

But whatever their misgivings and suspicions may have been, Job was evidently unconscious of them; he saw nothing but friendly sympathy and compassion in their silence: he assumes that they are wholly with him, that they are on his side and will take his part. And it is one of the finest and most natural touches in the Poem that the man who had remained silent under the most terrible pressure of misfortune, holding down his unruly thoughts, letting his doubts and questions prey on his heart but refusing to utter them, resolving, like poor Lear,

“No, I will be the pattern of all patience;  
I will say nothing,”

is surprised into utterance by the first show of sympathy and kindness. *Now* his pent up grief and rage and despair break all bounds; for he is confident that his friends understand him, and feel for him, and will lend him a credent and sympathetic ear. Deceived at this point, as he soon discovered that he was, he was “the more deceived;” he felt that the very citadel and sanctuary of his soul had been surprised and betrayed. S. COX.

---

*OUR LORD'S WORDS TO HIS MOTHER AT CANA.*

(ST. JOHN ii. 4.)

IT used to be quite an established thing, almost part of the “tradition of the faith,” to read in these words a rebuke to the Virgin Mother. And this not by any means exclusively or chiefly among Protestant writers, but very generally among the Fathers. Irenæus, Chrysostom, Augustine, all take the same

view of our Lord's meaning ; and the general consent of the ancient expositors may be summed up in the words of the first : " Dominus *repellens intempestivam ejus festinationem* dixit, quio mihi et tibi, mulier."

It may still seem to some an invidious thing, perhaps a rash, to pretend to run counter to such a consensus of authority, ancient and modern ; yet a sense of truth impels me to make the attempt. And if it can be shewn that the circumstances required and the words involved no such rebuke, while they are at least patient of a meaning far more in keeping with the character and position of Christ, I trust that no prepossession or theological prejudice will bind us down to the traditional view.

Let us take the circumstances first : and herein I make bold to ask any candid reader to tell me what fault he can possibly find with the behaviour of our Lord's mother ? Was she never to speak to her Son at all ? Was she never to tell Him about anything ? Was she alone excepted from the general liberty given to men to bring their troubles, their difficulties, their annoyances even, unto Him ? Or, was it wrong of her that she felt for the embarrassment of her hosts—worthy people, too, as they must have been ? Who does not see what an unhappy plight they were in ? Who, that has invited guests and found the provision running short, but can sympathize with their distress ? It is very likely that the fact of Jesus and his little band being there may have brought some unexpected addition to the numbers at the feast ; some may have come, rather on his account than on the bridegroom's, whom a kindly hospitality could not turn away. If

so, it may account for the wine running short (where no intemperance can be suspected), and explain the personal interest taken in the matter by our Lord's mother. Whether, however, this was so, or not,—and it must remain a mere conjecture,—it cannot seriously be argued that she had no business to tell her Son of the trouble her hosts and his were in. There is no instance in the Gospel of his discouraging such a thing; there is the whole analogy of his life and character against it: when did He ever stand upon his dignity, as though He might not be troubled with even the less pressing wants of his fellow-men?

It is, however, assumed that his mother wished to dictate to Him what He should do. But where is anything of the sort written? where hinted at? What could be simpler than her words, "They have no wine"? What could be more proper, more submiss, more thoughtful than her injunction to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it"? It did not compromise Him; it did not pledge Him to anything; it only cleared the way for anything He might choose to do. But it is supposed that she *intended* to dictate to Him. This is that "reading between the lines" which critics practise with so much gratification to themselves and so much injustice to others, imputing bad meanings to innocent words, according to the real or supposed views of the writer. What right has any one to imagine that our Lord's mother meant to dictate to Him what He should do when she merely mentioned a want? Why should they mete out to her a measure which they would keenly

resent being applied to themselves? Was it not perfectly natural after all? Joseph was now, as we conclude, dead—perhaps, long dead—and she had been habitually dependent on the care, the forethought, the gentle consideration, the ready sympathy of her Son; how should she not go straight to Him with this little trouble? Surely, when we so “read between the lines,” we forget the thirty years spent together at Nazareth, almost alone, and the perfect confidence in all matters of daily life—in such matters, *e.g.*, as food and wine—which must have grown up between mother and Son. It is quite unnecessary to suppose that she even thought of his working a miracle on this occasion. He had not wrought miracles for her and for the supply of her needs; why should she expect Him to do so now for the sake of others; but no doubt his careful loving forethought had habitually taken off her hands and off her mind every care and anxiety of which He could relieve her; and it was the natural result of this, that, when this little trouble about the wine arose, she should tell Him of it as a matter of course, and expect that *somehow* his wisdom and kindness would find a way out of it. To suggest that this was the secret of her behaviour on this occasion is only to suggest that He had been to her all that a perfect Son would naturally be.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I think I may dismiss with scorn the idea, entertained perhaps by some, that our Lord intentionally administered a public snub (to use a vulgar but expressive word) to his mother, in order to furnish Protestant controversialists with a suitable theme. This belongs to the histrionic treatment of the Gospel story, as if our Lord were an actor always speaking from behind a mask, with an eye to future controversies.

We have, however, the fact to account for, that Mary has always been blamed, not only by those who have, so to speak, held a brief against her, and have rejoiced to be able to find her in the wrong; but also by those who have revered her as one exceptionally near and dear to God. I think that the mistake,—for mistake I must consider it—has arisen in this way: we cannot help seeing that our Lord spoke with some warmth of feeling; we fail to catch sight of the real emotion which underlay his words; hence we conclude that He must have been moved by something of resentment or indignation, and have sought for the cause of such a feeling in his mother's words. I believe that, in fact, a very different emotion possessed his mind.

It will be allowed, I suppose, that his words themselves in the Original *need* not have conveyed any rebuke? They seem harsh in the English Version; they would be even rude if used now; but they are much softer in the Greek, and probably were softer still, because more familiar in idiom, in the Aramaic. The expression translated "What have I to do with thee?" was probably a familiar one, because the same idiom was used by Pilate's wife in her private message to her husband; and the expression itself was used by the devil speaking through the demoniac (Mark i. 24). In neither case is any reproach implied; in the latter it was immediately followed by the acknowledgment that He was the Holy One of God. Evidently, I think, it was an exclamation, in common use, of sorrowful or angry deprecation, as the case might be: it indicated a certain aversion, but not necessarily to the person

addressed; all would depend, as in the case of many common exclamations among ourselves, on the tone and manner in which the words were spoken. Of course, we may assume that our Lord looked very angrily at his mother, and that the aversion intimated in his words was against her supposed interference: to me it seems far more probable, far more in keeping with his character, to suppose that He looked very sad, and that the aversion He really felt was to the prospect which opened before his eyes at those innocent words about the wine.

Certainly, had she guessed what the effect of her words would be, she would never have uttered them, or have uttered them only with the deepest sorrow. For what were they? They were the divinely appointed signal, which our Lord doubtless recognized in Himself, for the commencement of that short career of miraculous beneficence which found its certain and natural goal in the death of the Cross. Given the circumstances of the times, given the temper of the rulers, and even human foresight could have predicted that end from that beginning. If a man *will* use gifts so exceptional and so invidious as those of Christ, he must either use them to crush and disarm others, or he will be crushed himself. And Christ was far too good to use miraculous powers with impunity: the very use, however purely unselfish, implied the claim to possess them; and the claim to possess them, in one so out of harmony with the dominant religious passions of the day, necessitated his destruction. A mere teacher could be tolerated, or at least endured; but a teacher who wrought evident miracles was too

dangerous to be tolerated; and when the dominant party were once convinced that either they or He must go to the wall, his destruction was merely a matter of time. Accordingly it was the raising of Lazarus, a miracle of pure beneficence, which precipitated the designs of the rulers and brought about the final catastrophe.

If we recognize this close connection—and I do not see how any one can fail to recognize it—between the miracles of Christ and his death, we may surely understand something of the feeling with which He made that “beginning of miracles” in Cana of Galilee. He must have known secretly where that path would end on which He was about at that moment to enter; He must have known that in the Providence of his Father those innocent words of his mother called Him to take up his Cross and carry it forth to Calvary. Shall we be astonished if the natural shrinking of human nature from death—and such a death!—brake forth in those words of sad expostulation, “What to me and thee, O woman! mine hour is not yet come.” “Mine hour” is here the same evidently of which He afterwards said, “This is *your* hour, and the power of darkness” For that hour which was the chosen hour of the rulers, the hour of their success and seeming victory, was his hour too, the hour of seeming destruction and of bitter agony, whereby He redeemed the world to God. When, therefore, He said, “Mine hour is not yet come,” we may reverently suppose that such thoughts as these were in his mind: “How little knowest thou what thou art doing, to what thy words are meant to lead me!

There is an hour in store for me of which thou hast heard somewhat already, an hour which will be one of anguish for thee too, when a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also: but that hour is yet afar off; months and years shall pass before that awful hour arises on thee and me; then why, O my mother, why shouldst thou call it to thee? why shouldst thou point me to it? why shouldst thou bid me enter upon the path which has no earthly ending save in the utter darkness of that hour? If I must drink of that cup which the Father hath prepared for me, his will be done; but why should it be thy voice, O my mother, which calls me to it?" Such, seems to me, expressed in very feeble words, the only real and only adequate feeling which could have prompted that exclamation of his. And no one, I think, will dare to say that the feeling was unworthy of Him; He had not been true man if He had not dreaded the strife from which He was to emerge a glorious victor.

And there is another thing to be considered. No one can have contemplated the life of Christ without being struck by the extreme contrast between the former and the latter part of it; the one all quiet and seclusion, the other all turmoil and publicity. Nor can any one doubt where the sharp division ran between the one and the other. It was at Cana of Galilee, in his first miracle, in the response He felt obliged to make to his mother's simple words, that He took the fatal step which altered the whole complexion of his life. Those words, "They have no wine," must have rung in his ears as the knell of all the quiet happiness, of all the peace, of all the un-



hindered communing with his Father which had been his, and should be his no more: what unnumbered regrets, what sorrowful anticipations, must they not have awakened in his human spirit? To live henceforth in the vortex of a whirlwind; to have no leisure so much as to eat, no time to pray save when others slept; to be the gazing-stock of every eye, the common talk of every tongue; to be followed about, to be thronged and jostled, to be gaped upon, to be hunted up and down by curious vulgar crowds;<sup>1</sup> to be hated, and detested, and defamed, and blasphemed; to be regarded as a public enemy; to be watched and spied upon, and trapped, and taken as a notorious criminal;—who shall say how dreadful the prospect of this was to his pure and therefore sensitive soul? Who is there that has been obliged by his duty to stand in the public eye, to be the talk of malicious tongues, the butt of scurrilous newspapers, even to a small degree, but knows how keen the suffering is to one who loves quiet and retirement? And *we* have our homes, our holidays of rest; *He* had no home and no rest. The “fierce light which beats upon a throne” may be very hard to bear; but those who sit on thrones can command at least a measure of privacy and seclusion. He was always in the midst of friends and foes. The storm and strife of tongues which touches us now and then, and scathes us, and makes us writhe, never ceased to beat upon his un-

<sup>1</sup> Those who would gain a vivid idea of the intolerable publicity and bustle in which our Lord's life was spent after He had begun to work miracles, even among the more friendly Galileans, should study the first chapter of St. Mark in the Original, and note especially the telling expression in verse 36.

sheltered head; it raged around Him and about Him more and more, until at last it caught Him and dashed Him, faint and bleeding, upon the Cross of Calvary. Does any one think that Christ was indifferent to all this? Will any think it wrong, or out of place, to impute to Him a horror, a shrinking, most intense? How could He, having any human feeling, help shuddering as He stepped across the threshold, and entered upon that scene of publicity, of contradiction, of contention, of blasphemy, in which He was to spend the rest of his days on earth?

It was, I repeat distinctly, the exercise of his miraculous gifts which entailed upon Him a publicity so painful and so unmitigated. As a teacher merely, the curiosity, the attention, the hostility He would have provoked, would have been comparatively tolerable. Many a one, then and since, has given himself out to be some great one, and yet lived and died comparatively unmolested. It was the fatal power of working miracles, and the readiness to use that power for others, which robbed its owner of all chance of peace or rest, and gave such an awful intensity to the passions which were stirred up about Him. Whether He sought a breathing space from the incessant demands upon Him in the heathenish coasts of Tyre and Sidon on one side, or in the houseless wilderness on the other, still He could not be hid; still He was followed by crowds in whom desire of getting something from Him was stronger even than curiosity to see Him work a miracle.

And yet no one seems to have noticed or under-

stood the strong repugnance which our Lord shewed to using his miraculous powers—a repugnance so natural and inevitable that it might have been augured before-hand—a repugnance which is attested by many a passage in the Gospels, and, as it seems to me, most vividly by those words of sad expostulation, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.” If we once understand this truly human and wholly blameless shrinking from publicity on the part of our Lord, we shall see directly the meaning of that oft-repeated injunction, “See thou tell no man,”—impressed, as St. Mark tells us, by almost threatening gestures (Mark i. 43). On the ordinary theory of our Lord’s miracles it is difficult to see in these words anything but the unmeaning repetition of a formula which He knew would be useless. As usual, the simplest explanation is the only true one: He did really shrink from and deprecate the painful and fatal publicity which the report of his miracles caused. In like manner, the inward distress which He shewed over some of the more remarkable of his miracles—as when He healed the deaf and dumb, and when He raised Lazarus: a distress which has quite puzzled the commentators—had, I doubt not, no more recondite or unreal a cause than this same shrinking of his human spirit from a display of superhuman power, which was painful to Him in itself and dreadful in its consequences.

If it be objected to this view, “Why, then, did He work miracles at all?” it is enough to answer that He did not come to please Himself, but to do his Father’s business. The works which He did were,

as He said, given Him to do ; and He had, morally speaking, no choice but to do them. Having those miraculous gifts He was bound to use them for the good of others ; if He had not used them, He had been less good than many of his servants, who, having exceptional gifts, use them freely for the benefit of their fellows, not minding the trouble or danger to themselves. Given the need and the appeal, and He must satisfy the need to the utmost of his ability, just as we must to the utmost of ours. That his ability extended to miraculous healings and supplyings, was, humanly speaking, a great misfortune to Him ; but it did not alter the moral law which governs the use of gifts. Now here, at Cana, was a need,—they had no wine ; here, too, was the appeal,—his mother's, an indirect one indeed, but made in perfect faith ; add to this the secret intimation that the time was come to use the miraculous gifts entrusted to Him,<sup>1</sup> and no liberty of action remained to Him : He must needs, as the well-beloved Son, take the step so fatal to his own peace.

Here, then, is the secret of that exclamation which has caused so much needless conjecture and so much unfair blame. It was prompted by a certain human repugnance and aversion, it is true ; but these feelings were not excited by his mother or by any fault in her, but by the sad prospect which her words, all unknown to her, called up before his prescient mind.

RAYNER WINTERBOTHAM.

<sup>1</sup> I have assumed that our Lord worked miracles as He forgave sins, *not* by his inherent power as God, but by the *ἐξουσία*, or derived power, or authority, given Him as *Son of Man*. I cannot now argue it, but I am perfectly convinced that it was so. See Matt. ix. 6-8, Luke xiv 28-31, Matt. xxi. 21, John xiv. 12, &c.