

ART. IV.—THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN.

PART II.

“As an eagle stirreth up his nest.”

THE Jewish conception of the Messiah among the ruling classes of the nation was political rather than spiritual, and directed towards one who should “rise to reign over the Gentiles” in Jerusalem, but without the inspired addition, that “in Him shall the Gentiles trust” (Rom. xv. 12).

From this earthly and sensual view of the kingdom of God it was absolutely necessary to rouse the nation, if the Saviour was not to be rejected when He came. How was this to be done?

St. John’s Gospel presents us with the working of the problem; and shows that the whole question was before the mind of our Saviour from the very first, and the result of His appeal to His own people foreseen. The Jewish nation would refuse Him; and only a remnant would be saved. Such a view of His life and work must perforce have been concealed from the eyes of men, even from His most intimate followers,¹ until His death was an accomplished fact. Where results are certain, an experiment is no trial. Just as ministers of the gospel, if they hold strong predestinarian doctrine on the negative side, generally make very inefficient evangelists; so we may say with all reverence, that if the results of our Saviour’s earthly ministry had been seen by those who followed Him as clearly as He foresaw them Himself, their work would have been paralyzed, and their efforts would have lost all meaning and all force. The probationary side of His ministry necessitated a certain ignorance whither it was tending, on the part of His disciples and the world. But the veil that blinded the eyes of His disciples was no hindrance to His eagle-sight. “The eyes that behold afar off” never failed to discern the end from the beginning. He knew the lowest step of His humiliation before He stooped.

Now this aspect of our Lord’s earthly life is laid open before us in the Gospel of St. John. We see Him setting Himself deliberately to the task of awakening the nation from the delusions in which the rulers had settled themselves to rest. From the very beginning, He took the course which was best calculated to disenchant them and disappoint their hopes. He never compromised Himself, or veiled His opposition to their theories for an hour. And when they were convinced that His methods, if persisted in, would destroy the Jewish “nest,”

¹ Note that the intimations of His sufferings given to the disciples were, even to the last, a mere perplexity to them. See Luke xviii. 34.

they took their resolution at once. "If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him. And the Romans shall come and *take away both our place and nation.*" (John xi. 48.)

They had made their nest at Jerusalem on earth; in the shelter of the courts and altars of the temple of the Lord. They felt instinctively that our Saviour's teaching had created a fresh centre of religious life. Where He was, there was the new Jerusalem; and the necessity for their temple, the reason for its protection, was all but gone. The ground was slipping away from beneath their feet. No sooner had they admitted this fact in council, than the high priest of the year spoke out plainly. The "one man" must die, that "the whole nation perish not." The Eagle of Israel bade them choose between Himself and the nest; and they chose that He should die.

Let us briefly review the steps by which the Jewish rulers were brought to this conclusion, as detailed in the Gospel according to St. John.

In the opening sentences the Evangelist indicates, not obscurely, that men's reception of the Messiah is in no way dependent upon their earthly relation to Him. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, *not of blood*" (John i. 12).

The manner of His introduction to the Jewish people is next indicated. A prophet was sent as His forerunner, to bear witness of His coming; to be what Aaron had been to Moses, or Samuel to David in times past. But the prophet came not to Jerusalem. He abode in the desert, and preached there. The deputation of Pharisees, sent by the Supreme Council of the nation to report upon his message and his claims, were compelled to cross the Jordan before they could receive a reply (John i. 28). And when given, it was so ambiguous that it did not even enable the ruling powers to determine whether John's baptism was "from heaven or of men." He spoke obscurely of "One standing among them, Whom they knew not"—Who had come up behind him, but must take His place in front, and Who would baptize, not with water, but with fire and with the Holy Ghost. Yet this mysterious personage was not indicated to the council, or introduced to the messengers whom they sent. He was pointed out casually to two of John's disciples as "the Lamb of God." They followed Him, and, with a few others who joined them, to the number of half a dozen or thereabouts, had the privilege of witnessing the "manifestation of His glory" at a humble marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, where poverty was so conspicuous that the wine ran short before the feast was done. Our Lord then came to Jerusalem, to the Passover, and

through His miracles made many believers. Yet His public acts were calculated to perplex and prejudice, rather than attract any possible political adherents to His cause. The forcible expulsion of licensed traders from the Court of the Gentiles without authority or apology, except that enigmatical saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," was not a conciliatory act. That it made a deep impression is clear from the account already given by the other Evangelists of our Lord's trial. From first to last, our Lord vouchsafed no explanation of the saying. Yet what was it but an intimation that henceforward they must accept *the Person of the Eagle instead of the Place of His nest?* "He spake of the Temple of His Body."

In close connection with this incident we have the story of Nicodemus and his stolen interview with Jesus. Familiar as the story is, it is so utterly divorced from its context by editorial and incidental mishaps, that I almost despair of persuading any one to read it as I feel compelled to do. However, the attempt must be made :

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, many believed on His name, seeing the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. BUT there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him.—John ii. 23—iii. 2.

We are so used to end the chapter before Nicodemus is introduced, and omit the conjunction which I have emphasized in iii. 1, that the connection never strikes us. And so Nicodemus gets the disgrace of coming by night for fear of a persecution which *had no existence as yet*, while our Lord's plans were still wrapped in obscurity; and curiosity, rather than opposition, was the feeling of the time. But why did Nicodemus come by night, unless he was afraid? A fair question, but very easily answered. Nicodemus wished to induce our Lord to "commit Himself to him." He came imbued with the prevalent expectation concerning the Messiah, that at the very least He must restore the national independence and break the foreign yoke. But Pontius Pilate was governor in Judæa; and Pontius Pilate was not a governor to be ignored, nor was the power behind him likely to tolerate treason. How could Nicodemus expect the Messiah to discuss the overthrow of the Roman government in public and in the face of day? The obvious flattery of his opening words—the title of "Rabbi," given by a ruler to the poor Man from Nazareth; the readiness to meet Him half-way if He could

but disclose the secrets of His kingdom—show at once what Nicodemus had in mind. And now mark the consummate wisdom of our Lord's reply. Before a word of treason can be uttered He stops the mouth of Nicodemus by lifting the whole question into a higher region, and baffles the "Master of Israel" with "the wisdom that cometh from above." "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD."

Nicodemus had not mentioned "the kingdom of God." No; but He Who "knew what was in man," saw what Nicodemus had in view. He had come there to play the part of Abner at Hebron, with David: "Make a league with me, and behold my hand (the hand of the teacher of Israel) shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee" (2 Sam. iii. 12, 21). But this was not what our Lord required. Or, if it was, He must first make sure that this "teacher of Israel" understood his work. What was behind this visit of Nicodemus remains hidden until the secrets of all hearts shall be made known. Whether the rulers had put him forward as a feeler, or whether any tacit understanding left him free to act independently, and them free to use his information if it should prove to have any value in their eyes; or whether he simply came to forestall others, and was fighting for his own hand, it is not likely that we shall ever know in this world. But there are few things that indicate more clearly than this incident of Nicodemus how entirely at cross-purposes the "Eagle" of the fourth Gospel and his nestlings then were. A sentence in the discourse which follows brings this out in its full force. I take leave to render one word as it is usually rendered by the synoptists, to bring out the point before us, and call attention to the striking turn given to the word ($\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{o}\omega$) in the Gospel of St. John. "As Moses EXALTED the serpent in the wilderness, even so" (and so only) "must the Son of Man be EXALTED" (here). The Cross will be Messiah's only throne. "If thou wilt take it, take it; for *there is no other save that here.*" But "there is none like that. Give it Me!"

What an answer to the speculations of Nicodemus respecting a kingdom! Did he hope that the Gentile would immediately be put under the feet of the Jew? But "God sent not His Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." And as to his night-visit and its purpose, how he must have been rebuked by what follows: "Every one that *doeth evil* hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." Would the projects of Nicodemus have borne discussion in the light of open day? Hardly. But on our Lord's trial before Annas (xviii. 20) He could say without fear of contra-

diction, "I spake openly to the world. *In secret have I said nothing.*" Who does not see that even to have suffered Nicodemus to state in His presence what was evidently working in the Pharisaic mind might easily have led to a charge against Jesus of misprision of treason, if the discourse had been repeated with the ordinary perversion to which all human reports are liable? We cannot wonder that Nicodemus appears to have left the Saviour's presence at last without reply. For him, however, the "nest" was no longer a place of repose. "Doth our law judge any man before it *hear him, and know what he doeth?*" (vii. 51), is a question sufficiently indicative of his frame of mind, and that he, at least, knew more of what the Christ was doing than his brethren at the Council Board. And—best of all—in that dark hour when the serpent in the wilderness found his Anti-type, Nicodemus saw daylight where his countrymen, almost without exception, were in the dark. He "came to Jesus by night" before Israel had discovered what Jesus came to be. When they had utterly rejected Him, Nicodemus was not ashamed to confess Him in the light of day. He became a true child of the Eagle, after all; for "*Where the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*"

I have dwelt long on this incident, because I find in it a key to the whole gospel. From the scene with Nicodemus our Lord passes to another, where human jealousy, if He had been an earthly potentate, would certainly have prevailed. Yet He would not even allow the number of His disciples to rival that of the followers of John the Baptist, until the Fore-runner's race was run. Rather than permit the Pharisees to suppose any such thing, He would retire to Galilee, and even linger in Samaria on the way. While there He let fall an oracle which, once published, was more fatal to the temple than anything He had yet said: "The hour cometh when ye shall *neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*" The "nest" that was broken down on Mount Moriah would not hold its place on Gerizim for a single day.

Next, a nobleman of Cana presents himself. But his son is healed in such a manner as to separate the nobleman from Christ's company and send him home. Once more we note the loss of a political opportunity. Neither the Jerusalem nor the Galilean nobleman were employed as such men would have been by an aspirant after earthly power.

Another visit to Jerusalem follows (ch. v.), which brings the early Judæan ministry¹ to a close. On this occasion we

¹ I use the expression in the sense which it has in Ellicott's Hulsean "Lectures on the Life of our Lord."

find our Lord doing in secret an act which brings the deadly enmity of His people upon Him at once. He bids the man whom He has healed at Bethesda carry his bed home on the Sabbath day. The act and the order are reported, and "therefore did the Jews begin to persecute (*ἐδίωκον*, imperfect) Jesus, and sought (*ἐζήτουν*) to slay Him, because He did (*ἐποίησε*, imperfect, 'persisted in doing') these things on the Sabbath day."¹ The way in which He met the charge was very striking. There was no sort of apology, reticence, or concealment. His reply made matters ten times worse. "My Father worketh hitherto (on the Sabbath), and I work." The significance of that saying is profound, but the offence lies on the surface. "He said that God was His own Father (*ἰδιον*), making Himself equal with God" (v. 18). And, so far from being disposed to soften the impression, He went on to claim identity of action (verse 19), equal honour (verse 23), and equal self-existence (verse 26) with God. No assertion of our Lord's Deity that can be found anywhere among His public utterances is so explicit as this discourse in Jerusalem in the fifth chapter of St. John. But this Evangelist gives no record of the impression produced by it, or of any reply made.

When we put this assumption of Divine honour side by side with the avowed and deliberate rejection of earthly power, the effect is very striking. Anything more certain to disturb all popular notions of what the Messiah was to be, we cannot conceive. The impossibility of making any political capital out of His work or presence must have provoked and thwarted the Jewish statesmen to the last degree.

Between this discourse in St. John v. and the story of the feeding of the five thousand in St. John vi. we must place the greater part of our Lord's Galilean ministry as recorded by the three synoptists. All this is entirely omitted by St. John. If he had not narrated that signal miracle we should be sorely puzzled to harmonize this portion of the gospel at all. The miracle is related by all four Evangelists. But St. John alone brings out three characteristic points: first, that our Lord would have been made king by the five thousand if He had not prevented it; secondly, that He took special pains to conceal the more astonishing display of power which succeeded it (His walking on the sea) from all but His own immediate followers; thirdly, that on the day following He delivered a discourse in Capernaum which alienated a number of His disciples by the highly spiritual, but symbolical, teaching it contained. These three points are peculiar to St. John's

¹ Our Lord's steadfast opposition to the Rabbinical sabbath was another sharp thorn in the Jewish nest throughout the whole of His ministry.

Gospel. The agitation of the Jewish mind is continued throughout. He could neither reign over them, nor feed them (temporally), nor cease to keep their minds upon the strain with spiritual teaching to which they would not rise. A few were found capable of the flight to which he stirred them up. The yearnings of His heart for all betray themselves in the touching appeal to the twelve: "Will ye also go away?" (vi. 67). And the power of His attraction is reflected in the answer: "Lord, to whom shall we go (away)? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Such moving incidents as these are demanded by the course of the story. They show clearly that however sternly our Lord repelled the advances of political Judaism, He had nothing repulsive in Himself. It was because He was bent on *drawing* all men unto Him that He must needs die. The very intensity of His love for the many made Him reject the selfish approaches of the few.

Once fairly on the track, we trace the same footmarks everywhere. The next temptation to court the public favour is presented on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles, by His brethren, not as yet believers in Himself. "There is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, *show thyself to the world*" (vii. 4). It is the invitation of Nicodemus repeated, only more rudely and by coarser minds. But it is just as firmly declined. "In secret," as before, He goes up to Jerusalem, still claiming unearthly honours, still refusing to be drawn into public life. This time the truth that He is the very Christ is made so obvious, that a blind beggar taken from the streets and healed becomes a match for the highest authorities, when the question of our Lord's divine mission is in dispute. The rebukes of this nameless disciple must have been keenly irritating to the Jewish mind. "Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes" (ix. 30). It was heresy to admit the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth could be the Son of God. "If any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (ix. 22). But the children and the beggars in the streets knew it, and all the authority of the Pharisees could not stop their tongues. Blind men and Canaanitish women called Him the "Son of David." His connection with Nazareth made that palpably impossible. And He never condescended to explain. "Ye both know Me, and ye know whence I am," was His answer (vii. 28). Yet He might easily have brought proof that Bethlehem, and not Nazareth, was the city of His birth. Must we say once more that the truth He sought to inculcate was His heavenly origin? His descent, not from David, but from

above? At last, on the Feast of Dedication (kept since the fourth century as Christmas Day), they crowd around Him in Solomon's porch at Jerusalem, and ask in utter despair, "How long dost Thou *lift up our soul* (and keep it in suspense)? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly" (x. 22-24). They might well say, "Lift up our soul"! How else could the nestlings of the Eagle be stirred up to fly? This upward strain, which tried them so sorely, was the very thing that the Eagle of Israel had put upon them of set purpose, that they might prove themselves His children. "He came to His own," to teach them to "mount up with wings as eagles," and "His own received Him not." "He laboured in vain; He spent His strength for naught and in vain;" for so it was written of Him by the prophets (Isa. xlix. 4).

This brings us to the close of the tenth chapter of the Gospel. Its last verses significantly record our Lord's retirement beyond Jordan to the place where John at first baptized, and where he had received the deputation from the Senate of which we spoke before. In that region, where the words concerning the Eagle were first spoken to Moses, He found many followers. There, also, was given that most valuable testimony to the truth of the "Word" and the "Voice" together. John did no miracle; "*but all things that John spake of this man were true.*"¹

But little of our Lord's public ministry, as described in the fourth Gospel, now remains. One supreme effort to awaken Jerusalem fills the eleventh chapter, and the twelfth chapter records the result. Then we pass to the upper chamber in Jerusalem, and see the Eagle on the pinnacle of the rock, with the few who dared to follow Him, pluming His wings for the last flight. Before this He had been hovering over Jerusalem from the side of Bethany, to see whether the Word that broke the four days' slumber of the dead Lazarus would avail to stir His people's hearts. But they would not "be persuaded, even though one rose from the dead." May not the inscrutable grief of our Lord as He went to the tomb to perform this act of power be partly traceable to His foreknowledge of the effect which the miracle would have upon the city which He loved! The tears on the way to the grave of Lazarus, and the tears on the way to Jerusalem, were but one sorrow after all. For, in fact, it was the resurrection of Lazarus which determined our Lord's death. The meeting of the Sanhedrin that followed was signalized by the speech of Caiaphas already referred to, which made it clear to

¹ A testimonial, in its form, not beyond the reach of any Christian minister. But what a priceless record of ministry it is!

Sadducees as well as Pharisees that the "One Man" must die.

Our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem receives an entirely fresh light from St. John. He expressly connects it with the raising of Lazarus, and he notes that in consequence of this triumph the desirability of putting Lazarus to death was discussed also, "because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus." It is difficult to realize the extreme bitterness of the enmity which could calmly consider such a measure of opposition as this. What a strange perversion of the well-known maxim, *Salus populi suprema lex!* But further, how entirely this aspect of the case discloses the true reason for our Lord's crucifixion, and that it was an act of political expediency rather than religious animosity which brought Him to His end. On religious grounds the Pharisees must have defended the doctrine of the resurrection, and thrown the shelter of their powerful party over every person whose actions lent support to their belief. But the Pharisees themselves, in concert with the chief priests, called the council after the raising of Lazarus; and the Sadducees, who were in office, were able to command the votes of the opposition in the measures adopted against our Lord's life. From first to last, the kingdom He had set before them was "not of this world." But He could not persuade them to rise to it. The Church of Israel, which He had Himself established in Jerusalem, had now become too earthly, and His own teaching was too heavenly, to allow of any compromise between the two. Mere political Christianity in every shape is excluded from St. John's Gospel, and finds no precedent in our Lord's lifetime except among His betrayers and murderers. Space will not permit me to go into the account of our Lord's trial as given by St. John. To gather up the threads of the argument will occupy another paper. We have seen how largely the Divine Portraiture has determined *the subject-matter* of the fourth Gospel. We have seen, also, how entirely suitable it was to *the readers* for whom the Gospel was designed. We shall find that the choice of St. John as the fourth *Évangelist* was no less suitable to the *Portrait* which he was appointed to draw.

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ART. V.—WORK AMONG HOP-PICKERS.

"**H**OW d'ye do, Mr. Cobb; and are you quite well, sir, and the lady, and has your eye got all right, and did you shoot the dog that bit you?" "Is Mr. Bacon [Scripture Reader] coming down this year, and Mr. Grove?" (an evangelist; see