

# DODS MARCUS

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:  
THE GOSPEL OF ST.  
JOHN, VOL. I

**Marcus Dods**  
**The Expositor's Bible: The**  
**Gospel of St. John, Vol. I**

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*The Expositor's Bible: The Gospel of St. John, Vol. I:*

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# **Marcus Dods**

## **The Expositor's Bible: The Gospel of St. John, Vol. I**

### **INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

In order to read the Gospel of St. John with some intelligence, it is necessary to understand its purpose and its plan. For in the whole range of literature there is no composition which is a more perfect work of art, or which more rigidly excludes whatever does not subserve its main end. From the first word to the last there is no paragraph, sentence, or expression which is out of its place, or with which we could dispense. Part hangs together with part in perfect balance. The sequence may at times be obscure, but sequence there always is. The relevancy of this or that remark may not at first sight be apparent, but irrelevancy is impossible to this writer.

The object which the Evangelist had in view in writing this Gospel we are not left to find out for ourselves. He explicitly says that his purpose in writing was to promote the belief that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (chap. xx. 31). This purpose, he judges, he will best accomplish, not by writing an essay, nor by framing an abstract argument in advocacy of the claims of

Jesus, but by reproducing in his Gospel those manifestations of His glory which elicited faith in the first disciples and in others. That which had produced faith in his own case and in that of his fellow-disciples, will, he thinks, if fairly set before men, produce faith in them also. He relates, therefore, with the utmost simplicity of language, the scenes in which Jesus seemed to him most significantly to have revealed His power and His goodness, and most forcibly to have demonstrated that the Father was in Him. At the same time he keeps steadily in view the circumstance that these manifestations had not always produced faith, but that alongside of a growing faith there ran an increasing unbelief which at length assumed the form of hostility and outrage. This unbelief he feels called upon to account for. He feels called upon to demonstrate that its true reason lay, not in the inadequacy of Christ's manifestations, but in the unreasonable and unspiritual requirements of the unbelieving, and in their alienation from God. The Gospel thus forms the primary apologetic, which by its very simplicity and closeness to reality touches at every point the underlying causes and principles of faith and unbelief.

The object of the Gospel being kept in view, the plan is at once perceived. Apart from the Prologue (chap. i. 1–18) and the Appendix (chap. xxi.), the body of the work falls into two nearly equal parts, chaps. i. 19–xii., and xiii.–xx. In the former part the Evangelist relates, with a singular felicity of selection, the scenes in which Jesus made those self-revelations which it was most important that men should understand, and the discussions in

which their full significance was brought out. Thus he shows how the glory of Christ was manifested at the marriage in Cana, in the cleansing of the Temple, in the conversation with the Samaritans, in the healing of the impotent man, in the feeding of the five thousand, in the cure of the man born blind; and how, through these various signs or object-lessons, Jesus makes Himself known as the Life, the Light, the Judge of men, or, in one word, as the Son doing the Father's works, manifesting the Father's presence, disclosing in His various words and deeds "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

These manifestations culminate in the raising of Lazarus, recorded in the eleventh chapter. This final sign, while in "many of the Jews" (xi. 45) it produced faith, aggravated at the same time the unbelief of the authorities, who "from that day forth took counsel together for to put Him to death" (xi. 53). The twelfth chapter, therefore, holds a place by itself. In it we have three incidents related, and all related for the same purpose, namely, to demonstrate that there was now no further need of such manifestations of the glory of Jesus as had already been given, and that all things were now ripe for the catastrophe. The incidents in which this became apparent were Mary's anointing of Jesus, His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the enquiry of the Greeks. By introducing these three incidents together at this point, John wishes to show (1) that Jesus was now embalmed in the love of His intimate friends, (2) that He had found in the untutored instincts of the people a response to His claim, and

(3) that even in the still wider circle of the outlying nations His name was known. He may, therefore, now safely finish His self-revelation. It has done its work. And the completeness of its result is seen, not only in this widely-extended impression and firmly-rooted attachment, but also in the maturity of unbelief which now took active steps to take Jesus and put Him to death.

This part of the Gospel therefore appropriately closes with the words: "These things spake Jesus and departed, and did hide Himself from them" (xii. 36). The public manifestation of Jesus is closed.

Between the first and the second part of the Gospel there is interposed a paragraph (xii. 37–50), in which John briefly points out that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was no more than had been predicted by the prophet Isaiah, and that it reflects no suspicion on the manifestations of His relation to the Father which Jesus had made. He then sums up in one or two sentences the significance and consequences of receiving and of rejecting Jesus.

In the second part of the Gospel the writer is still guided by the same purpose of showing how Jesus manifested His glory. This is obvious not merely from the contents of this second part, but also from the fact that in the language of John the death of Jesus is constantly referred to as His glorification, being the "lifting up" which was an essential step to, or part of, His glorification. Before entering upon the last scenes, which are described in chaps. xiii.–xix., Jesus is assured that in His death the Father

is to glorify His Name (xii. 28); and in the prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter, which closes the explanations which our Lord Himself made of His work, it is still the manifestation of His glory that is in His thoughts. The characteristic which distinguishes this second part of the Gospel is, that Jesus no longer manifests His glory to the people in signs of manifest power, but now, in chapters xiii.–xvii., further discloses His glory privately to the Twelve; and in chapters xviii. and xix. passes triumphantly through the ultimate trial which still lay between Him and the final consummation of His glory. That this final glory has been achieved is witnessed by the Resurrection, the record of which, and of its results in faith, occupies the twentieth chapter. De Wette has the credit of being the first to discern that the entire Gospel is held together by this idea of the manifestation of Christ's glory, and that "the glory of our Lord appears in all its brightness in the second part of the narrative (xiii.–xx.), and that (*a*) inwardly and morally in His sufferings and death (xiii.–xix.), and (*b*) outwardly and sensibly, in the triumphant event of the Resurrection."

The best tabulated division of the Gospel with which I am acquainted is that which the Rev. A. Halliday Douglas, M.A., of Huntly, has printed for private circulation. By the kindness of the author I am allowed to publish it here.



# I

## *THE INCARNATION*

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that hath been made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth. John beareth witness of Him, and crieth, saying, This was He of whom I said, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me.

For of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” – John i. 1–18.

In this brief introduction to his Gospel John summarises its contents, and presents an abstract of the history he is about to relate in detail. That the Eternal Word, in whom was the life of all things, became flesh and was manifested among men; that some ignored while others recognised Him, that some received while others rejected Him, – this is what John desires to exhibit at large in his Gospel, and this is what he summarily states in this compact and pregnant introductory passage. He briefly describes a Being whom he names “The Word;” he explains the connection of this Being with God and with created things; he tells how He came to the world and dwelt among men, and he remarks upon the reception He met with. What is summed up in these propositions is unfolded in the Gospel. It narrates in detail the history of the manifestation of the Incarnate Word, and of the faith and unbelief which this manifestation evoked.

John at once introduces us to a Being whom he speaks of as “The Word.” He uses the term without apology, as if already it were familiar to his readers; and yet he adds a brief description of it, as if possibly they might attach to it ideas incompatible with his own. He uses it without apology, because in point of fact it already had circulation both among Greek and Jewish thinkers.

In the Old Testament we meet with a Being called “The Angel of the Lord,” who is at once closely related, if not equivalent, to Jehovah, and at the same time manifested to men. Thus when the Angel of the Lord had appeared to Jacob and wrestled with him, Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for, said he, “I have seen God face to face.”<sup>1</sup> In the apocryphal books of the Old Testament the Wisdom and the Word of God are poetically personified, and occupy the same relation to God on the one hand, and to man on the other, which was filled by the Angel of the Lord. And in the time of Christ “the Word of the Lord” had become the current designation by which Jewish teachers denoted the manifested Jehovah. In explaining the Scriptures, to make them more intelligible to the people, it was customary to substitute for the name of the infinitely exalted Jehovah the name of Jehovah’s manifestation, “the Word of the Lord.”

Beyond Jewish circles of thought the expression would also be readily understood. For not among the Jews only, but everywhere, men have keenly felt the difficulty of arriving at any certain and definite knowledge of the Eternal One. The most rudimentary definition of God, by declaring Him to be a Spirit, at once and for ever dissipates the hope that we can ever see Him, as we see one another, with the bodily eye. This depresses and disturbs the soul. Other objects which invite our thought and feeling we easily apprehend, and our intercourse with them is level to our faculties. It is, indeed, the unseen and

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<sup>1</sup> See also Gen. xvi. 13, xviii. 22; Exod. iii. 6, xxiii. 20; Judges xiii. 22.

intangible spirit of our friends which we value, not the outward appearance. But we scarcely separate the two; and as we reach and know and enjoy our friends through the bodily features with which we are familiar, and the words that strike upon our ear, we instinctively long for intercourse with God and knowledge of Him as familiar and convincing. We put out our hand, but we cannot touch Him. Nowhere in this world can we see Him more than we see Him here and now. If we pass to other worlds, there, too, He is concealed from our sight, inhabiting no body, occupying no place. Job is not alone in his painful and baffling search after God. Thousands continually cry with him, "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him."

In various ways, accordingly, men have striven to alleviate the difficulty of mentally apprehending an invisible, infinite, incomprehensible God. One theory, struck out by the pressure of the difficulty, and frequently advanced, was not altogether incompatible with the ideas suggested by John in this prologue. This theory was accustomed, although with no great definiteness or security, to bridge the chasm between the Eternal God and His works in time by interposing some middle being or beings which might mediate between the known and the unknown. This link between God and His creatures, which deemed to make God and His relation to material things more intelligible, was

sometimes spoken of as “The Word of God.” This seemed an appropriate name by which to designate that through which God made Himself known, and by which He came into relations with things and persons not Himself. Vague indeed was the conception formed even of this intermediary Being. But of this term “the Word,” and of the ideas that centred in it, John took advantage to proclaim Him who is the manifestation of the Eternal, the Image of the Invisible.<sup>2</sup>

The title itself is full of significance. The word of a man is that by which he utters himself, by which he puts himself in communication with other persons and deals with them. By his word he makes his thought and feeling known, and by his word he issues commands and gives effect to his will. His word is distinct from his thought, and yet cannot exist separate from it. Proceeding from the thought and will, from that which is inmost in us and most ourselves, it carries upon itself the imprint of the character and purpose of him who utters it. It is the organ of intelligence and will. It is not mere noise, it is sound instinct with mind, and articulated by intelligent purpose. By a man’s

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<sup>2</sup> For the need of intermediaries, see Plato, *Symposium*, pp. 202–3: “God mingles not with men; but there are spiritual powers which interpret and convey to God the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and rewards of God. These powers span the chasm which divides them, and these spirits or intermediate powers are many and divine.” See also Philo (*Quod Deus Immut.*, xiii.): “God is not comprehensible by the intellect. We know, indeed, that He is, but beyond the fact of His existence we know nothing.” The Word reveals God; see Philo (*De post. Caini*, vi.) “The wise man, longing to apprehend God, and travelling along the path of wisdom and knowledge, first of all meets with the Divine words, and with them abides as a guest.”

word you could perfectly know him, even though you were blind and could never see him. Sight or touch could give you but little fuller information regarding his character if you had listened to his word. His word is his character in expression.

Similarly, the Word of God is God's power, intelligence, and will in expression; not dormant and potential only, but in active exercise. God's Word is His will going forth with creative energy, and communicating life from God, the Source of life and being. "Without Him was not any thing made that was made." He was prior to all created things and Himself with God, and God. He is God coming into relation with other things, revealing Himself, manifesting Himself, communicating Himself. The world is not itself God; things created are not God, but the intelligence and will that brought them into being, and which now sustain and regulate them, these are God. And between the works we see and the God who is past finding out, there is the Word, One who from eternity has been with God, the medium of the first utterance of God's mind and the first forthputting of His power; as close to the inmost nature of God, and as truly uttering that nature, as our word is close to and utters our thought, *capable of being used by no one besides, but by ourselves only.*

It is apparent, then, why John chooses this title to designate Christ in His pre-existent life. No other title brings out so clearly the identification of Christ with God, and the function of Christ to reveal God. It was a term which made the transition easy from Jewish Monotheism to Christian Trinitarianism. Being

already used by the strictest Monotheists to denote a spiritual intermediary between God and the world, it is chosen by John as the appropriate title of Him through whom all revelation of God in the past has been mediated, and who has at length finished revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. The term itself does not explicitly affirm personality; but what it helps us to understand is, that this same Being, the Word, who manifested and uttered God in creation, reveals Him now in humanity. John wishes to bring the incarnation and the new spiritual world it produced into line with the creation and God's original purpose therein. He wishes to show us that this greatest manifestation of God is not an abrupt departure from previous methods, but is the culminating expression of methods and principles which have ever governed the activity of God. Jesus Christ, who reveals the Father now in human nature, is the same Agent as has ever been expressing and giving effect to the Father's will in the creation and government of all things. The same Word who now utters God in and through human nature, has ever been uttering Him in all His works.

All that God has done is to be found in the universe, partly visible and partly known to us. There God may be found, because there He has uttered Himself. But science tells us that in this universe there has been a gradual development from lower to higher, from imperfect towards perfect worlds; and it tells us that man is the last result of this process. In man the creature at last becomes intelligent, self-conscious, endowed with will, capable to some extent of meeting and understanding its Creator. Man is

the last and fullest expression of God's thought, for in man and man's history God finds room for the utterance not merely of His wisdom and power, but of what is most profoundly spiritual and moral in His nature. In man God finds a creature who can sympathise with His purposes, who can respond to His love, who can give exercise to the whole fulness of God.

But in saying that "the Word become flesh" John says much more than that God through the Word created man, and found thus a more perfect means of revealing Himself. The Word created the visible world, but He did not become the visible world. The Word created all men, but He did not become the human race, but one Man, Christ Jesus. No doubt it is true that all men in their measure reveal God, and it is conceivable that some individual should fully illustrate all that God meant to reveal by human nature. It is conceivable that God should so sway a man's will and purify his character that the human will should be from first to last in perfect harmony with the Divine, and that the human character should exhibit the character of God. An ideal man might have been created, God's ideal of man might have been realized, and still we should have had no incarnation. For a perfect man is not all we have in Christ. A perfect man is one thing, the Word Incarnate is another. In the one the personality, the "I" that uses the human nature, is human; in the other, the personality, the "I," is Divine.

By becoming flesh the Word submitted to certain limitations, perhaps impossible for us to define. While in the flesh He could



reveal only what human nature was competent to reveal. But as the human nature had been created in the likeness of the Divine, and as, therefore, “good” and “evil” meant the same to man as to God, the limitation would not be felt in the region of character.

The process of the Incarnation John describes very simply. “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” The Word did not become flesh in the sense that He was turned into flesh, ceasing to be what He had previously been, as a boy who becomes a man ceases to be a boy. In addition to what He already was He assumed human nature, at once enlarging His experience and limiting His present manifestations of Divinity to what was congruous to human nature and earthly circumstance. The Jews were familiar with the idea of God “dwelling” with His people. At the birth of their nation, while they were still dwelling in tents outside the land of promise, God had His tent among the shifting tents of the people, sharing all the vicissitudes of their wandering life, abiding with them even in their thirty-eight years’ exclusion from their land, and thus sharing even their punishment. By the word John here uses he links the body of Christ to the ancient dwelling of God round which the tents of Israel had clustered. God now dwelt among men in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The tabernacle was human, the indwelling Person was Divine. In Christ is realized the actual presence of God among His people, the actual entrance into and personal participation in human history, which was hinted at in the tabernacle and the temple.

In the Incarnation, then, we have God’s response to man’s

craving to find, to see, to know Him. Men, indeed, commonly look past Christ and away from Him, as if in Him God could not be satisfactorily seen; they discontentedly long for some other revelation of the unseen Spirit. But surely this is to mistake. To suppose that God might make Himself more obvious, more distinctly apparent to us, than He has done, is to mistake what God is and how we can know Him. What are the highest attributes of Divinity, the most Divine characteristics of God? Are they great power, vast size, dazzling physical glory that overpowers the sense; or are they infinite goodness, holiness that cannot be tempted, love that accommodates itself to all the needs of all creatures? Surely the latter, the spiritual and moral qualities, are the more Divine. The resistless might of natural forces shows us little of God till we have elsewhere learned to know Him; the power that upholds the planets in their orbits speaks but of physical force, and tells us nothing of any holy, loving Being. There is no moral quality, no character, impressed upon these works of God, mighty though they be. Nothing but an impersonal power meets us in them; a power which may awe and crush us, but which we cannot adore, worship, and love. In a word, God cannot reveal Himself to us by any overwhelming display of His nearness or His power. Though the whole universe fell in ruins around us, or though we saw a new world spring into being before our eyes, we might still suppose that the power by which this was effected was impersonal, and could hold no fellowship with us.

Only, then, through what is personal, only through what is like ourselves, only through what is moral, can God reveal Himself to us. Not by marvellous displays of power that suddenly awe us, but by goodness that the human conscience can apprehend and gradually admire, does God reveal Himself to us. If we doubt God's existence, if we doubt whether there is a Spirit of goodness upholding all things, wielding all things, and triumphant in all things, let us look to Christ. It is in Him we distinctly see upon our own earth, and in circumstances we can examine and understand, *goodness*; goodness tried by every test conceivable, goodness carried to its highest pitch, goodness triumphant. This goodness, though in human forms and circumstances, is yet the goodness of One who comes among men from a higher sphere, teaching, forgiving, commanding, assuring, saving, as One sent to deal with men rather than springing from them. If this is not God, what is God? What higher conception of God has any one ever had? What worthy conception of God is there that is not satisfied here? What do we need in God, or suppose to be in God, which we have not in Christ?

If, then, we still feel as if we had not sufficient assurance of God, it is because we look for the wrong thing, or seek where we can never find. Let us understand that God can best be known as God through His moral qualities, through His love, His tenderness, His regard for right; and we shall perceive that the most suitable revelation is one in which these qualities are manifested. But to apprehend these qualities as they appear in

actual history we must have some sense for and love of them. They that are pure in heart, they shall see God; they who love righteousness, who seek with lowliness for purity and goodness, they will find in Christ a God they can see and trust.

The lessons of the Incarnation are obvious. First, from it we are to take our idea of God. Sometimes we feel as if in attributing to God all good we were dealing merely with fancies of our own which could not be justified by fact. In the Incarnation we see what God has actually done. Here we have, not a fancy, not a hope, not a vague expectation, not a promise, but accomplished fact, as solid and unchangeable as our own past life. This God whom we have often shunned, and felt to be in our way and an obstacle, whom we have suspected of tyranny and thought little of injuring and disobeying, has through compassion and sympathy with us broken through all impossibilities, and contrived to take the sinner's place. He, the ever blessed God, accountable for no evil and sole cause of all good, accepted the whole of our condition, lived as a creature, Himself bare our sicknesses, all that is hardest in life, all that is bitterest and loneliest in death, in His own experience combining all the agonies of sinning and suffering men, and all the ineffable sorrows wherewith God looks upon sin and suffering. All this He did, not for the sake of showing us how much better a thing the Divine nature is than the human, but because His nature impelled Him to do it; because He could not bear to be solitary in His blessedness, to know in Himself the joy of holiness and love

while His creatures were missing this joy and making themselves incapable of all good.

Our first thought of God, then, must ever be that which the Incarnation suggests: that the God with whom alone and in all things we have to do is not One who is alienated from us, or who has no sympathy with us, or who is absorbed in interests very different from ours, and to which we must be sacrificed; but that He is One who sacrifices Himself for us, who makes all things but justice and right bend to serve us, who forgives our misapprehensions, our coldness, our unspeakable folly, and makes common cause with us in all that concerns our welfare. As while on earth He endured the contradiction of sinners, and waited till they came to a better mind, so does He still, with Divine patience, wait till we recognise Him as our Friend, and humbly own Him as our God. He waits till we learn that to be God is not to be a mighty King enthroned above all the assaults of His creatures, but that to be God is to have more love than all besides; to be able to make greater sacrifices for the good of all; to have an infinite capacity to humble Himself, to put Himself out of sight, and to consider our good. This is the God we have in Christ; our Judge becoming our atoning Victim, our God becoming our Father, the Infinite One coming with all His helpfulness into the most intimate relations with us; is this not a God to whom we can trust ourselves, and whom we can love and serve? If this is the real nature of God, if we may always expect such faithfulness and help from God, if to be God be to be all

this, as full of love in the future as He has shown Himself in the past, then may not existence yet be that perfect joy our instincts crave, and towards which we are slowly and doubtfully finding our way through all the darkness, and strains, and shocks that are needed to sift what is spiritual in us from what is unworthy?

The second lesson the Incarnation teaches regards our own duty. Everywhere among the first disciples was this lesson learned and inculcated. "Let this mind," says Paul, "be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." "Christ suffered for us," says Peter, "leaving us an example." "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" is the very spirit of John. Look steadily at the Incarnation, at the love which made Christ take our place and identify Himself with us; consider the new breath of life that this one act has breathed into human life, ennobling the world and showing us how deep and lovely are the possibilities that lie in human nature; and new thoughts of your own conduct will lay hold of your mind. Come to this great central fire, and your cold, hard nature will be melted; try in some sort to weigh this Divine love and accept it as your own, as that which embraces and cares for and carries you on to all good, and you will insensibly be imbued with its spirit. You will feel that no loss could be so great as to lose the possession and exercise of this love in your own heart. Great as are the gifts it bestows, you begin to see that the greatest of them all is that it transforms you into its own likeness, and teaches you yourself to love in the same sort. Understanding our security and our joyful prospect as saved

by the care of God, and as provided for by a love of perfect intelligence and absolute resource; humbled and softened and melted by the free spending upon us of so Divine and complete a grace, our heart overflows with sympathy. We cannot receive Christ's love without communicating it. It imparts a glow to the heart, which must be felt by all that comes in contact with the heart.

And as Christ's love became incarnate, not spending itself in any one great display, apart from the needs of men, but manifesting itself in all the routine and incident of a human life; never wearying through the monotonous toil of His artisan-life, never provoked into forgetfulness in His boyhood; so must our love derived from Him be incarnated; not spent in one display, but animating our whole life in the flesh, and finding expression for itself in all that our earthly condition brings us into contact with. The thoughts we think and the actions we do are mainly concerned with other people. We are living in families, or we are related as employer and employed, or we are thrown together by the hundred necessities of life; in all these connections we are to be guided by the spirit which prompted Christ to become incarnate. Our chance of doing good in the world depends upon this. Our review of life at the close will be satisfactory or the reverse in proportion as we have or have not been in fact animated by the spirit of the Incarnation. We must learn to bear one another's burdens, and the Incarnation shows us that we can do so only in so far as we identify ourselves with

others and live for them. Christ helped us by coming down to our condition and living our life. This is the guide to all help we can give. If anything can reclaim the lowest class in our population, it is by men of godly life living among them; not living among them in comforts unattainable by them, but living in all points as they live, save that they live without sin. Christ had no money to give, no knowledge of science to impart; He lived a sympathetic and godly life, regardless of Himself. Few can follow Him, but let us never lose sight of His method. The poor are not the only class that need help. It is our dependence on money as the medium of charity that has begotten that feeling. It is easy to give money; and so we discharge our obligation, and feel as if we had done all. It is not money that even the poorest have most need of; and it is not money at all, but sympathy, which all classes need – that true sympathy which gives us insight into their condition, and prompts us to bear their burdens, whatever these are. There are many men on earth who are mere hindrances to better men; who cannot manage their own affairs or play their own part, but are continually entangled and in difficulties. They are a drag on society, requiring the help of more serviceable men, and preventing such men from enjoying the fruit of their own labour. There are, again, men who are not of our kind, men whose tastes are not ours. There are men who seem pursued by misfortune, and men who by their own sin keep themselves continually in the mire. There are, in short, various classes of persons with whom we are day by day tempted to have no more to



do whatever; we are exasperated by the discomfort they occasion us; the anxiety and vexation and expenditure of time, feeling, and labour constantly renewed so long as we are in connection with them. Why should we be held down by unworthy people? Why should we have the ease and joy taken out of our life by the ceaseless demands made upon us by wicked, careless, incapable, ungrateful people? Why must we still be patient, still postponing our own interests to theirs? Simply because this is the method by which the salvation of the world is actually accomplished; simply because we ourselves thus tax the patience of Christ, and because we feel that the love we depend upon and believe in as the salvation of the world we must ourselves endeavour to show. Recognising how Christ has humbled Himself to bear the burden of shame and misery we have laid upon Him, we cannot refuse to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the *law* of Christ.

## II

# *RECEPTION CHRIST MET WITH*

### **John i. 1-18**

In describing the Word of God, John mentions two attributes of His by which His relation to men becomes apparent: "All things were made by Him," and "the life was the light of men." By whom were all things made? what is the originating force which has produced the world? how are we to account for the existence, the harmony, and the progress of the universe? – these are questions which must always be put. Everywhere in nature force and intelligence appear; the supply of life and power is unfailing, and the unconscious planets are as regular and harmonious in their action as the creatures that are endowed with conscious intelligence and the power of self-guidance. That the whole universe is one does not admit of a doubt. Far as the astronomer can search into infinite space, he finds the same laws and one plan, and no evidence of another hand or another mind. To what is this unity to be referred? John here affirms that the intelligence and power which underlie all things belong to the Word of God: "without Him was not anything made which was made."

"In Him was life." In this Divine Being, who was "in the

beginning” before all things, there was that which gives existence to all else. “And the life was the light of men.” That life which appears in the harmony and progress of inanimate nature, and in the wonderfully manifold and yet related forms of animal existence, appears in man as “light” – intellectual and moral light, reason and conscience. All the endowment possessed by man as a moral being, capable of self-determination and of choosing what is morally good, springs from the one fountain of life which exists in the Word of God.

It is in the light of this close relationship of the Word to the world and to men that John views the reception He met with when He became flesh and dwelt among us. This reception forms the great tragedy of human history. “In Agamemnon returning to his palace after ten years’ absence, and falling by the hand of his unfaithful spouse, we have the event which is tragical *par excellence* in pagan history. But what is that outrage when compared with the theocratic tragedy? The God invoked by the nation appears in His temple, and is crucified by His own worshippers.” To John it seemed as if the relationship borne by the Word to those who rejected Him was the tragical element in the rejection.

Three different aspects of this relationship are mentioned, that the blindness of the rejecters may more distinctly be seen. First, he says, although the very light that was in man was derived from the Word, and it was by His endowment they had any power to recognise what was illuminating and helpful to their

spiritual nature, they yet shut their eyes to the source of light when presented in the Word Himself. "The life was the light of men... And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not." This is the general statement of the universal experience of the Eternal Word, and it is illustrated in His incarnate experience summarily related in verses 10 and 11. Again: "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." So little had men understood the source of their own being, and so little had they learned to know the significance and purpose of their existence, that when their Creator came they did not recognise Him. And thirdly, even the narrow and carefully-trained circle of the Jews failed to recognise Him; "He came unto His own" – to everything which had pointedly and of set purpose spoken of Him, and could not have existed but to teach His character – "and His own received Him not."

1. "The light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not." As yet John has said nothing of the Incarnation, and is speaking of the Word in His eternal or pre-incarnate state. And one thing he desires to proclaim regarding the Word is, that although it is from Him every man has such light as he has, yet this light is commonly rendered useless, and is not cherished. As it is from the Word, from God's uttered will, that all men have life, so it is from the same source that all the light which is in reason and in conscience is derived. Before the Word appeared in the world, and shone out as the

true light (ver. 9), He was in all rational creatures as their life and light, imparting to men a sense of right and wrong, and shining in their heart with some of the brightness of a Divine presence. This sense of a connection with God and eternity, and this moral faculty, although cherished by some, were commonly not “comprehended.” Evil deeds have been suffered to darken conscience, and it fails to admit the true light.

2. “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.” When our Lord came to earth the heathen world was mainly represented by the Roman Empire, and one of the earliest events of His life on earth was His enrolment as a subject of that empire. If we had been invited before His coming to imagine what would be the result upon this empire of His appearance, we should probably have expected something very different from that which actually happened. The real Sovereign is to appear; the Being who made all that is, is to come and visit His possessions. Will not a thrill of glad expectancy run through the world? Will not men eagerly cover up whatever may offend Him, and eagerly attempt, with such scant materials as existed, to make preparations for His worthy reception? The one Being who can make no mistakes, and who can rectify the mistakes of a worn-out, entangled world, is to come for the express purpose of delivering it from all ill: will not men gladly yield the reins to Him, and gladly second Him in all His enterprise? Will it not be a time of universal concord and brotherhood, all men joining to pay homage to

their common God? “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him” – that is the true, bare, unvarnished statement of the fact. There He was, the Creator Himself, that mysterious Being who had hitherto kept Himself so hidden and remote while yet so influential and supreme; the wonderful and unsearchable Source and Fountain out of which had proceeded all that men saw, themselves included, – there at last He was “*in the world*” Himself had made, apparent to the eyes of men, and intelligible to their understandings; a real person whom they could know as an individual, whom they could love, who could receive and return their expressions of affection and trust. He was in the world, and the world knew Him not.

Indeed, it would not have been easy for the world to show a more entire ignorance of God than while He was upon earth in human form. There was at that time abundance of activity and intelligent apprehension of the external wants of men and nations. There was a ceaseless running to and fro of the couriers of the empire, a fine system of communications spread over the whole known world like a network, so that what transpired in the most remote corner was at once known at the centre. Rome was intelligent to the utmost circumference through all its dominions; as if a nervous system radiated through the whole of it, touch but the extremity in one of the remotest colonies and the touch is felt at the brain and heart of the whole.<sup>3</sup> The rising of a British tribe, the discovery of some unheard-of bird or beast, the birth

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<sup>3</sup> See Isaac Taylor’s *Restoration of Belief*.

of a calf with two heads – every scrap of gossip found its way to Rome.<sup>4</sup> But the entrance of the Creator into the world was an event of such insignificance that not even this finely sympathetic system took any note of it. The great Roman world remained in absolute unconsciousness of the vicinity of God: they registered His birth, took account of Him as one to be taxed, but were as little aware as the oxen with whom He shared His first sleeping-place, that this was God; they saw Him with the same stupid, unconscious, bovine stare.<sup>5</sup>

3. But in this great world of men there was an inner and specially trained circle, which John here designates “His own.” For although the world might be called “His own,” as made and upheld by him, yet it seems more likely that this verse is not a mere repetition of the preceding, but is intended to mark a deeper degree of insensibility on the part of Christ’s rejecters. Not only had all men been made in God’s image, so that they might have been expected to recognise Christ as the image of the Father; but one nation had been specially instructed in the knowledge of God, and was proud of having His dwelling-place in its midst. If other men were blind to God’s glory, the Jews at least might have been expected to welcome Christ when He came. Their temple and all that was done in it, their law, their prophets, their institutions, their history and their daily life, all spoke to them of God, and reminded them that God dwelt among

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<sup>4</sup> See Pliny’s *Letters to Trajan*, 23, 98.

<sup>5</sup> Cp. Faber’s *Bethlehem*.

them and would come to His own. Though all the world should shut its doors against Christ, surely the gates of the Temple, His own house, would be thrown open to Him. For what else did it exist?

Our Lord Himself, in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, makes even a heavier accusation against the Jews, intimating, as He there does, that they rejected Him not because they did not recognise Him, but because they did. "This is the Heir. Come, let us kill Him, that the inheritance may be ours." In any case their guilt is great. They had been definitely and repeatedly admonished to expect some great manifestation of God; they looked for the Christ to come, and immediately before His appearance they had been strikingly awakened to prepare for His coming. But what was their actual state when Christ came? Again and again it has been pointed out that their whole thoughts were given to the schemes which usually distract conquered nations. They were "tossing in unhelpful and inefficacious sedition," resenting or paying hollow homage to the rule of the foreigner, looking uneasily for deliverance, and becoming the dupes of every fanatic or schemer that cried, "Lo here!" or "Lo there!" Their power of discerning a present God and a spiritual Deliverer was almost as completely gone as that of the heathen, and they tested the Divine Saviour by external methods which any clever charlatan could have satisfied. The God they believed in and sought was not the God revealed by Christ. They existed for Christ's sake, that among them He might find a home on earth,



and through them be made known to all; they believed in a Christ that was to come, but when He came the throne they raised Him to was the cross. And the suspicion that perhaps they were wrong has preyed on the Jewish mind ever since, and has often pricked them on to a fierce hatred of the Christian name, while sometimes it has taken almost the form of penitence, as in the prayer of Rabbi Ben Ezra, —

“Thou! if Thou wast He, who at mid-watch came,  
By the starlight, naming a dubious name!  
And if, too heavy with sleep – too rash  
With fear – O Thou, if that martyr-gash  
Fell on Thee coming to take Thine own,  
And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne, —  
Thou art the Judge.”

It is the detailed history of this rejection which John presents in his Gospel. He tells the story of Christ's miracles, and the jealousy they excited; of His authoritative teaching and the opposition it aroused; of His unveiling His Divine nature, His mercy, His power to give life, His prerogative of judgment, His humble self-sacrifice, and of the misunderstanding which ran parallel to this manifestation. He tells how the leaders strove to entangle Him and find Him at fault; how they took up stones to stone Him; how they schemed and plotted, and at length compassed His crucifixion. The patience with which He met this “contradiction of sinners” was a sufficient revelation of His

Divine nature. Though rudely received, though met on all hands with suspicion, coldness, and hostility, He did not abandon the world in indignation. He never forgot that He came, not to judge the world, not to deal with us on our merits, but to save the world from its sin and its blindness. For the sake of the few who received Him He bore with the many who rejected Him.

For some did receive Him. John could say for many, along with himself, "We beheld His glory," and recognised that it was Divine glory, such as none but an Only-begotten in the image of His Father could manifest. This glory dawned upon believing men, and gradually encompassed them in the brightness and beauty of a Divine revelation, by the appearance among them of the Incarnate Word, "full of grace and truth" (ver. 14). Not the works of wonder which He did, not the authority with which He laid the angry waves and commanded the powers of evil, but the grace and truth which underlay all His works, shone into their hearts as Divine glory. They had previously known God through the law given by Moses (ver. 17); but coming as it did through law, this knowledge was coloured by its medium, and through it God's countenance seemed stern. In the face of Jesus Christ they saw the Father, they saw "grace," an eye of tender compassion and lips of love and helpfulness. In the law they felt that they were seeing through a dimmed glass darkly; they became weary of symbols and of forms in which often they saw but flitting shadows. What must it have been for such men to live with the manifested God; to have Him dwelling among them, and in Him

to handle and see (1 John i. 1) the “truth,” the reality to which all symbol had pointed? “The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

And to those who acknowledge in their hearts that this is Divine glory which is seen in Christ, the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father, He gives Himself with all His fulness. “As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God.” This is the immediate result of the acceptance of Christ as the Revealer of the Father. In Him we see what true glory is and what true sonship is; and as we behold the glory of the Only-begotten, sent to declare the Father to us, we acknowledge the unseen Father, and His Spirit brings us into the relationship of children. That which is in God passes into us, and we share in the life of God; and this through Christ. He is “full” of grace and truth. In all He is and does, grace and truth overflowingly manifest themselves. And “of His fulness have all we received, and grace upon grace.”<sup>7</sup> John read this off his own experience and that of those for whom he could confidently speak. What they had seen and valued in Christ became their own character. The inexhaustible fulness of grace in Christ renewed in them grace according to their need. They lived upon Him. It was His life which maintained life in them. By communion with Him they were formed in His likeness.

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<sup>6</sup> The first introduction in the Gospel of the name of Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> This expression means a succession of graces, higher grace ever taking the place of lower.

The presentation of Christ to men now divides them into two classes, as at the first. There are always those who accept and those who reject Him. His contemporaries showed, for the most part, a complete ignorance of what might be expected of God, a native inability to understand spiritual greatness, and to relish it when presented to them. And yet Christ's claims were made with such an air of authority and truth, and His whole character and bearing were so consistent, that they were half persuaded He was all He said. It is chiefly because we have not a perfect sympathy with goodness, and do not know its value, that we do not at once and universally acknowledge Christ. There is in men an instinct that tells them what blessings Christ will secure to them, and they decline connection with Him because they are conscious that their ways are not His ways, nor their hopes His hopes. The very presentation to men of the possibility of becoming perfectly pure reveals what at heart they are. By the judgment each man passes on Christ he passes judgment on himself.

Let us stir ourselves to a clearer decision by remembering that He is presented to us as to His contemporaries. Time was when any one going into the synagogue of Nazareth would have seen Him, and might have spoken with Him. But the particular thirty years during which this manifestation of God on earth lasted makes no material difference to the thing itself. The Incarnation was to be some time, and it is as real having occurred then as if it were occurring now. It occurred in its fit time; but its bearing on us is not dependent on the time of its occurrence. If it had

been accomplished in our day, what should we have thought of it? Would it have been nothing to us to see God, to hear Him, perhaps to have had His eye turned upon us with personal observation, with pity, with remonstrance? Would it have been nothing to us to see Him taking the sinners place, scourged, mocked, crucified? Is it conceivable that in presence of such a manifestation of God we should have been indifferent? Would not our whole nature have burned with shame that we and our fellow-men should have brought our God to this? And are we to suffer the mere fact of Christ's being incarnate in a past age and not in our own, to alter our attitude towards Him, and blind us to the reality? Of more importance than anything that is now happening in our own life is this Incarnation of the Only-begotten of the Father.

### III

## *THE BAPTIST'S TESTIMONY*

“There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light... John beareth witness of Him, and crieth, saying, This was He of whom I said, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me. For of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; and he confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No. They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet. And they had been sent from the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither

the prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: in the midst of you standeth One whom ye know not, even He that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethany beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me. And I knew Him not; but that He should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water. And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, He said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” – John i. 6–8, 15–34.

In proceeding to show how the Incarnate Word manifested Himself among men, and how this manifestation was received, John naturally speaks first of all of the Baptist. “There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness ... that all might believe through him.” The Evangelist himself had been one of the Baptist’s disciples, and had been led to Christ by his testimony. And to many besides, the Baptist was the true forerunner of the Messiah. He was the first to recognise and proclaim the present King. John had come under

the Baptist's influence at the most impressible time of his life, while his character was being formed and his ideas of religion taking shape; and his teacher's testimony to the dignity of Jesus had left an indelible print upon his spirit. While his memory retained anything it could not let slip what his first teacher had said of Him who became his Teacher and his Lord. While, therefore, the other Evangelists give us striking pictures of the Baptist's appearance, habits, and style of preaching, and show us the connection of his work with that of Jesus, John glances very slightly at these matters, but dwells with emphasis and iteration on the testimony which the Baptist bore to the Messiahship of Jesus.

To us, at this time of day, it may seem of little importance what the Baptist thought or said of Jesus. We may sympathise rather with the words of the Lord Himself, who, in allusion to this witness, said, "I receive not testimony from man." But it is plain that, at any rate from a Jewish point of view, the witness of John was most important. The people universally accepted John as a prophet, and they could scarcely think him mistaken in the chief article of his mission. In point of fact, many of the most faithful adherents of Jesus became such through the influence of John; and those who declined to accept Jesus were always staggered by John's explicit indication of Him as the Christ. The Jews had not only the predictions of prophets long since dead, and descriptions of the Christ which they could perversely misconstrue; they had not merely pictures of their Messiah by which they might identify



Jesus as the Christ, but of which it was also quite possible for them to deny the likeness; but they had a living contemporary, whom they themselves acknowledged to be a prophet, pointing out to them another living contemporary as the Christ. That even such a testimony was to a large extent disregarded shows how much more the inclination to believe has to do with our faith than any external proofs.

But even to us the testimony of a man like John is not without importance. He was, as our Lord bore witness, “a burning and a shining light.” He was one of those men who give new thoughts to their generation, and help men to see clearly what otherwise they might only dimly have seen. He was in a position to know Jesus well. He was His cousin; he had known Him from His childhood. He was also in a position to know what was involved in being the Messiah. By the very circumstance that he himself had been mistaken for the Messiah, he was driven to define to his own mind the distinctive and characteristic marks of the Messiah. Nothing could so have led him to apprehend the difference between himself and Jesus. More and more clearly must he have seen that he was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. Thus he was prepared to receive with understanding the sign (ver. 33) which gave him something more than *his own personal surmises* to go upon in declaring Jesus to the world as the Messiah. If there is any man’s testimony we may accept about our Lord it is that of the Baptist, who, from his close contact with the most profligate and with the most spiritual of the people,

saw what they needed, and saw in Jesus power to give it; the business of whose life it was to make Him out, and to arrive at certain information regarding Him; a man whose own elevation and force of character made many fancy he was the Messiah, but who hastened to disabuse their minds of such an idea, because his very elevation gave him capacity to see how infinitely above him the true Christ was. Seen from the low ground the star may seem close to the top of the mountain; seen from the mountain-top it is recognised as infinitely above it. John was on the mountain-top.

Of John's person and work nothing need here be said save what serves to throw light on his witness to Christ. Going from the comfortable home and well-provided life and fair prospects of a priest's family, he went to the houseless wilderness, and adopted the meagre, comfortless life of an ascetic; not from any necessity, but because he felt that to entangle himself with the affairs of the world would be to blind him to its vices, and to silence his remonstrance, if not to implicate him in its guilt. Like thousands besides in all ages of the world's history, he felt compelled to seek solitude, to subdue the flesh, to meditate undisturbed on things Divine, and discover for himself and for others some better way than religious routine and the "good wine of Mosaic morality turned to the vinegar of Pharisaism." Like the Nazarites of the earlier times of his country, like the old prophets, with whose indignation and deep regret at the national vices he was in perfect sympathy, he left the world, gave up all the usual prospects and ways of life, and betook himself to a

life of prayer, and thought, and self-discipline in the wilderness. When first he went there, he could only dimly know what lay before him; but he gathered a few friends of like disposition around him, and, as we learn, “taught them to pray.” He formed in the wilderness a new Israel, a little company of praying souls, who spent their time in considering the needs of their fellow-countrymen, and in interceding with God for them, and who were content to let the pleasures and excitements of the world pass by while they longed for and prepared themselves to meet the great Deliverer.

This adoption of the *rôle* of the ancient prophets, this resuscitation of their long-forgotten function of mourning before God for the people’s sin, and addressing the nation authoritatively as God’s voice, was outwardly shown by his assumption of the prophet’s dress. The rough skin for a cloak; the long, uncared-for hair; the wiry, weather-beaten frame; the lofty, calm, penetrating eye, were all eloquent as his lips. His whole appearance and habits certified his claim to be the “voice” of one crying in the wilderness, and gave him authority with the people. Slightly altering what has been said of a great modern, we may much more truly say of the Baptist, —

“He took the suffering human race,  
He read each wound, each weakness clear:  
He struck his finger on the place,  
And said, ‘Thou ailest here, and here.’  
He looked on (Isr’el’s) dying hour

Of fitful dreams and feverish power,  
And said, 'The end is everywhere,  
(Christ) still has truth, take refuge there.'"

He was listened to. It is so always, in our own day as in others: the men who are unworldly and have the good of their country or of any class of men at heart, the men who are saintly and of few desires, these are listened to as the commissioned messengers of heaven. It is to these men we look as the salt of the earth, who preserve us still from the corrupting, disintegrating influence of doubt. To these men, no matter how different they be from us in creed, we are forced to listen, because the *Holy* Spirit, wherever He is, is the Spirit of God; and all men instinctively acknowledge that those who are themselves in the kingdom of God have authority to summon others into it, and that those who are themselves unworldly have alone a right to dictate to worldly men. There is no power on earth like the power of a holy, consecrated life, because he who is leading such a life is already above the world, and belongs to a higher kingdom. There is hope for our country, or for any country, when its young men have something of John's spirit; when they school the body until it becomes the ready instrument of a high and spiritual intention, fearless of hardship; when by sympathy with God's purposes they apprehend what is most needed by men, and are able to detect the weaknesses and vices of society, and to bear the burden of their time.

But the Baptist's equipment for the most responsible office of proclaiming the Messiahship of Jesus was not completed by his own saintliness of character and keen perception of the people's needs, and knowledge of Jesus, and incorruptible truthfulness. There was given to him a sign from heaven, that he might be strengthened to bear this responsibility, and that the Messiah might never seem to be only of the Baptist's appointing and not of God's. Some degree of disappointment may be felt that external signs should have intruded on so profoundly spiritual and real an occasion as the baptism of Christ. Some may be ready to ask, with Keim, "Is it, or was it ever, the way of God, in the course of His spiritual world, above all upon the threshold of spiritual decisions affecting the fate of the world, and in contradiction to the wise economy of revelation pursued by His supreme ambassador Himself, to take away from seeking and finding souls the labour of deciding their own destiny?" But this is to suppose that the signs at the baptism of Jesus were mainly for His encouragement, whereas John describes them as being given for the certification of the Baptist. "I knew Him not" – that is, I did not know He was the Messiah – "but He that sent me to baptize with water, He said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The baptism of Jesus was, in fact, His anointing as the Messiah; and this anointing by which He became the Christ

was an anointing, not with a symbolic oil, but with the Divine Spirit (Acts x. 38). This Spirit descended upon Him “in a *bodily* shape” (Luke iii. 22), because it was not one member or faculty or power which was communicated to Jesus, but a whole *body* or complete equipment of all needful Divine energies for His work. “God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him;” there is no gauge, no metre checking the supply. Now for the first time can the whole Spirit be given, because now for the first time in Jesus is there room to receive it. And that the Baptist may confidently proclaim Him as King the sign is given, – not the outward sign alone, but the outward sign accompanying and tallying with the inward sign; for it was not said to the Baptist, “Upon whomsoever thou shalt see a dove descend,” but, “upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descend.”

This anointing of Jesus to the Messiahship occurred at the moment of His truest identification of Himself with the people. John shrank from baptizing One whom he knew to be already pure, and to have no sins to confess. But Jesus insisted, identifying Himself with a polluted people, numbered with transgressors. It was thus He became true King and Head of mankind, by identifying Himself with us, and taking upon Him, through His universal sympathy, all our burdens, feeling more shame than the sinner’s self for his sin, pained with the suffering in all their pain. It was the Divine Spirit of universal love, attracting Him to all sorrow and suffering, which identified Him in the mind of His first confessor as the Christ, the Son

of God. This to the Baptist was the glory of the Only-begotten, this sympathy which felt with all, and shrank from no sorrow or burden.

Thus equipped, the Baptist gives his testimony with confidence. This testimony is manifold, and uttered on several occasions, – to the Sanhedrim's deputation, to the people, and to his own disciples. It is negative as well as positive. He repudiates the suggestions of the deputation from Jerusalem that he himself is the Christ, or that he is in their sense Elijah. But the most remarkable repudiation of honours which could be rendered to Christ alone is found recorded in chap. iii. 22–30, when the growing popularity of Jesus excited the jealousy of those who still adhered to the Baptist. Their complaint was the occasion of calling up clearly in the Baptist's own consciousness the relation in which he stood to Jesus, and of prompting the most emphatic enunciation of the unrivalled dignity of our Lord. He says to his jealous disciples, "If I do not gather a crowd of followers while Jesus does, this is because God has appointed to me one place, to Him another. Beyond God's design no man's destiny and success can extend. What is designed for me I shall receive; beyond that I desire to receive and I can receive nothing. Least of all would I covet to be called the Christ. You know not what you say in even remotely hinting that such a man as I could be the Christ. It is no mere unworldliness or purity which can raise a man to this dignity. He is from above; not to be named with prophets, but the Son of God, who belongs to the heavenly world of which

He speaks.”

To make the difference between himself and Christ clear, the Baptist hits upon the happy figure of the Bridegroom and the Bridegroom’s friend. “He that has and keeps the Bride is the Bridegroom. He to whom the world is drawn, and on whom all needy souls lean, is the Bridegroom, and to Him alone belongs this special joy of satisfying all human needs. I am not the Bridegroom, because men cannot find in me satisfaction and rest. I cannot be to them the source of spiritual life. Moreover, by instigating me to assume the Bridegroom’s place you would rob me of my peculiar joy, the joy of the Bridegroom’s friend.” The function of the bridegroom’s friend, or paranymp, was to ask the hand of the bride for the bridegroom, and to arrange the marriage. This function the Baptist claims as his. “My joy,” he says, “is to have negotiated this matter, to have encouraged the Bride to trust her Lord. It is my joy to hear the glad and loving words that pass between Bridegroom and Bride. Do not suppose I look with sadness on the defection of my followers, and on their preference for Christ. These crowds you complain of are evidence that I have not discharged the function of paranymp in vain. To see my work successful, to see Bride and Bridegroom at length resting in one another with undisturbed, self-forgetting confidence, this is my joy. While the Bridegroom cheers the Bride with His voice, and opens to her prospects which only His love can realize, shall I obtrude myself and claim consideration? Is it not enough for one life to have had the joy of identifying the



actually present Christ, and of introducing the Bride to her Lord? Has not that life its ample reward which has been instrumental in achieving the actual union of God and man?"

Probably, then, the Baptist himself would think we waste too much emotion over his self-sacrifice and magnanimity. After all, it not being possible to him to be the Messiah, it was no small glory and joy to be the friend, the next, to the Messiah. The tragic character of the Baptist's death, the despondent doubt which for a time shook his spirit during his imprisonment, the severe life he had previously led, all tend to make us oblivious of the fact that his life was crowned with a deep and solid joy. Even the poet who has most worthily depicted him still speaks of

"John, than which man a *sadder* or a greater  
Not till this day has been of woman born."

But the Baptist was a big enough man to enjoy an unselfish happiness. He loved men so well that he rejoiced when he saw them forsake him to follow Christ. He loved Christ so well that to see Him honoured was the crown of his life.

Besides this negative repudiation of honours that belonged to Jesus, the Baptist emits a positive and fivefold testimony in His favour, (1) to His dignity (vv. 15, 27, 30), "He that cometh after me *is preferred before me*;" (2) to His pre-existence (vv. 15, 30), which is adduced as the reason of the foregoing, "for He *was before me*;" (3) to His spiritual fulness and power (ver. 33),

“He baptizeth with the Holy Ghost;” (4) to the efficacy of His mediation (ver. 29), “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;” (5) to His unique personality (ver. 34), “this is the Son of God.”

1. Three times over the Baptist declared the superiority of Jesus; a superiority so immense that language failed him in trying to represent it. The Rabbis said, “Every office which a servant will do for his master a scholar should perform for his teacher, except loosing his sandal-thong.” But this exceptionally menial office the Baptist declares he was not worthy to perform for Jesus. None so well as the Baptist himself knew his limitations. He had evoked in the people cravings he could not satisfy. There had gathered to him a conscience-stricken people, longing for renewal and righteousness, and demanding what he had no power to give. Therefore, not merely his explicit enouncements from time to time, but his entire ministry, pointing to a new order of things which he himself could not inaugurate, declared the incomparable greatness of Him that was to come after him.

2. This superiority of Christ was based on His pre-existence. “He was before me.” It may appear unaccountable that the Baptist, standing on Old Testament ground, should have reached the conclusion that Jesus was Divine. But it is at any rate evident that the Evangelist believed the Baptist had done so, for he adduces the Baptist’s testimony in support of his own affirmation of the Divine glory of the Incarnate Word (ver. 15). After the wonderful scene at the Baptism, John must have talked closely

with Jesus regarding both His work and His consciousness; and even if the passage at the close of the third chapter is coloured by the Evangelist's style, and even by his thought, we must suppose that the Baptist had somehow arrived at the belief that Jesus was "from above," and made known upon earth the things which He, in a pre-existent state, had "heard and seen."

3. The Baptist pointed to Jesus as the source of spiritual life. "He baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." Here the Baptist steps on to ground on which his assertions can be tested. He declares that Jesus can communicate the Holy Ghost – the fundamental article of the Christian Creed, which carries with it all else. No one knew better than the Baptist where human help failed; no one knew better than he what could be effected by rites and rules, by strength of will and asceticism and human endeavour; and no one knew better at what point all these become useless. More and more they seemed to him but a cleansing with water, a washing of the outside. More and more did he understand that, not from without, but from within, true cleansing must proceed, and that all else, save a new creation by the Spirit of God, was inefficacious. Only Spirit can act upon spirit; and for true renewal we need the action upon us of the Divine Spirit. Without this no new and eternal kingdom of God can be founded.

4. The Baptist pointed to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." That by this title he meant only to designate Jesus as a person full of gentleness and innocence is out of the question. The second clause forbids this. He is

the Lamb that takes away sin. And there is only one way in which a lamb can take away sin, and that is, by sacrifice. The expression no doubt suggests the picture in the fifty-third of Isaiah of the servant of Jehovah meekly enduring wrong. But unless the Baptist had been previously speaking of this chapter, the thoughts of his disciples would not at once turn to it, because in that passage it is not a lamb of sacrifice that is spoken of, but a lamb meekly enduring. In the Baptist's words sacrifice is the primary idea, and it is needless to discuss whether he was thinking of the paschal lamb or the lamb of morning and evening sacrifice, because he merely used the lamb as the representative of sacrifice generally. Here, he says, is the reality to which all sacrifice has pointed, the Lamb of God.

5. The Baptist proclaims Jesus as "the Son of God." That he should do so need not greatly surprise us, as we read in the other Gospels that Jesus had been thus designated by a voice from heaven at His baptism. Very early in His ministry, not only His disciples, but also the demoniacs ascribe to Him the same dignity. In one sense or other He was designated "Son of God." No doubt we must bear in mind that this was in a rigidly monotheistic community, and in a community in which the same title had been freely applied to Israel and to Israel's king to designate a certain alliance and close relation subsisting between the human and the Divine, but of course not suggesting metaphysical unity. But considering the high functions which clustered round the Messianic dignity, it is not unlikely

that the Messiah's forerunner may have supposed that a fuller meaning than had yet been recognised might be latent in this title. Certainly we are safe in affirming that by applying this title to our Lord, the Baptist intended to indicate His unique personality, and to declare that He was the Messiah, God's Viceroy on earth.

Whether we can add to this testimony the thoughts contained in the closing paragraph of the third chapter may be doubted. The thought of the passage moves within the circle of ideas familiar to the Baptist; and that the style is the style of the Evangelist does not prevent us from receiving the ideas as the Baptist's. But there are expressions which it is difficult to suppose that the Baptist could have used. The preceding conversation was occasioned by the growing popularity of Jesus; was this, then, an occasion on which it could be said, "No one receives His testimony"? Is this not more appropriate to the Evangelist than to the Baptist? It would seem, then, that in this paragraph the Evangelist is expanding the Baptist's testimony, in order to indicate its application to the eternal relations subsisting between Jesus and men generally.

The contents of the paragraph are a most emphatic testimony to the pre-existence and heavenly origin of Christ. In contrast to persons of earthly origin, He is "from heaven." He "cometh" from above, as if His entrance into this world were a conscious transition, a voluntary coming from another world. His origin determines also His moral relationships and His teaching. He is "above all," in dignity, in authority, in spirit; and He speaks

what He has seen and heard. But in the thirty-fourth verse a new idea is presented. There it is said that He speaks the words of God, not directly, because He is from above, and speaks what He has seen and heard, but “because God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.” What are we to understand by this double Divine inhabitation of the humanity of Jesus? And what are we to understand by the Spirit being given without measure to the Incarnate Word?

In the Old Testament two ideas present themselves regarding the Spirit which illustrate this statement. The one is that which conveys the impression that only a limited amount of spiritual influence was communicated to prophetic men, and that from them it could be conveyed to others. In Numb. xi. 17 the Lord is represented as saying to Moses, “I will take of the Spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them;” and in 2 Kings ii. 9 Elisha is represented as praying that the eldest born’s portion, the two-thirds of Elijah’s spirit, might be bequeathed to him. The idea is a true and instructive one. The Spirit does, in point of fact, pass from man to man. It is as if in one receptive person the Divine Spirit found entrance through which He might pass to others. But another idea is also frequent in the Old Testament. The Spirit is spoken of rather as conferring a gift here and a power there than as dwelling wholly and permanently in men. One prophet had a dream, another a vision, a third legislated, a fourth wrote a psalm, a fifth founded an institution, a sixth in the power of the Spirit smote the Philistines, or, like Samson, tore a lion in pieces.

In Christ all powers are combined – power over nature, power to teach, power to reveal, power to legislate. And as in the Old Testament the Spirit passed from man to man, so in the New Testament Christ first Himself receives and then communicates to all the whole Spirit. Hence the law noticed at a subsequent stage of this Gospel that “the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified” (vii. 39). We cannot see to the bottom of the law, but the fact is apparent, that until Christ received into every part of His own humanity the fulness of the Divine Spirit, that Spirit could not fill with His fulness any man.

But why was the Spirit needed in a personality of which the Word, who had been with God and known God, was the basis? Because the humanity of Christ was a true humanity. Being human, He must be indebted to the Spirit for all impartation to His human nature of what is Divine. The knowledge of God which the Word possesses by experience must be humanly apprehended before it can be communicated to men; and this human apprehension can only be arrived at in the case of Christ by the enlightenment of the Spirit. It was useless for Christ to declare what could not be apprehended by human faculty, and His own human faculty was the measure and test of intelligibility. By the Spirit He was enlightened to speak of things Divine; and this Spirit, interposed, as it were, between the Word and the human nature of Jesus, was as little cumbrous in its operation or perceptible in consciousness as our breath interposed between the thinking mind and the words we speak to declare our mind.

To return to the direct testimony of the Baptist, we must (1) acknowledge its value. It is the testimony of a contemporary, of whom we know from other sources that he was generally reckoned a prophet – a man of unblemished and inviolable integrity, of rugged independence, of the keenest spiritual discernment. There was no man of larger size or more heroic mould in his day. In any generation he would have been conspicuous by his spiritual stature, his fearless unworldliness, his superiority to the common weaknesses of men; and yet this man himself looks up to Jesus as standing on quite a different platform from his own, as a Being of another order. He can find no expressions strong enough to mark the difference: “I am not worthy to loose His shoe latchet;” “He that is of the earth” (that is, himself) “is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: He that cometh from heaven is above all.” He would not have used such expressions of Isaiah, of Elijah, of Moses. He knew his own dignity, and would not have set so marked a difference between himself and any other prophet. But his own very greatness was precisely what revealed to him the absolute superiority of Christ. These crowds that gathered round him – what could he do for them more than refer them to Christ? Could he propose to himself to found among them a kingdom of God? Could he ask them to acknowledge him and trust in him for spiritual life? Could he promise them His Spirit? Could he even link to himself all kinds of men, of all nationalities? Could he be the light of men, giving to all a satisfying knowledge of God and of their



relation to Him? No; he was not that light, he could but bear witness of that light. And this he did, by pointing men to Jesus, not as a brother prophet, not as another great man, but as the Son of God, as One who had come down from heaven.

It is, I say, impossible that we can make nothing of such a testimony. Here was one who knew, if any man ever did, spotless holiness when he saw it; who knew what human strength and courage could accomplish; who was himself certainly among the six greatest men the world has seen; and this man, standing thus on the highest altitudes human nature can reach, looks up to Christ, and does not only admit His superiority, but shrinks, as from something blasphemous, from all comparison with Him. What is the flaw in his testimony, or why are we not accepting Christ as our light, as able to take away our sins, as willing to baptize us with the Holy Ghost?

But (2) even such testimony as John's is not sufficient of itself to carry conviction to the reluctant. None knew better than John's contemporaries that he was a true man, not liable to make mistakes in a matter of this kind. And his testimony to Christ did stagger them, and often held them in check, and no doubt threw a kind of undefined awe over the person of Christ; but, after all, not many believed on account of John's testimony, and those who did were not influenced solely by his testimony, but by his work as well. They had become concerned about sin, sensitive to defilement and failure, and were thus prepared to appreciate the offers of Christ. The two voices chimed, John's voice saying,

“Behold, the Lamb of God!” the voice of their own conscience crying for the taking away of sin. It is so still. The sense of sin, the feeling of spiritual weakness and need, the craving for God, direct the eye, and enable us to see in Christ what we do not otherwise see. We are not likely to know Christ until we know ourselves. What is the man’s judgment regarding Christ worth who is not conscious of his own littleness and humbled by his own guilt? Let a man first go to school with the Baptist, let him catch something of his unworldliness and earnestness, let him become alive to his own shortcomings by at last beginning to strive after the highest things in life, and by seeking to live, not for pleasure, but for God, and his views of Christ and his relation to Him will become satisfactory and true.

## IV

# *THE FIRST DISCIPLES*

“Again on the morrow John was standing, and two of his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? And they said unto Him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where abidest Thou? He saith unto them, Come, and ye shall see. They came therefore and saw where He abode; and they abode with Him that day: it was about the tenth hour. One of the two that heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He findeth first his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, Christ). He brought him unto Jesus. Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter). On the morrow he was minded to go forth into Galilee, and he findeth Philip: and Jesus saith unto him, Follow Me. Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can

any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto Him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” – John i. 35–51.

In the prosecution of his purpose to tell how the Incarnate Word manifested His glory to men, John proceeds to give one or two instances of the eagerness with which prepared souls welcomed Him, and of the instinctive perception with which true and open minds confessed Him Son of God and King of Israel. This paragraph is the continuation of that which begins at ver. 19 with the general title, “This is the witness of John.” We are now introduced to some of the results of John’s witness, and are shown that Christ is King, not only by official proclamation, but by the free choice of men. These instances here cited are but the first among countless numbers who in every generation have felt and owned the majesty of Christ, and who have felt irresistibly drawn to Him by a unique affinity. In the spell which His personality laid upon these first disciples, in the uninvited yet

cordial and assured acknowledgments of His dignity which they felt drawn to make, we see much that is significant and illustrative of the allegiance He evokes from age to age in humble and open-minded men.

In proceeding to gather to Himself subjects who might enter into His purposes and loyally serve Him, Jesus shows a singularly many-sided adaptability and inexhaustible originality in dealing with men. Each of the five disciples here introduced is individually dealt with. "The finding of the one was not the finding of the other. For John and Andrew there was the talk with Jesus through the hours of that never-to-be-forgotten evening; for Simon, the heart-searching word, convincing him he was known and his future read off; for Philip, a peremptory command; and for Nathanael, a gracious courtesy disarming him of prejudice, assuring him of a perfect sympathy in the breast of the Lord. Thus there are those who seek Christ, those who are brought by others to Christ, those whom Christ seeks for Himself, those who come without doubts, and those who come with doubts."<sup>8</sup>

The two men who enjoyed the signal distinction of leading the way in owning the majesty and attaching themselves to the person of Christ were Andrew and probably John who wrote this Gospel. The writer, indeed, does not name himself, but this is in accordance with his habit. The suppression of the name is an indication that he himself was the disciple spoken of, since had it been another he could have had no scruple in mentioning

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<sup>8</sup> See Mr. Reith's rich Handbook on *The Gospel of John* (Clark).

his name. We know also that the families of Zebedee and Jonah were partners in trade, and it was likely that the young men of the families would go in company to visit the Baptist when the fishing was slack. These two young men had already attached themselves to the Baptist; had not merely passed through the fashionable ceremony of baptism, and returned home to talk about it, but were laid hold of by John's teaching and character, and had resolved to wait with him till the predicted Deliverer should appear.

And at length the day came when the master whom they trusted as God's prophet suddenly checked them in their walk, laid his hand breathlessly upon them, and gazing at a passing figure, said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" There in actual bodily presence was He for whom all ages of their people had longed; there within sound of their voice was He who could take away their sin, lift off the burden and the trouble of life, and let them know the blessedness of living. We are ever ready to think it was easy for those who saw Christ to follow Him. Could we read His sympathy and truthfulness in His face, could we hear His words addressed directly to ourselves, could we ask our own questions and have from Him personal guidance, we fancy faith would be easy. And no doubt there is a greater benediction pronounced on those who "have not seen, and yet have believed." Still, the advantage is not wholly theirs who saw the Lord growing up among other boys, learning His trade with ordinary lads, clothed in the dress of a working man. The brothers of Jesus found it

hard to believe. Besides, in giving the allegiance of the Spirit, and forming eternal alliance, it is well that the true affinities of our spirit be not disturbed by material and sensible appearances.

These two men, however, felt the spell, and “followed Jesus” – representatives of all those who, scarcely knowing what they do or what they intend, are yet drawn by a mysterious attraction to keep within sight of Him of whom they have ever been hearing, and whom all ages have sought, but who now for the first time stands clear before their sight. Without a word to their teacher or to one another, silent with wonder and excitement, they eagerly follow the passing figure. So does enquiry begin with many a soul. He who is much spoken of by all, but of whom few have personal knowledge, suddenly assumes a reality they scarcely were looking for. It is no longer the hearing of the ear, but now, whispers the soul, mine eye seeth Him. The soul for the first time feels as if some action were demanded of it; it can no longer just sit and listen to descriptions of Christ, it must arise on its own account, and for itself seek further knowledge of this unique Person.

“Then Jesus turned and saw them following,” – turned probably because He heard them following, for He suffers none to follow in vain. Sometimes it may seem as if He did; sometimes it may seem as if the best years of life were spent in following, and all to no purpose. It is not so. If some have spent years in following, and cannot yet say that Christ has turned and made them conscious that He is responding to their search, this is

because in their path lie many obstacles, all of which must be thoroughly cleared away. And no man should grudge the time and the toil that is spent on honestly clearing away whatever prevents a perfect cohesion to this eternal Friend.

The question put by Jesus to the following disciples, "What seek ye?" was the first breath of the winnowing fan which the Baptist had warned them the Messiah would use. It was not the gruff interrogation of one who would not have his retirement invaded, nor his own thoughts interrupted, but a kindly invitation to open their minds to Him. It was meant to help them to understand their own purposes, and to ascertain what they expected in following Jesus. "What seek ye?" Have you any object deeper than mere curiosity? For Christ desires to be followed intelligently, or not at all. At all times He used the winnowing fan to blow away the chaff of the great crowds that followed Him, and leave the few immovably resolute souls. So many follow because a crowd streams after Him and carries them with it; so many follow because it is a fashion, and they have no opinion of their own; so many follow experimentally, and drop off at the first difficulty; so many follow under misapprehension, and with mistaken expectations. Some who came to Him with great expectations left in shame and sorrow; some who thought to make use of Him for party ends left Him in anger when they found themselves unmasked; and one who thought skilfully to use Him for the gratification of His own selfish worldliness, discovered that there was no surer path to eternal ruin. Christ



turns away none for mere slowness in apprehending what He is and what He does for sinful men. But by this question He reminds us that the vague and mysterious attraction which, like a hidden magnet, draws men to Him, must be exchanged for a clear understanding at least of what we ourselves need and expect to receive from Him. He will turn from none who, in response to His question, can truly say, We seek God, we seek holiness, we seek service with Thee, we seek Thyself.

The answer which these men returned to the question of Jesus was the answer of men who scarce knew their own minds, and were suddenly confused by being thus addressed. They therefore reply, as men thus confused commonly reply, by asking another question, "Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?" Their concern was about Him, and so far the answer was good; but it implied that they were willing to leave Him with only such information as might enable them to visit Him at some future time, and so far the answer was not the best. Still their shyness was natural, and not without reason. They had felt how the Baptist searched their soul, and of this new Teacher the Baptist himself had said he was not worthy to loose his sandal-thong. To find themselves face to face with this greatest person, the Messiah, was a trying experience indeed. The danger at this point is hesitation. Many persons fail at this point from a native reluctance to commit themselves, to feel pledged, to accept permanent responsibilities and bind themselves with indissoluble ties. They are past the stage of merely keeping Christ in view, but very little past it. The

closer dealings they have had with Him have as yet led to nothing. Their fate hangs in the balance.

Out of this condition our Lord delivers these two men by His irresistible invitation, "Come and see." And well for them it was that He did so, for next day He left that part of the country, and the mere knowledge of His lodging by the Jordan would have availed them nothing; a warning to all who put themselves off with learning more about salvation before they accept it. An eagerness in acquiring knowledge *about* Christ may as effectually as any other pursuit retard us in making acquaintance with Him. It is mere trifling to be always enquiring about One who is Himself with us; the way to secure that we shall have Him when we need Him is to go with Him now. How can we expect our difficulties to be removed while we do not adopt the one method God recognises as effectual for this purpose, fellowship with Christ? Why enquire longer about the way of salvation, and where we may find it at a future time? Christ offers His friendship now, "Come with Me, now," He says, "and for yourself enter My dwelling as a welcome friend." Can the friendship of Christ do us harm, or retard us in any good thing? May we not most reasonably fear that hesitation now may put Christ beyond our reach? We cannot tell what new influences may enter our life and set an impassable gulf between us and religion.

Sixty years after, when one of these men wrote this Gospel, he remembered as if it had been yesterday the very hour of the day

when he followed Jesus into His house. His whole life seemed to date from that hour; as well it might, for what could mark a human life more deeply and lift it more surely to permanent altitude than an evening with Jesus? They felt that at last they had found a Friend with human sympathies and Divine intelligence. How eagerly must these men who had of late been thinking much of new problems, have laid all their difficulties before this master-mind, that seemed at once to comprehend all truth, and to appreciate the little obstacles that staggered them. What boundless regions of thought would His questions open up, and how entirely new an aspect would life assume under the light He shed upon it.

The astonished satisfaction they found in their first intercourse with Christ is shown in the bursting enthusiasm with which Andrew sought out his brother Simon, and summarily announced, "We have found the Christ." That is how the Gospel is propagated. The closer the tie, the more emphatic the testimony. It is what brother says to brother, husband to wife, parent to child, friend to friend, far more than what preacher says to hearer, that carries in it irresistible persuasive power. When the truth of the utterance is vouched for by the obvious gladness and purity of the life; when the finding of the Christ is obviously as *real* as the finding of a better situation and as satisfying as promotion in life, then conviction will be carried with the announcement. And he who, like Andrew, can do little himself, may, by his simple testimony and honest life, bring to

Christ a Simon who may become a conspicuous power for good. The mother whose influence is confined to the four walls of her own house may lodge Christian principle in the heart of a son, who may give it currency in one form or other to the remotest corner of the earth.

The language in which Andrew announced to Simon his great fortune was simple, but, in Jewish lips, most pregnant. "We have found the Christ!" What his people had lived and longed for through all past ages, "*I have found*" and known. The perfect deliverance and joy which God was to bring by dwelling with His people, this at last had come. Taught to believe that all evil and disappointment and thwarting were but temporary, the Jew had waited for the true life of man – a life in the presence and favour and fellowship of the Highest. This was to come in the Messiah, and Andrew had found this. He had entered into life – all darkness and shadow were gone; the light shone round him, making all things bright, and piercing into eternity with clear radiance.

The words with which Jesus welcomes Simon are remarkable: "Thou art Simon, son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas." This greeting yields its meaning when we recall the character of the person addressed. Simon was hot-headed, impulsive, rash, unstable. When his name was mentioned on the Lake of Galilee there rose before the mind a man of generous nature, frank and good-hearted, but a man whose uncertainty and hastiness had brought him and his into many troubles, and with whom, perhaps,

it was well to have no very binding connection in trade or in the family. What must the thoughts of such a man have been when he was told that the Messiah was present, and that the Messianic kingdom was standing with open gates? Must he not have felt that this might concern others, – decent steady men like Andrew, – but not himself? Must he not have felt that instead of being a strength to the new kingdom he would prove a weakness? Would not that happen now which so often before had happened – that any society he joined he was sure to injure with his hasty tongue or rash hand? Other men might enter the kingdom and serve it well, but he must remain without.

Coming in this mood, he is greeted with words which seem to say to him, I know the character identified with the name “Simon, son of John;” I know all you fear, all the remorseful thoughts that possess you; I know how you wish now you were a man like Andrew, and could offer yourself as a serviceable subject of this new kingdom. But no! thou art Simon; nothing can change that, and such as you are you are welcome; but “thou shalt be called Rock,” Peter. The men standing round, and knowing Simon well, might turn away to hide a smile; but Simon knew the Lord had found him, and uttered the very word which could bind him for ever to Him. And the event showed how true this appellation was. Simon became Peter, – bold to stand for the rest, and beard the Sanhedrim. By believing that this new King had a place for him in His kingdom, and could give him a new character which should fit him for service, he became a new man,

strong where he had been weak, helpful and no longer dangerous to the cause he loved.

Such are the encouragements with which the King of men welcomes the diffident. He gives men the consciousness that they are known; He begets the consciousness that it is not with sin in the abstract He takes to do, but with sinners He can name, and whose weaknesses are known to Him. But He begets this consciousness that we may trust Him when He gives us assurance that a new character awaits us and a serviceable place in His kingdom. He assures the most despondent that for them also a useful life is possible.

As Andrew, in the exuberant joy of his discovery of the Messiah, had first imparted the news to his own brother Simon, so Philip, when invited by Jesus to accompany him to Galilee, sought to bring with him his friend Nathanael Bartholomew (son of Tolmai). This was one of the devout Jews who had long been wondering who that mysterious Personage should be of whom all the prophets had spoken, and for whom the world waited that He might complete it. The news that He was found seemed only too good to be true. He had come too easily and unostentatiously, and from so unlooked-for a quarter, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" Good men, as well as others, have their narrow views and illiberal prejudices, and mark off in their own minds as hopeless and barren whole religions, sects, or countries out of which God determines to bring that which is for the healing of the nations. To rise above such prejudices we must refuse to

accept current rumours, traditional opinions, proverbial or neat dicta which seem to settle a matter; we must conscientiously examine for ourselves, – as Philip says, “Come and see.” He instinctively knew how useless it was to reason with men about Christ’s claims so long as they were not in His presence. One look, one word from Himself will go further to persuade a man of His majesty and love than all that any one else can say. To make Christ known is the best way to prove the truth of Christianity.

The shade of the fig-tree is the natural summer-house or arbour under which Eastern families delight to take their meals or their mid-day rest. Nathanael had used the dense foliage of its large and thick leaves as a screen behind which he found retirement for devotional purposes. It is in such absolute seclusion, retirement, and solitude that a man shows his true self. It was here Nathanael had uttered himself to his Father who seeth in secret; here he had found liberty to pour out his true and deepest cravings. His guilelessness had been proved by his carrying into his retirement the same simple and unreserved godliness he professed abroad. And he is astonished to find that the eye of Jesus had penetrated this leafy veil, and had been a witness to his prayers and vows. He feels that he is known best at the very point in which he had most carefully contrived concealment, and he recognises that no one is more likely to be the fulfiller of his prayers than that same Person who has manifestly been somehow present at them and heard them.

To the man of prayer a suitable promise is given, as to the

man of uncertain character a promise fitting his need had come. Under his fig-tree Nathanael had often been in sympathy with his forefather Jacob in his great experience of God's attentiveness to prayer. When Jacob fled from home and country, a criminal and outcast, he no doubt felt how completely he had himself fallen into the pit he had dugged. Instead of the comforts of a well-provided household, he had to lie down like a wild beast with nothing between him and the earth, with nothing between him and the sky, with nothing but an evil conscience to speak to him, and no face near save the haunting faces of those he had wronged. A more miserable, remorseful, abandoned-looking creature rarely lay down to sleep; but before he rose he had learned that God knew where he was, and was with him; that on that spot which he had chosen as a hiding, because no one could find him, and scarcely his own dog track him to it, he was waited for and met with a loving welcome by Him whom he had chiefly wronged. He saw heaven opened, and that from the lowest, most forlorn spot of earth to the highest and brightest point of heaven there is a close connection and an easy, friendly communication. If Jesus, thought Nathanael, could reopen heaven in that style, He would be worthy of the name of King of Israel. But he is now to learn that He will do far more; that henceforth it was to be no visionary ladder, swept away by the dawn, which was to lead up to heaven, but that in Jesus God Himself is permanently made over to us; that He, in His one, visible person, unites heaven and earth, God and man; that there is an ever-living union between the



highest height of heaven and the lowest depth of earth. Profound and wide as the humanity of Christ, to the most forgotten and remote outcast, to the most sunken and despairing of men, do God's love and care and helpfulness now come; high and glorious as the divinity of Christ may the hopes of all men now rise. He who understands the Incarnation of the Son of God has a surer ground of faith, and a richer hope and a straighter access to heaven, than if the ladder of Jacob stood at his bed-head and God's angels were ministering to him.

## V

# ***THE FIRST SIGN – THE MARRIAGE IN CANA***

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and Jesus also was bidden, and His disciples, to the marriage. And when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine. And Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. Now there were six waterpots of stone set there after the Jews’ manner of purifying, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the ruler of the feast. And they bare it. And when the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast calleth the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man setteth on first the good wine; and when men have drunk freely, then that which is worse: thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.” – John ii. 1–11.

Having recorded the testimony borne to Jesus by the

Baptist, and having cited instances in which the overmastering personality of Jesus elicited from simple-hearted and godly men the acknowledgment of His majesty, John now proceeds to relate the homely incident which gave occasion to the first public act in which His greatness was exhibited. Testimony comes first, inward and intuitive recognition of the greatness declared by that testimony second; perception that His works are beyond the reach of human power comes last. But in the case of these first disciples, while this order was indeed maintained, there was no great interval between each step in it. It was but the “third day” after they had in their hearts felt His impressiveness that He “manifested forth His glory” to them in this first sign.

From the place where they first met Him to Cana of Galilee was a distance of twenty-one or twenty-two miles.<sup>9</sup> Thither Jesus repaired to be present at a marriage. His mother was already there, and when Jesus arrived, accompanied by His new-found friends, all were invited to remain and share in the festivities. Owing probably to this unexpected increase to the number of the guests, the wine begins to fail. Among the minor trials of life there are few which produce more awkwardness than the failure to provide suitable entertainment for a specially festive occasion. Mary, with the practised eye of a woman whose business it was to observe such matters, and perhaps with a near relative’s charge

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<sup>9</sup> Modern topography inclines to identify this Cana, not, as formerly, with Kafr-Kenna, but with Kânet-el-Jelil, some six miles N.E. of Nazareth. It is called Cana of Galilee to distinguish it from Cana in Asher, S.E. from Tyre (Joshua xix. 28).

and liberty in the house, perceives the predicament and whispers to her Son, "They have no wine." This she said, not to hint that Jesus would do well to retire with His too many friends, nor that He would cover the lack of wine by brilliant conversation, but because she had ever been accustomed to turn to this Son in all her difficulties, and now that she sees Him acknowledged by others her own faith in Him is stimulated.

Considering the simple manner in which He had walked in, and taken His place among the other guests, and partaken of the refreshment, and joined in the conversation and mirth of the day, it would seem more likely that she should have had no definite expectation as to the way in which He would extricate the host from his difficulty, but only turned to Him on whom she was accustomed to lean. But His answer shows that he felt Himself urged to action of some kind by her appeal; and her instructions to the servants to do whatever He ordered indicates that she definitely expected Him to relieve the embarrassment. How He would do so she could not know, and had she definitely expected a miracle she would probably have thought the help of the servants unnecessary.

But though Mary did not anticipate a miracle, it had already occurred to our Lord that this was a fit occasion for manifesting His kingly power. His words grate somewhat on the ear, but this is partly due to the difficulty of translating fine shades of meaning, and to the impossibility of conveying in any words that modification of meaning which is given in the tone of voice and

expression of face, and which arises also from the familiarity and affection of speaker and hearer. In His use of the word "Woman" there is really no harshness, this being the ordinary Greek term of address to females of all classes and relationships, and being commonly used with the utmost reverence and affection. The phrase "What have I to do with thee?" is a needlessly strong translation, although it might be difficult to find a better. It "implies a certain resistance to a demand in itself, or to something in the way of urging it;" but might be quite sufficiently rendered by such an expression as "I have other thoughts than thine." There is nothing approaching angry resentment at Mary's inviting His aid, nothing like repudiation of any claim she might have upon Him, but only a calm and gentle intimation that in the present instance she must allow Him to act in His own way. The whole phrase might be rendered, "Mother, you must let Me act here in My own way: and My time for action is not yet come." She herself was perfectly satisfied with the answer. Knowing her Son well, every gleam of His expression, every tone of His voice, she recognised that He meant to do something, and accordingly left the matter in His hands, giving orders to the servants to do whatever He required.

But there was more in the words of Jesus than even Mary understood. There were thoughts in His mind which not even she could fathom, and which had He explained them to her then she could not have sympathized with. For these words, "Mine hour is not yet come," which she took to be the mere intimation

of a few minutes' delay before granting her request, became the most solemn watchword of His life, marking the stages by which He drew near to His death. "They sought to take Him, but no man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come." So again and again. From the first He knew what would come of His manifesting His glory among men. From the first He knew that His glory could not be fully manifested till He hung upon the cross.

Can we wonder, then, that when He recognised in His mother's request the invitation from God, though not from her, that He should work His first miracle and so begin to manifest His glory, He should have said, "My thoughts are not yours; Mine hour is not yet come"? With compassion He looked upon her through whose soul a sword was to pass; with filial tenderness He could only look with deep pity on her who was now the unconscious instrument of summoning Him to that career which He knew must end in death. *He* saw in this simple act of furnishing the wedding guests with wine a very different significance from that which she saw. It was here at this wedding feast table that He felt Himself impelled to take the step which altered the whole character of His life.

For from a private person He became by His first miracle a public and marked character with a definite career. "To live henceforth in the vortex of a whirlwind; to have no leisure so much as to eat, no time to pray save when others slept, to be the gazing-stock of every eye, the common talk of every tongue; to

be followed about, to be thronged and jostled, to be gaped upon, to be hunted up and down by curious vulgar crowds; to be hated, and detested, and defamed, and blasphemed; to be regarded as a public enemy; to be watched and spied upon and trapped and taken as a notorious criminal” – is it possible to suppose that Christ was indifferent to all this, and that without shrinking He stepped across the line which marked the threshold of His public career?

And this was the least of it, that in this act He became a public and marked character. The glory that here shed a single ray into the rustic home of Cana must grow to that dazzling and perfect noon which shone from the cross to the remotest corner of earth. The same capacity and willingness to bless mankind which here in a small and domestic affair brought relief to His embarrassed friends, must be adapted to all the needs of men, and must undauntedly go forward to the utmost of sacrifice. He who is true King of men must flinch from no responsibility, from no pain, from no utter self-abandonment to which the needs of men may call Him. And Jesus knew this: in those quiet hours and long, untroubled days at Nazareth He had taken the measure of this world's actual state, and of what would be required to lift men out of selfishness and give them reliance upon God. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me” – this was even now present to His mind. His glory was the glory of absolute self-sacrifice, and He knew what that involved. His kingship was the rendering of service no other could render.

The *manner* in which the miracle was performed deserves attention. Christ does all while the servants seem to do all. The servants fill in the water and the servants draw off the wine, and there is no apparent exercise of Divine power, no mysterious words of incantation uttered over the waterpots, not so much as a command given that the water should become wine. What is seen by the spectators is men at work, not God creating out of nothing. The means seem to be human, the result is found to be Divine. Jesus says, "Fill the water pots with water," and they *filled* them; and filled them not as if their doing so were a mere form, and as if they would leave room for Christ to add to their work; no, they filled them up to the brim. Again He says, "Draw out now, and bear to the governor of the feast," and they *bore*. They knew very well they had only put in water, and they knew that to offer water to the governor of a marriage feast would be to insure their own punishment; but they did not hesitate. There seemed every reason why they should refuse to do this, or why they should at least ask some explanation or security that Jesus would bear the evil consequences; but there was one reason on the other side which outweighed all these – they had the command of Him whom they had been ordered to obey. And so, where reasoning would have led them to folly, obedient faith makes them fellow-workers in a miracle. They took their place and served, and they who serve Christ and do His will must do great things; for Christ wills nothing that is useless, futile, not worth doing. But this is how we are tried: we are commanded



to do things which seem unreasonable, and which we have no natural ability to do. We are commanded to repent, and are yet told that repentance is the gift of Christ; we are commanded to come to Christ, and are at the same time assured that we cannot come except the Father draw us; we are commanded to be perfectly holy, and yet we know that as the leopard cannot change his spots, nor one of us add a cubit to his stature, so neither can we put away the sins that stain our souls and walk uprightly before God. And yet these commands are plainly given us, not only to make us feel our helplessness, but to be performed. We feel our inability, we may say it is unreasonable to demand from us what we cannot perform, to require that out of the thin and watery substance of our human souls we should produce wine that may be poured out as an offering on the holy altar of God; but this is not unreasonable. It is our part in simplicity to obey God; what is commanded we are to do, and while we work He Himself will also work. He may do so in no visible way, as Christ here did nothing visibly, but He will be with us, effectually working. As the will of Christ pervaded the water so that it was endowed with new qualities, so can His will pervade our souls, with every other part of His creation, and make them conformable to His purpose. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it;" this is the secret of miracle-working. Do it, though you seem to be but wasting your strength and laying yourself open to the scorn of onlookers; do it, though in yourself there is no ability to effect what you are aiming at; do it wholly, up to the brim, as if you were the only

worker, as if there were no God to come after you and supply your deficiencies, but as if any shortcoming on your part would be fatal; do not stand waiting for God to work, for it is only in you and by you that He performs His work among men.

The significance of this incident is manifold. First, it gives us the key to the miracles of our Lord. It has become the fashion to depreciate miracles, and it is often thought that they hamper the gospel and obscure the true claim of Christ. It is often felt that so far from the miracles verifying Christ's claim to be the Son of God, they are the greatest obstacle to His acceptance. This is, however, to misunderstand their significance. The miracles unquestionably formed a most important element in Christ's life; and, if so, they must have served an important purpose; and to wish them away just because they are so important and make so large a demand upon faith seems to me preposterous. To wish them away precisely because they alter the very essence of the religion of Christ, and give it that very power which through all past ages it has exerted, seems unreasonable.

When the Jews discussed His claims among themselves or with Him, the power to work miracles was always taken into account as weighing heavily in His favour. He Himself distinctly stated that the crowning condemnation of those who rejected His claims arose from the circumstance that He had done among them the works which none other man had done. He challenges them to deny that it was by the finger of God that He wrought these works. After His withdrawal from earth the miracle of

the Resurrection was still appealed to as the convincing proof that He was all He had given Himself out for. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the power of working miracles was one great evidence of the Divine mission of Christ.

But though this is so, we are not on that account warranted in saying that the only purpose for which He wrought miracles was to win men's belief in His mission. On the contrary, we are told that it was one of His temptations, a temptation constantly resisted by Him, to use His power for this object without any other motive. It was the reproach He cast upon the people that except they saw signs and wonders they would not believe. He would never work a miracle merely for the sake of manifesting His glory. Whenever the unsympathetic, ignorant crowd clamoured for a sign; whenever with ill-concealed dislike they cried, "How long dost Thou make us to doubt? Show us a sign from heaven, that we may believe," He was silent. To create a mere compulsory consent in minds which had no sympathy with Him was never a sufficient motive. Was there a sick child tossing in fever, was there a blind beggar by the roadside, was there a hungry crowd, was there even the joy of a feast interrupted: in these He could find a worthy occasion for a miracle; but never did He work a miracle merely for the sake of removing the doubts of reluctant men. Where there was not even the beginning of faith miracles were useless. He could not work miracles in some places because of their unbelief.

What then was the motive of Christ's miracles? He was, as

these first disciples owned Him, the King of God's kingdom among men: He was the ideal Man, the new Adam, the true Source of human goodness, health, and power. He came to do us good, and the Spirit of God filled His human nature to its utmost capacity, that it might do all that man can do. Having these powers, He could not but use them for men. Having power to heal, He could not but heal, irrespective of the result which the miracle might have on the faith of those who saw it; nay, He could not but heal, though He straitly charged the healed person to let no man know what had been done. His miracles were His kingly acts, by which He suggested what man's true life in God's kingdom should be and will be. They were the utterance of what was in Him, the manifestation of His glory, the glory of One who came to utter the Father's heart to His strayed children. They expressed good-will to men; and to the spiritual eye of a John they became "signs" of spiritual wonders, symbols and pledges of those greater works and eternal blessings which Jesus came to bestow. The miracles revealed the Divine compassion, the grace and helpfulness that were in Christ, and led men to trust Him for all their needs.

We must, therefore, beware of falling into the error that lies at either extreme. We must neither, on the one hand, suppose that Christ's miracles were wrought solely for the purpose of establishing His claim to be God's Viceroy on earth; nor, on the other hand, are we to suppose that the marvels of beneficence by which He was known did nothing to prove His claim or promote

His kingdom. The poet writes because he is a poet, and not to convince the world that he is a poet; yet by writing he does convince the world. The benevolent man acts just as Christ did when He seemed to lay His finger on His lips and warned the healed person to make no mention of this kind act to anyone, and therefore all who do discover his actions know that he is really charitable. The act that a man does in order that he may be recognised as a good and benevolent person exhibits his love of recognition much more strikingly than his benevolence; and it is because the miracles of Christ were wrought from the purest and most self-denying compassion that ever explored and bound up the wounds of men, that we acknowledge Him as incontestably our King.

2. In what respects, then, did this first miracle manifest the glory of Christ? What was there in it to stir the thought and attract the adoration and trust of the disciples? Was it worthy to be the medium of conveying to their minds the first ideas of His glory they were to cherish? And what ideas must these have been? The first impression they must have received from the miracle was, no doubt, simple amazement at the power which so easily and unostentatiously turned the water into wine. This Person, they must have felt, stood in a peculiar relation to Nature. In fact, what John laid as the foundation of his Gospel, – that the Christ who came to redeem was He by whom all things were at first made, – Jesus also advanced as the first step in His revelation of Himself. He appears as the Source of life, whose will pervades

all things. He comes, not as a stranger or interloper who has no sympathy with existing things, but as the faithful Creator, who loves all that He has made, and can use all things for the good of men. He is at home in the world, and enters physical nature as its King, who can use it for His high ends. Never before has He wrought a miracle, but in this first command to Nature there is no hesitation, no experimenting, no anxiety, but the easy confidence of a Master. He is either Himself the Creator of the world He comes to restore to worth and peace, or He is the Delegate of the Creator. We see in this first miracle that Christ is not an alien or an usurper, but one who has already the closest connection with us and with all things. We receive assurance that in Him God is present.

3. But it was not only the Creator's power which was shown in this miracle, but some hint was given of the ends for which that power would be used by Christ. Perhaps the disciples who had known and admired the austere life of the Baptist would expect that He whom the Baptist proclaimed as greater than himself would be greater in the same line, and would reveal His glory by a sublime abstemiousness. They had confessed Him to be the Son of God, and might naturally expect to find in Him an independence of earthly joys. They had followed Him as the king of Israel; was His kingly glory to find a suitable sphere in the little family difficulties that poverty begets? It is almost a shock to our own ideas of our Lord to think of Him as one of a marriage party; to hear Him uttering the ordinary salutations, civilities, and

enquiries of a friendly and festive gathering; to see Him standing by while others are the principal figures in the room. And we know that many who had opportunity to observe His habits could never understand or reconcile themselves to His easy familiarity with all kinds of people, and to His freedom in partaking in mirthful scenes and hilarious entertainments.

And just because of this difficulty we find in reconciling religion with joy, God with nature, does Christ reveal His glory first at a marriage-feast, not in the temple, not in the synagogue, not by taking His disciples apart to teach them to pray, but at a festive gathering, that thus they may recognise in Him the Lord of all human life, and see that His work of redemption is co-extensive with human experience. He comes among us, not to crush or pour contempt on human feelings, but to exalt them by sharing in them; not to show that it is possible to live separate from all human sympathies, but to deepen and intensify them; not to do away with the ordinary business and social relations of life, but to sanctify them. He comes sharing in all pure feelings and joys, sanctioning all natural relationships; Himself human, with interest in all human interests; not a mere spectator or censor of human affairs, but Himself a man implicated in things human. He shows us the folly of fancying that God looks with an austere and morose eye upon outbursts of human affection and joy, and teaches us that to be holy as He is holy we are not required to abandon the ordinary affairs of life, and that however we make them the apology for worldliness, it is not the necessary duties or

relations of life that prevent our being Christlike, but these are the very material in which His glory may be most clearly seen, the soil in which must grow and ripen all Christian graces and fruits of righteousness.

This, then, was the glory Christ wished His disciples first of all to see. He was to be their King, not by drilling men to fight for Him, nor by interrupting the natural order and upsetting the established ways of men, but by entering into these with a gladdening, purifying, elevating spirit. His glory was not to be confined to a palace or to a small circle of courtiers, or to one particular department of activity, but was to be found irradiating all human life in its most ordinary forms. He came, indeed, to make all things new, but the new creation was the fulfilment of the original idea: it was not to be achieved by thwarting nature, nor by a one-sided development of some elements of nature, but by guiding the whole to its original destination, by lifting the whole into harmony with God. We see the glory of Christ, and accept Him as our Ruler and Redeemer, because we see in Him perfect sympathy with all that is human.

4. While enjoying the bounty of Christ at the marriage feast, John cannot have yet understood all that was involved in His Master's purpose to bring new life and happiness to this world of men. Afterwards, no doubt, he saw how appropriately this miracle took the first place, and through it read his Lord's own thoughts about His whole work on earth. For it is impossible that Christ Himself should not have had His own thoughts about



the significance of this miracle. He had, during the previous six weeks, passed through a time of violent mental disturbance and of supreme spiritual exaltation. The measureless task laid upon Him had become visible to Him. Already He was aware that only through His death could the utmost of blessing be imparted to men. Is it possible that while He first put forth His power to restore the joy of these wedding guests, He should not have seen in the wine a symbol of the blood He was to shed for the refreshment and revival of men? The Baptist, whose mind was nourished with Old Testament ideas, called Christ the Bridegroom, and His people the Bride. Must not Jesus also have thought of those who believed in Him as His bride, and must not the very sight of a marriage have set His thoughts working regarding His whole relation to men? So that in His first miracle He no doubt saw a summary of His whole work. In this first manifestation of His glory there is, to Himself at least, a reminder that only by His death will that glory be perfected. Without Him, as He saw, the joy of this wedding feast had been brought to an untimely close; and without His free outpouring of His life for men there could be no presenting of men to God unblemished and blameless, no fulfilment of those high hopes of mankind that nourish pure characters and noble deeds, but a swift and dreary extinction of even natural joys. It is to the marriage supper of the *Lamb*, of Him who was slain, and has redeemed us by His blood, that we are invited. It is the "Lamb's wife" that John saw adorned as a bride for her Husband. And whosoever would sit

down at that feast which consummates the experience of this life, terminating all its vacillation of trust and love, and which opens eternal and unlimited joy to the people of Christ, must wash and make white his garments in this blood. He must not shrink from the closest fellowship with the purifying love of Christ.

5. His disciples, when they saw His power and His goodness in this miracle, felt more than ever that He was the rightful King. They “believed on Him.” To us this first of signs is merged in the last, in His death. The joy, the self-sacrifice, the holiness, the strength and beauty of human character which that death has produced in the world, is the great evidence which enables many now to believe in Him. The fact is indubitable. The intelligent secular historian, who surveys the rise and growth of European nations, counts the death of Christ among the most vital and influential of powers for good. It has touched all things with change, and been the source of endless benefit to men. Are we then to repudiate Him or to acknowledge Him? Are we to act like the master of the feast, who enjoyed the good wine without asking where it came from; or are we to own ourselves debtors to the actual Creator of our happiness? If the disciples believed on Him when they saw Him furnish these wedding guests with wine, shall we not believe, who know that through all these ages He has furnished the pained and the poor with hope and consolation, the desolate and broken-hearted with restoring sympathy, the outcast with the knowledge of God’s love, the sinner with pardon, with heaven, and with God? Is not the glory He showed at this

marriage in Cana precisely what still attracts us to Him with confidence and affection? Can we not wholly trust this Lord who has a perfect sympathy guiding His Divine power, who brings the presence of God into all the details of human life, who enters into all our joys and all our sorrows, and is ever watchful to anticipate our every need, and supply it out of His inexhaustible and all-sufficient fulness? Happy they who know His heart as His mother knew it, and are satisfied to name their want and leave it with Him.

## VI

### *THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE*

“After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples: and there they abode not many days. And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and He made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew their tables; and to them that sold the doves He said, Take these things hence; make not My Father’s house a house of merchandise. His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of Thine house shall eat me up. The Jews therefore answered and said unto Him, What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou raise it up in three days? But He spake of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He spake this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.” – John ii. 12–22.

Whether the Nazareth family returned from Cana to their own

town before going down to Capernaum, John does not inform us. Neither are we told why they went to Capernaum at all at this time. It may have been in order to join one of the larger caravans going up to Jerusalem for the approaching Feast. Not only the disciples, some of whom had their homes on the lake-side, accompanied Jesus, but also His mother and His brothers. The manner in which the brothers are spoken of in connection with His mother suggests that He and they bore to her the same relation. They remained in Capernaum “not many days,” because the Passover was at hand. Having come to Jerusalem, and appearing there for the first time since His baptism, He performed several miracles. These John omits, and selects as more significant and worthy of record one authoritative act.

The circumstances which occasioned this act were familiar to the Jerusalem Jew. The exigencies of Temple worship had bred a flagrant abuse. Worshippers coming from remote parts of the Holy Land, and from countries beyond, found it a convenience to be able to purchase on the spot the animals used in sacrifice, and the material for various offerings – salt, meal, oil, frankincense. Traders were not slow to supply this demand, and vying with one another they crept nearer and nearer to the sacred precincts, until some, under pretence perhaps of driving in an animal for sacrifice, made a sale within the outer court. This court had an area of about fourteen acres, and was separated from the inner court by a wall breast high, and bearing intimations which forbade the encroachment of Gentiles on pain of death.

Round this outer court ran marble colonnades, richly ornamented and supported by four rows of pillars, and roofed with cedar, affording ample shade to the traders.

There were not only cattle-dealers and sellers of pigeons, but also money-changers; for every Jew had to pay to the Temple treasury an annual tax of half a shekel, and this tax could be paid only in the sacred currency. No foreign coin, with its emblem of submission to an alien king, was allowed to pollute the Temple. Thus there came to be need of money-changers, not only for the Jew who had come up to the feast from a remote part of the empire, but even for the inhabitant of Palestine, as the Roman coinage had displaced the shekel in ordinary use.

There might seem, therefore, to be room to say much in favour of this convenient custom. At any rate, it was one of those abuses which, while they may shock a fresh and unsophisticated mind, are allowed both because they contribute to public convenience and because they have a large pecuniary interest at their back. In point of fact, however, the practice gave rise to lamentable consequences. Cattle-dealers and money-changers have always been notorious for making more than their own out of their bargains, and facts enough are on record to justify our Lord calling this particular market "a den of thieves." The poor were shamefully cheated, and the worship of God was hindered and impoverished instead of being facilitated and enriched. And even although this traffic had been carried on under careful supervision, and on unimpeachable principles, still

it was unseemly that the worshipper who came to the Temple seeking quiet and fellowship with God should have to push his way through the touts of the dealers, and have his devotional temper dissipated by the wrangling and shouting of a cattle market. Yet although many must have lamented this, no one had been bold enough to rebuke and abolish the glaring profanation.

Jesus on entering the Temple finds Himself in the midst of this incongruous scene – the sounds and movements of a market, the loud and eager exclamations of competing traders, the bustle of selecting one animal out of a flock, the loud talk and laughter of the idle groups of onlookers. Jesus cannot stand it. Zeal for the honour of His Father's house possesses Him. The Temple claims Him as its vindicator from abuse. Nowhere can He more appropriately assert His authority as Messiah. Out of the cords lying about He quickly knots together a formidable scourge, and silently, leaving the public conscience to justify His action, He proceeds single-handed to drive out cattle and traders together. A scene of violence ensued, – the cattle rushing hither and thither, the owners trying to preserve their property, the money-changers holding their tables as Jesus went from one to another upsetting them, the scattered coin scrambled for; and over all the threatening scourge and the commanding eye of the Stranger. Never on any other occasion did our Lord use violence.

The audacity of the act has few parallels. To interfere in the very Temple with any of its recognized customs was in itself a claim to be King in Israel. Were a stranger suddenly to appear

in the lobby of the House of Commons, and by sheer dignity of demeanour, and the force of integrity, to rectify an abuse of old standing involving the interests of a wealthy and privileged class, it could not create a greater sensation. The Baptist might be with Him, cowing the truculent with his commanding eye; but there was no need of the Baptist: the action of Christ awakening conscience in the men themselves was enough to quell resistance.

No doubt Jesus began His work at the house of God because He knew that the Temple was the real heart of the nation; that it was belief in God which was their strength and hope, and that the loss of that belief, and the consequent irreverence and worldliness, were the most dangerous features of Jewish society. The state of matters He found in the Temple could not have been tolerated had the people really believed God was present in the Temple.

Such an act could not pass without being criticised. It would be keenly discussed that evening in Jerusalem. At every table it would be the topic of conversation, and a most serious one wherever men in authority were meeting. Many would condemn it as a piece of pharisaic ostentation. If He is a reformer, why does He not turn His attention to the licentiousness of the people? Why show such extravagant and unseemly zeal about so innocent a custom when flagrant immoralities abound? Why not spend His zeal in clearing out from the land the polluting foreigner? Such charges are easy. No man can do everything, least of all can he do everything at once. And yet the advocate of temperance is



twitted with his negligence of other causes which are perhaps as necessary; and he who pleads for foreign missions is reminded that we have heathen at home. These are the carping criticisms of habitual fault-finders, and of men who have no hearty desire for the advancement of what is good.

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