

It is surely our old friend opportunism, "the cult of the jumping cat."

To-day, when democracies govern, and yet our most urgent questions are of the rights and obligations of these same democracies, who shall strengthen our various leaders, and us who follow, to be just and calm and fearless, and to declare that majorities have their duties as well as their rights? How shall we dare to set our convictions, if need be, against the rush of multitudes, all going one way? What voice shall we match against the soul-subduing voice of the Time-Spirit?

Only His, who is the Spirit of the very Truth itself, who speaks what He hears within the veil, and whose voice, uttered in the most secret places of the soul, is a genuine revelation of the future, telling His people of a hope for humanity grander and more elevating than all that newspapers are preaching, a hope that maketh not ashamed.

G. A. CHADWICK.

THE BAPTIST'S MESSAGE TO JESUS.

MATT. XI. 2-19; LUKE VII. 18-35.

THE impression which the unbiassed reader would naturally receive from these narratives undoubtedly is that the Baptist, whose function it had been to identify and proclaim the Messiah, was now doubtful of the identification he had authorized. The difficulty of understanding how such a change of mental attitude could arise is forcibly stated by Strauss: "Such a doubt is in direct contradiction with all the other circumstances reported by the evangelists. It is justly regarded as psychologically impossible that he whose belief was originated or confirmed by the baptismal sign, which he held to be a divine revelation, and who afterwards pronounced so decidedly on the Messianic call and the

superior nature of Jesus, should all at once have become unsteady in his conviction ; he must then indeed have been like a reed shaken by the wind, a comparison which Jesus abnegates on this very occasion (Matt. xi. 7). A cause for such vacillation is in vain sought in the conduct or fortunes of Jesus at the time ; for the rumour of *the works of Christ*, which in Luke's idea were miracles, could not awaken doubt in the Baptist, and it was on this rumour that he sent his message. Lastly, how could Jesus subsequently (John v. 33 ff.) so confidently appeal to the testimony of the Baptist concerning Him, when it was known that John himself was perplexed about His Messiahship ?”

The difficulty is genuine and all honest interpreters have acknowledged it, while some have sought escape from it by illegitimate methods. Chrysostom and Euthymius among patristic interpreters, and Calvin and Beza among the reformers, emphatically assert that it was not to dissipate doubts of His own but to convince His disciples that John sent them to Jesus. He believed that when they saw the works He was doing they would accept Him as the Christ. This construction of the incident, however, is precluded by the fact that it was the disciples of John who had already themselves reported to him the miracles of Jesus, and there is no hint given that they shared the doubt of their master. The answer of Jesus is also pointedly addressed to John (Matt. xi. 22), and they are instructed to say to him, “Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me”—words which imply that John was in danger of misconstruing Jesus. The same conclusion is put beyond question by the apology for John which Jesus considers it necessary to make to the people. This apology proceeds on the idea that occasion had been given to doubt whether John was so steadfast and prophetic a man as had been commonly believed.

Several recent commentators, such as Fritzsche, Hase

and others, have supposed that the intention of the Baptist was to quicken within Jesus the Messianic consciousness, to remind Him of the expectations of those who believed in Him, and provoke Him to the definite assumption of kingly powers. So far from unbelief was John, that it was the very certainty of Jesus' Messiahship that prompted the question. This is nearer the truth. It brings out the impatience which John felt, but it fails to emphasize the doubt.

Accepting the question, then, in its obvious and natural sense as implying a doubt in the Baptist's mind regarding the identification of Jesus as the Christ, how is this doubt to be accounted for? In both narratives it is directly connected with the reports of the miracles of Jesus which had been brought to John in prison. Strauss thinks quite an opposite result might have been expected from such a report, and jeeringly remarks: "This is opposed to all psychological probability, that I wonder Dr. Paulus, or some other expositor versed in psychology and not timid in verbal criticism, has not started the conjecture that a negative has slipped out of Matt. xi. 2, and that its proper reading is *ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης οὐκ ἀκούσας κ.τ.λ.*"

Notwithstanding these supposed psychological impossibilities which Strauss discovered in the narrative, it must still be maintained with the best recent expositors, that it was precisely these miracles of Jesus, reported to the Baptist in prison, which provoked him to send his embassy to Jesus. John was disappointed in Jesus because these works of His were not the kind of works he had expected the Messiah to perform. He himself "did no miracle"; he had preached repentance and prepared the people for their King. He had come in the spirit of Elias denouncing prevalent iniquity and he had heralded one who was to come in the same spirit but with a mightier manifestation of it. He had shared in the popular expectation that the

Messiah would reign visibly in Israel, and he could not understand why, if Jesus was the Messiah, He refrained from establishing the Messianic kingdom, and contented Himself with healing a few sick folk and preaching, not to the authorities and men in high places, but to the poor. This beneficent, non-aggressive, quiet, genial ministry irritated him.

It was not, then, that the personal misfortunes of the Baptist were clouding his faith; it was not that the hard fare of the prison was blotting out his bright expectations. Against such an interpretation of John's state of mind Jesus emphatically warned the people, reminding them that it was no reed bending now to one wind now to the opposite, they had seen in the wilderness. The man whom they had seen content with a camel's hair garment, and such food as he could gather from uncultivated nature was not likely to feel so keenly the change to prison fare. But no doubt the prison would have its own effect upon him. Day after day, month after month, passed as he lay with his blazing energies pent up, and still there reached him not the shout of a nation proclaiming its king, but the same monotonous tidings of a few lepers cleansed, a few blind beggars restored to sight. He had waited to feel the shock of revolution shake the solid walls of the remote fortress where he lay; let its ruins bury him; if only he knows that God has remembered His people, he will die in triumph. But as when one listens in the dead of night till the ear aches with the silence, so did John wait till his heart grew sick with watching. What could it mean? He had learned how quickly a man must do his work if he is to do it at all. He had learned how short a time would be given to any one who was resolved to root out evil from the land. Why, then, this delay on the part of Jesus? Why did He not complete the work John had begun by denouncing the wickedness of Herod? Why was He content to go about

in villages, talking with unimportant sinners, dining at rich men's tables, helping a few sick women and crippled beggars, while the nation cried out for its King?

With such feelings preying on his mind, John sends to Jesus, saying, "Art Thou He that should come, or are we to look for another?" Had any one challenged his own former testimony, and now assured him he had been mistaken in indicating Jesus as the Messiah, he would probably have maintained His Messiahship as before. But in his own mind perplexities have arisen. He cannot make out why Jesus should act as He does. He cannot rid himself of the belief that Jesus is the Messiah, but he cannot reconcile that belief with the behaviour of Jesus. And the miracles now reported to him only increase his perplexity; for, if this almighty power resides in Him, why does He not use it to sweep away iniquity and revolutionize the nation?

This state of mind can be pronounced psychologically impossible, only by those who fancy that the conviction wrought in John's mind at the baptism of Jesus, precluded his subsequent consideration of the evidence that came before him—a supposition which implies that a continual miracle was wrought on the mind of the Baptist, and that he was a mere mechanical official with no personal spiritual conflict and no trial of his faith. With all his countrymen he had to rise to new conceptions of the kingdom, and this was the path by which he had to travel to those new conceptions. He appeals to Jesus Himself, knowing that He alone comprehended the situation. The authorities had mistaken the Baptist himself for the Christ: Jesus would make no mistake.

From this revelation of an unexpected perplexity in the mind of the prominent witness to the Messiahship of Jesus many reflections arise. We see how entirely Jesus stood alone, how misleading was the counsel, and how fatal the aid He could receive even from such a man as John. We cannot

overestimate the clearness of aim and stability of purpose, which with so much apparent ease, though doubtless with some unseen mental conflict, put aside not only the popular expectation but the grave judgments and suggestions of a man like John. It also becomes apparent that even good, wise, and strong men are tempted to think God is doing nothing if He is not using them. If a religious movement goes on without us, we at once begin to view it critically and with suspicion.

John's mistake is common still. Men can never reconcile themselves to Christ's method. His work seems so slow; one is tempted to say, so inefficient and careless; it disappoints in so many ways the expectations of practical men. He seems so tardy in making any definitely marked impression on the world that a large number of persons use their own methods for reforming society and leave Him to His work. If He actually sat as King in our midst, legislating for us and administering justice and redressing all grievances, we should not be offended in Him. But things go on so much as if no power in Heaven or on earth were His, His help comes so ambiguously, His interference is so indirect, that in times of great stress and need, many are tempted to ask with John, half in doubt half in challenge, whether this is the final and best rule of mankind?

Is it not precisely John's difficulty which is at present hindering many of the most earnest men in the working classes from believing in Christ. His methods bring no immediate revolution, no upturning of social order, no instant setting right of all that is wrong. He claims to be King, and to have a special regard for the oppressed, yet generation after generation of the oppressed pass away, and He gives no sign. It is this which causes many to turn from Him in disappointment and look for "another," generally a hasty demagogue, and it is this which causes many to hate and blaspheme His name.

John's state of mind being apprehended, the answer of Jesus becomes at once intelligible. Virtually Jesus says to the Baptist, I have chosen My method of action. These are the works by which I vindicate My claim to the Messiahship. All that you now urge has been urged before, and I have put it aside as a temptation inviting Me to deflect from the proper work of the Messiah. The Gospel is preached to the poor because the influence I seek is not that of fashion, or money, or power, but a spiritual human influence. It is through the individual I work, and by individual attraction I form the kingdom. The ills common to humanity, permanent and universal, concern Me more than the grievances of the Jewish people. The kingdom I am founding is spiritual and universal: hence My method. And, "blessed is he whosoever is not offended in Me."

Jesus here shows in what spirit He meets honest and serious-minded doubt. He knew that beneath that question of John's which so shocked the bystanders there was a heart more capable of loyalty to Him than was to be found in any of those who gave their easy assent to claims they scarcely understood. That question was of more value to Him than the unreasoning hosannas of thoughtless followers; for through it he saw a man in earnest and to whom the answer was of immeasurable consequence. It is when a man takes the Messiahship of Jesus seriously and proposes to make the mind of Christ rule all that He Himself is connected with, that he begins to question whether this or that method or principle of Christ can be approved. It is through such doubt and such perplexity ultimate faith and true allegiance are reached.

After dismissing the messengers of John, Jesus seeks to improve the occasion to the people. And he aims chiefly at two things, at clearing the character of John from the suspicion of fickleness and weakness which might have

arisen from his message; and at suggesting to the people that while John did not cordially approve the methods of Jesus it was possible that they themselves approved of the methods neither of John nor of Jesus.

In the course of His address to the people He somewhat abruptly introduces the words: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." In Luke xvi. 16 in a different connection similar words are used. "The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it," where the same word expressive of violent seizure is retained, having fixed itself in the memory. The interpretation of this saying which is most commonly received is that which Alford gives: "The kingdom of heaven is pressed into (or taken by storm) and violent persons (stormers)—eager, ardent multitudes—seize on it" (as on the plunder of a sacked city). This interpretation is inviting. It seems to suit the context. Until John the kingdom was predicted, "all the prophets until John prophesied"; but when John came, he could say, The kingdom is at hand: the time is fulfilled. The prophet's occupation was gone; John could say, The King is standing in your midst. The change was as that from the leadership of Moses to that of Joshua. Moses could but see the land afar off from the mountain top; Joshua took the kingdom by storm.

And this interpretation carries great truths. It is men of earnestness who fight their way into the Kingdom. As Christian, in Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, saw many men in armour keeping the doorway and terrifying all comers, till a man of stout countenance came, and said to him at the gate, "Set down my name, sir!" and forthwith hewed his way into the palace, giving and taking many wounds, so is it with the kingdom. And also, as in all times of revolution and violent excitement, so in the founding of Christ's

kingdom, it was not the orderly procession of a coronation day that was visible, but rather the rush of a storming party. In a rush through a breach it is every man for himself, and often it is the wild, undisciplined private who finds himself first within the enemy's rampart. Strange people come to the front when it is on each man's native courage, resource, and earnestness success depends. And in great religious movements it is not the martinet or the man who shows best on parade who is always first in the breach. There may be much to shock persons who worship decorum. In critical times, when appeal is made to the elementary forces of humanity, men of violence come to the front, men of the Luther type, who shock and enrage scholars and men of taste like Erasmus, do the requisite storming. And so the Pharisees were sincerely shocked to see the kind of following the Messiah had gathered round Him—a following which seemed to them no better than the troop of desperadoes and gladiators who were told off as a forlorn hope to mount a breach. Among them there was nothing orderly and decorous, no praying at appointed hours, no fasting, no recital of tradition, nothing which had become identified with religion in the respectable Pharisaic mind.

This interpretation is tempting, but there are difficulties in the way of accepting it. Was there any such pressure into the kingdom as is thus implied? And even though there were, would not the language be unduly strong—"Taking by force," "snatching"? This strong language tallies much better with another interpretation—indeed, suggests it. For such language is actually used, in John vi. 15, of the attempt of the people to make Jesus a King. It is obvious, therefore, to suppose that what Jesus meant by the kingdom "being done violence to," is that the people, excited by the Baptist's preaching, sought forcibly to establish the kingdom he had proclaimed; precisely as the

Galileans had sought to take Him by force and make Him a King. And hence the relevancy of introducing the sentence into His apology for the Baptist. For the Baptist also had apparently taken offence at, or been stumbled by, the gentle and quiet methods of Jesus, and he, too, wished to take the kingdom by violence. This saying of Jesus, then, is but another way of calling attention to the fact that His kingdom is spiritual, that it cannot be taken by storm, or established by swift and violent methods, but that it belongs to the meek, to those who, with greater earnestness than the violent, believe in spiritual methods, and can patiently wait till these methods prevail.

The point of the little parable with which the section closes is obvious. Neither John nor Jesus was such a leader as the people desired. They were not sufficiently interested in the spiritual movements of their time to approve of either the severe or the genial reformer. They had adopted the fatal critical attitude: the attitude of unconcerned spectators and judges. John, they said, overtaxed their strength and demanded a purity of life which seemed easy to him but was impossible to them. Jesus was even more unsuitable. In Him indeed there was no asceticism that they could see; he came eating and drinking, sociable, free from care, living a cheerful life among the common people. But when they besought Him to resist the oppressor He went and paid His taxes, and when they would have made Him a king He hid Himself from them. He seemed to ignore the national sorrows. He would not interfere; not even when His relative was basely thrown into a dungeon would He head a rescue. Nay, He would actually accept the hospitality of a publican. What could be made of such a person? The Messiah indeed! He was a mere good-natured time-server, indifferent to the sorrows of His people so long as He could dine well: "a gluttonous man and a winebibber." They had mourned to Jesus, but

He had not joined in their lamentations; they had piped to the ascetic and grim Baptist, but not a step would he dance.

Those to whom our Lord spoke must have seen how exactly this parable hit off their attitude towards the two great forms in which God had been revealed to them in their own day. In the persons of John and Jesus religion and the will of God had taken definite shape before them. But the people approved of neither. They were like petted children who think every one should fall in with their whim, dancing when they pipe and pretending to cry when they whimper or strike them. To some people no religious movement of their time quite responds. They live at feud with their generation because they cannot get their own whim petted. The great movements of their time pass on as if they heard them not. They feel themselves ill-used. They have fallen on evil days and spend their time sulking and grumbling. They are the only survivors of the good old times and accept it as their mission to bewail the degeneracy of the Church. In fact they are only spoiled children sitting in the market-place, much in the way of practical men, and piping their little monotonous tune, wondering that no one listens to them.

Certainly John and Jesus represented opposite poles of human life, and that man had no ordinary breadth of view who could perceive that far from being antagonistic they were forwarding one great movement. Frequently, men of limited vision and narrow spiritual experience fail to see the inner harmony of movements which are superficially diverse. Sometimes they count those the enemies of religion who are indeed its truest friends. They do not recognise how many varieties of type it takes to make a world. And as men could plausibly denounce Jesus as undoing the work of John, so does the truest progress often seem mere demolition of what many have found to be for

their soul's health. By hastiness of judgment and self-satisfied condemnation of all that does not at once commend itself to our preconceived ideas of how God will accomplish His work, we are found to be resisting God and mistaking good for evil. To make our own tastes and expectations the measure of the religious movements of our time is to secure that we get no good from the movements that engage the activities of other people and that we get all the harm, the self-righteous vanity and hardness of heart and blindness to the truth, which must result from opposing the work of God in our own generation. Triflers, playing at religion, may criticise all movements and support none: men will take care that their devoted support be given to one form or other of the work of God in their own time.

MARCUS DODS.

PROFESSOR F. BLASS ON THE TWO EDITIONS
OF ACTS.

II.

THE process of comparing the two texts of *Acts* is a hopeless one, unless we start from the principle that in every case the more sensible and complete explanation is to be preferred. It is necessarily assumed in all other departments of literature that preference must be given to the interpretation which restores order, lucidity, and sanity to the work. Unluckily that principle is far from being admitted in the case of *Acts*. Even of those who admit the book to be composed by one author, many do not permit our assumption; and, in particular, the North-Galatian theorists avowedly base their view on the contrary assumption—that the most striking feature of the book is its gaps, and that therefore it is quite in the author's style to omit what we should expect and to shock our sense of historical