

of any good foundation in nature, when regarded as an explanation of the origin and succession of species; and may refer to the papers of the Duke of Argyll, already cited, as fully showing that this conclusion is inevitable, and that Spencer and Darwin take their followers very nearly into the same position with that of the pre-Newtonian physicists, who explained the rise of water in a pump by the aphorism that "Nature abhors a vacuum." So Spencer endeavours to show us that among the varieties of organic beings "Nature abhors the unfit," and the Natural Selection of Darwin is merely the converse of this, to the effect that "Nature selects the fittest." Neither of these dicta, however, exempts us from the necessity of enquiry as to the First Cause, and under Him the secondary causes, if any, of the vast and complicated succession of living things that have inhabited and now inhabit the earth.

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(To be concluded.)

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.

I.

THE generation of Jews to which our Lord belonged was rich in possessing two samples of God's best gift to the world—men of prophetic vision, and devoted to the highest interests of humanity. If only they had known how to value them! But of John they said, "He hath a devil"; and of Jesus, "Behold, a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber"! Not so did the two servants of God think of each other. Even when his mind was clouded with doubt as to the precise vocation of Jesus, John had no doubt at all as to His high endowments and worth. The question, "Art Thou He that should come?" could only have been addressed to one conceived capable of being a Christ. How

generously Jesus thought and spoke of John, while fully aware of his limits, we know from the occasional encomiums recorded in the Gospels. But sufficient evidence of high esteem is supplied in the one fact that the fame of the Baptist drew Jesus from Nazareth to the Jordan.

John's ministry preceded that of Jesus, and is briefly reported by the Evangelists as its prelude. It was a ministry of an entirely distinct type—a ministry of *condemnation*. John was the severe moral censor of his time. His way of life was congruous to his function, and gave it momentum: austere, ascetic, aloof; attire rude, diet spare and mean. The burden of his preaching was "Repent!" To enforce the solemn message he used a symbolic rite—baptism in the river; in this, as in his mode of life, showing himself, like all the Hebrew prophets, alive to the power of religious symbolism over the imagination. Whether his baptism was original or not, it was in any case fitting, an impressive, easily understood emblem of death to an old life of sin and resurrection to a new life of righteousness.

In the quiet retreat of Nazareth Jesus heard of this man, of his aspect, his preaching, and his rite; and, irresistibly drawn to the scene of his work, went forth to see, to listen, and even to be baptized. That He should wish to see the man of whom all spoke in awestruck tones is intelligible; that He could listen with interest and sympathy to his preaching is not surprising in one who could appreciate every spiritual movement that was genuine and earnest, however diverse from His own. But to be *baptized*! Was He too a sinner then? Had He a troubled conscience? Did He feel the need of going to the Jordan that moral defilement might be carried by its swift stream down to the Dead Sea?

The baptism of our Lord raises for us a psychological problem. According to the first Evangelist it was a problem for the Baptist, and it is not improbable that the

subject exercised the thoughts of the apostolic Church. We may even learn from the narratives of the Evangelists, compared with each other, the stages of the mental process through which that Church passed in reference to this part of the evangelic tradition. The report of Mark, as was to be expected from the archaic Gospel, represents the stage of simple, unhesitating acceptance of the baptism of Jesus as a matter of fact; that of Matthew the more advanced stage of doubting reflection; that of Luke the final stage of acquiescence in an incident in the history of the Lord Jesus which was known to have caused perplexity, but was now regarded either as a matter sufficiently explained or as not admitting of further explanation. Mark simply states that Jesus was baptized, as if it were a matter of course.¹ Matthew represents John as offering objections, and receiving from Jesus a reply which, if it did not completely remove his scruples, at least induced him to offer no further opposition. Luke touches the incident in a slight manner, in a participial clause, as if hurrying over a fact which could not be denied, but which He knew to be beset with difficulty.

The doubting stage is very distinctly reflected in the conversation between the Baptist and our Lord as reported in Matthew. But in the light of that conversation one can discover, even in Luke's narrative, some traces of a consciousness that doubt had been, or that there was a risk of misunderstanding. Both in the report of the temptation and in that of the baptism Luke writes as one who feels that misapprehension needs to be guarded against. In both events he sees the shadow of sin, and he is solicitous that it may not reach the person of the Holy One. In the story of the temptation he accomplishes the end by representing Jesus as retiring from the Jordan into the wilderness "full of the Holy Ghost";² in that of the

¹ Mark i. 9.

² Luke iv. 1.

baptism the means he employs is to associate the transaction with prayer. His words are, "Jesus also, having been baptized, and being engaged in prayer,"¹ after which he goes on to report the descent of the Spirit and the voice from heaven, these being the things which he is chiefly concerned to relate, what goes before simply serving to date the preternatural phenomena. It is noticeable that in indicating the time at which these occurred, he refers not only to the baptism of Jesus, but to the baptism of the people collectively. What he says is in effect this: "The heaven was opened, when all the people was baptized, and in particular after Jesus had been baptized, and when He was in the act of praying." The reference to the general baptism is too vague to be of much use for dating the celestial event, and it can hardly have been introduced for that purpose. The connexion in the writer's mind rather is between the general baptism of the people and the particular baptism of Jesus. The suggestion is: Jesus was baptized in connexion with a great collective administration of the rite; He was included in the movement; He was no exception. Does the Evangelist mean not merely to state the fact, but to hint at a reason?—to say, "Because all the people was baptized, therefore Jesus also was baptized, so expressing sympathy, and maintaining solidarity with His penitent fellow-countrymen"? If so, then he had a glimpse into the heart of the matter, as will appear.

Returning to Matthew, we find John giving as his reason for unwillingness to baptize Jesus: "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?"² which may be taken to mean, "If either of us is to be baptized, it should be I by you, not you by me." John's professed sense of need for baptism is not to be pressed. Before Jesus came and asked for baptism it probably never crossed

¹ Luke iii. 21.

² Matt. iii. 14.

John's mind that he himself, as well as the people who had come to hear him preach repentance, ought to be baptized. His whole attitude had been that of a *censor*, not of a fellow-sinner. Jesus, on the other hand, felt a strong desire to be baptized. Here therefore we are at once confronted with a radical difference between the two prophetic personalities. John stands alone and apart from the people, and from this position of superiority and aloofness preaches to them the duty of repentance, and summons them to undergo baptism as the outward symbol of a penitent spirit. Jesus, on the contrary, takes His place among the people and on a level with them; with them listens meekly to the preacher's stern denunciation of the sin of Israel, and, along with those whose hearts have been touched, comes and offers Himself as a candidate for baptism. The act must mean one of two things: either consciousness of personal shortcoming, or profound, intense sympathy with the sinful obliterating all sense of separateness. Such sympathy, if deep enough, would fully account for the behaviour of Jesus. Intense love always makes the good fellow-sinners with the evil. A saintly father's shame over a son's misconduct brings him down in feeling to the son's moral level. In rude primitive ages this moral solidarity found recognition in the infliction of the penalty due to the offence of a single member of a family upon the whole family. Blood, it was held, made all alike sinners. Put love instead of blood, and you have a law of the moral order holding good for all time, and for the highest civilization, and for the loftiest and purest moral consciousness, making holiest and unholy one, the holy one not ashamed to call the unholy his brethren.

It is in this direction, it appears to me, that we must find the explanation and significance of our Lord's baptism. Various solutions of the problem have been suggested which it would be tedious to enumerate. One of the most feasible

is that in receiving baptism Jesus consciously bid farewell, —died, so to speak,—to the old life in Nazareth, with its natural relations to parents, neighbours, and earthly vocation, and consecrated Himself to His higher Messianic calling. This in all probability was one aspect of the transaction, but it can hardly have exhausted its meaning. It leaves out of view just that which constituted the specific feature of John's baptism, its connexion with sin and repentance. Had Christ's baptism signified no more than this, it would have amounted to utilising a rite instituted for one purpose for another, kindred perhaps, but far from identical. Practically the assumption of those who favour this view is that self-consecration to the new Messianic career was all that baptism could mean for a perfectly holy being. But the question is, Was it all it could mean for a perfectly *loving* being?

Self-consecration may have been included in the significance of the symbolic rite as applied to Jesus; but, far from exhausting its import, it was not even the chief element in the case. The solemn transaction had many sides. It was for one thing an emphatic profession of *solidarity with John*. Thereby more impressively than by words Jesus recognised the Baptist as God's messenger to his generation, and his baptism, and all that it represented, as "from heaven" and not "of men." Jesus did not come to the Jordan to look on at a distance, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, in an attitude of suspicion, or of careful uncommittedness, or of amused interest in a curious but exhilarating outburst of fanaticism. Neither did He come to patronise a movement which He thought on the whole worthy of countenance though disfigured with eccentricities, and to pay John compliments for the good he was manifestly doing. He came rather as an earnest sympathiser, deeply impressed with what was going on, and cherishing unfeigned respect and even reverence for the

chief agent. "What went ye out to see?" He asked the people who had visited the scene, on a certain occasion. He, for His part, had gone out to see one whom He deemed in some respects the greatest of the prophetic race to which he belonged, God's most remarkable and valuable gift to Israel. And this, for one thing, He meant to say, by going forward to John and demanding baptism.

This, but not this alone. Jesus meant to proclaim His solidarity not with John only, but also *with the people*; not only with the unsparing denouncer of sin, but likewise with the denounced sinners. Thus He would "fulfil all righteousness," as He gave John to understand it was meet He should do.¹ "All righteousness," rather righteousness under every aspect, the reference being not to detailed duties coming under the general conception of righteousness, but to varying conceptions of the *nature* of righteousness. The remarkable expression is intentionally vague, Jesus, in using it, being fully aware that there were aspects or forms of righteousness which John could not be made to understand. He could understand and be gratified by Christ's appreciation of his own ministry of condemnation, as expressed in submission to baptism; but in so far as that act signified sympathy with the people condemned it could only puzzle and perplex him. It would hardly so much as enter into his mind that it could possibly bear such a meaning. But we cannot doubt that it was present to the mind of Jesus when He spoke of fulfilling every form of righteousness. He had in view two complementary, we might even call them in some respects opposed, or apparently incompatible, aspects of righteousness: sympathy with the preacher of repentance, and sympathy with his audience. Or, looking at the matter in relation to abstract principle rather than to persons, we may discriminate the two types as consisting, on the one hand, in respect for the

¹ Matt. iii. 15.

righteousness of the law represented by John, and, on the other, in respect for the righteousness of love or of grace, which was to be the characteristic of the new era that was coming in. Then, and at all times, Jesus showed Himself both willing and able to fulfil righteousness in both these aspects. At His baptism He did justice to John and also to the people. He expressed His appreciation for the old "way of righteousness,"¹ with its severe negative idea of holiness as consisting in aloofness from moral evil, and at the same time He inaugurated a new way in which holiness was to manifest itself through gracious fraternal relations with the unholy.

John was out and out of the old way. His very conception of Messiah was coloured by legalism. His "coming One" was simply one who was coming to judge with fan and axe in hand. The very *πνεῦμα* which was to be the element employed in the Messianic baptism was for him simply a holy wind of judgment that should sweep away the chaff separated from the wheat by the judicial fan. He belonged in spirit wholly to the era then closing; not a Christian, outside the new kingdom of heaven about to begin, to the last simply bewildered by its surprising phenomena, unable to sympathise with its characteristic spirit.²

With this idea of the Baptist in our minds we see that the baptism of Jesus had a twofold significance in reference to him. It symbolically expressed *criticism* as well as approval, and proclaimed him weak as well as strong; represented him as one who, while possessing great sub-

¹ Matt. xxi. 32.

² The above is the idea of John suggested by all the data in the Synoptical Gospels, naturally interpreted. It is otherwise in the Fourth Gospel. John there appears Christianised. It serves no good purpose to soften down or explain away the Synoptical statements, in a harmonistic interest, so as to bring the two representations into accord. The difference should be allowed to appear unmitigated, and the problem of reconciliation then attempted on the basis of acknowledged diversity. This is a small part of a large problem.

stantial merits, was subject to serious limitations. By His baptism, in short, Jesus declared, through a symbol, what He afterwards said in words when He pronounced John to be the greatest of prophets, yet less than the least in the kingdom of God.¹

Whether John was alive to this critical aspect of Christ's baptism we know not; it certainly offered matter for serious reflection. It is not likely that that baptism would be more than a puzzle to him: a moral stumbling-block, a source of misapprehension as to the character of Jesus. This it would almost inevitably be to bystanders. The people who looked on while Jesus was immersed in the Jordan would take for granted that He thereby confessed Himself to be a fellow-sinner. Nothing short of the most solemn protestation and the most careful explanation of the real meaning of the transaction could prevent that inference from being drawn, if even these would suffice. There is no reason to believe that either the protestation or the explanation was forthcoming. Jesus was content to be misjudged, to pass for a sinner *pro tempore*. The question, of course, arises in our minds, Did prudence not dictate careful avoidance of such a serious misunderstanding? In other words, abstinence from baptism for fear of what men would think? The question cuts deep, and points to a policy involving many applications. On the same ground Jesus would have found it necessary to avoid meeting and eating with publicans and sinners, to abstain from fellowship in prayer, especially such as contained confession of sin, with His disciples, to shun the cross which held Him up to the view of the world as a criminal. Nay, the policy of prudent regard to reputation virtually interdicts the Incarnation, whereby Jesus came at least "in the likeness of sinful flesh," and as one living in the flesh could not but be thought by the world subject to such moral infirmities

¹ Matt. xi. 11.

as have their seat in the body. Indeed, one of the leading objections to the Incarnation taken by Celsus was that it subjected the Divine Being to degradation.

All these cases belong to the same category as the baptism. The question therefore must be looked at broadly in order to be wisely answered in any one instance. Thus, *e.g.*, it may be plausibly contended, as it has been recently in an able and valuable book,¹ that Jesus did not and could not have fellowship in prayer with His disciples. Now, it is quite true that the Gospels contain no clear statement to the contrary effect, and that He *could* not have such fellowship may be plausibly shown by such reasoning as the following: "If Jesus practised family prayer, as the head of a household, either it contained, or it did not contain, the element of confession. If it did, it gave the disciples a false impression of *His* character; if it did not, it led to a false idea of *their own*."² It is a cleverly stated and apparently formidable dilemma, but escape is not impossible. The first horn is the weak one. It assumes that Jesus, out of regard to His sinlessness, was under the necessity of shaping His conduct so that no misunderstanding as to His character should arise. If that were indeed so, then with reverence it may be said that He was placed in a very unhappy predicament. Practically it amounted to this, that "sinlessness" doomed Him to an aloofness which meant death to fraternity, to brotherly fellowship with intimate companions in the practice of religion, to close comrade-like relations with persons of evil repute, to crucifixion between two thieves; in one word, death to *love*, which is the fulfilling of all righteousness. The question forces itself on us, Can this be sinlessness? Can we conceive of a sinless being consciously, deliberately,

¹ *The Christ of History and of Experience*, by D. W. Forrest, being the third course of Kerr Lectures.

² Forrest's Lectures, p. 25.

taking up this attitude towards His faithful companions: "I am sorry that out of regard to my sinlessness I cannot pray with you. Of course you must confess sin, and in such confession I cannot join; therefore you must pray by yourselves"? The further question has to be faced, In what other instance did Jesus follow this imaginary policy of aloofness with a view to prevent a false impression of His character? And if in no other case, why in this? Why should we doubt that Jesus not only acted on the Messianic motto, "In the midst of the Church will I sing *praise* unto Thee,"¹ but joined habitually with His friends in prayer also, even in prayer containing confession of sin?

False impressions, serious misunderstandings—doubtless these will arise. "It must needs be that offences come." Grave enough sometimes; think of that one, for example, "a man gluttonous and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." That was what came of the meeting with publicans and sinners in Capernaum. Truly tragic, but it could not be helped. Helping it by aloofness in the supposed interest of sinlessness would be a spurious Pharisaic holiness,—would indeed, in the view of Jesus, be sin. A harder, nobler, more heroic way was the only one open to Him. It is the doom of perfect love that, while it excludes the *reality* of sin, it inevitably involves the *appearance* of it,—an appearance not to be shunned, but meekly borne. The only remedy is time. Love must wait for the favourable verdict of its own children, and in their implicit trust and absolute devotion find compensation for all the hard thoughts and evil surmises it has had to endure.

Jesus consistently followed this course. He meekly bore and bided His time. He took misconstruction very calmly. "Whosoever," said He, "speaketh a word against the Son

¹ Heb. ii. 12.

of man it shall be forgiven him,"¹ not meaning forgiven barely or with difficulty, but forgiven as easily and readily in His case as in the case of other men. Nay, forgiven more easily, because in His case misunderstanding was exceptionally apt to arise, and was on that account the more excusable. How could such a love as His obey its own divinely gracious impulses, boldly, fearlessly, regardless of current opinion and conventional barriers, and expect to escape censure? Jesus did not expect to escape. He was prepared for the most outrageous calumnies, and when they came he quoted them as quietly as if they had been uttered about another person.² Far from being surprised or hurt when His conduct created doubt, suspicion or grave misconception, He was rather thankful that there were any exceptions. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me."³ He accounted the man who did not find in Him and His ways a stumbling-block the exception, —the man of rare discernment, and as blessed as it was rare. He was specially impressed with the rarity of this type of man when He learned that even the Baptist did not belong to the class.

The expression "blessed" (*μακάριος*) shows that Jesus was far from being indifferent to good name and favourable opinion. Contrariwise He passionately longed, thirsted, for appreciation, as is the way of great, loving hearts. But He understood that appreciation of any real value must come from men who *knew* Him, who had intelligent acquaintance and sincere sympathy with His spirit and aims, and who were themselves spiritually His own creation, the fruit of His teaching and personal influence. This was what He meant when He uttered the notable reflection: "Wisdom is justified of her *children*," or her *works*.⁴ The two readings come to the same thing. It is an appeal from

¹ Matt. xii. 32.

² Matt. xi. 6.

³ Matt. xi. 19.

⁴ Matt. xi. 19.

the present to the future,—from the old dying era that cannot understand, to the new era coming in that will understand,—from the existing generation that is full of prejudice, and can only see faults and even vices and crimes and blasphemies and intolerable impieties, to a generation that shall arise and bless the calumniated one, because by His much misunderstood love He has made them what they are, and they are the offspring of His soul's bitter travail. It is an appeal from the Pharisaic Simons, who say, "If this man had been a prophet," to the sinful women, who, much forgiven, greatly love,—from conceited Rabbis to teachable disciples,—from the wise and understanding to the "babes." Wisdom, love, is justified by her works, and her children, sooner or later; and with this justification she is well content. She may be very imperfectly understood even by her children for a time, but that does not disturb her serenity. She can wait for their maturer judgment. Doubtless the conduct of Jesus was sometimes a mystery to His own disciples. His very prayers may have puzzled them and raised in their minds questions they could not answer. But He offered no premature solutions, gave no over-solicitous assurances, but left them to find out for themselves, through growing intimacy, that their Master was indeed "the Holy One of God."¹

This was the true path for One who was working for all time, and was destined to become the Saviour of the world. The unheroic path of egoistic prudence may be left to such as wish to get through the world as quietly as possible and do nothing worthy of mention. The two ways lie far apart, and it is beyond the wit of the wisest to walk in them both. You must choose your road and choose once for all. You cannot be a hero to-morrow and a prudential man to-day. You must begin as you mean to end. Jesus began as He

¹ John vi. 69.

ended. He began with baptism and ended with crucifixion; and beginning, middle and end were connected by one uniform principle of action which dictated this programme: gracious love to sinful humanity, ever true to itself, constantly exposing itself to reproach, and content to bear it, supported meanwhile by a good conscience and the approving voice from heaven, "Thou art My beloved Son," and looking with calm confidence to the future for the justification of redeemed men.

How ample is that justification at this date! The most misunderstood of men now passionately loved and worshipped as the Friend of sinners, not ashamed to call them brethren! Not ashamed indeed, but not through lack of temptation more subtle and plausible than any of those experienced in the desert. How elementary the temptation "make bread out of stones" compared with that contained in the suggestion "If Thou be the Son of God, make it Thy first business to guard Thy reputation for holiness"! That came from Satan, but this comes from friends jealous for the Master's honour. Jesus shewed Himself Divine by turning a deaf ear to all such seemingly wise counsel. For the God of the Bible does not make it His highest concern to guard His good name against the misunderstanding of those who have no insight into His gracious spirit and purpose. He swears oaths as if His word could not be trusted. He employs very faulty men as the agents of revelation, a thing which the sceptical wiseacres of the eighteenth century thought it very improper for Him to do. "A revelation must take the form of a catechism and be given through exceptionally good men," said Reimarus. Let us be thankful that the fact is altogether otherwise, and that God is neither a god of the Epicurean type, finding His felicity in heartless neglect of the world, nor a god of the Pharisaic type, guarding His holiness by aloofness from the world's sin, but a God like Jesus, whose inmost nature

is love, and who condescends to enter into the most intimate relations with greatly erring men for their highest good.

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NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS IN
HEBREW.

WHILE using the latest edition of Spurrell's *Notes on the Book of Genesis*¹ I have collected a number of additional observations, which, I venture to think, will be found interesting to English admirers of that excellent work.

In the very first verse of the first chapter Spurrell decides rightly in favour of the absolute sense of בְּרֵאשִׁית, and disapproves of that construction which treats the word as a *status constructus* with בְּרָא (b'rō or bārā) which follows, on the ground that *v.* 2 forms a parenthesis and the conclusion begins in *v.* 3. He justly remarks that the absolute sense of בְּרֵאשִׁית may be inferred even in the absence of the article in the vocalisation of ב. For other adverbs also are pronounced without the article in spite of their absolute sense. I may add the following to the three examples given by Spurrell:—בְּרֵאשִׁית appears in Isaiah 46.

¹ I regard as a specially valuable part of the *Notes* the materials which Spurrell has provided out of the old versions. In the employment of these old documents he has followed a course which has always presented itself to me as an ideal, one which most commentators have unfortunately failed to take. For the practice in most commentaries has been to state only how a single portion of the text has been presented in the particular version, and possibly to add this or that phrase from the actual language of the version. This secures for the reader of the commentary no true insight into the context of the version, on which, after all, the true understanding of the single expression often depends. It is also praiseworthy that Spurrell quotes here and there the actual language of a mediæval Jewish commentary, as, for example, Rashi (pp. 5, 29), and appends complete literal translations to all his oriental quotations. He has thus adopted the excellent practice of August Wünsche, in his very instructive commentaries on Hosea and on Joel, as well as of Gustav Baur in his able and thorough *Geschichte der alttestamentlichen Weissagung* (vol. i., 1861).