

be able to devote itself without distraction to the ever-broadening task of the conquest of the world for God. Blessed is he that followeth after purity, not merely for his personal salvation, but for the share that is given him in the travail of Christ's soul.

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*OUR LORD'S FIRST APPEARANCE AT THE  
FEAST OF TABERNACLES.*

(JOHN VII. 11-29.)

IN the record which St. John has preserved of our Lord's public teachings at Jerusalem we find scarcely any of His long or connected discourses, but rather such conversational discussions as serve to bring out His relations to the several parties into which the people were divided. It is a report of free and casual talk which the fourth gospel gives us, not a reproduction of formal instruction. The object is, not so much to tell us what Jesus preached, as to let us see how Jesus' preaching told on this or that section of His countrymen—how they received it, and what they did in consequence of it. In this way the evangelist works out, with something like dramatic skill, the steps of that tremendous tragedy. With sustained though simple power the development of Jewish enmity is traced, and the deepening of the plot around the Christ. Each incident helps on the action; priests and people, friend and traitor, Caiaphas and Nicodemus, all play their several parts before us, till in Pilate's hall and on Golgotha the interest culminates and the tragedy is consummated.

In the passage now before us, the purpose of the evangelist seems to be to bring out the relation of parties to Jesus at the opening of a new chapter in the history, and to do

this in connexion with the impression made by His sudden appearance in the temple during the week of the Feast of Tabernacles. For this end, he first prepares us by disclosing in what state of mind different sections of the festival crowd expected our Lord's arrival. Then, bringing the Lord abruptly on the scene, he relates, not His opening address itself, but some conversation which grew out of it with two classes of His audience in the hearing of the rest. Following this order, we have to inquire into the elements of which that throng of holiday-keepers was composed which filled the temple courts, when suddenly the Prophet of Galilee broke into the midst of them.

1. Foremost in influence, though smallest in numbers, was that faction of official men whom St. John, himself a Galilæan, constantly calls "the Judæans" or "the Jews." As if the bigotry and fanatical orthodoxy which distinguished the metropolitan province from the ruder north had been in them concentrated, he gives them as a party this somewhat vague name. They are to be distinguished both from "the people," or the crowd of miscellaneous pilgrims, and from the citizens, or the general population of Jerusalem. So far as can be gathered, the faction of "the Jews" included a large majority of the Sanhedrim, and embraced therefore the leading rabbis and priests, both of the Sadducean and of the Pharisaic side of religious opinion. It comprised, in other words, the bulk of those whom the nation was accustomed to revere, whether for learning or office, for the sanctity of their class or the weight of their personal character. It is absolutely necessary for the understanding of our Lord's position to remember this. It is not enough to say that these men were prejudiced, dishonest, or fanatical: let it be taken into account that they represented the ancestral faith, led the nation's worship, and ruled, by a quite legitimate claim, the opinions of the people. It could be no light thing for a solitary

and unlettered provincial to array Himself against such a combination as that.

Let us mark exactly in what relation our Lord stood to this Jewish faction at the date before us. Judicially, He was as yet uncondemned. The Sanhedrim had taken no action against Him; it had not even sat in judgment upon His claims. Only the faction—composed of the very men who formed the bulk of the great council—had already taken decided action. In their individual capacity, or as members of a party, they had as good as extra-judicially condemned Him. They had made no secret of their opinion, that the cure of the Bethesda cripple months before constituted a breach of the Sabbath law, and therefore a capital offence. Ever since then they had been stirring factious opposition against Jesus, and endeavouring to entangle Him in their toils. Even now, during the first two or three days of this feast, they searched for Him among the arrivals from Galilee, and began to grow uneasy lest He should again, by absenting Himself, escape the hands of the law. Thus they were “going about to kill” Him.

2. Next, John distinguishes among the crowd (ver. 25) a number of citizens, Jerusalemites, privy to the designs of the rulers and sympathising with them. Public opinion among the populace of a small capital city like Jerusalem is always coloured very strongly by the sentiments of those in high position to whom the common people look up. No one will wonder therefore to find these ignorant citizens echoing the views of the faction, and hasty even to outrun their betters in persecuting zeal.

3. Far more numerous than either of these classes was the mixed throng of strangers from the provinces who had come to the feast. This part of the audience, disunited and undecided, John terms “the crowd,” or the multitudes (a term mistranslated in the Authorized Version “the people”). Among them there was much “murmuring,”

much underground whispering and canvassing of opinions. Some were inclined to think well of Jesus; others leant to the side of the authorities; probably the majority wavered. As circumstances seemed to favour either party, we hear now the partisans of Jesus and now His enemies loud in the assertion of their respective views. Before Jesus came to the feast, of course His enemies were in the ascendant. The Jews had it all their own way. Those in the crowd who followed the cue of the authorities were bold and open-mouthed with the party cry, "He is a deceiver of the people," an impostor playing on the credulity of the country people, and exciting vague hopes which He cannot gratify. His few well-wishers dared to say nothing better for Him than that, right or wrong, He was surely honest and earnest, "a good man": an enthusiast possibly, but, at least, no knave.

Such was the motley yet, on the whole, unpromising gathering which was at its height when "Jesus went up into the temple, and taught." Little has ever been said, so far as I know, on the eloquence of the Lord Jesus in His public discourses. But here at least this unrecorded sermon seems to have broken on that hostile audience with extraordinary effect, especially on those who were best able to appreciate—on "the Jews," I mean, the scholarly party. The secret of its effect on them one can readily surmise. The skill and insight with which He lit up old dark Scriptures, the fervour of sacred oratory with which He pressed home the truth, the majesty of His self-assertion, and the power, grander than any bestowed by human rhetoric, with which He spoke, these things, in spite of prejudice and His provincial accent, filled the circle of accomplished doctors with admiration. We see them, as His last sentences died among the corridors, look at each other, wondering and saying, "How knoweth this Man letters, having never learned?" There is more than surprise

in this criticism of the rabbis. Is there not a tinge of displeasure? The privilege of publicly expounding the Old Testament books was in their hands. They formed a learned guild, into the immunities of which no man could pass till he had "learned letters," that is to say, studied the literature which for centuries had been gathering round the sacred text. Men are so much led by unacknowledged feelings of this petty sort, that I suspect professional jealousy of an untaught layman, who had passed through no rabbinical college, but presumed, untrained and unlicensed, to trench on their monopoly, had really a good deal to do with their opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, to do them justice, was there not at first blush some unlikelihood that a poor man without study should know what the nation's profoundest scholars had sought for centuries in vain? Undoubtedly; if the doctrine of Jesus were a fruit of research or meditation, a theory or a discovery wrung by scientific processes from data, or by the scholarly interpretation of sacred documents. Their criticism took that for granted. Thence grew the wonder. But to know God's truth one does not need to be deep in human lore. It is a learning of the heart. There are better schools for this than the school of Gamaliel. There have been Israelites in elder days who were herdmen like David and Amos, yet saw very deep into eternal truth and had eyes for the visions of God. What if this carpenter's Son has communed with Jehovah amid the silence of Nazareth's hills, and seen with the eyes of a pure heart what never yet was opened to scholarly rabbi from dusty parchments? Nay, what if this Man be right when He claims a loftier origin—be born and taught and sent of Jehovah the eternal to reveal His truth to men?

The assertion of this explanation of what surprised the doctors is, of course, the first thing we naturally find in the reply of Jesus. "*My doctrine is not Mine, not of My*

making or discovery ; if it were, it would have no worth : *but got from above—His who sent Me.*” Nor need it seem strange that the possession of Divine truth should be separated in His case from a purely intellectual or professional culture, since it is a possession given only to pure hearts. It hangs, in fact, on a moral, not on an intellectual condition. “He that will do the will of God, he shall know.” This axiom is at first introduced for an apologetic, it is then turned to a polemical, use. With that manysidedness of application which marks our Lord’s words, He uses this principle to defend Himself, and then directs it against the rabbis. The relation of spiritual knowledge to spiritual honesty may explain why the Holy Child was wiser than the learned ; it will also show why the learned reject the wisdom of the Child. For here are verily not one but two marvels, whereof the one is uttered in the query of the Jews ; and the other is to be understood out of it. “How (asked they) should this untaught Man from Galilee know Divine letters ?” Answer : Because “He hath a will to do His Father’s will ; therefore He knoweth of the doctrine.” But how comes it to pass that learned theologians and Bible students and expounders should not know the doctrine to be Divine, even when it is plainly preached ? Answer : “Because they have no will to do the will of God.” To this second (this unasked) question, He chiefly bends His reply.

Taken in its whole extent (down to ver. 24), His demonstration covers two points. First, He lays down the principles of spiritual discernment, the conditions under which Divine truth will be recognised as Divine when spoken by a human messenger. These conditions are two : one respects the hearer of the message ; and one the speaker of it. To the recognition of God’s message, there needs (1) in the hearer, moral honesty, or a willingness to do the will of God when known ; there needs (2) in the speaker,

moral honesty again, in the form this time of absolute, unselfish devotion to the cause of Him who sent him.

*First*, the hearer must be willing to do the duty which arises out of the truth taught. For all new truths of God implicate also the will of God; belief of the truth issues in obedience to the will; and if I am not willing to obey, I am not able to believe. Instinctively I hate the light so long as I love the sin which the light rebukes or shun the duty which the light discovers. It cuts very deep, this; it traces back unbelief to its root. It lies in the will, the disordered, dishonest, ungodly will. Our Lord does not say, "If any man does God's will, he shall know": alas! it seldom comes the length of doing; but He says, tenderly and profoundly, "If any man wishes to do"—is seriously and honestly set on doing what God wishes—that man's moral nature has a clear single eye, capable of vision; and "he shall know the doctrine."

But, *second*, the speaker on his part must authenticate his mission from God by thorough consecration to it, and by the moral simplicity or straightforwardness which this imparts. A man who affects to have a message to me from God, yet can abuse such a claim for his own interest, for greed or pride or power, to enrich or exalt or glorify himself, that man gives me in his very life the evidence that no truth of God has really seized or mastered him. He has been sent on no errand from the Eternal. Where both conditions meet, a true speaker to true hearers, there God's truth approves itself. In the present case, there was no defect in the Speaker. This Messenger was true, without unrighteousness; He sought His Father's glory. That the defect lay with the hearers, and wherein that defect appeared, formed the second half of Jesus' unanswerable demonstration.

Proof that they were not willing to do the will of God:  
"Did not Moses give you the law? so that you are not

ignorant of God's will, but have it in purest form. Had you kept or tried to keep the Law of the Ten Words, you would have known of My doctrine that it is not Mine. *But none of you keepeth the law*"; and a flagrant instance lay to hand, to which He was fast leading them. So, in His outspoken, conscience-cleaving way, He breaks out, "*Why go ye about to kill Me?*" At this point He was interrupted by some bystanders, who, being strangers, knew nothing about the plots of the faction against His life, and took these for wild and crazed words. Jesus took no notice of the interruption, because the men He was addressing knew in their own conscience what He meant. They understood Him to refer to the old affair of the Bethesda cure, at which the thought first arose in them of cutting Him off. And if they were cloaking murderous hate beneath a show of zeal for the broken Sabbath—thinking to kill judicially and with form of law—He will proceed to strip off this cloak also from them. "The Sabbath law is not broken when by priestly practice and rabbinic approval an infant of eight days old is circumcised on that day, for it yields to the higher dignity and validity of that venerable sacrament. What I have done is better still and higher than circumcision, since to betoken on the flesh of a babe the cutting off of inborn impurity is not so great a work as to restore the crippled frame of a man to soundness, and a sinful soul to God. 'I have made the man every whit whole! Why are ye angry with Me?'" Thus He has explained their unbelief, uncloaked their malice, convicted them of inconsistent and unrighteous judgment, and left them silenced, scorched, and helpless: *them*, the rulers and rabbis and great ones of the land; He, the poor, unlettered Nazarene!

As Jesus lingered in the temple, He overheard eager talk among the people. There were some there who wondered at the inaction of the official party. A knot of Jerusalem citizens, who had known how anxious the rulers

were to apprehend Jesus, heard Him braving these rulers by retorting on them a charge of intended murder, and saw Him pass unmolested through the public courts. Too rude themselves to feel the power of holy truth from holy lips, they could not understand this forbearance. "Is it possible (they began to say) that the rulers have changed their mind? Have they come to know that, after all, He is what He calls Himself, the Christ of God?" So speaking among themselves, I find a touch of mockery in the tone; only, lest any overhearing should misunderstand, they hasten to protest that they are very far from seriously thinking He can be the Christ. Let no one suspect them of heretical leanings. Nay, though even the rulers be imposed upon, they know better. This boast of superior information with which the conceited citizens carried off their contemptuous unbelief in the hearing of simple pilgrims from the country becomes positively ludicrous when we hear the rest. Among the many rumours about the Christ which, in the lack of sound scriptural knowledge, were then current in Judæa, this was one: "When Messiah comes, no man is to know whence he is"; a supernatural visitor, he will be without father or mother, appearing of a sudden in glory, none knows whence or how. On the strength of this vulgar blunder, these would-be-wise citizens rejected Jesus. They shared no doubt the usual mistake of the time, that Jesus was a Galilæan. They thought they knew whence He was: they could see plainly that He was not the Christ.

With learned conceit in the rulers Jesus had entered into argument, aiming to reach the conscience through a keen, close demonstration of their moral unfitness to be judges. With the ignorant conceit of the citizens it was in vain to argue. Jesus sought to reach them by another way. Sometimes the vulgar may be best disarmed by satire; again, where logic fails, sheer strength of testimony will often

carry conviction. Raising His voice therefore to gain a hearing over their disjointed talk, this wise winner of souls blent grave irony with sublime self-assertion in His words. They were boasting of what they knew, though blundering at every step; and Jesus lays emphasis on the word as He concedes the boast. "Yes, ye know Me, and again ye know whence I come: and yet, after all, ye do *not* know Him whom *I know*." More or less correctly, they did know from what mechanic family He was sprung after the flesh. But the higher source whence He came, His spiritual mission from the Father, they could not know, for the Father Himself they knew not. Their conceit of half-knowledge about His earthly origin blinded them to His birth from heaven. Their special ignorance of Jehovah blinded them to Jehovah's Messenger. Against their (fancied) knowledge of His mean descent and human parentage, He puts His own knowledge of the heavenly Father, and His coming forth from Him; against their light, rude, scoffing boast, His own deep, earnest testimony to Himself.

It was in vain to argue; but a simple assertion of what He felt and knew down in His own heart, delivered in touched and softened tones, might yet tell upon the crowd. "I am not come of Myself: but He that sent Me is true, whom ye know not. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He hath sent Me." Never could lips but His own use such words; clearer, grander never fell from His. *Knowledge*, absolute, personal, unique, of the eternal God as His Father, resting on such a twofold relation to Him as this: the relation, first, of eternal fellowship past, *I am from Him*; and the relation, secondly, of special mission into the world now, *He hath sent Me*. The mysterious consciousness of Jesus stretched back into pre-existence and up into Divine relations. He remembered glory before the world was; and in His weakness of manhood could identify His Judæan life with that long past existence in the solitude of

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the Godhead. How far down does this permit us to see into the secret life of Jesus, the unspoken memories that filled His loneliness and linked the weary present, passed amid the contradiction of sinners, to that unforgotten and stupendous past! Within the daily burdened life which men saw, we are to detect a secret sense of Godhood, a sweet oneness with the Father retained unbroken, whereby His soul is nourished all through this desert! And the line that links the two and makes the life that now is, with all its contrasts, an intelligible continuation of His personal experience, what is it but this, "He hath sent Me"?

There is nothing here, I repeat, but assertion. It is self-witness, and nothing more. Against the anger or the arguments of men, learned and unlearned, He could still oppose at worst this invincible certainty of His own consciousness, this knowledge of which He was as sure as of existence. It was the last resource always left Him, to utter this as He does here, and fling it with the momentum of a life and death truth upon the souls of men. "I know Him: for I am come from beside Him, and He did send Me."

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