

CHAPTER VII.

THE PATRIOTISM OF
THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

“The poet says, Dear city of Cecrops; shall I not say, Dear City of God?”—MARCUS AURELIUS.

“We are a Colony of heaven.”

—PHILIPP. iii. 20 (Moffatt's Translation).

“The Roman poet Horace calls death a departure ‘in eternum exilium’; Christians called it a return ‘in patriam’; all the difference between the two points of view is there.”—HOLLAND.

“But that which put glory of grace into all that He did, was, that He did it out of pure love to His Country.”

—BUNYAN, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

CHAPTER VII.

THE few pages which follow are designed rather as an epilogue than as an independent chapter. They will point to a region lying in strictness beyond the boundary of the subject already studied. They will invite the reader, without leaving the territory he has already explored, to climb to a view-point within the limits of that territory, and thence, like the prophet, to behold an inheritance in the distance whose effective occupation is the task of another day.

We have in earlier chapters been dealing with patriotism in its original form of love of an earthly country. We have recognised it in this primitive sphere as a divinely-implanted instinct, honourable in its origin, authoritative in its commands, and capable of forming an incomparable instrument of Christian service. We have concluded that the heart which does not catch fire at the bright blaze of patriotic ardour is hard to kindle, and remains the colder and poorer for its lack. But the question is not an idle one as to whether there may be

an absolute form of patriotism to which earthly patriotism is relative. Can the phrase "love of country" be caught up into any practical connection with the "Country" of which Christian poets have often sung, and with the "Celestial City" to which Christian pilgrims have often travelled? Can the expression be brought into useful association with such a term as that of the "Kingdom of Heaven"; with such a historic title as "The City of God"; or with lines so familiar to Christian worship as those which exclaim—

"O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God's elect"?

If Marcus Aurelius could say that "man is a citizen of that sublimest state of which all other states are as it were houses," may we not expect some louder reverberation of this idea in the streets of the city that hath foundations?

The moment we ask these questions, there leaps to mind one outstanding feature in the phraseology of the New Testament. This feature is the prominence in the teaching of Jesus of a word congenial with patriotic sentiment—the word **Kingdom**. Our Saviour spoke of God's Kingdom, not casually, nor once or twice, but persistently and with deliberate enlargement of the term. If there be a metaphor in the words "King" and "Kingdom," when applied to religious experience, the metaphor

is the great Teacher's own. We do well to follow a suggestion inherent in our Lord's own language. It is plain that in whatsoever respects the new Society ranks as a "Kingdom," in these same respects must there be room for a loyalty of its citizens which responds to the challenge of the term, and goes out in pride to the Kingdom and in devotion to the King. Such a patriotism will transcend but not exclude the patriotisms of earth. It will set these last in a just perspective, increase their usefulness by tracing their limits, and give their labours the guarantee of immortality.

The Kingdom of Heaven, as depicted in the teaching of Jesus, has many qualities which ought, in Calvin's phrase, to add no small excitement to us, if we rank ourselves among its loyal citizens. "Consider," said Milton to the rulers of England, "what nation it is whereof ye are and whereof ye are governors—a nation not beneath the reach of any point, the highest that human capacity can soar to." Christian men and women may gratefully brace themselves for a similar consideration in respect of the Kingdom of Heaven, with ampler warrant, a wider field, and an outlook not bounded by time. The teaching of Jesus about God's Kingdom is a rich and complex thing, and because of that inherent wealth the more congruous with the complexity of personal and national life. It

is not a merely "simple" teaching. Simple it is in its use, and offered to the immediate grasp of the most naïve obedience. But it is simple in the same sense as a key might fairly be called so, which turns easily in the lock because of a useful intricacy of pattern corresponding to the lock's many wards. The teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom is multiform, paradoxical, brimming over the confines of logic, and therefore answering all the better to life, to experience—to reality.

It cannot be denied that there is to-day a sharp spur of urgency pricking on Christendom towards the discovery of a "Patriotism" responsive to the call of the Kingdom of Heaven. The children of this world are often, in respect of the nurture of love of country, wiser than the children of light. They are well accustomed to ponder reflectively their country's greatness and thus to become intelligently aware of her vocation. They add fuel to the flame of patriotic ardour by individual and corporate meditation; and in the noblest instances they have achieved a fervour of patriotic zeal, and an intensity of patriotic sacrifice, which we have seen to form one of the wonders of human history. On the other hand, is there anything more sadly lacking in conventional Christianity than just a corresponding fervour of patriotic loyalty in response to our Lord's proclamation of the "Kingdom"? Is it not too often forgotten

that a King cannot be separated from his Kingdom, nor the royal greatness fully recognised apart from the appointed background? It is disconcerting to reflect that the Christian Church seems at certain periods to have evolved a pitiful fragmentary loyalty, of a form sadly peculiar to herself. In earthly states one has frequently observed a loyalty to the kingdom (as in our own Protectorate), which, because of its own intensity, has fore-sworn loyalty to the king. The Christian Church stands alone among commonwealths in having at times manifested a pseudo-loyalty to her King, which has felt itself absolved from concern in the interests of His Kingdom. We find no clear teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven in the Creeds, in the Shorter Catechism, or in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. It seems singular that the Kingdom for which our Saviour lived and died has often as a conception had so little power to engage the interest, stir the feeling, or prompt the sacrifice of those who are called by His name. What manner of patriotic longing should breathe in the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come"? What measure of patriotic loyalty should animate the citizens who "seek first the Kingdom of God"?

Here, however, as so often in other instances, we find the most reasonable hope for the future to spring from cheering features in the retrospect

of the past. When Andrew Melville held his famous interview with James VI. in Falkland Palace, and after a heated argument took the king by the sleeve, calling him "God's sillie vassal," and said: "Sire, as divers times before, so now again I must tell you that there are twa kings and twa kingdoms in Scotland. There is Christ Jesus the King and His Kingdom, whose subject King James the Saxt is, and of whose kingdom nocht a king nor a lord nor a heid, but a member. And, Sir, when ye were in your swaddling-clothes Christ Jesus rang freely in this land,"—when Andrew Melville so spoke, it is evident that he felt himself a citizen of two countries whose loyalties were not incompatible, though one was supreme.

Or again, we may take an illustration from still earlier days and a still more classic incident. One of the greatest calamities, as it seemed, that ever overtook the world was the overthrow of the Roman Empire by the Goths, about 400 years after Christ. Civilisation looked on in helplessness while the barbarians spoiled the Roman cities, desolated their fertile plains, seized their colonies, and defiled their altars. The hearts of men were shaken as seldom before or since in human history; it seemed as if the mountains were removed and cast into the sea. And just in that hour a great Christian genius stepped forward, and wrote a book which became one of the classics of the world, and

the name of it was 'The City of God.' In it Augustine said in effect: "You were proud, O Romans, of your city. You called her eternal, imperial, divine. You have been compelled to recognise that history is rebuking your pride, and showing your faith unfounded. But I have to tell you, or remind you, of another City, so glorious in promise and achievement that yours may not be named beside her. She is the true Divine City, for her Builder and Maker is God, and she shares the eternity of her Builder." When we contemplate Augustine turning from the wreck of Rome to paint the glories of the City of God, we may justly describe the spirit of the episode as the Patriotism of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Other instances multiply in the view. The writer to the Hebrews read back this higher patriotism into the story of even the Old Testament saints, and spoke of Abraham as looking for a City that had foundations, and of the patriarchs as desiring a better Country that is a heavenly. St Paul spoke of his Citizenship being in heaven, rejoiced that he was a fellow-citizen with the saints, and saw his noblest heritage in the Jerusalem which is above, which is free and the mother of us all. And, to pass in a bound from earliest days to latest, let us hearken to the glowing appeal of Dr Duff to a General Assembly in 1850—"spoken by a Highlander to brother-Scots": "In days

of yore I was wont to listen to the poems of Ossian, and to many of those melodies that were called Jacobite songs. . . . One of these seemed to me to embody the quintessence of loyalty of an earthly kind. It is the stanza in which it is said by the father or mother—

‘I hae but ae son, the gallant young Donald’;

and then the gush of emotion turned his heart as it were inside out, and he exclaimed—

‘But, oh, had I ten, they would follow Prince Charlie.’

Are these the visions of romance—the dreams of poetry and of song? Oh, let that rush of youthful warriors from bracken bush and glen, that rallied round the standards of Glenfinnan, bear testimony to the reality, the intensity of the loyalty to an earthly prince; and shall a Highland father and mother give up all their children as a homage to earthly loyalty, and shall I be told that in the Churches of Christ fathers and mothers will begrudge their children to Him who is the King of kings and Lord of lords? ”¹

It cannot be repeated too often that it is only as subservient to a higher Patriotism that all earthly patriotisms tend to fall into place and usefulness. Otherwise they illustrate only too readily the justice of Ruskin’s warning: “Every faculty of man’s soul, and every instinct of it

¹ Quoted by Dr Ogilvie in ‘The Apostles of India.’

by which he is meant to live, is exposed to its own special form of corruption. And the more beautiful they are, the more fearful is the death which is attached as a penalty to their degradation." Earthly patriotism, if it is to avail for the good of the human race, must learn to say with the Roman centurion, "I also am under authority." But so speaking and so yielding submission, it will be caught up to higher service and clothed with more tender beauty. Love of country and love of God will dwell together in unity. Love of God will prompt to love of country; and love of country will pay homage to love of God. Whether as citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom or as citizens of an earthly, Christian men will embody their patriotism (to use the phrase for the last time) in "the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action." While the expression in Christian language of the final goal of history combines into one radiant forecast the ambitions of those who love their Saviour, and the ambitions of those who love their country—

There were great voices in heaven,
saying, The kingdoms of this world
are become the kingdoms of our
Lord and of His Christ.