

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE FIFTEENTH YEAR OF TIBERIUS CÆSAR AND UNDER THE PONTIFICATE OF ANNAS AND
CAIAPHAS - A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

(St. Matthew iii. 1-12; St. Mark i. 2-8; St. Luke iii. 1-18.)

THERE is something grand, even awful, in the almost absolute silence which lies upon the thirty years between the Birth and the first Messianic Manifestation of Jesus. In a narrative like that of the Gospels, this must have been designed; and, if so, affords presumptive evidence of the authenticity of what follows, and is intended to teach, that what had preceded concerned only the inner History of Jesus, and the preparation of the Christ. At last that solemn silence was broken by an appearance, a proclamation, a rite, and a ministry as startling as that of Elijah had been. In many respects, indeed, the two messengers and their times bore singular likeness. It was to a society secure, prosperous, and luxurious, yet in imminent danger of perishing from hidden, festering disease; and to a religious community which presented the appearance of hopeless perversion, and yet contained the germs of a possible regeneration, that both Elijah and John the Baptist came. Both suddenly appeared to threaten terrible judgment, but also to open unthought-of possibilities of good. And, as if to deepen still more the impression of this contrast, both appeared in a manner unexpected, and even antithetic to the habits of their contemporaries. John came suddenly out of the wilderness of Judæa, as Elijah from the wilds of Gilead; John bore the same strange ascetic appearance as his predecessor; the message of John was the counterpart of that of Elijah; his baptism that of Elijah's novel rite on Mount Carmel. And, as if to make complete the parallelism, with all of memory and hope which it awakened, even the more minute details surrounding the life of Elijah found their counterpart in that of John. Yet history never repeats itself. It fulfils in its development that of which it gave indication at its commencement. Thus, the history of John the Baptist was the fulfilment of that of Elijah in 'the fulness of time.'

For, alike in the Roman world and in Palestine, the time had fully come; not, indeed, in the sense of any special expectancy, but of absolute need. The reign of Augustus marked, not only the climax, but the crisis, of Roman history. Whatever of good or of evil the ancient world contained, had become fully ripe. As regarded politics, philosophy, religion, and society, the utmost limits had been reached. Beyond them lay, as only alternatives, ruin or regeneration. It was felt that the boundaries of the Empire could be no further extended, and that henceforth the highest aim must be to preserve what had been conquered. The destinies of Rome were in the hands of one man, who was at the same time general-in-chief of a standing army of about three hundred and forty thousand men, head of a Senate (now sunk into a mere court for registering the commands of Cæsar), and High-Priest of a religion, of which the highest expression was the apotheosis of the State in the person of the Emperor. Thus, all power within, without, and above lay in his hands.

Within the city, which in one short reign was transformed from brick into marble, were, side by side, the most abject misery and almost boundless luxury. Of a population of about two millions, well-nigh one half were slaves; and, of the rest, the greater part either freedmen and their descendants, or foreigners. Each class contributed its share to the common decay. Slavery was not even what we know it, but a seething mass of cruelty and oppression on the one side, and of cunning and corruption on the other. More than any other cause, it contributed to the ruin of Roman society. The freedmen, who had very often acquired their liberty by the most disreputable courses, and had prospered in them, combined in shameless manner the vices of the free with the vileness of the slave. The foreigners - especially Greeks and Syrians - who crowded the city, poisoned the springs of its life by the corruption which they brought. The free citizens were idle, dissipated, sunken; their chief thoughts of the theatre and the arena; and they were mostly supported at the public cost. While, even in the time of Augustus, more than two hundred thousand persons were thus maintained by the State, what of the old Roman stock remained was rapidly decaying, partly from corruption, but chiefly from the increasing cessation of marriage, and the nameless abominations of what remained of family-life.

The state of the provinces was in every respect more favourable. But it was the settled policy of the Empire, which only too surely succeeded, to destroy all separate nationalities, or rather to absorb and to Grecianise all. The only real resistance came from the Jews. Their tenacity was religious, and, even in its extreme of intolerant exclusiveness, served a most important Providential purpose. And so Rome became to all

the centre of attraction, but also of fast-spreading destructive corruption. Yet this unity also, and the common bond of the Greek language, served another important Providential purpose. So did, in another direction, the conscious despair of any possible internal reformation. This, indeed, seemed the last word of all the institutions in the Roman world: It is not in me! Religion, philosophy, and society had passed through every stage, to that of despair.

Without tracing the various phases of ancient thought, it may be generally said that, in Rome at least, the issue lay between Stoicism and Epicureanism. The one flattered its pride, the other gratified its sensuality; the one was in accordance with the original national character, the other with its later decay and corruption. Both ultimately led to atheism and despair - the one, by turning all higher aspirations self-ward, the other, by quenching them in the enjoyment of the moment; the one, by making the extinction of all feeling and self-deification, the other, the indulgence of every passion and the worship of matter, its ideal.

That, under such conditions, all real belief in a personal continuance after death must have ceased among the educated classes, needs not demonstration. If the older Stoics held that, after death, the soul would continue for some time a separate existence - in the case of sages till the general destruction of the world by fire, it was the doctrine of most of their successors that, immediately after death, the soul returned into 'the world-soul' of which it was part. But even this hope was beset by so many doubts and misgivings, as to make it practically without influence or comfort. Cicero was the only one who, following Plato, defended the immortality of the soul, while the Peripatetics denied the existence of a soul, and leading Stoics at least its continuance after death. But even Cicero writes as one overwhelmed by doubts. With his contemporaries this doubt deepened into absolute despair, the only comfort lying in present indulgence of the passions. Even among the Greeks, who were most tenacious of belief in the non-extinction of the individual, the practical upshot was the same. The only healthier tendency, however mixed with error, came from the Neo-Platonic School, which accordingly offered a point of contact between ancient philosophy and the new faith.

In such circumstances, anything like real religion was manifestly impossible. Rome tolerated, and, indeed, incorporated, all national rites. But among the populace religion had degenerated into abject superstition. In the East, much of it consisted of the vilest rites; while, among the philosophers, all religions were considered equally false or equally true - the outcome of ignorance, or else the unconscious modifications of some one fundamental thought. The only religion on which the State insisted was the deification and worship of the Emperor. These apotheoses attained almost incredible development. Soon not only the Emperors, but their wives, paramours, children, and the creatures of their vilest lusts, were deified; nay, any private person might attain that distinction, if the survivors possessed sufficient means. Mingled with all this was an increasing amount of superstition - by which term some understood the worship of foreign gods, the most part the existence of fear in religion. The ancient Roman religion had long given place to foreign rites, the more mysterious and unintelligible the more enticing. It was thus that Judaism made its converts in Rome; its chief recommendation with many being its contrast to the old, and the unknown possibilities which its seemingly incredible doctrines opened. Among the most repulsive symptoms of the general religious decay may be reckoned prayers for the death of a rich relative, or even for the satisfaction of unnatural lusts, along with horrible blasphemies when such prayers remained unanswered. We may here contrast the spirit of the Old and New Testaments with such sentiments as this, on the tomb of a child: 'To the unjust gods who robbed me of life;' or on that of a girl of twenty: 'I lift my hands against the god who took me away, innocent as I am.' It would be unsavoury to describe how far the worship of indecency was carried; how public morals were corrupted by the mimic representations of everything that was vile, and even by the pandering of a corrupt art. The personation of gods, oracles, divination, dreams, astrology, magic, necromancy, and theurgy, all contributed to the general decay. It has been rightly said, that the idea of conscience, as we understand it, was unknown to heathenism. Absolute right did not exist. Might was right. The social relations exhibited, if possible, even deeper corruption. The sanctity of marriage had ceased. Female dissipation and the general dissoluteness led at last to an almost entire cessation of marriage. Abortion, and the exposure and murder of newly-born children, were common and tolerated; unnatural vices, which even the greatest philosophers practised, if not advocated, attained proportions which defy description.

But among these sad signs of the times three must be specially mentioned: the treatment of slaves; the bearing towards the poor; and public amusements. The slave was entirely unprotected; males and females were exposed to nameless cruelties, compared to which death by being thrown to the wild beasts, or fighting in the arena, might seem absolute relief. Sick or old slaves were cast out to perish from want. But what the influence of the slaves must have been on the free population, and especially upon the young - whose tutors they generally were - may readily be imagined. The heartlessness towards the poor who crowded the city is another well-known feature of ancient Roman society. Of course, there was neither hospitals, nor provision for the poor; charity and brotherly love in their every manifestation are purely Old and New Testament ideas. But even bestowal of the smallest alms on the needy was regarded as very questionable; best, not to afford them the means of protracting a useless existence. Lastly, the account which Seneca has to give of what occupied and amused the idle multitude - for all manual labour, except agriculture, was looked upon with utmost contempt - horrified even himself. And so the only escape which remained for the philosopher, the satiated, or the miserable, seemed the power of self-destruction! What is worse, the noblest spirits of the time of self-destruction! What is worse, the noblest spirits of the time felt, that the state of things was utterly hopeless. Society could not reform itself; philosophy and religion had nothing to offer: they had been tried and found wanting. Seneca longed for some hand from without to lift up from the mire of despair; Cicero pictured the enthusiasm which would greet the embodiment of true virtue, should it ever appear on earth; Tacitus declared human life one great farce, and expressed his conviction that the Roman world lay under some terrible curse. All around, despair, conscious need, and unconscious longing. Can greater contrast be imagined, than the proclamation of a coming Kingdom of God amid such a world; or clearer evidence be afforded of the reality of this Divine message, than that it came to seek and to save that which was thus lost? One synchronism, as remarkable as that of the Star in the East and the Birth of the Messiah, here claims the reverent attention of the student of history. On the 19th of December a.d. 69, the Roman Capitol, with its ancient sanctuaries, was set on fire. Eight months later, on the 9th of Ab a.d. 70, the Temple of Jerusalem was given to the flames. It is not a coincidence but a conjunction, for upon the ruins of heathenism and of apostate Judaism was the Church of Christ to be reared.

A silence, even more complete than that concerning the early life of Jesus, rests on the thirty years and more, which intervened between the birth and the open forth showing of John in his character as Forerunner of the Messiah. Only his outward and inward development, and his being 'in the deserts,' are briefly indicated. The latter, assuredly, not in order to learn from the *Essenes*, but to attain really, in lonely fellowship with God, what they sought externally. It is characteristic that, while Jesus could go straight from the home and workshop of Nazareth to the Baptism of Jordan, His Forerunner required so long and peculiar preparation: characteristic of the difference of their Persons and Mission, characteristic also of the greatness of the work to be inaugurated. St. Luke furnishes precise notices of the time of the Baptist's public appearance - not merely to fix the exact chronology, which would not have required so many details, but for a higher purpose. For, they indicate, more clearly than the most elaborate discussion, the fitness of the moment for the Advent of 'the Kingdom of Heaven.' For the first time since the Babylonish Captivity, the foreigner, the Chief of the hated Roman Empire - according to the Rabbis, the fourth beast of Daniel's vision - was absolute and undisputed master of Judæa; and the chief religious office divided between two, equally unworthy of its functions. And it deserves, at least, notice, that of the Rulers mentioned by St. Luke, Pilate entered on his office only shortly before the public appearance of John, and that they all continued till after the Crucifixion of Christ. There was thus, so to speak, a continuity of these powers during the whole Messianic period. As regards Palestine, the ancient kingdom of Herod was now divided into four parts, Judæa being under the direct administration of Rome, two other tetrarchies under the rule of Herod's sons (Herod Antipas and Philip), while the small principality of Abilene was governed by Lysanias. Of the latter no details can be furnished, nor are they necessary in this history. It is otherwise as regards the sons of Herod, and especially the character of the Roman government at that time. Herod Antipas, whose rule extended over forty-three years, reigned over Galilee and Peræa - the districts which were respectively the principal sphere of the Ministry of Jesus and of John the Baptist. Like his brother Archelaus, Herod Antipas possessed in an even aggravated form most of the vices, without any of the greater

qualities, of his father. Of deeper religious feelings or convictions he was entirely destitute, though his conscience occasionally misgave, if it did not restrain, him.

The inherent weakness of his character left him in the absolute control of his wife, to the final ruin of his fortunes. He was covetous, avaricious, luxurious, and utterly dissipated suspicious, and with a good deal of that fox-cunning which, especially in the East, often forms the sum total of state-craft. Like his father, he indulged a taste for building - always taking care to propitiate Rome by dedicating all to the Emperor. The most extensive of his undertakings was the building, in 22 a.d., of the city of Tiberias, at the upper end of the Lake of Galilee. The site was under the disadvantage of having formerly been a burying-place, which, as implying Levitical uncleanness, for some time deterred pious Jews from settling there. Nevertheless, it rose in great magnificence from among the reeds which had but lately covered the neighbourhood (the ensigns armorial of the city were 'reeds'). Herod Antipas made it his residence, and built there a strong castle and a palace of unrivalled splendour. The city, which was peopled chiefly by adventurers, was mainly Grecian, and adorned with an amphitheatre, of which the ruins can still be traced. A happier account can be given of Philip, the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem. He was undoubtedly the best of Herod's sons. He showed, indeed, the same abject submission as the rest of his family to the Roman Emperor, after whom he named the city of Cæsarea Philippi, which he built at the sources of the Jordan; just as he changed the name of Bethsaida, a village of which he made an opulent city, into Julias, after the daughter of Augustus. But he was a moderate and just ruler, and his reign of thirty-seven years contrasted favourably with that of his kinsmen. The land was quiet and prosperous, and the people contented and happy.

As regards the Roman rule, matters had greatly changed for the worse since the mild sway of Augustus, under which, in the language of Philo, no one throughout the Empire dared to molest the Jews. The only innovations to which Israel had then to submit were, the daily sacrifices for the Emperor and the Roman people, offerings on festive days, prayers for them in the Synagogues, and such participation in national joy or sorrow as their religion allowed. It was far other when Tiberius succeeded to the Empire, and Judæa was a province. Merciless harshness characterised the administration of Palestine; while the Emperor himself was bitterly hostile to Judaism and the Jews, and that although, personally, openly careless of all religion. Under his reign the persecution of the Roman Jews occurred, and Palestine suffered almost to the verge of endurance. The first Procurator whom Tiberius appointed over Judæa, changed the occupancy of the High-Priesthood four times, till he found in Caiaphas a sufficiently submissive instrument of Roman tyranny. The exactions, and the reckless disregard of all Jewish feelings and interests, might have been characterised as reaching the extreme limit, if worse had not followed when Pontius Pilate succeeded to the procuratorship. Venality, violence, robbery, persecutions, wanton malicious insults, judicial murders without even the formality of a legal process - and cruelty, such are the charges brought against his administration. If former governors had, to some extent, respected the religious scruples of the Jews, Pilate set them purposely at defiance; and this not only once, but again and again, in Jerusalem, in Galilee, and even in Samaria, until the Emperor himself interposed.

Such, then, was the political condition of the land, when John appeared to preach the near Advent of a Kingdom with which Israel associated all that was happy and glorious, even beyond the dreams of the religious enthusiast. And equally loud was the call for help in reference to those who held chief spiritual rule over the people. St. Luke significantly joins together, as the highest religious authority in the land, the names of Annas and Caiaphas. The former had been appointed by Quirinius. After holding the Pontificate for nine years, he was deposed, and succeeded by others, of whom the fourth was his son-in-law Caiaphas. The character of the High-Priests during the whole of that period is described in the Talmud in terrible language. And although there is no evidence that 'the house of Annas' was guilty of the same gross self-indulgence, violence, luxury, and even public indecency, as some of their successors, they are included in the woes pronounced on the corrupt leaders of the priesthood, whom the Sanctuary is represented as bidding depart from the sacred precincts, which their presence defiled. It deserves notice, that the special sin with which the house of Annas is charged is that of 'whispering' - or hissing like vipers - which seems to refer to private influence on the judges in their administration of justice, whereby 'morals were corrupted, judgment perverted and the Shekhinah withdrawn from Israel.' In illustration of this, we recall the terrorism which prevented Sanhedrists from taking the part of

Jesus, and especially the violence which seems to have determined the final action of the Sanhedrin, against which not only such men as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, but even a Gamaliel, would feel themselves powerless. But although the expression 'High-Priest' appears sometimes to have been used in a general sense, as designating the sons of the High-Priests, and even the principal members of their families, there could, of course, be only one actual High-Priest. The conjunction of the two names of Annas and Caiaphas probably indicates that, although Annas was deprived of the Pontificate, he still continued to preside over the Sanhedrin - a conclusion not only borne out by Acts iv. 6, where Annas appears as the actual President, and by the terms in which Caiaphas is spoken of, as merely 'one of them,' but by the part which Annas took in the final condemnation of Jesus.

Such a combination of political and religious distress, surely, constituted the time of Israel's utmost need. As yet, no attempt had been made by the people to right themselves by armed force. In these circumstances, the cry that the Kingdom of Heaven was near at hand, and the call to preparation for it, must have awakened echoes throughout the land, and startled the most careless and unbelieving. It was, according to St. Luke's exact statement, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar - reckoning, as provincials would do, from his co-regency with Augustus (which commenced two years before his sole reign), in the year 26 a.d. According to our former computation, Jesus would then be in His thirtieth year. The scene of John's first public appearance was in 'the wilderness of Judæa,' that is, the wild, desolate district around the mouth of the Jordan. We know not whether John baptized in this place, nor yet how long he continued there; but we are expressly told, that his stay was not confined to that locality. Soon afterwards we find him at Bethabara, which is farther up the stream. The outward appearance and the habits of the Messenger corresponded to the character and object of his Mission. Neither his dress nor his food was that of the Essenes; and the former, at least, like that of Elijah, whose mission he was now to 'fulfil.' This was evinced alike by what he preached, and by the new symbolic rite, from which he derived the name of 'Baptist.' The grand burden of his message was: the announcement of the approach of 'the Kingdom of Heaven,' and the needed preparation of his hearers for that Kingdom. The latter he sought, positively, by admonition, and negatively, by warnings, while he directed all to the Coming One, in Whom that Kingdom would become, so to speak, individualised. Thus, from the first, it was 'the good news of the Kingdom,' to which all else in John's preaching was but subsidiary.

Concerning this 'Kingdom of Heaven,' which was the great message of John, and the great work of Christ Himself, we may here say, that it is the whole Old Testament *sublimated*, and the whole New Testament *realised*. The idea of it did not lie hidden in the Old, to be opened up in the New Testament - as did the mystery of its realisation. But this rule of heaven and Kingship of Jehovah was the very substance of the Old Testament; the object of the calling and mission of Israel; the meaning of all its ordinances, whether civil or religious; the underlying idea of all its institutions. It explained alike the history of the people, the dealings of God with them, and the prospects opened up by the prophets. Without it the Old Testament could not be understood; it gave perpetuity to its teaching, and dignity to its representations. This constituted alike the real contrast between Israel and the nations of antiquity, and Israel's real title to distinction. Thus the whole Old Testament was the preparatory presentation of the rule of heaven and of the Kingship of its Lord. But preparatory not only in the sense of typical, but also in that of inchoative. Even the twofold hindrance - internal and external - which 'the Kingdom' encountered, indicated this. The former arose from the resistance of Israel to their King; the latter from the opposition of the surrounding kingdoms of this world. All the more intense became the longing through thousands of years, that these hindrances might be swept away by the Advent of the promised Messiah, Who would permanently establish (by His spirit) the right relationship between the King and His Kingdom, by bringing in an everlasting righteousness, and also cast down existing barriers, by calling the kingdoms of this world to be the Kingdom of our God. This would, indeed, be the Advent of the Kingdom of God, such as had been the glowing hope held out by Zechariah, the glorious vision beheld by Daniel. Three ideas especially did this Kingdom of God imply: *universality*, *heavenliness*, and *permanency*. Wide as God's domain would be His Dominion; holy, as heaven in contrast to earth, and God to man, would be his character; and triumphantly lasting its continuance. Such was the teaching of the Old Testament, and the great hope of Israel. It scarcely needs mental compass, only moral and spiritual capacity, to see its matchless grandeur, in contrast with even the

highest aspirations of heathenism, and the blanched ideas of modern culture. How imperfectly Israel understood this Kingdom, our previous investigations have shown. In truth, the men of that period possessed only the term - as it were, the form. What explained its meaning, filled, and fulfilled it, came once more from heaven. Rabbinism and Alexandrianism kept alive the thought of it; and in their own way filled the soul with its longing - just as the distress in church and State carried the need of it to every heart with the keenness of anguish. As throughout this history, the *form* was of that time; the substance and the spirit were of Him Whose coming was the Advent of that Kingdom. Perhaps the nearest approach to it lay in the higher aspirations of the Nationalist party, only that it sought their realisation, not spiritually, but outwardly. Taking the sword, it perished by the sword. It was probably to this that both Pilate and Jesus referred in that memorable question: 'Art Thou then a King?' to which our Lord, unfolding the deepest meaning of His mission, replied: 'My Kingdom is not of this world: if My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight.'

According to the Rabbinic views of the time, the terms 'Kingdom,' 'Kingdom of heaven,' and 'Kingdom of God' (in the Targum on Micah iv. 7 'Kingdom of Jehovah'), were equivalent. In fact, the word 'heaven' was very often used instead of 'God,' so as to avoid unduly familiarizing the ear with the Sacred Name. This, probably, accounts for the exclusive use of the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven' in the Gospel by St. Matthew. And the term did imply a contrast to earth, as the expression 'the Kingdom of God' did to this world. The consciousness of its contrast to earth or the world was distinctly expressed in Rabbinic writings. This 'Kingdom of Heaven,' or 'of God,' must, however, be distinguished from such terms as 'the Kingdom of the Messiah' (*Malkhutha dimeshicha*), 'the future age (world) of the Messiah' (*Alma deathey dimeshicha*), 'the days of the Messiah,' 'the age to come' (*soeculum futurum*, the *Athid labho* - both this and the previous expression), 'the end of days,' and 'the end of the extremity of days' (*Soph Eqebh Yomaya*). This is the more important, since the 'Kingdom of Heaven' has so often been confounded with the period of its triumphant manifestation in 'the days,' or in 'the Kingdom, of the Messiah.' Between the Advent and the final manifestation of 'the Kingdom,' Jewish expectancy placed a temporary obscuration of the Messiah. Not His first appearance, but His triumphant manifestation, was to be preceded by the so-called 'sorrows of the Messiah' (the *Chebhley shel Mashiach*), 'the tribulations of the latter days.' A review of many passages on the subject shows that, in the Jewish mind the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven' referred, not so much to any particular period, as in general to the *Rule of God* - as acknowledged, manifested, and eventually perfected. Very often it is the equivalent for personal acknowledgment of God: the taking upon oneself of the 'yoke' of 'the Kingdom,' or of the commandments - the former preceding and conditioning the latter. Accordingly, the Mishnah gives this as the reason why, in the collection of Scripture passages which forms the prayer called '*Shema*,' the confession, Deut. vi. 4 &c., precedes the admonition, Deut. xi. 13 &c., because a man takes upon himself first the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and afterwards that of the commandments. And in this sense, the repetition of this *Shema*, as the personal acknowledgment of the Rule of Jehovah, is itself often designated as 'taking upon oneself the Kingdom of Heaven.' Similarly, the putting on of phylacteries, and the washing of hands, are also described as taking upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of God. To give other instances: Israel is said to have taken up the yoke of the Kingdom of God at Mount Sinai; the children of Jacob at their last interview with their father; and Isaiah on his call to the prophetic office, where it is also noted that this must be done willingly and gladly. On the other hand, the sons of Eli and the sons of Ahab are said to have cast off the Kingdom of Heaven. While thus the acknowledgment of the Rule of God, both in profession and practice, was considered to constitute the Kingdom of God, its full manifestation was expected only in the time of the Advent of Messiah. Thus in the Targum on Isaiah xl. 9, the words 'Behold your God!' are paraphrased: 'The Kingdom of your God is revealed.' Similarly, we read: 'When the time approaches that the Kingdom of Heaven shall be manifested, then shall be fulfilled that "the Lord shall be King over all the earth."' On the other hand, the unbelief of Israel would appear in that they would reject these three things: the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of the House of David, and the building of the Temple, according to the prediction in Hos. iii. 5. It follows that, after the period of unbelief, the Messianic deliverances and blessings of the 'Athid Labho,' or future age, were expected. But the final completion of all still remained for the 'Olam Habba,' or world to

come. And that there is a distinction between the time of the Messiah and this 'world to come' is frequently indicated in Rabbinic writings.

As we pass from the Jewish ideas of the time to the teaching of the New Testament, we feel that while there is *complete change of spirit*, the form in which the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven is presented is substantially similar. Accordingly, we must dismiss the notion that the expression refers to the Church, whether visible (according to the Roman Catholic view) or invisible (according to certain Protestant writers). 'The Kingdom of God,' or Kingly Rule of God, is an *objective fact*. The visible Church can only be the *subjective* attempt at its outward realisation, of which the invisible Church is the true counterpart. When Christ says, that 'except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God,' He teaches, in opposition to the Rabbinic representation of how 'the Kingdom' was taken up, that a man cannot even comprehend that glorious idea of the Reign of God, and of becoming, by conscious self-surrender, one of His subjects, except he be first born from above. Similarly, the meaning of Christ's further teaching on this subject seems to be that, except a man be born of water (profession, with baptism as its symbol) and the Spirit, he cannot really enter into the fellowship of that Kingdom.

In fact, an analysis of 119 passages in the New Testament where the expression 'Kingdom' occurs, shows that it means *the rule of God*; which was *manifested in and through Christ*; is *apparent in 'the Church'*; *gradually develops amidst hindrances*; is *triumphant at the second coming of Christ* ('the end'); and, finally, *perfected in the world to come*. Thus viewed, the announcement of John of the near Advent of this Kingdom had deepest meaning, although, as so often in the case of prophetism, the stages intervening between the Advent of the Christ and the triumph of that Kingdom seem to have been hidden from the preacher. He came to call Israel to submit to the Reign of God, about to be manifested in Christ. Hence, on the one hand, he called them to repentance - a 'change of mind' - with all that this implied; and, on the other, pointed them to the Christ, in the exaltation of His Person and Office. Or rather, the two combined might be summed up in the call: 'Change your mind', repent, which implies, not only a turning from the past, but a turning to the Christ in newness of mind. And thus the symbolic action by which this preaching was accompanied might be designated 'the baptism of repentance.'

The account given by St. Luke bears, on the face of it, that it was a summary, not only of the first, but of all John's preaching. The very presence of his hearers at this call to, and baptism of, repentance, gave point to his words. Did they who, notwithstanding their sins, lived in such security of carelessness and self-righteousness, really understand and fear the final consequences of resistance to the coming 'Kingdom'? If so, theirs must be a repentance not only in profession, but of heart and mind, such as would yield fruit, both good and visible. Or else did they imagine that, according to the common notion of the time, the vials of wrath were to be poured out only on the Gentiles, while they, as Abraham's children, were sure of escape - in the words of the Talmud, that 'the night' (Is. xxi. 12) was 'only to the nations of the world, but the morning to Israel?' For, no principle was more fully established in the popular conviction, than that all Israel had part in the world to come (Sanh. x. 1), and this, specifically, because of their connection with Abraham. This appears not only from the New Testament, from Philo, and Josephus, but from many Rabbinic passages. 'The merits of the Fathers,' is one of the commonest phrases in the mouth of the Rabbis. Abraham was represented as sitting at the gate of Gehenna, to deliver any Israelite who otherwise might have been consigned to its terrors. In fact, by their descent from Abraham, all the children of Israel were nobles, infinitely higher than any proselytes. 'What,' exclaims the Talmud, 'shall the born Israelite stand upon the earth, and the proselyte be in heaven? In fact, the ships on the sea were preserved through the merit of Abraham; the rain descended on account of it. For his sake alone had Moses been allowed to ascend into heaven, and to receive the Law; for his sake the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven; his righteousness had on many occasions been the support of Israel's cause; Daniel had been heard for the sake of Abraham; nay, his merit availed even for the wicked. In its extravagance the Midrash thus apostrophises Abraham: 'If thy children were even (morally) dead bodies, without blood vessels or bones, thy merit would avail for them!'

But if such had been the inner thoughts of his bearers, John warned them, that God was able of those stones that strewed the river-bank to raise up children unto Abraham; or, reverting to his former illustration of

‘fruits meet for repentance,’ that the proclamation of the Kingdom was, at the same time, the laying of the axe to the root of every tree that bore not fruit. Then making application of it, in answer to the specific inquiry of various classes, the preacher gave them such practical advice as applied to the well-known sins of their past; yet in this also not going beyond the merely negative, or preparatory element of ‘repentance.’ The positive, and all-important aspect of it, was to be presented by the Christ. It was only natural that the hearers wondered whether John himself was the Christ, since he thus urged repentance. For this was so closely connected in their thoughts with the Advent of the Messiah, that it was said, ‘If Israel repented but one day, the Son of David would immediately come.’ But here John pointed them to the difference between himself and his work, and the Person and Mission of the Christ. In deepest reverence he declared himself not worthy to do Him the service of a slave or of a disciple. His Baptism would not be of preparatory repentance and with water, but the Divine Baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire - in the Spirit Who sanctified, and the Divine Light which purified, and so effectively qualified for the ‘Kingdom.’ And there was still another contrast. John’s was but preparing work, the Christ’s that of final decision; after it came the harvest. His was the harvest, and His the garner; His also the fan, with which He would sift the wheat from the straw and chaff - the one to be garnered, the other burned with fire unextinguished and inextinguishable. Thus early in the history of the Kingdom of God was it indicated, that alike that which would prove useless straw and the good corn were inseparably connected in God’s harvest-field till the reaping time; that both belonged to Him; and that the final separation would only come at the last, and by His own Hand.

What John preached, that he also symbolised by a rite which, though not in itself, yet in its application, was wholly new. Hitherto the Law had it, that those who had contracted Levitical defilement were to immerse before offering sacrifice. Again, it was prescribed that such Gentiles as became ‘proselytes of righteousness,’ or ‘proselytes of the Covenant’ (*Gerey hatstsedeq* or *Gerey habberith*), were to be admitted to full participation in the privileges of Israel by the threefold rites of circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice - the immersion being, as it were, the acknowledgment and symbolic removal of moral defilement, corresponding to that of Levitical uncleanness. But never before had it been proposed that Israel should undergo a ‘baptism of repentance,’ although there are indications of a deeper insight into the meaning of Levitical baptisms. Was it intended, that the hearers of John should give this as evidence of their repentance, that, like persons defiled, they sought purification, and, like strangers, they sought admission among the people who took on themselves the Rule of God? These two ideas would, indeed, have made it truly a ‘baptism of repentance.’ But it seems difficult to suppose, that the people would have been prepared for such admissions; or, at least, that there should have been no record of the mode in which a change so deeply spiritual was brought about. May it not rather have been that as, when the first Covenant was made, Moses was directed to prepare Israel by symbolic baptism of their persons and their garments, so the initiation of the new Covenant, by which the people were to enter into the Kingdom of God, was preceded by another general symbolic baptism of those who would be the true Israel, and receive, or take on themselves, the Law from God? In that case the rite would have acquired not only a new significance, but be deeply and truly the answer to John’s call. In such case also, no special explanation would have been needed on the part of the Baptist, nor yet such spiritual insight on that of the people as we can scarcely suppose them to have possessed at that stage. Lastly, in that case nothing could have been more suitable, nor more solemn, than Israel in waiting for the Messiah and the Rule of God, preparing as their fathers had done at the foot of Mount Sinai.