

THE FOURTH GOSPEL'S MESSAGE ON JUDGMENT FOR TO-DAY.

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THE outlook of the present generation on life, whether economic or religious, has changed in a way which it is not easy for those belonging to an older generation to sympathize with, still less to appreciate and understand. Each generation forges on a little further ahead of the previous one, but whereas in times past, the progress, if it be progress, has been made on foot, thus enabling both parties to keep in sight of each other, to-day the younger group, metaphorically speaking, having eschewed pedestrian methods, has taken to motoring, in consequence of which its rate has been so greatly accelerated that it has left the older generation far behind, and out of sight. The moral and spiritual atmosphere which surrounds the people of to-day is very different to that of fifty or even thirty years ago. Appeals which were successful then have lost their cogency now. Some competent observers maintain that in addressing large bodies of men and women on the subject of religion, their belief even in the existence of God must not be taken for granted. Our experience is somewhat different to this. Amongst the masses of our population we should say that there is a vague idea in the existence of a Supreme Being, somebody above them who will occasionally intervene on their behalf, that somehow and somewhere everything will come right in the end provided they try to do their best, this best being construed in the sense of not doing any harm to anybody. That this is a satisfactory condition of things no one who has the spiritual interests of mankind at heart will allow. But it is true of the present as in the past that there is a light which lighteth every man who comes into the world (St. John i. 9). One of the most noticeable changes in present day teaching and thought is the absence of any appeal to the motive of fear. Long ago Clement of Alexandria observed that "the Saviour has many tones of voice and many methods for the salvation of men; by threatening He admonishes, by upbraiding He converts, by bewailing He pities, by the voice of Song he cheers."¹ But upbraiding and threatening have disappeared from many circles; indeed, if the truth be known,

¹ *Ad. Graecos*, Ch. I.

rarely are those particular tones to be heard in our voices, a kind of paralysis comes over us, so great is the power of herd suggestion and reaction.¹

When, however, we go back to the New Testament, and essay the difficult task of clearing our minds of all preconceived ideas and notions, and endeavour to find out what the apostolic writers felt and thought on the subject, the conviction is forced upon us that the appeal to fear found a place both in the foreground and background of their teaching (2 Cor. v. 11 ; Phil. ii. 12 ; 1 St. Peter iv. 18).

By all means let it be conceded that on the highest levels of religious experience, fear ceases to operate in the individual life and conscience, and love exercises undivided sway, nevertheless St. John does contemplate their existence side by side with each other until love has done her perfect work (1 St. John iv. 18). Fear will ultimately be cast forth from the soul (*ἔξω βάλλει*), but that implies that she was there to begin with, and had her place in the education of the spiritual life. Unlike sin which is lawlessness, and being contrary to the will of God (1 St. John iii. 4) ought never to have existed, fear has her place in the divine economy. He who was Perfect Love Incarnate said, "Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" (St. Matt. x. 28 ; St. Luke xii. 4, 5). In the past attempts have been made, and they will be made again in the future, to lift up before men a purely human Christ, but they will only succeed by tearing the Gospels to shreds and doing violence to Christian experience, and we believe that those Gospels will have to undergo the same fate at the hands of those who would eliminate a doctrine of Judgment to come from Our Lord's teaching. To attain that object the sacred records will have to undergo a similar drastic revision.

¹ In his chapter on the instinctive bases of religion Professor McDougall writes that "the long persistence of fear and awe in religion is well illustrated by the phrase widely current among the generation recently passed away, 'an upright, God-fearing man,' a phrase which expresses the tendency to identify uprightness with God-fearingness, or, rather to recognize fear as the source and regulator of social conduct. It is a nice question to what extent is the lapse from orthodox observances, so remarkable and widespread among the more highly civilized peoples at the present time, due to the general softening of divine retribution to a very secondary position, and to the discredit into which the flames of hell have fallen."—*An Introduction to Social Psychology* (Methuen & Co., London, 1923), 18th ed., p. 312.

Whilst, then, we shrink altogether from some of the appeals which Revivalists make in their efforts to turn men from sin to God, a painful example of which is given by Professor Pratt in his book on the religious consciousness,¹ yet we would plead for a more careful investigation from a psychological point of view of the part the emotion of fear may and should play in the moral and religious development of mankind. The famous line of Petronius " *primus in orbe fecit deos timor* " (It was fear that first suggested the existence of the gods) is an exaggeration, but that it is a *vera causa* of religion, no serious student of religion will deny. With regard to the matter of education we sympathize with Professor Mosso when he says " The educator should always treat the child as intelligent, because the animal (in him) will disappear and the man remain. He should have recourse to means the most easily understood, and the most persuasive. He should enable him to avoid occasions of wrong-doing, when he perceives that he has taken to bad habits, and seek by offering him greater attractions to withdraw him from unhealthy temptations." ² At the same time we are afraid that Mosso has not made due allowance for the fact that in the majority of people " the animal " never quite disappears. The average man is governed not so much by reason as by instinct, a truth which modern psychology is never weary of emphasizing. And of those who have come to love God for Himself more than for the gifts and blessings He brings, perforce not a few would admit that in hours of fierce temptation and conflict fear has exercised a salutary and restraining influence, and prevented them from abandoning themselves to courses both fatal and lasting in their effects. Do we not, it may be asked, lay ourselves open to the rejoinder that any claims of the spiritual life put forward on the ground that should they be rejected, the most serious consequences must ensue, will meet with little favour to-day? In answer to this we would suggest that the teaching on Judgment presented in the fourth Gospel is calculated to cause even the most light-hearted to pause and think, on account of its convicting power and self-evidencing truth.

In the opening chapter of the Gospel, apart from the Prologue, no hint is given of approaching judgment, but a divinely Human Figure is presented. " Come and see Him " are the words addressed

¹ *The Religious Consciousness* (Macmillan Company, New York, 1923), p. 178, note 23.

² *La Peur* (Félix Alcan, Paris, 1908), 4th ed., p. 169.

by Philip to Nathanael, and in the succeeding chapters those who have eyes to see are to behold His glory. More than once it is stated that His coming was not for the purpose of judging the world, but that it might be saved through Him (St. John iii. 17). "You Pharisees judge according to the flesh, and I (and it is a very emphatic I) judge no man," and at the close of the Ministry "If any one heareth My words and keepeth them not" (*φωλάξῃ*) (again the emphatic "I" makes its appearance) "I do not judge him, for I came not to judge the world but to save the world" (xii. 47). Continually is the Lord being judged, His claims questioned and scrutinized. During His first visit to Jerusalem in His public ministry when He drove the traffickers in merchandise and the moneychangers from the Temple, it was demanded of Him by the Jews that He should display His credentials authorizing Him to perform what in their eyes was a very high-handed action. "What sign shewest Thou that Thou doest these things?" (ii. 18). Nicodemus came to Our Lord by night, and with a scholar's characteristic caution allowed that from God He has come, a teacher (iii. 2) in contrast to those whose teaching is of their own invention (cf. vii. 17 ff). The evidences of his own senses had carried him to a certain point, but beyond that he could not go. His visit suggests that he had come either on his own initiative or as the representative of a class, to judge what manner of Man was this new Rabbi, and appraise Him at His true value. The woman of Samaria, when she came into contact with the Lord, took up a position of enquiry (iv. 9, 12, 19-20). From Chapter V onwards till Chapter XIII is reached, the Evangelist allows us to see groups of people discussing whether He who purports to be the Son of God is indeed what He makes Himself out to be. The scene is laid for the most part in and around Jerusalem, but in one instance it is transferred to Galilee and Capernaum. The Sanhedrin meets and holds secret conclaves (vii. 45-52, xi. 47-53) and various opinions and judgments are expressed. At the very outset "the Jews," i.e. the Scribes and Pharisees, are openly hostile, and it is not long before we find that they are determined to bring about His death (v. 18), though even in their case their judgment was shaken after witnessing the Lord's miracle on the young man born blind. Some amongst them judged Him to have a demon (x. 20, cf. viii. 48), others denied it (x. 21), but as a rule active unbelief characterized their attitude (x. 31, 39; xi. 53).

As for the people, the ordinary folk, their opinions sway to and fro. Sometimes they wish to make Him King (vi. 14, 15). "He is a good man" is the verdict of some. "He deceiveth the people" is the exclamation of others (vii. 12). Eventually the Pharisees take the lead, and all through the Lord's life evince a bitter and growing resentment against Him (vii. 32; viii. 13 ff; ix. 16; xi. 47 ff; xii. 42) until at length the climax is reached, when Pilate, the embodiment of Roman Law and Order, delivers Jesus to the chief priests to be crucified (xix. 16). At the same time we see the judgments of those who believed in Him. Nicodemus, from being a secret disciple, openly proclaims himself to be such by bringing myrrh and aloes for the burial of the Lord's body (xix. 39). The woman of Samaria and those of her own city confess that the Lord is indeed the Saviour of the world (iv. 42). And the once doubting Thomas climbs the heights of faith and confesses "My Lord and My God." We must test the claims of Christ. It is His wish. It is what He requires of us all.

"What think ye of Christ, Friend?
When all's done and said.
Like you this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but will you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can?"

Alongside of our judgment of Christ stands Christ's judgment of us and all men. For weighty statements meet us in the gospel on this inevitable result of His Life and Teaching which, on the surface, appear to be in utter contradiction to His previously mentioned utterances. When we look into the subject as a whole, it will be seen that this is not so. "For Judgment came I into this world, in order that they who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind" (ix. 39), and this has been given Him by His Father, "For the Father judgeth no man but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (v. 22), and more than that hath given Him authority to carry it out owing to His having come into the world, and taken our human nature with all that it entails, weakness, suffering and death. As Son of Man He will execute Judgment (v. 27). But though the Father has delegated judgment into His hands yet the judgment is not separate from the Father because of the Son's absolute dependence upon Him. "I can of Myself do nothing, as I hear I judge, and this judgment which is Mine is righteous because I seek not Mine own will but the will of the Father that sent Me"

(v. 30). Now the actual visible judging during the Son of God's earthly manifestation had not arrived. As it has been well said, "As little did He come to judge as the sun to cast a shadow; but like the shadow, judgment must naturally and of necessity ensue, having regard to the constitution and character of the cosmos."¹ The main object of our Saviour's coming was not judgment, but incidentally the process of judgment was taking place, for the perfect Revelation had come. Judgment flowed from His very presence. In judging Christ Pilate was himself being judged. The ruler of this world, the prince of darkness, though it was his hour (St. Luke xxii. 53) made assault after assault upon Christ (Col. ii. 15), and at the time appeared to have full and complete triumph, yet all unwillingly proclaimed his own downfall, and brought judgment upon himself, and those identified with him (St. John xii. 31). The very presence of the Son of God called out on the part of some, great faith, while others became more and more hostile, and thus became blind. The Light illumined some, and blinded others. "The light may become lightning." In the very judgments we pass on Christ we discover that we are not judging Him but judging ourselves. The Perfect Revelation was and is the touchstone by which a man, through his acceptance or rejection of it, is revealed, judged, all unwittingly, to himself.

"Eternal Life" is in the fourth Gospel a present possession identified with Christ. He not merely bestows, He *is*, eternal Life. The acceptance of Christ, dependence upon Him admits the believer to eternal Life here and now. In like manner a rejection of Him, which is both deliberate and wilful, implies judgment "here and now." A man who does not believe in the name of the only Begotten Son of God has already by the very attitude he adopts brought judgment upon himself, the process of judgment has commenced. And this judgment is not external to himself, an arbitrary sentence imposed upon him from without, but is internal, the outcome of his character. By his own act he has cut himself off from the Fountain of Life, and the seeds of death have already begun to germinate. In St. John iii. 18, the full force of the perfect tense must be allowed for, but "he who believeth not has already been, and is being judged" (*κέρχεται*), and "this is the judgment, *ἡ κελσις*, which denotes the

¹ *Evangelium des Johannes*. Holtzmann-Bauer (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1908), 3rd ed., p. 90.

process rather than the result, for the Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light." Death then is the reverse side of life, judgment of eternal Life, and this is true to experience. This silent judgment which is ever going on within the human soul is recognized by modern thought.

"Some day," says Mr. Ruskin, "you believe within these five or ten or twenty years for every one of us the judgment will be set, and the books opened. If that be true, far more than that must be true. Is there but one day of judgment? Why for us every day is a day of judgment—every day is a *dies iræ*, and writes its irrevocable verdict in the flame of its west. Think you that judgment waits till the doors of the grave are opened? it waits at the doors of your houses—it waits at the corners of your streets; we are in the midst of judgment—the insects that we crush are our judges—the moments we fret away are our judges—the elements that feed us, judge as they minister—and the pleasures that deceive us, judge as they indulge. Let us, for our lives, do the work of men while we bear the form of them if indeed those lives are not as a vapour and do not vanish away." ¹

But it is not Mr. Ruskin only who says this. The same truth is urged by one of the greatest if not the greatest Psychologist of our generation, the late Professor James. "We are spinning our own fates, good or evil and never to be undone. Every stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never so little scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle in Jefferson's play excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying 'I won't count this time!' Well he may not count it, and a kind heaven may not count it, but it is being counted none the less. Down among the nerve cells and fibres, the molecules are counting, registering and storing it up, to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do is in strict literalness wiped out." ²

In conclusion it may be asked, did St. John believe in a great day of Judgment? To this question an affirmative answer may be given without any hesitation (v. 24, 29). Already has the believer, in this life, passed out of the sphere of judgment. In his case what is partly hidden will be made manifest in the light of God's countenance. He will see the Christ who already belongs to him as He

¹ *Sesame and Lilies*, Ch. iii, pp. 193, 194.

² *Principles of Psychology* (Macmillan & Co., London, 1901), Vol. I, p. 127.

really is (1 St. John iii. 2). The abiding in Him, often partial and imperfect, will become complete and entire; and the Life eternal, dimly realized here, will be revealed in all its splendour and glory. None of these experiences are wholly and entirely new, the believer has had a foretaste of them in this world, but only in the "Resurrection unto Life" are they clearly seen and apprehended. The same law operates in the case of him who has rejected Christ, but entirely in the opposite direction. What has been going on within him, often ignored and even unknown to himself, will be brought and displayed before the burning light of God's Holiness and Love. The hideousness and malignity of sin will be exposed.¹ The judgment which has already begun under our present conditions is seen in all its terrible consequences. In Origen's words "Every sinner kindles for himself the flame of his own fire, and is not plunged into some fire which has been already kindled by another, or was in existence before himself. Of this fire the fuel and food are our sins."² Such questions as Eternal Hope, Conditional Immortality, the unendingness of future punishment, are outside the limits of this article. It may be that the severity of the truths just enunciated needs to be qualified by other truths. Notwithstanding this, who can deny that they demand a greater place in the life and thought of the Christian Church than is accorded them to-day. In the background of the Johannine view of judgment, the Saviour's words "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have Life" assume an importance and an urgency which the passing of the centuries has not diminished nor rendered obsolete. Should Judgment be ignored by the pulpit, the Scientist and the Novelist, and we may add all living Drama, will, when men and women least expect it, flash home to them its inevitable certainty.

¹ "And to me was shewed no harder hell than sin." *Revelations of Divine Love*, by Julian of Norwich, Ch. xl.

² *De Principiis*, Book II, x. 4.

