

that names itself after Him. If history in general cannot be understood without the significance of those exalted personalities who gave the impulse to any great movement, and who cannot be interpreted as mere products of their times, how much more does this apply to the sacred history of the origin of Christianity, in view of the person of Christ! To us He is the only-begotten Son of the Father, who has revealed the Father unto us. Give Christianity confidently a place by the side of other religions. Christianity contains whatever

is noble and divine in them, and much that they do not contain. Christianity recognizes the problem of sin, and proclaims the atonement of the sinner with God. Safely compare the Christ with Buddha or whomsoever you please. He raises Himself above them all, even as the Jungfrau in all her virginal glory rises high above her surroundings. The 'seeing' (*ὄραϊν*) of the Son of Man, becomes a sight of admiration (*θεωπέειν*), and the admiration ends in worship. *Sol Justitiæ, illustra nos!*

Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

BY THE REV. W. C. ALLEN, M.A., FELLOW OF EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

THESE are very simple words, and yet how they quicken the imagination. 'The kingdom of heaven'—is it the New Jerusalem which St. John saw coming down from God out of heaven, alight with the glory of God, splendid with its twelve gates, and its walls of gold, and its river of sweet waters, and its trees of life? Or is it the Church of God, the society of the faithful, the blessed company of all true-hearted saints, bearing through the ages of the world the gospel of God's goodness, terrible as a bannered army? Or is it the wide-spreading land towards which our eyes are turned, in which the king shall reign in righteousness, and princes rule in judgment?

And then the keys. To us English people the phrase suggests the barred gate or the locked door to be opened only by those who have the keys. And all this given to one man. 'I will give unto *thee* the keys.' No wonder that the figure of St. Peter has assumed a gigantic place in the imagination of men. What a position to hold! Janitor of the kingdom of heaven!

Or once again, how the words stir our imagination as we think of the influence that these short and simple syllables have exercised in European history, of the great system of ecclesiastical government built upon them, of the appeal made to them to-day, as through the nineteen centuries of Western civilization, in support of claims to authority over Christian men, and to their obedience. And truly any man or body of men would rightly claim our

solicitude and interest, if we knew that they could, in fact, open to us the door into that land of the blest, or throw back the gates of the city of God.

Let me give you one simple instance from a bygone age of the influence of these words upon the minds of simple men.

In the year 664 A.D. a conference of Christian bishops was held at Whitby. There were some matters of dispute between Christian men, and the king of Northumbria wished to see if some agreement could not be arrived at. He listened to the arguments on this side and on that until one speaker urged that the custom which he advocated had the authority of St. Peter. No further argument was necessary. 'I will not decide,' said the king, 'against the keeper of the door, lest when I come to the gates of heaven he shut the door against me.'

The same feeling influences to-day many who never heard of the Northumbrian king.

'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.'

I wish this morning¹ to make one or two suggestions as to the possible meaning of these much debated words, and then to point out how these our brethren, who are to-day to receive their commission, hold keys of the kingdom in proportion to their office; and lastly, to show how, in a sense, all

¹ This sermon was preached in Lichfield Cathedral on September 22, 1907.

who are Christ's disciples share the responsibility of having keys of the kingdom.

What, then, are the keys? To a Jew educated in the Old Testament the phrase would probably suggest the idea of authority, and the office of a steward or high official, rather than that of a door or gate-keeper. From this point of view the phrase would denote administrative authority, and would be further explained and expanded in the words which follow. For to a Jew 'to bind' and 'to loose' was the work of the ecclesiastical lawyer, and meant 'to allow' or 'to forbid,' 'to declare legal' or 'illegal.' St. Peter was to hold the keys, *i.e.* he was to be supreme administrator; he was to bind and to loose, *i.e.* he was to be supreme legislator. It is not unlikely that as the evangelist wrote the words, these were the conceptions which arose to his mind as to the nature of St. Peter's position within the kingdom.

But if we put aside for a moment the clause about binding and loosing, which is elsewhere written, not of St. Peter alone, but of the whole body of Christian disciples, and think only about the keys, it will be clear that the idea involved in having the keys may be that of opening a locked door. It is so used elsewhere by Christ Himself. He said of the Pharisees that they had the keys of knowledge, but that instead of opening the door of knowledge for the people to pass in, they neither went in themselves, nor allowed others to do so. Now if the key promised or given to St. Peter was a key which opened the door unto the kingdom, we can hardly doubt what it symbolizes. For did not Christ speak of Himself as the door? 'I am the door,' He said. And what can be the key of that door but faith and trust in Him. This, indeed, is the keynote of the whole New Testament, that that which will admit men into the kingdom, that which alone is the sure pledge of their entry there, is faith and trust in Him as the Son of God, resulting in baptism into His name.

Now this it was which was St. Peter's claim to entry. He had just given utterance to the great confession in Christ as the Son of God. And Christ promised him that it should be his privilege to open the door for others, no doubt by bringing them to faith and trust in Him and to baptism into His name.

We may, perhaps, paraphrase the words as follows:—

'Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jona. Flesh and blood have not revealed it to thee, *i.e.* the truth to which you have just given utterance was not taught you by men, it came to you by direct revelation from the Father in heaven. Your name is Peter, which signifies a stone, something hard. And this truth to which you have given expression is also something hard, a rock. And a rock is good for foundation work. I will build My Church upon it. The community of My disciples shall be established on this truth of My Divine Sonship. And if this truth is from one point of view a foundation rock, it is from another a key which will admit into the kingdom where I shall reign. You have the key, it was given to you by revelation of God. You shall admit others, and give to them the same key by bringing them to faith in Me, to admission into the Church, to expectation of My kingdom.'

If this or anything like it was the meaning of the words as Christ spoke them, the keys are the belief in Christ as the Son of God, He Himself is the gate or door; this belief is also the rock, the Church is the body of Christ built upon the rock, and the kingdom is the reign of Christ for which the Church hopes and towards which she looks.

And it may be noted here in passing that if we wish to see how St. Peter himself understood the words about the rock, we must turn to his Epistle. There we shall find him saying that Christ is the living stone upon which the Church is being built up. 'To whom coming,' he writes, 'as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye are being built up a spiritual house.'

Thus when the mind of St. Peter was illuminated by Divine revelation, when he saw as by a sudden unveiling that Jesus of Nazareth whom he had loved and served as a gracious and wise teacher was in truth the Divine Son, the manifestation in human life of the unseen and unknown God, there were put into his hands the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Through this same door of belief in the Incarnate Son of God all who should come into the kingdom would enter. And he was the first to hold the keys. But through the door others should come too. Did St. Peter's mind by some light of inspiration pierce but for a moment the veil of the future? Did he see the countless hosts of the saints flocking from east and west through that door which is Christ, by means

of those keys which are faith and trust in Him? Did he see them pressing into the spiritual house, slowly being erected by unseen hands, upon Christ the living rock? Did he see them, possessed like himself of the keys of the kingdom, calling others into the Church? Perhaps not, for St. Peter was no seer or visionary, but, as it would seem, a man of matter-of-fact mental fibre. But at least his after-life, and the letter which he wrote are a witness to his faithful obedience to his commission. He lived henceforth and died in the work of calling men into the Church, handing on to them, and through them to others the keys of the kingdom.

And to-day, my brethren, we are assembled to see some of our brethren entrusted in a special sense with keys of the kingdom. They are to receive through divinely appointed channels authority to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments. What are these but keys by which men enter into faith and communion with Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, by and through whom alone men may hope to enter the kingdom in which He shall reign. Let us pray for them that they may be sustained with Divine grace for the great work laid upon them. To be thus entrusted with keys of the kingdom is a great privilege. It is also a great responsibility. In this modern world of ours, with its perplexities and its passions, the one hope of men is now as ever Christ the Incarnate Son of God. He draws, as He foretold, all men to Himself. But He draws through the disciples whom He inspires, through the Church which He founded, through the sacraments which He ordained. He is the door. These as means of union with Him are the keys. But how great is the responsibility of those upon whom is laid the privilege of holding the keys. If they adulterate His Word, if they misrepresent the Church, if they do not faith-

fully administer the sacraments, they will turn away from Christ the door, those who would enter, and upon them shall rest the condemnation, 'Woe to you, for ye have the keys—but ye prevent those who would enter in.'

We send them forth with our prayers that they may faithfully use the keys, that they may unlock for many that door which is Christ, and that by their means the body of the faithful who labour and pray for the kingdom may be built up and enlarged.

And lest any of us should forget that not upon these, our brethren alone, but upon all of us who are disciples of Christ, there is laid in some measure this responsibility, let us remember that we too have keys of the kingdom. Christ is the door, and we may all help to open that door for some whom we know. Indeed, perhaps, we never really understand into what a kingdom of light and love, into what a paradise of God He is the door, until we have helped to let someone else in. Even the humblest of us may do that. You may not have been called to be a minister in the Church of God, but you have certainly been called to let others know and see that for you He is the door into the kingdom. Is He for you the Sun of your life, beneath whose bright rays darkness and mist are disappearing? That is a key, use it. Have you strong hope in the brightness of the future, because He abides for ever, and heaven will be where He is. That is also a key, use it. You know, *e.g.*, someone whose life is darkened by doubt or by perplexity, by sin or by sorrow, go and help them. You cannot, perhaps, as it seems to you, do much, or say much. But go, because you love Christ, and know that He loves them, and do your best. If you go in that spirit you shall perhaps, even though you do not know it, help to unlock for them the door into the kingdom of heaven.

Recent Foreign Theology.

Wellhausen and Harnack on the Book of Acts.¹

THE eight notes of Wellhausen concern emendations and interpolations of the text, which impinge

¹ *Noten zur Apostelgeschichte.* Von Julius Wellhausen. 'Nachrichten von der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissen-

more or less seriously upon the historical value of certain passages. As Harnack's essay discusses. *schaften zu Göttingen.* Philologisch-historische Klasse. 1907. Hef 1. 1p. 1-21.'

Die Zeitangaben in der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas. Von Adolf Harnack. 'Sitzungsberichte der königlich Preussischen Akademie des Wissenschaften. xxi. 1907.' Sonderabdruck.