

JOHN THE
BAPTIST

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JOHN:
THE BAPTIST
FORERUNNER
AND MARTYR

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John: the Baptist
Forerunner
& Martyr



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CONTENTS

CAP	PAGE
LIST OF PASSAGES IN THE GOSPELS	
	CONCERNING JOHN 6
	JOSEPHUS' ACCOUNT OF THE BAPTIST 6
I	TIME AND PLACE 7
2	BIRTH AND PARENTAGE 13
3	TRAINING 24
4	EARLY PREACHING 34
5	THE THREE INTERVIEWS WITH CHRIST 46
6	LATER TEACHING 58
7	IMPRISONMENT 70
8	DOUBT 79
9	MARTYRDOM 88
10	CHARACTER AND POSITION 97
11	SOURCES AND SUBSEQUENT INFLUENCE OF HIS TEACHING 104

LIST OF PASSAGES IN THE GOSPELS CONCERNING JOHN THE BAPTIST.

<i>In St. Matt.</i>	<i>In St. Mark.</i>	<i>In St. Luke.</i>	<i>In St. John.</i>
Ch. Ver.	Ch. Ver.	Ch. Ver.	Ch. Ver.
3. 1-16.	1. 2-10, 14, 15.	1. 5-25, 57-80.	1. 6-8, 15-37.
11. 1-19.	6. 14-29.	3. 1-22.	3. 23-27.
14. 1-12.	8. 23.	7. 18-35.	5. 33-35.
16. 14.	9. 12, 13.	9. 7-9, 19.	10. 40, 41.
17. 12.		20. 4-6.	

JOSEPHUS' ACCOUNT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

"Antiquities of the Jews," book xviii., chap. 5, § 2
(Whiston's Translation).

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John that was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism, for that the washing would be acceptable to Him if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away of some sins, but for the purification of the body, supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now when others came in crowds about him—for they were greatly moved by hearing his words—Herod, who feared lest the great influence which John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Machærus, the castle I have before mentioned, and put to death.



JOHN : THE BAPTIST, FORERUNNER, AND MARTYR

Cap I *THE TIME AND PLACE*

"Make ready the way of the Lord."—ST. MARK
i. 4.

UPWARDS of four hundred years had passed since the last prophet of Israel had carried to the people a message concerning God. A race of prophets had never been wanting before since Moses received his message at Horeb ; and, indeed, taking the word in a larger sense, the Patriarchs themselves had been prophets of God. Sometimes a generation had passed without such a messenger, but no fewer than fourteen generations had

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

now gone since God's voice had been heard.

Other considerations had concurred to reduce Israel to a low and despondent state. After the return from Babylon, there had been governors exercising more or less authority ; there had passed across Palestine the shadow of the great Macedonian power ; there had stalked through it the barbaric splendour of the Syrian monarchs ; and there had been heard the tread of the Roman hosts and the clash of the Roman arms. There had come the stormy times of the Maccabees, in which Judæan soldiers, led by native chiefs, had matched their prowess with the conquerors of the world. Their names are still famous, but their courage and bloodshed were in vain ; and now an Asmonean dynasty professing to belong to themselves, but with a broken genealogy and no true national spirit, was reigning under the sanction and obedient to the dictates of the Emperor of Rome.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

These things made a break with the great historic past of Israel, and they paved the way for still greater changes. In what relation did Israel now stand with reference to God? It is difficult to conceive what answer the priests and people would have given to this question. But it is obvious that they no longer heard or expected to hear the voice of God from day to day as in the times of old. Their national faith had almost become part of a bygone history. God seemed as silent to them and almost as far away as to the nations of modern times.

One thing, however, still survived, and could not be forgotten, even amid Roman oppression and the strife of contending parties: that there had been given to Israel of old the promise of the Messiah. It was the solitary light that continued to burn, breaking the obscurity and cheering the heart of the faithful Jew. Beautiful and sacred passages rang in his ears every

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

sabbath, which had never been fulfilled, declaring the advent of the hope of Israel, to which the faithfulness of God was pledged. And just as the morning star precedes the day, there was a second promise that ere Messiah came, a messenger or prophet should come like a herald, to blow the trumpet and proclaim His advent. There were not, perhaps, many in Israel who, in the midst of the national distress, were waiting for the consolation. There were fewer still who, in that early sunrise, were already awake and watching for the Daystar in the East.

There was, however, a remarkable and general expectation in Israel and over all the East, which even reached the confines of Rome, and is still preserved in its literature, that ancient prophecy was about to be fulfilled in a new Messianic age. Chaldæan sages were consulting the stars; the Sibylline books were recording as in oracles, and at least one great Roman

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

poet was writing in imperishable verse, this beautiful and universal hope of humanity. Traceable perhaps to the pages of the prophet Daniel, which fixed the time by certain obscure measurements, and which by means of Alexandrian culture had become known to the reading world, there had spread the expectation not merely of a coming Prince, but that He was nearly due. Amid the conflicts of arms and of parties, political and ecclesiastical, this floating expectation maintained its place in the hearts of those who were living for heavenly things. In Judæa especially, within the precincts of the sanctuary of God, recently adorned and beautified by Herod the king, there was a band of holy men and women who lived in the hope that their eyes should see the King. They remembered the strain of the prophet Haggai, and looked for the Desire of all nations to glorify the very building of which the foundation-stone had been laid with mingled tears

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

and shouts of joy. There were priests at the altar who offered their sacrifices in hope of the Advent; and there were holy women who prayed that they might witness the Lord's Anointed.

It was to a people in these circumstances that the news was suddenly brought that a new prophet of God had been heard. And when inquiry was made, a singular and impressive story was told to all who cared to hear.



Cap 2

HIS BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

*“Zacharias, thy prayer is heard.”—ST. LUKE
i. 13.*

AMONG the prophets of Israel there were two who foretold not merely the coming of Messiah, but also the previous coming of one who was to be a sign and testimony that the Lord was near.

The closing words of the Old Testament must surely have prevented any diligent student of its pages from overlooking or forgetting such a prediction. Here they are : “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord come ; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

earth with a curse" (Mal. iv. 5, 6). The obscurity of this prediction, due to the fact that it embraces both the first and second advents of the Messiah, was made plain to those who heard it by the beginning of the third chapter of the same book: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple; and the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, behold He cometh, saith the Lord of hosts." So spake the last of the ancient prophets of Israel four hundred years before the event predicted by him; taking up and prolonging the strain of the great Messianic prophet Isaiah, and using some of the same words which he employed: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God; . . . the voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God. . . . And the glory of the Lord

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

These words were uttered seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. We have express New Testament authority for referring them to John the Baptist. “This is he that was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord ; make His paths straight” (St. Matt. iii. 3). “Yea, and thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to make ready His ways” (St. Luke i. 76). And in St. Matt. xi. 14 we have the language of the Lord Himself, “If ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, which was to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Predicted by ancient prophets, the birth of the messenger is in due time announced by an angel ; and not only by an ordinary angel, but by the same who is commis-

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

sioned to announce the Messiah Himself, one who says of his own name and position, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak unto thee and to bring thee these good tidings." The angel not merely announces the birth of the child, but gives orders from heaven as to the name by which he is to be known. This is an honour which the child receives in common with only five of the men of Scripture, the others being our Lord Himself, Ishmael, Isaac, Josiah, and the son of Isaiah.

The father of the Baptist was Zacharias, a priest descended from Eleazar and of the order of Abijah. David had divided the priests into twenty-four courses, of which that of Abijah was the eighth. Each of these courses discharged the priests' duty in the Temple for one week at a time, and the priests connected with it came up to Jerusalem from their Levitical cities for the purpose of doing so. Some of the courses, in the time of Herod,

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

are said to have contained thousands of priests ; and their visit to Jerusalem for their sacred week explains for us the multitude of priests who had the opportunity of hearing the Lord in the holy city, and also the number of those who are mentioned in the Gospel narratives in other parts of the country.

From the priests who had come up to Jerusalem in their course, one was selected by lot to perform the duty of offering the incense upon the golden altar. Many of the priests never attained to this honour ; and almost no one received it more than once. It was, therefore, a great event in the life of a man when the lot was cast in his favour ; and popular belief and tradition among the Jews regarded it as the occasion of Divine communications made to men in days gone by.

The scene was sufficiently striking to merit description. Four courts surrounded the Temple : one for the proselytes on the outside, the next one for the women, a third

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

for the men of Israel, and the innermost of all for the priests. High on its rocky platform, the holy and beautiful house of God rose above these courts, seen by the worshippers in all. They were nearly full of those who at the evening hour had come to pray; and when the priest, clad in white, with covered head but uncovered feet, turned to go into the sanctuary, it is said that the people all fell prostrate on their faces, and so continued till the priest appeared again at the door of the Temple and blessed them in the name of the Lord. When Zacharias then left the people on their faces, and went in to offer incense upon the golden altar that was in the holy place before the veil, "there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense" (St. Luke i. 11).

It was indeed a messenger bearing to him a special announcement from God. A child was to be born to him in his old age, in answer to his prayer. Six things

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

are told him regarding the child : (1) many were to rejoice at his birth ; (2) he was to be great in the sight of the Lord ; (3) he was to be a Nazarite from his birth, drinking neither wine nor strong drink ; (4) he was to be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb ; (5) he was to turn many of the children of Israel unto the Lord their God ; (6) he was to go before the face of the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to turn" (as Malachi said) "the hearts of the fathers to the children," and he was to make ready (as Isaiah had said) "for the Lord a people prepared for Him." Such was the message from heaven. Never had the priest's name been so appropriate : Zacharias was indeed *remembered of God*. But the announcement was too wonderful. Was it strange that his faith for a moment wavered, and that he met the angel's message with the expression of doubt, if not incredulity ? It was the story of Abraham again, and the birth of John made parallel

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

with that of Isaac. "Whereby shall I know this?" was the question, "for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years." The characteristic answer was, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God, and I was sent unto thee to bring thee these good tidings." It was the first time that his word had been doubted. Now then a miracle must be done to prove a prophecy. "Behold, thou shalt be silent, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall come to pass, because thou believedst not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season." So the new revelation of God to Israel opens with the appearance of an angel and a message from God; and it is met by unbelief on the part of man. Is it not in embryo the story of the Gospel from the beginning to the end?

The time of the vision and interview with the angel Gabriel had been somewhat protracted; and the great company of priests and other worshippers gathered

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

in the Temple courts, had waited in impatience for the reappearance of Zacharias. Till he returned, their worship was not complete, and they were not at liberty to go. At length the old man staggered out beyond the threshold of the Temple in evident excitement, and began to make signs to the people, laying one hand upon his mouth and beckoning with the other now to the holy place and now to heaven. As they crowded round to know what he meant, they discovered, to their infinite surprise, that he was dumb ; and at length (in what way we know not) they awoke to the fact that he had seen an angel of the Lord. On his arrival at his temporary lodging (probably in one of the chambers allotted to the priests), he would make known in writing on such a tablet as is spoken of afterwards (St. Luke i. 63) the story of what had happened. His wife Elizabeth apparently was not in Jerusalem with him, but in the hill-country of Judæa, in a city of Judah, or perhaps in

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

Juttah, south of Hebron, which is supposed to have been their residence. She was herself a descendant of Aaron, and had received a name which signifies *the oath of my God*. She apparently had no difficulty in accepting the promise of God; and the only utterances which fall from her lips in the Gospel are those of genuine, heartfelt, and almost ecstatic praise. Sarah no longer instigates Abraham to disbelieve; she is foremost in faith. With Divine wisdom, taught her by the Spirit of God, she seems at once to understand the position and office which her son was to hold in accordance with ancient prophecy. Both father and mother are filled with the Holy Ghost; the father is poet and psalmist also; they are both obedient to the word of the Lord, and, in the face of the opposition of relatives, they gave to their child the name that was appointed in heaven, and called him John. The word is probably the Hebrew *Jonah*, well known as borne by one great pro-

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

phet of the past ; if so, it means *the dove*. If the word *John* be a distinct and separate word, it was a name unknown to the Jews, and is supposed to signify *the gift of Jehovah*. Already there seems to be in the name itself an indication that he belongs neither to the past nor the future, but is a solitary link between the two.

The closing portion of this wonderful first chapter of St. Luke contains the inspired song of Elizabeth and the prophetic song of Zacharias.



Cap 3

HIS TRAINING

“*Strong in spirit.*”—ST. LUKE i. 80.

WHAT sort of preparation did God give His servant John? St. Luke says (i. 80), “The child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel”—a pregnant verse, which speaks of *growth, strength, solitude, and manifestation.*

Be it remembered from the first that John was a descendant of Aaron, and that his education necessarily had in view his being fitted to become a priest of God. He must have been taught therefore a full knowledge of the Levitical law and its strict observance. In describing his parents, the Evangelist speaks not only of

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

their keeping the commandments, but also "all the ordinances of the law." The influence of such knowledge on his youthful mind must have been great. The Levitical law to an unspiritual mind was, and is still, meaningless and forbidding; but all earnest Christians who have made it a study know how full it is of the deepest secrets of God.¹ The child of Zacharias would come to know something of its meaning, and would see how to humble and holy hearts it glowed with Divine light. May we not picture to ourselves the parents and the child talking over it together? Nor let it be forgotten how much the new message from heaven would give fresh light to the sacred page in that house in the hill-country. Not only Isaiah and Malachi, who spoke of John himself, whose every verse referring to him would be imprinted

¹ See Mrs. Singe's remarkable book on the "Five Great Offerings of the Law" (London: Marshall Bros.).

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

on his memory as soon as he could read, but almost every part of the Scripture given by inspiration of God, would gain in meaning when studied in the light of the coming Messiah, of whom John was the messenger.

We have spoken of the teaching and influence of the parents, yet it is hardly possible that they could have been spared to see more than the very first fruits of their child's development. It is the penalty paid by the "child of old age" to become soon an orphan; and we must assume that such a trial came early to the child of Zacharias and Elizabeth. It was the beginning of the solitude which went on deepening in his life.

He was from the first a Nazarite, as the angel had directed. It is true that only a part of the vow detailed in Num. vi. is specified with regard to him; but it must be conceded that the part here includes the whole. And a very significant thing this vow of the Nazarite was.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

It included abstinence from all wine and strong drink ; it allowed the hair to continue uncut ; and it scrupulously avoided all uncleanness from coming in contact with the dead. These details embodied one grand thought : entire separation unto God, at whatever cost of pleasure, outward peculiarity, and the loss of family affection. The vow was usually taken only for a short period of weeks or months. The chapter describing it does not contemplate a lifelong vow, which was probably deemed too high a level to be aimed at. Only three men in Scripture are recorded to have undertaken a perpetual vow of the kind ; these are Samson (who broke it, Judges xvi. 14, 19), Samuel the prophet, and John, the greatest of the three. In this he found the key-note of life ; he was willing to be “ separated unto the Lord.”

But there was a further development in the training of John. He spent a life of self-denial, ever deepening as he went on. This was conspicuous in his home, his

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

food, his dress, and the model or example of his life. "*He was in the deserts until the day of his showing unto Israel.*" I take this to mean that at a certain period of his life he ceased to live in the city of his birth, and took up his abode in the wilderness itself. This must have been shortly after his parents died, and at a very early period of his manhood. If the accounts of that wilderness are to be trusted, it was the type of wild desolation. "One may travel all day and see no other life than the desert partridge or a chance fox or vulture. The Hebrews fitly call it Jeshimon, the appalling desolation or horror."¹ This wilderness of Judæa must have been an awful solitude when the Baptist lived in it, and was possibly the scene of the Lord's temptation, when, as St. Mark tells us (i. 13), it was haunted by wild beasts. In some cave of this vast desert region, near a well of

¹ Dr. Geikie's "Life of Christ," vol. i., p. 71, where the full description may be consulted.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

water, John seems to have made for a time his abode. "His meat was locusts and wild honey" (St. Matt. iii. 4). This is the locust insect, not the bean of the locust tree. By the Levitical law (Lev. xi. 22) the insect was a food permitted to the Jew, not unclean, but the food only of the very poor. The traveller Burckhardt says, "All the Bedawin of Arabia and the inhabitants of towns in Nejd and Hedjaz are accustomed to eat locusts. In Egypt and Nubia they are only eaten by the poorest beggars. 'Wild honey' is found plentifully in all that region, and is part of the Arabs' food." Throughout Scripture it is often mentioned.¹ "Locusts and wild honey," with the "water of the well"—these were the food of John during his abode in the deserts.

He had his raiment of camel's hair (St. Matt. iii. 4). The coarse tufted hair of the

¹ See Jonathan's case (1 Sam. xiv. 7), Issachar's (Deut. xxxii. 13), and Israel's promise (Ps. lxxxii. 16).

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

camel is woven into a rough, thick garment by the Arab women. It is the covering of tents, and sometimes the cloak of the poor. Canon Tristram ("Natural History of Bible," p. 66) says, "It is very harsh and rough to the touch, and thus his dress was in accordance with the austerity of the rest of the Baptist's mode of life." Something like this had been the prophets' dress in ancient time: the famous mantle of Elijah was one of hair, bound with a leathern girdle about the loins (1 Kings i. 8); and one mark of a prophet in the days of Zechariah was the rough garment which he wore (xiii. 4).

If it be asked why John adopted this austere manner of life, it must be remembered that he set Elijah before him as the model and exemplar of his life. For all these outward austerities John had Elijah's example, the thought of whom seems never to have been long absent from him.

But there is no doubt a deeper secret

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

here, which we must not miss. The Scripture thought which lies beneath all fasting and austerity in God's servants is that of overwhelming sorrow, which takes away the taste for the pleasures and comforts of life. And the thought in the power of which John lived was deep conviction of the sin of Israel in the sight of God and their total want of preparation for the coming of Messiah. He was at hand, even at the door; He would find them utterly unready to receive Him; and what would befall Israel then? It was that which drove John into the solitudes and the austerities of his desert life.

So, alone, an orphan, brotherless, with no nearer kin than the Son of Mary, John lived. There are traces of early partial intercourse between the two—the Nazarene and the Nazarene—in John's testimony at Jordan, "I have need to be baptized of Thee." But such meetings must have been few and short; and in

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

his solitude the lad who was "waxing strong in spirit" sought refuge where Elijah had met his greatest revelations. For years John fed his strong soul on silent intercourse with God and God's word. In the desert, like Moses and yet unlike him, the son of Zacharias lived. John, who never entered the world, turned away from it from the first, and found God enough to people the wilderness with holy thoughts. In the desert, like Elijah, he heard the still, small voice, not once, but every day. For him God was in the tempest and in the earthquake, in the blazing heaven and the starlit night. Where nature was most rugged God was near, and where it was silent He was speaking. Independent of human aid or wisdom, he trusted in no arm of flesh. Thus he learnt to be fearless of danger and resolute of purpose, carrying his life in his hand because God was holding it in His. Feeding on the sacred book, which is everywhere

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

traceable in his words, he grew wise unto salvation:—behind, the facts of his birth and youth, the angelic vision, the message of Gabriel, his mother's song, and his father's prophecy; within, the fulness of the Spirit, a perpetual Teacher and a Divine Guide; before, his short and unknown life. Thus, not impatiently, he waited in the desert till the time of his "showing unto Israel."

In all this there were three secrets, on which the men of the present day would do well to muse.

1. He had renounced self and the world. The world had given him nothing; he possessed nothing in it; he hoped nothing from it.

2. He dwelt with God in constant communion, shutting out other sources of interest and strength, finding God enough here, as He would be after death.

3. He waited for the appearance of Messiah, whom he was to prepare for and announce.



Cap 4 *HIS EARLY PREACHING*

“The voice.”—ST. MARK i. 3.

NOTHING is more striking about John than the abruptness with which he is introduced in the sacred page. “In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” So reads the beginning of the third chapter of St. Matthew. Not a word to tell us who John was, or why he was called the Baptist, or how he became a preacher, but as if the Evangelist desired to emphasize his relation to Elijah, who appears in an equally abrupt manner in the first book of Kings!

The position given to John and his

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

ministry is also most striking. It is one of the few things recorded in all four Gospels at considerable length. With the exception of the genealogy by St. Matthew, and the visit of the Magi, and the birth of Christ, it is the very first thing told us, arresting our attention from the beginning.

And the character of the message put into John's mouth completes the emphasis, standing, as it does, almost alone among the teachings of Holy Writ.

The burden of the sin of Israel lies upon his heart, excites his indignation, and calls forth his solemn note of warning, "Repent ye." It is a denunciation of sin ; he finds it everywhere, in every class, from the highest to the lowest ; he sees it as no one else in that generation has done ; and, if he stands alone, he will denounce it.

He begins on the border of the wilderness. He does not seek men out. He does not need to do so. They come to

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

him flocking round, for there is enough about him, in his look, his dress, his manner, his message, to tell men that this is something real, and to compel them both to come and listen.

His message is "Repent." It is practically a new one. There is much in the Old Testament about sin and turning from sin, but here is a new word, the word *repent*, which afterwards becomes very familiar. It is common enough in our authorised version of the Old Testament, where it is chiefly used concerning God Himself. Six or seven times it is employed there for a man turning from his sin.¹ But practical repentance is a New Testament doctrine, first taught by the Baptist. He who needs a new word has found some thought which is sufficiently new to force a new expression. It

¹ See Prov. xiv. 15, where the Greek is used. In Job xlii. 6 the Hebrew word is found, but not the Greek word which the New Testament employs.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

is as when a new man needs a new name. And this first word of the Baptist has introduced a new term into theology, of which the New Testament is full. The thought contained in the word is a call to a total change of mind about one's own sin, for the first time understanding it, for the first time hating it, for the first time renouncing it. John denounces the sin of the people.

And he does so not in vague general terms, as if dealing with an abstraction and part of a system of thought ; but all who come to him receive a separate warning, till they expect it in future, and put themselves in the way of it, and ask for it if they do not find it (see St. Luke iv. 10-14). The Spirit of God is at work in the first words of John, convicting men of sin, till they come asking whether they have done what is wrong. And this man who has lived in the wilderness, and might have known nothing of the state of the people, is able

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

to point out to one after the other how they have disobeyed and offended God. All classes gather about him, from the highest to the lowest, the good and the bad, the respected and the despised. Publicans come there bearing their reproach, and he tells them of their exaction, their covetousness, their cheating and oppression of the people. Soldiers come asking what they are to do to get right with God, probably the rough soldiers of Herod, Jewish men, not Romans, and he tells them of their violence, their extortion, and their discontent. But Pharisees and Sadducees also come in their pride of place and character, revered of the people, men of influence in Israel, themselves teachers of the Law, and he tells them that they are vipers like their fathers. He asks what they mean by coming to him, and who have sent them to flee from the wrath to come? At length a great multitude gathers about his steps; the wilderness is no longer

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

solitary ; throngs have come from every city and village round, and he tells them all that they are taking shelter in the fact of their descent from Abraham, while they are despising the teaching of Abraham's God. And now, he says, the generations of Israel, from father to son, have trifled with their privileges and responsibilities, and God will bear it no longer. The woodman has gone forth with his axe into the forest, the trees are marked for destruction, and every fruitless tree shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.

Yes ; for a crisis has come, and that is why John has been sent. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Again it is a new phrase, with a new thought behind it. There are indications in the Old Testament, many a time and oft repeated, that God is the King of all the earth, and that Israel is the kingdom of God. There is in Zechariah and elsewhere the picture of the heavenly

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

King coming to His people, riding into His capital, bringing salvation ; there is in Daniel the prophet the prediction that in days to come God would set up a kingdom on the earth. But here is something more definite, more spiritual, more immediate. A new King who is about to appear, a new kingdom to be now set up, time, place, circumstances, are all fixed ; and this man in the camel's hair, lifting up his voice in the awful wilderness, is the herald who has come one week before crying, "Prepare ye the way of the King." "The kingdom of heaven"! it is the word that is never absent from the Lord's own lips ; it is the word that rings through every page of the four Gospels ; it is the offer to humanity of a new Sovereign and a new dominion, which they rejected ; and the setting up of the kingdom has been postponed even until now. But John heard the noise of the chariot wheels when he announced that the King was at hand.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

Repentance in the view of the kingdom of heaven ! It was to be real repentance ; a repentance that gave up the sin that it was sorry for ; a repentance that passed from sin to God ; a repentance that brought forgiveness, and that issued in a new life. It was a repentance that made from the first, open confession, and was not ashamed of itself. And hence John, withdrawing to that part of the wilderness where Jordan rolled, preached from its banks that he might *baptize*. Here is a third new thing : Baptism. There had been in Israel from the days of Moses the baptism of cups and vessels for the removal of uncleanness and the preparing of such vessels for the service of God. There had also crept into Israel, not commanded by the Law, but introduced by the instincts of the people, a washing of proselytes when they came to be received in Israel, as if the filth of heathenism which had gathered about them needed to be cleansed away before

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

they could present themselves in the sanctuary of Israel. There had been the cleansing of the leper by the ordinance of the law, who was to wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and be unclean until the even. Ere the priests sacrificed in the Temple they had to wash their hands and feet in water beside the laver of brass which stood in the court. But the thought that a Jew, a son of Abraham, circumcised the eighth day, one who had eaten the Passover, who had observed the feast and was ceremonially clean—that he needed to be washed, and *must* be washed before God would accept him: this was a new thought, unknown to Israel and taught them first by John. It, too, received the new name of *Baptism*,¹ a sign and outward symbol of that repentance

¹ Only twice used in the Septuagint Greek (2 Kings v. 14), of the washing of the leper Naaman, and once, Isa. xxi. 4. Does the passage St. John iii. 25 refer to a dispute with the Jews as to the need of baptism for the Jew?

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

which John preached, called "the baptism of repentance"; and the name and the rite so introduced have been hallowed by the acceptance of the Lord Himself when He instituted it as one of the sacraments of the Church of God. Nor must we suppose that it was from the brain of John alone that such a thing sprang. He himself tells us that in nothing he was his own master, that nothing was done of himself, but that God sent him to baptize as well as to preach. What part of the Jordan was visited by John and by the multitudes who followed him is uncertain. The name given is Bethabara, or, as some say it should read, Bethania, and another place is Enon, near Salim, chosen because there was much water there. But whether these places were near the ford of Jordan, close to Jericho, or whether they were a short distance south of the Sea of Galilee, we do not positively know. The one site is recommended by the neighbourhood of Jeru-

JOHN. THE BAPTIST

salem, from which the multitude of priests and Pharisees might readily proceed to hear him ; the other site is no less recommended by its neighbourhood to Bethsaida and to Cana of Galilee. We must be content to leave the matter in the doubt in which Scripture leaves many of these questions of locality. Nor can we press the much water which was there into the service of one mode of baptism, whether immersion, or sprinkling, or pouring out, especially in view of the scarcity of water at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. But gathering up into one this early teaching of John, the son of Zacharias, we note and emphasize its threefold meaning : (1) a solemn denunciation of the sin of each man that listened to him ; (2) a solemn warning to repent of that sin that he might be forgiven of God ; and (3) the trumpet-note proclaiming that the crisis of Israel had come, and that the chariot of the King was at hand.

Are *we* not now in a somewhat similar

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

position? Has no trumpet-voice gone forth from God, warning us that the great crisis is close at hand, and that the Lord long promised is at the door? The ears are deaf which have not heard it, and the hearts are dull which do not understand. Christ's second coming may almost be as near us as was His first to the day of John the Baptist.



Cap 5 *HIS THREE INTERVIEWS WITH JESUS*

“He seeth Jesus.”—ST. JOHN i. 29.

FIRST, let us ask how we are sure that there were three, and that they did not even occur on successive days at the same season?

Now the answer to these questions is, that the first interview, when Jesus was baptized, was immediately followed by the temptation in the wilderness, which lasted forty days. The second and third interviews (at which John pointed Him out to his disciples) took place (St. John i. 43) immediately before Jesus went forth into Galilee.¹ The temptation of forty

¹ Note that in St. John i. 35 “the next day after” is not the day after John Baptist “saw,” but after

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

days, therefore, and possibly a week or two more happened between the first interview and the other two.

That there was some previous personal knowledge of Jesus on the part of John was inevitable. With the usual reserve of Scripture, we are not told of any meetings between them in early youth, but considering the relationship of the two mothers and the whole extraordinary circumstances of the births of the two children, we cannot suppose it possible that they did not meet more than once in boyhood and in the course of thirty years. They lived at only two or three days' distance from each other, and once a year were bound to go to Jerusalem, which reduced the distance to a few miles. We must also bear in mind that what had happened before and after the birth of

his testimony given of it (ver. 29), and that, again, is dated, not from the baptism of Christ, but (ver. 19) from the deputation of the priests and his declaration to them.

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

both would be a frequent subject of meditation and of solemn talk over what was to come in future years. Traces of this personal knowledge are visible in the recognition which took place at the first interview; and when John says, "I knew Him not" (St. John i. 33), he does not refer to personal acquaintance with Him as a relative, but means that he did not know Him to be the chosen One of God for whom he was waiting.

John was preaching and baptizing on the banks of Jordan. The great crowd, composed of all classes, had as usual gathered round him, and he, in his fervent way, had exhorted them one by one as they were baptized, when, lo! there came to the front a Man still young, slightly younger than John himself. There was in His manner something at once to attract attention. According to very early tradition, He was unlike the Jewish type of man, and hence the more noteworthy: fair hair, parted in the middle, flowing

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

in wavy locks down to either shoulder ; a fresh, fair complexion, with bright blue eye ; peace and dignity seated side by side upon His countenance, and a mien quiet, meek, yet kingly. Coming to the front, He asked to be baptized like the rest. John, so stern and commanding in his speech to others, immediately bowed low before the Stranger, and said to Him "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" The answer returned to him was, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (St. Matt. iii. 15). The sacred rite was then performed, and when it was done Jesus knelt upon the bank in prayer ; and then in His own sight and that of John there took place a marvel. We are not told whether it was open to the view of all the multitude, and we make no conjecture upon the subject. The heavens were cleft asunder as by a stroke, as if one could see far upwards towards the throne of God, and from

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

their height there came a mystic voice, clear, thrilling, solemn, "Thou art My beloved Son ; in Thee I am well pleased." At the same moment a white something seemed to flutter down the sky, and as it approached through the clear air was observed to be a white and stainless dove, which passed downwards till it rested with folded wing upon the head of Jesus. John "saw the Spirit descending like a dove and lighting upon Him" (St. Matt. iii. 16).

This first interview at the baptism of Jesus becomes a turning-point not only in the story of the Baptist, but in that of the Lord Himself. The question may well be asked how the Lord Jesus could submit to the baptism of repentance, which implied the need of being purged from sin, and was accompanied generally by the confession of sin. The answer to this question introduces us to the position occupied by Christ as the Substitute for His people. The baptism at Jordan was

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

the close of the private life and the beginning of the public ministry of Christ. It was the formal assumption, so to speak, of the position and office of Messiah. It was to that office what anointing was to the high-priest or the prophet. To those who have not grasped this meaning in the baptism of Jesus it must ever seem most mysterious; but what then took place was His setting apart to His special work as the Messiah of the Jews and the Saviour of the world. For thirty years He had already lived a life of common duties and cares, labouring for a time in a way that the Jews were wise enough to feel was no dishonour to their noblest men. It was needful for the completeness of His humanity that He should have this experience of common human life; and the singular humbleness of the lot which He thus assumed is in keeping with the no less singular silence regarding its details in the word of God. The voice which came from the Father at the baptism

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

was the testimony of Heaven to the perfect purity and stainless character of these by-past years of toil, meeting the personal testimony of John, "I have need to be baptized of Thee." Jesus had been tested, and is now approved in the region of private life; He knew and bore and experienced this daily life of labour. And one remembrance that ever comes back to us out of the unrecorded details of His life is the knowledge that He found Himself as near to God throughout it all as in the solemn hours that followed.

But now He was to enter on the special work for which He had become incarnate; from henceforth He was not merely a carpenter and the son of a carpenter; not merely the Child of Mary and the cousin of John, but the Messiah, as standing openly before God on behalf of men, to bear their burden, to suffer their penalty, and to win them to God. He begins by identifying Himself with them and taking their place at Jordan. He who had no

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

sin of His own takes the place of His people in baptism, occupies for a time the position of a sinner, and submits to be baptized. In order to furnish Him for the ministry which has now begun, the Holy Spirit descends upon Him and abides in fulness, permeating His entire being, so that every word and work done by Him in time to come is done in the power of the Holy Ghost.

The second and third interviews of John with Jesus take place, as has been said already, after the temptation in the wilderness is over. Jesus returns in the power of the Spirit, and on His way to Galilee visits John, who is still surrounded with his many disciples, and is baptizing. John descries Him in the crowd. What is most singular in the interview is, that there is no record of any speech between the two. But John "seeth Jesus coming unto him and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (St. John i. 29). Again, the next

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

day John sees Him again in the crowd, and turning to two disciples who were standing with him, points with his finger to Jesus as He walks, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God" (St. John i. 35, 36).

One of the two was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother; the other, who is not named, we gather to be John the Evangelist, son of Zebedee. They leave the Baptist and quietly follow the footsteps of Jesus as He walks. He then, apparently having left the crowd, turns and asks them why they are following, and they, apparently taken somewhat aback at the question, reply by asking Him where He is lodging. It is the Lord's method of opening an important conversation with them. He invites them to come with Him and see; they accept the invitation, and go along with Him, conversing on the way. Entering the humble house where for the time He has His dwelling, they continue in fellowship with Him, sweet, though unrecorded, till it is too late to

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

leave, and they are asked to pass the night beneath His roof. It is most strange that we do not learn whether the Baptist himself visited Jesus that evening and took part in the holy converse; but it is a symbol of his whole life and work that he pointed these disciples away from himself unto Christ. He had been the voice in the wilderness, and now he is the finger-post to point to Jesus.

Just before these later interviews a remarkable event had taken place in the life of John. Stirred by the marvels of his life and ministry, the priests and Levites in Jerusalem had sent to him a formal deputation of their own number to ask for a public declaration of his position and claims. No such event occurs in the history of any of the Hebrew prophets. The position of Moses on going to meet Pharaoh is the only one that can be compared with it. The question which the deputies asked John was whether he claimed to be the Messiah. In a manner

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

as solemn as their question his answer is recorded: "John confessed, and denied not; and he confessed, *I am not the Christ.*" They then asked whether he were Elijah; and to that question he also answered, No. They asked again whether he were the prophet, possibly meaning Jeremiah¹ (see St. Matt. xvi. 14), who was then expected by the Jews to return, but again he answered, No. They asked him then to tell them in so many words what he claimed to be, that they might report it to the Sanhedrin. He answered that he claimed to be the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet." They then challenged him on the subject of baptism, which was obviously a great perplexity to them all, asking what it meant and by what authority he did it.

¹ So most commentators. But it is worth considering whether "the Prophet like unto Moses" (Deut. xviii. 18) is not meant.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

The answer made to this inquiry does not attempt to justify or even to explain his own position, save to state that it is that of a forerunner only. He compares himself to One who is already among them, whom they do not recognize, and indicates that it is in preparation for His higher and more spiritual work that he is baptizing men. And in doing so he takes the opportunity of giving a further and remarkable testimony to Christ: "I baptize with water; in the midst of you standeth One whom ye know not, even He that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose" (St. John i. 26). The meaning of the declaration will be considered in the next chapter.



Cap 6 *HIS LATER TEACHING*

“It abode upon Him.”—ST. JOHN i. 32.

THOUGH the whole ministry of the Baptist did not probably exceed six months, yet there is a great and manifest advance from his earlier teaching, which has been already considered, to that which was given by him in the later months of his ministry. The difference is, indeed, a very remarkable one, and what at once enhances and explains it is the fact that the difference is traceable to what occurred at the baptism of Jesus. From that day it is no longer repentance, confession, and baptism which form the burden of John's addresses. His later teaching turns entirely upon Jesus the Christ.

To begin with (and the remark is ap-

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

plicable both to the earlier and the later addresses), what the Baptist did not teach is almost as striking as what he did. What shall we say to the fact that, while dwelling so much upon sin and upon duty, he never directly refers to the law of Moses? What shall we say to the further fact that he, priest as he was, makes no reference whatever to any of the sacrifices of the Law? What shall we say to the fact that, though leading his disciples to fast, he makes no allusion to the great fast on the Day of Atonement? What shall we say to the fact that, in the remains of his teaching which we possess there is not so much as an allusion (by name at least) to the precious volume of inspiration of which we can see he made personally so much use? These questions present a problem, almost a riddle, demanding some solution, and pointing to some great truth behind. The solution which I venture to offer is threefold. On the one hand, I take it to mean that he

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

was gifted with the more than prophetic insight which enabled him to see the substance of the truth which lay behind all the preparatory shadows of the Law ; on the other hand, his eye had become so fixed upon the person of Christ, first in prospect and then in advent, first as expected and then as having come, that everything else disappeared in that light ; and, thirdly, he occupied an entirely intermediate position between the two dispensations, belonging actually to neither of them, but preparing the way from the one to the other. Whatever may be said of the solution, the facts remain, forming one of the most notable characteristics of the teaching of John.

As regards his positive teaching after the baptism of Jesus, it partakes almost entirely of the character of testimony to Christ. The first part of his career is that of the forerunner who prepared the way ; the second is that of the witness who gave testimony to the great Light which had come into the world.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

1. The Baptist then seized and set forth fully the *spiritual character* of Messiah's mission. Looking back on the Old Testament prophecies, it is not easy even for us to say what they indicate as the special object which the Messiah was to accomplish. We can see the two lines of prophecy, one, represented by the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and the ninth chapter of Daniel, setting forth that He was to suffer and die in connection with sin; the other, represented by many passages in Isaiah and the Psalms, setting forth His royal state and government; but it is evident to all who think upon these statements how difficult it must have been beforehand to define what the Messiah was to be and to do when He came. Indeed, it could not have been defined by any human wisdom. But John, enlightened by that Holy Spirit of whom he was also to testify, at once seized on and preached the cardinal doctrine that Messiah's mission was a spiritual one, and that a man's preparation for it was to become personally right with God.

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

It is from this point onwards that the wonderful inspiration of God in the Baptist leads him to set forth, with a clearness quite amazing, most of the leading doctrines of the Gospel. While John and Peter were still fishermen in Galilee, the Baptist was already preaching almost all that is vital in the Gospel of the one and the epistles of both.

2. How clear and unmistakable, for instance, is his testimony to *the dignity, the pre-existence, and even the Deity* of Christ. "Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose"—*there* is His mysterious dignity. He was so great a Master that John was not worthy to become His household slave! "After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me, for He was before me" (St. John i. 30); again "He cometh from above," and "He that cometh from heaven is above all" (St. John iii. 31). These statements anticipate Paul's—"Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor" (2 Cor. viii. 9); and they occupy the very ground of our Lord's own

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

saying, which so startled the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I am" (St. John viii. 38). If we ask how John could have seen beforehand such a truth, the answer is, By the illumination of the Holy Spirit alone. But that illumination seems to have used two passages in the Old Testament: "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Angel of the covenant, whom ye delight in" (Mal. iii. 1, R.V. margin), a passage which implies that He had pre-existed long before His earthly appearance. The other passage is in Isaiah (ix. 6), where the Child who is to be born is also called "the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace." At all events, John's testimony to the pre-existence of Christ is direct, precise, and unmistakable.

Nor should there be any doubt that the testimony given by John after the baptism of Jesus conveys his belief in the Divinity of Him who had come as Messiah: "I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (St. John i. 34),

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

that is *the* Son, not one of many, the only One, the "only-begotten of the Father."

3. We come next to what is perhaps the most remarkable, though the most simple, of all the utterances of the Baptist "He seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (St. John i. 29). It is vain to attempt to limit the meaning of these words to the personal character and purity of Jesus. There might have been some force in such an attempt had the first part of the declaration not been followed by the second, had Jesus been pointed out only as the "Lamb of God." But the conclusion of the statement throws a clear light on the meaning of the early portion of it, as unquestionably pointing to the sacrificial character of the Lamb. Only in that capacity could it be said that He taketh away the sin (or, as the R.V. margin gives it, beareth the sin) of the world. The Lamb, God's Lamb, God's Lamb that taketh away sin, could have to the Jews

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

who listened only one meaning, especially as spoken by a priest. They at once recall such words as those used of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, "The goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land" (Lev. xvi. 22), and also such words as Isaiah spoke of the Messiah, "He humbled Himself . . . as a lamb that is led to the slaughter," (Isa. liii. 7); "We did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, but He was wounded for our transgressions; He bare the sin of many" (vers. 4, 5, 12). It was inevitable that the young priest should regard the priestly side of Divine truths everywhere in the world, and thus intend a precise and definite meaning in such words used by him.

Nor is it without force that he so designates Jesus as the Lamb after the position has been accepted by public baptism, when He was, so to speak, "set apart" as the Lamb for the Passover. According to the direction (Exod. xii. 3, 6), four days before the Passover the lamb was to be

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

set apart in the house. We have here, then, the death of Christ and atonement by means of His blood preached by John ere the Master had called a single disciple. "It is the blood that maketh atonement" (Lev. xvii. 11); and the descendant of the house of Aaron points out the "Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." The first theme of John's later preaching was *Calvary*.

4. This brings us to another part of the later teaching of the Baptist, which we must not pass altogether without notice. It is the clear conception which John seems to have gained of the doctrine of the Trinity. At the baptism of Jesus this doctrine is first fully unfolded for us in Scripture, and perhaps nowhere is it more simply or more fully set forth. Yet what *we* read of John saw and heard! The heavenly voice declared Jesus to be the Son of God—"My beloved Son." And John entered at once into the meaning of the truth so revealed: "I beheld and bare witness that this is the Son of

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

God" (St. John i. 34). We know what the Jews thought of this title: "Say ye of Him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, *Thou blasphemest*, because I said, I am the Son of God?" (St. John x. 36). This, too, was the climax of the disciples' faith; this was Martha's confidence (St. John xi. 27); and this was Peter's confession (St. Matt. xvi. 17), which "flesh and blood" had not taught, but which the Father had revealed to him. Long before, John had testified what Peter had thus learnt; and he had done so surely in the sense which the Jews attached to the words.

And as the Father and Son were revealed to him, so the descent of the Holy Spirit is clearly seen by him. "The bodily shape" which the unseen Spirit of God had assumed was only the outward manifestation of Him who was one with Father and with the Son. The third note of John's later teaching, then, was *the truth of the Holy Trinity*.

5. And, once more, perhaps the most

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

wonderful item of all the truth which fell from the lips of the Baptist is that which still remains to be noticed. A special revelation had come to him, appointing a sign by which he should recognize the Messiah and know one of His chief functions. (“He that sent me to baptize with water, He said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit”) (St. John i. 33). There is no doubt that this is the word of the Baptist himself. In what sense did he understand his own words? No doubt, the key is to be found in the rite which John himself observed. He “baptized with water”; he did symbolically what Jesus was to do in reality. He set forth in type the need of purification, and how it was to be done. But the power to do for the soul of man what water does for the body lay with the Holy Ghost. And the gift of Him who possessed that power lay with Jesus

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

Christ. No other sense can be put upon John's words. And John recognized that the gift of the Spirit to Him "without measure" (St. John iii. 34) was a preliminary to His baptizing others. This may be called the highest and deepest truth committed to John the Baptist as a teacher. It was utterly unknown to the Apostles till the day of Pentecost. And the reason may be that they only then received that gift which John possessed all his life. He knew what it meant, because he had it. No man knows it till then. John stands alone in all previous history in knowing this. Perhaps he only of the men of Scripture sees that this is the crowning characteristic of the work of Messiah. Even now the Church of Christ hardly knows what is meant; is disputing over it, because it does not practically possess it. John preached not only *Calvary*, and *faith*, and *the Holy Trinity*: he preached also PENTECOST, and the relation of Jesus Christ to the wondrous gift then bestowed



Cap 7

JOHN'S IMPRISONMENT

“In kings’ houses.”—ST. MATT. xi. 8.

IT is difficult to realize—and probably few do so—that the whole ministry of John occupied only a few months in all, and had practically closed when the public ministry of Jesus Christ began. St. Matthew tells us (iv. 12, 17) that Jesus did not go into Galilee nor begin to preach till He had heard of John’s imprisonment. St. Mark (i. 14) says that it was after John was put in prison that Jesus came into Galilee. St. John (iii. 23, 24) apparently means that after the miracle at Cana Jesus was at Jordan with certain disciples baptizing those who came to Him, that the numbers who were at-

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

tracted to Him were even greater than had gone to the Baptist, and that this took place before the imprisonment of the latter. From these various statements put together, we gather that Matthew and Mark are speaking of the Galilean ministry of Christ in general, while John is referring to the single visit to Cana. At all events, the ministry of John, as we have said, practically closed as the ministry of Christ began. The work of the forerunner ended when the Master Himself appeared. We are thus enabled to say how long John preached. He was six months older than Christ. By the Law priests were not allowed to officiate in public till thirty years of age. The Lord began (St. Luke iv. 1) when He was thirty. So that John's whole ministry lasted only for six months. At the close of this period there was one man who had not been able to join the crowds at the Jordan, but whose longing to hear the preacher could no longer be resisted. It was Herod the

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

Tetrarch himself (St. Mark vi. 20). Living in great state and luxury, which he had imported from Rome, and generally to be found at Tiberias, on the lake of Galilee, not far from one of the sites where John is supposed to have preached, he sent for the Baptist, that he might see and hear him. He had already "observed him," and was satisfied that he was "a just man and a holy"; and having a general knowledge of the subject of his preaching, he sent for him to the palace. We naturally, I think, ask, Was Herod not afraid to take such a step? Were his house so well ordered, and his conscience so clear, that he could welcome the sermon of a prophet of God? But rulers have easy consciences for the most part, for they know that court preachers seldom speak the language of rebuke.

So for the first time, though not a man "clad in soft clothing," the Baptist is in a "king's palace." In the large hall, usually devoted to banquets, dances, etc., he

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

speaks to the motley crowd. There sit the Tetrarch, the princess, and her daughter, there are courtiers, ladies, pages, nobles, soldiers, and servants; they expect to hear John's most eloquent sermon. And they seem to hear it. For a time all goes well. Sin is denounced; conscience is put at the bar; repentance is urged; the willingness of God to forgive is made known; nay, the kingdom of heaven is at the very door! Every one is thrilled. It is solemn preaching. The court listens in awe. And Herod the Tetrarch, too—"he heard him gladly."

Yes, but John's sermon is not yet done. He has been speaking of sin in general and the sin of various classes of men. He has now something more to say. He turns to Herod himself; and, personally addressing him, asks aloud who is that sitting by his side in the gilded chair upon his left hand. It is Herodias, his wife. *His wife?* Nay, his brother's wife—his brother's, who is living

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

not far away, from whom this woman eloped to live with Herod the Tetrarch! John pointed to her, and said, It is not lawful for thee or for her! That is thy sin! She must go back!

The meeting instantly broke up. What! insult the princess and her daughter before the court! Does the preacher dare do such a thing in such a presence? Yes, for that was God's message; John was only a voice to speak it. If he were brought into that palace, it was to tell the truth, to rebuke sin, and to be faithful both to his Master and to men. The sermon comes to a sudden termination; Herod and his family instantly leave the hall; and John is left in the company of the guard, a prisoner.

As might be expected, John's personal rebuke of the Tetrarch resulted in his immediate imprisonment; but the position seems to have been a very complicated one, and it was made more so by the contradictory elements found in the character

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

of Herod. Fear of the multitude, on the one hand (St. Matt. xiv. 5), influenced him largely; for John was regarded by them as a prophet. A superstitious fear seems also to have been at work within him, leading him to shelter his prisoner from the immediate vengeance of Herodias (St. Mark vi. 10). Incredible as it might seem did we not know the strange workings of a sinful soul, he sent more than once for John to come out from his prison to speak to him. He heard him again¹ even "gladly," and "did many things," if that be the right translation of the phrase; meaning that there were many minor things which he was ready to correct or to abandon, though he could not face the full repentance which God and His prophet demanded. Possibly even

¹ I confess, however, that, notwithstanding the apparent authority of the R. V., I am inclined to take St. Mark vi. 20 as referring to a period before the imprisonment of John, and meaning that Herod had more than once heard him before his open rebuke.

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

Herodias feared that he might some day be induced to take that final step!

I suppose that many in the present day will take the part of Herodias, judging that that was neither the time nor place to remonstrate. As if any time or place were fitting in their eyes for a poor preacher to do that! But God's prophets, men like the Baptist and men like the Reformers (have we any like them still?) have their own views of faithfulness and duty, to which they are prepared to adhere and for which they are willing to suffer.

The scene of his imprisonment (as Josephus tells us) was a castle called Machærus, on the east side of the Dead Sea. It was another of the palaces of Herod, given him by the father of his first wife, King Aretas, in Arabia, and a favourite residence, occupying the flat top of a prominent hill, looking far west over Jerusalem and Judæa. There, for a time in comparatively easy bondage, he was

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

permitted to see friends, to hear news from the outside, and to send messages to whom he would. Had Herod at first had his way when his passion boiled over, John's life had been the forfeit. "Herod, when he would have put him to death, feared the multitude, for they counted John as a prophet" (St. Matt. xiv. 5). He was crafty and cautious, this "fox," as Jesus called him (St. Luke xiii. 32). And so he kept John in bonds.

Silence falls for a time over the prison-house. In the Old Testament we are permitted to enter the prison of Joseph and learn many lessons there, without which the Bible would be the poorer; and even the days spent by Jeremiah in his dungeon are not without a record. So in the New Testament we see the interior of a Philippian gaol, and how an apostle and his friend spend there a midnight hour; and from the damp Mamertine dungeon at Rome we hear a suggestive request in view of winter

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

and its cold. But of the Baptist's prison at Machærus there is nothing said. The solitude of the cell was less than that of the "deserts," where of his own accord he had lived so long. He had with him the companionship of a good conscience. But this silence came after busy months of labour and of testimony. The strong man, whose soul was full of the truth of God and of burning words, had lost his opportunities of usefulness. He had lost them for ever; his work was over. God needed him no more. In all the compass of Holy Writ, I know no one who could so fully take home the humbling and salutary truth. But to the enforced silence and uselessness his eager spirit must have submitted with a double pang. He who had rendered such noble service among the crowds was now to be taught the harder and higher lesson of being still and patient in spirit before the Lord.



Cap 8

HIS DOUBT

“Art Thou He?”—ST. MATT. xi. 3.

TO the silence of the dungeon at Machærus there is an exception. We hear of it once again before the end. How long has passed we are not certain, one year, possibly two. John has been all but forgotten by the fluctuating crowd. During a busy season, after sending out the seventy disciples, the Lord receives a message from the Baptist. “John had heard in the prison the works of Christ” (St. Matt. xi. 2). Some disciples had been permitted to enter, and they told him the wonderful story of what was going on in Galilee and in Judæa. What passed in the soul of John as he listened we can only conjecture. No doubt the past would come

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

very vividly back to him, the far past as well as that which was more recent : the past of his mother's stories and his father's song, the past of the open heaven and the audible voice ; the past of his own testimony, his own courage, his own faith, his own expectation. Then there must have risen in his soul with bitterness the thought of his present uselessness : "Seventy disciples sent out to preach in the highways ; and I left alone, unworthy to tell that Messiah has come ! Did I not hear of that sermon at Nazareth where He said that He had come to 'open the prison-doors to them that are bound' ? Yet my prison-doors have not yet opened. Has He forgotten that John the Baptist lives ? Many months have passed since He undertook the position of the Saviour of men and of the hope of Israel. Can I have made a mistake ? Is it after all possible that He is not the expected One but only a forerunner and a prophet like myself ?"

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

But the broken soliloquies of an imprisoned man who can conceive or recount? They are the deeper and the darker in proportion as the fire and energy burn strong within; and they are between the soul and God. This only we know, that John can contain himself no longer; the silence is broken at last, and two of these disciples go seeking for Jesus with a message. "John the Baptist hath sent us unto Thee, saying, Art Thou He that cometh, or look we for another?" (St. Luke vii. 20.) It was a question of doubt and darkness, well fitted to discourage, if that were possible, Jesus of Nazareth Himself. He seems to have received it at first in silence. "In that hour," says St. Luke, continuing the narrative, "He cured many of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and on many that were blind He bestowed sight." It is as if the Lord had plunged more deeply into work to hide His disappointment, while the two messengers joined the

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

twelve, and mutely followed His steps. It seems as if He had relieved His heart by opening more widely the floodgates of His love and mercy. Miracle after miracle was done that day, as if the goings forth of His power were a rest unto His soul. And then, when the day's work was over, and the quiet of the evening fell, He turned to the two astonished messengers and said, "Go back and tell John the things ye have seen to-day: the miracles of power and mercy, the healing of the deaf, the raising of the dead, and the good news of the Gospel preached to the poor. And add" He said, "this word—John will understand it—'Blessed is he whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in Me'" (ver. 23).

The message in one view seemed to add to the difficulty rather than to lessen it. John's real difficulty had been why he was left. The power of miracles was not entrusted to him, else, no doubt, like Peter, his prison-door had opened to let

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

him free. And to hear that Jesus was so prodigal of miracle that every needy one who sought his feet was healed seemed but to make it the harder and more mysterious that none could be done for John.

But the answer sent was *the offer of a blessing*, if the Baptist were able to receive it: "Blessed is he." It was the blessing of the man who trusts and is not offended. How many truths of deep and ever-living meaning are contained in the short word. There is, first, the implied truth that no one could foretell the manner of Messiah's working. God cannot be anticipated, least of all in His deep spiritual doings.

Secondly, there is the undisputed sovereignty of God in all His ways. It must be unquestioned of all, and especially of all His workers. It is almost the fundamental truth for every one who, knowing God, would do His best work.

There is, thirdly, the wonderful fulfil-

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

ment of Old Testament prophecy in Isa. xxxv. 5 : "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped ; then shall the lame man leap as the hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." And the Lord's work had gone beyond the tenor of the prophecy ; for lepers had been cleansed, and the dead had been raised. The two disciples must have heard of what had taken place at Nain, must have met many who had been present ; possibly they had seen the young man who had been raised from his bier, for part of the message was, "The dead are raised up." And John, who knew so well the prophecy of Isaiah, "Say to them that are of a fearful heart" (or, as the margin gives it, "of a *hasty* heart"), would recognize that he had his answer in the prophet's olden word.

But, fourthly, the answer of the Lord meant more. He continually appealed to

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

His miracles as proof of His Divine mission. "Many believed on His name when they saw the miracles which He did" (St. John ii. 23), and John, who himself did none, would understand the teaching.

Fifthly, another testimony was to be found in preaching to the poor the Gospel of God's love and of man's salvation. It was the fulfilment of Isaiah's other word, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek" (margin, the *poor*) (Isa. lxi. 1). Not the truth without miracles, nor miracles without the truth; the Lord showed Himself by means of both. And the power of the sign was shown in order that the truth might reach the hearts of men.

But, sixthly, perhaps the most important part of the message is Christ's appeal to John to trust Him. Here He offers a blessing to those who, being tried, are not offended. There is much temptation to be offended; there is suffering often to

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

be endured for His sake ; there is shame in the sight of men ; there is the imputation of folly ; there is our utter failure to understand the meaning of God's mysterious ways. His methods often seem contrary to those of worldly wisdom. And when men endure and lose all for Him, it is trying far beyond description to suppose that He has forgotten them. But this very trial and the darkness of it are a great part of their best discipline. The finer the gold, the longer it is kept in the purifying flame ; the larger the soul, the more difficult the task ; the more advanced the scholar, the more complicated the lesson. He who is to become a martyr has much to learn before. John could not have stood where he is to-day had he not learned this lesson too, how to suffer, be still, and murmur not at God. One of the last things we submit to God is the intellect which questions ; it often lags behind the will which is given to God. And so submission is blessing as well as

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

wisdom. We never know what is in God for us till we have put the last treasure into His hands. The Baptist was to learn that his dungeon and his darkness were the crowning mercy here, the last test of faith, the last touch of fire upon the soul. He was nearly ready now. "Blessed is he"—the Baptist, his disciples, we also, every soul—"whosoever shall not be offended in Me."



Cap 9

HIS MARTYRDOM

“Give me the head of John.”—ST. MARK vi. 25.

AT the age of thirty years the work of John was over, and his life about to close. Not unfrequently have the tyrants of this world made the lives of men the playthings of passion; but seldom has a miserable lordling had such a stake to play for and such a jewel to fling into the ditch as Herod of Galilee.

It was his birthday (or perhaps his accession day) that became the occasion of the crime. Residing for the time at his southern palace, the “black fortress” of Machærus, Herod assembled the noblemen, military officers, and chief men of his province at one of those banquets

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

which he had learned so well how to celebrate when sojourning in Rome. The Emperor Tiberius, who was then on the throne, spent much of his fortune, and still more of his time, in those ungodly revels which history has made famous. Mere animal luxury and refined appetite then reached their climacteric, and men exhausted the sources of wealth and power in solving the problem whether such things could make them happy. Herod had been a courtier of the baser sort in the halls of the Palatinate, and it was such a banquet as he had seen at his imperial master's table that he now spread before the astonished captains of Galilee. The hall was hung with flowers, the music throbbed from time to time throughout the feast, the strong wines of Italy and Cyprus were not spared, and songs and ribald laughter filled up the intervals. It was a company of *men*, for at that time no women were permitted to sit down at the table.

But when the feast itself was over, there

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

had been introduced the custom of seeing women dance. In mimetic performances without words well-known mythological stories were represented by professional dancers. Here, in Herod's palace, there entered, amid the heated and noisy company, Salome, the daughter of Herodias, then, or shortly to be, the wife of one of Herod's brothers; and she, violating every rule of the day, alone, with garland and flowers, to the sound of a pipe, danced before them all. Herod himself, in his drunken state, was delighted beyond measure, and stammered out a promise to give her anything she might ask—yes, he repeated, with an oath, to give her whatever she might ask, were it "half of his kingdom." She glided out of the chamber to again consult her mother, and returning amid the noisy applause of the guests, begged that she might receive at once, without any delay, "the head of John the Baptist," served upon a dish. The plot had been arranged beforehand; the

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

daughter waived her own opportunity to gratify her mother's vengeance against the hated prophet of Jordan. "Give me the head of John the Baptist."

The request sobered Herod in a moment. The laugh of the guests died away when they saw his face whitened with emotion as he clenched his hand and shrank back in his chair. What! the head of John, the son of Zacharias? Yes; Herodias and her daughter will take nothing else!

Was it conscience that smote him then with still power enough to make him tremble, though not to bar the way of sin? This weak and passionate ruler had in all his miserable life heard only one voice that touched something in the depths of his soul and opened up a vision of what might have been; and this was the voice of the man whom he was doomed to slay. But one string was left upon the broken harp of life which had been made to sound God's praises; and that string

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

vibrated only to the words of the preacher of Jordan. He was the only man Herod respected, the only man whom, in the better sense, he *feared*; and it was he whom the wretched girl forced him to destroy!

For, like a wild beast, he was taken in the toils. Sin had cast its net round him; Satan and these women held him fast. He feared his oath; he feared his captains; he was a coward at heart: and between the two fears—the fear of conscience and the fear of man—he gave way. The order was passed to the governor of the castle that Salome should have her ghastly dish to crown his anniversary feast.

Into the dungeon itself and the scene transacted there the sacred writers give no glimpse. With its usual reticence as to deathbed scenes, Scripture tells us nothing. The event is left in silence. Yet who can refrain from picturing to himself something of what took place? In such

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

strong men as John, the tide of life flows full ; and in him there was strength yet unexpended, power of work, possibility of service, both for man and God. Very darkly the mystery had already fallen round him, and the whisper came that probably his time was over and his last message given. He had learned the lesson of humility before ; now he had to learn submission. God waited till that was taught ; there was no further need for delay. And so on that spring night, when the early shadows fell deep on the prison floor ; at an unaccustomed hour, the door of the cell opened to admit, not only the usual guard, but a darker stranger by his side. There was not much more time than just to look death in the face ; a few minutes measured at once the shock of surprise and the pain of the keen-cutting sword ; and he who had been schooling his heart to say, " Even so," to God's will, knelt among angels, who welcomed one greater than themselves. The passage was

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

short, if dark, and it opened like a door into that heavenly glory for which the earthly sunset was exchanged. Perhaps Herod suffered as much as John in that short half-hour.

But Salome and the guests are waiting in constrained silence; "the king's command required haste." The last dish appears at the feast; John the Baptist's head is brought on its silver platter and handed to the damsel. She took up the charger and brought it to her mother. Mother and daughter in their private chamber regaled themselves with the awful sight, the nerves hardly still and the eyes open in death. Dare they look upon it? It was their doing; they had their wish. Were they—and is any sinner—*satisfied* when the deed of sin was done?

Certain disciples of John who still lingered about his prison heard the sad news, and with bold hearts, but reverent hands, they wrapped up the poor remains of what was yesterday their master, buried

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

them on the slope of that eastern hill, and then with burdened spirits went, where all mourners should go, to tell Jesus. Perhaps they were the same who had but lately come with the Baptist's message; now in their sorrow they remembered how the one teaching of John from the beginning was, "I am not He, but He standeth among you." Doubtless they found from that hour another Master.

They came and told Jesus. He knew it already, and we are not told what He said. Sorrow for John He scarcely could. Could any of us grieve for the holy dead if we knew the exchange they have made, if we heard the song they are singing, and saw the sights they are seeing? What must the Lord have thought of the Baptist's change? Thou hast finished the course, and kept the faith; the kingdom of heaven after all was nearer than thou didst know.

And Herod? Well, I think next morn-

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

ing Herod was neither proud nor happy. He had provided another sting for conscience, another blot on memory, another thorn for his pillow, another terror for death. Afterwards, when the fame of Jesus and of His wonderful miracles spread abroad, some said, "It is Elias"; others said, "It is Jeremiah"; others again said, "a new prophet had come"; but Herod, when he heard, said, "No; *it is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.*" And, like a wraith in the night, that thought followed Herod as long as he lived.



Cap IO

HIS CHARACTER AND POSITION

“There hath not arisen a greater.”

—ST. MATT. xi. II.

THE personal characteristics of the Baptist have necessarily been frequently referred to in the preceding pages. His fearlessness we have seen in the sermon which cost him his liberty and then his life; his force was seen in the influence which shook the nation and remained long after he had passed away; his zeal was like a fire burning in his bones. “What went ye out for to see? a reed shaken by the wind?” Was this a man driven to and fro by every wind of doctrine, looking for the verdict or the applause of men? Verily, no. “But what went ye out for to see? a man clothed

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses." Was John the type of the self-indulgent priest, preaching a gospel which he did not practise, seeking to reach eternal life without privation or sacrifice? Not so. "But what went ye out for to see? a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet"—"a prophet," for he had a Divine message for the whole world; "more than a prophet," for not only did he foresee the Lord like Abraham and David, but, like John the Apostle, he could say, "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon; and our hands have handled, of the Word of life declare we unto you" (1 John i. 1).

Yet from such things in John we turn to one other characteristic in which he excels all men in Holy Writ—I mean his wonderful humility; for the humility of such a man, a man of such power, influence, and character, is the rarest of

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

human qualities. But for its measure and manifestation in John we must have recourse to the words of Paul. "He reckoned himself dead indeed"; he "bore about in his body a continual dying"; he "bore in his body the marks" (the *stigmata*) "of the Lord Jesus." He was the body-slave—nay, he was not worthy to be the body-slave—of Jesus Christ. His joy was not only to point to Jesus, but to point away from himself to Him. He had to preach not only Christ's greatness, but his own littleness, in order that men might understand the other. He was not content to say, "He must increase," but must add, "and I must decrease." When asked by the deputation from the Pharisees who he was, his answer was, "A voice," a message, nay, not a message, but only the sound which carried it. When the Carpenter of Nazareth stood before him, he said, "I have need to be baptized of Thee," but he must add, "and comest Thou to *me*?" as

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

if he were the last that Christ should come to. When two of his disciples were standing to listen to him, one of them Andrew of Bethsaida (known in these later days as the St. Andrew of Scotland), the other John son of Zebedee (known since to the world as John the beloved disciple of Patmos), the Baptist bade them turn from himself and go with Jesus. The greatest man in Palestine, in public estimation stronger than Pilate or Herod, more followed than high-priest or rabbi, wished only to be nobody, and felt that he was nothing. And was all this very bitter to him, a constant grief, an inward anguish? Nay! Speaking in a parable (before Jesus did so), he pictures a marriage-feast, the rejoicing company, the veiled bride; he draws his own portrait there; and he is not a man of tears, to mar the gathering by untimely sorrow: he too is full of joy. The joy of the Baptist is to stand near Jesus the Bridegroom and to hear Him speak.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

All this has one explanation, and only one. He had seen for himself the *glory of Jesus*. He had seen it in the purity and sweetness of His human character, but that was not enough. God opened his eye afterwards to see the glory of Jesus as the Son of God, to see Him as the Lamb that taketh away sin, to see Him as the Giver of the Holy Ghost. That sight was enough to dwarf every human claim and condemn every human excellence. It was the story of Job repeated in a higher fashion : “ I had heard of Thee, . . . but now mine eye seeth Thee.” That was enough. Self was nothing ; self was dead. John was dead to sin and to self, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. It is still the only secret of self-death and of the new life.

“ Yet he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” So then John did not himself enter the kingdom. He heralded it ; he blew the trumpet ; he came up to the gate ; he saw the King ; but it

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

was not permitted him to pass over the threshold, and to partake of the special privileges of those who are part of the body of Christ. The mere difference in knowledge is great—to have seen or read of Calvary, and to understand what it means. To have been at Pentecost, to possess and to enjoy now the outpouring and the fulness of the Holy Ghost, and to see what is meant by this provision for the world—these are things which were impossible till the hour had come. Had John lived for three years more, even had he been a prisoner all the time, his position then had been quite a different one, even as the position he did hold was different from that of Isaiah. But to every man there is his own blessing. “That one and the self-same Spirit divideth to every man severally as He will.” And none of us dare say that the will of God is not good; least of all would *he* say it who thought himself not worthy to tie the latchet of his Master. And how much

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

less we, who, being "in the kingdom," have a higher post both of service and reward than John himself!

His was a short but noble life. "Through faith and patience he has inherited the promises." And over that life there sounds, above all, the strange benediction sent to him in prison: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me."



THE SOURCES AND THE
INFLUENCE OF HIS
TEACHING

Cap I I

“*Was it from heaven?*”—ST. LUKE xx. 4.

BEFORE closing these pages we must say a few words as to the sources of the Baptist's teaching, so far as these can be traced in the Old Testament, and also as to the influence which it exerted over the writers of the New.

The record of John's life and labours occupies about 194 verses in the four Evangelists (in Matthew, forty-seven; in Mark, twenty-eight; in Luke, eighty-five; and in John, thirty-four). Of these only about thirty report his words; and hardly more than half of these give us distinct and separate utterances, the others being parallel

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

passages in the different writers. Yet in these eighteen or twenty verses we trace something more than fifty references to Old Testament statements, either in substance or form or both. In some, indeed in most, instances, the connection is distinct and unmistakable. Of these more than forty are from the three prophets Isaiah, Malachi, and Jeremiah.

About twenty passages from the book of Isaiah are to be found giving colour to John's utterances. The name by which he calls the evil nation recalls the *vipers* of Isa. lix. 5; the "fleeing" from "the wrath to come" has in view Isa. x. 3; the "fruits meet for repentance" remind the reader of Isa. iii. 10; the consolation felt in being children of Abraham is but the repetition of Isa. lxiii. 16; the need of purging in baptism is a different form of the "Wash you, make you clean," of Isa. i. 16; the fan and the threshing-floor are echoes of Isa. xli. 16 and many other passages of the prophet; the axe

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

laid to the root of the trees recalls the awful denunciations of Isa. xiv. ; the warnings against exaction, and oppression, and false fasting, remind us of Isa. lviii. 6, 7 ; the Lamb that taketh away sin is referred to in Isa. liii. 7, 11 ; the Spirit "remaining" is found in Isa. xi. 2 ; the "Bridegroom" of the Church is in Isa. lxii. Of the verses which comprise the sayings of the Baptist, I have quoted eleven which bear marked traces of the study of Isaiah.

But the influence is almost as strong in the case of Jeremiah ; he too is suggested at every turn. Possibly the one prophet himself bears the impress of his more ancient brother, who flourished generations before him. But there is much more than this, for nothing can be more distinct than the spirit of Isaiah the fervid from that of Jeremiah the tender and sorrowful. And it is the spirit of each of them, even more than the words, that we find in the Baptist. The image of the fan is a favourite one

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

with Jeremiah, found more than once in his writings, and in xv. 7 it is employed exactly as John uses it: to signify the sifting of God's people. So the address, "O generation!" seems to have originated with Jeremiah (ii. 31). *Fruit*, as the outcome of life, and the name for it as distinguished from works, is found (xvii. 10; vi. 19; xxi. 14; xxxii. 19). The "axe being laid to the root of the tree, which is hewn down and cast into the fire," was applied by Jeremiah to the unprofitable in Israel (vii. 20; xi. 16, 19). So, too, the wonderful thought of God as the Husband of Israel is found in ii. 23. And these similarities of thought and diction are not to be looked at only in themselves, but as placed in the setting of Jeremiah's position and character, who more than any other perhaps was the "man of sorrows" among the prophets of Israel, and lived in a rejection and a loneliness which came specially home to the Baptist John.

There is, however, another line of

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

thought which I must very shortly open up, somewhat similar to that which has occupied us in this chapter—I mean the influence exerted by the teaching of the Baptist on those who came after him, as recorded in the New Testament. And here we must tread with much reverence and caution, for the traces which we find most abundantly are *in the teachings of our blessed Lord Himself*. Of course the Lord could be indebted to no man, for He was the Teacher, and, through the Spirit, was Himself the Inspirer, of the Word. But there is another sense in which He may have used men to pave the way for His own teaching, enabling them to utter more imperfectly some aspects of the truths on which He was Himself to dwell. And this we find to be the case with John. He was made to prepare the way in this respect also, and no doubt this is the explanation of what we find in the Gospels.

Some of the images already noted as

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

suggested to John by Isaiah and Jeremiah are afterwards employed by the Lord. "The generation of vipers" is twice spoken of by Him (St. Matt. xii. 34 ; xxiii. 33) ; the "fruit" of the life is named by Him (St. Matt. vii. 16, 17), as it is also by St. Paul (Gal. v.) ; and "the branch that beareth not fruit" is to be "hewn down and cast into the fire" (St. John xv. 2, 6).

But there are other instances more precise and more striking.

1. It surely must count for something that the rite employed by John so prominently (though not for the first time) should be one which Jesus Christ afterwards instituted as one of the two sacramental signs in His Church. I am quite bearing in mind that He used it in a deeper and in a different sense, *but* He used it ! Already during His lifetime He had given directions to His disciples that they should baptize, which they had done largely and with great effect (St. John v. 1). This must have been a baptism of

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

repentance and purging, and it is the link between the rite of John and the sacrament of the Master.

2. In like manner the exhortation to repentance, both in the thought and in the word, must not escape our notice. With this, as has been referred to in a previous chapter, we are now so familiar that it is difficult not to find it in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Were it only the word *repentance*¹ used once in all the Septuagint, used in New Testament, I think, sixty-three times of man, eleven times being in St. Luke, and almost all of these by the Lord, we can see how John's opening trumpet-blast of warning has been perpetuated by our Lord for the benefit of men.

3. A third phrase or title which our Lord found in St. John's words, and was pleased to use Himself, is that of *the Bridegroom* of His Church, not coined

¹ The verb is used in Old Testament Greek twelve times of God and six times of man.

FORERUNNER AND MARTYR

by the Baptist, as we have seen already, but selected by him from the stores of Old Testament language, and immediately thereafter repeated by Christ (see St. Mark ii. 19; St. Matt. ix. 15, xxv. 1, 5, 6, 10; St. Luke v. 34).

4. So, too, the Baptism of the Spirit, the remarkable and peculiar phrase which John for the first time employed to denote the Pentecostal blessing, is the very name by which our Lord prefers to designate it in His closing interview with His apostles (Acts i. 5).

5. But of all the phrases and thoughts employed by John, and accepted by the Lord Jesus as a fitting expression of the great truths He desired to convey, the most important, undoubtedly, is that of the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God. It is, indeed, the characteristic phrase of the Lord, the name by which continually and prominently He speaks of that which He came to establish on the earth. It rang out, practically for the

JOHN: THE BAPTIST

first time, in the opening words of John : “ Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” In the Gospels alone the two phrases *kingdom of heaven* and *kingdom of God* occur no fewer than eighty-three times, almost always in the lips of the Lord Himself. And what adds to the wonder of it is that *after* His death and ascension the former disappears from the New Testament almost wholly, and the latter is but rarely found there. The whole subject is one of great interest ; and attention has of late been largely called to it. Here I can only point to its close connection with the teaching and the influence of John the Baptist.

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