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*STUDIES IN THE "INNER LIFE" OF JESUS.*

VI.

THE EARLY SELF-DISCLOSURE.

1. HAVING accepted His task, Jesus set about its fulfilment. But what was His first step? According to the Synoptists He passed from His Baptism and Temptation to His public ministry in Galilee. But, according to John, He gathered a few followers around Him, and, after a brief visit to Cana, began His public ministry in Jerusalem. It is not at all unlikely that He drew His first disciples from the following of John the Baptist, and that, as the Messiah of the Jewish people, He made His first public appearance in the capital, the centre of national life and worship. The call of some of His disciples to be His constant companions, recorded in the Synoptists, most probably was preceded by such personal intercourse as John reports. These differences in the narratives can be harmonized. A greater difficulty meets us when we compare the Johannine record of Jesus' sayings and doings in the early Judæan ministry with the Synoptic account of His words and works in Galilee. According to John, the Baptist proclaims Him the Messiah; He is accepted by the first disciples as the Messiah; to the woman of Samaria even He declares Himself to be the Messiah. According to the Synoptists He carefully guards the secret of the Messiahship, until at Caesarea Philippi, Peter, in the name of the other disciples, confesses Him the Messiah, and even then He forbids the publication of this discovery to the multitude; and it is only at His last entry into Jerusalem that He assumes Messianic dignity, and accepts Messianic homage. How can we explain the apparent inconsistency of these two representations?

2. The Gordian knot is often cut by denying the apos-

toloc origin and the historical value of the Fourth Gospel. Wendt, in his recent work, while acknowledging the apostolic origin and the historical value of the Source used by the Evangelist in recording most of the discourses of Jesus, finds very few traces of the use of this Source in this part of the Gospel. The conflict of the evidence is set aside by denying the credibility of one of the witnesses. Another explanation, which the writer of these Studies was at one time more inclined to favour than he is now, may be briefly stated. While John in his old age retained a very vivid memory of times and places, and thus his report is to be relied on in these particulars, he lost the remembrance of the small beginnings of his faith in Jesus in the experience he had of what that faith had grown into. He could not so detach himself from his present convictions of the grace and glory of his Lord, as to recall what he had actually thought of Him when he first met Him. The bright radiance of his full-grown faith fell over and hid from him the dim gleams of that faith when new-born. Human experience offers many illustrations of such a psychological process. A husband and a wife, who have lived their common life of love for a number of years, find it very difficult to realize that they were once strangers to one another, and that their present intimate relation began in what appeared a casual acquaintance. Dr. Sanday recognizes such a possibility in the words, "It is possible that the Evangelist may have been led to define somewhat in view of later events and later doctrines" (*Hastings' Bible Dictionary*, ii. p. 612). Without entirely rejecting this explanation, the writer now prefers to entertain another, which may be thus stated :

3. The beginning of His ministry seems to have been a time of strain and stress for Jesus. Mark graphically describes His retirement from the Baptism to the Temptation in the words, "Straightway the Spirit driveth Him

forth into the wilderness." His answer to His mother in Cana is not the utterance of a calm mood, but betrays intense and even conflicting emotion. The impression made on His disciples by His bearing and behaviour in cleansing the Temple is expressed by the quotation, "The zeal of thine house shall eat me up." How bold is the challenge to the priesthood in the words, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up"! How severe is this demand made on the Pharisaic party as represented by Nicodemus in the saying, "Ye must be born anew"! How striking is His confidence in the woman of Samaria, when He confesses Himself the Messiah! Is it not a legitimate conclusion that Jesus, intensely inspired by the consciousness of His vocation, and as yet necessarily ignorant of the unpreparedness of all with whom He came into contact to receive Him in the spirit and for the purpose which He Himself cherished, was at first franker in speech and more daring in deed than afterwards, when, taught by experience the danger of a premature and misdirected Messianic movement, He exercised a reserve in utterance and a restraint in action, which secured the delay during which He was enabled to teach and train His disciples to confess Him Messiah as a result of the impression He had made, and the influence He had wielded, and not as a consequence of the popular Messianic expectations which from the beginning they had cherished? May we not even find a hint of a change from confidence to caution in John's words, "Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men"? Heralded and acknowledged Messiah by the Baptist, His divinely ordained forerunner, confirmed in His sense of Sonship, and endowed for His work by gifts from Heaven at His Baptism, tested by temptation but triumphant in His fidelity to His vocation, convinced of the world's urgent need of Himself as the Saviour divinely promised and humanly desired, is it sur-

prising that He entered on His work with enthusiasm and energy, without ostentatiously declaring, yet also without entirely concealing from all who He knew Himself to be, and what He was called of God to do for men? Would it not have been strange rather if calculating caution, and not fervent zeal, had marked the beginning of His ministry?

4. This course, however, was also the path of wisdom. However careful an observer and skilful a judge of His times Jesus had been in Nazareth, it was quite impossible for Him to know what was the condition of all classes in the community as regards their preparedness or otherwise for His ministry. Experience alone could show if the people generally could be trusted to receive Him as the Messiah, such as He desired to be, and not as they expected. What men will do cannot be known until their choice has been made, until they have been tested. Does not a fresh light fall on the early ministry, if we regard it as for the most part a time of testing? The Baptist was, as might be expected, the first whose faith was proved; next came the disciples whom He had gathered around Him; then Jesus' own family followed. The priesthood was tested by deed, the cleansing of the Temple, and the Pharisaic party by word, the talk with Nicodemus. As the woman of Samaria seemed ready, the truth was made known to her. Even as Jesus Himself was tempted, and proved Himself ready for His vocation, so it was needful that He should test His environment to discover how far it was ready for the exercise of that vocation. As we read the record, we must be impressed by the care and skill with which Jesus made these tests. His enthusiasm and energy were tempered by discernment and discretion. Priests and scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees, proved themselves unready. Samaritans were impressionable, but not reliable. His mother even was not altogether intelligent. A few disciples of the Baptist seemed capable of further teaching and training. Thus

He came with the fan in His hand, sifting the chaff from the wheat.

5. If the writer supposed that this explanation raised any doubt, or laid any charge against the sinless perfection of Jesus, he would not even venture to mention it, for that unique glory of Jesus is a certainty for faith against which no conjecture of thought can be advanced. But did not Jesus learn obedience by the things that He suffered? was He not surprised and grieved by the unbelief of the multitude and the misunderstanding of His disciples? did He not gain information by inquiry, and did not the Divine guidance come to Him not apart from, but by means of His daily experience of men's works and ways? If He was thus limited in knowledge (this important subject must be dealt with in a subsequent Study), He could not foresee the attitude men would assume to Him until He put them to the test. It is, therefore, no detraction from the excellence of His Person to recognize the consequences for His action which this limitation of knowledge imposed. May we not also add that, even if His confidence was sometimes misplaced, and His expectations were sometimes disappointed, the charity of His spirit, the generosity of His judgment, moral excellences, are thereby made the more conspicuous, and thus the very limitation of His knowledge serves as a foil for the exaltation of His character. He was too good to be cynical and suspicious; He was so good that He saw other men in the light of the surpassing radiance of His love and grace.

6. It is not improbable, in view of this explanation, that Jesus, as already suggested in a previous Study, gave the Baptist some indication of His vocation, that the Baptist at His Baptism was convinced of His Messiahship, and conveyed this conviction to two of his disciples in an allusion to the prophetic ideal Jesus had accepted, that these disciples forsook the Baptist and followed Jesus, and that a

few others from John's circle joined the small company. As we study the narrative of the intercourse of Jesus with these first disciples, what strikes us is that the Evangelist does not ascribe to Jesus any words explicitly claiming the Messiahship. He cannot refuse the Baptist's testimony, nor deny the confession of the disciples, but He does not expressly confirm either. What He does is to assert His spiritual dominion over them. Had John and Andrew in their first conversation shown the imperfect conceptions they cherished, and thus imposed on Jesus the task of education, which during the whole ministry was so patiently continued?

7. Probably the ideas of these disciples were little, if at all, in advance of the popular expectations. Their intercourse with John the Baptist may have led them to lay greater stress than the people did on the moral reformation involved in the Messianic reign. What they needed was to be so taught and trained by the instruction and influence of Jesus, that they would accept His Messianic ideal. Peter did this in the name of the other disciples at Caesarea Philippi, even although their original expectations had been disappointed. If it is this scene which is alluded to, as is not improbable, in John vi. 66-71, then Jesus' question, "would ye also go away?" suggests that it was not an entirely new discovery of His Messiahship which had to be made by the disciples, but a conviction, formerly accepted, which had to be maintained against adverse influences within and without, in spite of the thorough change in their thoughts and hopes, which Jesus by His words and works required of them. It may be even that some of the disciples who joined Jesus at the Jordan did falter in their faith, and waver in their allegiance, when they learned more about His works and ways, and that the summons to follow Him recorded in the Synoptists may have been a recall from a temporary distrust and desertion, a return to faith and allegiance.

Whether that be so or not, it is intelligible and credible that these men, who cherished the Messianic hope, and had been influenced more or less directly by the Baptist, did accept his witness to Jesus, and did attach themselves to Him with a trust and loyalty which were afterwards sorely tried by the unlikeness of His aims and their wishes, but never altogether failed in the trial. May we not add that it is highly improbable that anything short of a belief in Jesus' Messiahship could have induced the disciples of the Baptist to leave him for another teacher and master.

8. Over these men, thus brought to Him, Jesus aims at gaining a moral and spiritual influence by assuring them both of His intimate knowledge of them, and His gracious feeling towards them. It is as the Searcher of hearts that Jesus draws from Nathanael the full confession of His Messiahship. Yet He is not content that His claims should rest for His disciples on any marvel in His knowledge of them. In the figurative saying with which the conversation closes, He appeals to His sympathetic and representative relation to men, and His constant and intimate communion with God as the highest proof of His claims. May we not discover in these words the endeavour from the very beginning of His intercourse with His disciples to turn their thoughts and wishes from the national, political, secular aspects so prominent in the popular Messianic expectations to the personal, moral, spiritual aspects of His work for men? He speaks to Peter about his character, and to Nathanael about his communion with God. He promises His disciples as the greater things of the future not any earthly conquests, and splendours, but an open heaven, and a ceaseless communication between Himself and God. Were they surprised and disappointed, or was their bewilderment so great, that they could not yet judge whether He was or was not what they had been waiting and hoping for? Already He used His own characteristic title for



Himself, which partly disclosed, partly concealed His claims. If there was in this early Judæan ministry more confidence and less caution than in the later Galilean, if in the enthusiasm and energy of His first attempts to fulfil His vocation He made greater ventures in testing the readiness of others to welcome Him than He afterwards did, yet we may discover, if we look more closely at the record, that from the first He recognized the need of concealment as well as disclosure, and that, therefore, the contrast between the Johannine and the Synoptic representations is not so absolute as it is often made out to be.

9. One feature in the narrative which claims closer scrutiny is the insight into the character of Peter, and the experience of Nathanael, which Jesus displays. Are we to describe it as supernatural knowledge, or not? To deny the limitation of Jesus' knowledge is to reduce the Incarnation to a mere semblance, even although what boasts itself the strictest orthodoxy is most prone to this form of Docetism. We have no right to proceed on the assumption that Jesus knew all the thoughts and all the feelings of all the persons with whom He came into contact; and it is our duty as far as we can to find an explanation for His insight into the minds and hearts of others without this assumption. Nevertheless we should be prepared to admit, if a candid examination of the records demands the admission, that even as Jesus had a supernatural endowment of power to heal the bodies of men, so He had a supernatural endowment of knowledge to be used in His dealings with their souls. That Jesus knew Simon's name is not to be regarded as a miracle, since Andrew had probably told Jesus a good deal about his brother before setting out to bring him to Jesus. Jesus' call of Philip need not involve any supernatural knowledge of his condition, as Andrew and Peter were his fellow-townsmen, and could tell Jesus of his fitness and readiness. But it does seem that Jesus' words to Peter

and Nathanael do show a knowledge of them which cannot be explained by common insight, even when heightened by exceptional sympathy. As Peter approached Jesus, there came to Him an intuition, given Him by His Father, both of what the man now was, and of what he afterwards would become. We need not suppose that Jesus never saw Nathanael with the bodily eye under the fig-tree, but only beheld Him in that position in spiritual vision. But the passing glance He had cast on Nathanael was accompanied by an intuition of His spiritual condition, to which He appealed in justification of the words of commendation which He addresses to him. In each case the intuition was necessary to enable Jesus to offer the greeting which He did, and in each case too we are further warranted in assuming there was the need of doubt being met or faith being won by such a proof of knowledge. This power was not given to relieve Jesus of the necessity of using means for gaining knowledge, for He used such means. Its constant exercise would have been a refusal of the conditions of the Incarnation. Only when necessary for securing influence over others was it given and used. It is surely noteworthy, that Jesus, as soon as He can, turns away attention from the supernatural knowledge, which had so impressed Nathanael. He does not want His disciples to see in Him a marvel of knowledge or of power; He wants them to see in Him One who is in most intimate relation and closest sympathy with them, but who also, while on earth, is in unbroken intercourse with God in heaven. His fraternal consciousness towards men and His filial consciousness towards God, that is the thing greater than His supernatural knowledge.

10. May we not even go a step further in the interpretation of this saying? It is as the Son of Man that He thus knows men. The condition of receptivity for the supernatural endowment of knowledge was the human sympathy

which He had already displayed in His generous judgment and His gracious treatment of the disciples. Only One who loved with a love unto self-sacrifice could be entrusted with the secrets of other hearts. Only One who made the life of others His own care and burden, and gave Himself freely for their good, could claim the right thus to invade the sanctuary of another personality. A selfish man, endowed with such a hold over others as such knowledge would give, would be a terror and a menace to all. Because Jesus had accepted the vocation of Saviour through self-sacrifice, therefore did God enrich Him with this gift of insight. This sympathy with men in turn had its source in His union with God. Hearts were laid bare to Him, because heaven was open. The angels of His insight could pass in and out of the souls of men, because the angels of His aspiration were ever rising towards God, and the angels of God's satisfaction in Him were ever coming down to His spirit. It was as God's Son that He was man's brother. The Infinite's participation and satisfaction in the life of the finite finds its highest and fullest expression and exercise in the human sympathy of the Son of Man, and the supernatural knowledge which that sympathy for its beneficent ends could, when necessary, command. This endowment is not to be regarded as an inexplicable marvel ; it may be understood as an essential factor in the self-disclosure of God to man in the God-man. In this figurative utterance Jesus lifted His disciples from the lower planes of thought and feeling, on which even the Baptist and they as his followers moved, to the loftier heights of Divine vision and communion, in the clear air of which He Himself ever lived, but in which they needed much teaching and training before they could even breathe.

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