

THE ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE PARABLES AND THE MAXIMS)

BY

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Before I enter into the discussion of the subject at issue, I think the first thing I must do is to define what the kingdom of God is. Modern commentators of the gospels say nothing concrete about it. They relate the term «Kingdom of God» used by Jesus to the Jewish Messianic ideas and sometimes they find it akin to, and sometimes different from it. F. Kunkel avoids the answer to the question by admitting that «we do not know what the Kingdom of God is. It seems to be the goal of spiritual revolution or even of all creation, but there is no objective information about any details. We are still limited to our subjective theories and hopes». ¹ Middleton Murray also says that «to define and classify Jesus' thought about the Kingdom of God is impossible; it has to be seized by an act of imagination from the vantage point within. Then it becomes irrelevant to ask whether Jesus conceived the Kingdom of God as supernatural or natural, as timeless or in time. There is no answer to such questions, because Jesus' mind moved on a plane where such antitheses have no meaning». ²

But, if Jesus had said nothing to explain what He meant by using the term «Kingdom of God», why, then, He advises us to pray: «Thy Kingdom come»? Would it be possible that we are exhorted to pray for something without having been taught or without knowing what it is? And how should we be able to serve the Kingdom if we were unaware of it?

Kunkel solves this difficulty by saying that God could tell us directly about it; but he wants us to find out by ourselves³, but this is not all true. God wants us, indeed, to find out by ourselves only

1. *Creation Continues*, p. 90.

2. *Jesus*, p. 70. quot. by I. H. Marshall, *The Challenge of New Testament Ethics*, The MacMillan Company, New York 1947 p. 25 f.

3. *Ibid.* p. 91.

those truths that fall within the limitations of our knowledge, but truths beyond our possibilities of knowledge are to be revealed to us by a way or another, and such a truth seems to be the truth of the Kingdom of God. The question is so important that the gospels have something to tell us about it.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

The main proclamation of John the Baptist was the exhortation towards the people to repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Mt. 3 : 2). Jesus himself started his ministry as a preacher of the Kingdom of God (Mk. 1 : 14). All his teaching is coloured by the idea of the Kingdom to which He ascribes an ultimate value worthy of being acquired by all man's efforts (Mt. 11 : 12, Lk. 16 : 16). Therefore, it follows that Jesus had to explain the nature of the Kingdom, especially at a time when a false idea of a worldly Kingdom of God was prevailing among Jews, and one can say that all the parables of the Kingdom refer to this explanation. There are also some other intimations in his sayings more explicit than his parables, that guide us to find out what the Kingdom of God is.

Though Jesus started his ministry by preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and saying : «The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand ; repent and believe in the gospel» (Mk. 1 : 14), a little later He presents himself as the ruler of the Kingdom. He calls Simon and Andrew to follow him promising to make them «become fishers of men» (Mk. 1 : 17). He claims complete self-denial from his disciples, who had to leave everything for his sake (Mt. 10 : 38), and assures them that, «blessed is he who takes no offence at me» (Mt. 11 : 6), and «whoever causes to shake the faith of one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a great mill-stone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea» (Mt. 18 : 6), while «whoever denies me, I will deny him before my Father» (Mt. 10 : 33). In general He calls men to take his «yoke» upon them (Mt. 11 : 29), claiming for Himself the supreme authority of the lawgiver, who has the right both to give a new law and amend the law of Moses. All these imply that Jesus considers Himself to be the bearer and, at the same time, the ruler, the king, of the Kingdom of God. In other cases He is more explicit. Before Pilate at his question: «Art thou the king of the Jews?» (Jn 18 : 33), acceptet that He was a king, but explained : «My Kingship is not of this world ; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight,

that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingdom is not of this world» (Jn 18:36). In other words, «My Kingdom is neither of a worldly nature nor is it defended by worldly powers», as Jews were expecting the Kingdom of God to be.

A more clear answer to the question, as to what was the nature of the Kingdom He came to set up on earth, is given by Jesus in Mt. 16:16-19. When Peter confessed that He is «Christ the Son of the living God», He said to him: «Thou art Peter and on this rock (πέτρα) I will build my Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it». Here the Church is identical with the Kingdom and has the same characteristics with it, as Jesus described them before Pilate by having said: «My Kingdom is neither of worldly nature, nor is it defended by worldly powers». This can also apply to the Church, for though not being defended by worldly powers the Church appears so powerful that even the gates of Hades will not succeed in prevailing against it. Furthermore, Jesus invests the Church with the supreme authority of forgiving the sins of men or of denying forgiveness. He also relates the Church to the Kingdom when He says to disciples: «I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven» (cf. Mt. 18:18 and Jn 20:23). This last verse implies a close relationship or a kind of unity between the Church and the Kingdom of Heaven, so that the Church is represented as an earthly and visible constitution of a transcendent origin and exercising heavenly functions as well.

In other cases Jesus identifies Himself with the Church, as it is clearly shown in the simile of the vine and its branches (Jn 15:1-7). In this connotation St. Paul defines the Church as the body of Christ, of which each Christian is an individual member (1 Co. 12:27). Early ecclesiastic tradition and early Fathers, as Chrysostom and Augustine, as well as posterior writers, as Luther and others,¹ consider the Kingdom of God to be identical with the Christian Church which is the new Israel,² and in this meaning St. Cyprianus taught that «outside the Church there is no salvation» (*extra Ecclesia nulla salus est*),

1. Richard Whately, Archbishop of Bulbin, wrote a book on this basis under the title: *The Kingdom of Christ*. New York, 1842.

2. Entirely groundless is the distinction made by John J. Morey between Kingdom and Church. He supports the idea that the Church has been built on the Kingdom and that Britain is the modern Israel and the basis of the kingdom (*The Parables of the Kingdom of God*. London 1936, p. 46).

a doctrine which is still held by the Roman Catholic Church as well as by the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Some of the parables are capable of this interpretation. In the Parable of the Tares, beginning with the words: «The kingdom of heaven may be compared», Jesus Himself, explaining it to his disciples, says that «he that soweth the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the Kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one» (Mt. 13: 37-38). As we know by historic experience Jesus set up his Church consisting of faithful people living in this world which is composed of good men (actually Christians) and bad men (nominally or potentially Christians, but bad in themselves and unworthy of the Kingdom of God), while the Parables of the Mustard Seed (Mt. 13: 31-32) and of the Leaven (Mt. 13: 33) imply the setting up of the Church composed at its beginning of the narrow circle of Christ's disciples and its gradual growth throughout the world. The Parable of the Drag-Net (Mt. 13: 47-48), on the other hand, represents the Kingdom of God as a net that, when cast into the sea, gathers fish of every kind, good and bad. This feature is found to be a feature of the Church, which in its present form contains both good Christians and nominally Christians, who will be differentiated in the last judgment.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, (12:22-23), Christians are represented to be citizens of the city of God, which is called heavenly Jerusalem, festal gathering of innumerable angels, and church of the first-born in heaven. Peter also considers Christians to be «the chosen race, the royal priesthood (βασιλειον ιερατευμα) the holy nation, God's own people» (1 Pet. 2:9). This description involves a twofold nature of the Kingdom of God as consisting of the Church in Heaven—the triumphant (θριαμβεύουσαν) Church—and the Church on earth—the militant (στρατευομένην) Church. It follows, then, that the link between the members of the Church is not interrupted by death, but the mutual relations of the quick and the members of the triumphant Church continue even after separation effected by death. And as Christ is the mystical body and the Lord of the Church in its twofold nature, it follows that the Kingdom of God in a wide sense has two spheres; the heavenly and the earthly spheres. In a narrow and eschatological sense the Kingdom of God is in Heaven, where the will of God is ruling in an absolute way, and this is the Kingdom men are called for membership (He. 13:14) through the Church, the earthly branch of the Kingdom.

ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE KINGDOM

As a foreign person in order to become a citizen of a state has to present certain requirements, likewise, if one wants to be enrolled as a member of the Kingdom of God, he will be asked to present his qualifications on which his membership of the Kingdom must be based. From what Jesus says in relation to the ethics of the Kingdom the main requirements seem to be the following:

1. *Call from God and free will on the part of man.* Jesus starting his ministry called all those who labour and are heavy-laden to go to him in order that He may give them rest (Mt. 11:28). That the mission of Jesus had the purpose of calling men to prepare themselves for the Kingdom is indicated by many passages of the gospels. He began his ministry by calling men to repentance (Mt. 1:14). He calls His disciples; His general calling to all men is: He who wills, let him follow me (Mt. 16:24), and appeals to free will of all men who are left free to accept or to reject it. No violence is indicated by it. The acceptance of the call is rewarded, while the rejection of it, implying insistence in sinful condition, is punished. This is clearly given in the Parable of the Marriage Supper (Mt. 22:2-14). «The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son and sent forth his servants to call those who were invited... But they made light of it and went off... and some of them seized the servants and killed them». The King was angry and sent his troops and destroyed these murderers and burned their city. Then he sent his servants to invite other men who accepted his invitation and rejoiced the happiness offered to them as a reward of their good will. The end of the parable «many are called but a few are chosen» shows that all men—the word «many» (πολλοί) here is equivalent with the word «all» (πάντες) and thus is interpreted by ancient commentators, St. Chrysostom and others—are invited, but are considered to be «chosen» only those who accept the calling with a free will and without compulsion.

2. *Repentance and Faith.* After having accepted the calling, the second step of man's preparation for membership of the Kingdom of God is repentance. According to the doctrine of the Scripture man is a sinner and, as such, cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven, unless he will rid himself of his sins through repentance and faith. Therefore, Christ came into the world with the exclusive purpose to call men to repentance. Repentance involves faith; one cannot say which of the two comes prior to the other. It is better to say that both are gifts of God to those who possess good will and disposition to accept the call for

salvation, and are granted to them immediately after they have accepted God's call. Repentance means a full change in the whole attitude of man and the decision to undertake the difficult straggle to overcome his weaknesses and bad tendencies, and install in himself a stable moral life led in accordance with the will of God. Faith, on the other hand, means the innermost man's confidence that God is true in His promise and that through the death of Christ He will set the faithful free from the dominion of sin and make them become worthy of being heirs of His Kingdom.

A very fine illustration of repentance and faith is given to us in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-25). The younger of a man's two sons, having mistaken his dependence on his father for privation of freedom, asked his father's permission to leave the paternal house in order to lead a life according to his own will. But instead of being free, as he had believed, he deprived himself of his father's inheritance and became a sheer slave of his own sinful passions and arrived at a full misery. But some time «he came to himself»—he repented—and decided to come back to his father and ask his forgiveness. His decision to come back is a manifestation of faith, which he re-obtained after having realized that his misbelief in his father was the cause of his misery. «And he arose and came to his father», who, seeing him coming back, «had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him». The picture of the Prodigal Son is a common picture applying to every man, who has been saved through the grace of God. The process from repentance, as from a starting-point, up to the arrival at the paternal house involves, indeed, a great strife, the happy outcome of which depends on two important and indispensable factors; man's will and God's grace. Both these factors are involved in the process of the Prodigal Son's return. ~~The two main pictures of it, that is, that of the Son going back to his father, and that of the father running to meet him coming back, are indicating, the first, man's will, and the second, God's grace or help. And the result of the co-operation of these two factors is the happy condition of man effected through faith and repentance, which is marvelously illustrated in the father's affirmation: «This my son was dead and is alive again». Dead, indeed, is the man who lives out of the regime of the Kingdom of God represented here as the father's house, i. e., man's own house, while alive and happy is he who chooses and maintains to live in it. This life is elsewhere described by Christ as eternal: «Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die» (Jn 11:26).~~

3. *New Birth.* Next to repentance and faith comes new birth. Jesus speaking to Nicodemus (Jn 3:1 f.) says that «unless one is born anew he cannot enter the Kingdom of God»; and interpreting what new-birth is, He describes it as a rebirth «of water and spirit». Though new-birth, in ethical sense, means the inner renaissance of man effected by faith and grace, there is no doubt that Jesus is here explaining the significance of the sacrament of Baptism as the most indispensable requirement of man, to enter the Kingdom. Baptism is not a simple symbol that symbolizes the new life in Christ, but with it and through it an actual change from the life of sin to the regenerated life in Christ is taking place. According to St. Paul's interpretation, in virtue of the baptism the old man, the man of sin, dies and the man of virtue, the new man in Christ, emerges out of it. (Rom. 6:3-11, 2 Co. 5:14). And, to quote Kunkel's words, «this going down into the water symbolizes a regression into the primeval state of existence. The human body, for a moment, ceases to be carrier of individual consciousness. The initiate becomes an unconscious part of the material substance of the universe. He goes into the womb from where the Creator called him. He becomes matter again, and then emerges, breathing anew, on a higher level, as a conscious spirit; he is actually 're-born'». ¹ The ethical aspect of the baptism lies also in the free will with which man proceeds towards it and with which he accepts the obligations and duties that come out of it.

4. *Self-denial.* In the Baptism, in addition to the confession of faith in Christ, we recognize that we belong no longer to ourselves but to Him who redeemed us at the highest price from the slavery of sin. We declare self-denial and full belongingness to Christ who died for us. We confess full dedication to serve the highest goals of Christ in this world, which consist in the prevailing of His Kingdom among men. We declare with His disciples: «Lo, we have left all and followed Thee» (Mk. 10:28). Indeed, self-denial means to leave everything for the Kingdom of God. One cannot serve two masters; nor can one mark any advance in spiritual life while he keeps himself tied with things of this world; «no one, who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God» (Lk. 9:62).

As it is very correctly said, that «there is no sin in all the world which is not an expression of undue self-love», ² it can also, on the contrary, be said, that every kind of virtue is an expression of self-

1. *Creation Continues*, p. 39.

2. L. H. Marshall, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

denial. A kind of self-denial is found in the parable of the Talents and Pounds (Lk. 19:12-27). The first two servants who traded on the talents entrusted to them, the one having gained ten talents and the other five, proved themselves not caring for their own interests but for their master's. By having done so they proved themselves to be virtuous and worthy of praise and reward, while the third one who did not trade on the talent given to him showed selfishness by not willing to work on account of his master and proved himself worthy of condemnation and punishment.

Jesus defines self-denial as the first condition of discipleship. «If any man wishes to come after me», He says, i. e., to be employed as a servant in my mission, «let him deny himself (ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτόν)... and follow me» (Mt. 16:24). Self-denial, therefore, involves the abandonment of contemporary and relevant values for the sake of the permanent and eternal ones. It enables man to distinguish between, and make the due classification of values. The due appreciation as well as the preference of the highest values to the subordinate and secondary ones are shown in the Parables of the Hidden Treasure (Mt. 13:44) and the Precious Pearl (Mt. 13:45-46). Here both the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of a high price represent the Kingdom of God as being the highest of all values for which these two men sold all that they had and bought it. The meaning of both these parables is eschatological and the purchase of the Kingdom implies the outcome of man's right orientation in the quest of the ultimate truth during his present life. And when he discovers it he sacrifices all secondary values, even his life, for the sake of truth. It is the nature of self-denial, in its last analysis, as Jesus interprets it, to be identical with self-love. For, «whoever loses his life for my sake he will save it» (Lk. 9:24), affirms the Lord.

«This idea of self-denial», as Marshall points out, «is something new in Ethics, and self-sacrifice for the sake of others, as a means to social good, is the central idea of Christian morality. It is from this vantage point that we see the innermost meaning of Jesus' call to repentance—there is to be a complete change of mind, change of front, a redirection of interest and love and care. When a man repents he stops thinking and caring for himself alone and takes God and his neighbour into all his thoughts and into all his decisions in matters of conduct. The rule of self is abandoned for the voluntary acceptance of the rule of God»¹.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

5. *Love as the Highest Requirement.* Jesus in defining the law of the Kingdom, formulated it in two commandments; (a) «Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy strength» and (b) «Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself» (Mk. 12:30-31). It is plain that Jesus maintained that the highest requirement of the Kingdom is love manifesting itself in three forms; (a) love of God, (b) love of neighbour, and (c) love of oneself. The love of God manifests itself in the unshakable faith that God is the Father of all men and, as such, He is Love seeking for all men's salvation. This faith predisposes man to confide himself in the care of God like the children absolutely depend themselves on their parents' care (Mt. 18:3). Love of neighbour, in so far as all individuals are of equal value before God, lies in the appreciation and acceptance of this equality and its measure is the love of oneself.

Jesus took these commandments from the Old Testament (Deut. 30:6 and Lev. 19:18), but it is something new in His presentation. He saw and stressed the profound connection between the two and summed up the whole content of religion and ethics in these two sentences: God is the God of Love and he who wishes to be a child of God must be caught and carried along by the stream of divine love and reflect the love of God in his own life. Further, in the Parable of the Kind Samaritan, Jesus introduced a new conception of 'neighbour' as any human being whom it is possible to serve whatever may be his race, nation or creed. Again, Jesus almost fused these two commandments into one, because the love of God is inseparable from the love of man, so that failure to love man is a palpable proof that there is no genuine love of God. This relation between love of God and love of neighbour made St. John say; «If any man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar» (1 Jn. 4:20). Likewise also the love of man, in the deeper and wider sense of the term, is inseparable from the love of God.

Though love as a commandment appears to be deprived of ethical value, in so far as its appeal is directed not to any external rule but to the will of man by which it is to be transformed into an active and vivid rule of life, love is invested with the highest moral value; for, as Marshall correctly says, «ἀγαπᾶν is determined by the subject, as a free determined act»;¹ «The love of God is the inspiration of life, a great moral dynamic; and the love of man is the clue to the overwhelming

1. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

majority of the problems of conduct. He, who loves God and loves his neighbour as himself, is on the high-road to the highest ethical achievement to man»¹.

A general measure for one to test his conduct in his relations with his neighbours is the so called Golden Rule given by Jesus: «Whatever you wish men to do to you, do also to them» (Mt. 7:12, Lk. 6:31). This rule is given as a positive expression and complement of the Rabbinic formula: «What thou disliketh doth not to others» (*cf.* Tobit 4:15). True Christian love is not the apathetic and indifferent disposition towards one's neighbour, but the innermost predisposition or tendency to manifesting itself in the care of others' profit. In his care for profiting others, the follower of Christ can exclude nobody, even his enemies. Jesus leaves no doubt about it by saying: «You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you» (Mt. 5:43-44). He who is perfect in love does not make any exception in the objects of his love. As God in His perfection manifests His care both about good and bad men, likewise also he, who wants to be perfect in love, ought to love not only his friends but his enemies as well. He ought to do that as an obligation of imitating his heavenly Father and because even his enemies possess the same value as himself, for they are potential members of the Kingdom of God.

I am not going to discuss in further details the significance of love and its application in the particular cases in the field of human relations as a systematic work on the Ethics of the Kingdom of God should do. I suffice only to sum up that love is the ground on which all virtues flourish. The requirements for the Kingdom of God that are counted in the Beatitudes, i. e., poorness in spirit (humility or self-knowledge), meekness, hunger and thirstiness for righteousness, mercifulness, pure-heartedness, peacemaking, and readiness to suffer for the sake of truth, presupose love as their foundation and source.

Love is not only the supreme law of the Kingdom but also the invincible power that links its members, both in this present and the eternal life. And one can say that lack of love is the fundamental cause of all evil. Lack of love is the cause of disunion of the Church in the course of history and cleavage into numerous churches, the most of which conflict with each other. And we would not be far from

1. L. H. Marshall, *ibid.*, p. 107.

truth if we should maintain that the evil still prevails on earth owing to the fact that Christianity, the new Israel, is not governed by the rule of love and through the ages—except in the three first centuries—spent its powers in creating conditions of disunion instead of working for the prevailing of the Kingdom of God.

Long ago I read a book published in 1916, that is, two years after the outburst of the World War I, from which I quote: «There is in many minds a conviction that the day of the Churches is to an end. That is not merely an idea entertained by unsympathetic critics in whom the wish is father to the thought... Recent periodicals have been full of the question: Has the Church collapsed? And most of the answers, even by ministers or exministers, have inclined towards the affirmative».¹ This statement is of great importance; it expresses even to-day many a thinker's disappointment due to the failure of the Church or of the Churches in penetrating human relations with the spirit of Christian love, which should be the only conciliatory power of men's differences and the only factor to create intimate fellowship and Christian brotherhood, without which permanent peace and world union, the ideals of the Kingdom of God, are unattainable. For «what right has a Church disunited in itself to set itself up as a prophet of world harmony? Let the Church first put its own house in order. Till then it is a hypocrisy to expect others to do what it cannot or will not do itself».²

Yet there are some writers who attempt to justify this disunion of Christianity as being indispensable for the benefit of men; our inability to understand it, they say, «lies at the root of the error even of the Apostle St. Paul, who exclaims with his usual fervour but less with his usual wisdom: Has Christ been divided? (1 Co. 1:13). Yea, we may make the answer, He is divided and is yet divisible that all men share in him».³ That this judgement is entirely groundless is quite evident and needs no refutation.

To understand what actual union means we have to recall in mind St. Paul's presentation of the «fullness of God». Writing to Colossians (ch. 2:9), he affirms that in Christ dwelleth all the fullness of Godhead bodily; he also writes to the Ephesians (1:23) that «the Church which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all». That is to say, just as the fullness of God in all His eternal power

1. H. Bridges, *The Religion of Experience*, Chicago 1916, p. 1.

2. G. H. C. McGregor, *Is Christ Divided?* p. 98.

3. Samuel Butler, *The Fair Haven*, p. 206.

and grace and love in time first took bodily form in the person of Christ, and God's eternal purpose of salvation found its focal point in time in His redemptive work, so for all future time will that redemptive work find the focal point at which becomes visible and effective in that Church which is in every truth Christ's Body, one and indivisible as was Christ Himself. For here we reach the second of St. Paul's magnificent conceptions. The Church as the Body of Christ, one living organic unity which embraces a multitude of members and a multitude of functions; Christ is the Head of the life-principle of its limbs, each with his peculiar function to perform, but powerless and useless once they are severed from each other and from the Head.¹

Nothing for St. Paul is more important than this incorporation of all Christians in the Body of Christ, whereby there is to be «one man in Christ Jesus.» It has its beginning in the Baptism where we are «baptized into one Body»; it is constantly renewed in the Lord's Supper where we are reminded that «we, many though we be, are one Body; for we are all partakers of that one body.» For the early Christians both sacraments were ultimately symbols of the unity of the Church, as it is so beautifully expressed in the earliest of all ecclesiastic prayers preserved for us in the Didache of the Twelve Apostles (IX 4): «As this broken bread was scattered upon the hills and was gathered together to become one, so may thy Church be gathered from the borders of the earth into thy Kingdom».²

So far as this is true, the Church is the actually visible part of the Kingdom of God. Its ruling principle is embodied in one word: Ἀγάπη. Ἐνεργὸς καὶ ζῶσα ἀγάπη (active and living love) is the highest requirement both for the individual member of the Kingdom and for the whole organization of the Church. The imperative of love to us, both individually and collectively, lies in our obligation to witness the gospel of the Kingdom of God by giving ourselves living patterns of Christian life and working together to bring about our Lord's will expressed in his prayer: «Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one» (Jn. 17:11) and «that the love which thou hast loved me be in them and I in them (id. 17:26).

1. G. H. C. McGregor, *ibid.*, p. 99.

2. G. H. C. McGregor, *loc. cit.*