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their weaknesses ; He made them pray for the forgiveness of their sins. But He Himself, the man of the most absorbing of vocations, charged with the vastest mission, called day by day to submit his lofty spirit to the duties imposed upon Him by the life of humility and of self-renunciation, of gentle sympathy and silent submissiveness, which He had voluntarily undertaken, asks for no forgiveness for Himself, not even at Gethsemane or Golgotha ; He ever walks in the bright sunshine of the fatherly love of God ; He draws others into the belief of his perfect goodness ; He forgives sinners in the name of God ; He dies for them, and prepares to take his seat on the judgment-throne of the all-holy God." ¹

F. GODET.

ST. JOHN'S VIEW OF JESUS ON THE CROSS.

ST. JOHN XIX. 28-37.

It may be taken for granted in the following pages that, in the view of St. John, Jesus on the cross is the true Paschal Lamb. To say nothing of other passages of his Gospel, the quotation by the Evangelist in Chapter xix. 36, 37 of the two Old Testament texts there given is sufficient to establish this, and further argument may be dispensed with.

The point now immediately before us is a different one, and the question which we propose to answer may be stated in the following terms. Does St. John, seeing in Jesus on the cross the Paschal Lamb, see it at the moment when it was slain for the feast of the following night, or at that when it was placed upon

¹ *Der Geschichtliche Christus*, p. 109 et seq.

the table, to supply the food of the paschal supper? The first of these views is that generally entertained. If the latter has been taken at all, it has not at least been brought distinctly before the Church. It is the view, however, which we shall endeavour to establish in the present essay; and it seems to us that, if it can be established, it will be found to be of no small importance for the light thrown by it, both upon the theology of St. John and upon the relation of his narrative of the events of the last hours of Jesus to the narratives of the same events by the earlier Evangelists.

In entering upon this inquiry there are three characteristics of the beloved disciple upon which we must proceed. It is hardly possible, indeed, to do more than mention them. To give either the proof or the illustrations that might be easily supplied, would occupy much more space than we can command.

The first is what may be called the Evangelist's love of symbolism — his tendency, a tendency in which he only followed closely in the steps of his Master, to see in everything that happened around him, down even to its minute particulars, a symbol of deeper truths. How much this tendency penetrates the structure of the Fourth Gospel has not yet been shewn with the distinctness and fulness of treatment which it deserves. But it will be admitted by many, perhaps even by most, to such an extent as will justify our here assuming that it exists. Those who do not allow its existence will find nothing satisfactory to them in what we are about to say.

The second characteristic, proof of which must

also be dispensed with, is closely connected with the first. It is the tendency of the Evangelist to *select*, from the numerous particulars making up any event that occurs, those which best adapt themselves to this symbolical treatment, while at the same time they convey with sufficient accuracy the idea of the scene. Not that the narrative is either invented for the purpose of expressing an idea, or gives an un-historical representation of the facts. That it is not the former is proved by the character of the Gospel as a whole; for, pervaded as it is by the idealism of the writer, it affords every token which can be desired that the idealism rests upon a historical foundation. That it is not the latter is proved alike by the general tone of the author and by the harmonious verisimilitude of the picture that he presents. It must be borne in mind that no historian can exhaust all the details of any important event related by him, or present it in all the points of view in which it is possible to regard it. Consciously or unconsciously, *he must select*. Frequently he does not see, not less frequently he does not care to see, all that is seen by others. And if, especially, he wishes to set forth any incident recorded by him as an illustration of some principle of the Divine government, or of some particular aspect of the actors in it, he will mainly dwell, by the very necessity of the case, upon what has the most direct connection with his aim. His narrative, as one of facts, will thus be in a certain sense imperfect. It will share the general imperfection of all narratives, in so far as it will fail to relate everything that took place. It will have an additional imperfection of its own, in so far as it may deliberately

omit what the writer regarded as of no importance to his special design. But it will not on either of these accounts be unhistorical. Nay, it may be much more truly historical than one in which details are given with greater fulness. It may have caught the spirit of the scene, and its author may enable us to penetrate more thoroughly into the heart of the history than if he had occupied himself with a multitude of details, amidst which the singleness and force of their real bearing would have been lost.

A third characteristic of St. John's tone of mind, of which we shall avail ourselves in the following discussion, is his habit of viewing things in doubles, in such a way that all good has over against it counterpart evil, evil presenting to it a mocking resemblance. It would take a whole paper to illustrate this as it deserves to be illustrated, for it is a principle not unfrequently having a very close bearing upon the interpretation of St. John's writings, both in larger paragraphs and in individual expressions. Let us only observe that it does not apply merely to such contrasts as those of light and darkness, of life and death, but also to scenes in which the enemies of God play their part, unconsciously copying for evil and for self-destruction what would have been in similar circumstances the conduct of the friends of God for good and for spiritual blessing. It may be enough to refer, in illustration of this, to the scene with Caiaphas in Chapter xi., where that crafty and hard man unconsciously plays the part of a true prophet of God in what he says alike of the death of Jesus and of his work; where also we cannot fail to mark a kind of irony of Divine providence in the

mode in which the Jewish Council expresses its fear of the consequences of "letting Jesus alone." Its words had their disastrous fulfilment through the very means which they employed to escape their fate: "If we let him alone all men will believe on him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." The facts, as they afterwards turned out before the eye of the Evangelist, were to him not merely judgment, but irony of judgment; judgment, in its form, the mocking counterpart of blessing that might have been.

Keeping these principles in view, let us proceed to the consideration of the point before us. The passage to be examined, with the omission of certain clauses not material to the argument, is John xix. 28-37; and it may be stated once for all that we accept the narrative as one of facts. Nothing in it is due to the imagination of the writer. He selects his facts, groups them after his own fashion, places them in the light that appears to him to be suitable to his purpose, but he does not create them. Is then Jesus in this passage the Paschal Lamb at the moment of its death? or is He the Lamb at a later point when, after death, it has been prepared for the paschal table, and has been placed upon it for distribution to the guests?

The answer to this question is to be found in a consideration of the details of the narrative, not merely in themselves, but in the light of the principle of symbolism already spoken of. To that principle we are entitled to appeal. That it is often made use of in the Fourth Gospel it is impossible to deny. That it is made use of here is proved by the simple

fact that Jesus is here presented to us as the Paschal Lamb. If there be symbolism in the general picture, there is at least a probability that it exists also in the details. This probability is strengthened when we observe that we are expressly taught by the Evangelist that some of his details, such as the leaving of the legs of Jesus unbroken and the piercing of his side with the soldier's spear, had their corresponding facts in the history of the paschal lamb, and so helped to fill out symbolically the ideas connected with what he saw before him. It is thus natural to think that the same feature will be found in other details, although in regard to them no similar statement is made. Still further, if there be anything in the language in which the details are mentioned of so peculiar a kind as to convey the impression that they must have been designed to bear another than their purely historical meaning, we are not only justified in trying to discover their special application and force, but we are distinctly called upon to do so. Finally, if it shall appear that, by looking at them in a symbolical light, the difficulties of the narrative are removed, and it becomes possible not only to explain each detail separately, but to group them into one harmonious whole, the principle of interpretation applied will receive all the confirmation that can be desired. What we have to do, therefore, is first to consider the details of our narrative with a view to discover whether they are introduced in such a way as to lead to the impression that they are selected and treated for the sake of a deeper than their simple historical sense. Next, we have to see whether there is anything in what was done with the paschal lamb

offering an unmistakable correspondence with them. Lastly, we have to note the particular stage in the history of the lamb which offers the correspondence. That stage will be the one in which Jesus is brought before us as the fulfilment of all that the paschal lamb of Israel typified and shadowed forth.

I.

We take, first, one or two separate details contained in *Verse* 29. That verse runs as follows: "There was set a vessel full of vinegar: they put a sponge therefore full of the vinegar upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth." Three details meet us here: the "vessel full of vinegar," the "hyssop," and the phrase "put it to his mouth."

The "vessel full of vinegar." It is of no moment to inquire whether the "vinegar" thus mentioned is to be thought of as pure or as mixed with water. Even if the latter, it is the vinegar element in the mixture that arrests the attention of the Evangelist. We pass at once to the manner in which the fact is recorded, as compared with the manner in which the same fact is described in the first two Gospels. At first sight it certainly appears as if the differences were trifling. If they stood alone there might be nothing in them to attract attention. But it may be otherwise if there are later and clearer parts of the passage from which they derive a reflected light; and we must, therefore, ask our readers not to come to too hasty a conclusion, but to suspend their judgment upon what we have to say until the whole passage has been considered. Yet, for the sake of keeping the order of the text, we note the

differences now. St. Matthew's words (Chap. xxvii. 48), with which those of St. Mark (Chap. xv. 36) closely correspond, are, "And straightway one of them ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar." It will be observed that St. Matthew and St. Mark speak only of "one" person who did this; St. John uses the plural "they." Again, the former tell us only that the sponge was filled with vinegar; the latter informs us that the vinegar was drawn from "a vessel full" of it; and, when we remember the interest attached by him to the water-pots "filled up to the brim" of Chapter ii. 7, and to the net "full of great fishes" of Chapter xxi. 11, it seems not unlikely that this *fulness* of the vinegar vessel is not to his mind without a special meaning. Again, there may be something in the use of *ἔκειτο*, "there was set," a verb which in its employment by St. John, as in Jeremiah xxiv. 1, and in the prophetic passage, Luke ii. 34, seems to indicate not merely "being set" or "standing," but having a plan or character assigned by Divine arrangement (John ii. 6; xx. 5, 6, 7; Rev. iv. 2; xxi. 16). Finally, St. John is the only Evangelist who sees in the offering of the vinegar the fulfilment of Psalm lxix. 21, a psalm in a high degree applicable to the sufferings of the Messiah. These particulars are small, but taken together they are not without weight; and when we consider, notwithstanding the opinion of some commentators to the contrary, that the incident embodied in them is described as an aggravation, not as an alleviation, of the sufferings of Jesus, and that they all tend to bring out these sufferings with a liveliness greater than that of the earlier Gospels,

we can hardly be wrong in thinking that they receive the peculiar form in which they are expressed for the very purpose of accomplishing this end.

It is not, enough, however, to say that the circumstances now mentioned constitute simply a more vivid representation of the sufferings of Jesus than is set before us in the earlier Gospels. When we examine the passage more minutely, we seem to see a distinct intimation on the part of St. John that the scene of unbelief and hatred which he describes is regarded by him as the opposite and counterpart of that true paschal feast in which faith and love would have partaken of the true Paschal Lamb. One or two preliminary considerations may help to establish this. In the first place, there can be no doubt that vinegar was used in the paschal ritual. It was an ingredient of the sauce in which the bitter herbs were dipped.¹ In the second place, the words of Psalm lxix. 21, referred to in this passage, connect vinegar, not only with the sufferings and trials of the believer's pilgrimage on earth, but directly and immediately with those of Jesus Himself, the true Paschal Lamb, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." In the third place, the "I thirst" of Jesus, spoken in *Verse* 28, cannot well be confined to mere bodily thirst. That such thirst is included, or rather that it forms the groundwork of the figure, we do not deny; and, were the present the only passage in which the thought occurs, it might be necessary to think of nothing more. But the clearly symbolical treatment of the thirst of Jesus, in his interview with the woman of Samaria in Chapter iv., leads to the conclusion that

¹ Surenhusius, Mishna, Pesachim x. 3.

his present "I thirst" proceeded from a thirst of soul as well as of body; that it was his longing cry, in the last moment of life, to behold the great harvest reaped which He had sown amidst so many tears.

Keeping these three points in view, light dawns upon the idea of the Evangelist when he marks the offering of vinegar by the guilty Jews.¹ At a true paschal supper, in which the eye of faith beheld the antitype in the type, a believing Jew, as he tasted the vinegar, would have entered into sympathy with the sufferings of Jesus, would have felt that he had a share in them, would have joyfully appropriated them as his own. He would have welcomed the bitter vinegar as that which told him of a suffering Redeemer, and of his own fellowship with his sufferings. He would have beheld the true Paschal Lamb before him, suffering for his sake, thirsting for his salvation, telling him of a greater deliverance than that of his fathers from the bondage of Egypt. That is what

¹ It seems to be generally taken for granted that the fluid here spoken of as "vinegar" was the sour wine used by the Roman soldiers, an impression probably the more readily rested in because Roman soldiers are thought to be the persons who presented it to the lips of Jesus. But the parallel passages in the other Gospels, particularly Matthew xxvii. 47, make it clear that it is the Jews who do so, and John xix. 32, introducing the soldiers *afresh* upon the scene, confirms this conclusion. It is thus improbable that, in a purely Jewish scene, with only Jewish actors in it, we should meet with the drink of the Roman soldiery. It is much more probable that, at this paschal season, when vinegar was so much used by the Jews, they should have had some of it beside them. Godet, though we do not fully understand his words, may be quoted as decisively of opinion that the *ὄξος* spoken of was not the soldiers' wine. "The drink now offered Jesus," he says, "is simply one of vinegar prepared for the condemned criminals, as is proved by the sponge and the rod of hyssop. This last circumstance overthrows the opinion of those who think that it was wine intended for the soldiers" (*in loc.*). The symbolism, indeed, is not necessarily destroyed by the supposition that the vinegar was this wine, but it certainly receives force from the, in itself, much more probable supposition adopted in the text, that the vinegar was simply vinegar, and that the requirements of the paschal season explain its being at hand.

faith would have done. What do these Jews do? Exactly the opposite. Instead of glorying in the sufferings of Jesus, they take offence at them. Instead of seeing in Jesus a true Paschal Lamb, the vinegar of whose sufferings is to be made their own, they use the vinegar of that "vessel full" of it to increase his sorrow. Instead of partaking of the vinegar themselves, they cruelly thrust it to the lips of Jesus, as if it could quench the longings of his soul. In short, as they have steeled their hearts against Him, and are determined, to the utmost of their power, to aggravate his woe, an overruling providence leads them to do this in a way which makes their mockery a kind of *inverted and contorted passover*. They will have a feast, they will "rejoice and make merry" over Jesus on the cross (comp. Rev. xi. 7-10); and, in the bitter but deserved irony of God, a feast that would have been rich in blessing to the spirit of faith, becomes, to their spirit of unbelief, the instrument of deepening their sin, their degradation, and their shame.

(2) The second detail requiring examination is the "hyssop." In the earlier Evangelists we are informed that the sponge filled with vinegar was put upon "a reed;" and we are met by the well-known difficulty of reconciling that statement with the statement of St. John. That the account of the latter is not given without a purpose, will be acknowledged by every student of his writings. But what is the purpose? With the object that we have in view, we may spare our readers any laborious investigation into the nature of the plant called hyssop, although the result of such investigation would be that the "hyssop" of Scrip-

ture is of small and low growth, affording no branch that can be described as "a reed." ¹ Whether, how-

¹ Few questions with regard to the plants of the Bible have perplexed inquirers more than that relating to the identification of "hyssop." The learned Celsius, whose essay regarding it, in his *Hierobotanicon*, is distinguished by even a greater than ordinary degree of his elaborateness and care, says that to give a correct opinion regarding it *res est longe difficillima*, while he examines no fewer than eighteen plants in order to determine whether their characteristics correspond to those ascribed to hyssop in Scripture. The difficulties of the question, too, are strikingly illustrated by the efforts of several distinguished scholars to amend the reading as the only satisfactory means of escaping them. Thus, Camerarius thought that for ὑσσώπῳ should be read ὑσσῶ, a kind of spear, for which Heinsius would substitute ὑσαννον, unwashed and greasy wool. Even Bochart, whose investigation is hardly less painstaking than that of Celsius, can only suggest that ὑσσώπων should be read (*Hierozoicon*, lib. ii. c. 50). These solutions must of course be dismissed, and the well-established reading of the text retained.

Without endeavouring to determine exactly what plant now known is that referred to by the Evangelist, it will be observed that the main point of interest in the inquiry is, whether it was one capable of yielding a cane or strong stem of at least a foot and a half long, or whether it was a small, low-growing plant, from which only a bunch of tiny twigs and leaves could be obtained. This point ought not to be so difficult of determination as the exact *genus* and *species* of the plant.

1. There can be no reasonable doubt that the ὑσσώπος of the New Testament is the זֹרֶא of the Old. Apart from all other considerations, the similarity of the names may be accepted as conclusive upon this point.

2. The hyssop of the Old Testament was mainly used for sprinkling, and, although detergent and bitter qualities of the plant may have led in part to its employment for this purpose, there can be no doubt that its selection must also have been determined by its mode of growth, by its possession of a bushy habit, which would fit it for being gathered together in a bunch, and so for retaining a sufficient amount of the fluid to be sprinkled. This consideration leads to the thought of a thick and low plant rather than to that of one with strong stems of considerable length.

3. The passage in 1 Kings iv. 33 is of considerable bearing on the subject. We are there told of Solomon that "he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall;" and the conclusion has been drawn that hyssop must have had the form and habit of a "tree." Even granting the conclusion, no plant yet suggested for the hyssop possesses such a character. A plant only able to yield stems a foot and a half long is no more a "tree" than one of much humbler growth. Besides this, the true inference from the words quoted lies all the other way. To the Jew, the cedar in Lebanon was the noblest tree of the forest. When desirous to convey a graphic idea of the extent of the knowledge of his great king, he would naturally pass from it to the other extremity of the vegetable world, and the smallness of a plant would form a main ground of its being selected to express this. It appears, too, from Joshua ii. 6, that the Hebrew term,

ever, it can afford such a branch or not, will not help us much. It may have been capable of yielding a reed at once firm and long enough to enable the holder to reach with it the mouth of Jesus on the cross. Yet, even then, we should have to ask, Why is it not called, as by the other Evangelists, "a reed"? It may have been incapable of yielding a strong reed. The question remains, Why is it mentioned at all? attended by the additional difficulty of explaining how, by means of it, the sponge was lifted to the necessary

like the Greek one in Matthew xiii. 31, was of much wider signification than our word "tree."

4. It is particularly to be noticed, that if not such a plant as we suppose, the only other tenable supposition is that it is one of the Caper family, most probably the *Capparis Spinosa*. This is the opinion of Dr. Forbes Royle, in a paper, which we have not seen, in the "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society," viii. pp. 193-212; and it has been adopted by Stanley ("Sinai and Pal." p. 22), apparently Thomson ("Land and Book," p. 112), and the most recent travellers. Yet the description given of the *Capparis*, both by these writers and by botanists, is fatal to this idea. The branches may be long enough, but they are too weak to suit the necessities of our text. There is no evidence that they can supply what may be called a "reed;" and, unless they can do so, the whole purpose of the supposition, that of reconciling St. John's ὑσσώπῳ with the καλάμῳ of the first two Evangelists, is defeated. The plant is "a trailing shrub with numerous slender stems" (Carruthers, in "Bible Educator," i. 225); it has "a sprawling creeping habit" (Hamilton, in "Imp. Dict. of the Bible," i. 771); it has "long slender stems" (Thomson). Such descriptions are inconsistent with the nature of the stem that St. John must have had in his eye. No such stem could have supported the weight of the sponge filled with vinegar.

In addition to all this it may be remarked, that if the "hyssop" be the trailing plant supposed, there is something extremely strange in the fact that the Evangelist should use only the word ὑσσώπῳ. We might certainly have expected that he would insert some word that might express a *cane*, a *stem*, or *reed*, of hyssop; while, on the other hand, if the plant be so low and bushy as we imagine, the word used by him is in its natural place and is used in its proper sense. Any other supposition, too, makes it necessary to think that the cross was lower than it is at least generally imagined to have been.

Upon the whole, it seems to us impossible to identify the "hyssop" of Scripture with any species of the *Capparis*; and that it was rather the *Origanum*, the traditional hyssop of the Jews (comp. the excellent article by Mr. Carruthers in "Bible Educator," i. 225, and that under "Hyssop" in "Imp. Dict. of the Bible").

height. A probable explanation of this latter point appears to be that the instrument employed consisted of two parts. The stem was the "reed," a bushy plant fixed on the end of it was the "hyssop;" and we have before us the very simple phenomenon, that different writers, describing the use made of an instrument of two parts, mention, the one the one, the other the other part. St. Matthew and St. Mark fix upon the stem as if it were the whole, and say that the sponge was wrapped about the "reed." St. John fixes upon the extremity, consisting of a bunch of hyssop, and tells us that the sponge with its vinegar was wrapped about the "hyssop." This explanation, if adopted, will afford an interesting illustration of the manner in which the Fourth Evangelist *selects* from a combination of particulars that which is in correspondence with his aim.¹

What is this aim and what is the meaning of the incident? One or two different considerations will supply the answer. In the first place, hyssop, like vinegar, was used in the paschal ritual. It had been originally employed by the express command of the Almighty for sprinkling the blood of the paschal lamb upon the lintels and side posts of the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, that, thus separated from those of the Egyptians, the destroying angel might pass them by (Exod. xii. 22). It may have been

¹ Celsius (*Hierob.* p. 434) says, speaking of Leviticus xiv. 4, and Numbers xix. 18, that the sprinkler referred to was composed of a bunch of hyssop tied to a rod or cane of cedar wood, by means of a scarlet thread. Buxtorf (*Lexion* Ch. p. 50) also says, *Præceptum hyssopi erat (id est, fasciculi hyssopi), ut constaret tribus caulibus, in quibus essent tres culmi sive ramusculi.* Para, ch. ii. *Hyssopus brevior ligabatur filo ad bacillum.* Para, ch. ii. Celsius (p. 446) also quotes the Aethiopic version as reading, *Et erat ibi vas aceto plenum, et impleverunt spongiam aceto ac foliis hyssopi, et ligarunt super arundinem.*

selected for this purpose, partly owing to the bushy character which fitted it for sprinkling, partly owing to the bitter and detergent qualities which made it an appropriate symbol of cleansing. Such a use of it indeed belonged only to the passover of Egypt, and had been discontinued long before the days of Christ. But hyssop had still a place in the ritual, and Maimonides speaks of it as one of those things which entered into the composition of the sauce placed upon the table along with the roasted body of the paschal lamb.¹ At all events, there can be no doubt that with the thought of the Jewish Passover the thought of hyssop was most intimately associated. In the second place, in the ritual of the law as a whole, hyssop was the symbol of cleansing. It was employed in the cleansing of the leper (Lev. xiv. 4); in the sprinkling of the water of purification containing the ashes of the red heifer (Numb. xix. 18); and, according to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Chap. ix. 19), it had been used by Moses when, at the solemn institution of the covenant in Exodus xxiv., he "sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God hath enjoined unto you." Hence also the language of David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean" (Psa. li. 7). In the third place, to be made clean is in the Gospel of St. John, according to the view at least of its writer, the central idea of the work effected by the Redeemer for men. We see this in the account of the miracle at Cana of Galilee, when, beholding in that miracle the glory of the New

¹ M. Surenhusius, *Pesachim* x. 3.

Testament Dispensation, he brings the wine of the Gospel into such pointed contrast with the "water pots set there after the manner of *the purifying of the Jews*" (Chap. ii. 6). We see it in the record of that contest between the disciples of the Baptist and the Jew which leads to the last triumphant expression of the Baptist's faith (Chap. iii. 27, &c.), for that contest, he is careful to tell us, had arisen "about purifying" (Chap. iii. 25); we see it when he quotes Jesus as saying to the disciples, that He might describe their perfect standing in Him, "Ye are clean" (Chap. xiii. 10); we seem to see it also in one of the parts of his description of the New Jerusalem, when he tells us that "the city was pure (clean) gold, like unto clear (clean) glass" (Rev. xxi. 18). These passages are sufficient to shew how close was the connection in the mind of St. John between cleansing and the highest blessings of the Gospel.

Now, therefore, as before, with these points in mind, we can understand why our Evangelist attaches such special importance to the "hyssop." Again he sees in the wrapping around it of the sponge filled with vinegar the mocking counterpart of what the pious Israelite would have done with hyssop at a true paschal feast. Beholding in it the emblem of a precious though a bitter cleansing, such an Israelite would have eaten it with devout thankfulness and joy.¹ More especially, lifting his heart to Jesus as the true Paschal Lamb, he would have

¹ Bähr tells us that hyssop was regarded throughout the whole ancient world as the means of purification; that with this view it was mixed with food and used by physicians as a medicine; that in Egypt it was eaten by the priests with bread, and that this use of it passed over to the Therapeutæ (Symbolik, ii. 503).

been made partaker of a sprinkling of his blood, of a separation from a sinful world, by which he would have been assured of an eternal deliverance from all his spiritual enemies. But it was not so with the guilty Jews around the cross. Instead of this, they used the hyssop to increase the sufferings of Jesus, and the better to express their mockery. What a *travesty* of a believing Passover! The very plant which, partaken of in faith, would have been to them the symbol of their interest in the redeeming work of Jesus, becomes, again in the bitter irony of God, yet they know it not, the means of illustrating that abyss of hardened unbelief into which they have deliberately plunged themselves.

(3) A third detail in the verse we are now examining remains. It is the expression, "Put it to his mouth." The expression, remarkable enough in itself, would appear still more so, if we might translate not "put" but "offered it to his mouth." It is the same verb used in Chapter xvi. 2, where the rendering of the Authorized Version completely misses the point of the original. Not "doeth God service" is the meaning there, but "offereth service," that is, religious service, "to God." So great, would Jesus say, will be the fanaticism of your enemies that they will kill you in the belief that they are thereby rendering acceptable sacrifice to the Almighty. In like manner here, the true translation of the word, which is a sacrificial one, is not "put" but "offered," and the whole principle of our present exposition gains fresh confirmation from the fact. We shall not, however, urge this. We call attention rather to what will hardly be denied, that St. John, in departing

from the simple and natural language, "gave him to drink," must have had a reason for doing so. What is that reason? In the first place, it is almost unnecessary to say that the paschal ritual was one in which the mouth was chiefly used. The lamb was to be eaten, and so also were the vinegar and the hyssop. In the second place, just as the vinegar and the hyssop expressed something common to both the believer and his Lord, so also there is that connected with the mouth which does the same. Let us look at the words of Jesus Himself in Chapter xv. 3, "Now ye are clean on account of (not 'through,' as in the Authorized Version) the word that I have spoken unto you;" that is, He was the Word of life Himself, He was about to commit his word to the disciples, to "give them" the word which the Father had given Him (comp. Chap. xvii. 14); and, that they might rightly use that word, and be to the world in a certain sense a Word as He had been, He had cleansed them as He had done. (Comp. Isa. vi. 7.)

Once more, then, we can understand why our Evangelist employs so remarkable an expression as that before us. In the conduct of the Jews he sees the mocking counterpart of what a genuine Israelite would have done at a true paschal feast. Such an Israelite would have devoutly partaken of the Lamb of God, together with the other accompaniments of the supper. In doing so he would have "tasted of the Word of Life;" and that life would have become a life in him which would have impelled him to declare it to others (1 John i. 3). Not so with those who had been the chief instruments in nailing Jesus

to the cross. Instead of this, they impiously thrust the elements of their meal into his mouth—into that mouth out of which had come those words that ought to have been life to them, and that were life to faith. Do we not see, once more, the *inverted and contorted passover*? And, once more, can we fail to mark the keen but deserved irony of God which leads Jewish guilt and folly to express itself as it does? The Jews seize the first and readiest way of mocking the Redeemer; and, all unconsciously, they do it by means of an action, the counterpart of that which, gone about in a spirit of faith, would have exhibited their noblest privilege, and enriched them with the choicest blessings.¹

Such are the three points of detail in *Verse 29*. Their bearing upon the question in which we are immediately interested is so obvious, that little need be said to bring it out. All three take us to a moment in the history of the paschal lamb *later* than that of its death. They are connected with the eating rather than the killing of the lamb, with the celebration of the paschal feast rather than with preparation for it. Even should the particular light in which we have endeavoured to shew that St. John looks at the incidents described by him be thought to be insufficiently established, this conclusion ought not

¹ It seemed to the writer for a time that this singular expression might perhaps be traceable to some custom of putting leaves of the hyssop-plant *into the mouth of the lamb when it was placed on the table*. Such a practice might easily be supposed to have existed as a substitute for, and a memorial of, the first use of hyssop in connection with the passover of Egypt. And, if it did exist, it might explain the custom, still invariably followed, that when a young animal, such as a pig, is roasted whole, it is brought to the table with fruit or vegetables *in its mouth*. He has, however, been unable to discover any traces of such a custom in the case of the paschal lamb, and he mentions the conjecture now simply with the view of directing the attention of others to the point.

to be affected. The mouth is certainly connected with eating. Vinegar and hyssop, in the time of Christ, had no place in the ritual with the lamb at the time of death, and, as eaten, could have relation only to the paschal supper. When, therefore, we remember that we have the Paschal Lamb before us in Jesus as He hangs upon the cross, it seems impossible to doubt that we are invited to behold Him as that lamb, not in the instant of its death, but as placed upon the table for the paschal meal.

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III.

THE REIGN OF LAW AN INCENTIVE TO PRAYER.

WE have seen that "the reign of law" by no means renders prayer unreasonable; that, in many ways, and without any violation of law, God may answer our petitions. We must now attempt a bolder flight, and try to shew that this very reign of law, so far from being, as we are told, a conclusive reason *against* prayer, is, in fact, a sufficient reason *for* it, a common and keen incentive to the habit of hopeful supplication.

No man who is at once thoughtful and devout can regret to see religious questions even of the gravest kind discussed by public men, in our public prints, provided always that the discussion is marked by sincerity and reverence, however much he may differ from the conclusions at which they arrive. Such discussions breed doubts, indeed; but these very doubts both deepen and confirm our faith in the end,