

to preclude the objection of "naturalism." Our interpretation of the words of the Bible must then be left to stand or fall according to the verdict of exegetical science.

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THE PLACE AND FUNCTION OF THE LAMP.

I. THE PARABLE (*concluded*).

ST. LUKE xi. 33.

THIS charming parable occurs in three other passages in the Synoptic Gospels (St. Mark iv. 21; St. Luke viii. 16; and St. Matthew v. 15), and was uttered by our Lord in at least two wholly different connections of thought. Of these other uses of the Parable I gave an exposition in the last number of this Magazine. But here St. Luke gives us another repetition of it, and links it on to a passage so philosophical and profound that we must not expect to fathom half its depth of meaning and suggestion. In his version of it it runs: "*No man, when he hath lighted a lamp, putteth it into a cellar, or under a bushel, but on the lamp-stand, that they who come in may see the light.*" And the Verses which follow it, literally rendered, run thus: "*Thine eye is the lamp of the body. When thine eye is single, thy whole body is illuminated; but when it is evil, thy body also is endarkened. Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness. For if thy whole body be illuminated, having no part dark, the whole shall be illuminated as when the bright shining of the lamp irradiates thee.*"

Now no one can read these words without feeling how difficult they are, without being conscious of a meaning in them which it is hard to grasp and define. There is a touch of mysticism in them. Though they are found in the Gospel of St. Luke, and, substantially, in the Gospel of

St. Matthew also (Chap. vi. 22, 23), they sound like an extract from the Gospel of St. John. We feel that there is a deep meaning in them even before we attach any definite conception to them. And there *is* a deep meaning in them, which we must try to reach; they are full of "sundry and manifold" instruction.

If we look back to the preceding context (Verses 29-32), we find that our Lord had been reproaching the Jews of his day as "an evil and adulterous generation," because, though they had a perpetual witness for God in their own hearts, they did not listen to it; and though, *in Him*, they had the greatest of all proofs that God was with them, they did not recognize the manifestation of God in Him, but were greedy for mere wonders, for the mere signs of an omnipotent and irresistible Power. They were "evil," because it is only evil which obliterates or obscures the true and perpetual sign, the sign in the Conscience; and they were "adulterous," because there is a certain impurity in the appeal of a heart which does not really want to see God and to share in his holiness for mere proofs of his presence and power. Yet, evil and adulterous as they are, a sign such as they demand *has* been given them; a sign greater than that which convinced the Queen of Sheba that Solomon was taught of God, and greater than that which convinced the men of Nineveh that Jonah was sent to reveal the righteous judgment of God against all unrighteousness in men. One was with them, and had long been with them, who was greater than Solomon, greater than Jonah; wiser than the wisest sage, more righteous than any prophet and preacher of righteousness. The Son of Man was the great Light, or Lamp, of that generation; a Lamp that burned and shone with brighter and more penetrating rays than any of the wise and holy men to whom Jew or Gentile had been drawn. But for the reception of this Light, as of all light, there must be a cor-

responding organ, an eye capable of perceiving it; a single or healthy eye; an open eye that desired the light. Such an organ, such an eye, that evil and adulterous generation had not, and could not have so long as they remained evil. And the proof that they lacked it was, that they were still asking for signs when the supreme Sign stood before them. To ask a sign of Christ was as though a man should go to the sun, shining in meridian splendour, and ask for a lamp to guide his feet through the darkness. Had the Jews possessed a single and open eye, they would have recognized "the light of the world" in Christ Jesus far more easily than the Queen of the South recognized the wisdom of God in the wit of Solomon, or than the Ninevites recognized the voice of God's righteousness in the warning of Jonah. The mere fact that they did not see light in Him who was the Light was a sufficient and damning proof that their eye was evil. Seeing, they saw, and did not perceive; hearing, they heard, and did not understand.

This is one, and a fine, meaning of the passage before us. But still another meaning is suggested or thrown into it by the self-same context: "As Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites, so *also* shall the Son of man be to this generation." Now Jonah was a sign to the men of Nineveh, not only in that he spoke words to them which found an echo in their hearts, which quickened and roused their conscience, but also in that he told them how he had been for three days buried in the depths of the sea, and yet had been delivered from death that he might bring them God's call to repentance. And here, in like manner, after speaking to his brethren according to the flesh words well adapted to arouse and alarm their conscience, our Lord foretells that He too must be buried and yet rise again from the dead, to bring them to repentance. So familiar is this fact to Him, so clearly does He foresee the future death and resurrection while yet He is in the full vigour of his life

and the full stress of his work, that He can speak of it almost playfully, half hiding and half revealing it in the simple pretty parable of the Lamp. *He* is the Light of the world, the great Lamp of life. Men may, and will, try to hide the Lamp which God has kindled for their guidance and salvation in the "crypt" of death, under the "bushel" of an extinguished life; but God will none the less lift it to the "lampstand," shining on which it will give light both to all who are in the house and to all who may come into it. Yet, even then, when the Lamp is on the stand, when the Sun has risen into the sky, when the Divine Life reappears from and dissipates the night of death, only those will be able to see and to walk in its light whose eyes have been exercised and trained to discern the true Lord and Ruler of men; and the more wisely exercised, the more finely trained their eyes have been, the more will they see in Him, the more fully will they behold and reflect his glory.

So that here we have a second meaning thrown into our Parable by its context; and that meaning nothing less than one of those prophecies of things to come of which Christ uttered so many, though we take so little note of them and often fail to draw from them a confirmation of our faith. For, surely, we might reasonably and fairly argue that, if Christ had a more than mortal insight into the years to be, a fact which no Criticism can ever shake, He who confessedly had more than mortal insight may well have had also a more than mortal power.

So much as this is clear, I apprehend, and there is no difficulty in grasping these general meanings of the passage. It is, I suspect, when we enter into its details that the difficulty begins; when, for example, we read that the lamp of the body is the eye, and the brief dissertation that follows on the states of darkness and of light into which we drift according as the eye is healthy or diseased. And yet even

the meaning of these details is clear enough so soon as we seize the clue. For even if we confine our thoughts to the natural eye, is not the eye the lamp of the whole body? Do not the feet walk by it, and the hands work by it? May not the eye be impaired by disease, or by structural and inherited defects? And if the eye be injured, so that we cannot see, or cannot see clearly, or our power of vision is suddenly and largely reduced, is not the whole body cramped through all forms of its activity, even if it be not reduced to a state of trembling helplessness? May not those who are smitten with blindness well complain, with Milton's Samson, that, for them, "light, the prime work of God," is extinguished, "and all her various objects of delight annulled?" May they not well complain that they, "dark in light," are exposed

"To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,
Within doors or without, still as a fool
In power of others, never in their own;"

and even reasonably urge that "light so necessary is to life" as to be "almost life itself"?

On the other hand, may not even the blind be so trained, or so train and carry themselves as that, in the case of Mr. Fawcett, for instance, half the deprivations of blindness are annulled for them, and they can "see," as they call it, almost as well as if they had eyes? Where the bodily vision is impaired or defective, may it not be so cultivated and disciplined as to grow stronger and keener, and even the colour-blind *learn* to distinguish colours? Yes, even the most subtle and unsuspected defects may be discovered, allowed for, repaired. Thus, for example, when a novice is introduced into an astronomical observatory in which he is to be an assistant, it is almost invariably found that he sees a little more quickly, or a little more slowly, than an average observer would see. This little more or little less, this departure from the

standard on either side, is called his "personal equation," and is allowed for in all the calculations which are based on observations made by him. And this personal equation may depend on the structure of his eye or brain, or on his general bodily health, or on his having been used to observe things accurately or not used. It varies from year to year; but, as a rule, it is corrected in proportion as the eye grows healthy through an improvement in his general health, or in proportion as the eye is trained and accustomed to accurate and delicate work.

It would be easy to multiply facts such as these; but even these will go far to explain the sequence of thought in this mystical looking passage.

After referring to Himself as the Light and Life of men, our Lord goes on to say that, for the due apprehension of light, a corresponding and appropriate organism is required. This organ is the eye. The eye, which receives light for the whole body, gives light to the whole body, the light in which all its activities are carried on, and may therefore be called "the lamp" of the body. But the amount of light received and distributed depends on the power and accuracy of the eye that receives it. The organ may be diseased; it may prevent the access of the light, or pervert it, so that we do not see things as they are, or even in extreme cases do not see them at all. If this solitary lamp be put out, how profound must be the darkness in which we walk! If it be obscured or distorted, how radical and misleading must be the errors into which it betrays us! It is of the last importance, therefore, that we should keep the one organ which receives and imparts light, the light of all our seeing, all our working, all our progress, in a healthy condition. It is of the gravest moment that we should seek to remedy and correct every defect in it; that we should raise it to its highest power, and train it to the most accurate and delicate discriminations. No lamp is

kindled that it may be hid, hid wholly, as in "a cellar" beneath the room we occupy, or hid partially, as under "a couch" in the room; and least of all "the lamp of the body," which alone makes all other light visible to us and useful.

That is quite plain and clear, I think; but, of course, in all this we have been dealing only with the *form* of the passage, only with its outside of parable. For, while speaking of the eye of the body, it is obvious that it was the eye of the soul which our Lord had in view. The spiritual part in us has its perceptive faculty as well as the physical part; and it is even more important that the spiritual lamp should be lifted to its due place, and kept burning brightly, than that the physical lamp should be placed on the lamp-stand, and not hid in a crypt or under a bushel.

If, then, we turn from the form of the passage to its *substance*, what is it that our Lord is teaching us in these words? I take Him to teach that a healthy, trained, unprejudiced understanding is required for the due apprehension and appreciation of spiritual or religious truth; and that the health and power of the understanding, by which we both receive and impart the truth, depends mainly on the due placing and balance of the affections by which we are animated and impelled. Nay, more, I take Him to mean that, in proportion as this inward perception and love of the truth grows pure and strong within us, our whole outward life will reflect and betray the power of that truth; that as the inward light waxes clear and pure, it will penetrate and irradiate all our external actions, till it shines through and transfigures the whole man.

Remember, it is of the capacity for interpreting the signs of a Divine presence and activity that Christ is speaking. He Himself, He says, is the greatest of all signs that God is with men. If the Jews had not been wholly blind—blinder than the Gentiles who "came from the uttermost parts of

the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon," or who listened and "repented at the preaching of Jonah," they *must* have recognized the presence, the wisdom, and the righteousness of God *in Him*. That they did not recognize it was a sufficient and damning proof that their faculty of spiritual perception, their power to receive and radiate the light of truth, was corrupted, distorted, diseased.

Whence, then, did the disease which impaired, or even annulled, their power of true intellectual perception spring? It sprang, as we may infer from St. Matthew's report of this passage (Chap. vi. Verses 22, 23), from the evil and perverted affections of their heart. For St. Matthew reports Christ as teaching men that "where their treasure is there *their heart* will be also;" and, then, as going on to say: "*and the lamp of the body is the eye; if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.*" And from the connection in which the words stand, it is clear He means to suggest that the eye of the soul is affected by the condition of the heart; that our affections limit and determine our perceptions; that men fail to see what they do not want to see, and are able to see what they care to see, what they are looking for because they love it.

Even as a general truth this thought is confirmed by our common experience; for we all know that men are slow to see what they are reluctant to see; that they may even blind themselves, at least for a time, to truths which condemn courses of action on which they are strongly bent. But it is the special application of this general truth which Christ had in view that we must bear in mind. And this special application was that, *when God is revealing Himself to men*, whether in the wisdom of the wise or the reproofs of the holy, or even in the perfect wisdom and unblemished holiness of the Son of Man, this power of receiving and reflecting the light of that revelation depends mainly on

their willingness to receive it, on their freedom from the passions and affections which prejudice the mind against the truth of God, which lead them to hate and resent the light that condemns them.

Now is not *that* true—true to our experience, true to the experience of every man and every day? If we take the noblest forms of spiritual truth to men who are plunged in a sensual sloth, or the clearest manifestation of an eternal reality to men who are living only for the things of time, or the most perfect and charming exhibition of righteousness to men devoted to aims which can only be reached unrighteously, or a life through which there shines a love stronger than death to men to whom their own private and selfish ends are of paramount interest and importance, can *they* recognize and respond to the beauty, to the truth and the irresistible attractiveness of the truth, to the righteousness, the life, the love we place before them? Will they see *God* in it, or a manifestation of the supreme good, a disclosure of the true ideal and the true aims of human life? Will they not, rather, blink before the momentary irradiation, close their eyes to it, return to the dark and tortuous paths in which we found them walking, and perhaps even turn again and rend us for having disturbed them in their sordid pursuits even for an instant? Cannot even *good* men close their eyes to the facts and discoveries of science, if they do not want to see them, if they fear that to receive them would be to disturb the accepted and comfortable beliefs in which they have been cradled? Cannot even men of science close their eyes to the evidences of a moral and immortal spirit in man, or to the signs which indicate the presence and activity of God, whether in Nature or in History, if they are bent on reducing all the phenomena of the universe under their own materialistic conceptions of order and law? “The eye sees only what it brings in itself the power to see;” and its

power of seeing depends on the aims men cherish, on the bents they have taken.

Almost every sensitive and thoughtful man, even though he have no formulated religion, is conscious, at the lowest, of a Presence that besets him behind and before, which he cannot evade, whether his thoughts and aims soar to heaven or sink to hell; a Power, a Spirit, behind Nature, behind his own consciousness even, which is ever giving new meaning and scope to his thoughts, new direction to his aims, new depth to his hopes, new terror to his sins. We are all haunted, at times, by that sense of an unseen but all-encompassing Presence which the ancient Psalmist of Israel has so pathetically rendered for us (Psalm cxxxix.). And yet we are all conscious also that at times this Power retires from us, so to speak, leaves us to choose our own course and take our own way, and watches to see what we will do when we are thus left free, when the Divine hand is lifted from us. And who does not know that at such times—yes, and at all times—we may disregard that Presence, harden ourselves against that all-encompassing Power, close our eyes against a light too great and pure and piercing for our weak sin-burdened hearts, until we become blind to it, or plunge into open rebellion against it?

Now this constant and natural revelation of God both takes many forms and is supplemented in many ways. In how many ways, indeed, is God ever seeking to disclose Himself unto us, to come into vital and quickening contact with some part of our manifold nature! It is not merely that He wants us to know Him and believe some facts or truths about Him; He wants that we should know *Him*, wants to give *Himself* to us, and not mere notions and beliefs about Himself. By the slow and gradual processes of his providence, by the discipline of sorrow and of joy, by the experience and examples of our immediate neighbours, by inspirations addressed to the seeking intellect of

the philosopher, to the yearning imagination of the poet, to the common reason and conscience of all men; by the biographies He has moved holy men to indite, by writing out the history of one nation in full with a constant eye to its relation to truth and righteousness; and, above all, by the incarnation of all truth and righteousness and love in the perfect life of the Perfect Man, He has endeavoured to penetrate the mists that dim our vision of Him, to draw the veil and to purge away the disease which impairs or obstructs our view of Him.

In all these ways, and in many more, God is *seeking* us, seeking to shew and to impart Himself to us. There is no lack of light. From a thousand different centres the primal and eternal Light is shining all around us. What we lack, if as yet we do not see God, is not light to see Him by, but an eye to see Him with. And if the eye is blind, so that it cannot see Him, or distorted and diseased, so that we do not see Him as He is, *that* is because our hearts are preoccupied, and so preoccupied with other affections and pursuits that we do not care to see Him, will not be at the trouble to lift our eyes to heaven and open them on the light. Many a man sings—

“Teach me my God and King,
In all things Thee to see;
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee;”

who would, nevertheless, be more than a little startled were he to see God by his own fireside, or in his own office or factory, where nevertheless God as surely *is*, and is revealing Himself, as in any temple or church; and might be not a little disgusted even were he compelled to do *as for God* what he does in the shop or amid the excitements of a contested election!

And here, as every man's own heart will begin to rebuke him, I need add no more except only this: That it is by our

defective vision of God's universal presence and activity that we fall short of our proper and highest blessedness. There is a wonderful splendour in the words with which our Lord closes this remarkable passage. He would have us use and train the eye of the soul, keep the lamp always on the stand, because, in proportion as we cherish this inward light, "all things will become full of light" for us, and we ourselves shall be transfigured by the power of the light shining from within outwards; because our whole nature will thus become transparent to and irradiated with a heavenly glory. For it is, He says, as we kindle and tend this lamp of the soul that our whole nature grows clear, pure, transparent, till at last we stand full in "the bright shining" of the sun, the very lamp of heaven. And what is all this but saying in a more nobly poetic way that we are to let our inward light prove and approve itself by our "good works" (St. Matt. v. 16), that men, seeing our good deeds, may glorify our Father who is in heaven by a life as bright and good as our own?

Let us, then, open our eyes to the light, *i.e.*, open our hearts to the God who is always seeking us and disclosing Himself to us; let us suffer the sacred influence we receive from Him to radiate, to shine forth on our fellows through the good deeds of a life at one with his will; and in the end we shall become radiant with God, transparent to God; his rays will shine clean through us, through every part of our nature; we shall not only see Him, but share in the full splendour of his everlasting glory.

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