

ARTICLE V.

RULING IDEAS OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

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WHAT was the aim which guided the author in selecting what he did from the "many things that might be written"? He himself tells us. These things "are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name." The book is characterized by the use of certain words, as light, truth, way; and chief among these is the word Life. The guiding principle is Eternal Life, the never-ending possession of fellowship with God and all that makes this fellowship harmonious and blissful. It is what Paul calls the life "hid with Christ in God," which Peter describes as being made partakers of a divine nature through acceptance of the precious and greatest promises. It is the perfect attainment in character and condition of all that Christ set forth in the Beatitudes.

The climax of the *introduction* to the Fourth Gospel is reached in the fourth verse, "In him was life"; and those who receive Him become children of God, being born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The first miracle is wrought in honor of marriage, that rite which in every land and age safeguards the beginning of human life. Food and drink are the support of life. In the first miracle Christ supplies drink, the fruit of the vine. In the miracle of the Five Loaves he supplies

bread; and these are the two articles which he chose as the symbols of his body and his blood. In the last event which John records, Christ provides a breakfast, and then lays a triple injunction on Peter to feed his flock. Is there not a guiding principle in all this?

Again, the conversations, discussions, and discourses in this Gospel almost always come round to the topic of Eternal Life. Conversing with Nicodemus, Christ at once tells him, Ye must be born again; and soon follow the statements, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." The chapter ends with these words, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life." When Christ converses with the Woman of Samaria, who in every circumstance of life is the opposite of the Teacher in Israel, Christ promptly brings in the same thought, "The waters that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

Quite unlike either Nicodemus or the Woman of Samaria were the angry Jews who disputed with Christ after he had saved an impotent man from a living death; but still it is the same message. He asserts and reasserts his power to give life. He says, "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life." On the morrow, after feeding the five thousand, Christ bases on this miracle the presentation of spiritual life, and himself as the True Bread from heaven. His flesh is food indeed, and his blood is drink indeed; and when most of his followers forsake him,

and he asks the Twelve, "Would ye also go away," Peter replies, "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

The seventh and eighth chapters do not directly speak of eternal life; but the wish of the Jews to take his life, and his condemnation of their murderous attitude, form a very important part. He tells them that he is the light of life, that they shall die in their sins, and that where he goes they cannot come. In the ninth chapter, after the healing of the blind man, Christ presents himself as the light of the world. Light is essential to life. But in chapter x., which grows out of the ninth, Christ proclaims himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep; and he says, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." Again, at the Feast of Dedication he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life."

When Christ came to raise Lazarus from the dead, he said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die." He here repeats what he had said more fully and forcibly to the Jews after the healing of the impotent man. In the close and tender converse at the Last Supper, the leading thought seems to be that of intimate fellowship, interrupted for a while, and then renewed never again to be broken. To the questioning Thomas he replies, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." In the prayer to the Father he says, "Glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee; even as thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that whatsoever thou hast given him, to them he should give eternal life."

Mark, Matthew, and Luke all speak of eternal life; but

with them it is not the ever-recurring topic. Each man's bent of mind led him to be impressed by and to record certain things. Mark, the business man, deals mainly with the works of Christ. Matthew had been a publican, and hence not a Jew of blameless life; and the keynote of his Gospel seems to be, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." To Matthew Christ is the Promised One who should turn the people to righteousness; save them not only from the guilt of sin, but from the turpitude which entails that guilt. Matthew records more fully the Sermon on the Mount which sets forth the righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Parables with their graphic portrayal of the difference in character and destiny between the righteous and the wicked are most fully recorded by Matthew. All that he has preserved to us of the sayings of Christ are mainly of this kind. He is brief as to what transpired after the Resurrection; and he says nothing about the Ascension. Instead he closes with the Great Promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." He leaves with us an ever-present Saviour from sin. Among his readers would be many crude learners who would need special instruction ere they could reconcile the two thoughts of ascension and continued presence. Luke's aim is broader, more general, than the others; and he takes in both the birth and the Ascension, and gives a fuller account both of the words and the deeds of the Master. He also classifies with John in two important features: (*a*) the number of personal incidents and remarks recorded; (*b*) the larger place accorded to women.

Let us examine these two features as they appear in John's Gospel. His narrative begins with a dialogue between John the Baptist and a deputation of Jews from Jerusalem, about

John's ministry. Then follow conversations between John and two disciples, between these two and Christ, between Andrew and Simon, Christ and Simon, Christ and Philip, Philip and Nathaniel, Christ and Nathaniel. Conversations, dialogues, discussions, with individuals or with special groups, pervade the whole book. From this feature may we not safely infer that (1) Its author had a tenacious verbal memory. (2) He wrote at a time of life when memory begins to recall the scenes of youth and early manhood. (3) He had a deeper appreciation and fuller memory of those more spiritual teachings of the Master which would be reserved for individuals or special groups. (4) This would especially endear him to Christ. (5) John would be just the one to treasure up the discourse found in chapters xiii.-xvi., and the prayer which follows in chapter xvii. It requires great credulity to suppose that John or any other man of that age could have invented that prayer.

The Gospels of Luke and John, as compared with those of Mark and Matthew, illustrate the influence of Christianity in liberating and elevating woman; and this is most marked in John's Gospel. The seclusion to which women are subject in all non-Christian lands, not only precludes their appearance in public, but also the mention of their names. Pericles, in his eulogy of the patriotic dead of Athens, calls to mind also the sacrifices of the women, "whose names are not spoken in the assemblies of men." In China we often see an arch erected in honor of some woman who, having lost her husband in youth, would maintain lifelong widowhood. On this arch is recorded the name of her father and of her husband, *but not her own name*. It states that the daughter of so and so and youth-wife of so and so was chaste and filial. A boy has his baby name, his clan name, his school name; but often a

girl does not get beyond her baby name. Mark says nothing about the birth of Christ. He refers once briefly to his mother, but only to exalt spiritual affinity with Christ above natural relationship. He does not once give her name. Matthew relates the Virgin Birth; but Mary is kept decorously in the background.

But in Luke what a change! He had been much associated with the chivalrous Paul; and he was writing to a Christian gentleman. He makes Elisabeth just as prominent as Zacharias; and Mary is the central figure, while Joseph is quite in the background. He gives us a glimpse of Christ in the home of Mary and Martha; and he tells how Christ was followed by certain noble women who ministered to him. Luke was a Roman; and compare with this the number of women to whom Paul sends greetings in his Epistle to the Romans. Had Mark recorded what Luke did, it might have rendered his Gospel less available for circulation among raw converts from the debased idolatries of his day.

But why did not Luke include in his book the resurrection of Lazarus? If it did not circulate in Judea, how could it endanger the life of Lazarus? But it might soon have brought upon Mary and Martha an undesirable notoriety. Observe now the prominent part the two sisters had in the event as it is related in John, and also what an important factor was their intimacy with Christ. Of all that the Bible records there is nothing else quite equal to this as a display of intimate friendship of a good man for good women; though the meeting between Christ and Mary Magdalene falls behind only through its brevity. Yet the Old Testament records several cases in which some woman is the prominent character, as Jochebed, Ruth, Hannah, and others. Because of the two sisters of Lazarus many prominent residents of

Jerusalem were present at the sepulcher, and beheld the friend whom they had seen entombed four days before, come forth alive and well. Many of these condoling friends must have been women; and this would throw light on what Luke records of how the women of Jerusalem followed Christ on his way to be crucified.

We learn from Paul that in various places noble Christian women were highly valued fellow laborers; and by the time that John wrote, such women as these had won a new respect for woman, while under the firm and faithful discipline of the Apostles the churches had attained a high standard and reputation for social purity; and then John, writing for the second and third generations of Christians, could tell of the interview with the woman of Samaria; Christ going at the risk of life to raise from the tomb the brother of Mary and Martha; the tender love of Mary Magdalene and his meeting her alone just after the resurrection. Yet it is well that John records the words, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father." Even to this day in non-Christian lands, such passages have to be handled with care. But rightly handled they are of great value. But in countries where all women must marry, the question arises, Why were Lazarus and his sisters all living together? Why were the sisters not married off and living with their husbands? But if the Lazarus of John is the same person as Simon the Leper of Luke, leprosy in the family would afford an explanation. The devotion of the sisters to their brother would win the sympathy and esteem of Christ, while his healing of the leprosy would explain their love for him.

John, like Matthew, closes his narrative with Christ in converse with his disciples. Yet John also records sayings of Christ which point to an anticipated departure, an ascen-

sion to the Father. But he sought to make all believers share in the fellowship which he had enjoyed with Christ, even as he says in his First Epistle "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." The bodily ascension of Christ introduces us to one of the deepest mysteries of our faith; and it has to do with a form of existence of which we have had no experience. In regard to it we can now know only what is revealed to us; and only so much as we need to know is revealed to us. The rest remains a delightful anticipation, a glorious hope of things not seen. Among all the deep questions that beckon on the man of science to years of patient research, there are none so wonderful as this. Those for whom John wrote did not need to be told about the Ascension.

The Old Testament treats of reward and punishment in this life; the New Testament dwells on the effects of this life on the life to come; and Christ and his apostles present the reward and punishment of the future life for the sake of the effect on behavior of men in this life. Christ tells us to be joyful in suffering for righteousness. Yet he is very sympathetic toward all forms of human suffering; and he sternly warns us against heartlessness toward a fellow man. In John's Gospel he is the same tenderly compassionate friend of humanity as in the rest of the New Testament. Eternal life is never so presented as to belittle this life; yea, rather, it exalts this life as the portal to the life to come.

In the Fourth Gospel Christ has much to say about the truth. Thus: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"; and again: "To this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." Science teaches us many things as to the deadly dangers that lurk in

ignorance and error. Knowledge of the truth about things is essential to sentient well-being; and the higher we go in the scale of life, the more important and necessary does this knowledge become. The Old Testament prophets taught the people the truth about God's love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity as they are made manifest in this life, taught them faithfully what are the essential conditions of well-being on earth; and their appeal for proof was always to the seen and the tangible. Christ and his apostles taught the truth as related to the life to come.

It is interesting to note how John links the two, the visible and the invisible, the temporal and the eternal. The Word was God; "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father)." "This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory." "If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee." Note also that three of the miracles recorded — the healing of the impotent man, the healing of the man born blind, the feeding of the multitude — are unsolicited, spontaneous acts of mercy; and thus the eternal life which was with the Father was manifested. Manifest is one of the prominent words in this Epistle. The invisible and immortal descends to earth in visible and mortal form that he may take us with him back to the invisible and immortal.

There are seeming though not real discrepancies between John and the other evangelists, due (*a*) to his being more specific, or (*b*) to his aim in writing. Thus (*a*) he brings Mary Magdalene to the tomb before the other women, whence

she hastens away, and, returning again, meets Christ alone. But the Synoptists do not say that the women went together; and they may not even have lodged together; and it is quite likely that Mary would be more eager, and go earlier than the others. Again (*b*) John records a cleansing of the temple near the beginning of Christ's ministry, while the others record one near the end. But experience the world over proves that a forced cleansing of any kind, hygienic, political, or moral, never lasts long. There would soon be call for a second cleansing. It was fitting that Christ should thus begin and thus close his work. The Synoptists record the second because of its connection with his arrest and crucifixion, while John records the first because it drew from Christ a veiled prediction of his crucifixion and resurrection.

It is interesting to note that John never speaks of saving the soul. But this is in a measure true of the Synoptists also. Neither does Paul ever speak of salvation as the saving of the soul. With both John and Paul eternal life, eternal fellowship with Christ, is the absorbing thought. Yet John was familiar with the use of soul (*ψυχή*) as a synonym for spirit. He records how Christ said, "Now is my *soul* troubled"; and how he said to the disciples, "Let not your *heart* be troubled," and how Jesus himself was troubled in *spirit*. There may be three shades of meaning here. Perhaps Christ was troubled in soul through his relations with the world, but troubled in spirit through his deep and tender sympathy with the sisters, while the disciples were exhorted not to let their faith and love, their trust in God, be disturbed.

The First Epistle of John resembles the Fourth Gospel both in style and terminology. We also have a touch of the same thing in Matt. xi. 27 and in Luke xix. 22. With such a teacher as Christ and such a pupil as John, well might a

lasting impress have been left on the thought and style of the pupil. Matchless is the manner in which John clothes profoundest thought in simplest language. It requires a mastery, a bird's-eye view, of the subject. Was John more divine than Jesus? Or did he simply record the actual words of his great teacher? He who brought life and immortality to light had many things which he could not then say to his disciples; and many things which he did tell them, they could not then appropriate. But he made them a promise, saying, "The Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you." All that John records harmonizes with this promise, and also with what he states in his First Epistle that he is a witness of what he had seen, and handled, and heard of the Word of Life.

The Old Testament has only one Moses, one Elijah; and the New Testament only one John, one Paul. Yet diverse as these two men were there is deep harmony in their teachings. The divine preëxistence of Jesus, his very human and humane life on earth, the world-wide scope of his mission, are presented by both, each in his own way. In John we read, "God so loved the world"; and in Paul, "made of one blood," and "who would have all men to be saved." Each in his own way had wonderful visions and revelations, was deeply spiritual; yet both were thoroughly practical. Both make love the supreme rule in every relation of life. They dwell upon this and reiterate it. A munificent benefactor of Oberlin College at the Jubilee anniversary of his class spoke of this love as "that which was first taught by Christ and enforced by Paul and by John." Both loved to dwell on the great theme of Life and Love, here and here-

after, now and forever ; a life, a love, that faces trouble, toil, and danger ; defies death and the grave ; suffers with Christ for men ; and reigns with Christ eternally. Their words are immortal, never to be outgrown. Take that one sentence, " God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Had God's people taken this one sentence at its full value, the terrible war in Europe would never have been ; but, on the other hand, the hope of Eternal Life would be preached in every home on the face of the earth ; and along with it would go the teaching and the practice of all that science knows of the prevention and healing of disease. War, pestilence, and famine would be banished from the earth.