

THE FIRST MIRACLE.

It is a true saying of Renan that "the essential condition of the creations of art is to form a system, of which all the parts correspond and have mutual relations. In histories of this kind, the grand sign of having found the truth is to have contrived to combine the accounts in a manner which forms a narrative consistent, credible, where nothing jars" (*Vie de J., Introduction ci.*). Few English thinkers, at all events, will now pretend that Renan has himself done this; while, on the other hand, nothing is more impressive than the harmony of tone and temper which pervades the Gospels, taken frankly and as we find them.

The person who speaks in parts which are almost universally accepted, is one who seems to require the miracles in order to become intelligible. The Thaumaturgist acts and speaks, most exactly, as the beautiful Teacher could not have failed to do, on the hypothesis that He possessed miraculous power. Legend and reminiscence have somehow "contrived to combine the accounts" precisely as the French artist requires, although he has not been able himself to meet his own requirement.

Now this is emphatically true of the opening of the ministry of Jesus. In all the Gospels we find Him full of benign and suave attractiveness. The people marvel at His gracious words. He is in the synagogue, or by the sea, or on grassy slopes: He sits down among His followers and utters a seven-fold benediction: He astonishes a Samaritan and a woman by asking a courtesy from her. Explain the miraculous draught, as Keim hints, by suggesting that a shoal of fish was visible from where He stood, or the feeding of the multitudes, like Ewald, by supposing that His influence led the provident to share their supply with the hungry: yet you do not succeed in obliterating

from the record the character of precisely such a person as would naturally perform a work at a marriage feast. The disputed marvel is harmonious with the admitted temperament, which loves in its parables to speak of a great feast, of a marriage supper, of oxen and fatlings, of the fatted calf, of music and dancing.

Renan, however, tells us that Jesus, despite His profound originality, was, at least for some weeks, a copyist of John the Baptist. "The superiority of John was too great for Him, still little known, to dream of disputing it. He was quite content to grow up under his shadow, and felt Himself compelled, if He would gain the crowd, to use the external means which had led him to so amazing a success" (pp. 112, 113).

But the Baptist was an ascetic. His food was coarse. His clothing was rude. He had lived far from society, "in the deserts," until publicity was forced on him by his vocation, and even then he scarcely crossed the stream which bounded the settled land. The people "went out" unto him.

It is not difficult to judge whether the notion that Jesus copied his methods is more artistic in its harmony with the context, than the story of His behaviour at a wedding feast. For Renan exhibits Jesus, immediately before His baptism, endowed with a tenderness of heart which transformed itself into infinite sweetness, vague poesy, universal charm, (whatever these phrases may definitely mean) as exhaling from His person such a fascination that His acquaintances no longer recognised Him, and as ready to bring Paradise to earth, if only His notions had not been chimerical (pp. 76-84). Not long after His baptism, again, Renan dwells upon His profound affection, His loving manners, His abode in the house with Peter and Peter's family,—upon the mode of life which was a perpetual charm, upon a scandal which He caused by accepting a dinner from Levi, and

several times upon His smile and His infinite charm (156, 158, 162, 168, 169).

Violently wedged in between two periods of this character, a time when Jesus condescended to copy a rugged Baptist, whom Renan compares to a Hindoo Zogi beside the Ganges, does not help to make a narrative consistent, credible, where nothing jars.

But when a little that is rather Parisian than Galilean has been allowed to evaporate from these descriptions, they bear a strong witness in favour of our own Jesus, the Jesus who came almost straight from the wilderness of temptation to share a rustic festival, and to repair the bankruptcy of its supplies.

We are intended to observe the period at which this event occurred. It was the beginning of miracles. The days are carefully reckoned since He won His first disciples. Renan's notion of His subjection to the spirit of the Baptist is highly suggestive, and even instructive, for it reminds us that all His first disciples had been under that influence, and the most powerful of them had apparently been among John's stated followers. They came to Jesus from that school, expecting no doubt to find its methods and principles carried to a greater height of perfection. But He at once conveyed them to a wedding. The whole tone of their lives was changed. They must have noticed also that although the week of feasting had begun (for this is the natural and simple meaning of the statement that the mother of Jesus was already there), and although it soon became clear that the supplies were scanty, yet the arrival of Jesus was very welcome to these humble folk who knew Him; "both Jesus was bidden and His disciples to the marriage feast."¹

¹ "The use of the singular (*ἐκλήθη*) implies that they were invited for His sake, not He for theirs."—Farrar, *Life*, chap. xi. At least, it refutes the ancient notion that Nathaniel may have been the paranymph.

The deliberate, particularizing minuteness of all this, regarded as coming from the Apostle John, is a natural consequence of the surprise and interest with which he found himself just then in such a place.

To us, therefore, it suggests the difference between two kinds of piety—the ascetic and the distinctively Christian.

The Baptist represents all who strive to overcome the world by avoiding, not by converting it. He was the greatest outside the kingdom, the ripest fruit of that ancient system which bade Israel dwell alone among the nations. All the ceremonial restrictions which isolated his race, lest they should be infected by the paganism which they were unable to leaven for God, were carried to the uttermost in his hermit-like seclusion. And we must not deny that such piety is often real and earnest. It is better to enter into life maimed than, for lack of renunciation, to be cast into hell fire. But maimness is not the ideal of life, and the lonely Baptist, in his hair-cloth, “neither eating nor drinking,” has need to be baptized by the wearer of the seamless robe, who came, as He fearlessly avowed, “both eating and drinking.” Thus, from the very first, the disciples of Jesus were encouraged to mingle boldly in the social life of their time. It was natural therefore that St. Paul should instruct his Corinthian converts, when bidden by an unbeliever to a feast, that they were free to go, and only bound to behave as Christians there, walking charitably. The Church cannot be a conservatory of heavy perfumes and stifling sweetness, since the rushing wind of heaven, blowing over great spaces, broad and free, is the chosen type of the spirit of Jesus. We recognise it in this opening narrative. We find it again in the parable of the leaven which is to leaven all the lump, in the rebuke of that slothful servant who hid his talent in a napkin, and in all the reproaches levelled at Him who ate and drank with publicans and sinners.

Scepticism, equally with the Church, recognises the spirit of Jesus in the story, but it misuses the recognition. Keim acknowledges its verisimilitude: "According to the earlier Gospels, Jesus had certainly spoken words appropriate to this narrative. . . . 'Can the children of the bride-chamber fast as long as the bridegroom is with them?' And 'new wine is not put into old wine-skins.' . . . From this, and from the actual joyous and friendly feasts which Jesus held . . . could easily be derived the picture of a wedding festival at which Jesus was the bringer of joy" (iv. 208).

And Schenkel tells us that in its essential features it is certainly not an invention and was probably witnessed by John (p. 84.)

It must be owned, that such controversialists are hard to deal with. If the miracles were stern, and the ordinary life festive, we should be told that they were inconsistent. But when Jesus uses language harmonious with the record of His actions, we are told that the former is the origin of the latter, and not a thought is vouchsafed to the problem suggested by such harmonies, extending over such various manifestations of character.

Much ingenuity has been spent upon the question, What did Mary expect from Jesus when she said, They have no wine? Perhaps she herself could not have answered so definitely as many who have spoken for her. And at least we may be certain that hers was not the admirably Calvinistic notion of Calvin, that attention might be diverted by the preaching of a sermon. What is plain is that she looked to Jesus for relief, either by some happy device or else some manifestation of His hitherto latent power. But which was it? For half a lifetime she had known the resources of an absolutely unclouded judgment, a perfectly developed faculty and an entirely unselfish heart. She had enjoyed the peace and trustfulness inspired by loving contact with an ideal life.

And it was inevitable that in every embarrassment she must have turned to Him. As we consider those sinless obscure years which are the pledge of His sympathy with all our obscure lives, the years which (like those of the best women in the aphorism) "have no history," we are assured of their lovingkindness, their universal sympathy. We know that they were not spent in dreamy reveries; for His teaching, so marvellously practical, His broad and general principles, which always go with such wonderful directness to the details of life, reveal His interests. Renan has ventured to assert that "He lived entirely in the supernatural," and that "it pleased Him to display, in His very infancy, a revolt against paternal authority" (*Vie de J.*, pp. 43, 44). But this is contradicted not only by the explicit assertion that "He was subject unto them," but also by all the events which throw light, directly or indirectly, upon the period of seclusion. Of these, the most obvious is the astonishment of His mother at having to seek for Him, upon whose discretion she had reckoned with such implicit confidence, though he was but a boy of twelve, and who was surprised in turn at her supposing that He could have idly wandered, or lingered anywhere but in His true Father's house. He was a child who might have been tracked by asking where the call of God had led Him. A second hint is the Baptist's avowal of his own profound inferiority, before any supernatural revelation had enforced it. A third indication may be found in the enthusiasm of those who knew His whole life, when all Nazareth bare Him witness, until exasperated by finding that special privileges were refused to them. Such another is surely here, in the instinctive appeal to Him, as to a long-tried helper, even before it was actually fitting that He should interfere. This inference from Mary's appeal is obvious.

But more than this is probable. She knew not only His readiness to help, but also that His hour of manifestation to

the world was at last come. Is it to be supposed that He had returned from the forty days of seclusion, and from the public witness of the Baptist, with a new unction on His brows, and five disciples following His steps, without awakening great hopes, most of all in the bosom of her who had so long guarded the mighty secret, keeping it and pondering it in her heart? It was impossible that Mary should not expect, now, at last, a renewal of the wonders of His infancy.

And the noblest and most unselfish woman could not fail to wish to direct their operation, so as to remove, unnoticed, the distress of her own friends.

But this was the very temptation which first of all assailed Jesus in the desert, namely, the use of His special gifts for merely private ends. Not to lift Himself above hunger, nor His own circle above inconvenience and discomfort, but to witness for God and the mission of His Christ to human souls, Jesus "came forth." Therefore His opportunity did not exactly coincide with the first apprehensions of dearth; His "hour" was not yet. And a certain sharpness of decision is always audible in His words, as often as what is private and individual seeks thus to modify His public action. In the remonstrance of Peter He heard the voice of Satan. When His mother and brethren would interrupt His teaching, He declared that the claim of His disciples lay as close to His heart; *they* were His nearest and dearest. It is now that the sword began to pierce Mary's gentle breast, since now first it became necessary to subordinate His natural affection to His vocation, a process which should increase in stringency, until, expiring upon the cross, He said to her who had dreamed such happy dreams, "Woman, behold thy Son!"

The epithet, Woman, used at the last as well as now, has no stain of the disrespect and harshness which it would imply from one of us to his mother.

It was thus that Jesus addressed Mary Magdalene, weeping beside His tomb. Thus, in the classics, persons of the highest rank are accosted. But, though disrespect is absent, a certain aloofness is undeniable; it is assuredly a different word from Mother, and it proves that the earthly tie should not control His official action, even on earth, although Mariolatry declares it to be predominant, even in heaven. "She was the mother," said St. Augustine, "of His flesh, His humanity, His weakness; . . . but the miracle which He was about to do, He was about to do as God, . . . and He did not recognise the human womb, saying in effect, "That in Me which works the miracle was not born of thee." The assertion of His independence is also clear in His words, "What have I to do with thee?" This phrase occurs elsewhere, not only where disrespect is out of the question, but even where superiority is conceded. "What have we to do with thee?" goes with the prayer of the demoniacs to be tormented not (Matt. viii. 29). And in the Old Testament, where it is not rare, the widow of Sarephath spoke thus to Elijah when her son died; and the king of Egypt to Josiah when dissuading him from hostilities (1 Kings xvii. 18; 2 Chron. xxxv. 21; LXX.).

Again, therefore, we find no disrespect, but a very distinct refusal to admit her to a directorship or partnership in His action; and the assertion that He must await another call than hers, and an "hour" that is all His own.

"Mine hour" is often taken to mean His supreme manifestation in death and resurrection, so that He said, This is no time for Me to manifest Myself. "Still He can and does give a picture and type of the manifestation of His glory," adds Luthardt, unconsciously condemning his own exposition. For John says, not that He gave some faint premonition, but that He manifested His very glory; that His hour, in this sense, did presently arrive. Besides, if the time of which He spoke was at a distance of years,

Mary was refused indeed, and could scarcely have proceeded to make arrangements for the expected help. This she did, and it is worthy of remark that the only recorded mandate of her, whom some exalt into a rival deity, is, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." Clearly she understood Him well. His "not yet" told her that His opportunity only awaited some further development, perhaps the very deficiency which she would fain avert, and the pressure of which is quite discernible in the instant bringing of the new supply to the president of the feast. The disciples, at least, would then be in a position to understand the "sign."

The cleansing of hands and vessels was very necessary at a Jewish feast (Mark vii. 3), and accordingly six large vessels were in the room, probably borrowed, and not exactly of the same size, but containing, at the lowest estimate of what is meant, from forty to fifty gallons, and at the largest more than twice as much. That they were "set there" explains how the disciples, with their attention fixed upon their Master, knew whence the wine was. They could not be mistaken; and the large quantity, and the nature of the vessels whence it was drawn, forbade any possibility of fraud.

Let it be observed that Jesus, who never gave luxuries of a kind unusual among His rustic followers, always bestows lavishly, fish that break the net, and again an hundred and fifty and three great fish, and when He gives bread more broken pieces are left over, prepared for distribution, than the loaves which He began to break. It is the manner of Him who crowns the year with His goodness, who fills the valleys with corn, who pours down blessings until there is not room to receive them. In this case timid moralists take fright; they raise prudent theories about the nature of this wine, without reflecting that the very qualifications they seek to insinuate are a censure on

the narrative for introducing no qualifications whatever, since whatever sophistications may be attempted with the Hebrew words for wine, the Greek word stands here unguarded, unashamed, the same as when Paul said, Be not drunken with wine. "It *must* have been unintoxicating wine," says the heedless theorist. But that is precisely the necessity which St. John omits to recognise; he leaves the question open, even though he is obliged to record the somewhat vulgar jest of the governor of the feast, about what is usual when men are tipsy.

Even Keim is not ashamed to swell the cry that this strong phrase (*ὄταν μεθυσθῶσι*) implied excess on the actual occasion. As if the governor of the feast could possibly assert that the guests were intoxicated, a misfortune which would reflect shame most of all upon himself, whose duty was to check any individual who showed the least disposition to exceed. The exaggerated expression is more probably a bucolic attempt to show courtesy by insinuating (without direct mention of so delicate a matter) that there had never been any lack at all; plenty had been given already. But in any light, it ill supports the theory that at the feast which Jesus attended there was only non-intoxicating wine.

The anxious moralist would be much more successful if he were content to observe that circumstances are now entirely altered; that the invention of distilled liquors has revolutionized both the nature of the evil and the stringency of the remedies demanded; that Jesus is never recorded to have needed to rebuke a drunkard; that in the Old Testament wine is mentioned sometimes kindly, sometimes bitterly, according to contemporary social usages,¹ and that

¹ So that the very "wine" which Melchizedek gave to Abraham became "a mocker," and the "strong drink" which was poured upon the altar of God was "raging" and they were denounced as such by inspiration to the children of a more corrupt generation (Gen. xiv. 18; Lev. xxviii. 7; Prov. xx. 1).

our Lord enjoined all that reasonable abstainers need for their justification when He ordered that what offended, even if it were dear and useful as a member of the body, should be cut off and cast away.

This miracle stands admirably at the threshold of our Saviour's ministry, though Keim and others have laboured to remove it to a later period, for the more convenience of explaining it away. The character of it is still unobtrusive, and almost domestic, so that the Gospels of the public ministry did not record it, nor could they rightly have done so. It is in fact transitional, and is redeemed from the suspicion of being merely private, as Mary would fain have made it, by the recorded effect on the disciples, whom it prepared to follow, with added confidence, His stormy and persecuted course. Here they saw His power working in a direction the most unexpected, condescending and benevolent, very unlike the blood-splashed warrior with dyed garments whom they expected. He manifested forth His glory, says the same evangelist who had already recorded, of the Word made flesh, that He dwelt in a tent among us full of grace, and we beheld His glory.

When they looked back, they saw in this miracle also a glorious symbolism. The Jewish religion, and the domestic happiness of mankind, well typified by a marriage feast, what had come over both? Men's worship, men's daily life, alike required to be renovated, lifted above itself. To their longing, their aspiration, nay, their consciousness of what ought to be, the reality was as water unto wine. And Christ came to elevate and deepen both. He did not thrust old things aside, and substitute others altogether: He transformed, deepened, and elevated what was there. Alike in religion and in daily life—

“ 'Tis life, of which our veins are scant,
More life, and fuller, that we want.”

Now this beginning of the signs tells us, what He afterwards plainly said :

“I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly.”

G. A. CHADWICK.

*THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT.*

IV. ROMANS iii. 24-26.

IN earlier papers we have seen that each of the four Gospels represents Christ as deliberately purposing to go up to Jerusalem in order there to be slain by His enemies, and as teaching that His death was needful for man's salvation, and that it was made needful by man's sin. The same teaching we found re-echoed in the Book of Acts, and asserted in plain language in the Epistles of Peter and John, and in the book of Revelation. Wherein lay the need for this costly means of salvation, *i.e.* why God could not pardon sin apart from the death of Christ, we did not learn. For an answer to this pressing question, we turn now to the writings of the greatest of the apostles, to the epistles of St. Paul.

Among these epistles, that to the Romans claims our first attention. For the absence of any specific topic needing discussion, such as the various topics dealt with in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, left St. Paul free while writing it to give an orderly statement of the Gospel as he was accustomed to preach it in its various parts and as one organic whole. In it we shall find a full and clear account of the purpose and significance of the death of Christ, and of its relation to the good news of salvation announced by Him.