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ART. I.—THE GOSPEL AND ITS METHOD.

THE word “Gospel,” with the various words derived from it, or from the Greek word “Evangel,” such as to evangelize or to preach the Gospel, has become a characteristic word of the Christian revelation, and it has justly assumed this predominance by virtue of the position which it holds in the New Testament. The four records of our Lord’s whole life and work are each of them called the “Gospel;” and it is thus implied that this word is a summary of the whole of the Saviour’s manifestation on earth. The phrase has thus acquired an almost technical sense, which may sometimes obscure for us the life and vividness of the meaning which it always conveys. It would seem a significant fact that the mere use of the Greek word, in the sense of good tidings, appears to become prominent for the first time, if not actually to commence, with the New Testament writings. In the old classical writers, the Greek word is employed to mean reward for good news; but for its general employment to mean the good news themselves, we are referred by the authorities to writers later than the New Testament, such as Lucian and Plutarch. But it is equally prominent in the teaching of our Lord, in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles, especially those of St. Paul. It appears only once in St. John’s writings, in that passage of the Apocalypse where an angel is described as flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on earth, and to every nation and kindred and tongue and people; but St. John expresses exactly the same meaning in the opening of his first Epistle, where he says, “These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” From one end to the other of the New

Testament, the message, and the very phrase, of the angels is repeated: "Behold, I bring you good tidings," or rather—"I bring you the Gospel of great joy." It is this Gospel of the kingdom which our Lord proclaimed. It was unto the Gospel of God that St. Paul was separated; and it was of the Gospel of Christ that he declared he was not ashamed, since it was the power of God unto salvation. The whole Divine and Apostolic message is thus summed up in the proclamation of the Evangel, the Good News, the Gospel of Christ.

It is no wonder that this prominence was given to the word, for it expresses what was practically a new reality. A general proclamation of good news to every nation and kindred and people and tongue, good tidings of great joy to all people, and to the whole people, was, in fact, something of which the world at that day had hardly a conception. It is to be found, indeed, in the utterances of the prophets, but even these were misunderstood by those to whom they were addressed; and to the mass of the people such a conception existed only as the vague dream of some far-distant golden age. The possibility of good news to all classes, and especially to the poor, of a blessing being conferred upon every soul who would accept it—this promise was so amazing a novelty in human experience, that perhaps we can hardly realize the effect it was then calculated to produce. It was an age in which life was often marked by great splendour and luxury, and in which some of the highest developments of human genius—in literature and art, in law and in government—were displayed. But there were vast classes living in suffering and degradation, to whom no philosopher, moralist, or statesman would have dreamt of proclaiming good tidings of great joy; and the fact that Stoicism represents the highest moral ideal at which men of noble character could aim, is itself a sufficient proof of the entire absence from the best thought of that age of this conception of the Gospel. It was not the fulness of joy, but dignity and calm in endurance, which was deemed the mark of the wise man. Similarly gloomy, or at least sombre, conceptions have ever marked the highest efforts of human nature, when left to its own resources. In proportion as men have meditated deeply on the graver realities of life, whether in Greece and Rome or in the East, or even in the non-Christian philosophies of the present day, they have realized how dark a shadow rests over our natural life, and they have felt themselves unable to proclaim anything like good news to the mass of mankind. The promise is, in fact, so wonderful that, even after it has been brought within men's reach by the Christian revelation, they find it difficult to retain their grasp of it, and they are ever apt to let it slip.

But we may judge in some measure, from such considerations, what a spell this proclamation of a Gospel must have exerted over the hearts of those to whom it was first addressed. Perhaps the Evangelical narratives themselves afford the best conception of it, in the contrast they present between the condition of the crowds who followed our Lord, and the tone of His preaching. Take, for example, only the scene which is depicted for us on the occasion of the Sermon on the Mount. We read that our Lord's fame went out throughout all Syria, and they brought unto Him all sick persons that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those who were possessed with devils, and those who were lunatic, and those who had the palsy, and He healed them. And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from beyond Jordan. These multitudes—as we know from more than one instance recorded in the Evangelistic narratives—were often hungry, and ready to faint by the way, themselves poor and suffering and encumbered with their sick. It was to multitudes like these that our Lord proclaimed “the Gospel of the Kingdom.” It was on seeing them that He went up into the mountain, and proclaimed to His disciples beatitudes which were good tidings of great joy to every soul before Him: “*Blessed* are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. *Blessed* are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. *Blessed* are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Or as St. Luke reports the same, or a similar, discourse, similarly delivered at a moment when our Lord had been surrounded by a great multitude of people out of all Judæa and Jericho, who came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases: “*Blessed* be ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. *Blessed* are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled. *Blessed* are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh. *Blessed* are ye when men shall hate you, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man's sake.” The spiritual condition for this blessedness, expressed in St. Matthew and implied in St. Luke, does not alter the fact that, in both cases, our Lord has the weak and suffering people around Him directly in His mind, and is offering blessedness more especially to them—that to the poor the Gospel was being preached. They failed, indeed, in the sequel, to realize the true nature of that Gospel. When the physical miracles of healing, which were but its earnest and type, were withdrawn, they had no sufficient appreciation of its spiritual blessings; but, none the less, these tidings of great joy had been proclaimed to them, and they had crowded with eagerness to hear so strange and absorbing a message.

But let us inquire more particularly what was the nature of the message which could thus be proclaimed as a Gospel of great joy, especially to the poor. Its character is most comprehensively summarized in our Lord's own description of it, as the Gospel of the Kingdom, or the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. The starting-point of His preaching, and that to which all His words and deeds are to be referred, was that He came to establish the Kingdom of Heaven, a new realm, in which new privileges were to be offered to mankind, new duties required from them, and new powers bestowed on them. Our Lord declared Himself its King; the Holy Spirit, after His ascension into heaven, was His representative, and carried His Will into effect, and the Apostles were His ministers. Henceforth, all who submitted themselves to His rule, all who surrendered themselves to Him in faith and trust, were admitted, as it were, into a new world, in which new forces, new obligations, and new blessings were enjoyed. It was the sudden introduction into the realm of human nature of such new powers that, as St. Paul described it, a new creation was the result, "old things had passed away, behold all things had become new." Hitherto men had been struggling—not, indeed, entirely unassisted, yet comparatively so—with the various forces of their physical, rational, and moral nature, seeking happiness, truth, and goodness by such light, and with such powers, as that nature alone afforded them. Notwithstanding many brave struggles, the result, on the whole, had been a general sense of defeat, and a feeling of despair had been creeping, as has just been said, over the hearts of all thoughtful men. It was to men in this condition that our Lord came with "the Gospel of the Kingdom," offering them, in His capacity of King, a new realm of moral and spiritual life, and new powers to overcome the evil which oppressed them. In its essential character it was exactly typified by those visible miracles to which He directed the messengers of John the Baptist. "Art Thou He that should come," was John's question, "or do we look for another?" Jesus answered and said unto them: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

Such were the powers which our Lord wielded over the physical world. He did not merely tell lame people that they ought to walk, or lepers that they were by nature intended to be clean, or the blind that their eyes were designed for the purposes of sight—all that they knew too well; but He gave strength to the sinews of the lame, and purified the blood of

the leper, and opened the eyes of the blind. It was a new power, and not merely a new doctrine. "With authority He commanded even the unclean spirits, and they obeyed Him." But the power thus displayed in His miracles of healing was the earnest of a still mightier power, which by the same authority He exerted, and enabled His Apostles to exert, over the souls of men. St. Paul puts this aspect of the Gospel in the forefront of his message, when he declares that the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith. His interpretation of that power is explained in the sequel of the same Epistle, in which he proclaims it, first, as delivering men from the burden of a guilty conscience, by the assurance of the Divine forgiveness for the sins that are past, for the sake of the sacrifice of Christ; and next, as enabling men to overcome sin by the might of the Spirit of God dwelling in them. Among those who accepted the Apostle's message, that Spirit at once created a new moral and spiritual world; and the exquisite pictures contained in the Epistles of the lives of those who are led by the Spirit of God describe the realization, in the moral and spiritual realm, of the Gospel which our Lord proclaimed. The Kingdom of God was in these respects visibly established, and its glory was manifested to the world.

But still it may be asked, how this purely moral and spiritual glory corresponded to that ample proclamation of a Gospel which we have been considering? Our Lord's assurances, it may be said, cannot reasonably be restricted to moral and spiritual blessings alone. He Himself bestowed many physical and temporal blessings, and the Gospel which He sent His ministers to proclaim must be of the same character. This is a difficulty, however, which has not arisen for the first time in latter days. It was keenly felt by those to whom our Lord preached, and it has been often revived in the history of the Christian Church. The immediate hearers of our Lord craved for further manifestations of His power over visible nature. They were bitterly disappointed because He would not continue to annihilate all their diseases and sufferings, and to supply all their wants by a word, and because He refused to erect, by supernatural power, the visible kingdom of which He proclaimed the approach. But at this point we encounter an inexorable law of the Gospel of Christ, by which it is distinguished, more deeply than by anything else, from every other attempt to proclaim good news to mankind. Our Lord, as has been said already, gave men the earnest of His power over visible nature, and over all physical sufferings, by His miracles. But there is one inexorable condition of

men's final deliverance from physical evils, namely, that they should be first of all delivered from moral evils. The Scriptures reveal the whole edifice of human nature as resting on a moral foundation, and it is thus impossible for a sound and stable structure of human life to be erected, until the moral foundation has been rendered secure. Had all the sick people among the Jews, or in the world at large, been healed, as were those on whom our Lord exerted His saving power—had the Jewish nation been freed at a stroke from their temporal oppression—yet those diseases would have been reintroduced, and the social decay which led to that oppression would have recommenced, unless the moral character of the people had been regenerated. Accordingly, having once given men the pledge of His complete command of all the forces of their nature, physical as well as moral, our Lord directed the whole energy of His Church, and the whole operation of His Spirit, to the struggle with moral evil, and to the regeneration of our moral nature.

Now this, perhaps, however just and necessary, might have seemed to men a hard requirement, if it had been simply imposed on them by an authority standing apart from themselves. But our Lord has for ever silenced any murmurs of that kind by accepting this stern necessity Himself. He refused to save Himself, by any exercise of His inherent power, from the suffering involved in working out the salvation of mankind by moral and spiritual means. He voluntarily submitted to the utmost consequences of our moral evil, and sacrificed His own life on the cross, rather than interfere with the necessary satisfaction of the Divine moral laws. But while thus, alike by example and precept, He refused to save men from their evils by any other method than that of saving them from their sins, He at once bestowed on them the spiritual power necessary for that moral deliverance, and assured them of abundant reward for any sufferings they might here undergo in obedience to His Will. "Great is your reward in heaven," was His constant and sufficient encouragement to those who were called to suffer for His sake, and for that of their brethren. He Himself, "for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross," and He did but call upon His followers to imitate His own example.

Such was the comprehensive Gospel which our Lord proclaimed: Forgiveness of all our sins; acceptance with God; power more and more to conquer the spiritual and moral evils which beset us; assurance that all faithful work, and every advance in the graces of the Spirit of God, will promote the coming of His kingdom; and the promise of blessings hereafter which transcend our utmost hopes. A moral regenera-

tion will ever bring in its train a physical regeneration ; and so far as Christianity has produced the one, it has promoted the other. But while such a large proportion, not merely of unbelievers, but even of professing Christians, fail to respond adequately to that call to repentance with which the Gospel commenced, and which is renewed year by year, so long must Christians, like their Lord, be content to bear their share in those physical sufferings which are the natural consequences of moral evil. Meanwhile, we are assured that, even in suffering and disappointment, we are fellow-workers with our Lord in promoting the happiness of men, here and hereafter, by the only sure method, and we have an abundant hope of the full realization of the promises of the Gospel hereafter. St. Peter sums it up, with his characteristic force and directness, at the commencement of his Epistle: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." Spiritual blessings here, limited only by our faith and obedience and prayer, temporal blessings so far as they are compatible with our spiritual welfare, and infinite and eternal reward hereafter—this was the Gospel which Christ proclaimed to the poor.

We may observe, therefore, that the apparent difference between the form of the beatitudes in St. Matthew and St. Luke is wholly indifferent to their substance. Our Lord had offered these blessings to the poor especially, for they were most sensible of the need of them ; but they could only receive them in proportion as they were poor in spirit. He was not simply praising any qualities inherent in poverty, not even in poverty of spirit. He came to proclaim, not that the poor were blessed in themselves, but that blessings were offered to them in that kingdom which He established. It was not the excellence of certain moral characteristics in themselves that He was declaring, so much as the gracious assurance that a spiritual realm was now established, in which all such virtues would receive their full reward. In a word, He came not merely to reveal moral excellence, but to bless it ; and the beatitudes are creative declarations, as much as when God said, "Let there be light ; and there was light."

I have referred to the fact that this message was found hard to be understood at first ; but it very soon sank into men's

hearts, and touched the depths of their souls; and the early Church exhibited vividly in its lineaments this conception of the Gospel. Attention has been justly drawn to the cheerfulness and joy which mark the early monuments of Christian life in the catacombs: but a strangely perverse deduction has been drawn from the fact. It has been assumed to indicate that the more solemn doctrines and truths of the Christian creed had less prominence in the minds of the early Christians than in our own. The truth, as illustrated by the writings of the early fathers, especially in the precious relics which remain to us of what are called "The Apostolic Fathers," is precisely the reverse. It was the intense realization of those supreme realities, the sense that the burden of sin was lifted from their hearts, the apprehension of new moral powers within their souls, and the assurance of a blessed future, which gave them that abounding sense of joy and peace. Their spirit is exactly summed up in one of the opening chapters of the beautiful and simple Epistle of St. Polycarp to the Philippians:

Wherefore, girding up your loins, serve the Lord in fear and truth, as those who have forsaken the vain, empty talk and error of the multitude, and believed in Him Who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and gave Him glory, and a throne at His right hand. To Him all things in heaven and earth are subject. Him every spirit serves. He comes as the judge of the living and the dead. His blood will God require of those who do not believe on Him. But He Who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also, if we do His Will and walk in His commandments, and love what He loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, or blow for blow, or cursing for cursing, but being mindful of what the Lord said in His teaching—judge not that ye be not judged, forgive and it shall be forgiven you, be merciful that ye may obtain mercy, with what measure ye meet it shall be measured to you again; and once more, "Blessed are the poor and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."

This Gospel, these blessings, present and future, this moral regeneration, and this spiritual hope, infused a new life and energy and joy into men's hearts.

This aspect of the Christian revelation has ever been prominent when it has been proclaimed with success. The power of the early preachers of the Reformation lay in the fact that, whereas men had too generally been living under the rule of the Church, as a mere law, and purchasing deliverance from its penalties, they proclaimed, in all its fulness, the Gospel of forgiveness, of freedom from the guilt and power of sin. You will find it is the same in various degrees in movements—such as that of Methodism—which have stirred the hearts of the people at large. Inexcusable and unendurable as are some of the characteristics of a movement of this kind

which is prominent among us now, it must nevertheless be acknowledged—and the Church may well learn a lesson from the fact—that it has grasped the centre-point of the Christian message in taking, as it were, “for an helmet the hope of salvation.” Let the Church go to the suffering masses in our great towns, or to the heathen masses under our rule, and proclaim to them the hope of salvation in its widest sense—deliverance from moral evil here, from physical and political evil so far as that moral salvation is attained, and perfect salvation hereafter—and it cannot fail to command a welcome hearing. The glory of a spiritual deliverance may be poured into the poorest home, may illuminate the gloomiest cellar, and soothe the most suffering bed. And, for ourselves, let us endeavour to grasp this aspect of our Master’s message more firmly. It would, bestow a new energy on our Christian character if we lived more clearly, day by day, in the sense that we were the possessors of this Gospel; that we have the Spirit of God to give us ever-increasing deliverance from our moral evil; and that, in proportion as we yield to His influence, shall we be blessed ourselves, be a blessing to others here, and be abundantly rewarded hereafter. The message, indeed, is to the poor; but there is no man or woman who is not poor—none who can afford to stand alone, none who is not liable to fall without the Divine help, none who does not need the guidance and strength of the Spirit of God. But to all who are thus sensible of their poverty, the promise stands as the everlasting Gospel, “Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me.”

HENRY WACE.



ART. II.—PASTORAL VISITATION IN COUNTRY PARISHES.

I MUST begin by apologizing for the necessarily egotistical way in which I am almost compelled to write the following paper. It is well-nigh impossible to write on such a subject except in the first person, inasmuch as the sentiments expressed are, for the most part, the result of personal experience of nearly forty years in the ministry.

And, at the outset, let me say that I think that pastoral visitation should always be considered by us, the clergy, as holding a very foremost place in our ministerial work. I look at the matter from the standpoint of one who has the care of a country parish committed to him; and I am well aware that