

# "THE PENITENT MALEFACTOR"

## Chapter 15

### *Studies in the Gospels*

by

R. C. Trench

Luke xxiii. 39-43.

We might beforehand have anticipated that, were the history of the penitent malefactor recorded in one Gospel only, it would be in the Gospel of St. Luke; which is above all the Gospel of pardon and grace, and among the Gospels the correlative of the Pauline Epistles among the Epistles. St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul, lays, more than any other Evangelist, the groundwork upon which the latter builds; teaching historically that which St. Paul teaches dogmatically, namely, that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (vii. 47; xv.; xix. 10).<sup>1</sup> We have in the history before us a very notable example of that wondrous law of selection, according to which, out of the inexhaustible treasure-house of our Lord's sayings and doings upon earth, each Evangelist severally appropriates that which agrees best with his special purpose and aim. Such a law of selection we may continually recognize, so soon as the eye is once opened to look for and expect it.

We read in the verses which immediately precede this wondrous story, of the wild flood of blasphemy and scorn and hate which foamed and raged so fiercely round the foot of the cross; how his soul that hung on that cross was pierced and stabbed with taunts and reproaches, with words of malignity and hate, sharper and keener far than the nails which had torn his hands and his feet, or the spear which should penetrate his side. We read how heathen and Jew, as in a frightful rivalry, vied with one another, which should heap most of outrage upon the Christ of God; nor among the last was it the populace only; but the very chiefs of the Jewish nation, throwing off not merely all dignity, but all decency and decorum, and in the fierce delight of gratified hatred not caring to maintain even the religious hypocrisies which should have hindered them from openly rejoicing in the sufferings of another, were first and foremost in this crucifying afresh of the Son of God (Heb. vi. 6). And then, as to crown all, St. Matthew (xxvii. 44) and St. Mark (xv. 32) relate that two fellow-sufferers with our Lord, two who, fulfilling the prophecy made long before (Isai. liii. 9, 12), were crucified with Him, fell in with and took up the taunts of the crowd, reviled Him, mocked his pretensions, bade Him, if He were indeed the Christ, to save Himself and them--a fearful example, whether one only, or, for a while at least, both bore themselves thus, that the Greek proverb which ascribes to sufferings such a teaching power,<sup>2</sup> comes not always true. There are those whose hearts their own sufferings and the just punishments of God do not soften, but only harden and exasperate the more; so that they may howl upon their bed, nay, writhe upon their cross, and yet not repent them of their evil, but only go forward, adding new sin to their old, fierce, impenitent, and defiant to the last (Jer. v. 3; Rev. ix. 20, 21; xvi. 9, 11, 21; 2 Chron. xxviii. 22).<sup>3</sup>

---

1 See Holtzmann, *Die Synoptischen Evangelien*, Leipzig, 1863, p. 391, sqq.

2 Παθήματα, μαθήματα, or in Latin, Nocumenta, documenta.

3 The effects of crucifixion were very various on those who endured it. While the Christian martyrs would

St. Luke, indeed, tells us that not both, but that '*one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.*' A question presents itself here, Does the statement of the earlier Evangelists, and the necessity of harmonizing the several relations, require us to assume that he, who later in the day became a penitent, joined at first in these blasphemous ravings of his fellow-malefactor and of the multitude, and only after a while separated his lot from theirs, being convinced and converted by all the wondrous evidences of a divine grace and love which shone out in the suffering Lord? To this, which of course enhances the marvel of his conversion, making it still more sudden and miraculous, many interpreters in all ages have considered themselves bound by the statements of the preceding Evangelists; as counting that only by such an assumption is it possible to reconcile St. Luke's account with theirs. Thus Chrysostom,<sup>4</sup> Theophylact, Leo the Great.<sup>5</sup> Ambrose is more doubtful.<sup>6</sup> Augustine, on the contrary, is strong that one only blasphemed,<sup>7</sup> urging as a parallel case the words of Heb. xi. 33, 37, '*they stopped the mouths of lions,*' when, in fact, it was but one, namely Daniel, who did so; '*they were sawn asunder;*' when, in all likelihood, the allusion is but to one, namely to Isaiah. His parallel cases do not seem to me very convincing, yet, on the whole, I must decidedly incline to the conclusion at which he has arrived. The internal evidence in its favour is strong. The rebuke with which the penitent malefactor rebukes his fellow is very little like that of one, who has just been partaker in the sin which he condemns. His deliberate remonstrance, with no word of reference to himself, '*Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?*' sounds not at all like the remonstrance of one,--would have fitted ill, in that shape at least, to the lips of one,--who had just before been joining in the blasphemies, which all of a sudden he condemns.<sup>8</sup>

Up to the moment when his fellow malefactor joined in the railings of the multitude, he, we may suppose, had listened in silence; the work of grace which had begun in him sometime since, in his prison perhaps, going rapidly forward; for all around him and about him was such as would rapidly ripen a man for heaven, or for hell. The other it ripened for hell, him for heaven. He had heard all--in silence, though with deep horror of soul; but now he can keep silence no longer. There is a time to speak (Eccles. iii. 7), as well as a time to keep silence, and now for him that time has arrived. In that '*Save Thyself and us,*' in that plural '*us,*' the other is seeking to draw him into the same blasphemy with himself, is presenting this as the common taunt of them both. Need is therefore that he should speak, that he should separate himself off by a clear and distinct avowal from the other's sin, and not, by any longer holding his peace, become partaker of it. The English Version here, '*Dost not thou fear God?*' is doubly at fault, missing the emphasis twice. Read rather, '*Neither dost thou fear God?*' 'It is nothing so strange,' he would say, 'that these secure sinners, whom justice has not yet overtaken, for whom God's judgments are as yet far out of sight, should dare thus to open their mouths against the Holy One of God; but thou, upon thy cross, with such teaching as that might give

---

praise God from their cross, or exhort the beholders to embrace that faith for the sake of which they were willing to endure even that worst, some would spit on the bystanders (Seneca, *De Vitâ Beatâ*, 19), or reveal hidden iniquities of their former life, or utter curses against their enemies (Josephus, *B.J.* iv. 6. 1). . . .

4 See Suicer, *Thes.* s.v. ληστής.

5 Usque ad crucem reus, fit Christi repente confessor.

6 Fortasse et iste prius conviciatus est.

7 *De Cons. Evang.* iii. 16.

8 Cajetan: Hæc namque verba sonant non pœnitentem convicii proprii, sed increpantem alterius, quod simul cum aliis insultet Jesu.

thee, with such evidence as that affords that God is not mocked, that men eat at last the fruit of their doings, dost thou venture upon the same; "*neither dost thou fear God,<sup>9</sup> seeing,*" as he goes on to say, "*thou art in the same condemnation?*"<sup>1</sup> Two reasons are here alleged, though they may seem at first sight but one, why he should have refused to become partaker of the sin of those mockers; the first, which already lay in that question we have just dealt with, that he was in condemnation, that judgment had overtaken him; the second, that Jesus was a fellow-sufferer; community of suffering might have well inspired forbearance and pity of the one for the other.

And then, lest this word should seem to imply that they all shared in a common cross because they had shared in a common or like crime, he separates and distinguishes between Christ's cross and theirs. The condemnation indeed is common to all; but not so the guilt; '*and we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss; so far from having committed enormous crimes, as we have, there is no smallest fault or error in Him;*<sup>10</sup>--another reason why he should be spared these outrages and insults. If these are for any, they are for the wicked, for those who have wrought evil, not for those who are innocent and holy.<sup>11</sup>

Let us, before proceeding further, endeavour to realize to ourselves what manner of persons these '*malefactors*' probably were, how they had deserved this name, and by the course of what crimes they had reached a Roman cross, as the end of their conversation, as the due reward of their deeds. To understand this will, I am persuaded, help us not a little to understand how one of those crucified with Jesus should, even in the hour of his own worst suffering, have turned to the Lord with scorn and defiance, the other with penitence and prayer. Both these facts may, through such an enquiry, become more intelligible to us. '*Malefactors*' is the name by which St. Luke calls them; '*thieves*' (according to our Version) the two earlier Evangelists; from whom, and from the blending of whose record with his, we have learned to speak of 'the penitent thief.' Our Translators would have done much better to maintain the distinction which the Scripture maintains between him, the 'robber,' or violent spoiler (see Matt. xxi. 13; xxvi. 55; Luke x. 30; John xviii. 40; 2 Cor. xi. 26), and the 'thief,' or secret purloiner (Matt. vi. 19; John xii. 6; 1 Thess. v. 2; Rev. iii. 3; xvi. 15). Many passages have suffered in our Version from the neglect of this distinction, but none so seriously as that with which we now have to do.<sup>12</sup>

These two were not 'thieves,' as we have learned to call them, but robbers. Having vindicated

---

9 Maldonatus: Non dubito quin bonus ille et fidelis latro perversum illum latronem cum Judæis voluerit comparare, quæ comparatio in illâ dictione *nec* obscure delitescit; quasi dicat, Non solum illi qui pœnâ carent, sed nec tu, qui in eâdem pœnâ es, Deum times? Corn. à Lapide: Esto, Scribæ et Judæi liberi et validi non timeant Deum, ideoque subsannent Christum; tu tamen, qui in cruce torqueris et ad mortem tendis, deberes timere Deum.

10 Maldonatus: οὐδὲν ἄτοπον, nihil quod virum bonum non deceat; quibus verbis indicare voluit non solum nullum magnum scelus, sed nullem etiam vel levissimum peccatum in Christo esse. Yet ἄτοπος is too often used in Hellenistic Greek as entirely equivalent to *πονηρός* (it is joined with it, 2 Thess. iii. 2), to allow us very confidently to press this.

11 Maldonatus: Cum in eâdem quâ Christus pœnâ verseris, et, quod plus est, tu quidem merito, ille vero immerito, tamen neque pœnæ societas, nec ejus te movet innocentia, ut ejus miserare.

12 On the distinction between *λῃστής* and *κλέπτης* see my *Synonyms of the New Testament*, § 44.

this title for them, we may further enquire what at this time the name probably implied, and whether more than lies on the surface of the word. It will help us to answer this question aright, if we put side by side the application of the title of 'robber' to Barabbas (John xviii. 40), and the other notices of him which the Gospels supply, and then seek to read all in the light which contemporary history affords. Barabbas, this 'robber' according to St. John, was, we are told, 'a notable prisoner' (Matt. xxvii. 16); 'which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection' (Mark xv. 7); 'who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison' (Luke xxiii. 19); plainly a ringleader in one of those fierce and fanatic outbreaks against the Roman domination, which on a large scale or a small so fast succeeded one another in the latter days of the Jewish commonwealth. This at once explains how it was possible for the Chief Priests with their religious pretensions to shew the interest on his behalf which they did (Matt. xxvii. 20; Mark xv. 11), explains no less the enthusiasm with which the Jewish populace demanded his liberation (Luke xxiii. 18). He was the popular hero, who had sought to realize his own and their idea of the kingdom of God by violence and blood; who had actually *been* that which they wanted the Lord to be, and which, because He refused to be, they were now so eager to destroy Him. He had wrought, we may well believe, in that false Messiah spirit, which was filling with wild and insane hopes the whole nation, and rapidly hurrying it on to that final conflict with the Roman power, in which as a nation it should be for ever broken in pieces. There is every likelihood that the two malefactors crucified with Jesus belonged to the band of Barabbas. For good or for evil they knew something about the Christ, and that He was One who could deliver his own; the taunt uttered by the one embodies their conviction of this, no less than the prayer of the other. Barabbas, as we have seen, had been cast into prison 'with them that had made insurrection with him.' Two of the chief of these Pilate may have been very well pleased to send to execution on this occasion. It is abundantly plain from John xix. 15, 19-22, that he was willing in the bitterness of his spirit to retort in any way on those who had driven him to what his conscience told him was a hideous injustice, to the condemnation (for this much he could see) of a perfectly innocent man. As he evidently sought in that title over the cross to do an extreme displeasure to the Jews, so he may have intended the same in this: 'If you compel me against my better mind to send this man to the cross, I will send, to keep him company, two of the servants of your Messiah.'

Such seems to me a more probable explanation--I speak but of the human explanation--of these malefactors sharing in the cross of Christ, then to suppose that the additional indignity of being thus 'numbered with the transgressors' was devised for Him by the Pharisees. Doubtless they were quite capable of such a malignity, and insults of exactly this character have not seldom been heaped on high-souled sufferers in the concluding scene of their lives. Thus in the French Revolution, when some noble royalist was sent to the guillotine, it was constantly managed to mix up his execution with that of forgers, highwaymen, murderers, or the like; to the end that their shame and disgrace might redound upon him; and this last drop of bitterness not be wanting in his cup of pain. It is not that the Pharisees would have been behind the worst in modern times in any such subtle inventions of hate; but the ordering of malefactors to execution lay in other hands than theirs; and there is nothing to make us think that Pilate would devise any additional insult for Him whom he would have certainly set free, if the conscience of innumerable acts of violence and rapine and wrong, whereof the Jews might accuse him to Cæsar, had not made him the coward that he was. It was the Pharisees whom he desired, so far as he dared, to wound.

Whether, indeed, Barabbas had actually played the part of a false Christ, and set himself up as the true, we have no means of knowing. It is certainly far from unlikely. Keeping in mind the significance of names in Scripture, we can hardly fail to recognize a fearful mockery in his name, Barabbas ('Son of the Father'); as though in the very name he bore, not to speak of the work which he wrought, he should be the devil's counterfeit and caricature of the true Holy One of God. This suggestion would acquire increased probability, if it could certainly be affirmed that he was not merely named Barabbas, but Jesus Barabbas, the lying counterpart, even to his human name, of the true Saviour of men. So, as is well known, three cursive manuscripts, at Matt. xxvii. 17, even to this day read, and two of the older Versions, the Armenian and the Syriac. It is clear too that this was the prevailing reading in the time of Origen; who, speaking of *many* copies in which Barabbas was *not* called also Jesus, implies that, many as they were, they were still the minority.<sup>13</sup> In support of this remarkable reading, which De Wette, Fritzsche, Meyer, Ewald, Rinck<sup>14</sup> approve, but Lachmann, Tischendorf in his later editions though in the earlier he admitted it into the text, Alford, Tregelles<sup>15</sup> reject, it may be urged, that while we can scarcely conceive anyone daring to introduce the sacred name of Jesus, to give it to Barabbas, of even a thought of the kind suggesting itself to the mind of any, we can very well understand that many transcribers should have been shocked to find it there; and marring the text, which they impertinently sought to mend, have ventured to omit it. Vestiges, moreover, of the existence of such a reading survive in the text as it now stands; the words, 'which is called Christ,' twice introduced after the human name of our blessed Lord on the occasions when Barabbas is brought into opposition to Him (Matt. xxvii. 17, 22), and nowhere else, seem to be employed by Pilate out of a necessity to distinguish between him and another who bore the name of Jesus as well. It is at first strangely startling to think that this identity of name could possibly have existed; and yet He who bore every other scorn and shame, why should He not have also borne this?

All which has just been said being kept in remembrance, it will surprise us less, that so many elements of nobleness should display themselves in strength in one of these malefactors, than if we regarded him merely as a criminal of that meaner stamp whom we designate as a thief, or even as a robber, in our ordinary use of that word. His had been no petty larcenies; as little, in all likelihood, had he meant at the beginning to have his living by violence and wrong. Those whom the Romans with a certain amount of truth called 'robbers,' were oftentimes wild and stormy zealots, maintaining in arms a last and hopeless protest against that yoke of the stranger, which God had imposed on his people for the chastisement of their sins, and which therefore it behoved them meekly to accept. This may have been one of these, seeking at the outset of his career to work by the wrath of man what he counted the righteousness of God.<sup>16</sup> Presently a fugitive from Roman justice, compelled to take to the mountains, and to live there by rapine, he may have gradually learned less and less to discriminate between friend and foe, may have earned only too well the title under which he was at last to expiate his offences on a Roman cross.

---

13 In multis exemplaribus non continetur quod Barabbas etiam Jesus dicebatur, et forsitan recte, ut ne nomen Jesus conveniat alicui iniquorum.

14 *Lucub. Crit.* p. 285. Keim, *Jesu von Nazara*, vol. iii. p. 375, hangs in doubt, but inclines to accept this reading.

15 *On the Printed Text of the Greek Testament*, p. 194.

16 In the record by Josephus of the final agony of Jerusalem the ζηλωτής and the ληστής become nearly, or indeed altogether, convertible terms; thus see *B. J.* iv. passim. In the first French Revolution the noble Vendéans are constantly designated as 'les brigands de la Loire.'

His own confession implies as much (ver. 41). How easily, under such conditions, those who have begun with quite another aim degenerate into banditti, how imperceptibly and yet how surely the outlaw melts into the brigand, the story of Dolcino's Apostolicals, as of the Camisards in the Cevennes, abundantly teaches us;<sup>17</sup> while in the history of Jephthah we see how under more favourable circumstances this freebooter may rise into the chief and champion of his people (Judg. xi. 3, 11). He would do this the more easily, inasmuch as he would never by his lawless occupation have wholly forfeited his own respect or the respect of his fellow-countrymen; David, indeed, himself for a while was little better than such a freebooter as this (1 Sam. xxii. 2). Least of all would he forfeit this at a time when the whole framework of social life was dislocated and disjointed as it was at this period in Judæa; and when the disorganization of society seemed half to justify acts which would have been wholly without justification at another time. It is easy to perceive how a class like this, while it would enlist some among the worst, would also gather some into its ranks who, though miserably perverted now, might under more favourable circumstances have stood forth among the noblest of their age and nation. It is not altogether unlikely that an apostle of the Lord, Simon Zelotes, had been, as his name would indicate, on the very verge of becoming one of these; until in Christ he had found a more excellent way, had discovered that the truth, and the truth only, could make him free, or help him to make others free. But these worst and best, however they might accidentally be yoked together, and called by a common name, would yet only be waiting for some contact with the absolute truth, to reveal themselves in the essential differences of their character, differences which up to that decisive moment may have been concealed alike from others and from themselves. So it fared with this malefactor and the other. The decisive moment had now arrived. Heaven and hell claimed each its own. Of these two, so long yokefellows in evil, it was manifest at length that one had in him that which was akin to and was drawn to the light; the other, that which hated the light, repelled the light, and was in return repelled by it into a yet deeper darkness of its own.<sup>18</sup>

Few as are the words which this penitent utters in his brief address to his fellow-sinner, and then in his still briefer to his Saviour, they yet are sufficient to reveal to us a most authentic work of grace going forward within him. He is, in the first place, deeply convinced of his sin. There is no more certain sign of an effectual work of the Holy Spirit of God than a readiness on the sinner's part to accept and acquiesce in his punishment, whatever that punishment may be, to put his mouth in the dust, and to say, 'Thou art righteous, O God, that doest this;' 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?' (Lam. iii. 39; cf. Ezra ix. 6, 7; Luke xv. 18, 19); while, on the other hand, there can be no surer token of an impenitent and obdurate heart than the refusal of the sinner to receive correction, to humble himself under the mighty hand of God (Isai. i. 5; ix. 10; Jer. ii. 30; v. 3; Luke xv. 14, 15; Rev. ix. 21; xvi. 21). And this man even in that bitter cross saw nothing more than he had earned, '*the due reward of his deeds.*' How profound the conviction, how unreserved upon his part is the confession, of sin!

---

17 Renan, *L'Antechrist*, p. 280: Il faut vivre, et des corps France ne peuvent guère vivre sans vexer la population; voilà pourquoi brigand et héros, en temps de crise nationale, sont presque synonymes.

18 There are many apocryphal legends about these two robbers; which may be found in Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus*, pp. 93, 143, 580. Their very names are there given, but variously, Dimas, or Dysmas, and Gestas, Titus and Dumachus; this last possibly a corruption of Θεομάχος. In one of these legends it is told how the converted robber more than thirty years before had allowed the blessed Virgin and her Child to pass unharmed on their flight to Egypt, against the desire of the other, who would have despoiled the fugitives.

And then how many other principal graces shew themselves actively working in him<sup>19</sup>--all compressed, it is true, and this by the very necessities of the case, within the narrowest limits of time; but in their intension making up for what in extension they have not and cannot have. Ignorant he may very well have been of that special precept in Moses' law, 'Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him' (Lev. xix. 17); but love is the fulfilling of the law, and love will not suffer him to keep silence now. They two may in times past have been frequent partners in guilt, associates in many a deed of violence and wrong, strengthening one another in wickedness; but now, himself a penitent, he would fain lead his fellow-sinner by the same blessed path of contrition, repentance, and faith, which he himself is treading.

And then, further, what courage, what boldness speaks out in his confession of Christ, in his avowal, '*This man hath done nothing amiss;*' and still more in his open turning to Him as the one Helper and Saviour. Some perhaps might be tempted to rejoin, that at such a moment this did not cost him much, that for him, hanging on that cross, and doomed before many hours there to expire, the motives which would operate on others, the fear of men's reproach, the desire of their applause, must all have alike lost their power. But this is altogether a mistake. We have only to call to mind how often men, above all those who know no higher support, have in such a dreadful hour sustained themselves to the last on the sympathies of the beholders; how bold bad men, mainly upheld by these, have gone down with no sign of weakness, but as with flying colours, to hell. So far from costing him nothing, it must have required a mighty effort upon his part to separate himself, as now no doubt he did, from all the sympathies of all who surrounded his cross, and thus openly to cast in his lot with the crucified Lord. Hitherto, as a victim of Roman justice, as one of the '*robbers*' described just now, that is, as one of the latest champions of national freedom, a member probably of the band of Barabbas, and sharing in the popular interest which Barabbas excited, this man had been an object of sympathy and admiration to all the scorners and blasphemers of Calvary. Such he would have become still more, openly joining, as his companion did, in their insults and outrages against the Holy One of God. But to all this he prefers the reproach of Christ, which surely he did not escape, when he made that bold confession of his faith, '*Lord, remember me, when Thou comest into thy kingdom.*'

And if other graces signally manifest themselves in him, yet, more than all other, what a wondrous faith utters itself in these words of his. To believe that He, whose only token of royalty was the crown of thorns that still clung to his bleeding brows, was a king, and had a kingdom,<sup>20</sup> that He, on whose own eyes the mists of death were already hanging, was indeed the Prince of life, wielding in those pierced hands, nailed so helplessly to the cross, the keys of death and of hell, that He could shut and none could open, could open and none could shut;

---

19 Thus Gregory the Great (*Moral.* xviii. 40): Libet mentis oculos ad illum latronem reducere, qui de fauce diaboli ascendit crucem, de cruce paradisum. Intueamur qualis ad patibulum venerit, et a patibulo qualis abscessit.... In corde fidelium tres summopere manere virtutes testatur Apostolus, dicens, Nunc autem manent fides, spes, caritas. Quas cunctas subitâ repletus gratiâ et accepit latro, et servavit in cruce. Fidem namque habuit, qui regnaturum Dominum credidit, quem secum pariter morientem vidit. Spem habuit, qui regni ejus aditum postulavit, dicens, Memento mei, Domine, dum veneris in regnum tuum. Caritatem quoque in mente suâ vivaciter tenuit, qui fratrem et collatorem pro simili scelere morientem, et de iniquitate suâ arguit, et ei vitam quam cognoverat, prædicavit, dicens, Neque tu times Deum, etc.

20 Bengel: Regem profitetur, talem, qui mortuus mortuo benefacere possit.

that it would profit something in that mysterious world whither they both were hastening to be remembered by this crucified Man--that was a faith indeed. What was the faith of any other to his faith? Everything seemed to give the lie to Christ's pretensions. Disciples and apostles themselves had fallen away and fled. They had trusted once 'that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel' (Luke xxiv. 21); but they had now renounced that hope; and, indeed, every other hope; and then, in the midst of this universal unbelief, one, all whose anterior life might seem to have unfitted him for this heroic act of faith, does homage, not indeed in outward act, for his limbs are nailed to the tree, but in heart and word, to Jesus as the King of Israel, as the Lord of the spirits of all flesh. Truly we may say of his faith that it was itself one of the miracles of the crucifixion;<sup>21</sup> that in his conversion we have one of those glimpses of glory with which the Father is ever careful to light up the deepest depths of the humiliation of the Son.

But it will be well worth while to look a little closer and more in detail at his words. '*Lord*' need not in itself be more than a general term of respectful address; it is oftentimes this, and nothing further; thus Matt. xxv. 20, 24; John iv. 11; xii. 21; xx. 15, and elsewhere. But it may have a much deeper, and a theological meaning; and such no doubt it has here. For without assuming, which would indeed be absurd, that this untaught man meant by his '*Lord*' all which the Church now understands by Jehovah or Lord, yet was there on his part the recognition of a divine character in Christ. His '*Lord*' of itself would not be sufficient to prove this, but only as it is read in the light of what follows, '*Remember me, when Thou comest into thy kingdom.*' For that '*Remember me*' is no mere counterpart of Joseph's petition to the chief butler of Pharaoh (Gen. xl. 14; cf. Eccus. xxxvii. 6), but is itself a prayer, even as the prayers of the Jews constantly clothed themselves in this same form (Nehem. xiii. 14, 22, 31, and often in the Psalms; for another kind of remembrance see Rev. xvi. 19). But seeing that it was now at length abundantly evident that Christ's kingdom was not here, nor on this side of the grave, it must have been plainly in the glory of some kingdom to be revealed hereafter that he desired, through Christ's remembrance of him, a part.

The words themselves of his prayer should not stand exactly as in the English Version they do. Our Translators have on various occasions failed to mark the distinction between the prepositions equivalent in the Greek to our 'into' and 'in';<sup>22</sup> seldom however incurring thereby so grave a loss as here. It is not, '*when Thou comest into thy kingdom,*' as though Christ's kingdom could even in thought be contemplated as apart from Himself; but, '*when Thou comest in thy kingdom,*'--the words are correctly rendered at Matt. xvi. 28--'*when Thou shalt appear as a king with all thy royalties around Thee and about Thee, the angels, ten thousand times ten*

---

21 Augustine often magnifies the faith which breaks forth thus unexpectedly in this man, as a bright sun from behind thickest clouds. Thus (*Serm.* 232): *Magna fides; huic fidei quid addi possit, ignoro. Titubaverunt ipsi qui viderunt Christum mortuos suscitantem; credidit ille qui videbat secum in ligno pendentem. Quando illi titubaverunt, tunc ille credidit, Qualem fructum Christus de arido ligno percepit? . . . Non solum credebat resurrecturum, sed etiam regnaturum. Pendenti, crucifixo, cruento, hærenti, Cum veneris, inquit, in regnum tuum. Et illi, Nos sperabamus [Luc. xxiv. 21]. Ubi spem latro invenit, discipulus perdidit. Compare *Serm.* 285 Leo the Great (*Serm.* 51): *Quæ istam fidem exhortatio persuasit? quæ doctrina imbuit? quis prædicator accendit? Non viderat prius acta miracula; cessaverat tunc languentium curatio, cæcorum illuminatio, vivificatio mortuorum; ea ipsa quæ mox erant gerenda non aderant; et tamen Dominum confitetur et Regem, quem videst supplicii sui esse consortem.**

22 Thus εἰς has not its proper meaning, Rom. v. 5; nor ἐν, Rom. ii. 5; v. 21. On this, which is a fault common to many Versions of the New Testament, see Winer, *Gramm.* § liv. 4, 5, 6.

thousand, with Thee, and Thyself the centre of all' (Dan. vii. 10; Zech. xiv. 5; Matt. xxiv. 31; xxv. 31; 2 Thess. i. 7; Jude 14; Rev. xix. 14). Christ does not and cannot come *into* his kingdom; He comes *in* it and with it, brings his kingdom with Him, and where He is, there is his kingdom as well.<sup>23</sup> He who could utter this petition had taken in what Pilate could not take in, that this Man was a King, and that He would one day return to establish his kingdom upon earth.<sup>24</sup>

The reply of our Lord is a glorious example of what we may not unfitly call the prodigalities of the kingdom of heaven, of the answers to prayer, infinitely larger and more liberal than the suppliant in the boldest ventures of faith had dared to suggest. In two points the granting of this suppliant's petition immeasurably transcends the petition itself. All which he had been bold to ask, was that he might be remembered of the Lord. But one may remember the absent, may do them good at a distance, and keeping them at distance still. This to have done would have fulfilled the measure of all which he had desired. But for him, the first-fruits of the cross, the first who should set his seal to that word of the prophecy, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me,' for him Christ has better than remembrance in store; far better than this--'*thou shalt be with Me.*'

And not this only; he shall be with Him on that very day.<sup>25</sup> Christ's '*to-day,*' besides containing an announcement of his own departure out of this world within the limits of that day, contains also a pledge and promise for this poor pardoned sinner, that he too should find speedy release from all his agonies--a release indeed far speedier than according to common probabilities he might have looked for. Crucifixion, with all its sufferings, was so little mortal, that persons taken down from their cross have been known to recover. . . . But for him within a few brief hours, before that day had ended, it should be well. He should be at rest, and more than this--in Paradise and joy. The coming of Christ in his kingdom might very well be a remote contingency, as we know in fact that it was. In all likelihood this petitioner more or less looked onward to it as such. But it is no boon in some far off future which the Lord will bestow upon him; that very day he shall taste the sweetness of it: '*To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.*'<sup>26</sup>

---

23 Maldonatus forsakes his Vulgate, which, anticipating the error of our Version and of so many other, has here, in regnum tuum; but he: ἐν τῷ βασιλείᾳ σου, in regno tuo. Itaque non est sensus, Cum veneris ad regnandum, sed, Cum veneris, jam regnans; cum veneris, non ad acquirendum regnum, sed regno jam acquisito, quemadmodum venturus ad iudicium est.

24 In the *Evangelium Nicodemi* (pars 2, c. 10) the petition put into the mouth of this penitent, though substantially the same, is formally different. It is as follows: Κύριε, ὅτε [ἔταν?] βασιλεύσεις, μὴ μου ἐπιλάβῃ. As that apocryphal gospel dates probably as early as the second century, it is just possible that the difference here may, as Tischendorf (*Evangelia Apocrypha*, p. lxix.) suggests, represent another tradition of the words (verba latronis ita discedunt a Lucae textu, ut ex aliâ veterrimâ traditione fluxisse videantur); but far more probably we have here nothing more than a not perfectly accurate reminiscence of the words as they stand in St. Luke.

25 This is often urged by Augustine; thus *Serm.* 232: Quid ei dixerit Dominus audiamus: Amen, dico tibi, hodie mecum eris in Paradiso. Tu differs te; ego agnosco te; . . . invasisti in regnum cælorum; vim fecisti, credidisti, rapuisti. Non te differo; tantæ fidei hodie reddo quod debeo. Compare *Serm.* 327. 2. Instead of the rich and pregnant brevity of that prayer and this answer to that prayer, the *Narratio Josephi* (Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, p. 442) puts a speech of twenty lines into the mouth of the penitent, and one somewhat longer into that of our Lord.

26 The promise of these words can hardly fail to remind us of another 'Thou shalt be with me,' Samuel's to Saul (1 Sam. xxviii. 19); that also in Sheol, in the world of spirits; but that announcement how unlike to this; as full of fear and terror as this is of hope and joy.

We must not, however, dismiss without further notice a word on which so much has been written, a promise the form of which in times past has perplexed not a few. As many, indeed, as assume 'Paradise' to be equivalent to heaven, and, in fact, identical with the kingdom of glory, cannot fail to find a difficulty here, inasmuch as Christ Himself was not on that day in heaven, but in Hades; and these suggest various ways of escaping from this perplexity; which, however, is of their own creating. A not unfrequent one is the separation of 'to-day' from the words which follow, with the joining of it to those which precede: 'Verily, I say unto thee to-day, thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.'<sup>27</sup> Theophylact says of those who offer this explanation, that they 'do violence to the words';<sup>28</sup> a judgment in which most will concur.<sup>29</sup> By others, who in like manner make Paradise equivalent to heaven, or at least fail to see its identity with Hades, or rather with the more blessed half of Hades, it is said that however his human soul was that day in this latter place, yet, according to his divine nature everywhere present, He was in Paradise,—that is, as they understand it, in heaven (cf. John iii. 13).

This is the usual interpretation in the early Church,<sup>30</sup> and in the medieval,<sup>31</sup> and generally in the modern Roman Catholic.<sup>32</sup> But it is not universal. Severus, the great leader of the Monophysites, has seen his way perfectly here;<sup>33</sup> the only drawback to his exposition of this passage being that he makes Paradise here absolutely, and, so to speak, locally, identical with the Garden of innocence of our first parents; the truth being that in the evolution of theology in the later Jewish schools that Garden had lent a name to the happy place where the souls of the faithful, released from the burden of the flesh, are waiting their perfect consummation and bliss; therefore called often in old German, 'Wartehimmel,' or waiting-heaven; and that it is of this Paradise our Lord is speaking. Jeremy Taylor<sup>34</sup> has traced excellently well the history of

27 In the *Evangelium Nicodemi*, 26, the words are actually transposed, and stand thus, σήμερον λέγω σοι, μετ' ἐμοῦ κ.τ.λ.

28 Ἐκβιάζονται τὸ ῥῆμα.

29 The first I know who makes mention of this way of escape from a difficulty, which after all is imaginary, is Hesychius, a presbyter of Jerusalem, who probably wrote in the fifth century (*Quæst.* 47): [a long Greek quote follows which we have omitted]. He goes on to state, but does not approve of, this solution: [quote omitted].

30 Thus Augustine (*Ep. ad Dardanum*, 187); and this, although he has excellently well prepared the way for the right explanation by the distinction which he draws between Paradise, the waiting place of happy spirits, and heaven, or the kingdom of glory (restat igitur ut in inferno intelligatur esse paradus, ubi erat illo die futurus esse secundum humanam animam Christus). This, however, he suggests only to abandon it again, and to take refuge in the omnipresence of Christ, who according to his divine nature was everywhere, and therefore that day in Paradise=heaven. For similar explanations of the Greek Fathers see Suicer, *Theol. s.v. ληστής*.

31 Anselm in one of his deeply pathetic *Orationes* (the 42nd) expresses himself thus: Et quid hoc est, o rex desiderabilis? Tu clavis affligeris, et paradusum promittis. Tu pendes in ligno, et latroni dicis, Hodie mecum eris in paradiso! Et, o desiderium animarum, ubi est paradus, quia dicis latroni, Hodie mecum eris in paradiso? An paradus tecum est, et ubi tu vis, paradus est? An tu indubitanter paradus es, quia tam confidenter promittis, Hodie mecum eris in paradiso? Credo, Domine, credo certe quod ubi tu vis, et ubi tu es, ibi paradus est; et esse tecum, hoc est esse in paradiso. Compare Aquinas, *Sum. Theol.* 3(a), 52. 4.

32 Corn. a Lapide: Certum enim est Christum cum latrone die illo quo obiit non ascendisse in cælum, sed descendisse ad limbum patrum; ibique eis visionem suæ divinitatis impertivisse, itaque eos beâsse; quare tunc Christus eorum sortes mutavit; fecit enim ut limbus esset paradus, ut inferi essent superi, ut infernus esset cælum. Ubi enim est Christus, ibi est paradus; ubi est visio Dei et beatitudo, ibi est cælum.

33 Valuable fragments of his *Commentary on St. Luke* are preserved in Cramer's *Catena*. A few words of his on this matter I will quote: [long Greek quote omitted]. Having vindicated the higher dignity of the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, he proceeds: [Greek once again omitted].

34 A *Funeral Sermon on Sir George Dalstone*. For much which is interesting in Paradise, and on the successive

the word, and what upon his lips it signified now: 'Our blessed Saviour told the converted thief that he should "that day be with Him in Paradise." Now without peradventure He spake so as He was to be understood, meaning by "Paradise" that which the schools and pulpits of the Rabbies did usually speak of it. By "Paradise" till the time of Esdras it is certain the Jews only meant that blessed garden in which God once placed Adam and Eve; but in the time of Esdras, and so downward, when they spake distinctly of things to happen after this life, and began to signify their new discoveries and modern philosophy by names, they called the state of souls expecting the resurrection of their bodies by the name of Gan Eden, the garden of Eden. . . . It is therefore more than probable that when the converted thief heard our blessed Saviour speak of Paradise, or Gan Eden, he who was a Jew and heard that on that day he should be there, understood the meaning to be that he should be there where all the good Jews did believe the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be placed.'

This is the only occasion during the days of his flesh on which (so far at least as our records reach), Paradise was made mention of by our Lord. Once too He mentions it in his glory (Rev. ii. 7), and once it is on the lips of his chief apostle (2 Cor. xii. 4). These are the only times that it occurs in the New Testament. Hanging on the accursed tree his thoughts may well have travelled back to another tree, even the tree of life, standing in the Paradise of God;<sup>35</sup> in that Paradise, which by all this travail and sore agony He was at this instant winning back for the children of men, quenching in his own blood that fiery flaming sword which, since the sin and sentence of Adam, had kept it against them; even as He was opening for them the gates of another Paradise, and, as a Stronger, wresting from the strong one the keys of death and of hell (Rev. i. 18).

I will bring this *Study* to a close with one or two practical observations. There is sometimes a tendency to regard the grace vouchsafed to this penitent as exceptional, as not to be brought within the ordinary laws of God's dealings with the children of men. We may sometimes hear it said, that as that moment when the Son of God hung upon the cross was a moment unlike every other in the moral and spiritual history of the world, so there were graces vouchsafed then, unlike those of any other moment, larger, freer, more marvellous; such as were proper to that time and no other; the gates of mercy being, so to speak, thrown open more widely than at other times; and that therefore no conclusions can be drawn from what then found place as to what will find place when events have returned to their more ordinary course. This is sometimes urged, and chiefly out of a desire to withdraw the temptation to a deferred and late repentance, which the acceptance of this penitent at the closing moment of his life might else seem to hold out to others. I confess that even the desire to avert such an abuse, cannot persuade me to accept this explanation of the grace which he obtained. The laws of God's kingdom, the conditions under which grace may be obtained, are unchangeable. This man was accepted and forgiven exactly on the same grounds as those on which any other will find pardon and acceptance, because he repented, and believed, and obeyed. Time does not exist for God; and if only this repentance, faith, and obedience of his were genuine, whether they were spread over the forty or fifty years to which his life in the natural course of things might have been prolonged, or concentrated into the few hours upon the cross which he actually did survive, this made and could make no difference in God's sight. I have said, 'if only these were

---

meanings attached to the word, see Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus*; and an article, *Ueber die biblische Vorstellung vom Paradiese* in Illgen's *Zeitschrift für die Histor. Theol.* vol. vi. p. 145.

35 Bengel: *In paradiso; in quo feliciores arbores quam in Golgatha; cum immortalitate*, Rev. ii. 7.

genuine,' which in the present instance we know that certainly they were; for this is the fatal danger of all repentance postponed to the last, and thus withdrawn from all trial and proof, that the man, little as he may guess this, may be deceiving himself; that in all likelihood his repentance is *not* genuine, is *not* sincere; that almost certainly it is not so, when it has been deferred on so mean a speculation as this, of giving to God the least and obtaining from Him the most, grinding the corn of life, and, according to the old proverb, giving the flour to the devil, and only the bran to God. It is by the pressing of this, the almost universal self-delusion of death-bed repentances, that we must rescue this Scripture from dangerous abuse, from proving a temptation and a snare, not by excepting the dealing of God with this man from the category of his usual dealings in the kingdom of his grace and power.

One word more. We have admired, and with abundant reason, the faith of the poor penitent, who could believe, even in such an hour as that was, in the royalties of Christ, that the title set in bitter mockery over his head, spake nothing more than the truth, that He *was* a king, and would yet come in his kingdom, and that it would be well with them who should then be remembered of Him. But let us not finally take leave of this history without reverently admiring also *his* faith to whom this prayer was addressed, his confidence, not to be shaken by all which was happening round Him, which was finding place within Him, in his divine Sonship; his, who could believe that, crucified through weakness, He was yet Lord over all, that all things had been delivered into his hands by his Father, that He could grant to this suppliant for his grace all which he asked, and much more than he asked; who dispensed as confidently his favours from that cross of shame as the kings of the earth dispense theirs from their thrones of glory; who in this promise claimed and avouched all worlds as his own. Not when the victory had been already won, and He had been declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead (Rom. i. 4), did He say to the beloved apostle, 'I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of death and of hell' (Rev. i. 18), with a calmer and more majestic confidence than to this poor suppliant man He declares in the hour of his own agony, '*To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.*'<sup>36</sup> Truly this is the Lord of life; and then, when He thus spake, was gloriously fulfilled that which so many of the early Fathers thought they found written as a prophecy of the triumphs of the cross in the 96th Psalm, and which is equally true whether there fore-announced or not, *Regnavit a ligno Deus.*

---

36 Augustine (*Serm.* 285): *Ita factæ sunt tres cruces, tres caussæ. Unus latronum Christo insultabat; alter sua mala confessus Christi se misericordiæ commendabat. Crux Christi in medio non fuit supplicium, sed tribunal; de cruce quippe insultantem damnavit, credentem liberavit. Timete, insultantes; gaudete, credentes. Hoc faciet in claritate, quod fecit in humilitate.*