

THE MARRIAGE OF CANA AND ITS SYMBOLISM.

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“ E verso noi volar furon sentiti,
Non però visti, spiriti, parlando
Alla mensa d' amor cortesi inviti
La prima voce che passò volando,
' Vinum non habent,' altramente disse,
E retro a noi l' andò reiterando.”

DANTE, *Purg.* xiii, 25-30.

“ 'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want.”

TENNYSON, *The Two Voices*.

WE do not propose to discuss the symbolism of the Fourth Gospel as a whole, but to confine our attention to the first miracle of Cana in Galilee, with a view to apprehending its inner meaning.

Dr. Inge says that “ the symbolism ” of the Gospel “ is often in three stages. The text presents an apparent sense, which is in figure a second, this in turn points to a third deeper yet.”¹ It remains to be seen whether this method of interpretation should be applied to the “ turning of the water into wine.” It might seem to be so were we to place ourselves under the guidance of St. Augustine. According to him, the water is typical of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament apart from Christ. So long as the reader does not discern Him there, what can he find “ to match them for flatness and insipidity ” ? but once he discerns Christ in them, then what he reads not only hath a taste, but inebriates ; Christ is now manifested in the Law and the Prophets.² St. Augustine does not himself make the transition to a third and deeper meaning, but when he states “ Truly we too were water, and He made us wine, made us savour of wisdom : for we are the savour of His faith, we who before were without all savour of wisdom,”³ this may well be made to follow from the first interpretation, albeit his order will have to be reversed. Christ being clearly seen in the ancient Scriptures so inspires and inebriates those who study them that they are transformed by Him from water into wine. He attaches mystical meanings to the details of the miracle. The six waterpots signify the six ages of mankind which were not without prophecy. Their being filled up to the brim shows that the fulness of time has at length arrived, but only for those whose eyes are opened and discern

¹ *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, ed. by Dr. H. B. Swete (Macmillan & Co., London, 1909), p. 261.

² Tract. in Joh. ix. 3 and 6.

³ Tract. in Joh. viii. 3.

Christ is the water turned into wine. The two or three firkins apiece testify respectively to the Spirit of the Father and the Son understood together, and the same Trinity more particularly. The Lord's answer to His Mother implies that she gave birth to His Manhood, but not to His Divine Nature from whence proceeded the miracle. The day will however come when her Son will recognize her, when He is hanging on the Cross. Until then His hour has not yet come.

It is a far cry from St. Augustine to M. Loisy. Like him the brilliant French savant attaches to most of the events and sayings of the Gospel a symbolical meaning, but unlike the ancient Doctor of the Church, Loisy regards the Fourth Gospel as destitute of any historical value whatsoever.

With the majority of scholars, both Conservative and Liberal, Loisy asserts "le changement de l'eau en vin signifie le remplacement de l'eau de la loi par le vin nouveau de l'Évangile."¹ The Lord's Mother stands for the Old Covenant, "la personification de l'ancienne Alliance." The difficult words of verse 4, *τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι*, are translated as follows: "Qu'y a-t-il entre moi et toi, femme? . . . Jésus dit à sa mère qu'il n'y a rien de commun entre eux, et, ce disant, il lui signifie de le laisser tranquille. . . . C'est le Logos-Christ qui parle et qui se déclare indépendant de toute influence humaine, si respectable qu'elle soit. Sa mère ne lui est rien dans l'accomplissement de sa mission divine."

At first sight the idea of the Lord's Mother representing the Israelitish Community does not seem to merit discussion, for it may well be asked when did Judaism ever say to our Lord and His Church, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it"? On the contrary, the history of the first two centuries proves that the policy she pursued towards Christianity, far from being benevolent, was one of unrelenting hostility, and, wherever possible, of bitter persecution.

But on further consideration, we see that it is not ecclesiastical Judaism which according to Loisy is typified by the Lord's Mother (cf. St. John ix. 32-35, xvi. 2), but the spiritually-minded portion of the Jewish Church (cf. Rev. xii. 1 ff.), the true children of Abraham as distinct from the entire race (St. John viii. 37-39), in other words, that portion of the Jewish Theocracy which afterwards passed over to Christianity, its true home. At the moment when Christ spake in Cana of Galilee, this particular section, in common with the rest of the Jewish nation, entertained political views of the Messiah; and so long as they clung to these they could have nothing in common with Christ; but when His hour had come, that is to say, after He had been glorified, then, and not till then, having learnt the true meaning of His Messiahship, they would be numbered amongst His true and devoted followers.

We will not stop to consider now the objections which have been raised against this interpretation of the passage (St. John ii. 4) beyond observing that in St. John ii. 12, immediately after the

¹ *Le quatrième Évangile, deuxième édition refondue* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1921), p. 145.

miracle of Cana of Galilee, the Evangelist informs his readers that our Lord went down to Capernaum, "He and His Mother, and His brethren, and His disciples." Loisy would see in the brethren the representatives of those Jews who were untouched by this revelation of glory, but he leaves us quite in the dark as to the symbolic meaning he would attach to "the Mother" being at Capernaum. Failure to carry out the symbolism of the Lord's Mother in ii. 12, makes us hesitate to adopt Loisy's symbolism in ii. 4.

Leaving on one side the six waterpots which refer to the powerlessness of Judaism, we find it exceedingly difficult to follow Loisy when he says, "On peut croire que le maître d'hôtel et l'époux, qui interviennent à la fin du récit allégorique, quand le Christ et sa mère ne sont pas en scène, figurent respectivement, au moins pour le rédacteur, Jean-Baptiste et Jésus." It is well that the Redactor has been brought in at this juncture. To-day the host of Redactors, which is for ever on the increase, is in evil odour amongst scholars.¹ And it must be confessed Loisy's Redactor fully lives down to the bad reputation of his class, for what are we to say of a composer or editor who causes one actor to impersonate two quite different characters? At the beginning of the scene Christ is one of the bridegroom's friends, and then without any warning He is transubstantiated into the actual bridegroom himself. And how careless of the Redactor not to have mentioned the departure of Jesus and His Mother!

Surely the rule "entia non multiplicanda sunt," or as we should prefer to express it, "Redactores non multiplicandi sunt," should be more strictly adhered to than is usual amongst critical writers. Such desperate expedients as are resorted to by Loisy strengthen our belief that the first miracle of Cana of Galilee has nothing whatever to do with the contrasted Old and New Covenants.

We have already seen that the position which the Saviour occupied at the marriage feast is that of a sympathetic guest, a friend of the bridegroom. It is most important to observe that He is not the bridegroom, and to seek to force Him into this position is an outrage on the text.

On the other hand, we do learn from the Synoptists that the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a marriage feast (St. Matt. xxii. 2 ; xxv. 1, 5, 6 ; St. Luke xii. 36 ; cf. Rev. xix. 7-9), but it is noteworthy that whenever in the Messianic Kingdom the bridegroom is men-

¹ Archdeacon Charles castigates the poor unfortunate Redactor of the Apocalypse in the following manner: "a most unintelligent disciple, dishonest, incompetent, taking the most unwarranted liberties with his author's text, a shallow-brained fanatic and celibate" (*I.C.C. Revelation*, Vol. I, pp. liv, lv), and Spitta does not conceal his annoyance with the Redactor whose handiwork he discovers in every chapter of the Fourth Gospel. In the chapter on Lazarus he says "This passage, xi. 51 f., is important, more especially because it shows plainly that it is by no means always possible to attribute the gross blunders in the Redactor's interpretations to any incapability of perceiving the meaning of the original" (*Das Johannes-Evangelium* (Vandenhoeck in Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1910), p. 256). Loisy also comes upon traces of the Redactor in the first epistle of St. John.

tioned, the reference is always to our Lord (St. Mark ii. 19-20; St. Matt. ix. 5; St. Luke v. 34-50). Seeing that the Evangelist was a born Jew, he would be the last to choose an incident illustrating the contrast between the Old and New Covenants in which another figures as the Bridegroom in the Messiah's place. Moreover, in St. John iii. 28, 29, the Baptist is actually designated as the friend of the Bridegroom. Again, there is no instance in the first century of the Christian era of Jewish legalism being compared to water. Therefore it is with special pleasure that we welcome Dr. Garvie's refusal to be carried away by the majority of scholars in favour of the belief that there is a reference to the water of the Jewish ceremonial religion being changed into the wine of the Christian Gospel.¹ In company with him we shall decline to spend time and space in defending the Lord's character against the charge suggested by the jest of the ruler of the feast, but that is not to say it should be ignored, for the Evangelist sees in the words the unconscious expression of a most sober truth (cf. St. John xi. 50-52).

The miracle of Cana has a twofold purpose. On the Divine side, the manifesting forth of the glory of the Incarnate Son, not so much in the display of miraculous power as in the dependence exhibited by Christ on His Father's will, His compassion for human needs, and His active sympathy with the joys of mankind. On the human side, it was intended that some teaching should be conveyed that would either enhance the value or unfold the nature of eternal life. Although the Evangelist was an old man, his fondness for the society of young people had grown rather than diminished with increasing years. Twice in his first epistle the young men had been singled out as the objects of his tender thought and solicitude; and with fine insight he had appealed to their strength and their love of adventure (1 St. John ii. 13, 14). The story current in the Primitive Church of the aged apostle seeking to rescue the robber youth from his evil ways, confirms this impression. There is also in the Gospel a most graphic account of the spirited defence made by the young man born blind on behalf of his Benefactor against the ecclesiastical authorities, who come off very much the second best. Not that the Evangelist had forgotten the needs of old age. Nicodemus is a man who is no longer young (St. John iii. 4), hence the piquancy of his being told of the necessity of the new birth. Also the man who was healed by the pool of Bethesda would in all probability be on the wrong side of fifty (St. John v. 5). Well may we believe, then, that in the description of the first miracle in Cana the Evangelist had the young chiefly in view. Apart from the bridal pair, who would be in the heyday of their youth, the jest of the ruler of the feast would contain a warning to those who were standing on the threshold of life.

Human nature varies little from century to century. In speaking of the adolescent period, Stanley Hall says that it is characterized by "the love of excitement and adventure, the fierce, combative instinct that delights in danger, in struggle, and even in destruction,

¹ *The Beloved Disciple* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1922), pp. 83, 84.

the restless ambition that seeks with an insatiable longing to better its position, to climb heights that are yet unscaled, the craving for some enjoyment which not merely gives pleasure but carries with it a thrill of passion."¹

These same desires and longings must have been equally prevalent among the youth of Ephesus at the end of the first century, though even more applicable to them would be Swinburne's verses in "The Triumph of Time," with the exception of the last line:

"The pulse of war and passion of wonder, the heavens that murmur, the sounds that shine,
The stars that sing and the lives that thunder, the music burning at heart like wine,
An avowed archangel whose hands raise up all senses mixed in the spirit's cup
Till flesh and spirit are molten in sunder—
Then things are over, and no more wine."

More life and fuller is the universal cry of youth. If we picture to ourselves a heathen and corrupt society where licentiousness and unnameable vices and practices (Eph. v. 3) were looked upon not only as part and parcel of ordinary everyday existence but were also associated with religion itself, we can appreciate the overwhelming difficulties under which a Christian writer or teacher laboured in those days even to obtain a hearing for his message. Here was a faith presented to the civilized world whose adherents openly boasted that they gloried in a cross, thought it the highest honour to be led captives in the triumphal car (2 Cor. ii. 4) of a Galilean Peasant, and were proud to call themselves His "slaves" and to be regarded as fools for His sake (1 Cor. iv. 10). Nor were these merely phrases, for in their daily life and conversation they not only enjoined but practised self-denial, a vigorous abstention from those pleasures which were inimical to the higher life—*ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἡ ἀλαζονία τοῦ βίου* (1 St. John ii. 16)—a crucifixion of the flesh (Rom. vi. 6; Gal. ii. 20; v. 24; Eph. v. 22; St. Ign. ad Eph. viii. 1, 2) and delighted in viewing their life as a continual dying. No wonder that the youth of Ephesus should shrug their shoulders and turn their backs on such teaching, and exclaim "for such a religion we have no use at all." None the less the lives of those who "were arrayed from head to foot in the commandments of Jesus Christ" (St. Ign. ad Eph. ix. 2) could not fail to have their effect. Listen the Ephesians must to those who "against their outbursts of wrath were meek: against their proud words were humble: against their railings would set their prayers: against their fierceness were gentle" (ibid. x. 2). And ever and anon as they listened to these teachers of "the Way," they would hear of salvation, life, eternal life, abiding for ever, love passing all human understanding, joy which nothing in the world could take away,

¹ Quoted by President H. C. King, *Rational Living* (The Macmillan Company: New York, 1908), p. 151. Prof. Coe considers that the period of adolescence extends from about the age of 12 to about 25. This again is subdivided into early, middle, and later adolescence. Cf. Hastings, *Ency. of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 101 f.

“ of God who appeared in likeness of man unto newness of everlasting life ” (ibid. xix. 3). These notes were always sounding in the early preaching of the Gospel, and must have touched many a heart. And then a great event happened. One more Gospel was written claiming to come from an eyewitness ; nay more, he was an intimate disciple of Jesus, but now an old man living in their midst. Its message was Eternal Life, no shadowy life relegated to the dim and distant future, but a full, vigorous, abounding life, here and now, with its roots in the Beyond, and so invincible that death itself could effect no change except to free it from the limitations of earth. This was just the very gospel needed for those whose eyes were dazzled by the golden fruit which hung from life’s green tree. No attempt was made to disguise the truth that entrance to this life was through a hard and narrow gate. Pleasures had to be abjured, restrictions adopted and eagerly embraced, and, to crown all, a new birth was demanded. At first the samples of the heavenly wine might seem poor and thin, but the deeper men drank of them, the fuller and richer they found them, until at length it came to be realized that the best was being reserved to the last. The hard, exacting bondage which they had to endure was only in appearance, they learnt to their joy that it conveyed an inner freedom enabling them to realize all the God-given powers of their manhood. While they were abiding in the Vine of God and were drawing from Him their daily sustenance and strength, they learnt the secret that they were no longer His slaves but His friends (St. John xv. 14, 15). All things that Christ had heard of His Father, He was making known unto them.

One side of youth has been touched upon, but Goethe has reminded us that the child is a realist, the middle-aged man a sceptic, the old man is inclined to mysticism ; he also remarks that the young man is an idealist. Bearing this in mind, we may inquire in what direction would the youth of Ephesus and the surrounding cities of Asia Minor endeavour to find satisfaction for this side of their nature. The answer is near at hand. The Mystery Religions. Now it is quite unnecessary, in fact highly misleading, to suppose as some have that the Fourth Gospel should be looked upon as a handbook to a Greek Mystery Religion. Very far-fetched in our estimation are the opinions of those scholars who would ascribe the miracle of changing the water into wine, as do Loisy, Bauer, and Heitmüller, directly or indirectly to the influence upon the Evangelist of the Dionysiac mysteries. They bring forward the stories of the jars at the temple of Elis being left empty over-night and being found filled with wine next morning, and that, at the temple of Dionysus, wine instead of water flowed from the spring. The rejection of these so-called parallels does not however prevent us from recognizing that the Evangelist, as St. Paul before him, was well aware of the immense attraction the mystery religions exercised over the more thoughtful minds of the day.

The longing after Salvation was widespread. The men and women of those days were not so much crying out to be delivered from the burden of sin as to be released “ from the pressure of Fate,

Necessity, and those ills which belong to the limitations of earthly existence."¹ They wished to be assured of a future state of bliss and happiness beyond the grave.

An appeal to the past, however venerable, was useless. Philosophy had proved to be a broken reed. By direct communion with the Deity or deities alone could contact with the unseen world be established, freeing their votaries from corroding care and doubt, and enabling them to attain absolute certainty as to their condition in the Hereafter.

The rites of initiation, regeneration, purification by water in baptism, the secret practices and doctrines which were forbidden to be revealed, had the effect of producing in the minds of multitudes a vivid sense of the divine, and of their being in contact with some saving Deity. The Evangelist makes use of many of these ideas, just as the Sadhu speaks of the relationship of Christianity to his own country. "Indians do need the Water of Life, but not in the European cup." According to St. John, the Ephesians shall have the Water of Life, but in their own cup. The thought-forms of Ephesus shall be made to express the content of the Christian Gospel.

We too have our Mysteries. Only he who is of the truth heareth My voice. The Christian believer goes through a period of initiation. He that doeth the truth shall come to the light. Whoever is anxious to do the will of God shall know of the teaching thereof. He that followeth Christ shall not walk in darkness. Nobody who does not belong to Christ can have any conception of the excellency of the heavenly wine; the more it is partaken of, the better it is found to be.

No tongue of mortal can express,
No pen can write the blessedness;
He only who hath proved it knows
What bliss from love of Jesus flows."

We may then sum up thus the symbolism of the first miracle of Cana from the human side. It is the stage preparatory to the initiation into the mystery of Eternal Life, through Christ, which is effected by being born again of water and the spirit. In Chapter ii. the goal is presented before the believer and the man who wishes to become a disciple of Christ. In Chapter xv., where again the fruit of the vine is mentioned, we have its realization. Only those who belong to Christ can have experience that the best wine has been kept to the last.

¹ Cf. Hastings, *Ency. of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. IX : Art. "Mysteries (Christian)," by Dr. H. A. A. Kennedy, p. 74.