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THE CHURCHMAN

A Monthly Magazine

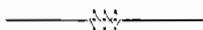
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creed at all. It means a step towards national apostasy. Whereas, on the other hand, the careful retention of elementary education as part of the mission work of the Church means the preservation of a religious influence over the mind of the country which does not end with the religious instruction given in the schools, but permeates everywhere, checking the spread of infidelity, opposing the progress of vice, forestalling to some extent the need for those special missions among the people, which have so often seemed in their disappointing results as if they had come too late; in short, promoting generally the spiritual welfare of our nation by spreading the dominion of the Kingdom of God.

J. M. BRAITHWAITE.



ART. III.—SAINTS' DAYS IN THE CHURCH'S YEAR.

VII. JULY. ST. JAMES THE APOSTLE.

A. FIVE SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

"Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church; and he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword; and because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also."—ACTS xii. 1-3.

WE experience no difficulty in identifying that James whom we commemorate during the present month, and in separating him off from others in the New Testament who bore that name. It is well known that we touch now one of those intricate questions which have perplexed theologians.¹ But no such question arises in the present instance. That St. James who is now before our attention is quite accurately defined: he is the earliest martyr among the Apostles, and he is the brother of John, who lived the longest. The Epistle and Gospel for the day set these two aspects of the commemoration before us in this order, and in this order we may consider them. The topics (though not without a deep inner connection) being different in their character, it is not needful in this instance to have regard to chronology.

There is an advantage in taking the whole of the context in its continuity, because in this way we gain a general im-

¹ See remarks on the Festival of St. Philip and St. James in THE CHURCHMAN for May. The St. James before us in this month is the San Iago of Compostella, for whom such strange legends have been invented. There is a touch of edification in one part of the story, where it is said that in Spain he made only seven converts.

pression of the spirit of the passage chosen for St. James's day, and this is a case where the general impression has great value for us, as well as our observation of the particulars separately.

Five persons are here named—first, St. *Paul* and St. *Barnabas*, who, though afterwards active missionaries of the Lord Jesus Christ, never, so far as we know, saw the Lord in His earthly presence; next, St. *Peter* and St. *James*, who were His constant companions from those early days by the Sea of Tiberias to the time of His Ascension;¹ finally, *Herod the king*—that is, Herod Agrippa I., the grandson of that earliest King Herod who slew the infants at Bethlehem, and the nephew of that other Herod who built the city of Tiberias, and who took part in the mocking of Jesus before His crucifixion.²

These five persons, too, are presented to us in one view; and the place in connection with which they are so presented is Jerusalem.³ It is a remarkable passage in the earliest history of the Church. Diverse elements in that history seem to meet here in one point, and to speak in eloquent language of what had happened and of what was coming. Barnabas and Paul represent the approaching diffusion of the Gospel throughout the Gentile nations; Peter and James remind us of the parables and miracles of Christ within the limits of Judæa; Herod impersonates the inevitable collision of Christianity with the selfish and cruel forces of the hostile world.

Barnabas and Paul, indeed, are not yet what they afterwards became. We observe, in fact, that the name of Barnabas is mentioned first, and that Paul still bears his old name of Saul.⁴ No great missionary expeditions have as yet been undertaken; no Apostolic epistles of world-wide and perpetual renown have as yet been written. Yet that in which he and Barnabas were now engaged was most strictly a work of preparation for the spread of the Gospel. There was great poverty among the early Christians of Judæa. Why this was so we need not at present inquire; but that this was the case we have proofs in more places than one of the sacred history.⁵ This was known at Antioch, where Barnabas and Paul were labouring; and in the prospect of impending scarcity the Christians there “determined, every man according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren which dwelt in Judæa; which also they did, and sent it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”⁶ This errand on which they went may have had very great consequences.

¹ See Matt. iv. 18, 21 and John xxi. 2.

² He was also the father of Herod Agrippa II. (Acts xxv. 13 : xxvi. 2).

³ Acts xii. 1, 19

⁴ *Ibid.*, xi. 30.

⁵ See Rom. xv. 26.

⁶ Acts xi. 30.

It was, indeed, simply an errand of kindness; and kindness is not religion—there may be kindness without religion. But, on the other hand, religion is kindness; there cannot be religion without kindness. How warmly hearts were bound together by this benevolence, how much of mutual confidence was inspired, what solid preparation made for the deeper acceptance and wider diffusion of the Gospel, we cannot tell. But two things we may say very confidently: first, that this juxtaposition of events and persons in the Acts of the Apostles is not accidental; and that now, as well as then, by treating people kindly, we prepare them to accept those religious principles which we feel to be of such infinite importance, and to believe that those principles are true.

Peter and Paul are always parallel figures, standing side by side, and prominent above all others, when we look back at the beginning of Apostolic Christianity. Here the picture is enlarged by the presence of Barnabas and James; and for the moment our chief attention is turned to James, who in himself, perhaps, is the least conspicuous of the four. Various things in the consideration of his death are very affecting to us. His work on earth, in his Master's cause, was absolutely finished before St. Paul's great work began. How true this is to the course of God's mysterious providence in all ages since! There is no symmetry in Providence, but there is a fitness in its mystery and a deep law of wisdom which at present we cannot fathom. Then we are always much affected by the thought of early deaths. St. Stephen died young—St. James died young; and both died by martyrdom. There is nothing gloomy in such deaths; the thought of them seems to bring us nearer to the better world. Still, they move our feelings as nothing else moves them, and they remind us how bad a world this is, which puts to death its purest and its best. Once more, it is affecting to remember that in the death of James an inroad was made in the sacred and united circle of the Apostles. It is like some of the saddest parts of our domestic experience. The first breaking of the circle was the death of Judas; the second was the death of James. Some of our friends pass away with the mark of sin upon them. It is a terrible thought; and we can only consign them to God, Who is just and knows all secrets. Some leave us with hope on their faces, and we rejoice while we weep. This separation, too, of Peter and James was the close of a special and most intimate friendship. Together they had been on the Mount of Transfiguration—together in the death-chamber of Jairus's daughter—together in the Garden of Gethsemane; and now all possibility of seeing one another on earth again was over.

And what are we to say of Herod? We may attend just to

one phrase in the narrative. It sometimes happens that a phrase in the Bible histories, which at first sight seems quite incidental, is afterwards found to be full of meaning. So it is here. *Because he saw it pleased the Jews*, he proceeded to "take Peter also." What an unworthy motive for so great a crime! And yet how common a motive this is among mankind! How well we all understand the temptation which it involves! How often we find, as we go through the picture-gallery of the Bible, that we discover traces of our own characters in the portraits of the sinners, if not of the saints!

B. THE FOLLY OF AMBITION.

"Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"—MATT. xx. 22.

It was a foolish ambition, though very natural. And there was for this ambition the excuse of ignorance. We can fix very definitely the time in our Lord's life on earth when those words were addressed to James and John. It was in coming to Jerusalem for the last time. The very place is known to us. It was in the neighbourhood of Jericho.¹ The Lord had been telling His disciples of His coming humiliation, of His suffering, and His death,² and they were utterly unable to understand His meaning.³ They were alarmed and perplexed.⁴ The Lord recognised this, and graciously made allowance for it. "Ye know not what ye ask," was His gentle word of rebuke. But at the same time also He spoke to them of His reigning, of His supremacy. This, too, it is quite obvious, they were very far from understanding. Yet this appealed persuasively to their natural human feelings, while the other revelation was a shock to them. Thus the ambition was natural, and on this account it had some superficial excuse. Moreover, words had been used which led them to suppose that the "kingdom" would "immediately" appear.⁵ It might well seem to them (and to their mother) that no time ought to be lost. But again they were very conscious that they were privileged ones among the twelve. They (with Simon) had been selected companions of their Lord on confidential occasions. They were "Boanerges" on the same authority which had made him "Peter."⁶ Moreover, they might seem to have a privilege which did not belong to him, inasmuch as they were cousins of the Lord Himself. Thus, on many accounts, we must admit that this ambition was natural.

¹ See Mark x. 32, 46.

² Matt. xx. 17-19.

³ Luke xviii. 34.

⁴ Mark x. 32.

⁵ Luke xix. 11.

⁶ See Mark iii. 17.

Yet it was very foolish; and in order to see its folly we cannot do better than to pursue this solemn and sacred history, and to consider what really did happen to these two brothers, James and John. "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They did "indeed" drink of this cup, and were baptized with this baptism. They learnt the meaning of the thrones accessory to the throne of Christ. They were associated with His crucifixion, yet in ways very different. James was the first of the twelve to die the martyr's death. John lived the longest, and did not literally die a martyr's death. Yet perhaps he was still nearer than his brother to his Master's martyrdom, for he had prolonged experience of the sufferings connected with the Cross, of the contradiction of sinners, of the cruelty of persecution, of the care of human souls.

To Zebedee and Salome, if they survived, and especially to the latter, it must have been a severe blow, when the hope of a distinguished career for James was suddenly cut short by the sword of Herod. The Crucifixion had, no doubt, in some degree opened their eyes. The deeper meaning of many words spoken by Jesus must have become apparent to the women who were gathered round the Cross.¹ That which was meant by the "throne"² of Christ was now better understood. Probably the death of Stephen had opened out some part of the glories of martyrdom. Yet the abrupt and final close of a life of hope cannot have been what they conjectured or imagined. The Lord had spoken of James as destined to share His "cup" and His "baptism." The higher the value these parents set upon this honour, the higher their estimate of their son's qualifications for a great career, the deeper must have been their grief when the blow fell. The subject is purposely set before the reader in this way, because it is in the light of the disappointment of parents that the early cutting off of a hopeful life is most evidently sorrowful. How constantly we have illustrations of this form of trial around us! This frequently has become the groundwork of proverbs. The best, we say, "die first;" those who are admirable and full of blessing to others in early life are "too good to live." Perhaps one great meaning of this martyrdom of St. James, as

¹ See Mark xv. 40.

² Each of these thrones was in fact a cross. This thought is very forcibly expressed by de Pressensé ("Jesus Christ, Son Temps, Sa Vie, son œuvre," pp. 528, 529): "Les douze trônes qui sont promis aux apôtres commenceront par être des croix. . . . En d'autres termes, avant de régner il faut souffrir. Il n'en est pas du royaume de Dieu comme du royaume du monde où les rois et les grands dominent."

recorded in Holy Writ, is to give point to such experience in life, to call our attention to a solemn mystery of Divine Providence, to admonish us of the mistake which lies at the root of ambition. Certainly, as we carefully study this history, we clearly see the folly there was in the petition laid before our Lord, however true it may be that there were excuses that lead us to judge that petition leniently.

And this folly becomes equally apparent if we take into our serious thought the case of St. John. His martyrdom was quite as real as that of his brother—nay, more real. Let us ask ourselves, Who suffers the most in this world of varied trial? Not he who is abruptly cut down on the threshold of a distinguished career, though in such a disappointment there is a pathetic interest which misleads us. Who is really the nearest to Christ? Not he whose opportunity has been the shortest, but he who by suffering, by sympathy, by sad knowledge of the hearts of men, has had the deepest and fullest experience. These truths receive signal illustration through the example of this Apostle, viewed in the light of the subject before us. Often must he have said during those long years, This is my Master's "cup;" this is my Master's "baptism:" here is part of the explanation of the great riddle spoken that day on the way to Jerusalem. The martyrdom of John was indeed a reality, not simply in Patmos, "in tribulation, and in the patience of Jesus Christ, for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ,"¹ but during those long years at Ephesus, where he was "tarrying" till his Lord should "come,"² spending laborious days and anxious nights in the presence of sinners, amid vulgar contentions and degrading ambition. And yet he himself had once been guilty in this very way. How much he had learnt since those early days in Galilee! Once he had wished to call down "fire from heaven" upon his Lord's adversaries.³ Now he was seeking to obtain the sway over human hearts by the exercise of humility. Can we not see how this great example suits our own day—suits every day and every age? Studying thus his biography, we learn how to take a true estimate of the best methods of suffering with Christ, of serving Him, and of becoming a blessing to mankind.

¹ Rev. i. 9.

² See John xxi. 22.

³ "These were the two disciples who made themselves so prominent in resenting the rudeness of the Samaritan villagers. The greatest zealots among the Twelve were thus also the most ambitious: a circumstance which will not surprise the student of human nature. On the former occasion they asked fire from heaven to consume their adversaries; on the present occasion they ask a favour from Heaven to the disadvantage for their friends. The two requests are not so very dissimilar."—Dr. Bruce on the "Training of the Twelve," p. 274.

In such studies we must never forget that we have before us part of the Lord's divinely-planned training of the Twelve for their future work. Thus, while there is a pattern for ourselves in these Gospel incidents, there is in them much more than this. The whole treatment of James and John, viewed in this way, is full of the utmost interest. Those early lessons by the Sea of Tiberias; these later lessons by the same lake; that admonition in Samaria; those favoured communications of Divine knowledge in the chamber of Jairus, at the Transfiguration, upon the Mount of Olives,¹ in Gethsemane; and that well-defined scene on the way near the Jordan, which has been particularly under our thoughts—all were parts of one great instruction, which was to have its results in the process of founding the Church. Great principles, thus taught, were to be laid firm for ever. All future ages were to reap the harvest, of which the seeds were then sown.

Yet—such is the many-sided power of Holy Scripture—we have in the last scene an admonition and rebuke within the sphere of the most commonplace action. There is a vulgar offence against right feeling and right principle, with which we are familiar everywhere around us. This is the filling up of public appointments on the mere selfish aim at self-advancement, without regard to the public good, or to the claims of those who are really fitted for such posts. Thus society is injured, the general standard of duty is lowered, and jealousy and discontent are promoted. It must be confessed also that admission to high ecclesiastical appointments has too often been conducted on this faulty method. Now the existence of such low views of responsibility is very apparent in James and John upon this memorable occasion. When Matthias was appointed to succeed Judas, it was expressly stipulated by Peter, under Divine inspiration, that the new Apostle must have the requisite qualifications.² And here too it is solemnly asserted that for high service there must be the accompaniment of fitness. Thus does the lofty teaching of the Bible flow over the surface of our common life, and fill even the very crannies of society.

And yet one side more of this subject must be touched—though perhaps the hand that touches it should be gentle. It seems cruel to single out Salome for special blame. Yet scheming for domestic advancement is very full of mischief. Family ambition is seriously to be blamed. Christian mothers ought to learn here part of their highest duty towards their sons.

J. S. HOWSON.

¹ See Mark xiii. 3.

² See THE CHURCHMAN for February.