

M. Loisy and the Gospel Story.

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THE publication of Loisy's *Les Évangiles Synoptiques* more than a year ago coincided with the wave of excitement which accompanied their distinguished author's excommunication, and the Modernist controversy as a whole. The sympathies of English students could only be on one side, and these extraneous and accidental circumstances made it difficult to appraise dispassionately the value of Loisy's commentary. By now perhaps the halo of martyrdom is a little less dazzling to our eyes, and it is more possible to examine the books in the light of common day. No one can refuse to acknowledge their exhaustive and scholarly treatment of their subject, or the lucidity and charm of their style, but there can be no doubt that to most readers they have proved a disappointment. When critics of the calibre of Sanday, Salmon, Ramsay, Burkitt, Allen, and Harnack had done so much to vindicate the general historical accuracy of the Gospels, we seemed to be moving towards something of a fixed position in their criticism, but here the whole question is thrown back indefinitely. With Loisy in one's mind, it is possible on hardly any point to speak of 'the unanimity of modern critics,' and it is safe to say that the Gospels have never received more drastic treatment from one who stood within the pale of historic Christianity.

Now the two volumes which comprise the commentary are somewhat terrifying in size, and probably more people are ready to talk about them than to read them. It may, then, be of service to attempt a sketch of Loisy's portion at somewhat greater length than has been possible in the ordinary reviews. For it is well for those who defend Loisy, sometimes with greater enthusiasm than knowledge, to realize clearly to what they are committed. We may sympathize with him sincerely and respectfully in the treatment he has received, and admire unreservedly his devotion to the truth, but most of us will probably prefer to pause before we accept his critical conclusions.

We need only state summarily his view of the Gospels themselves, as helping us to understand his estimate of their historical value and of their picture of Christ, which is the main theme of his book. Briefly, he throws back the three Synoptic

Gospels to late dates, St. Mark to about 75, St. Matthew and St. Luke to at least the close of the first century. They are not, even in part, the work of their traditional authors; and what is more important, they are in no sense first-hand authorities. 'En ce qui concerne l'origine des Synoptiques, il paraît certain que pas un d'eux ne repose directement et complètement sur la tradition orale, qu'aucun d'eux n'est l'expression immédiate de souvenirs gardés par un témoin' (i. p. 81). Even St. Mark, the earliest, is 'une œuvre de second main,' 'une œuvre de foi beaucoup plus qu'un témoignage historique' (p. 84). They are all three composite documents, many stages removed from the original facts, and have been drastically edited under influences which we shall consider later. Loisy's main interest with the 'Synoptic problem' is to show that neither where our documents agree, nor where they differ, can they be regarded as resting on any sound basis of fact.

We proceed to outline the career of Jesus, as Loisy conceives it (i. pp. 203 ff.). The troubled state of Palestine under Roman rule and Herodian misgovernment had produced a prophet. A certain John appeared preaching the near fulfilment of the national hopes, and the approach of the Kingdom of God. Among his hearers there found Himself, more or less by accident, one Jesus, born at Nazareth some thirty years before. He already, as it seems, believed Himself to be called by God, to be the chief agent in the proclamation of the Kingdom, and was ready, like others, to be baptized by John. This experience deepened the conviction of His call, and on the prophet's imprisonment He decided to carry on his work. He adopted the idea of the Kingdom, as He found it, with its traditional Judaic setting (i. p. 225), and the one theme of His preaching was its imminence, together with the necessity of repentance for those who looked for a share in it. It meant the future rule of God and of righteousness upon earth, inaugurated by a resurrection, which need not be conceived of as sweeping away the material world. 'La notion évangélique du royaume n'est pas si spirituelle; les hommes qui y auront part seront en chair et en os; ils ne se marieront pas, parce qu'ils seront immortels,

mais ce n'est point par pure métaphore qu'on se les figure assemblés dans un festin' (p. 238). He Himself is to hold the chief place therein, and in that sense He is the Christ. But He is only the Christ of the future; He is not so yet; hence the reticence as to His claims. 'En fait, il n'y avait pas de Messie tant qu'il n'y avait pas de royaume' (p. 213). This is the central idea of His conception of His person; titles such as 'Son of God' or 'Son of Man,' if used at all, were vague and general, and of no real significance as explaining who He was. His ethical teaching was transitory, not having in view the normal requirements of social life of His own or any other period, but laying down the conditions for entrance into the Kingdom, which was soon to sweep away the existing order of things. 'Toute la morale de l'Évangile est donc subordonnée à la conception eschatologique du règne de Dieu' (p. 236).¹ This teaching was marked by a strong independence, an originality of selection; also by great simplicity; and both of these features attracted the people. Parables or simple metaphors played a large part in it; but were in no way designed to veil the truth from the unready, as our Evangelists have falsely imagined. Though we are told that the first three Gospels 'représentent fidèlement la substance de l'enseignement donné par Jésus' (p. 82), yet such large deductions must be made from this admission that we wonder where we can rely on finding the real meaning of Jesus, let alone His exact words. The parables have been much edited; some are entirely due to the Evangelists. Generally 'il est à présumer que les disciples mêmes ne firent jamais aucun soin pour retenir ce qu'ils entendaient, et que leur mémoire garda seulement ce qui les avait le plus frappés' (p. 187). Only striking fragments remain, and of these the meaning is often disguised by their setting and combination. Probably none of the 'words from the Cross' are authentic (ii. p. 684). A saying such as that of St. Mk 9¹ ('There be some here which shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God come with power') is genuine because untrue; but as actually spoken, it was probably still more untrue, and Christ is presumed to have said, 'Those here shall not die, etc.' (ii. p. 28). We are reminded of the 'foundation pillars' of Schmiedel's article.

¹ Loisy here seems to adopt the *Interimsethik* of a recent German critic, Schweitzer; i.e. Christ's teaching was intended only for an interval which was expected to be short.

More or less against His will, Jesus appeared as a worker of miracles. Here the facts have been grossly exaggerated in our records, under the influence of 'faith,' 'symbolism,' and so on, and the details are quite unreliable, but He probably did work a certain number of cures in nervous diseases, particularly in those supposed to be due to demoniac possession. A few months was enough to attract the attention of the political authorities, Antipas in Galilee, and the ruling caste at Jerusalem, and Jesus retired for safety to the north. Here comes the crisis of the ministry; the disciples confess their belief in His Messiahship, and encouraged by this, their Master decides to declare Himself at Jerusalem. 'Là est le terme assigné à la préparation du règne de Dieu. Jérusalem est le passé, la ville des grands souvenirs; c'est le présent, le lieu des réunions nationales; c'est aussi l'avenir, car une Jérusalem nouvelle doit surgir à la place de l'ancienne' (i. p. 213). The decision was dangerous, and the disciples realized it. So did Jesus Himself. But He never lost His faith that somehow God would intervene by a miracle, and save Him. 'Jésus n'allait pas à Jérusalem pour y mourir; il y allait pour préparer et procurer, au risque de sa vie, l'avènement de Dieu' (p. 214). The events of the next few days accentuated the danger, but still there remained the hope. 'Jésus n'avait pas laissé de la (sc. *la catastrophe*) prévoir, mais il n'avait pas cessé non plus d'espérer le miracle' (p. 218). That indeed was the ground of the prayer in Gethsemane. No miracle, however, came; He was arrested, and at once hurried before Pilate, who condemned Him to death with little hesitation, as claiming to set up a kingdom. Jesus, in fact, could not deny the charge; for His mission, as He understood it, 'n'était pas l'institution d'une société spirituelle, compatible avec tous les pouvoirs humains, c'était l'instauration complète du règne de Dieu, à la place de la tyrannie des hommes' (p. 221). Of the crucifixion practically no details are known; He died with some loud cry on His lips, and was buried, probably by the soldiers, in the common grave. 'Ainsi finit le rêve de l'Évangile; la réalité du règne de Dieu allait commencer.'

Not unnaturally we exclaim 'how?' For to the historian the curious fact is that from this career, in no way unique, hardly out of the common, there has arisen a religion which has dominated the civilized world, and which still has some hold even

over educated minds. The Abbé himself believes in it sincerely. How then did it come about? Apparently because Jesus was followed by a succession of men of spiritual power and literary genius who proved able to develop in a most unexpected manner a somewhat unpromising material. A few of them are known to us by name, in particular a certain Paul of Tarsus; the majority are remembered only by fragments of their work. They include the series of writers to whom we owe the Gospels, the 'Christian prophets' who are responsible for their poetry (p. 256), or such men as the 'croyant de génie' who has given us the account of the Transfiguration (ii. p. 33).

The first step was soon taken. The impression made by Jesus on His followers was too strong to be effaced merely by His death. 'Le travail intérieur de leur âme enthousiaste pouvait leur suggérer la vision de ce qu'ils souhaitaient' (i. p. 223). The wished-for visions soon came, the earliest apparently to Peter by the lake of Galilee, in the half-light of the morning; a late and artificial version of this is preserved in St. Jn 21. Others followed; and it was of course quite a natural thing for simple folk to believe in a Resurrection, to stake their lives on the fact, and to find in the belief a force sufficient to renew the face of the earth. 'Nul ne contestait que Jésus fût mort sur la croix. Nul ne pouvait démontrer qu'il ne fut pas ressuscité' (p. 224). The need of some proof was, however, felt later on, and this was met in two ways. Nothing was known of the burial of Jesus; His friends had perhaps tried to find His body, and their failure gave rise to the legend of the empty tomb (i. p. 178; ii. pp. 721 ff.). To the final editor of the second Gospel this was in itself sufficient, and he concludes his narrative with its discovery, thinking it unnecessary to add details of any appearances of the risen Christ. Legend soon defined 'the third day' as the date. In popular belief the spirit haunted the body till this time, and a resurrection afterwards would be inconceivable. The 'third day' was further identified with the first day of the week, because Christians were in the habit of meeting together on that day, and pagan converts naturally fixed upon it as being 'the day of the sun.'¹ Possibly also, the influence of

¹ This extraordinary argument should be noticed. All our evidence shows the 'first day' as established in the usage of the Church before Gentile influence had had time to make itself felt. No doubt later on, its appropriateness as 'the

the Old Testament was at work, in the parallel of Jonah, or the 'third day' of Hos 6² (i. p. 177; ii. p. 723). Loisy forgets to remind us that this passage is never quoted in N.T.

The second proof of the Resurrection itself was also found in the prophecies of the Old Testament. 'Il est de toute invraisemblance que les textes de l'Ancien Testament aient suggéré aux disciples de Jésus la résurrection de leur Maître; mais ce qui paraît certain, c'est que cette idée, aussitôt que née, chercha son appui, sa défense, sa preuve, dans les Écritures, et qu'elle les y trouva' (i. p. 176).

The crucial step of a belief in the Resurrection having been taken, further developments quickly followed, particularly under the influence of St. Paul. Dr. Sanday, in the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (ii. p. 886), says: 'We need to examine with all the closeness in our power the nature of the relation between St. Paul and Christ, or—*what almost amounts to the same thing*—between the Epistles (as represented by their central group) and the Gospels.' But Loisy by no means regards these two statements of the problem as identical. For him, our Gospels are impregnated with Paulinism, St. Mark, the earliest, no less than the rest; in fact rather more. The author was probably 'grand partisan de Paul'; 'son évangile est une interprétation paulinienne, volontairement paulinienne, de la tradition primitive. Son paulinisme ne tient pas seulement à quelques expressions, à quelques lambeaux de phrase ou de doctrine qu'il aurait empruntés à l'Apôtre des gentils; il est dans l'intention générale, dans l'esprit, dans les idées dominantes et dans les éléments les plus caractéristiques de son livre' (i. p. 116). It was St. Paul who discovered a wide significance in the death of Jesus, as 'a ransom for many.' It was not so in His own view. 'Jésus a regardé sa mort comme possible, et, dans certain éventualité, comme la condition providentielle du royaume qui allait venir, mais non comme un élément nécessaire en soi de sa fonction messianique; il l'a envisagée comme un risque à courir, un péril à affronter, non comme l'acte salutaire par excellence auquel devait tendre son ministère, et duquel dépendait essen-

day of light' was realized (e.g. by Justin), but this could hardly have led to its choice. And to suggest that Christians fixed on Sunday as the day of the Resurrection, because for some unknown reason they were in the habit of observing it as a day of worship, may well stand as a classical example of hysteron-proteron.

tiellement tout l'avenir' (i. p. 243). Under similar influence the idea of forgiveness of sins has been introduced into a simple miracle such as the healing of the sick of the palsy, giving a new turn to the whole episode (i. p. 108, 476). It is to St. Paul that we owe the whole narrative of the institution of the Eucharist; the very words of consecration are derived from him: 'Ce doit être lui qui, le premier, a conçu et présenté la coutume chrétienne comme une institution fondée sur une [volonté que Jésus aurait exprimée et figurée dans la dernière cène' (ii. p. 541). The only basis of fact was a supper held at Bethany, in which Jesus promised His disciples a share in the Messianic feast.

Under such influences the person of Jesus assumes a new importance; He was not merely the Messiah of the future kingdom; He was Christ on earth. He becomes the incarnate Wisdom of God; He will appear again as Judge. 'Jésus apparaît comme juge et non comme témoin; il ne présente pas les hommes à son Père; il vient dans la gloire du Père, et accompagné des anges. Cette mise en scène apocalyptique est aussi dans le goût et les idées de Paul' (ii. p. 26). He must then be supposed to have known of His approaching death and to have understood its necessity. Prophecies of it are readily placed in His mouth. The predictions we find in the Gospels 'sont visiblement dominées par une double préoccupation théologique et apologétique, à savoir, montrer que le Christ avait prévu sa fin' (ii. p. 16). He must be protected against the carping of unbelievers! 'La dignité du Christ est sauvée, dans le récit de Gethsémani, par un acte formel de résignation à la volonté du Père' (i. p. 181). Generally with regard to His knowledge of the future, 'on ne se borna pas à gloser les paraboles primitives, on en créa quelques-uns' (p. 190). Why, then, were the Apostles so completely taken by surprise? Simply because they were obtuse and unworthy of their Master. This explanation has the advantage of exalting the far-seeing (or imaginative?) Apostle of the Gentiles, at the expense of his Galilean predecessors. The second Gospel is dominated by this idea; examples may be found in the refusal of the thrones to the two sons of Zebedee, in the praise of the exorcist 'who follows not us,' in the rebuke to Peter after his confession¹ (i. p. 96, 117;

¹ We note that St. Matthew is supposed to be free from this tendency (ii. p. 7); yet he narrates the rebuke.

ii. p. 20). The 'first shall be last, and the last first' is a vindication of the position of St. Paul. We seem to remember something of this sort in the criticism of fifty years ago, and had imagined it was somewhat out of date.

It remained to emphasize the sin and unbelief of the Jewish nation in rejecting its Christ. This result is attained not merely by a certain heightening of the opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees, or by an increased stress on their hypocrisy; the central facts have been manipulated in a startling way. The whole narrative of the trial before Caiaphas is due to a desire to transfer the guilt from the Roman to the Jew (i. p. 181). 'Le procès devant Caïphe est une fiction apologétique' (p. 111). The denial of Peter is the only solid fact between the arrest and a brief morning consultation of the Sanhedrin to prepare the charge which was to be presented before Pilate (ii. p. 595). St. Luke's account of the trial before Herod is a trace of another attempt to do the same thing (p. 640). The Barabbas episode is again a legend with the same tendency; possibly it has some slight historical basis.

Once more, when the Gospels took their present form an organized Church existed. In fact, Jesus had no idea of founding any society; it was unnecessary, if the Kingdom was so near. He chose the Twelve, as preachers of that Kingdom, not at all as the first of a long line of successors. This gap, again, was filled without hesitation, and we find much which contemplates a Church, with its officers, its organization, and its worship; all this is entirely unhistorical. This is particularly the case in St. Matthew, where ecclesiastical interests are strongest. We may instance the promise to St. Peter, which, we are told, represents accurately the position of the Church and of St. Peter's successors in the writer's time (ii. p. 12).² In other cases the details of the picture merely represent the later usage of the Church. In St. Luke's account of the Baptism, 'on croirait assister, et l'on assiste en effet à un baptême dans les premières communautés chrétiennes' (i. p. 411). The accounts of the feeding of the five thousand, and of the Last Supper are both largely coloured by the customs of the Agapé and the Eucharist, as actually celebrated in the Church of later days.

Generally speaking, Christian apologetic and

² The passage is one of the few which betray the Roman touch; cf. the remarks on the perpetual virginity in i. p. 290.

Christian faith have been everywhere at work, the former particularly in the first Gospel. Faith surrounded the head of its hero with a halo; He tends to become omniscient; claims are put in His mouth which express the later views of His followers. 'Dans tous ces développements, ce n'est plus seulement la foi qui domine le souci de l'exactitude historique: il en a été ainsi dès le commencement; c'est la dévotion, née de la foi, qui se satisfait dans les peintures qui lui semblent les plus dignes de son objet' (i. p. 182). The narrative of the Transfiguration, which is supposed to have been originally a legend of a post-Resurrection vision, is an example of this tendency. But fancy was particularly busy with the question of the origin of the Master. The first conception was that of a unique consecration in the Baptism. This was felt to be insufficient, and myths of the Virgin Birth arose, with which go the connected stories of the Magi, the visits to the temple, etc. It will be readily understood that the Abbé takes the most severely critical view of their origin. They are 'pieuses fictions'; 'l'ensemble des anecdotes, y compris celle de Jésus à douze ans, n'a rien qui dépasse les facultés moyennes d'invention des hagiographes populaires à toute époque et en tout pays' (i. p. 197; cf. pp. 139, 169). He differs from others of the extreme school only in the very low estimate he forms of their literary and imaginative value; of this more later. We note that he believes that their origin is to be looked for on Gentile soil, not so much in mythological ideas, as in the tendency to conceive of the Divine Sonship as something which must be materially realized (i. p. 339).

As in the Resurrection story, so here the influence of the O.T. has been strongly felt. *Is* 7¹⁴ did not, indeed, create the belief in the Virgin Birth, but it served as a valuable proof thereof. In *L'Évangile et l'Église* (p. 24), the Abbé laid down the principle with regard to the O.T. that 'il serait plus juste de dire qu'elle colore la plupart des récits, que d'affirmer qu'elle en a créé quelques-uns.' His present view seems to go beyond that. The story of the Magi is regarded as suggested by the star of Balaam's prophecy. The hymns of St. Luke are merely imitations, not very successful or appropriate, of O.T. songs. The announcement of the betrayal is probably inspired by *Ps* 41¹⁰; the flight of the young man naked, by *Am* 2¹⁶. Most startling of all, the fourth word

from the Cross ('My God, etc.') has nothing of the crucial significance usually assigned to it; it simply expresses the Christian conviction that *Ps* 22 was Messianic, and could be applied to the Crucifixion (ii. p. 684).

We pass on to consider a further factor of which Loisy makes much, the influence of symbolism. The details of the Gospel story must have a meaning, and were freely, and more or less deliberately, invented to convey that meaning. Whole incidents, narrated as fact, are really only picturesque symbols of spiritual truth. Many of the miracles are explained in this way. The draught of fishes is an allegory of the success of the Gospel among the Gentiles, just as the rejection of Nazareth had figured its failure among the Jews (i. p. 439). So in the raising of the widow's son at Nain, 'la veuve désolée représente la fille de Sion, Jérusalem menacée de perdre Israël, son fils unique, et le perdant en effet, pour le recouvrer miraculeusement par la puissance de Jésus' (i. p. 655). The feeding of the five thousand is in origin the expansion of a metaphor about spiritual food; $5 + 2 = 7$, the perfect number; the 12 loaves are the inexhaustible treasures of the Gospel. 'A lire le premier narrateur, on se douterait à peine qu'il s'agit d'un miracle, le récit flottant, pour ainsi dire, et très consciemment, entre le symbole et la réalité' (i. p. 938). It is indeed not always clear how far the symbol was realized, or how far the miracle was literally understood by the Evangelists. But to Loisy the allegory is not something added to the fact; it has produced the fact—or rather the fiction.

The principle is not only called in to explain the miraculous; it accounts for much which to the ordinary reader looks like the most innocent detail. The 'after six days' of the Transfiguration is symbolic of a mystic week (ii. p. 30). Did Christ's friends mourn His death? It is an allegory of the universal mourning of nature (p. 698). Do we read of two thieves on whom the Crucifixion made an opposite impression? It is not fact, but 'le mauvais larron représente la judaïsme incrédule, la foi du bon larron représente la conversion du monde' (p. 677). We hear of two sisters, Martha and Mary; they are an allegory of the Jewish and Gentile sections of the Church, and Loisy feels himself unable to gainsay those who see in the story nothing more (p. 105). The 'mountains' of the first Gospel are all pure symbol.

(p. 745). 'La pâque du dernier repas dans les Synoptiques, et, celle du crucifiement dans le quatrième Évangile, le sabbat de la sépulture, et le dimanche de la résurrection sont des données symboliques, dont il est maintenant difficile à l'historien de dégager le point de départ dans la réalité des faits' (p. 700). We cannot, indeed, distinguish between fancy and fact; the mysterious realm of the subconscious self come to our aid. 'Paul n'a pas pris pour traditionnel un récit où il avait mêlé sa propre doctrine; le mélange s'est fait de lui-même dans la région subconsciente de l'âme où se préparent les visions et les songes' (ii. p. 532, n. 1). We may compare an eloquent passage in i. p. 195, unfortunately too long to quote; the enthusiastic faith of the first century was not troubled to draw any distinction between vision and reality.

What are we to say of all this? Perhaps our first word would be that if the Roman Church is ever to excommunicate, it could hardly be expected to hold its hand here. But after all a man's views are not always to be received as truth, because he has been excommunicated, and sympathy with one whom we may regard as the victim of persecution must not be allowed to blind our judgment. In the first place, most Christians of every school will be with us in an amazed protest against the extraordinary lack of taste (to call it nothing worse) which marks these volumes. Sarcasm and irony are mercilessly invoked to call attention to the 'absurdities' of the Gospel narrative; phrases such as 'enfantin,' 'banal,' 'd'une invention très faible,' 'escamotage littéraire,' are continually applied to it. The raising of the widow's son is 'un récit sans originalité'; the Apostles were 'ni les êtres obtus que dit Marc, ni les personnages de vitrail que montre Luc' (i. p. 167); the details of the trial before Pilate are 'de traits qui conviennent mieux à la fiction légendaire qu'à l'histoire, et qui ressembleraient plutôt à un effet de théâtre, dans un mélodrame ou une pièce enfantine, qu'à la réalité' (ii. p. 644). A passage on the stories of the infancy has already been quoted; it by no means stands alone. 'Rien n'est plus arbitraire comme exégèse, ni plus faible comme narration fictive' than the second chapter of St. Matthew; nor is it much better to read that in St. Luke's account 'le merveilleux est moins banal et moins enfantin' (p. 169). He has, too, the lowest opinion

of the Evangelists' style—St. Mark has 'aucun goût littéraire'; St. Matthew, 'une médiocre invention'; St. Luke's style is 'inégal, maniéré, on oserait presque dire truqué.' The dedication to Theophilus is 'pompeuse et banale' (i. pp. 257 ff.). The whole passage should be read with its sarcastic phrases of half-praise to get the full effect. Loisy realizes of course that his view is, to say the least of it, unusual, and he quotes Renan's well-known eulogy on the other side (p. 260, n. 3). *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*; and one who now attacks the Gospels as literature will not injure them. Probably such language has never before been used by a professed believer; when it is, it can hardly expect the mitigation of sentence which may be granted to a Blatchford.

With regard to the Abbé's general position, it is impossible here to enter into a discussion of the details of the commentary. Any one at all familiar with modern criticism will have noticed that on many points he can be answered completely from writers of the most extreme school. But one or two general considerations may be allowed. It is usual with English critics to insist on the fact that they approach the Bible with no prejudice against the supernatural as such. It is not so with Loisy. He states his fundamental assumption quite clearly. The author of the Acts cannot be an eye-witness because he narrates miracles. 'Ne serait-il pas inouï qu'un disciple immédiat des apôtres eût présenté comme a fait Luc les témoignages concernant la résurrection?' (i. p. 172; cf. p. 179). To him the miraculous is not to be marked with a query in the margin, as Sanday has suggested; it calls for the thickest of blue pencils at once. The Gospels as a whole cannot rest on the evidence of eye-witnesses, because they contain miracles. This *a priori* assumption is at least dangerous, some would say unscientific. We remember Harnack's argument. He gives a list of the miracles in the 'We-sections' of Acts: 'mehr Wunder in wenigen Versen kann man wohl doch nicht wünschen!' The eye-witness (and Loisy himself admits that in this case he was an eye-witness) who has recorded these was quite capable of the miracles of the rest of the Acts and the third Gospel (*Lukas der Arzt*, p. 24).

Again, most readers will feel that the part assigned to symbolism is exaggerated. Few will deny that metaphor has sometimes been misinterpreted as fact, and allegory transformed into

history. With regard, *e.g.*, to such a detail as the darkness at the Crucifixion, most critics will admit that there is as much of symbol as of fact, and will approve the Abbé's delightful epigram, 'Le ciel est toujours sombre pour une âme désolée' (ii. p. 679). And his commentary on the Fourth Gospel has made us realize that the tendency may have been at work on a larger scale. But even if one admits the possibility with a mystical writing such as the Fourth Gospel, the case is very different with the first three. They read as a whole as simple, straightforward narrative, and to find subtle and hidden allegories in almost every detail, number, place, or saying, is surely a return to an exegesis long discredited. If the episode of the two thieves is merely an allegory of faith and unbelief, there are few incidents in history which cannot be explained as symbol rather than fact. We are reminded of the tyranny of the 'Solar Myth,' and of Tylor's amusing exposure of its possibilities in *Primitive Culture*.

The fact is that Loisy approaches the Gospels, as they have been interpreted by centuries of Christian teaching, and often reads into them far more than their writers, with all their Oriental mind, ever dreamt of. Naturally we believe that in many cases they selected their facts as typical and significant. But what is typical may none the less remain true as fact. We need no more regard Martha and Mary as symbolic personifications of the Jewish and the Gentile Church, than we regard the two daughters of Henry VIII. as fictitious embodiments of Romanism and Protestantism, because they happen to represent different elements in the English mind of the period.

It is curious, again, to note how with all his undeniable psychological subtlety, the Abbé again and again succeeds in missing the obvious, and discovering difficulties and contradictions, which it requires very little ingenuity to explain. He misses the exquisite appropriateness of the reproaches round the Cross, of St. Peter's remonstrance after the first announcement of the Passion and of Christ's subsequent rebuke, an incident which it is hard to believe invented. He fails to see how true to life is the same Apostle's dazed suggestion of the three tabernacles: 'il n'est pas croyable que les trois personnages célestes soient invités à rester pour le plaisir des trois disciples' (ii. p. 36). The pathetic irony of the 'Sleep on now' in Gethsemane is twisted into

a literal command, frustrated by the unexpected arrival of Judas. Mary could never have kept the events of the childhood in her heart, because she could not understand them! 'On n'a pas coutume de retenir avec soin les choses qu'on n'a pas comprises' (i. p. 382). Difficulties of the most pedantic description are made much of, *e.g.* in the angel's word to Zacharias, 'thy prayer is heard,' because we have not been specially told that he had been praying for a child; or, in the murmurings of the scribes in the healing of the sick of the palsy, because St. Mark had not previously referred to their presence. In the same incident fault is found, because the crowd is represented as paying more attention to the miracle than to the forgiveness of sins—a trait altogether true to human nature. Similarly, in the insults before Caiaphas, we read 'les "quelques-uns" qui se mettent à frapper Jésus, arrivent on ne sait d'où' (ii. p. 612), as though every incident must commence with an exhaustive list of the *dramatis personæ*. With regard to the Jewish trial we are told no one could have known the details; 'aucun fidèle de Jésus n'était en état de les prendre sur l'heure; aucun ne songea sans doute à les prendre plus tard' (ii. p. 596); the events of the crucifixion remained equally unknown; 'aucun disciple n'avait souci de recueillir pour la postérité ce qui se passait' (i. p. 179).

Frankly, this is hair-splitting unworthy of the Abbé and his subject, and such arguments are enough to make even the most careless reader realize that negative criticism is not always the most scientific. The whole treatment is, in fact, *a priori* and subjective to a degree. The true method tries without *arrière pensée* to analyze the documents, to get to their sources, to estimate their authority. It allows to the full for the influence of all the factors on which Loisy lays so much stress, symbolism, idealizing of the past, Old Testament prophecy, and ecclesiastical interests. But it can set a limit to their influence, and as we study our authorities, the historical figure of Jesus, and the fact of His work stand out all the more clearly. As Harnack has said of the two sources of the Gospels, 'where they agree their evidence is strong, and they do agree in many and important points. Destructive critical inquiries . . . break themselves in vain against the rock of their united testimony' (*Sprüche und Reden Jesu*, p. 172).

On the other hand, if we accept the drastic *a priori* treatment of Loisy, we are ultimately brought to the conclusion that we can know nothing of the historic Jesus. And if the figure and work of Jesus dissolve in mist, how can we explain the fact of Christianity or the consistent, lifelike narrative of the Gospels? The ascription to unknown men of genius will not do. If the story was in the main true, it required no very extraordinary power to tell it for us, as it has been told. The magic is in the facts, rather than in their presentation. But if the career of Jesus was only what Loisy imagines, the real founders of Christianity were those who developed the story and gave it the form in which it has appealed to the world. Where were such men to be found in the first century? As Professor Burkitt has reminded us, it is not an easy thing to write parables such as those of the Gospels, and after all, as we have seen, Loisy himself has no very high estimate of the abilities of the Evangelists.

But the last word in a discussion such as this will always be 'What of the Resurrection?' The Abbé's position is not clear. Were the visions

true, *i.e.* were they consistent, veridical, objective apparitions of a living being, proving the persistence of personality after death in the sense desired by the Society for Psychical Research? If so, they form a fact as unique in the history of the world, as is the Resurrection as more popularly conceived. And then the story of the life that led up to it must be read once more in the light of its unique sequel. We lose the right to reject all that raises that life above the common run of human experience. If, on the other hand, the visions were merely subjective, the working of the (supposed) intense enthusiasm of the mourners, we are face to face with the old difficulty of explaining the rise of the belief, its persistence and general consistency, its vitality and value for the world. An immortality, such as that ascribed to Keats in *Adonais*, fails to meet the requirements of Christian history and of individual experience. It is a small point that the Abbé's treatment leaves his own position a psychological puzzle; the crux is that it leaves the fact of Christianity an insoluble historical enigma.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF REVELATION.

REVELATION II. 10.

'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.'—R.V.

THE SITUATION.

It is the promise to the angel of the Church in Smyrna. This Church, faithful hitherto beyond all the others, was about to be sorely tried, tried with persecution even unto death. The promise is both a preparation and an encouragement. It is a preparation sent by Him who is the First and the Last (see the signature at the beginning). And it is an encouragement from Him who Himself was persecuted unto death and received the crown of life.

THE LANGUAGE.

Be thou faithful. The same Greek word means 'believing' in Jn 20²⁷. And no doubt faith is

the foundation of faithfulness. But here the meaning is 'trustworthiness,' 'loyalty,' as in Mt 25^{21, 23}, Lk 16^{10, 11}, Rev 2¹³ 3¹⁴.

'*Thou*' singles out the 'Angel.' We know that one 'Angel' of Smyrna was faithful unto death—the great Polycarp.

The crown of life. Not 'a'; there is only one. Life in its perfection cannot be separated into portions. It is His life. 'Because I live, ye shall live also.'

THE SERMON.

There are two things in the text—Faithfulness and its Reward.

I. FAITHFULNESS. 'Be thou faithful unto death.'

I. It is faithfulness, not all through life until death comes, but such as may issue in death. It is quite true that a daily martyrdom for Christ in the workshop or in the home may be more heroic than a single act of loyalty that causes death. But