added, (after referring to the greatness of John the Baptist), "Notwithstanding, he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he" (S. Matt. xi. 11).

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Thus we are assured that "The Kingdom of Heaven" began from the proclamation of John the Baptist; and, therefore, we know for certain that the Lord Jesus Christ, whose coming he proclaimed, is the King of this Kingdom.

This is the great truth which forms the foundation of all the teaching of the New Testament; and it is of the utmost importance to have a clear idea of it. The Lord Jesus Christ came to be the Saviour of the world by becoming King of a spiritual Kingdom of grace and blessing, whose subjects were to be purchased and redeemed by His own Blood shed upon the Cross. He was not merely the greatest of God-inspired teachers: but He came to found God's Kingdom upon earth, and to rule in love over the hearts of men of all nations and ages, and thus prepare them for life everlasting. And when Nicodemus, one of the rulers of the Jews, thus addressed Him, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God," He at once endeavoured to lead him to grasp this truth, by the abrupt reply, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God;" and again, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (S. John iii. 2-5). In other words, men must not merely listen to His teaching; but they must have their eyes opened to see Him as the promised King, and receive the principle of a new Life as His subjects; or, else, His coming would be in vain.

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Taking now as our starting-point the great truth that the Lord Jesus Christ came to found a Kingdom, our next enquiry must be respecting the subjects or citizens of this Kingdom.

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Who are the subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven?"

One of the woes pronounced by our Lord against the Scribes and Pharisees was for this, "Ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (S. Matt. xxiii. 13). They would not themselves enter this Kingdom by accepting Him as Christ the King; and they hindered others from doing so. The Jews had thought themselves to be the subjects of God, whilst all the rest of the world were castaways. But from these words, as well as from those referred to above, which were spoken to Nicodemus, we conclude that the subjects of Messiah's Kingdom are they, and only they, who "believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (1 S. John iv. 15, v. 1), and, having thus accepted Him as their King, have been admitted by a formal act into His Kingdom.

When the Herald proclaimed "The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand" (S. Matt. iii. 2), he was calling upon the whole Jewish people to enter into it. But the call to enter Messiah's Kingdom was not to be confined to the Jews. It was to be published far and wide throughout the world.

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The Prophets had foretold a day when "The Gentiles shall come to Thy light, and kings to the brightness of Thy rising" (Isaiah lx. 3), and that "in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hosea i. 10). And this was now about to be fulfilled. And in the homage which the Wise Men from the East paid to the infant Saviour, "born King of the Jews," we see the first sign that free and full salvation was henceforth placed within the reach of all the nations of the world without distinction. And thus it came to pass that, in after years, the Apostles addressed their converts, taken equally from amongst Jews and Gentiles, in such words as these, "God hath called you unto His Kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. ii. 12); God "hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. i. 13).

In other words, "The Kingdom of Heaven" is a real Kingdom, though a spiritual and heavenly one. The Lord Jesus Christ is King, and all the nations of the world are called to be His subjects.

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And where is "The Kingdom of Heaven"?

The answer is clear. Wherever they are who have accepted the King and been admitted as His subjects.

"The Kingdom of Heaven" is not as yet *in* Heaven, so far as its subjects are concerned. It is true that the King Himself has ascended His throne in Heaven. And as members of Christ we share in some degree in the exaltation of our Head, so that S. Paul does not hesitate to say of the Lord's people here on earth, God "hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephes. ii. 6). But such words seem to apply to that part of our nature to which our hopes and affections belong. So far as our duties and difficulties are concerned, we are still surrounded with earthly temptations. We are still in a state of trial here, however much we

may be looking for and longing after our home. And Heaven will not be opened to receive the subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven" until the Great Day, when they will be welcomed with the words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you" (S. Matt. xxv. 34).

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Christ's Kingdom "is not of this world" (S. John xviii. 36), as He declared plainly to Pilate when he questioned Him about Himself. But for the present we may consider that, practically speaking, it is *in* the world though not *of* it. For its subjects are not yet in Heaven: but are partly at rest in Paradise; partly here on earth still warring against evil.

We can now express in few words the chief points respecting the nature of that "Kingdom of Heaven" which John the Baptist, in his office as Herald, proclaimed to be "at hand."

The Lord Jesus Christ came to found a Kingdom. He is the King of "The Kingdom of Heaven."

All who will accept Him as their King—all the men and women and little children in the world, of every land and of every age—may be admitted as the subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven." For "He died for all" (2 Cor. v. 15).

And "The Kingdom of Heaven," though it is a spiritual and heavenly Kingdom, is as yet here on earth, and will not be in Heaven, until the subjects of the King have been tried and found faithful, and the number of the elect shall be accomplished.

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It follows that the statements of Holy Scripture respecting "The Kingdom of Heaven," which are to be considered in the following pages, refer not merely to the world to come—to that which we commonly understand by the word Heaven—but to that Kingdom which has been founded here on earth; and into which, as Christians, we have been already called. And the subject becomes of infinite importance to us all, when it is understood that "The Kingdom of Heaven" is, at this present time, that Kingdom of grace in which we may obtain salvation through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He has called us all to be subjects of this Kingdom now, that, by obtaining a share in His precious merits, we may be brought into a state of present salvation; and that, by continuing in this state through His grace, we may be recognised as His subjects in that great day, when the Kingdom of Grace will have become the Kingdom of Glory Everlasting.

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] Christ is the Greek word which corresponds with the Hebrew word Messiah, meaning "The Anointed One." Amongst the Jews three classes of men were anointed to their official duties—Prophets, Priests, and Kings. And the name "Messiah" implied that they expected the Deliverer to bear office in these ways; and especially as King, the highest of these offices.
- [2] In a similar passage of S. Matthew the difficult expression occurs, "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (S. Matt. xi 12); but the meaning seems to be the same. Our Lord was calling attention to the fact that the expected King had come and His Kingdom was open to the eager zeal of such as would seize upon it and press into it.

CHAPTER II.

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THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM.

"This is He whom Seers in old time
Chanted of with one accord;
Whom the voices of the Prophets
Promised in their faithful word."

We have seen that, in the providence of God, John the Baptist was sent to proclaim to the world that "The Kingdom of Heaven" was at hand, and to point out the King. And as soon as the Herald had raised the expectation of men by the proclamation of the coming Kingdom, our Lord began His public ministry, the great object of which was the founding of His Kingdom for the salvation of the world. And, as S. Matthew tells us, He "went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom" (S. Matt. iv. 23); or, as S. Mark relates, "After that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel" (S. Mark i. 14, 15).

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Thus the King took up and continued the message of His Herald, only adding to John the Baptist's preaching of repentance the call to believe the Gospel—to have faith in the good tidings which He came to tell of the Kingdom of Heaven and of God. And from this time to the end of His ministry we find that the Gospel of the Kingdom was the continual subject of His teaching. Thus S. Luke records that He declared once to a multitude which would detain Him, "I must preach the

Kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent” (S. Luke iv. 43). And, a few chapters after, we read, “It came to pass afterward that He went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God” (S. Luke viii. 1). And then, after a while, “He called His twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And He sent them to preach the Kingdom of God” (S. Luke ix. 1, 2). And having thus spent the years of His public ministry in publishing the good news of the Kingdom, He declared towards the end of it, as He was foretelling to His disciples the signs of His future coming to judgment, “And this Gospel^[3] of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (S. Matt. xxiv. 14).

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And what is the Gospel of the Kingdom?

To form the answer we must look to the general teaching which runs through the Bible. As soon as Adam fell from his high estate as God’s child, the Deliverer was promised, “who should bruise the serpent’s head” (Gen. iii. 15). Ages passed with only a dim hope of a coming Saviour; until at length God gave to Abraham the distinct promise that the Deliverer should arise from his posterity; saying, “In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. xxii. 18). Again ages passed; and David was raised up from amongst the descendants of Abraham, and of the predicted tribe of Judah, and to him the promise was made, “Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam. vii. 16). We know that princes of the family of David succeeded one another on the throne for 450 years, until the Jews were carried into captivity; but we learn from the Psalms that it had been revealed to David himself that this promise was not to be fulfilled in any such earthly and temporal manner. And his faith and hopes are expressed continually in glowing words, describing a Kingdom of Messiah, which should be universal and without end, a Kingdom of righteousness and peace.

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Thus in Psalm ii. the nations of the world are represented in rebellion against God and the Messiah. “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed” (Ps. ii. 1, 2), i.e. Messiah—Christ. And then the decree of the universal sovereignty of Messiah is proclaimed: “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Ps. ii. 7, 8). Then in Psalm xxii, after the mysterious sufferings of Messiah have been set forth, His Kingdom is again proclaimed as universal: “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee” (Ps. xxii. 27). And, to pass over other passages, in Psalm lxxii. Messiah’s everlasting reign of righteousness and peace is described in glowing words: “They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him. His Name shall endure for ever; and men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed^[4]” (Ps. lxxii. 5, 7, 11, 17).

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Many years passed; and then Isaiah proclaimed in prophecy, “Behold a King shall reign in righteousness” (Isai. xxxii. 1); and in many a glowing passage described the peace and glory of His Kingdom. And Jeremiah yet more clearly announced, “Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness” (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6). And Daniel was directed to explain the king’s dream, as a vision of earthly empires, which should be overpowered “by the Stone cut out without hands;” for “the God of Heaven shall set up a Kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. ii. 44, 45). And Zechariah sang, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee” (Zech. ix. 9).

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Many years were yet to pass before the fulfilment of these promises should be commenced, through the setting up of the everlasting sovereignty of Messiah. But at last the fulness of time was come; and the Angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary at Nazareth, and after addressing her as the favoured mother of Messiah, declared of her Son, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end” (S. Luke i. 32, 33).

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This then was the Gospel—the Gospel of the Kingdom—the Gospel of God. The good news was published abroad that the long-promised King of the seed of David was come. Messiah’s Kingdom was to be set up; and all men were invited to enter in and be saved.

The King Himself went forth to preach the good news, and to describe His Kingdom and the character of His subjects. But by what means could He persuade the people that He was their King? We often wonder that the Jews were so slow to believe in Him; but perhaps we do not realise their difficulties. There was one great obstacle which stopped all but a very few from accepting Him. And it was this. “The Kingdom of Heaven” which He preached as the Kingdom of Messiah was altogether different from anything which they had expected, because it was a spiritual Kingdom. No doubt the words of the Psalmist and of the Prophets ought to have led them to expect the Son of God as King. And, if they had nurtured any real love of God in their hearts, they would have been ready to become His subjects. But it was not so. They expected a conqueror to free them from the yoke of their enemies. And the enemies which He came to

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conquer were spiritual—the great enemy of the whole human race—not the earthly foes of the one race of Israel. They expected the glory and pomp which are the outward signs of the authority to rule; and they could not understand the position which He claimed to hold who had come in such humility that He said, “The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head” (S. Matt. viii. 20). “Tell us,” they said, “by what authority doest thou these things?” (S. Luke xx. 2). And, therefore, we need not seek far to find the reason of the small success which followed the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Only a spiritual power can move men in spiritual things, and a man must first give himself up to the guidance of the Holy Spirit before He can take in spiritual truths. If men resist the teaching of God, no evidence will move them. “If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead” (S. Luke xvi. 31). “The Kingdom of Heaven” could not be set up until the Holy Ghost was given^[5], because the Jews were not prepared to accept Messiah as the King of a spiritual Kingdom; and only the Holy Ghost could move the hearts of men to desire spiritual blessings, and to hope for spiritual rewards.

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So our Blessed Lord preached the Gospel of the Kingdom to unwilling hearts; and was compelled to “upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not” (S. Matt. xi. 20). Only the few received Him—the few who were “babes” in spirit—whilst “the wise and prudent” (S. Matt. xi. 25) rejected Him.

There were two kinds of evidence to which He continually appealed in His arguments with the Jewish rulers in proof of His claims upon their hearts. The first was the direct testimony of John the Baptist: “Ye sent unto John and he bare witness unto the truth” (S. John v. 33). For “when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? he confessed, I am not the Christ” (S. John i. 19, 20). “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God” (S. John i. 29). And he declared that he knew Him in consequence of the visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon Him at His baptism; and (said he), “I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God” (S. John i. 34). The other evidence was “greater witness than that of John,” namely, the miracles which He wrought, for (said He) “the works which the Father hath given Me to finish bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me” (S. John v. 36); and “though ye believe not Me, believe the works” (S. John x. 38). Other kinds of evidence were also employed; such as the direct testimony of the Father in the voice from Heaven, and in the immediate answers to prayer in the working of His miracles—“The Father Himself which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me” (S. John v. 37)—and also, the statements of Holy Scripture, describing His person and His work so clearly that He could say to the Jews, “Search the Scriptures; for they are they which testify of Me” (S. John v. 39). But we know the result. All the evidences were in vain. The Jews in general refused to believe in Him as their King. The ruling classes not only rejected Him, but they also hindered others from acknowledging Him. So that He cried out against them, “Ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (S. Matt. xxiii. 13).

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And there were but very few exceptions. The Apostles and the small band of disciples professed their faith in Him. “Whom do men say that I am?” He asked them once; “and they said, Some say John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, Jeremias or one of the Prophets.” None accepted Him as Messiah, their King. “But whom say ye that I am?” He went on to ask; “and Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (S. Matt. xvi. 13-16). So also Nathanael, the “Israelite indeed,” boldly proclaimed his belief: “Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel” (S. John i. 49). And there was one bright flash of enthusiasm which carried all along exultingly to welcome Him on His last visit to the Holy City; when the crowds spread branches of the palm-trees, and cried, “Hosanna to the Son of David: blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord” (S. Matt. xxi. 9). “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in Heaven, and glory in the highest” (S. Luke xix. 38).

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But it was within a few days after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem that the rulers of the Jews took the Lord Jesus, and having condemned Him in their own council for blasphemy, for professing Himself to be Messiah—“the Christ”—“the Son of God” (S. Luke xxii. 67-71), they charged Him before the Roman governor with treason, for saying “that He Himself is Christ a King” (S. Luke xxiii. 2). And this accusation, it may well be noticed, was not a different charge from the former. All that they did was to put cleverly before the earthly governor the earthly side of the spiritual crime, for which they had themselves condemned Him. If He was Messiah, He was their King. They condemned Him for professing to be Messiah; a charge on which no civil tribunal could give judgment. But professing to be Messiah, He professed to be King; and this they represented as an offence against the state, and to be punished accordingly. And the result was, that by the Providence of God He was not stoned to death, as was His first martyr Stephen, on the charge of blasphemy; but He was handed over to the civil power to be crucified for treason, as claiming to be King. And it came to pass, that after their persistent rejection of Him, the Jewish rulers were compelled to see Him acknowledged upon the cross as their King, in the words of the superscription containing the charge on which He was condemned. His cross became His throne, with His title above it, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (S. John xix. 19). Fit throne for Him who was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Phil. ii. 6-10). And all the efforts of the Jews to alter it were in vain. Pilate at length was firm: “What I have written, I have written” (S. John xix. 22).

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Thus seemed to end the Kingdom which our Lord and His disciples had been inviting men to join. They could preach no more the Gospel of the Kingdom, for the King was put to a shameful death.

“The chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him. But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel” (S. Luke xxiv. 20, 21). So spake even the disciples in their despair. They had “trusted,” as they supposed, in vain.

Verily God’s ways are not as man’s ways.

FOOTNOTES:

- [3] It may be noticed here, that the expression “preaching the Gospel” is used in these passages of Holy Scripture in a very wide sense. It is not limited to the preaching of the great doctrine of the Atonement, but it refers to the general purpose for which Christ came; which was, to gather all the world into His Kingdom of grace and salvation. See Bishop How’s Commentary on the Gospels, under S. Luke viii. 1. (Publ. by S. P. C. K.)
- [4] See this very skilfully drawn out in a little devotional Commentary on “Five Psalms of the Kingdom,” by Rev. G. F. Saxby. Published by J. T. Hayes, London.
- [5] See below, notes on pp. 50 and 83.

CHAPTER III.

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THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM.

“What is earth but God’s own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield?
Wheat and tares therein are sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown;

Grant, O Lord of Life, that we
Holy grain and pure may be.”

What appeared to be the death-blow of “The Kingdom of Heaven” was but a necessary step in its formation. The King was crucified in weakness, only to be “declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. i. 4). And the reason for His humiliation has become clear to us, as expressed in the familiar proverb, “No cross, no crown.” The way to His exaltation upon the throne of His Kingdom led by the cross. His Kingdom must be “purchased with His own Blood” (Acts xx. 28). He must “suffer for sins, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. iii. 18).

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But the question now arises, What sort of Kingdom was it that He offered unto men when He preached to them the Gospel of the Kingdom? Has He enabled us to form, from His own recorded words, a definite idea of the nature and character of “The Kingdom of Heaven”?

For the answer we turn naturally to His Parables; because the form of teaching which He most commonly employed was that which is known by the name of Parable. And we find that fully half of them were Parables of the Kingdom; that is to say, they either begin with the words “The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto” such and such things; or they contain some distinct reference to it. And as the first two of these Parables were interpreted to the disciples, we are left in no doubt as to the general meaning of them all.

The Parables of “The Kingdom of Heaven”^[6] may be divided into two divisions. Those of the first division relate in a general manner to “The Kingdom of Heaven” or “The Kingdom of God,” under its various aspects, which will be set forth more fully in subsequent chapters; some parables describing the Kingdom as it may be seen on earth; some expressing the inward spiritual reign of the King over the hearts of men; and others teaching that those who fail to use their opportunities as subjects of it here, will lose the glory of sharing in its perfect state hereafter. And the Parables of the second division relate to certain special circumstances which affect the position of its subjects.

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The first division consists of the seven Parables collected together in S. Matt. xiii; and begins with the Parable of “The Sower,” which was one of those which our Lord Himself explained. “Hear ye the Parable of the Sower. When any one heareth the Word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart” (S. Matt. xiii. 18, 19). The good news about “The Kingdom of Heaven” falls like seed. They who hear about it are like the different kinds of soil on which seed is sown. One pays no heed to what he hears, and the birds of folly and thoughtlessness carry off, at once, “that which was sown in his heart.” Others desire to live as subjects of the Kingdom here, and be prepared for its perfect state hereafter, only they are like stony ground, or as soil which is foul with weeds and thorns; they cannot stand against the scorching heat of temptations or petty persecutions, or else the cares and riches of this world choke the word and make them unfruitful. Whilst other men

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accept the good news of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, and bear fruit, by living as useful subjects of their King (S. Matt. xiii. 18-23).

The next Parable—"The Tares"—is a very striking one, because it describes the state of "The Kingdom of Heaven" as being completely different from what men would have expected. It was the Lord's own account beforehand of the sad outward appearance of His Kingdom. It described the work of God as being maliciously injured and marred by Satan, so that good and bad would be found together side by side, so closely intermingled that it would be impossible to separate them, or to distinguish between them. And the separation would not be made until the end of the world, however much men might wish to make it at once (S. Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43).

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We may well pause here for a moment to think about the meaning of these words. Our Blessed Lord was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. And when He began to describe the Kingdom which He came to found, He told His disciples at once that it would be very far from being a perfect state, such as some might dream of. They must expect to see evil growing wild in it, like weeds in a field of corn. There would be bad subjects as well as good; and there would be no means of separating them. And as long as this world should last, the outward appearance of "The Kingdom of Heaven" would be like a field of wheat and tares growing together.

At the same time He encouraged His disciples with the prospect of boundless success. In the next Parable—"The Grain of Mustard Seed"—He described, prophetically, the outward spread of His Kingdom from very small beginnings, until the nations of the world should find shelter within it. For though nothing could be less promising of success than the first beginnings of "The Kingdom of Heaven," yet, as a spreading tree may rise from the smallest seed, even so should His Kingdom extend its branches through the world (S. Matt. xiii. 31, 32).

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And this was not their only ground for encouragement and hope. For this description of the outward extension of the Kingdom, taken by itself, gives a very imperfect idea of its character. He taught them that "The Kingdom of Heaven" would exert a spiritual power over the hearts of men. It would be like leaven working in the meal. It would change the hearts of its subjects. The effect would be such as was afterwards described by the Apostle S. Paul, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. v. 17). And as leaven goes on working until the whole mass of the meal in which it is hid is leavened, even so He would lead us to understand that one heart truly leavened with the Gospel of the Kingdom will affect others; and that, silently and unnoticed, it will extend until it works a moral change in the state of the whole world (S. Matt. xiii. 33)^[7].

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He then went on to describe that as the Kingdom extended, men would begin to find out its value; and for the saving of their souls would gladly give up their worldly prospects. "The Hidden Treasure" and "The Pearl of Great Price" set forth the priceless value of "The Kingdom of Heaven." The rights and privileges of citizenship are worth more than all the world besides. These two Parables are alike in that both express the great worth of that of which the Gospel tells, viz. the salvation won by our King and Saviour Jesus Christ, and given to the subjects of His Kingdom; but they differ in describing different ways in which men may find it out. One man will find it like a hidden treasure, as we should say by chance (S. Matt. xiii. 44). So the woman of Samaria found the long-expected Saviour, when she had only gone to fill her pitcher at the well (S. John iv. 28, 29). Others will have to search diligently with the earnest desire to find out "what is truth," and the truth will be brought home to their souls only after long and patient seeking. Like as it happened to S. Paul, who had long been seeking for "The Pearl," in being more excessively zealous toward God, but who found it not, until the Voice "Why persecutest thou Me" (Acts ix. 4) brought him to Jesus Christ. Furthermore, these two Parables both set forth this truth: that, if men wish to gain the priceless blessings of "The Kingdom of Heaven," they must be ready, as S. Paul was, to give up all that they have, and "count all things but loss, that they may win Christ" (Phil. iii. 8).

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The character of "The Kingdom of Heaven" having been thus expressed, we are carried on in the last Parable of the series—"The Draw-net"—to the end of this present world. "The Kingdom of Heaven" is described as catching in its net all, both good and bad, who come within its reach. But, at the end, the net will be drawn to shore, and the judgment and separation will be made. The evil will be cast away. The good will be preserved, and admitted to their reward of joy and glory everlasting (S. Matt. xiii. 47-49). And "The Kingdom of Heaven" being perfected at length, and "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Ephes. v. 27), will be seen as the glorious Kingdom of righteousness and peace described in the glowing words of prophecy.

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Such is the account given by our Blessed Lord of "The Kingdom of Heaven." In the above Parables we see its nature and character described, from its foundation to the end of this present world. From His own words we learn its history. There is, first, the sowing of the seed; then the apparent spoiling of the design by the intermixture of evil with the good; then the Kingdom is seen to have a power of rapid growth and extension, and a leavening influence over the hearts of men; then its value is declared to be so priceless, that men will give up all things for its sake; and lastly, we are told of a day when all evil will be purged out, and it will become a glorious and perfect Kingdom. But with the exception of this one faint glimpse of eternity, there is not a word in all these Parables respecting what we commonly understand by the term "Heaven." "The Kingdom of Heaven" is here on earth, and belongs to this present time. It was the will of our Lord to describe His Kingdom as we know it, in its present imperfect state here on earth, in which men have temptations and duties, as well as great privileges and blessings. Whilst of the future condition of His Kingdom in glory, very little has been revealed.

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But besides this general description of "The Kingdom of Heaven," we find other Parables which

describe various circumstances relating to the rejection of the Kingdom by the unbelieving, or affecting the position of those who have become its subjects.

For instance, the Apostle Peter was doubtful how often a brother should be forgiven, and our Lord spoke the Parable of "The Unmerciful Servant," teaching that the subjects of His Kingdom, being themselves in a state of forgiveness, would forfeit all their blessings if they did not unreservedly forgive their brethren. The debt of sin which the King has already forgiven His subjects, in admitting them into a state of salvation, is as it were "ten thousand talents." The debt incurred by any offending brother is but as "an hundred pence" in comparison (S. Matt. xviii. 21-35).

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Again, in the Parable of "The Labourers in the Vineyard" He taught that the subjects of His Kingdom must not grudge one against another, if a rebel or one who has been neglecting his duty all his life turns and is accepted at the last. The King cannot do otherwise than what is right. "At the eleventh hour" a labourer may be taken on, and receive his reward. And, on the other hand, one who might have been first in the Kingdom of glory and reward may fall away through an evil spirit of self-glorification, and become last of all (S. Matt. xx. 1-16).

Three Parables follow which were spoken with special reference to the Jewish rulers, the Priests, and Scribes, and Pharisees. The first of these—the Parable of "The Two Sons"—seems to have been spoken to win them over to a knowledge of their sin and danger, and, if it might be possible, to induce them to accept the Gospel of God, and to enter the Kingdom. The Son in the Parable who at first said, "I will not," "afterward repented and went." Even so, the bold and open transgressors of the law were being won over to repentance, and were entering in. But the second son who said, "I go Sir, and went not," professed a ready obedience and then did not carry it into practice, but held back and refused to enter in. Even so the Pharisees and others who made good profession of zeal for God's service "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (S. Luke xviii. 9), and being satisfied with the mere profession, "rejected the counsel of God against themselves" (S. Luke vii. 30). And He thus sorrowfully yet firmly applied it to their own case, saying, "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you" (S. Matt. xxi. 28-31).

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They would not be won over; but, on the contrary, their hostility was increased. The consequence was, that the next Parable of "The Wicked Husbandmen" declared the miserable end which would certainly come upon them in judgment. The Kingdom of God was set forth under the figure of a vineyard—a figure which must have been familiar to them from its frequent use in the Old Testament (Psalm lxxx. 8-16; Isaiah v. 1-8)—and the husbandmen, instead of protecting their master's interests, were represented as beating his servants and slaying his son. What, asked the Lord Jesus, will he do with them? And they answered, to their own condemnation, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen." And He then added these plain words of warning, "Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you^[8], and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (S. Matt. xxi. 33-43).

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The enmity of the rulers now reached its highest pitch. "They sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the multitude, because they took Him for a prophet" (S. Matt. xxi. 46). And as they had now clearly determined to reject the idea of the Kingdom, which He had come to found, the Parable of "The Marriage of the King's Son" was spoken, describing the call of others into the privileged position which they despised. "Jesus answered and spake unto them again by Parables, and said, The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son." And when the invited guests refused to come, "The king was wroth, and sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers. Then said he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy." Who then should be admitted to the feast? Those from the highways. The Gentiles from far and wide should be called to take the place which the Lord's own people refused to enjoy (S. Matt. xxii. 1-10).

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Two other Parables of "The Kingdom of Heaven" remain to be considered—"The Wise and Foolish Virgins" and "The Talents"—both of which describe the judgment which the subjects of the Kingdom must be prepared to meet at the last day. The lessons to be learned from them are plain. The foolish virgins, who were shut out at the last because their lamps had gone out, are a warning to all who profess the faith of Christ and have once been earnest in the spiritual service of God. They are represented as being shut out, not for profanity and wickedness; but for spiritual negligence—for not seeking to keep up the supply of grace through prayer and holy ordinances rightly used. Empty lamps were useless. So our Lord warned His future subjects that mere profession of faith and mere outward ordinances, without the Spirit, would be equally useless in preparing them to meet His coming at the Great Day (S. Matt. xxv. 1-13).

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As the Parable of "The Ten Virgins" is a warning against spiritual negligence, so the Parable of "The Talents" teaches the danger of neglecting the outward service of the King. The powers and opportunities of usefulness which He has given to His subjects, He will expect them to use. All must work according to their talents, or be condemned as "unprofitable servants and cast into outer darkness" (S. Matt. xxv. 14-30).

This lesson of warning brings to an end the Parables which describe the nature and conditions of "The Kingdom of Heaven" in its present imperfect state. But to these is added a description, in words of striking clearness, of the day when this present Kingdom of grace and trial will be transformed into, and replaced by, the Kingdom of glory and reward; "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him; and before Him shall be gathered all nations;

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and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left." Then will He appear as King indeed, seated on His throne of glory; and consequently He now uses that title plainly of Himself. "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (S. Matt. xxv. 31-34).

Thus the full meaning of the words "The Kingdom of Heaven" is unfolded in the Gospels. It is a Kingdom upon earth, springing from small beginnings, but intended to include the whole human race within its influence. It is the Kingdom of God, and yet imperfect, through the malice of the Evil One, who is ever striving to spoil God's work. And whilst in the world it is not of the world, but wholly spiritual and divine in its origin. For God is ruling over the hearts of its subjects. And His rule working and spreading secretly, like leaven changing the meal, is intended in His loving purpose to convert the whole world unto obedience to Himself.

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Thus we see that "The Kingdom of Heaven" is described as being that state of grace and probation into which Christ's people are called at the time of their baptism, and in which they are blessed, and tried, and made fit for His nearer Presence. But, at the same time, we are led to think that a day will come when this present imperfect condition of His Kingdom will be brought to an end; when those who have been tried and found worthless will be cast out; and "The Kingdom of Heaven" as we know it, having been purged of all evil, will become the Kingdom of His glory and joy.

And when this shall come to pass, all the predictions respecting Messiah's Kingdom will at length be realised. "The everlasting Kingdom" (2 Peter i. 11) ordained "before the foundation of the world" (Ephes. i. 4), will then have embraced all nations, so that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah xi. 9). Then will the reign of righteousness and peace of Him, who is "the Lord our Righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 6), appear in all its perfect beauty. God's "people will be all righteous;" and "inherit the land for ever" (Isaiah lx. 21), even "the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. i. 12). And Christ, being at length in every sense "the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah ix. 6), when no foe will be left to be subdued, and "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain" (Isaiah xi. 9), will then be proclaimed "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Rev. xix. 16).

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And then also our daily prayer "Thy Kingdom come" (S. Matt. vi. 10) will have received its perfect fulfilment. For all that is now imperfect in His rule will have been set right; through the conversion of the heathen, the repentance of the ungodly, and the sanctification of all who "neglect" not "so great salvation" (Heb. ii. 3).

The number of the elect will be accomplished. The Son will "have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father;" God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. xv. 24, 28).

FOOTNOTES:

- [6] To prevent any doubt arising in the mind of the reader, it may be well to state that the expressions "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God" are used indiscriminately and with the same meaning in these Parables. By comparing S. Matt. xiii. 31 with S. Mark iv. 30 and S. Luke xiii. 18 it will be seen that "The Kingdom of Heaven" is "The Kingdom of God," and "The Kingdom of God" is "The Kingdom of Heaven." S. Matthew nearly always uses the expression "Kingdom of Heaven," whilst S. Mark and S. Luke use the expression "Kingdom of God."
- [7] Because leaven is commonly referred to in Holy Scripture as a symbol of evil, some have interpreted this Parable in a very different manner. But the meaning assigned to it above is in accordance with ancient interpretation; and the other explanation is involved in difficulties. For, if the leaven represents a corrupting influence, the Parable would describe the Kingdom of Heaven either as having an evil effect upon the world, or else as progressing itself towards corruption till the whole is corrupted.
- [8] The Jewish people and their rulers had formed God's Kingdom upon earth in ancient times; and they were still His chosen people, who would naturally continue to form a part of His Kingdom, now that it was to be extended so as to embrace the world. But the privileges which they despised they would lose; and others who valued them would gain them.

CHAPTER IV.

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THE SUBJECTS OF THE KINGDOM.

"Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see their God,
The secret of the Lord is theirs,
Their soul is Christ's abode."

The Subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven”—who are they?

The subjects of a kingdom are, in a general way, those who have been born within its limits, and who submit to its laws and accept its king. But when we enquire into the teaching of our Lord about the subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven,” we are met at once with the difficulty that, in the days of His earthly ministry, the Kingdom was not yet founded^[9]. The King was only preparing the way for His Kingdom to be set up. And there is necessarily a great difference between joining a Kingdom in the act of being founded, and being born under its laws and within its limits.

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Consequently with respect to His teaching about the Subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven,” two things have to be considered. First, the conditions under which men are permitted to join His Kingdom; and, secondly, the life which His subjects are required to lead.

At the very commencement of His ministry a divine picture was drawn of the character and life of the true subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven.” For as He “went about all Galilee preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, there followed Him great multitudes of people. And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (S. Matt. iv. 23-v. 3). Thus He began the Sermon on the Mount by declaring the blessedness of His subjects, though they would be very different from those whom the world commonly counts blessed. And the last Beatitude ended, as the first began, with distinct reference to the Kingdom, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (S. Matt. v. 10); as though to make it clear to His hearers that the blessedness spoken of throughout all the verses was connected with His Kingdom.

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He then addressed those who, in their hearts, accepted Him, as “the salt of the earth;” and as “the light of the world” (S. Matt. v. 13, 14). They would not only be blessed in themselves, as His subjects, but they would also be a blessing to others. They were to be the salt which should preserve the world from corruption; and the light which should lead men to “glorify their Father which is in Heaven” (S. Matt. v. 16).

Having thus described, at the beginning of His Sermon, the general character and office of the subjects of His Kingdom, our Blessed Lord went on to answer a question, which would doubtless arise in the minds of His hearers. Would the Kingdom of which He spoke destroy, or be opposed to the Law, under which God’s People had lived from ancient times? The answer was most distinct: “Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven” (S. Matt. v. 17-20). So far from coming to destroy the Law, He had come that it might be fulfilled by His subjects, as it had never been fulfilled before. For they would be required to surpass even the Scribes and Pharisees in their observance of it, by keeping it in the spirit, as well as in the letter; otherwise they would prove themselves unfit for His Kingdom. And then followed examples of the observance of some of the laws of old—such as the law of purity, and the law against murder—in this enlarged spiritual sense; ending with the exhortation, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect” (S. Matt. v. 21-48).

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One of the chief ways in which God’s People had failed in their service towards Him, was in the spirit in which they had discharged their religious duties. Righteousness had become but another name for formality. Prayers and alms and fasts had been turned into opportunities for showing off before men, and for gaining the reputation of sanctity. Consequently it was necessary that He should lead back His hearers to the real meaning of these duties; and set forth the principle which must guide His subjects in all their religious acts—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting—namely, this; the desire to please their “Father which is in Heaven” (S. Matt. vi. 1-18). And that there might be no mistake about the kind of rewards which they might look for, He declared that they must “lay up for themselves treasures in Heaven” (S. Matt. vi. 19-21); that is to say, they must love and long for spiritual rewards, setting their hearts upon higher things than this world can give. And the only way in which they could do this, was by devoting themselves with their whole strength to the service of God. For no half-service of God was possible: “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon” (S. Matt. vi. 24). Then if they lived for God, they might lay aside all over-anxious thoughts about this present life. If they really gave themselves up to be His subjects, they would certainly have all things ordered for them for the best. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (S. Matt. vi. 33).

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The Sermon ended with mentioning some of the difficulties which the subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven” would have to meet in the practice of godliness. In the first place, in order to become His subjects they would have to enter through a narrow gate, upon a path which few would find. For whilst, on the one hand, “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat,” on the other hand, “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (S. Matt. vii. 13, 14). And when they had entered upon this narrow way, He warned them that they must be on their guard against being misled by foolish professors, because mere profession of obedience would neither prove them to be subjects of His Kingdom, nor win for them admission “in that day” into His glory and joy, “Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in Heaven” (S. Matt. vii. 21-23). Therefore they must

set to work to do the will of God, and so be true subjects of Messiah's Kingdom. And then, as doers of His words, and not hearers only, they would be building like wise men "upon a rock" (S. Matt. vii. 24).

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The description thus given by the King Himself of the character and life of His subjects sets vividly before us the difficulties which a Christian must overcome. It may not be always easy to decide whether the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" refers to the Kingdom as it is now on earth, or as it will be hereafter in Heaven; but it is clear that our Blessed Lord would teach in this Sermon both the difficulty of becoming a professing Christian at all, and also the need of earnest strivings after holiness in order that a subject of His Kingdom of Grace should find a welcome when that Kingdom shall have become the Kingdom of Glory. And when we think of the very different standards hitherto aimed at either by Jews or Gentiles, we see at once the reason which prevented so many of His hearers from accepting "The Kingdom of Heaven." For it is clear that a man who had been brought up either as a Jew or as a Gentile would have to lay aside almost all his previous habits and modes of thought—he must become a new man altogether—to enter in.

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Who then would enter in? Who would become subjects of the Kingdom of Heaven?

The Lord Jesus declared at once, what modern missionary experience still finds to be the case, that little children were the most likely to become His subjects, and the fittest to enter into "The Kingdom of Heaven." Some mothers once brought their little ones for His blessing; and when the disciples were hindering their coming, "He was much displeased and said unto them, Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God" (S. Mark x. 14). And not only did He declare that little children were the most suitable to become His subjects; but He said also, that those who were grown up and wished to enter His Kingdom must become like children to do so. For He added, "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (S. Mark x. 15). And on another occasion He expressed His thankfulness that only child-like hearts could take in the mysteries of the Kingdom, saying, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (S. Luke x. 21).

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When we read in such passages as these of the difficulty of entering into "The Kingdom of Heaven," it becomes very important to remember that the Kingdom was not then set up; and that the words were spoken with respect to men who had grown up under other conditions and modes of thought. For whilst the words still apply literally and exactly to the case of converts from amongst the Heathen, they are not applicable at all, in the same sense, to persons who have long ago entered "The Kingdom of Heaven" as children, and have lived under its influence. Thus, for instance, when we read that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (S. Matt. xix. 23), there is no need to suppose that the rich, who have grown up as His subjects, have less hope of Heaven than others. The temptations which come with riches are great, but the grace of God will enable His subjects, whether rich or poor, to serve Him faithfully, if they seek for it. The words clearly referred to the difficulty which the rich Jew or the rich heathen would find in declaring himself a subject of Jesus Christ. It is easier for the poor and the unlearned to become a Christian, than for the rich and the learned. In after years S. Paul found this to be the case at Corinth. "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called" (1 Cor. i. 26). And the same thing is still happening in heathen lands. The chief successes in India have been amongst the low castes of Tinnevely, the hard-working Kols of Chota Nagpur, the simple Karens of the hills of Burma; and amongst the wealthy merchants and the learned Brahmins converts have been few. Experience confirms the truth of our Lord's teaching. He declared beforehand, that the rich, and the learned, and those who had enjoyed the greatest privileges, would be the most unwilling to be won over to His Kingdom. And the prediction has been fulfilled.

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It might have been supposed that, when at last Messiah's Kingdom was set up, all who had enjoyed the privilege of knowing the true God, and had been taught to expect a Deliverer, as their King, would have eagerly sought admission into His Kingdom. But to one who made the remark, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God," He spoke the Parable of "The Great Supper," teaching that many, who have the opportunity and the invitation will refuse to enter in, and make all kinds of excuses; and that others will have their places (S. Luke xiv. 15-24). And on another occasion He warned the Jews, that many would come from all quarters of the world, "and sit down in the Kingdom of God" (S. Luke xiii. 28, 29), whilst they themselves were thrust out. And we know how literally the warning has come true. And lest any one should be deceived into thinking that it was an easy thing to become His subject, He referred again and again to the difficulties which men must be prepared to meet and overcome in entering "The Kingdom of Heaven." To those who said that they would follow Him, He explained that entire devotion of self to God would be required of His subjects. A man must count the cost beforehand. "The dead" must be left to "bury their dead," whilst the man fulfils the commission which God entrusts to him, to "preach the Kingdom of God;" and "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (S. Luke ix. 57-62). But, on the other hand, for those who gave up freely all that they loved, "for the Kingdom of God's sake," the reward should be "manifold more" even "in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." (S. Luke xviii. 29, 30). And He encouraged the few, who in their hearts accepted Him as their King, in such words as these, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out" (S. John vi. 37); "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (S. Luke xii. 32).

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The thought that the difficulties thus described referred in the first instance to those who were

outside of "The Kingdom of Heaven," may wellfill us with thankfulness that we have been brought into the Kingdom through the piety of our parents, without even an effort on our parts. We have been so far helped already, that we have been placed upon the narrow way that leadeth unto life; and though temptations of many kinds assail to entice us from the road, and though the difficulties of the way are great, we have the hope to encourage us, that, if we are in earnest, the grace of God the Holy Ghost will preserve us, that we may be welcomed at last as faithful subjects, and admitted into the Kingdom of Glory.

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But at the same time we must remember that, in another sense, the words about the difficulty of entering "The Kingdom of Heaven" still apply to ourselves. For we have been admitted as subjects of the Kingdom, only that we may loyally serve our King; and we have been placed upon the narrow way, only that we may struggle up the steep ascent to Heaven. "The Kingdom of Heaven" is as yet in an imperfect condition here on earth. Here we are in a state of trial and probation, as well as of grace and blessing. And a day will come when the Kingdom of Grace will become the Kingdom of Glory. Then, they who have served their King, and proved themselves in the time of their trial to be His faithful soldiers and servants, will be welcomed into the joy of their Lord. But they who have professed to be His subjects, and have been satisfied with a mere profession, will cry, "Lord, Lord" (S. Matt. vii. 22-23), in vain.

Therefore, our King still cries to us, as to His hearers before the Kingdom was set up, "Strive to enter in" (S. Luke xiii. 24). He still bids us build "upon the Rock," by being "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (S. James i. 22). And He still warns us of the dangers of riches; "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. vi. 10). For we have still to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (S. Matt. v. 13, 14). And the standard which He has set us is still, and ever will be, far above us; "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (S. Matt. v. 48).

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The teaching of our Lord about His subjects is thus seen to correspond with what His Apostles, in time to come, taught their converts when they addressed them, as "called to be saints" (Rom. i. 7, Ephes. i. 1, etc.). We know that the world would like to find some easier course than this. But it is impossible; because the subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven" are called that they may be ready for the life *in* Heaven. And "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. xii. 14).

In subsequent chapters we shall consider the means provided by the King to enable His subjects to become such as He described them. For the present, let the thought of our holy calling increase our sense of the infinite love and mercy of our King.

Let us think of His own description of His work. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (S. Luke xix. 10). When we were wandering in the ways of sin, ignorant of God our Father, and unfit to be admitted into our home or to enjoy it if admission were possible, He came to seek us out and bring us into His Kingdom. And now that He has "overcome the sharpness of death and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers," our efforts after holiness are so imperfect, and our weakness and love of wandering are so great, that we should be in despair, if our King had not taught us His unceasing care. But this He has set forth in a well-known series of Parables; first, under the figure of a shepherd finding a stray sheep and calling friends and neighbours to rejoice over its recovery; then under the figure of a woman finding the lost coin; and, lastly, under the figure of a father welcoming home his prodigal son (S. Luke xv).

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Therefore, our position is this. As subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven," we are called, according to our Lord's own teaching, to a high and holy life; and the more we realise this truth the greater do our imperfections appear, and the clearer becomes our sense of the need of mercy, as well as help. But the King, who thus described His subjects, has also described His enduring love; and His invitation, still and for ever, applies to all who feel their unworthiness: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (S. Matt. xi. 28).

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FOOTNOTE:

[9] See S. Matt. xvi. 18. Pearson on the Creed, p. 336.

CHAPTER V.

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THINGS PERTAINING TO THE KINGDOM.

"Now is there solemn pause in earth and heaven;
The Conqueror now
His bonds hath riven,
And Angels wonder why He stays below;
Yet hath not man his lesson learned,
How endless love should be returned."

Hitherto our thoughts about "The Kingdom of Heaven" have been founded on the teaching of the King respecting His Kingdom recorded in the Gospels. But we must not forget to give attention to the very important time in the life of our Lord extending between His Resurrection and Ascension, during which He appeared to His Apostles upon terms very different from those on which He had previously associated with them^[10]. And though few records have been preserved of His instructions to them during this period, we find this general description, which very clearly shows the nature of those instructions. In the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, S. Luke records that the time was spent in "speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Acts i. 3). Consequently, though we have not His discourses in full, we know that the subject of them was still the same as in the time past—the good news of "The Kingdom of Heaven."

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During the years of His public ministry the Apostles frequently asked their Lord to explain what they did not understand in His teaching. And we may feel sure that, at this time, many things must have appeared to them in a new light, and many sayings must have gained a force and meaning which they had failed to perceive before. And if "The Kingdom of Heaven," about which He had said so much, was to be a real Kingdom, it is clear that there must have been many things on which they would require instruction, about the order and government of it, and about the practical carrying out of His loving designs for the salvation of the world. And inasmuch as we find that, almost immediately after their Lord's Ascension, the Apostles were fully prepared not merely to preach, as He had done, the good news of the Kingdom, but to call men into it as a Kingdom already established upon earth, we conclude that all these matters must have been fully explained to them during these days, and that these were "the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" of which He spake.

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Passing by, for the present, other questions of difficulty which would very probably arise in their minds, there are two passages in our Lord's discourses recorded in the Gospels which we can hardly doubt were discussed at this time; because some of His words have been preserved to us which connect those passages with what afterwards became the practice of the Church.

The first question of difficulty which would naturally arise out of one of His former sayings, and to which He provided the answer, was this—What was to be the form of admission into "The Kingdom of Heaven"? He had said to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (S. John iii. 5). But what did the words mean? What steps were to be taken by one who wished to enter the Kingdom? With what use of water would the Holy Spirit's power be connected? Here was a practical question requiring a decided answer. And we conclude that this was one of "the things pertaining to the Kingdom" which were spoken of during this time, because we find a brief record of distinct instructions given by our Lord to His Apostles how they were to admit men as His disciples or subjects. No discourse is recorded, but this clear commission is handed down by S. Matthew—evidently given in such a way that the Apostles could not fail to understand its meaning—"Go ye and make disciples^[11] of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (S. Matt. xxviii. 19). And consequently Holy Baptism became at once, and has been ever since, the form of admission into "The Kingdom of Heaven" (Acts ii. 38-41). And being an outward form, and yet a spiritual act, we have herein both "the water and the Spirit." It is an outward form in which there is a ceremonial use of water; and yet it is a spiritual act, because united with the most solemn naming of the Name of God, as He has in these last days revealed Himself to man; "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" and S. Paul does not hesitate to say, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body" (1 Cor. xii. 13).

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The other question arising out of some words of our Lord, which we conclude was discussed and answered by Him during this time, was the difficult one about the meaning of "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." He had once said, after S. Peter had confessed Him as the Christ, "I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven^[12]" (S. Matt. xvi. 19). And the same words about binding and loosing were repeated shortly afterwards to all the Apostles (S. Matt. xviii. 18). We can hardly doubt but that the question must have arisen in their minds what the keys of the Kingdom could be whereby the power of binding and loosing was given them. And although no discourse is recorded, it seems that this was another of "the things pertaining to the Kingdom" of which He spoke. For S. John, in the brief record which he has given of His first appearance to the Apostles after His Resurrection, has thus described what occurred:—Suddenly the Lord was in their midst, and said, "Peace be unto you. And He showed unto them His Hands and His Side" in proof that it was He Himself. And He said again "Peace be unto you. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." And "He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (S. John xx. 19-23). And ever since there has been this practical interpretation of the meaning of "the keys." Christ's ministers have confidently acted, as having been entrusted by their Lord with His authority to admit men into "The Kingdom of Heaven" by Holy Baptism, or to defer the act of admission until after longer probation; to exercise the judicial power of excommunication, or expulsion from the Kingdom, for notorious sin and unbelief, as in the case of the incestuous Corinthian (1 Cor. v. 3-7), or to re-admit after repentance, as S. Paul decided to do in the same case (2 Cor. ii. 6-10); and to assure all men that in the holy Ordinances of the Church of Christ free and full remission of sins may be certainly gained.

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We can readily imagine that many other matters were discussed amongst "the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

If disciples were to be made in all parts of the world, and were then to be taught "to observe all things commanded" (S. Matt. xxviii. 20) by the King, the question must have arisen, Who were to be appointed to teach them? And thus the whole subject of the government of "The Kingdom of Heaven," and the Orders and duties of the King's Ministers, would be opened.

Again, the words of institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, "This is My Blood of the new testament^[13], which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (S. Matt. xxvi. 28), pointed both to the ending of the old covenant, or testament, which was sealed in the blood of beasts (Exod. xxiv. 5-8), and to the passing away of the Jewish ritual and modes of worship. And the question would arise, What forms of worship were to be observed by His subjects in place of those ordained by the Law of Moses? Sacrifices could no longer have their former meaning, when the Lamb of God, to which they pointed the worshipper, had been offered upon the Cross. Was "the breaking of bread" to take the place of all the old sacrificial services?

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And with the subject of worship, the observance of the Sabbath would need to be considered. Was the Jewish Sabbath still binding on men's consciences? Was the Seventh Day to be observed in accordance with the Law of Moses, or was the First Day of the week to take its place, now sacred to the subjects of the Lord Jesus as that on which He rose, and to the keeping of which He had seemed to give His sanction, by appearing once and again on that day to the disciples as they were assembled together? (S. John xx. 19, 26.)

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On all these points^[14] we find, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, that the Apostles took at once a definite line of action. They knew what to do, and how to direct their converts. And though we have no record of the words of our Lord, we are confident that the Apostles were thus carrying out His own teaching^[15], under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, on all such matters "pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

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Amongst the few words recorded as having been spoken at this time to the Apostles, is this clear promise, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i. 8). And in the power of the Holy Ghost we find that they went forth to publish the glad tidings of "The Kingdom of Heaven." And, beginning from Jerusalem, they extended their work gradually to Samaria, and Syria, and to all countries, carrying out their Lord's commission, and preaching the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, as freely offered to all who would accept Him as their King, and enter through the strait gate of the New Birth into His Kingdom.

FOOTNOTES:

- [10] For fuller information about this period, see Bishop Moberly's "Discourses on the Great Forty Days."
- [11] See the note in the margin of a Reference Bible.
- [12] It is well known that the Romanists have sometimes founded their argument, in support of the claims of the Papacy, very mainly upon this verse; starting with the assumption, of which there is no proof, that the Pope is the successor of S. Peter, and asserting that a power was hereby given to S. Peter which the other Apostles did not possess. The weakness of the argument becomes clear when it is known that the same words were repeated again to all the Apostles; and that the above explanation, and practical enforcement of them, were equally spoken to them all.
- [13] Testament and Covenant are translations of one and the same word. The Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments, because the Old Testament contains the record of God's dealings with men under the Old Covenant; and the New Testament declares the New Covenant made with all the world through Jesus Christ.
- [14] A question may arise in the minds of some, whether it is a historical fact that the early Christians were in no doubt about the substitution of the First for the Seventh day? The answer is that, from the first, there was no doubt about the observance of the First Day; but that amongst the Jewish converts the observance of the Sabbath was permitted for some time, in addition to the Christian festival, and was only gradually discontinued. See Rom. xiv. 5; Gal. iv. 10; Col. ii. 16; and compare Acts xx. 7; 1 Cor. xvi. 2; Rev. i. 10.
- [15] This view is strengthened by the account given by S. Paul of the direct revelation granted to him respecting the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Not having been amongst the number of His Apostles in the days when He was on earth, S. Paul had received no instructions from His own mouth. But the defect was supplied by direct revelation. He says, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread," &c. (1 Cor. xi. 23).

CHAPTER VI.

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THE KING ON HIS THRONE.

"Crown Him with many crowns,
The King upon His Throne."

When the time came for our Blessed Lord to return into Heaven again, He ascended in the presence of His Apostles, whilst in the act of blessing them; "and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts i. 9). And, we are told, they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (S. Luke xxiv. 52), not sorrowing as before at His being taken from them. And when we consider what His Ascension implied, we can see that they had good reason for their joy. For the Ascension was the sign of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to His Mediatorial^[16] Throne at God's right hand.

When He was before the Jewish Council He had declared to them, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power." And the High Priest, hearing these words, cried out, "He hath spoken blasphemy" (S. Matt. xxvi. 64, 65); because he understood that He was thus openly claiming to be Messiah—the King—of whom David had said, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (Ps. cx. 1). And inasmuch as He had previously silenced the Pharisees with these same words, asking them to explain how David could speak of Messiah as "my Lord" (S. Matt. xxii. 44; S. Mark xii. 36; S. Luke xx. 42), when He was to be the Son of David, we can see that the importance of this passage is very great. And that for two reasons. First, as testifying that Christ should be no mere human descendant of David, because David calls Him Lord; and, secondly, as foretelling the Ascension of Christ to the Throne at God's right hand. And not only do all the three first Gospels record the use which He made of this verse to silence the Jews; but we find also that S. Peter on the day of Pentecost, and also S. Paul in his Epistles to the Corinthians and to the Hebrews (Acts ii. 34; 1 Cor. xv. 25; Heb. i. 13, x. 13), quoted it in support of their arguments that our Lord was exalted to His Throne. The Apostles argued in this way; David had thus clearly foretold the Ascension of Christ, and that His Ascension would be to the Throne of power, at the right hand of God. Therefore, inasmuch as He had ascended into Heaven, His Ascension was clearly the fulfilment of the prophecy, in order that He might make His solemn entry upon His kingly office, and be seated on His Throne. The Ascension was the last crowning proof that Jesus was Messiah—the King of the house of David—the "Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek" (Ps. cx. 4), that is, "King of Righteousness" and "King of Peace" (Heb. vii. 2).

In other words, the Apostles maintained that the Ascension of our Lord was the act whereby He ascended the Throne of "The Kingdom of Heaven," the Mediatorial Kingdom of Messiah. And this is the testimony which they have given under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. God "raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church" (Ephes. i. 20-22). And we are assured that the Ascension of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, implied that He has won the right of sovereignty over all the world; and that all mankind are summoned to bow before Him, and accept Him as their King. For, because "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross," therefore "God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. ii. 8-11).

But for the successful setting up of "The Kingdom of Heaven" two things were still needed. First, the overthrow of the enemies of Messiah's Kingdom; and secondly, the gift of the Holy Ghost, to induce men to be willing to submit themselves to the spiritual rule of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently when the King had ascended the Throne, and all mankind had been given Him as His subjects, He was "from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool" (Ps. cx. 1; Heb. x. 13). All who are set against "The Kingdom of Heaven" must in the end be subdued before Him. And no doubt the wicked amongst men who oppose His rule will, if they turn not, be included amongst these enemies. And yet we must never forget that these belong really to the number of those who were given to Him as His subjects. This is one of the mysteries of the Gospel, that "whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8), and "when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. v. 10); so that we are assured that the King in His loving mercy would have the wicked not "under His footstool," but amongst the sharers of His glory. But there are other enemies which will certainly be subdued in God's own time; and they are the spiritual powers of evil which are hindering men from being His subjects. He will "put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. xv. 24) arrayed against Him; even "the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world" (Ephes. vi. 12), by which His subjects are assailed. "For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25).

But the destruction of His foes is not the only, nor the chief result of His Ascension. When the King ascended the Throne of "The Kingdom of Heaven," "He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men" (Eph. iv. 8), even the gifts by which men might be brought to submit themselves to His spiritual rule, and be saved by Him. And inasmuch as only the Holy Ghost can change the heart, and make men such as He had described His subjects to be, He had previously explained to His Apostles that there was one gift on which all future success depended, the gift of "the Comforter which is the Holy Ghost" (S. John xiv. 26). And He had assured them, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you" (S. John xvi. 7).

They did not understand the words at the time when they were spoken; but at the time of the

Ascension they knew that they were to “wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts i. 4), of which He had told them; and to “tarry in the city of Jerusalem until” they were “endued with power from on high” (S. Luke xxiv. 49). Ten days of watching, suspense, and prayer followed. At last, “when the day of Pentecost was fully come, suddenly there came a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts ii. 1-4). Hitherto the little band of believers had numbered “about an hundred and twenty” (Acts i. 15) in Jerusalem. But now that the Holy Ghost was given, who could move the hearts of men and change them, the Apostles found themselves endued with the promised “power from on high,” which should give weight to their testimony; and the vast multitude, who assembled to listen to S. Peter’s sermon, were “pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts ii. 37).

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The previous instructions which had been given them about “the things pertaining to the Kingdom” (Acts i. 3) were now to be put into practice. The Apostles had the answer ready: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise”—of the Holy Ghost, who alone can change the heart and make men to be born again as the children of God—is not to us only, said the Apostle, but “is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words,” besides those which are recorded, “did he testify” to the truth about the Lord Jesus being Messiah, the King; and with such force did he “exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation,” that three thousand “gladly received his word and were baptized” (Acts ii. 38-41), as subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

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Thus the Kingdom was established amongst men by the power of the Holy Ghost^[17]. A spiritual Kingdom, but none the less a Kingdom upon earth. A spiritual Kingdom, not established by any power of man, and not belonging to this world; and yet a Kingdom of which men and women and little children were the subjects; “The Kingdom of Heaven” as described by our Lord in His parables and discourses.

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And the Kingdom having been thus established amongst men, from this time we find a special name was given to it. Henceforth “The Kingdom of Heaven” becomes “the Church.” It was a word which our Lord Himself had occasionally used with reference to His Kingdom, as when He said, “Upon this rock I will build my Church” (S. Matt. xvi. 18); but it now became the common expression. Thus when a persecution broke out against the Christians, it was thus described, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the Church” (Acts viii. 3). So Herod “stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church” (Acts xii. 1); and when S. Peter was imprisoned, “prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him” (Acts xii. 5). And throughout the Book of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles it is almost always used as the name of the body of believers or subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

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At the same time, in order that there might be no doubt that the Apostles were simply carrying on their Lord’s preaching of “the Gospel of the Kingdom” (S. Matt. iv. 23), and that “The Church” which they founded was in very deed “The Kingdom of Heaven,” in certain passages describing the character of their preaching we still find a reference to the Kingdom. Thus, when Philip preached the Gospel to the Samaritans, his work is described in these words, “When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the Name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts viii. 12). And a similar instance occurs respecting the preaching of the great Apostle to the Gentiles, S. Paul. The whole of the latter half of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is filled with the record of the extension of the Church by the labour of S. Paul in the various lands he visited. And he himself continually uses the word “Church,” both in his addresses recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and in his Epistles to the Churches. Thus, for instance, to the Elders whom he had ordained to take charge of the Church at Ephesus, he says, “Feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own Blood” (Acts xx. 28). And yet when the general character of his preaching is described, it is still spoken of as the good news of the Kingdom. For to these same Elders S. Paul says, “And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, shall see my face no more” (Acts xx. 25). And the last record of him leaves him at Rome “preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, no man forbidding him” (Acts xxviii. 31).

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We may now briefly sum up the results of the Ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In ascending into heaven He was fulfilling the prophecy, to which special prominence had been given in His discourses with His opponents, “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (Ps. cx. 1). He was thus ascending the Throne of the Mediatorial Kingdom of Messiah—“The Kingdom of Heaven”—and having ascended in triumph, “He gave gifts unto men.” And upon receiving the great gift which He had promised—even the Holy Ghost—the Apostles became endued with the power, by which alone “The Kingdom of Heaven” could be founded upon earth, and be extended amongst men. And, from that day forward, “The Kingdom of Heaven” may be said to have been established. And as the Apostles went forth preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God, and believers were multiplied, we find that, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the word “Church” was used to express this body of the faithful. And the name thus used in those early days of “The Kingdom of Heaven,” has been generally applied to it ever since.

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Thus we are brought face to face with the practical importance of the teaching of our Blessed Lord about “The Kingdom of Heaven.” “The Kingdom of Heaven” is “The Church of Christ.” The

FOOTNOTES:

[16] See Pearson on the Creed, pp. 283, 285.

[17] It is sometimes said that the Kingdom was founded by our Lord in the call of His Apostles. But inasmuch as He spoke of it as being still in the future, when He said to Peter, "Upon this rock *I will* build My Church" (S. Matt. xvi. 18), and expressly declared that the Baptism of the Spirit was the appointed means of entering into it (S. John iii. 5), it seems more accurate to say that our Lord founded His Kingdom on this day, through the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles. For thus His words which specially applied to their own cases were fulfilled, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost" (Acts i. 5; S. Matt. iii. 11); and the gift was then handed on to others in the appointed way, by which they also might be brought into the one Body (1 Cor. xii. 13).

CHAPTER VII.

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THE PARABLES EXEMPLIFIED IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

"To Him shall prayer unceasing
And daily vows ascend;
His Kingdom still increasing,
A Kingdom without end."

We have seen that our Lord described in His Parables the general character and nature of "The Kingdom of Heaven." Consequently, if the Church established by the Apostles under the guidance of the Holy Ghost is "The Kingdom of Heaven," it will necessarily be found to agree with the description thus given. Let us therefore now consider how far the history of the Church, in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, agrees with the picture of "The Kingdom of Heaven" drawn beforehand by the King.

The Parable of the Sower admits of frequent illustration if we understand the seed to refer, in a general sense, to the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, whether it is preached to men outside the Kingdom or to those within it. The birds are continually carrying off the seed from thoughtless and hardened hearers; opposition and persecution and temptation still scorch up the seed in others; and worldliness and love of money still choke that which was beginning to grow well in many hearts. And we can see all these characters, in those who were first called to be members of the Church of Christ. The Jews, generally, in all places visited by S. Paul, from whom he was forced to turn away in despair of producing any effect (Acts xiii. 46), were like the wayside on which the seed fell only to be devoured. Such also was Felix, who "trembled" as he heard S. Paul reasoning "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," but went away and "left Paul bound" (Acts xxiv. 25-27); and Agrippa "almost persuaded to be a Christian" (Acts xxvi. 28). Of hearers in whom the seed is scorched up by the fire of temptation or persecution, we may see instances in Ananias and Sapphira, who fell under the temptation to appear zealous whilst being really worldly (Acts v. 3); or in John Mark, who was disheartened at the seeming difficulties before him, and turned back from Pamphylia (Acts xiii. 13), leaving S. Paul and S. Barnabas to go on without him. Of those in whom the seed is choked by the weeds of worldliness and love of money, there were many examples. Simon Magus, who after renouncing his sorcery and being baptised, thought that the power of the Holy Ghost might "be purchased with money" (Acts viii. 19, 20); Demas who "loved this present world" so much that he forsook S. Paul in the hour of danger (2 Tim. iv. 10); and the many of whom S. Paul spoke with tears, "whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil. iii. 19). And, lastly, of those in whom the seed bears fruit an hundredfold, it seems almost invidious to select examples. But such were the martyr Stephen, who prayed for his murderers (Acts vii. 60); Tabitha, "full of good works and almsdeeds" (Acts ix. 36); Cornelius, upon whom the Holy Ghost fell even before he was baptised (Acts x. 46); S. Luke, "the beloved physician" (Col. iv. 14), "whose praise is in the Gospel" (2 Cor. viii. 18).

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The Parable of "The Tares," which described the sad outward appearance of "The Kingdom of Heaven," was unhappily at once exemplified in the early Church. Amongst the first members of the Church of Christ were found Ananias and Sapphira "to lie unto the Holy Ghost" (Acts v. 3); and Simon Magus to bring upon himself the rebuke "thy money perish with thee" (Acts viii. 20). And, as years passed on, we find S. Paul writing to the Church of God at Corinth to rebuke its members of schism (1 Cor. i. 12); of being "carnal" and encouraging "envying and strife and divisions" (1 Cor. iii. 3); of "fornication," and that not merely in a single instance (1 Cor. v. vi); of tampering with idolatrous feastings (1 Cor. viii); of disorders in their religious assemblies, and especially of gross profanity in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. xi); of strange misuse

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of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. xii, xiv); and of denying the great doctrine of the Resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 12). All of these charges show how strongly the tares began at once to grow amongst the wheat. And, in later years, the same Apostle warns the Elders of Ephesus that "grievous wolves" will enter in among them "not sparing the flock" (Acts xx. 29); referring probably to the Gnostic heresies against which the First Epistle of S. John is mainly directed.

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Let us pass on to happier examples. The Parable of "The Mustard Seed," describing the outward spread of "The Kingdom of Heaven," is illustrated by almost every chapter of the Acts. Beginning with the little seed of an hundred and twenty members, the Church increased at once to thousands on the Day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 41, 47). Then, as the increasing numbers required that Deacons should be ordained to assist the Apostles, we read that "the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the Priests," recognising, we may suppose, the fulfilment of the sacrificial types in the person and work of the Lord Jesus, "became obedient to the Faith" (Acts vi. 7). Then by the Providence of God this multitude of the believers was scattered through the persecution which arose about Stephen, and they "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts viii. 4). So that next "Samaria received the word of God" (Acts viii. 14). Then the good news spread to Damascus, and to Antioch in Syria (Acts ix, xi. 19).

Such was the growth of the Church in the first ten or twelve years. Then Antioch became a fresh starting-point, and within the next twenty years, under the efforts of S. Paul and S. Barnabas and others, the glad tidings spread from Antioch to Cyprus, and from Cyprus to the coasts of Asia Minor (Acts xiii, xiv). Then after extending through many provinces of Asia, the Gospel tree spread forth its branches to Macedonia (Acts xvi. 11); and from Macedonia to the ancient cities of Greece (Acts xvii, xviii); and from Greece to Italy and Rome, the capital of the world. With this Parable of "The Mustard Seed," we may connect that of "The Seed growing secretly" (S. Mark iv. 26, 27), and we may think how little the rulers of the old world imagined, that there was a power at work amongst them, which would change the moral character of the whole Empire. The Church of Christ was extending her influence secretly and unnoticed, or noticed only to be despised by the ruling classes. Yet within three hundred years the faith of Christ became the professed religion of the Roman Empire.

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But the spread of the Church of Christ was not merely an outward extension in the number of professed members. The Parable of "The Leaven" had set forth the power which "The Kingdom of Heaven" would exercise over the hearts of men. And of this also we may find examples in almost every chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. See the leaven working in the first members of the Church, who lived together in such love and unity that "they had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts ii. 44, iv. 32). Think of the devoted lives led by the Apostles, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame" (Acts v. 41) for their Lord's sake. Other instances may be seen in Stephen praying for his murderers (Acts vii. 60); in the character of Barnabas, "a good man full of the Holy Ghost and of faith" (Acts xi. 24); in the Elders, who were ordained by S. Paul in the different cities which he visited, and who handed on the knowledge they had gained to their more ignorant fellow-countrymen, "feeding the Church of God" (Acts xiv. 23, xx. 28); in the case of Aquila and Priscilla instructing Apollos (Acts xviii. 26); in the Ephesian converts burning their books (Acts xix. 19); in Lydia taking care of S. Paul at Philippi (Acts xvi. 15); and in the love shown to him afterwards by the Philippians in general, his "dearly beloved and longed for," his "joy and crown" (Phil. i. 3-8, iv. 1-10). Other signs of the leaven working in the hearts of the faithful may be gathered from a variety of expressions in the different Epistles, pointing to the changed lives of the members of the Church (1 Cor. vi. 11); whilst the Apostles were continually urging their converts to let the leaven work more freely upon them, and become more apparent in the holiness of their lives, in the putting off "the old man," and in the putting on "the new man" (Ephes. iv. 22, 24).

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The Parables of "The Treasure" and "The Pearl," which set forth the priceless value of salvation, and the different ways in which it becomes known to men, may be illustrated by several instances in the early history of the Church. One finds the truth, as it were, by chance, like some hidden treasure. Such was the man of Ethiopia finding, as he crossed the desert, an apparently chance traveller able to expound to him the prophecies of Messiah (Acts viii. 27); and such was the jailor at Philippi, stopped in the act of committing suicide to be baptized by his prisoners (Acts xvi. 27, 30). Another finds "The Pearl" worth all the world besides, only after long search. Such was S. Paul, who sought for it in intense zeal for God, and found it in the Voice which said, "Why persecutest thou Me?" (Gal. i. 14, Acts ix. 4). And such was Cornelius, whose prayers and alms called down the blessing from above which brought to him the knowledge of His Saviour (Acts x. 30-48). Whilst the value which men set upon the discovery was shown by the joy with which all things were given up for the sake of Christ, when men "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people" (Acts ii. 46, 47); when they rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name" (Acts v. 41); when being expelled with violence from one city they went on to the next, and, instead of complaints, "the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost" (Acts xiii. 50-52); and when one could say, who had given up all his earthly prospects and high position amongst his fellows, "what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Phil. iii. 7, 8).

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The last Parable of the series, "The Draw-net," referring as it does to the final separation at the end of the world, cannot be illustrated by example.

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Of the other Parables of "The Kingdom of Heaven" describing special circumstances which affect the subjects of the Kingdom, only one, "The Marriage of the King's Son," seems to be capable of

illustration by examples. And this is abundantly illustrated throughout the Acts of the Apostles in the history of the extension of the Church. As soon as the Gospel spread to Gentile lands, we find the Jews in general persistently refusing to accept the Lord Jesus as Messiah and to become members of the Church. Thus at Antioch in Pisidia, after the glad tidings had been so published that "almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God; when the Jews saw the multitudes they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming." Then the literal fulfilment of this prophetic Parable followed. "Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts xiii. 44-46). And, in a similar way, the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles records how the Jews in Rome brought upon themselves the warning Words of S. Paul, "Be it known, therefore, unto you; that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts xxviii. 25-28).

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Thus we find the Parables of "The Kingdom of Heaven" exemplified and fulfilled in the history of the early Church. And any doubt still lingering in the mind of the reader, about the Church of Christ being "The Kingdom of Heaven," may be dispelled by the clear testimony of the facts recorded in Holy Scripture.

CHAPTER VIII.

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THE ESSENTIAL UNITY OF THE KINGDOM.

"Elect from every nation,
Yet One o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, One Faith, One Birth."

If it is true that our Lord came to found a real Kingdom, and if the Church described in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is this Kingdom, it is clear that the quality of Unity or Oneness is essential to it. It must belong to the nature of the Church that it should be One; because we cannot conceive in our minds, in any practical sense, the idea of two Kingdoms of Heaven.

This truth was illustrated by our Lord under the form of a figure. "I am the Vine; ye are the branches" (S. John xv. 5). The idea of a tree implies oneness, and the branches have no separate existence apart from the stem. Even so the subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven" can exist only through union with Christ Himself; and wherever Christians are enrolled, in whatsoever country they may be, all must belong to the same Kingdom, because all are branches of the One Vine.

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Consequently, if the Church be "The Kingdom of Heaven," then, as it spread through the world and different countries received the Gospel, we shall expect to find that the various branches of the Church founded by S. Paul and the other Apostles were not independent one of another, in the sense of being so many separate and distinct bodies, but were all united together, as forming the One Church or Kingdom of Christ.

The question now arises, Was this the case?

God in His Providence has not left us in any doubt upon this point. We can trace this oneness very clearly in the history of the Church during its extension under the Apostles, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The following incident serves as an example. After S. Paul's return to Antioch at the close of his first missionary journey, a dispute arose about the necessity of teaching the Gentile converts to observe the law of Moses. And it was determined by the Church at Antioch that "Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem, unto the Apostles and Elders, about this question." The first recorded Church Council was then held to consider the matter; and after full discussion, it was determined to send the decision in a letter after this manner: "The Apostles and Elders and Brethren send greeting unto the Brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia." Then after stating the case, the decision was thus given: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well" (Acts xv. 1-29). From which it is clear that all the believers in the several Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch and Cilicia were brethren together, and fellow-subjects of one Kingdom, bound to the observance of common laws framed by common consent for the general good government of the whole body. And it is equally clear that the ties which held together these various communities of Christians were the Apostles themselves, who had founded them. The various Churches were one, because their founders were fellow-workers, who acted in concert, taking counsel together. But what bond of union held the founders themselves together?

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The answer to this question shows the ground on which the essential Oneness of the Church is based. And it is clearly this. The Apostles and Bishops who founded the various Churches were all commissioned officers of one King—the King of "The Kingdom of Heaven"—and they were commissioned, not to found Churches bearing their own, names, independent one of another, but

to extend the King's dominion. And their authority and power to act were wholly dependent upon their acting in the King's Name, and with His concurrence. For when the commission was given to the Apostles to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations," these words were added by the King, "And lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (S. Matt. xxviii. 20). From which we see also that the continuance of the Unity was secured, in the same way, through the Apostles' successors, after they themselves should be called to rest. And whilst the Apostles and Bishops were thus appointed as the agents to extend "The Kingdom of Heaven," the King Himself was the actual bond of union, securing the essential unity of the Church, wherever subjects were brought in. One King over all held all together.

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As time passed and various branches of the One Church were formed, there were also other ties which were felt to bind Christians one with another as one body. The Church was a spiritual Kingdom; and by one and the same Holy Spirit all had been moved to accept the King, and all had been new-born as the children of God. And as all had received the same Holy Spirit, so all looked forward to the same hope of eternal life; all having been called to enter the same state of salvation, in which the prize was within their reach. All had been taught the same articles of Faith. All had been baptized, with the same form, into the Name of the Blessed Trinity. And so S. Paul summed up their bonds of union in these words, "One Body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one Hope of your calling; one Lord; one Faith; one Baptism; one God" (Ephes. iv. 4-6).

But the unity of a Kingdom depends, not merely upon having one Head and certain general laws and ordinances; but also upon the ready obedience of the subjects. "Every Kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation" (S. Matt. xii. 25). An earthly kingdom is strong only when the people are united together in loyally obeying the king, and the laws, and officers of the kingdom. It is weak when suspicion and factious opposition prevail; or when the subordinate princes exercise their authority without respect to the general good. And, if it does not fall altogether, it is an unhappy kingdom indeed, when these opposing interests break out into open rupture and civil war.

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The case is exactly the same with "The Kingdom of Heaven." It is strong only as a united Kingdom. And the last prayer of our Lord before His Passion shows how well the King knew beforehand wherein the weakness of His Kingdom would consist, which would hinder it from comprehending the whole world according to His loving design. The essential unity of the Kingdom was secured, as we have seen above. But still the strength of His Kingdom, as a united Kingdom, would depend upon the loyal obedience of His subjects. And He knew that His subjects would be as much exposed to the evil influence of false teachers, as the subjects of an earthly king are to the seductions of the misguided and seditious. And He prayed "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be One in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (S. John xvii. 21).

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An unhappy tendency to division was soon manifested in the Church. And S. Paul wrote to "the Church of God which is at Corinth," to rebuke them for imagining that the founders of the Church were founding communities in their own names, forgetting that they were the mere ministers of the King. "While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man" (1 Cor. i. 12; iii. 1-5).

The tendency to form divisions in the Church which so early appeared, increased rather than diminished as years went on; though it was checked, under the Providence of God, by the frequent persecutions which broke out against the Christians. The inevitable result followed. "The Kingdom of Heaven" was weak, and unable to maintain the conflict against the heathenism of the world around it, as it ought to have done. Christendom was divided against itself. The National Churches, which had been founded as Branches of one and the same Church, were engaged in contests between themselves. Then one Church usurped an authority over other Churches, provoking in course of time further disunion. And in our own days, after eighteen centuries have passed since the Church was founded, it is calculated that not one-third of the inhabitants of the earth profess the faith of Christ. So greatly have the unhappy divisions which prevail amongst Christians weakened the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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But as Englishmen we are chiefly interested in the Church of our own country. Consequently, we must now come to the consideration of a question which, probably, has already troubled the minds of many readers of these pages—if the Church is one, what is the position of those who have separated from their own National Branch of this one Church, or Kingdom of Christ?

It is a question of much difficulty, because those who have been outwardly separated from their brethren have been brought into a position altogether different from any which is described in the New Testament. For the subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ are described therein as subjects of one Kingdom, bound together by the closest ties of loyalty to the King, and of brotherhood with one another. At the same time, the names by which Christians in this country are divided into Church-people and Dissenters, only add to the confusion. For to suppose, as these names suggest, that Dissenters do not belong in any sense to the Church of Christ, is an idea which is repugnant to the minds of all who know anything of their work. But though the difficulty of the question is so great, it is hoped that the previous chapters will have prepared the reader to see his way to the answer, which Holy Scripture enables us to form.

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But first let us clear the way by calling to mind the origin of the present lamentable state of things. The difficulty has been created by the inevitable imperfection of all things with which man's freewill is concerned. For God clearly intended that His Church should be one; and that it

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should work upon the world with the irresistible force of an united Kingdom. And inasmuch as we find, in our own days, that this intention has been frustrated, there can be no doubt but that it is our duty to do what we can to bring back the conditions of our life here into conformity with it. For Christian people cannot be content with a state of things which they find to be plainly contrary to God's intention. Consequently, in considering this question, it seems that the right course to take is to give prominence to the bonds of union which still exist between the different bodies of Christians in this country; and instead of magnifying the causes and extent of disunion, to endeavour to draw men closer together.

Now it is clear from Holy Scripture, that the Church of Christ consists of those who have been made subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven;" and we have already seen that our Lord explained that the form of admission into His Kingdom would be by Holy Baptism. Therefore, with respect to so-called Dissenters, we conclude, that all have been brought into the Church or Kingdom of Christ in this land, who have used the means which He ordained for that purpose, namely, Holy Baptism. And the names assumed by those who separate themselves from their brethren cannot destroy the effects of this great Sacrament. It appears also that they have become in some degree partakers with their brethren of those bonds of union mentioned by S. Paul, "One Body; one Spirit; one Hope; one Lord; one Faith; one Baptism; one God" (Ephes. iv. 4-6). Though, unhappily, their appreciation of some of these bonds of union is slight; and they are deprived (either by their deliberate will, or, more commonly, by the accidents of their birth) of the many privileges which they might enjoy, through communion with their brethren in the Ordinances of religion and in the common service of our Lord Jesus Christ^[18].

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At the same time, it ought to be clearly understood, that we have no certain warrant of Holy Scripture for more than this. For, as there is no example in the Bible of any one professing faith in Christ, and yet holding back from being baptized into the Name of the Trinity, it is not possible to describe the position of the unbaptized with any certainty of assurance. The offer of salvation through Jesus Christ is thus briefly stated, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (S. Mark xvi. 16); that is, he will be placed in a state of present salvation by being admitted into "The Kingdom of Heaven." But the case of any one believing and not being baptized is not contemplated.

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In the next place, still confining our thoughts to our own country, we shall do well to consider that the greater number of those who have separated themselves from us have done so with the hope of thereby doing God service; or else under the idea that the separation is of small importance, being more a matter of personal choice than of principle. They have forgotten or have been ignorant of the prayer of the Lord Jesus—"That they all may be one; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (S. John xvii. 21)—forewarning us that the result of divisions would be the spoiling of His work for the saving of the world. And, at the same time, it is right that we should also call to mind that in many instances in the past history of the Church in this land, those who have professed to hold the position of loyal subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven" have seemed to be equally careless of this inevitable loss through the separation of their brethren.

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With these considerations in our minds, if we now go on to test our opinions by the sure warrant of Holy Scripture, fearlessly taking our stand upon its distinct teaching, we shall see how important it is that both so-called Church-people and so-called Dissenters should be induced to study carefully what is recorded therein about "The Kingdom of Heaven," or Church of Christ. For, on the one hand, we shall find that Holy Scripture clearly teaches that the Church is a spiritual Kingdom, and that the only way to receive the benefits of membership is by being led and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. And, on the other hand, we shall see that Holy Scripture makes it equally clear that our Lord described His Church as being a real Kingdom, though a spiritual one; and that this Kingdom was established with distinct laws and ordinances, by His directions, and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. And consequently, if, on the one hand, any are content with the name of Church-people without seeking to advance in the spiritual life, they are clearly acting as the Jews, who trusted to being able to say, "We have Abraham to our father" (S. Matt. iii. 9). Similarly, on the other hand, if men carelessly weaken "The Kingdom of Heaven" by forming factions, or so-called denominations, under different leaders, and known by the names of their founders, they are clearly bringing themselves under the rebuke of S. Paul, "While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal^[19]?" (1 Cor. iii. 4); or if they propose to themselves to form a holier society, by expelling the tares from the wheat in the Lord's field, they are disregarding the teaching of His parable (S. Matt. xiii. 24-30), the meaning of which cannot be doubtful. And, at the same time, all who will take pains to study Holy Scripture will find that to be a member of "The Kingdom of Heaven," or Church of Christ, is no mere matter of choice, but of vital importance; because no other way has been revealed whereby we may be saved, but by accepting the Gospel of the Kingdom, and by being admitted into it, as those first converts were, to whom S. Peter said, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts ii. 40, 41).

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We are now in a position to sum up what has been gathered from Holy Scripture about the essential unity of "The Kingdom of Heaven."

The idea of a Kingdom implies the necessity of unity. And it was provided that the essential unity of "The Kingdom of Heaven" should be maintained through the Headship of the one King over all. The King commissioned His Apostles to make all the nations of the world His subjects, and assured them of the authority to do this by promising to be with them and their successors to the end of the world. And wherever the Church spread, however defective and imperfect it might be,

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it was still part of one and the same Kingdom, owning the Lord Jesus Christ as King. Besides this bond of union, one Holy Spirit was working with more or less success upon all the subjects, wherever they might be; one Hope was held out before all, of salvation; one Faith in the ever-blessed Trinity was taught to all, and professed by all; one Baptism enrolled all; one God was the object of the worship of all.

But the unity of a Kingdom depends not only upon the King and the laws and ordinances of the Kingdom, but also upon the loyal obedience of the subjects. And the subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven" have, in past times, so far forgotten this duty, that it has come to pass that for centuries the great branches of the Church of Christ have had little, if any, outward communion or fellowship with one another. And in our own country the professed members of Christ are divided into many bodies, not only independent of one another, but oftentimes opposing, rather than helping forward, the extension and well-being of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And the result has been that we have learned by sad experience the reason of the foreboding tone of our Lord's last prayer, "That they all may be one; ... that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (S. John xvii. 21). The multitudes of men, practically heathen, in the midst of this professedly Christian land, and the still greater multitudes of men in other lands whom the good news of the Kingdom has not reached, are proofs of the weakness of the Church of Christ. Christians are not "one;" and consequently "the world" does not "believe" in Him whom the Father of His great love sent to be its Saviour.

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During the first few centuries the Church spread rapidly, not only throughout the more civilised parts of the Roman Empire, but also amongst the rough Celts of Britain and the fierce Teutons of Germany. We may well ask, why did it cease to spread, and why are so many lands still lying in darkness? Since Christ came to be the Saviour of the world, how is it that there are so many millions of Buddhists and Hindoos in Asia, that to this day it is said that not one-third of the inhabitants of the world are; Christians? The answer is, alas! clear. The unity of the One Universal Church of Christ has not been maintained in the full and perfect manner described in our Lord's Prayer, "That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us" (S. John xvii. 21). Christians have lost the sense of brotherhood, which should bind them all together in Christ, of whatsoever nation or language they may be. The Church has ceased to move with the irresistible power of one mighty army, acting with one mind for the glory of God.

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All thoughtful subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven" must lament this state of disunion and weakness. And men are striving in different, and in some cases opposite ways, to bring about re-union. But when we begin to ask, What is the remedy? we find that we are facing a mighty problem. God's loving purpose for the salvation of the world has been marred by man's wilfulness. His Kingdom, which might have been irresistible and have won the whole world for Christ, has been split up into many portions, which have been opposing and weakening one another, instead of fighting His enemies. How can these portions, after centuries of disunion, be reunited into one? How can the mischief be undone?

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It is beyond the power of man.

Yet at the same time we can see that there are certain things which all can do to advance the object in view, and to promote re-union at least in our own National Church at home, if not also between the different branches of Christ's Holy Church^[20] throughout the world. But to do so, two things are clearly necessary. One thing is to have a clear grasp of the principle which runs through the whole teaching of the Bible,—that Christ came to found a Kingdom. And the other is to desire unity. If all desired unity, the desired result would certainly be accomplished.

But one thing is certain. No plan of re-union can succeed which is not based upon the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. "The Kingdom of Heaven" is there clearly described. First by the King Himself in His parables and discourses, before the Kingdom was yet founded; and then in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, which tells how the Kingdom or Church of Christ, which had been purchased with His own Blood, was set up under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. And inasmuch as no man, nor any body of men, can form a new "Kingdom of Heaven," the only position which a Christian can hold, in agreement with Holy Scripture, is the position of a subject of that Kingdom which was so founded.

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And when we call to mind that "The Kingdom of Heaven" extended to our own land, by the Providence of God, in early days, we see at once that our aim, as loyal subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be to win back those who have separated from us, to act as fellow-soldiers with us in the one great army of our King, serving under the same flag and the same officers, and fighting with united energy for the glory of God.

But as in an earthly kingdom various opinions may be held by different persons and parties, and yet all may be loyal subjects of the same King, and earnestly advancing the well-being of the kingdom, so in the spiritual Kingdom of Messiah unity does not mean that all must think alike^[21]. But there is one necessary condition, namely this,—the essential unity of the Kingdom must be kept in view. There can be but one "Kingdom of Heaven." Consequently, to form separate and independent bodies cannot fail to cause confusion and weakness. To act in the Name of the King men must be united. If we, who call ourselves by the Name of Christ, desire to spread His Kingdom with the irresistible force which belongs to it, we must show to the world that we are all one in interests—in the common hope of Heaven; all one in faith—in the common belief in the love of God, as it is expressed in the work of redemption, through the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; all one in Baptism into the great Name of the ever-Blessed Trinity; and, above all

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FOOTNOTES:

- [18] Let me beg every reader of these lines to pause here, and shoot up an arrow of prayer that God may lead men to think of the blessedness of being united, as sons of one Father, brethren of one family, subjects of one Kingdom. And I would ask those readers who may be, at present, living in outward separation from the Ancient Branch of Christ's Church in this land, to consider with themselves what cause there is in their own case to justify, before God, such a separation from their Brethren in Christ.
- [19] Consider also S. Paul's earnest words, "Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, that there are contentions among you" (1 Cor. i. 2, 10, 11).
- [20] A caution is perhaps needed here to prevent the reader from supposing that any re-union is advocated which would involve union with error. On the one hand, we must "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. v. 1). We must firmly refuse to accept any other foundation than that of the Creeds, settled by an undivided Christendom. And on the other hand, we must set ourselves with equal firmness against allowing any "Shibboleth" (Judges xii. 6), made out of exaggerated views of particular doctrines, to cut off those who should be brethren, not only in name but in life.
- [21] Truths are many-sided. Men may agree in their belief in truths, and yet hold different opinions concerning those truths. Just as men, who live on different sides of a mountain, all look upon the same mountain, and yet see different views of it; so men see different sides of a truth. To know a truth perfectly men must see it from every point of view. And the power of taking such comprehensive views of truths is granted to few, if any, here on earth. Probably this perfect knowledge is reserved for us in Heaven; when all, who have loved their Lord in sincerity, will find that their controversies with one another here on earth have been due to their imperfect knowledge and limited views of the truths of God.

CHAPTER IX.

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THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH.

“Christ is gone up; yet ere He passed
From earth, in heaven to reign,
He formed One Holy Church to last
Till He should come again.

So age by age, and year by year,
His grace was handed on;
And still the Holy Church is here,
Although her Lord is gone.”

A question often arises which is, in no little degree, perplexing to Christian people. What is the Holy Catholic Church? The words are very often in our mouths; for they are repeated continually in the Creed. What do we mean by them?

The teaching of our Lord about His Kingdom, and the description of the founding of that Kingdom by the Holy Ghost, acting through the Apostles, are the materials out of which the answer must be formed. And it is hoped that the readers of these pages have been led to see this already.

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But there are two ways of dealing with this question: first, as an article of faith; and secondly, as a matter of fact. The Church is an object on which faith is exercised; but if faith is laid aside altogether, the facts of the existence of the Church and its rapid extension in our own day still remain to be considered.

We must deal with it first as an article of the faith. "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." It is an article of faith added to our profession of faith in God, expressing our belief in the reality of the Gospel. It is like saying, in other words, that we believe that what our Lord preached was literally true, and has come to pass. Hereby we declare that the Kingdom which He proclaimed is a real Kingdom, and that we belong to it as His subjects, and share in the salvation which He, the long-promised Messiah, came to bring.

We have already considered the grounds on which this faith is based. We have seen that the Church founded by the Apostles was in reality and truth "The Kingdom of Heaven," which was described beforehand by our Lord in His parables and discourses, and which He declared could not be entered except through a new birth of the Spirit. And we have seen how the Holy Ghost

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was given according to His promise, first to lead men to accept the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ; then to bring them into His Kingdom, new-born as the children of God; and then to dwell within them and influence their lives, and prepare them for the presence of their Father.

Consequently, in professing our faith in “The Holy Catholic^[22] Church,” we are simply expressing the belief of Christians, that the good news which He preached has come to pass, that “The Kingdom of Heaven” has been founded; and that we, who profess this belief, have been called to enter it as His subjects, and have been put into the way of salvation, wherein we have a present share in His infinite merits, and a good hope of eternal Life through Him.

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The Holy Catholic Church is “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

But we have also to deal with the words “The Holy Catholic Church” as referring to a matter of fact. The existence of the Church is a historical fact, which may be traced down through the eighteen centuries from the times of the Apostles to our own. And we cannot realize in any practical manner what the Holy Catholic Church is, without some degree of knowledge of its history. Consequently, we must now proceed to consider what the Church is, by the help of the records which have come down to us.

The history of the Church of Christ during the greater part of the first century is within reach of all, because it is contained in Holy Scripture, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles. And this Bible history of the Holy Catholic Church may be divided into two periods; the first, whilst the Church was confined almost exclusively to converts from amongst the Jews, and had hardly extended beyond the limits of Palestine; and the second, when it began to spread amongst the Gentiles, in the heathen countries of Asia and Europe.

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During the first period the interest is centred in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost the foundation of the Church was laid in Jerusalem, through the conversion of three thousand devout Jews to the faith of Christ. And as the Apostles went on preaching boldly to the Jewish people, that the Lord Jesus whom they had crucified was none other than Messiah, of whom their prophets had foretold all things exactly as they had happened, the rulers laid hold of them, thinking to terrify them into silence. But in vain; for “the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts vi. 7). Then the persecution arose about Stephen, one of the newly-ordained deacons; and the faithful “were scattered throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria,” and they “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts viii. 1, 4). And so the Church began to spread under the Providence of God beyond the limits of Judæa.

Meanwhile we find that the Church was growing into a duly organised body. It was not a collection of Independent congregations, but a Kingdom, ruled by laws and ministers appointed either directly by the King Himself, or under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And its subjects are spoken of under four divisions; Apostles, Elders, Deacons, and Brethren. And a brief description of these three orders of Ministers and of the general body of brethren will best illustrate the account given in the Acts of the Apostles of what the Holy Catholic Church was like during that period.

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To the first order of Ministers—the Apostles and their successors—our Blessed Lord had committed His authority to found and extend His Kingdom. For to “the eleven Disciples” the commission was given, “Go ye and make disciples^[23] of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.” And then these words were added, showing that the commission was to be handed on by them to successive Apostles for ever: “And lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (S. Matt. xxviii. 16-20). And we find that, as years passed on, the Apostles ordained others to take their places; to assist them during their lifetime in the various countries and cities where converts had been made, and to succeed them when they were gone. The duties of these chief Ministers are clearly described in the Epistles, which we possess to two of them, viz. Timothy and Titus; being such as the Apostles themselves fulfilled, and including the general oversight of all teaching, and matters of order, and the ordaining of Elders and Deacons, as S. Paul sums them up to Titus: “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain Elders in every city” (Titus i. 5). And in the first ages of the Church the number of such overseers or Bishops was very large; every chief city having one to rule over the Church in that place, and to keep up the unity with the whole body.

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We come now to the second order of Ministers, the Elders. When the numbers of the faithful increased, it is clear that the Apostles by themselves would be unable to instruct them in the things commanded by the Lord (S. Matt. xxviii. 20); and we conclude that Elders were appointed at once to assist them—probably from amongst the seventy disciples sent out by our Lord (S. Luke x. 1)—because, when mention is made of them, S. Luke seems to take for granted that his readers will know who they are. The first mention of Elders in the Church at Jerusalem is in connection with the alms sent by the Christians at Antioch, to relieve their poor brethren in the capital: “They sent it to the Elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts xi. 30). Elders are mentioned again as taking part with the Apostles in the first Council at Jerusalem, when “The Apostles and Elders came together to consider of the matter” (Acts xv. 6). And it is made quite clear that Elders were regarded as a necessary order of Ministers in the Church of Christ, by the account given of the return of S. Paul and S. Barnabas from their first missionary journey: “They returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, and when they had ordained them

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Elders^[24] in every Church, they commended them to the Lord" (Acts xiv. 21-23). Their office was to take charge of the different congregations or Churches in the various towns and villages, very much as is still the duty of the second order of Ministers in the Church. We may learn this from the words of S. Paul during his last journey to Jerusalem. Having landed at Miletus, "He sent to Ephesus, and called the Elders of the Church;" and when they were come he reminded them what his teaching had been, and then charged them thus: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts xx. 17-28).

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The appointment of the third order of Ministers—the Deacons—was at first for a special object; to take the management of the distribution of daily necessities to the widows and needy (Acts vi. 1-6). But, from the first, the spiritual gifts bestowed upon them were exercised in the more distinctly spiritual work of preaching. Thus Stephen's "faith and power" (Acts vi, vii) stirred up the first persecution; and Philip, another of the first Deacons, by his faithful preaching brought about the conversion of the Samaritans (Acts viii. 5-14), and then laid the first stone in the foundation of the Ethiopian Church (Acts viii. 26-38).

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Thus from the first beginning of "The Kingdom of Heaven" we find the three orders or classes of Ministers, which have been ever since in the Holy Catholic Church. Apostles and Bishops bearing the Lord's commission to which the promise of His presence was attached; Elders or Priests having charge of congregations, as Pastors, to feed, instruct, and lead; and Deacons having special oversight of the relief of the poor, but also using their talents to preach as God gave unto them.

The position and life of "The Brethren" are set forth with equal clearness. As soon as a man was induced, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, to profess his belief in Jesus the crucified—as being Messiah, the Son of God, our Saviour—he was baptized according to the Lord's instructions to the Apostles (S. Matt. xxviii. 19). He was thus enrolled amongst the subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven," who were commonly spoken of as "Believers" or "The faithful," as "The Brethren," and as "Saints." In this way multitudes were brought into the Church on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 41); thus Philip admitted the people of Samaria (Acts viii. 12), and the Ethiopian officer of Queen Candace (Acts viii. 36-38). Thus S. Peter admitted the Gentile Cornelius, his hesitation to do so having been first removed by the manifest descent upon him of the Holy Ghost (Acts x. 47, 48); and thus S. Paul and S. Barnabas continually admitted converts in their missionary journeys. It does not appear that the Apostles themselves baptized; but they directed the act to be administered by an attendant. Thus S. Paul took John Mark with him as his "minister" on his first journey (Acts xiii. 5), and on other journeys Silas and Timothy and others. When Cornelius and his friends were baptized, we do not read that S. Peter baptized them, but "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts x. 48); and S. Paul expresses his thankfulness that only a few individuals could say that they had been baptized by him in person, "lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name" (1 Cor. i. 14-17).

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The life of "The Brethren," after baptism, is also described with much distinctness, in a few words which seem to have been recorded once for all of the first converts, in formal terms which should be applicable to all others: "They continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts ii. 42). And the four particulars thus stated seem to include all the duties of the Christian life. Their stedfast attention to "The Apostles' doctrine" implies that they accepted their testimony as the truth necessary for salvation. Their holding to "the fellowship" or communion, implies their unity with the Apostles, and with one another. Their continual observance of "The breaking of bread" implies the high position at once given to the ordinance of the Holy Communion, instituted by the Lord Himself as the bond of the New Covenant, in place of the sacrifices of the blood of beasts under the Old Covenant. And their habitual joining in "The prayers," implies that the assembling of Christians for common worship was practised from the first.

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Such was the life of the first subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven." And this record of it in Holy Scripture sets it forth as the pattern for all future generations. It is true that the infant Church was not perfect, and, had it been so, it would not have corresponded with the description which our Lord had given of it in His Parables; but the leaven was at work upon the hearts of the believers, and the result was manifest in their lives.

After about ten years had thus passed, during which the Church was being gradually developed as the Kingdom of Messiah in Judæa and Samaria, the second period of its history, as recorded in the Bible, began. And henceforth Antioch became a fresh centre of interest and activity, in consequence of the ordination of S. Paul and S. Barnabas as Apostles. "There were in the Church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, sailed to Cyprus" (Acts xiii. 1-4). Thus began the first missionary journey into heathen lands. And from Cyprus the good news of "The Kingdom of Heaven" spread to Asia Minor, where in the course of years the seven branches of the Church were founded to which was addressed the Book of the Revelation, vouchsafed to the aged Apostle S. John (Rev. i. 4). From Asia the Church extended into Europe, the Apostles being called thither by the vision at Troas of the "man of Macedonia saying, Come over unto Macedonia and help us" (Acts xvi. 9). The first victories of the Cross in Europe were gained at Philippi and Thessalonica, and thence the good news passed on to Greece, and the rich city of Corinth became the Apostle Paul's headquarters for "a year and six months," the Lord having "much people" there (Acts xviii.

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10, 11). From Greece the Gospel spread to Rome, the capital of the ancient world. So that we learn from Holy Scripture, that, within the lifetime of the Apostles, the mustard-seed of the Gospel had sprung up and grown into a tree, whose branches overshadowed well nigh the whole of the then civilised world, as it was known to the Romans.

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The answer to the question, What is the Holy Catholic Church? is thus provided for us in the Bible, whether we regard it as an article of the faith, or as a matter of historical fact. The Holy Catholic Church is "The Kingdom of Heaven," which was described beforehand by our Lord in His parables, which was set up on the Day of Pentecost, and then gradually developed into an organised body, under laws and ministers duly ordained by the Lord Himself, or under the guidance of the Holy Ghost; and which then spread from one land to another through the exertions of the holy Apostles. The Holy Catholic Church is that Kingdom whose founding is described, and whose history is commenced, in Holy Scripture.

But the history of the Church is only commenced in Holy Scripture, and for a full explanation of the Holy Catholic Church, regarded as a historical fact, we need to have this history continued down to our own days. Within the limits of this little book, nothing but a very brief outline of the history of the Church is possible. But without doubt every Christian in this country ought to have such a general knowledge of this history, as will enable him to understand clearly how the Church of England of to-day is united with the Church of Apostolic times.

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The history of the further extension of the Church of Christ is contained in the writings of various Christian authors whose books have been preserved to us. Some few of these, such as Polycarp and Clemens of Rome, were contemporaries with the Apostles, and were ordained by them. These were followed by Justin Martyr—who in his "Apologies on behalf of the Christians" gives a full account of their manner of life, and worship, and ordinances—and Irenaeus, and Clemens of Alexandria, who lived between A.D. 120 and A.D. 200. Of the next or third century, we have many books by Tertullian, Origen and Cyprian, giving full accounts of the faith and laws of the Christians, their social life and their worship. And in the fourth century, the historian Eusebius wrote his History of the Church from the days of our Lord down to the reign of Constantine, the first Christian Emperor; and many of the great theologians and defenders of the faith flourished, whose names may well be "household words" with Christians of all ages, such as Athanasius, Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine.

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From these or other ancient authors we learn that Christianity rapidly spread to the northern parts of Africa, to which country many of them belonged; to France, and to Britain, where there was a scattered British Church whilst the Romans still held the country.

In course of time, the two great capitals of the Roman Empire naturally assumed the chief importance in the history of the Church; and Rome became the chief see of the Western or Latin-speaking Church, and Constantinople of the Eastern or Greek-speaking Church^[25]. And from that time forward, down to the Reformation period, the history of the Church is contained in numberless writings of successive authors, in the decrees of Popes, in the records of the great monastic orders, in the works of the Schoolmen, and in the chronicles of the various historians. And last, though not least, we find it imperishably recorded in the cathedrals, and abbeys, and parish churches, which tell of the inventive genius and taste and skill of our pious fathers in the middle ages^[26].

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But our interest naturally attaches itself chiefly to our own country, and to the records we possess of the Church of England. The Roman troops were withdrawn from Britain about the end of the fourth century; and in the course of the next two hundred years, the various tribes of heathen Saxons who invaded our shores overcame the resistance of the Britons and settled in England; and, by their victorious advance, the few that survived of the British Christians were driven to take refuge in the mountains of Wales and the western counties. Toward the close of the sixth century the attention of Gregory the Great, the good and zealous Bishop or Pope of Rome, was called to the heathen condition of Saxon England; and A.D. 597 Augustine was sent over with a band of clergy to convert the Saxons. He landed in Kent, converted Ethelbert the king, and became first Archbishop of Canterbury^[27]. Shortly afterwards Celtic missionaries—Aidan, Chad, and others—pushed southwards, converting Northumbria and the Midlands; others landed in the southern counties; and the English people grew into power as a Christian nation.

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As years passed on, the Bishops, or Popes, of Rome usurped to themselves an ever-increasing authority, which was the cause of many contests between them and successive kings of England; and at the same time many abuses grew up and superstitious practices were mingled with the simple belief of purer ages, and a gradual decay of true spiritual religion set in. At length in the sixteenth century the English Church asserted its right to reform abuses under its own Archbishops and Bishops. Then the Reformation period began. The Pope of Rome endeavoured to resist the movement, and to maintain his authority; and upon the people of England refusing to submit to his unreasonable and unbearable claims, the rupture between the Church of Rome and the Church of England resulted.

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The position thus taken by the Church of England must be clearly understood.

During the Middle Ages the various Churches of the west of Europe were gradually brought to acknowledge the supremacy of the Popes or Bishops of Rome. So that the Pope was able to exercise an authority over all these Churches. Hitherto learning had been confined to a very few. But now, through the invention of printing, the knowledge of Holy Scripture was rapidly extending; and people were finding not only that the claims of the Pope were without foundation,

but also that many of the ceremonies and practices, to which they were accustomed, were superstitious and wrong.

This then was the work of the Reformation—to free the Church of England from the unreasonable claims of the Papal Supremacy; and to bring back the faith and worship of the people into harmony with the writings of the ancient Fathers of the Church.

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The result was that new services were compiled in English out of the old Latin books, which the people had been unable to understand; and much that was superstitious was omitted. But the changes were introduced gradually, and as the people were prepared to accept them. The same Parish Clergy, in most cases, ministered as before, only according to the new forms; the Churches were used by the same worshippers; the same Creeds were repeated. For the Reformation touched not the ancient Catholic Faith. It only removed the modern ceremonies and superstitious beliefs which had been added to it.

Like all great human efforts, the Reformation was not unmixed with evil; but, at the same time, the blessings gained by our country were very great. And if other countries had succeeded in reforming abuses, in a similar manner, no doubt the Church of Christ would have gained great influence for good, not only in Europe, but also throughout the world. But the power, which the Church of Rome had usurped to herself, was too valuable to be parted with. The Pope denounced the Reformation, and broke off all communion with our Church and nation.

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What then became the position of the Church of England? We have seen how the unity of the various branches of the Church was provided for by our Lord, through the Apostles and Bishops, to whom He entrusted His commission to extend His Kingdom. And by the Providence of God the unity of the Church of England with the Holy Catholic Church has been maintained, notwithstanding this unhappy schism between us and the Church of Rome^[28]. Our Archbishops and Bishops still exert as before an indisputable authority, as the officers of the King of “The Kingdom of Heaven;” and having fellowship with them, we know that we are in the same position as the first members of the Church, who “continued stedfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts ii. 42). Nothing but time separates us from the Apostles and the early Church of Christ. What was necessary for the first subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven” we enjoy. What they were taught to believe, we believe. What they were led to hope for, we hope for likewise. The promise of our Lord to His Apostles, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (S. Matt. xxviii. 20), includes our Bishops, with all the other successors of the Apostles from that day until now.

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To the question, What is the Holy Catholic Church^[29]? the answer must be given, It is “The Kingdom of Heaven”—the Kingdom of Messiah—which, according to His own prediction, has spread from land to land through all the world. And when we speak of the Church of England, we speak of that branch of the one great spiritual Kingdom which was founded, under God’s Providence, in our own land, in ancient times, and which includes ourselves. For Bishop has followed Bishop, and the Gospel has been preached, and subjects have been brought into the Kingdom of Christ, in this favoured land of England, from one generation to another, from the very beginning of our national life until our own day.

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FOOTNOTES:

[22] The word “Catholic” is the Greek for “Universal,” and expresses the truth that the Church of Christ is open to, and embraces, all the nations of the world; because the Kingdom of Messiah was not to be restricted to one nation, but was intended to spread over the whole earth. And, consequently, the word also expresses the essential unity of the Church, because there can be but one Church which is purposed to include the whole race of man.

[23] See the marginal note in a reference Bible.

[24] The word “Elders” is in the Greek *Presbyteroi*, from which comes “Presbyter,” and from the shortened form “Prester,” which was once in use, comes our present English form “Priest.” The use of this word “Priest” to translate the word *Hiereus*, which is the name in the Greek of the Jewish Minister, and the mistaken idea that the sacrifices he offered were propitiatory in the sense that they “could take away sin” (Heb. x. 4), have caused much misunderstanding of the word, and prejudice against it, which the knowledge of its meaning removes.

[25] In the course of the ninth century a very serious dispute raged between the Eastern and Western Church. The Greeks had often before protested against the pretensions of the Popes of Rome, and now they complained that the Latins had introduced the word “Filioque,” meaning “and the Son,” into the article of the Creed respecting the procession of the Holy Ghost. The Nicene Creed, as drawn up in the original Greek, contains only these words, “proceeding from the Father.” The Latin Church added “and the Son,” without the authority of a General Council. And though the contest seems to have been about words, rather than any difference of doctrine, at last, after a dispute of many years, it ended in the schism between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome—between the East and the West—which has never been healed.

[26] See Archbishop Trench’s Lectures on Medieval Church History.

[27] He must not be confused with the great theologian, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in Africa,

who was mentioned above (page 137), and who lived two hundred years before.

- [28] It need hardly be said that it is a great mistake to use the term "Catholic" as if it were the exclusive right of the members of the Church of Rome. On the contrary, they have no standing-ground in England at all; and fall into the number of schismatics here, because they refuse to hold communion with the branch of the Holy Catholic Church in this land.
- [29] The Holy Catholic Church may be considered to be divided—speaking generally—into three great divisions. The Eastern, or Greek-speaking Church; the Roman, or Latin-speaking Church; the Anglican, or English-speaking Church. And now, by the Providence of God, we can see that a mighty responsibility has been laid upon our own branch of "The Kingdom of Heaven." We feel sure that with the marvellous spread of the English nation, the Church of Christ ought to have spread with equal rapidity; and past neglect, especially with respect to the great colonies founded in past generations in America, brings us much to answer for. Yet we may take courage when we think how the English-speaking branch of the Holy Catholic Church has spread in recent times. North America, Canada, and the West Indies; Australia, New Zealand, and many islands of the sea; South Africa; India, China, and Japan, all bear witness that the good news of the Kingdom has been scattered, far and wide, by English-speaking agents of the great King. And our Archbishop of Canterbury is the acknowledged centre of as wide a sphere of spiritual energy as the Pope himself.

CHAPTER X.

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THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

"The Saints on earth, and those above,
But one communion make;
Joined to their Lord in bonds of love,
All of His grace partake."

The history of the extension of the Church of Christ from one land to another, and of the successive victories won by the Cross over heathen races from age to age, gives by itself a very imperfect idea of the meaning of the words "The Holy Catholic Church." Because, with the outward extension of the Church, its influence upon the inner man needs always to be considered. For when our Lord described the extension of "The Kingdom of Heaven," He not only likened it to the spread of a tree branching out on every side, but He also declared that it would work as leaven, secretly, by changing the hearts of men.

This truth may be said to be kept prominently before Christians by the term "Holy" being applied to the "Catholic Church." The Church of Christ is of necessity and essentially "Holy." We see that this must be so, when we understand what Holy Scripture says of it; that it is builded entirely by the Holy Ghost (Eph. ii. 20-22); that its members are "called with an holy calling" (2 Tim. i. 9), "called to be saints" (1 Cor. i. 2), that is, holy persons; and that a day will come when the Lord Jesus, who "loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word," will "present it unto Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25-27).

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But yet we know that at present the Church of Christ is very far from being perfect. And the mingling together of holy and unholy in the Church is exactly in accordance with the prediction of our Lord Himself. For whilst He spoke of the power of His grace to change and sanctify the hearts of the subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven," He also expressly foretold that there would be tares in His field amongst the wheat (S. Matt. xiii. 24-30), which would remain as long as the world lasts; and that the Gospel net would enclose bad fish as well as good, and both would be retained in it until the Angels make the separation at the end (S. Matt. xiii. 47-50). The truth of His teaching has been confirmed by the subsequent history of the Church in all ages. Holy and unholy are together; and though we are forbidden to attempt to separate them, we know that there is, as it were, a gulf between them, which though not impassable is very great. The words of S. Paul to the Jews, "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. ix. 6), apply to God's people still. And as he went on to quote from the prophet Isaiah, "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved" (Rom. ix. 27), so, we know by experience, that it is still the "remnant" only, which really live up to "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," and "press toward the mark for the prize" (Phil. iii. 14). "Many are called, but few chosen" (S. Matt. xxii. 14).

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Consequently, since there are unholy as well as holy members of "The Holy Catholic Church," the question arises, What is the portion of those who are, what they are called to be, "Saints"? And how shall we express it? Shall we accept the theory of some who say that there are two Churches; an outward and visible Church which is a mixed company of good and bad; and an inner and invisible Church which is known to God alone, and which consists of the good only? A moment's consideration of what has been pointed out in previous chapters to be the teaching of Holy Scripture, about "The Kingdom of Heaven," will show that the idea is untenable; because it is "The Kingdom of Heaven" which is distinctly described as imperfect in its present state here on

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earth; and we cannot conceive the idea of two universal Kingdoms of Messiah. What then is the teaching of Holy Scripture respecting the position of the "Saints," who really are, what they are called to be, holy?

It is expressed in the words of the Creed, "I believe in the Communion of Saints."

They who live as Christians, that is, as belonging to Christ, enjoy "The Communion of Saints." All subjects of "The Kingdom of Heaven" may enjoy this position of the Saints, if they will. If they are unnatural children of their Heavenly Father, if they are disloyal subjects of their King, if they resist, instead of being led by, the Holy Spirit, they are hindering God's good-will concerning them, and making of none effect the sufferings of their Saviour. But if they look up to and love their Father, if they set themselves to serve their King, if they strive to follow the guidance of the Spirit, they are in the way of salvation, and have "The Communion of Saints."

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But what is "The Communion of Saints"?

No little confusion has been brought into the consideration of these words by the very prevalent idea that the Saints are, necessarily, departed Saints who have finished their course in God's faith and fear. But this is not the usual Bible sense of the word. For instance, in the Psalms it is commonly used for the name of those who believe in and worship God. "Sing to the Lord, O ye Saints" (Ps. xxx. 4). "O love the Lord, all ye His Saints" (Ps. xxxi. 23). "The Lord forsaketh not His Saints" (Ps. xxxvii. 28). And in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles it is continually used in the same sense, for the Lord's people in general. "Peter came down to the Saints which dwelt at Lydda" (Acts ix. 32). And at Joppa, "He called the Saints and widows" to him (Acts ix. 41). And S. Paul speaks of his work as a persecutor in these words, "Many of the Saints did I shut up in prison" (Acts xxvi. 10). And in most of his Epistles he addresses those to whom he is writing as "called to be Saints" (Rom. i. 7; 1 Cor. i. 2).

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Another frequent cause of misunderstanding is the idea that "the Saints" mean only a few very holy persons, who have attained by the grace of God such a degree of perfection, as is beyond the reach of those who live an active life in the world. But this idea also is found to be contrary to the ordinary Bible use of the word. Those whom S. Paul addresses in his Epistles as "Saints," are rebuked for almost every kind of sin. The Corinthians, especially, are an instance of the imperfections which may yet be found in God's Saints, and may teach us how tenderly we need to deal with the failings of those who are just emerging from heathenism in our own days. The First Epistle to the Corinthians administers rebukes for schism, fornication, idolatrous tendencies, misuse of spiritual gifts, profanation of the worship of God, and misbelief. And even the Saints at Ephesus, who are addressed as if they had made great advance in the understanding of the mysteries of the faith, are warned to abstain from lying, violent anger, stealing, foul speaking, and unkind behaviour (Eph. iv. 25-32). From which we learn to give a very wide meaning to the word "Saints;" and to understand by it, Christian people who, with many imperfections and frequent falls, are seeking to gain a better knowledge and deeper love of God; and are striving to be led by the Holy Spirit to resist sin and advance in holiness.

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And what is "The Communion" which such persons enjoy?

It is Communion with God, so that their "life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). They are declared to be united with God, as a branch is united with its stem; deriving spiritual life—a new and higher life than the natural life which belongs to all—from Him. They are "begotten again" (1 Pet. i. 3), and "born of God" (S. John i. 13); and the seed of this eternal life is not left dormant in them, as it is in the careless and ungodly; for they remain not as "children," but "grow up unto Him in all things" (Eph. iv. 14, 15); and letting "the mind that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii. 5) be in them, and "being strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, Christ dwells in their heart by faith" (Eph. iii. 16, 17); and they are advancing "unto the perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 13).

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The closeness of this union or communion with God in Christ is expressed more fully by the figure of the body and its members. The Saints together form the Body of Christ. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. xii. 12, 13). Christ is the Head: and the Church is the Body. For God "gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body" (Ephes. i. 22, 23). So intimately connected are the Saints with their Lord that they are the members of Christ—yea, S. Paul does not hesitate to say, "We are members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones" (Ephes. v. 30). This is a great mystery; but when faith has accepted it, it is seen to be the ground of the Christian's strength. He is strong through grace, because his strength is not his own, but is derived from Christ his Lord, with Whom through the Spirit he is united.

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The importance of the two holy Sacraments of Christ is in connection with this truth. Holy Baptism is the means ordained for uniting us with the Body of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 13). Holy Communion is the means of maintaining this union, and of drawing supplies of grace from Him (1 Cor. x. 16, 17), as will be considered more fully presently.

Thus through a right use of the means ordained by Christ Himself the Saints are His own members^[30]. "Why persecutest thou Me?" said the Lord to the persecutor of His people. And they have the good hope to cheer them, that when the great day of judgment comes, whilst to some who address the Judge, "Lord, Lord," as if they had always served Him, it will be said, "I never knew you, depart from Me" (S. Matt. vii. 22, 23); the Saints, on the other hand, will be

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recognised as being like Him—as bearing God’s image—and will receive the welcome, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you” (S. Matt. xxv. 34).

The meaning of “The Communion of Saints” becomes clearer when we know that “Communion” is the same word as that which is more often translated “Fellowship.” The Apostle S. John speaks with great clearness about this Communion or Fellowship. Referring to the good tidings delivered by himself and the other Apostles about the person and work of the Saviour, he saith, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.” In other words, he declares that the Gospel was preached that all might enjoy the Communion or Fellowship which the Apostles possessed. And then he goes on to explain with whom they enjoyed this Communion: “And truly our Fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 S. John i. 3). And this assertion of the Communion of the Christian with God agrees with the words of the prayer of our Lord for His people, recorded by the same Apostle; wherein He prayed, “That they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (S. John xvii. 22, 23).

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These thoughts of the Communion of the Christian with God—the Father and the Son—would be incomplete, did we not also think of our Communion with the Holy Ghost. For inasmuch as the whole spiritual life of the Christian is due to the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, this Communion with God, which the Christian enjoys, is in reality the work and gift of the Holy Ghost. And this is testified to us by the familiar words of blessing, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the Communion” (or Fellowship) “of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2 Cor. xiii. 14).

Furthermore, “The Communion of Saints” describes the fellowship or tie of brotherhood which unites Christians together, one with another. For if all Saints have Communion with God, it follows that all have Communion one with another in Him. If Christians are really striving to be, what they are called to be, holy, they are all one family; united together by the common bond of sonship; “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. iii. 26). Their adoption into the one family of God is to them a real relationship. And this also is expressed very clearly by S. John: “If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie; but if we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1 S. John i. 6, 7). And inasmuch as death does not sever the union between the Saint and God, but rather intensifies it (seeing that S. Paul describes the result of death as the “being with Christ,” Phil. i. 23), it follows that “The Communion of Saints” is not a fellowship with the living only, but with the departed also. “All are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. iii. 28); whether Jews or Gentiles, whether living or departed.

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Having now concluded, from the teaching of Holy Scripture, that “The Communion of Saints” is that fellowship which Christians enjoy, through being made one with God, and with one another; we shall do well to consider more carefully about the means by which they are enabled to keep up this union, and to maintain the sense of its reality from age to age. When our Blessed Lord spoke in the synagogue at Capernaum respecting the Bread of Life, He used these words, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you;” and then He added, “He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in Him” (S. John vi. 53, 56). His hearers had no idea about what He meant by His Flesh and Blood. But in instituting the Holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, He explained the words Himself. For “He took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to His disciples, and said, This is My Body; and He took the cup, saying, This is My Blood” (S. Matt. xxvi. 26-28). And consequently S. Paul, referring to this Holy Sacrament, appealed to the Corinthians to remember the bond of union with God, and with one another, in which they were joining, saying, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ? For we being many are one Bread and one Body, for we are all partakers of that one Bread” (1 Cor. x. 16, 17). And, therefore, we conclude that this Holy Sacrament is the bond of union, ordained by our Lord Himself, to maintain outwardly and visibly, as well as inwardly and spiritually, “The Communion of Saints” with God and with one another. And this is clearly expressed by the name “Holy Communion” by which we commonly speak of this Holy Sacrament.

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Does any one ask, What is “The Communion of Saints?” The answer is clear. It is the Communion or fellowship which Christians enjoy with God, and therefore with one another, whether in this world or in Paradise. And the Sacrament of the Holy Communion is the ordained means whereby this union is maintained by the Saints on earth.

It is a sad but manifest fact, that it is in the power of men to “frustrate the grace of God” (Gal. ii. 21), and to make His good-will concerning them to be of none effect. So that whilst all who are called to enter the Kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ are called to enjoy the blessings which He has gained for us, the multitude make little or no use of His gifts. But all who will, may by His grace be assured of sharing in all the benefits of His Sacrifice. “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 S. John i. 7).

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And as the Saints, by virtue of this Communion with God, have the assurance of “The forgiveness of sins;” so likewise they look joyfully forward in hope of “The Resurrection of the Body” and “The Life Everlasting.” For “The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17).

FOOTNOTE:

- [30] Consequently the expression “in Christ” or “in the Lord” is frequently used to denote the fact of a person being a Christian. Thus S. Paul sends greeting to certain, who had been converted before himself, in these words, “Salute Andronicus and Junia who were in Christ before me” (Rom. xvi. 7); and describes the Christians of Palestine, at the time of his visit, as “the Churches of Judæa which were in Christ” (Gal. i. 22). And thus of the Christian departed it is said, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord” (Rev. xiv. 13).

CHAPTER XI.

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CONCLUSION.

“From Heaven He came and sought her
To be His Holy Bride,
With His own Blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.”

“The Kingdom of Heaven,” what is it?

It is the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. It is that Kingdom which was prophetically set forth by our Lord in His parables; that Kingdom, the subjects of which were described in His teaching, and redeemed by His Blood to be His own “purchased possession” (Eph. i. 14); that Kingdom which was founded through the coming of the Holy Ghost—being a spiritual Kingdom not of the world, though at present in the world—and which was preached from land to land as an Universal Kingdom, intended to embrace the whole race of man.

The purpose for which our Blessed Lord came down from Heaven, and “humbled Himself even to the death upon the cross” (Phil. ii. 8), was that He might found this Kingdom. “He purchased” it at no less a cost than “with His own blood” (Acts xx. 28). For He “loved the Church and gave Himself for it^[31]” (Ephes. v. 25).

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In other words, the salvation which is proclaimed in Holy Scripture, as the great gift of God’s love, is offered unto man through the means of a Kingdom of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the King, and all the men and women and little children in the world are intended to be the subjects. The Son of God became the Son of Man, that in Him the words of the Psalmist might be fulfilled, “I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Ps. ii. 8); and those other words (which are quoted by S. Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews), “Thou hast put all things under His feet” (Ps. viii. 6).

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“But we see not yet all things put under Him” (Heb. ii. 8). Although He “gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works” (Tit. ii. 14), the perversity of man has spoilt the perfection of His work, and hindered the results of His self-sacrifice. Eighteen hundred years have passed, and still His rule is imperfect; and not one third of the human race, whom He redeemed unto Himself with His own blood, accept Him as their King. But in His perfect foreknowledge, this hindering of His work of love for the salvation of man was present from the first; and was foretold by Him in part in His parables. And it pleased Him to entrust to His faithful people the task of removing and overcoming by their prayers and exertions the obstacles which opposed His rule.

When the Pharisees once asked “When the Kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for behold the Kingdom of God is among^[32] you” (S. Luke xvii. 20, 21). His Kingdom was already being set up amongst them, though they knew it not; and ever since those days it has been spreading amongst men. But He knew how strongly the great enemy of God and man would oppose the extension of His Kingdom; and how powerful the perversity of man would be to hinder it; and when His disciples asked to be taught to pray, these were the words He bade them pray, “Thy Kingdom come” (S. Matt. vi. 10).

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It follows, therefore, that it is a matter of great importance that we understand clearly the meaning of these words. We cannot suppose for a moment that our Lord meant that the Kingdom of God is not *come* at all in this present time. Because many passages, which have been already quoted, have assured us that His Kingdom was founded long ago amongst men. Moreover, He expressly directed His disciples to assure those to whom they preached, whether they hearkened or not—“The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (S. Luke x. 9, 11).

What then is the meaning of the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come”?

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The Kingdom of God is come already, and men are everywhere “pressing into it” (S. Luke xvi. 16). But His rule over the hearts of men is imperfect, and will be so as long as it can be said “We see not yet all things put under Him” (Heb. ii. 8). Therefore He has taught His faithful people of every age to lift up this prayer—“Thy Kingdom come”—that it may be brought to pass that He may rule

in all hearts supreme; that the lands which are still heathen may be brought into His Kingdom; and that those who now profess to bear His Name may be “Saints” indeed. And inasmuch as He “loved the Church and gave Himself for it,” not that it might consist of so-called Christians—who in heart are worshippers of Mammon, and not subjects of the Crucified—but “that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water and the word, that it should be holy and without blemish,” this prayer—“Thy Kingdom come”—must continue to ascend until He can “present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph. v. 25-27). And then at last the cry will be raised, “The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. xi. 15).

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We are taught in Holy Scripture that faith can move mountains of difficulty (S. Matt. xvii. 20), and that the prayer of faith has a power to which God has set no bounds (S. Matt. xxi. 22). And the surest way to pray in faith is to be ourselves striving for the fulfilment of our prayers.

Now the King Himself declared the source from which the weakness of His Kingdom would arise. When He prayed for His little band of disciples, He added, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (S. John xvii. 20, 21). Consequently if we would gain an answer to our prayer, “Thy Kingdom come,” we want to lead Christian men to think that the saying is true, “A Kingdom divided against itself cannot stand” (S. Mark iii. 24); and that it is impossible for “The Kingdom of Heaven” to be strong to win souls for Christ, whilst its subjects are forming factions and so-called denominations, and are opposing one another. “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Ps. cxxxiii. 1, 3).

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To re-unite the divided branches of Christ’s Holy Church, or even to heal the divisions amongst God’s people in our own land, is a work which is beyond the power of man to accomplish. But if Christians would but be persuaded to see the advantages of unity, and to desire to live up to their high calling as God’s children—as the one family of God—the first step would have been taken which would lead, in God’s own time, to the end in view.

For if the subjects of “The Kingdom of Heaven” only realised their position, how great would be the answer to this universal prayer, “Thy Kingdom come!” How would Christ’s Kingdom be then advancing in the world! For His Church would be moving, as one mighty army, against His foes, and Christ in His members would be indeed going forth, “conquering and to conquer” (Rev. vi. 2).

May He pardon all that is defective in these pages, and bless them to the promotion of His glory. May He grant that those who read them may be strengthened in their own faith, and be themselves prepared for the great day, when “The Kingdom of Heaven,” as we know it, will have become the Kingdom of Glory; “when there shall be one flock and one Shepherd” (S. John x. 16); and the daily repeated prayer will have been fulfilled,

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THY KINGDOM COME.

FOOTNOTES:

[31] When it is said that Christ died for the Church, it is necessary to remember that in His intention the Church included the whole world (see S. Matt. xxviii. 19). The wilfulness of man in refusing to believe cannot alter that intention though it spoils the completion of it. “God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son”—thus the wideness of His loving intention was set forth—“that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish” (S. John iii. 16)—thus the necessity of man’s belief, in order that the intention might be carried out, was announced beforehand.

[32] See marginal note in a reference Bible.

THE END.

A Prayer for Unity.

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace; Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that, as there is but one Body, and one Spirit, and one Hope of our Calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart, and of one soul, united in one holy bond of Truth and Peace, of Faith and Charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify Thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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