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*THE AUTONOMY OF JESUS: A STUDY IN THE  
FOURTH GOSPEL.*

As the trait of autonomy has been developed by this method, and as there is little or nothing in Philonic speculation to account for the unwonted prominence assigned it in this Christian writing, it is natural to look for the sources in those materials which lay to hand in earlier Christian literature. The general Christology<sup>1</sup> of the Fourth gospel rests upon a semi-Pauline basis which supports a superstructure of distinctive ideas due partly to Alexandrian speculation, partly also to the previous development in the synoptic gospels. As the latter lie nearest to the Fourth gospel in time and spirit, it might be supposed that they would throw some light upon the early presuppositions of this autonomy idea. But as a matter of fact this is not the case. In the primitive synoptic tradition the self-determining power of Jesus is carefully subordinated to his mission. His deeds of healing and wonderful acts are done by him as the agent or delegate of God (Mark vii. 34, Matt. xiv. 19). His power is from God; he is subject generally to the common duties and obligations of human existence (Matt. iii. 15); and as his actions are dependent upon natural motives, his knowledge is, like that of his

<sup>1</sup> Composed in all likelihood at Ephesus, primarily for the local churches, the Fourth gospel betrays the existence of a threefold situation. In addition to the "Alexandrian" Semi-Gnostic element, which requires no comment (Acts xviii. 24 f.), there is evidence that a strong Jewish school existed, whose influence (1 Tim. i. 7) and antagonism had to be met by dialectic; chapters v.-ix. especially reflect the contemporary polemic of Christians and Jews upon the burning questions of the day. Upon the other hand there are traces, as in Apocalypse (ii.-iii.), of the religion cultivated by the mysteries (e.g. iii. 3 = renatus in eternum, a technical phrase; xii. 24, corresponding to the Demeter mysteries; i. 18, *ἐξηγηταί*, Christ being the Divine mystagogue; xiv. 8 and xvii. 19), the language being carefully chosen and employed to represent Christianity as the final solution of such aspirations and problems. Evidence for both of these features in Ionian religious life is fairly familiar.

followers, beset by natural limitations (Mark xiii. 32, xiv. 35, 36, etc.). Liable to surprise and disappointment, dependent for information now and then upon the course of events or the reports of his neighbours, the Jesus of this tradition determines his conduct as a rule by ordinary methods of reflection and observation, in regard either to the progress of outward affairs or to the inner movements of the human consciousness. The amount of self-possession and spontaneous vigour predicated of him is not more than might be reasonably expected from a personality so commanding and unique, nor is there any obvious interest in heightening this side of his career. With the increase of reflection and reverence in the church, fresh problems rose. The more emphasis fell upon the person of Jesus in early Christian faith, the more richly was his inner consciousness and authority portrayed; the colours were intensified, the features more clearly cut—a development whose traces can still be made out not merely in the epistles and Apocalypse, but in the later portions of Matthew and Luke, where interpretation and reflection predominate, though as yet upon fairly historical lines. No longer is the unique independence of Christ chiefly a matter of shrewdness or rare intuition, due to the working of a rapid, energetic genius who possesses the gift of seizing the moment, forecasting the future, and with the abandonment of entire devotion throwing himself upon his particular age and opportunity. Something higher is in the writers' mind. They see in it the Godhead breaking through. Yet, for all this, it is not the autonomy but the necessity of Christ's life that mainly fascinates their devout imagination. Their leading concern is to show how that life conformed to the prophetic standards or the Divine decrees already promulgated in the Old Testament; consequently the stress falls upon the necessity of his sufferings, of his death, of his resurrection on the third day (Matt. xvi. 21; Mark viii. 31; Luke ix. 22, xvii. 25,

xxiv. 7, 26 = Acts xvii. 3),<sup>1</sup> as the fulfilment of Scripture (Matt. xxvi. 54). This comes to a head in Luke, where divine necessity is a leading characteristic of Jesus and his career: from first to last (ii. 49, iv. 43, xiii. 33, xix. 5, xxii. 37, xxiv. 26, 44) he is devoted to the higher will of God in his activity and suffering alike. His life is represented as the supreme form of constraint—a splendid obedience to God's behest, and that (it must be admitted) in a less artificial and more impressive manner than the method which, as in Matthew, had paralleled it with naïve literalness to the ancient prophecies. "This rigorism," as Keim finely puts it (*Jesus of Nazara*, E. Tr., ii. 328 f.), "which brooks no bending and no twisting, which presses straight forward, knows but one thing and rejects all else . . . lies like a godlike glory on the whole life of Jesus." But while the synoptic gospels thus correctly depict Christ's undeviating adherence to his line of mission, the union in him of inclination and destiny, and his refusal to adopt compromise or to abandon his principles for an instant under any lower suasion, the autonomy of his life in the Fourth gospel is rather different; the trend is to raise him not merely above the possibility of wavering and seduction, but even above that level where goodness is subject to appeals and impressions, as a growing and human product. Influence is quite out of keeping with the Johannine<sup>2</sup> Christ. There is a tendency to view humanity and its needs as in some degree a hindrance upon the whole to

<sup>1</sup> In view of passages like Luke ii. 49, iv. 43, xi. 42, xii. 12 (besides many others), it seems impossible for us to confine *δεῖ* in Luke ix. 22 to logical necessity rather than to moral obligation (*ῥημελεν*, Heb. ii. 17) or natural fitness (*ἐπρεπεν*, Heb. ii. 10). Luke xvii. 25 is a characteristic addition of the author to the source at his command.

<sup>2</sup> I use this term merely as a convenient adjective. At the most it implies that whatever historical elements or personal reminiscences underlie the narratives and speeches of the Fourth gospel, the ultimate source of that substratum is the development of early Christianity which sub-apostolic tradition has vaguely but persistently connected with the residence of the apostle John in Asia Minor.

Jesus,<sup>1</sup> and to represent the career of this Being in such a way that he would be distracted or degraded by the impact of a human touch. In this respect the atmosphere of the Fourth gospel is theologically superior, as it is ethically inferior, to that of the synoptists.

In the earlier theology of Paul the subordinate place assigned to Christ's human life naturally precluded any widespread reference to either autonomy or necessity in his career.<sup>2</sup> But in one famous passage (Rom. v. 19: "through the obedience of the One"), corroborated by others (especially Phil. ii. 1-11), the apostle happens to find occasion for emphasizing the latter as a dominant feature in Jesus. His career, as Paul viewed it, was one great obedience, conscious and free, yet due to the Divine behest and rewarded by the Divine favour; submission to God was its

<sup>1</sup> Thus "grace" is conspicuously absent from the Fourth gospel, and indeed from the whole group of the so-called "Johannine" books; it merely occurs as a term in the colloquial and stereotyped form of salutation (2 Ep. 3, Apoc. i. 4, 5, xxii. 21). The only exception to this statement is found in John i. 14-17, where however *χάρις* is evidently introduced, in Pauline fashion, to contrast Christianity with the Mosaic economy. In the subsequent chapters this distinctive feature of Christ's character is entirely dropped; he is not presented as an embodiment of *χάρις*, and it cannot be said that the burden of the story is in any real sense his gracious love. The conception of *ἀλήθεια*, upon the other hand, is more congenial to the author. His Christ utters the claim, "I am ἡ ἀλήθεια," but never "I am ἡ χάρις," and it simply illustrates the limitations of this gospel to say, with Hort (*Hulsean Lectures*, p. 44), that "as the power in him was the grace, so the revelation in him was the truth." Words like *ἐλεέω*, *οἰκτιρῶ*, *σπλαγχνίζομαι*, and *ἔλεος* are unknown to the vocabulary of the Fourth gospel, and their absence is highly significant.

<sup>2</sup> In an Old Testament passage, part of which is incidentally quoted by Paul (1 Cor. ii. 16), any joint action of God and other powers is carefully repudiated (Isa. xl. 13, 14: "Who hath regulated the Spirit of Jehovah, and being his counsellor informed him? With whom hath he taken counsel, that he might instruct him and teach him as to the path of right, and teach him knowledge, and inform him of the way of perfect discretion?" Cheyne). The point of the passage is to sarcastically prove the absolute freedom of the Lord from all conditions that might trammel his activity. He defers to no one, and in this autonomy lies the effectiveness of his providence. In one aspect the Fourth gospel affords a series of variations upon this theme (cp. *Wisd. Sol. ix. 13*), as applied by the Christian consciousness to some concrete details of Christ's career on earth. His *ἀντρονῶμα* is just the privilege *suis legibus uti*.

principle, self-sacrifice its end (2 Cor. viii. 9). However, as Paul never had any occasion to bring Christ into relation with any of his human contemporaries—disciples or opponents—his writings throw little or no light<sup>1</sup> upon this question of autonomy. Not much more help is to be got from a study of Hebrews, which lies midway between Paulinism and the Fourth gospel, in the development of early Christian thought, though distinctive and apart from both. There also, as in Luke, the element of necessary obedience (v. 8-9) is prominent, with reference to the sufferings and death of Christ. To the question, “Why was Christ’s death necessary?” an answer was sought mainly along sacrificial lines; his death, as this writer understood it, was a vital element in the new relation (*διαθήκη*) instituted between God and man, which indeed could not have come into existence otherwise. Similarly, he had to suffer, because without pain his sympathy and intelligence would have remained incomplete. Such experience was needful to equip him for the rôle of high priest; and that office again is a gift (chap. v.), it is not chosen by the occupant but conferred upon him. One passage (v. 7-9), indeed, on the passivity and human weakness of Jesus lies curiously nearer to the synoptic tradition than to the Fourth gospel, which tends to omit all traces of such infirmity as derogatory to the superhuman majesty and power of the divine Logos. It could not be inferred from the Fourth gospel that Jesus had thus to win his knowledge of God painfully, and to fortify his faith gradually and constantly; the true

<sup>1</sup> Besides, the Christology of the Fourth gospel and that of Paul viewed the person of Jesus from very different sides. As a passage like John iii. 24, 25 is sufficient to show, an idea such as that of Christ’s humiliation (Phil. ii. 1-11) was foreign to the circle of ideas and emotions in which the later writer moved. It may be also noted that in the Fourth gospel, for example, there is no place, as in Paul (Rom. i. 4, etc.), for the Spirit as a factor in the high and glorified existence of Christ; here the Spirit is conceived mainly in its relations to man; it operates among disciples and believers rather than upon the person of Christ himself, nor is this contradicted by passages like John i. 33, xvi. 14.

and helpful idea that even he required to make his way humbly into the higher reaches of thought and feeling is vividly present to the mind of the Alexandrian genius who wrote Hebrews, but it is uncongenial (if not entirely foreign) to the temperament of the Fourth evangelist.

It is clear, therefore, that in previous appreciations of Jesus, even along semi-Alexandrian lines, there had been little or nothing to suggest so remarkable a prominence as that assigned in the Fourth gospel to his spontaneous and independent freedom. Whether his person had been studied from the prophetic, the sacrificial, or the ethical standpoint, the conditions under which it was construed did not necessitate any peculiar emphasis upon his self-determination. So far as any feature was regarded as characteristic, it was his submissiveness (due largely to the popular use of a passage like Isaiah liii., with its impressive ideal of the Servant's obedience and humility), which was only thrown into more brilliant relief by his undoubted majesty and authority. The wonder and glory of his life was that, being what he was, he stooped to obey. His self-suppression, his restraint, his humiliation—these, not unnaturally, fascinated the imagination and the mind of early Christianity. But while it is undeniable that these qualities are recognized also in the Fourth gospel, their proportion is changed. In the balance of elements which compose the character of Jesus here, a new quality assumes an unwonted predominance, and it is this element of the Christology which demands attention. Why was it introduced? Whence did it come? As the latter question helps to elucidate the former it has been taken first. But since the result of our inquiries hitherto is to leave its origin obscure, it remains for us to look outside the records of primitive Christianity and pass beyond the limits of early Christian thought.

Kindred ideas immediately present themselves in the

allied conception of wisdom found in the Alexandrian *Wisdom of Solomon*, a book whose influence<sup>1</sup> upon Paul (especially in Romans), the gospels, Hebrews, and James, is widely recognized at the present day. In its philosophical rhetoric, autonomy of a sort is amply predicated of the divine Reason as she labours among men. Wisdom also, somewhat in the manner of John i. 43 f, 47 f, forestalls her votaries; "she is beforehand with those who desire her, making herself first known. He who rises early to seek her shall have no toil, for he shall find her already seated at his gates" (vi. 13-14). "She goes about herself, seeking those who are worthy of her" (vi. 17). Freedom of motion and penetrating power are hers: "there is in her a spirit that is intellectual, holy, only-begotten (*μονογενής*), manifold, subtle, penetrating (or freely moving), keen (*ὄξύ*, cf. Heb. iv. 12), unhindered, free from care (*ἀμέριμνον*), all-powerful, all-surveying, and passing through all spirits that are intellectual (*νοερόν*, a Stoic term), pure, most subtle: for wisdom is more mobile than any motion, she pervades and passes through all things by reason of her purity" (vii. 22-24). "Being a unity, she can do all things, and remaining in herself she renews all things" (vii. 27). "She stretches from one end of the world to the other with unabated strength, and orders all things well" (viii. 1). "She knows how to divine things old and things to come; she understands subtleties of speech and interpretations of enigmas, she foresees signs and wonders

<sup>1</sup> For Paul, see especially Grafe's discussion and proof in *Theologische Abhandlungen* (1892), pp. 250 f; for Hebrews, von Soden in *Hand-Commentar zum N. T.*, iii. 2 (3rd edition, 1899), pp. 5, 6; for James, Spitta's edition in *Zur Gesch. u. Litteratur des Urchristentums*, ii. (1896), p. 14 f. There is a possibility that it was also used by the author of 1 Peter (von Soden, *ibid.* p. 118), as well as by the composers of Matthew and Luke; it was certainly familiar to the author of the Slavonic Enoch, a century later to Clemens Romanus, and later still to Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria (Eusebius, *HE.* vi. 13). Its wide circulation and its attraction for the primitive church can be further inferred from the fact of its inclusion in the Muratorian canon (see also Epiph. *Haer.* 76).



and the issues of seasons and times" (viii. 8). Such qualities of self-possession and spontaneous energy, which are plainly cognate to some of the attributes of Jesus in the Fourth gospel, must in all likelihood be referred in part to the Stoical tendencies with which the wisdom of Solomon is tinged. In Stoicism independent volition or autonomy was frankly recognized as an excellence of the ideal life; and as the ethics of that school dominated to a large extent the Roman Empire and (if we are to credit Josephus) Judaism itself towards the opening of the second century after Christ,<sup>1</sup> it is not improbable that they permeated the mental atmosphere in which the Fourth gospel was composed, although that gospel is hopelessly at variance with the major part of the Stoic theology. Indirectly, I believe, the Johannine emphasis upon Christ's self-possession takes a form which is more or less due to the contemporary and popular ideas of Stoicism upon the ideal life. Throughout that philosophic school, and even in the minds of many who did not share its distinctive tenets, from Musonius Rufus, or even from Posidonius, Cicero, and Seneca, down to Epiktetus and Aurelius, self-sufficiency is advocated as a supreme quality of character. The divine

<sup>1</sup> Vestiges and echoes of Stoicism are to be noted possibly even in Ecclesiastes, but certainly in Philo (Zeller, *die Philosophie d. Griechen*, iii. p. 271 f.), 3rd Maccabees, and 4th Maccabees (before 70 A.D.); the last named ("worin mosaische Legalität u. stoische Moral sich zu einem idealisirten Judenthum verbinden," Holtzmann) is a semi-philosophical tractate, written by a Jewish contemporary of Paul, in order to prove that the pious reason (ὁ εὐσεβῆς λογισμὸς) is supreme in human life (*αὐτοδέσποτος, αὐτοκράτωρ, τῶν παθῶν*), the historical narrative being written in order to exemplify the principles laid down in a speculative preface. To say nothing of the Stoic λόγος, the Stoic conception of the world-soul had certain affinities with some elements in the providential function of the Philonic Logos. In arguing from the use of Stoic terms to familiarity with Stoic principles it must be remembered, however, that the moral terminology of this school was widely diffused throughout the civilized world, especially in the first century A.D., and that the presence of Stoic diction is far from implying necessarily a sympathy with Stoic theories. On the relation of Stoicism and early Christianity, see W. W. Capes (*Stoicism*, 1880; chaps. xi. and xiv.).

reason (*διάνοια*) in man, we read, is exempt from all necessity. While a person is bound to take part in the relationships and responsibilities of life, he is inwardly *αὐτεξούσιος*, in so far as his intelligence is concerned. The distinctive excellence of human nature is, in fact, its possession of this ruling faculty (*τὸ ἴδιον ἡγεμονικόν*, Cicero's *principatus*), which tests, rejects, selects (*ἐκλεγόμενον, ἀπεκλεγόμενον*). Amid the swarm of exterior necessities, this governing faculty subsists, and subsists—if one chooses to have it so — not merely unimpaired but steadily developing; the result being that the soul ceases to be moved or turned by outward things, which have no right of admission into its life. On this view man has the power of maintaining himself in tranquillity by refusing to yield to external impressions or be unduly affected by ordinary appearances, so that the outside events of life merely come to furnish him with matter and opportunities for the soul's victorious and equable progress through this world. "Whatever this life of mine is," Aurelius reflects, "it is a little flesh, a little breath, and the ruling faculty." The function of the last named (which forms the characteristic side of man in Stoicism) is to avoid being circumscribed or limited by anything exterior to itself, or—in the favourite metaphor of Aurelius—to prevent life being pulled like a puppet by the strings of desire and fear; just as on the positive side it aims at asserting itself, converting apparent obstacles into a real furtherance of its true interests, co-operating with others and labouring for them, but never suffering itself to be subject to wants of any kind, or to be depressed and distracted. "The leading principle has no wants." It must not stand utterly apart from human life, but it must not on the other hand be melted into the flesh or overpowered by what is gross and common. To be anti-social and to be materialized are two of its great dangers—especially the latter. The *ἡγεμονικόν* must be preserved pure

and free, as well as allowed to freely devote itself to practical and moral ends; for the inner being of the sage, as Stoicism conceived him, self-conservation was an absolute duty. Hence "intelligence and reason," ideally conceived, "have the power of passing through all that opposes them," inevitably as a stone falls or as a flame rises. "What pulls the strings is that which is hidden within a man; this is the power of persuasion, this is life, this (if one may say so) is man" (Aurelius). Possessed of this a man is independent of external impulse, able to stand erect and to avoid being diverted by blame or praise, advice or warning; like gold or emerald or purple (to use the Stoic simile), whatever happens, he must keep his colour. The average Stoic, especially during the Roman period 60 B.C.—200 A.D., would have readily joined Sir Henry Wotton in praising the capacities and qualities<sup>1</sup> of the independent life—

How happy is he born and taught  
That serveth not another's will . . .  
Whose passions not his masters are,  
Whose soul is still prepared for death,  
Untied unto the world by care  
Of public fame, or private breath . . .  
Who hath his life from rumours freed,  
Whose conscience is his strong retreat—  
This man is freed from servile bands  
Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;  
Lord of himself, though not of lands;  
And having nothing, yet hath all.

This is merely an ennobled description of the *αὐτάρκης*, the man who is free to live his own life, or (to put it in a less selfish form) who is free to do his task and execute his mission without hindrance from other people, and to adhere steadfastly to his chosen line of action. That a conception like this has coloured the representation of Jesus in the

<sup>1</sup> A similar emphasis is laid in Eccclus. xxxii. 23, xxxvii. 13-14 upon self-reliance, when safe-guarded by friendship and by prayer.

Fourth gospel is, I think, more than likely. Autonomy was identified in the purest ethics of the age with the crowning excellence of human life, and it is highly probable that this element went unconsciously to tinge a portrait of Jesus in which the author aimed at bringing out his absolute, unchecked authority in action, especially for an audience which could not but be familiar and sympathetic with Greek thought and feeling. Certainly the employment of the Logos category in itself involved a somewhat free handling of the synoptic tradition, and at the same time encouraged any tendency to heighten the self-possession and the majesty of Jesus in the interests of faith. But that would not of itself suffice to explain the distinctive phenomena of the Fourth gospel; it is this contemporary feature of Stoical ethics, mediated possibly by the Wisdom of Solomon and allied writings, and rendered feasible by the author's speculative bent, which throws the clearest and most satisfactory light upon his sources and method in expounding Christ's divine autonomy.

The dangers and difficulties of such a method, as I have already hinted, are not obscure. When narratives like these are taken in our dry Western literalness, as if they were intended to be nothing but coherent and circumstantial statements of fact, the reader is plunged into moral problems of considerable magnitude; upon that line of interpretation the conduct of Jesus has given occasion (from the days of Porphyry downwards) to charges of fickleness, deception, vacillation, exclusiveness, harshness, and inconsistency; he is accused of a certain lack of sympathy, and of aloofness from human need; men have complained that they missed in him the charm, the humane feeling, the simple accessibility of the synoptic Jesus, and they have blamed the narrative of the Fourth gospel (not altogether without reason?) for introducing a Christ who stands almost outside the laws of moral

influence and impression, and is apparently tinged with a certain artificiality and restraint in his relations with his family and friends. Most of these difficulties, however, are imaginary. They melt whenever some or all of the narratives in question are regarded, as they were probably meant to be regarded, not as detailed historical accounts, but as, in their present form at least, the semi-allegorical<sup>1</sup> expression of great principles, set with all an Oriental's love of *minutiæ* and incident in the picturesque form of a story, and yet intended primarily to convey and point a moral. Like any true artist, the author of the Fourth gospel has his individual vision or conception of the subject in hand; this idea he develops with occasional representations of actual facts and incidents, fully alive to the place of anecdote and the value of detail as a method of literary proof; but while far from indifferent to the letter, he is true to his dominant idea, and to it he subordinates as much as is needful. It is in this respect that the Fourth gospel marks an advance upon the synoptists, especially Matthew and Luke. They also betray the introduction of an imaginative and interpretative element into the primitive memories of Jesus, and exercise to some degree what has been called "a creative pressure upon incidents." But in the Fourth gospel a distinctive and particular method of vision first obtains its due in the historic representation of Jesus; never before had the analytic details and circumstances of his career been so completely subordinated, in the interests of faith and reverence, to a speculative idea of his person: never before had so intel-

<sup>1</sup> The Alexandrian taste for allegory, with its tendency to depreciate history as such, was quite in keeping with the independent and allied disposition which (as Zeller has shown) led the Stoics to employ allegorical methods for propagating their own ideas of the world and God. Upon the relations of the philosophic Diatribè, as employed in the Stoic propaganda and the early Christian literature, there is an interesting statement in Wendland's *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Griechischen Philosophie u. Religion* (1895): "Philo und die kynische-Stoische Diatribe," pp. 2-6.

lectual an interpretation of his personality found expression in terms of the synoptic tradition. It represents probably the maximum of divinity and the minimum of humanity compatible within the limits of a biography of Christ which adhered substantially to that primitive tradition. The result is that one or two traits, such as this of autonomy, are sometimes elaborated so decisively that the accompanying features of ignorance, surprise, mistake, and disappointment, are almost wholly obliterated. Hence the loss of vividness and actuality which is occasionally felt in the Johannine sketch of Jesus as an individual. He is hardly ever persuaded, seldom needs to be informed,<sup>1</sup> is never disappointed in men or things, never taken aback, never mistaken in his hopes or calculations, not apt to be moved to any natural outburst of love or fear.<sup>2</sup> Whenever character is thus represented as insulated and apart, isolated in the main from the formative environment of circumstance, it tends to produce an impression of unreality and even insipidity;<sup>3</sup> and although, for several reasons, this danger is happily avoided by the author of the Fourth gospel in his delineation of Christ, yet we can easily realize how, with a less devout and skilful writer, or with a subject

<sup>1</sup> vi. 6 is plainly intended to correct the idea which might be gathered from the synoptic account (Mark vi. 38), that Jesus ever needed to ask information or help from any source. The slight and infrequent references to such a practice in the Fourth gospel (iv. 1; xi. 3-6) show how far this trait lies from the author's conception of Jesus among men. The normal attitude of the incarnate Logos was a complete and certain perception of the details in any case which came before him (v. 6, 42).

<sup>2</sup> Except e.g. in chaps. xi. 35 and xii. 27, 44—exceptions which serve to prove the rule (Oscar Holtzmann: *das Johannes-Evglm.*, 1887, p. 133). After making all necessary deductions, the above statement is amply borne out by the general drift of the gospel, so far as Christ's life among men (i.-xii.) is concerned.

<sup>3</sup> "The only moral excellence of which we have any experience or can form a distinct idea, is that produced by moral effort. If we try to form an idea of moral excellence unproduced by effort, the only result is seraphic insipidity. Character is formed by action on a basis of natural tendency, under the moulding environment of circumstance": Goldwin Smith, *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, pp. 21, 129.

of less moral and religious grandeur, the gain in theological importance would have been accompanied by a corresponding and heavier loss in human reality.

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;  
 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
 So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
 In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
 The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

That represents not unfairly the attitude of the synoptic editors to Jesus. To them he was sublime yet human, lofty yet accessible; there was evidently little or no sense of hopeless incongruity between his common lot and the mysterious dignity of his inner, secret self. It would be unjust, in face of incidents and sayings, such as those preserved e.g. in chaps. xiii. f., to assert that the Fourth gospel is exclusively wrapped up in adoration of the lonely Star; but certainly the lowly duties of a human life seem to find little or no place in the picture which this author gives of Christ's average outward existence. It is as though he shrank from urging that the inner calm of Jesus could be rippled by keen sensibility to human woe or weal. Consequently in passing from the synoptic gospels to the Fourth, while we are sensible of an unspeakable gain in our conception of Christ as an eternal and mystic being, a possession of the devout soul, a final revelation for the church and world, it is impossible to deny that we do miss<sup>1</sup> something as we proceed; the high and semi-abstract conceptions of his majesty do not interfere with his tender personal relationship to his disciples, as that is conveyed in his divine and penetrating words (chaps. xiii.-xvii.), but they do serve to diminish those simple and natural ties of intercourse which in the earlier gospels knit him to

<sup>1</sup> No man, says Aristotle significantly in the *Ethics* (*Nik. Eth.* viii. 7, 6)—no man desires that any friend of his should become divine—for then he would lose his friend.

the common business and anxieties of men, and showed him as the friend and lover of his kind, moving unaffectedly amid the exercise of charities that soothe and heal and bless.

It is hardly necessary to add that this predominance of unfettered freedom, as the outcome of autonomy, is not allowed to infringe upon the human side of Christ, as the author conceived him. He is too excellent a writer to have committed such a breach of historical decorum or to have perpetrated the error of painting an entirely abstract and superhuman Christ, even had the synoptic tradition in the churches formed a less solid barrier against such incipient docetism. He is thrilled by the impression of Jesus. "The Logos became flesh, and dwelt among us." That forms the keynote of his treatise, and it recurs throughout. Even Jesus, the incarnate Logos, must needs be subject to the natural laws of the world (xi. 15), to space and time (iv. 1-4),<sup>1</sup> to weariness and thirst; he is accessible to occasional impulses and influences of fear and prudence (vii. 1, viii. 59, x. 40, xi. 54), he is swayed here and there by motives (iv. 40) such as those of grief (xi. 36), strong feeling (xi. 38), joy and indignation (xviii. 20), and he has some limitations of knowledge (xi. 34). Such touches indicate that the author did not conceive Jesus as absolutely out of range of human impulses and needs, or out of contact with the world of men and things, although he strove none the less to show that his autonomy remained intact. Further, in chapters xiii.-xvii. a true humanity appears; the words addressed to his inner circle of adherents are suffused with love and joy that hasten to communicate themselves and still respond to our deepest human needs. Yet the weakness of the book

<sup>1</sup> As Zahn admits (*Einleitung*, ii. p. 549), the *ἐθε* must not be pressed; it is simply a colloquial and ordinary phrase, employed without any deeper mystic import. Parallels in Josephus (*Antiq.* xx. 6. 1 etc.) and Bereschith Rabba, 32, 81.



lies in this, that the author's esoteric aims and presuppositions led him to confine this side of Christ's person mostly to a revelation in words, and in words addressed to this inner group instead of to mankind as it lived around him. Hence the Fourth gospel lacks much of that broad and deep humanity which streams from Jesus as he moves in the synoptic gospels. To this author, writing for a circle of Christian believers, Jesus is the head of the church, the founder of a community which stands over against Judaism, the representative and fountain of light amid darkness, of truth against error. The evangelist's esoteric tendency and speculative dualism thus combine to prevent him from quite doing justice to the synoptic conception of the Son of Man, or even to the conception found in Hebrews. To the Johanneine Christ ordinary life is not irrelevant, but it seldom exercises much direct influence upon him or carries home to him the same urgent appeals as in the earlier tradition. We miss in this gospel, in fact, that sense of human lives attracted to Jesus and vibrating at his touch, which lends so much charm and persuasiveness to a sketch like that of Mark. In the idealized picture of the Fourth gospel Jesus seldom moves men, and less seldom is moved by them. He seems hardly at home with his age. He is shown to us in a sketch in which high abstraction is not suffered to sink into anything like a cool, nonchalant indifference,<sup>1</sup> as of a hermit spirit, but in which at least it is not the author's aim to do justice to the warmth and graciousness with which the Son of Man treated children and women, the disappointing and the disappointed, the aspirants who sought his

<sup>1</sup> "The abstract terms, Work, Light, Life, Spirit are not abstract" to this writer; "they have all a mystic, personal quality; out of them looks the face of Jesus, and His look is love" (Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 346). On the other hand it is to be observed that the men who approach Christ in the Fourth gospel are, as a rule, individuals of excellent moral character. He is thrown into contact with selected specimens of human nature (Nathanael, Nikodemus, etc.), not with the poor, the sinful, the sick, and the despised.

help, the friends who gathered round him with counsel and support. The range of his motives lies somewhat apart from that work-a-day world; he appears in it and withdraws from it abruptly; he speaks, questions and answers, seldom if ever out of a natural connexion with the immediate situation; and if he occasionally responds in debate or moves in action under outward pressure, it remains none the less true that the general result of the narrative is to obscure the moral communications between Jesus and his contemporaries. Traits and incidents to the contrary exist, as we have already noted; but they do not really form a characteristic feature of this gospel. They are not of its essence. The slightest comparison of the synoptic gospels shows at once how meagre is their sum, and at the same time throws into relief the fact that this author's main interest lay rather in the transcendental quality of the Life in question. The surprising thing is that writing under so dominant and conscious a tendency he managed to combine the real and the ideal with such success, to delineate a character, and also, in doing so, to develop antitheses and ideas of a particularly abstract nature.<sup>1</sup> Indeed it must be reckoned one proof of his literary skill and religious insight that this dualism seldom obtrudes itself upon the whole, when we consider the enormous obstacles met by any one who would essay to carry out a conception such as that laid down in the Johannine prologue. Any lesser man would have allowed the idea to overwhelm the historic circumstantiality, or would have fallen into repeated contradictions as he endeavoured to depict human features and a human situation for

<sup>1</sup> We may put it in this way. The historical descriptions in the synoptic gospels rarely suggest upon the whole that there could be anything incongruous in conceiving Jesus under such concrete and local categories. In the Fourth gospel, however, we are made sensible that there was something to reconcile when the ideal and the real were thrown into close juxtaposition, and that the writer was conscious of this. Fortunately he had before him an authoritative tradition of Jesus, possibly in writing, which was derived from the reminiscences of John the apostle.

so divine a Spirit. For wherever self-sufficiency is delineated upon a large scale, it verges upon an unnatural and arid isolation from the passions that sway human life; with the result that the subject appears to be, like one of Leibnitz's monads, "windowless."

JAMES MOFFATT.

(*To be continued.*)

## RECENT NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

### III.

#### SECOND CENTURY RIVALS OF THE EVANGELIC JESUS.

WHEN it is alleged that the Jesus of the evangelic narratives is not the Jesus of history, but an ideal figure created partly by the Church's faith which all unconsciously surrounded the Lord with an halo of glory, and partly by the theological processes of a later generation, the question arises: *Is it credible that that age should have imagined such a character as is depicted by the evangelic narratives? Was it capable of conceiving so transcendent an ideal?* This is the inquiry to which we shall now address ourselves, and it so happens there is material at hand for a singularly satisfactory and instructive solution.

By the middle of the second century the Faith had won its way to recognition, and had proved to the intellectual world that it was not a folly to be laughed at, but a force to be reckoned with. Once it engaged the attention of lettered men, they dealt with it after two methods. One was argument, and the principal disputant was the philosopher Celsus, whose clever attack in the *True Word* evoked Origen's masterly reply. The other method was more subtle and elusive. Christianity was not directly assailed, but an attempt was made to undermine it by proving that it was not so wondrous or unique a thing as it professed to