

JUDAS AND THE KINGDOM.

BY DUDLEY WRIGHT.¹

PROBABLY there has been no character in sacred or profane history who has been more abused on such slender evidence than the Apostle Judas. Some, like the late Rev. H. R. Haweis, who claimed that Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate were about the two most blackened characters in history, have sought for redeeming features in the Gospel narratives, but the majority have inclined more to the opinion of Dr. George Reith who, commenting on John vi. 70, wrote: "Judas Iscariot was not even a child or son of the devil but a devil himself." A few like the Rochester professor, Dr. A. H. Strong, have been more charitable and admitted that "Judas was an able man and a practical administrator" and that "he probably experienced strong emotions and received strong impulses toward good under the influence of Christ." The name "Judas" however as the Rev. William Bruce, Swedenborgian, has pointed out has come to be regarded "as a name to express the lowest depths of humanity; and his case affords, if not an example, at least a type of the extremity of human degradation and depravity which rendered the Lord's death at once inevitable and necessary." In the spirit of speculation dear to Swedenborgians Mr. Bruce regards Judas as the type of the Jewish Church, which was about to betray and crucify Jesus, killing the Just One whom they professed to be longing and looking for as their deliverer.

The character of Judas has, however, always been considered too much in isolation from his surroundings. Jesus, who declared that he came to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, who was not sparing in his invectives against the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes, who called Herod "a fox," has no word of rebuke to the only one among the twelve who, according to the

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generally accepted belief, was guilty of the heinous crime of treachery. The soldier, who is guilty of that crime, may be condemned to be shot. The most highly civilized nations reckon it as a crime in the first degree and the less civilized of that number regard it as an offence entailing capital punishment. The writer of the Fourth Gospel volunteers the information that on one occasion Jesus called Judas a devil, but there is no evidence to substantiate that statement, and, having regard to the fact that he had already called Peter by that name, and the after event of the betrayal, it is more than probable that Jesus was referring not to Judas at all but Peter; the expression, it will be remembered, was used on the occasion of Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Christ.

As to his fate, Matthew says (xxvii. 3): "Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned repented himself and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying: 'I sinned in betraying innocent blood.' And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, departed and went and hanged himself;" while Peter, in his speech after the Ascension says that "he purchased a field with the reward of his iniquity, and falling headlong he burst asunder in the midst and all his bowels gushed out." With the aid of the imagination it is perhaps possible to reconcile these two statements but they are both opposed to that of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, who says that "Judas walked about in this world a sad example of impiety, for his body having swollen to such an extent that he could not pass where a chariot could pass easily, he was crushed by the chariot, so that his bowels gushed out," which is not opposed to the information supplied by Theophylact that "his eyes were so swollen that they could not see the light, that they were so sunk that they could not be seen even by the optical instruments of physicians, and that the rest of his body was covered with runnings and worms." He further states that "he died in a solitary spot which is left desolate; and no one could pass the place without stopping up his nose with his hands." Misfortunes almost if not quite as dire have overtaken other people who have not been charged with the crime of Judas. Suicide seems to have been a most unlikely event. Repentance, though necessarily bringing remorse in its train, does not lead to self-destruction, but rather to the recognition of the real self within. The Roman Church, of course accepts the suicide and eternal perdition view, though Cajetan has declared that the lips of Judas may be worshipped as having once touched Jesus with a treacherous kiss.

The references to Judas in the Gospel narratives are not nu-

merous, but he is never mentioned without the information being vouchsafed that he was the betrayer, though few commentators have the honesty to point out that the word used for "betray" does not imply treachery. Is it not possible that jealousy may have influenced the Gospel statements concerning Judas, for whether the name Iscariot is derived from Kerieth in Judah or Kerieth in Moab it seems certain that he was the only apostle selected from a place beyond Galilee.

The word "sinned" in Matthew xxvii. 4, has no special meaning but implies, as it invariably does, the committal of a mistake.

It is evident from Matthew x and Mark iii that Judas was among the number who had "power over unclean spirits and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of diseases" and was one sent forth to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out devils," so that if the orthodox conception be the correct one he was empowered to do what in Matthew xii Jesus is represented as describing to be impossible. We have only the unsupported statement of the Fourth Gospel that he was a thief, although from this slender foundation a writer in the *Pulpit Commentary* states that Judas "began with petty peculations which were not discovered by his comrades." The position of steward in Essenic communities was one of great responsibility, and the following statement of Mr. Haweis in *The Picture of Jesus* seems a nearer approximation to the truth:

"Had Judas really been a thief, would he have been left with the bag and trusted as almoner, as he was down to the last day of Jesus's life—the day before the crucifixion? Not likely. In fairness to the poor, if not to his own apostles, Jesus would not have allowed that. No, the blot on Judas so far is not that he carried the bag and filched, but that incessant care about money bred in him avarice and insensibility to the spiritual side of life, the opposites of which were manifested so touchingly by the woman who broke the alabaster vase full of precious ointment for love of the Lord."

Arguing by deduction it would seem that there was this scarcity of money for, although the thirty pieces of silver are said to have been returned to the priests, there is no mention of the transmission of any money to the remnant of the apostles when the stewardship of Judas came to an end.

There are discrepancies in the Gospel narrative as to the precise moment Judas succumbed to the temptation to betray Jesus, or, rather, when "the devil entered into him." According to the Fourth Gospel this did not happen until after the morsel had been handed him by Jesus, while Luke says that this event happened before the

supper, and all the Synoptists agree in placing the bargaining with the chief priests and captains before the supper. According to the *First Gospel of the Infancy* Judas was possessed by Satan from a very early age, and one day when sitting by Jesus "he went to bite him. And because he could not do it he struck Jesus on the right side, so that he cried out. And in the same moment Satan went out of the boy and ran away like a mad dog. And that same side on which Judas struck him the Jews pierced with a spear."

There seems however to be little ground for the somewhat extravagant language employed by Dean Farrar in his *Life of Christ* when he says:

"As all the winds, on some night of storm, riot and howl through the rent walls of some desecrated shrine, so through the ruined life of Judas envy and avarice, and hatred and ingratitude, were rushing all at once. In that bewildering chaos of a soul spotted with mortal guilt, the Satanic had triumphed over the human; in that dark heart earth and hell were henceforth at one; in that lost soul sin had conceived and brought forth death."

If an unprejudiced view of the Gospel narratives is taken it is highly probable that Judas acted not only with the full knowledge and approbation of Jesus, but even by his direct command. Dr. Stalker is of opinion that Judas "hoped to become chancellor of the exchequer in the new kingdom" which seems not at all unlikely. He was the least obtrusive character among the apostles, and had not Jesus declared that the one who humbled himself would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Mr. Matthew Arnold and other writers of repute have traced the gradual growth of the Messianic idea and the usurpation of the spiritual conception of dominion by the materialistic one of kingdom, and the devout Jews who based their faith upon the literal interpretation of prophecy believed in the advent of a personal Messiah who would sit upon the throne of David. Simeon, the priest, was waiting for the consolation of Israel and had been told in a dream that he would see the Messiah before he died. Anna, the prophetess, when she saw the infant Jesus spake of him to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. There is nothing supernatural or impossible in these supernormal phenomena. Similar authentic occurrences are happening daily, and are encountered in the biographies of saints, preachers and other public men. John the Baptist evidently expected Jesus to assume the rôle of Messiah, and it would seem from the questions he asked Jesus by the medium of his disciples that he was somewhat impatient at what he regarded as the unnecessary delay which was

taking place before putting in his claim to the throne. The massacre of the infants at the instigation of Herod is attributed to his fear of the establishment of a rival kingdom, and they who listened to the wild utterances of the Judean preacher would place a material and not a spiritual interpretation upon the message he delivered.

At the outset of his ministry Jesus taught in parables the spiritual nature of the kingdom, but, afterwards, in the progress of his career he seems to have adopted the prevalent materialistic views. He who had left the multitude when they wanted to make him a king, entered Jerusalem as a would-be king and refused to rebuke his disciples when they joyfully publicly proclaimed him to be such. The expectations raised by this triumphal entry were not fulfilled; there was no inauguration of government by an earthly conqueror and no rewards meted out to his followers, and from that time Jesus's invectives against the Scribes and Pharisees increased in number and force. After this triumphal entry Jesus was asked to state by what authority these things were done and refused to give any answer. The activity of the priests to secure his arrest increased and the Pharisees tried to inveigle him into expressing a negative opinion against the paying of tribute to Cæsar. The hopes of the disciples had been raised to the highest pitch, and, though, at the Paschal Supper, there was strife among the apostles as to who should be the greatest in the kingdom, the rebuke of Jesus was of the mildest description and even that was toned down by the promise that they should eat and drink at his table in the kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

There was undoubtedly a secret understanding between Jesus and Judas. "That thou doest do quickly," he said, "and no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him." The passing of the morsel was regarded as a mark of high honor and there is no hint that the incident here was an exception to this general rule. Dr. Plummer thinks that Jesus, as a forlorn hope, gave the traitor a mark of affection, but such a view is hardly consistent with the general narrative. Certainly the words of Dr. Reith: "What a moment in the history of a soul! Life and death, heaven and hell, God and the devil, contending for him; and the scale going to eternal misery and loss," seem not only extravagant but almost bordering on the blasphemous to thus describe Omnipotent Love worsted in a conflict with an evil power.

The disciples merely thought that Judas, as steward, left the company to make some purchases for the coming feast, which proves that though they may have been sitting at a Paschal Meal it was not

the Passover, when no purchases could have been made. The fact that Judas left the gathering immediately after receiving the morsel and before Jesus broke the bread, drank wine and distributed the elements to the remaining apostles, destroys the reality of the scene made familiar to us by artists of the Judas with cunning countenance listening to the words of Jesus and upsetting the salt cellar at the same time, as well as causing to vanish the superstition with regard to the number thirteen because of the presence of Judas at the Last Supper.

The apostles' hopes of the immediate establishment of the kingdom must have been raised when Jesus declared "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." Words of joy and exultation fell from Jesus' lips immediately after the departure of Judas, followed as quickly by the full realization of the consequence of his act when he declared, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night," whereupon he once again rose to the spiritual conception of his mission in the discourse narrated in John xiv-xvii.

That Jesus had a large following is evident by the desire of the priests to effect his arrest "in the absence of the multitude," or, as the alternative reading gives it "without tumult."

The two disciples who were journeying to Emmaus from Jerusalem had no words of regret for the fate that had overtaken Jesus: they thought only of their own loss. "We trusted it had been he who should have redeemed Israel."

No artist has yet done justice to that scene upon the Mount of Olives in the Ascension morn and depicted the earnestness and agitation with which the Apostles asked the question, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?" They clung still to their belief in an earthly kingdom and, doubtless, again literally interpreting prophecy, thought of the words uttered over 500 years before: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem in the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and the west, and there shall be a very great valley: and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north and half of it toward the south."