

Psalm reminds me of a palimpsest. The words that obtrude themselves upon the eye of the reader are those of some chronicler or scholiast; but beneath and between the letters gleams forth the "holy writ" of the old gospel. And I cannot persuade myself that the original poet had so mean an estimate of his art as to mar a fine figure, when he had got it, by an artificial application of it. Burns was right; personal godliness and domestic piety are the stability of any time; this is the subsoil into which even the loftiest prophecy and poetry must strike their roots for sustenance. And without the existence of such a religion in old Israel I cannot conceive how the nation could either have lasted so long as it did, or have had grace to sorrow after a godly sort when the evil day came.

JAMES ROBERTSON.

THE LIGHT OF GALILEE.

II.

"THE people which sat in darkness saw a great light."¹ This is the text borrowed by the Evangelist Matthew from a Hebrew prophet to convey an idea of the benefit that came to Israel, and specially to the northern part of the Holy Land, through the public ministry of Jesus, of which he is about to give an account. "A great light"—the light of the dark land of Galilee—such is his conception of Jesus as He appeared in the work which He commenced after His return from the Jordan. It is the Evangelist's way thus to illustrate with prophetic oracles the plain, simple, unadorned story of the evangel of the kingdom as told, say, in the earlier Gospel of Mark. Thereby he doubtless gratified his own liking, and at the same time

¹ Matt. iv. 16.

provided for the needs of his first Jewish Christian readers, helping them by this primitive apologetic to believe with a firmer faith that Jesus was the Christ. For them these prophetic, poetic quotations, which abound in the first Gospel, had greatly more apologetic value than they have for us; but they still possess undiminished, one might say ever increasing, worth, as showing us what the Evangelist saw in Jesus, and as aids to our seeing Him with the Evangelist's clear spiritual vision.

No happier instance of this use of prophetic texts to depict the career and character of Jesus can be found in the whole Gospel than the one above cited. The oracle is fitly and felicitously chosen, whether regard be had to the condition of the people among whom Jesus began to work, or to the aim and tendency of His ministry among them. Galilee was a land of spiritual darkness, not perhaps more than, or even as much as, other parts of Israel, say the southern province of Judæa, with Jerusalem for its centre, over which the deepest darkness brooded, that of sacerdotal Sadducaism, Rabbinical legalism, and Pharisaic formalism. There was darkness of every sort there, as throughout Israel: the darkness of irreligion and of counterfeit religion, of gross vice and of spurious sanctity, of minds indifferent to truth, and of minds longing for the knowledge of God but not knowing where to find it. Jesus brought what all needed—light, ample light, like that of day. His advent in Galilee was as a sunrise on a land that had long lain under the darkness of night. And His light, like that of the natural sun, was catholic, universal, impartial, shining on all: “on the evil and on the good,” on learned and ignorant, saint and sinner, reputable and disreputable; on lovers of old ways, and on men more or less dissatisfied with things as they were, and sighing for some new voice from heaven. It was a light rich in its variety, blending in its pure rays the prismatic hues of religious genius, gracious

love, serene wisdom, genuine holiness, and incorruptible moral integrity.

Jesus came to be a sun to all. He let His light shine from an unclouded sky freely, openly, all around; on hill and dale, in towns, villages, and rural retreats, in the synagogue, and on the highway. If any remained in darkness, it was not His fault. No class was overlooked in His plan or in its execution. Frequenters of the synagogues, and those who might not appear, or cared not to be seen there, scribes and social pariahs, seekers of pleasure and seekers after God—all had their opportunity. Even Jerusalem, though for a season shunned, was not neglected. Its turn came at last, and it got the message it needed: stern as the voice of doom, yet tender as the yearning voice of a mother.¹

This large, comprehensive interpretation of the figure—"a great light"—was, I think, in the Evangelist's mind when he used it; and it must be in ours if we wish to form a clear, full, well-balanced view of our Lord's ministry as reported in the Synoptical Gospels. Justice to the metaphor demands that Jesus be conceived as deliberately aiming at serving the purpose of a light to *all classes of the community*, and as *actually accomplishing His aim* in the short period, all too brief as it appears, during which His ministry lasted. That will mean attaching more significance to some parts of Christ's work than most readers of the Gospels have been accustomed to assign to them. It means also, of course, taking Galilee as including all Israel, while implying that the light shone there with special brightness.

From a religious point of view the people of Israel as it existed in our Lord's time may be distributed into five classes:—

1. The respectable frequenters of the synagogue.

¹ Matt. xxiii. 37.

2. The social pariahs who might not or did not go there.
3. The "still in the land," the seekers after God, who would be most likely to welcome the new light of a prophet if he should arise.
4. The self-satisfied virtuosos in religion, who made an idol of the religious tradition, with the teachers who inculcated and transmitted the tradition.
5. The Sadducees, influentially represented by the priests.

To these might be added a sixth class, the Essenes, who, however, were a people apart, having no organic connexion with the community, and may therefore be left out of account. If the light of Jesus reached them at all, it would be as reflected from some of those who came directly into contact with His influence.

With reference to all the above-named five classes Jesus performed an illuminating function in the manner suited to each class.

No reader of the Gospels can fail to be impressed with the truth of this statement so far as classes three and four are concerned. The teaching on the hill, commonly called "The Sermon on the Mount," impressively exemplifies the extent and quality of the instruction given to men of teachable spirit, and the reports of encounters with Pharisees and scribes with equal obtrusiveness bear witness to a ministry of criticism upon the unteachable. But ordinary readers of the Gospels, it is to be feared, have but a very faint and inadequate conception of the service Jesus rendered in reference to the first, second, and fifth sections of Jewish society. It has scarcely entered into the mind of not a few that there was such a thing as a deliberately planned and earnestly executed ministry in the synagogues, and an equally deliberate and earnest ministry among the non-religious class; and, least of all, that even the Sadducees had a place in the beneficent purpose of the great Illuminator. All this is doubtless due in part to the

defective character of the records, which are extremely condensed and fragmentary, omitting much, and even in what is related making a few short sentences do service as the whole story of what was in reality a very considerable matter. But it is due also in no small measure to our not making enough of the little we are told, and failing to take in earnest what is seriously meant and is representative of much unreported detail. Nowhere more than in the Gospels is there need for historic imagination in the reader, enabling him to realize how much is implied in a brief notice like this, "He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee,"¹ or in the three sentences which tell the romantic tale of the gracious attitude of Jesus towards the "publicans and sinners" of Capernaum.²

1. On synagogue, custom-house, and lowest haunt of vice the light impartially, benignantly, shone; but first on the synagogue. The synagogue ministry was the first piece of work Jesus took on hand, for two reasons: first, because the synagogue offered a ready-made channel of influence; next, because the sooner that work was begun the less risk of interruption through the jealous interference of the professional religious teachers, a thing much to be dreaded, and inevitably to be encountered, sooner or later, by such an unconventional teacher as Jesus. In the light of this second consideration we understand the haste with which He left Capernaum as graphically described by Mark. He preaches in the synagogue of that town to-day, then departs to-morrow—departs before dawn while men sleep, lest an enthusiastic people detain Him. The plan is to preach in all the synagogues of Galilee, and Capernaum is simply the starting-point. She has had her benefit, and now away and on, on, ever on, till the work is done; no time to tarry anywhere; well if it be got even half through before the scribes are upon Him!

¹ Mark i. 39.

² Mark ii. 15-17.

To grasp the fact of this circular preaching tour it is necessary to rid our minds of a false impression based on a mistaken interpretation of the statement in Matthew iv. 13, Jesus "came and *dwelt* in Capernaum," that that town became from the commencement His fixed abode. All that can be said is that Capernaum was more of a home to Him than any other place. The ministry of our Lord was an itinerant, not a resident, ministry, and Capernaum was simply the centre from which He started on His excursions, and to which He returned after days, weeks, or it might be months of absence. The synagogue ministry might have required not months merely, but years, for the towns of Galilee were numerous; but there is reason to believe that from various causes it was only partially executed. One of these causes was the very success which attended the work, the popularity arising out of the impression made by Christ's preaching and by healing acts like the cure of the *leper*. After that cure—doubtless an incident of the synagogue ministry—Jesus, we read, "could no more openly enter a city, but was without in desert places."¹ That the scribes also had a hand in stopping the work may be inferred from the fact that on the return of the preacher to Capernaum they were lying in wait for Him.²

The Galilæan synagogues offered not only a ready channel but an inviting sphere. Jesus was not indifferent to such considerations. He let His light shine on all in the way best fitted to benefit, but He valued religious susceptibility. This He would find as readily as anywhere among those who would form His audience in a Galilæan synagogue. The Galilæans might be in some ways a benighted people. Living in a borderland, they might be impure in race, language, and religious custom; but they

¹ Mark i. 45.

² Mark ii. 6.

were cheerful, simple, open-hearted, lovers of freedom, and not too much enamoured with the ways of the scribes. If Jesus taught not as the scribes, they would be prompt to notice the difference, and be the better pleased with the preacher on that account. They would give Him close attention and an appreciative hearing. It might be difficult to speak to such an audience on the kingdom of God without creating misapprehension—thoughts of political independence and a restored kingdom of Israel, rather than of righteousness, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost. If that could be prevented, Jesus would know how to do it. The great gathering on the north-east side of the lake, when the thousands were fed and the project was entertained of making Jesus a king, may be taken as a proof that His attempt to guide the thoughts of the people into a spiritual channel had been the reverse or successful. There is reason, however, to believe that that misguided enthusiasm was the result of the house mission of the twelve, which seems to have been designed as a supplement to the ministry of the Master in the synagogue, and may have been carried on chiefly in those places which He had not been able to overtake. Their preaching, or talk rather, would consist largely of *anecdotes of the Master*, reports of popular parables originally forming parts of His synagogue addresses, and of some of the marvellous cures He wrought, with crude digests of the things He was wont to say about the kingdom, very imperfectly understood by themselves, and likely to be more seriously misunderstood by their hearers. But at the worst, and supposing the dangerous enthusiasm referred to to have arisen out of the Master's own preaching, it is always a comfort to speak to an audience that is alive, open-minded, open-hearted, capable of any sort of generous self-abandonment, not hidebound by formalism, and frozen with indifference and sceptical cynicism. Such were the Galilæans, and there-

fore Jesus loved to preach to them; and so He became "the light of Galilee."

2. The ministry among the "publicans and sinners" followed that in the synagogues. It was undertaken soon after the return to Capernaum from the preaching tour. The classes in question began to show an interest in Jesus, and to follow Him.¹ He noted the fact with pleasure, and resolved to avail Himself of this freshly-opened door, the result of His plans being the so-called feast in Matthew's house, which in reality was a great gathering of the social pariahs to hear, and to eat in order to the better hearing. I do not propose here to expatiate on this new form of evangelic activity; the one point I desire chiefly to insist on is that we must cease to think of this meeting as accidental, or incidental, and begin to regard it as deliberate and designed, and as representing a co-ordinate and quite important department of that intense though short-lived movement by which Jesus made Himself the spiritual sun of Israel. Here were poor people whose lives and souls were dark enough; how could the great Illuminator pass them by? No fear of His doing that, for the light they most needed was just that which He could supply in abundance—the light of *love*, of which from all other quarters there came not to them a solitary ray. Jesus became their light by being their Brother, to their glad surprise and to the scandal of all others. What He said to them we know not, or perhaps we do; for what if the parables of finding things lost formed the kernel of the sermon? But how much He said simply by being there! "Blame who may, I hereby affirm my brotherhood with you. I say God is *your* Father also. I declare my belief in the possibility of pure, spiritual, saintly life even for you; I see in vision, as the outcome of this meeting, passionate devotion to the kingdom, the poetry of self-

¹ Mark ii. 15.

consecration to God, alabaster boxes broken, fervent kisses of enthusiastic followers bestowed, crosses willingly borne, lives cheerfully sacrificed. 'Hopeless characters,' say ye cold critics who stand outside thinking evil thoughts? I decline to recognise finality in evil. Artesian wells may spring up from beneath the hardest rock, and 'sparks from heaven transpierce earth's coarsest covertures.'" Behold how the blessed, beauteous Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in His wings!

3. For the men of good will and teachable spirit Jesus also arose with the mild, benignant light of *wisdom*. From the first He was on the outlook for such men. He expected to find them, and with reason. For it is a poverty-stricken time in which no such men are to be found in a community. In a dark time like that into which Jesus was born, it is almost a matter of course that there shall be found in considerable numbers persons who may be described as religious malcontents, getting no light for their minds in current teaching, no rest for their souls in established moral and religious custom; sighing, praying for a new message from heaven, and giving prompt welcome to it when it comes. What a comfort in such a time the advent of a man like the Baptist—one man at least in earnest, and in contact with reality! A still greater boon will be the advent of a Jesus endorsing the Baptist's message, and bringing another, grander, more winsome, more satisfying. You may expect to meet some of these seekers after God first at the Jordan, devoutly listening to the preacher of repentance; then, later, in the company of the Greater One. Be not surprised at the readiness with which they respond to His call. The acquaintance may be slight, but their hearts are prepared, and His eye can detect in their faces the subtle indications of preparedness—souls longing for the true Master. Union is certain, and it will be fruitful.

In course of time a disciple-circle gathered around Jesus ; two circles, rather : an outer, larger one, and an inner, more intimate one, whom He constituted into a body of twelve. These societies, united by spiritual affinity, especially the smaller, He took pains to instruct. It was not easy to find the necessary time and leisure. The ever-growing crowds from Galilee and elsewhere pressed in upon the admired Preacher and Healer with incessant and insatiable demands for words and deeds of grace. But the over-tasked Master made time, and eagerly sought leisure for what He felt more and more to be a more important task than attending to the wants of the multitude. For it became clear as time passed that the earlier ministry in the synagogues was not going to issue in satisfactory results. Of popularity there was more than enough, but what comfort could be found in that if, where much seed had been sown, there was but a scanty promise of a crop, and if, after an abundant blossom, there was to be no ripe fruit? Such was the depressing thought in the mind of Jesus on the day of the parable-discourse from the boat. That discourse, made up probably of parables on sowing, interspersed with comments, was a review and criticism of past evangelic work, and when it was delivered the Speaker had made up His mind to devote more attention to the good soil, the men of good and honest heart, who were likely to yield in due season thirty, sixty, or an hundred fold. He had, indeed, begun to do that already, for the retreat to the hill had for its aim to secure a quiet interval for disciple-instruction, and the so-called *Sermon on the Mount* was the astonishing result. It was the first of a series of retreats in different directions, having the same end in view.

The "Sermon on the Mount" was not a sermon—not preaching, but teaching, and the audience was not the multitude, but disciples. A contrary impression is indeed given by Luke's narrative, and in part even by Matthew,

but we must hold that the more exact tradition has been preserved by Mark, who, though he does not report the "Sermon," reproduces most clearly the situation.¹ That he does no more is not surprising. It is no disparagement of the Apostle Peter, his source, to say that he probably did not distinctly remember the details of the teaching on the hill, and even if he did, he was not likely to use them in the popular addresses whose contents are summarised in the Second Gospel. The preservation of the teaching is probably due to the fact of some disciple having taken notes, and no one was more likely to do that than Matthew, to whom tradition ascribes the compilation of the *Logia*. But it may be asked, If Peter, Mark's apostolic authority, was silent as to the teaching, what occasion could he have to refer to the hill retreat at all? The answer must be, Because he remembered vividly an important event that took place there. The Master there *made* the twelve, of whom he, Peter, was one. And Mark deemed this one fact worth recording, though of what took place, further, during the sojourn on the hill-top he had nothing to communicate. And he is more careful than either of his brother evangelists in reporting the precise circumstances amid which the event took place. An immense crowd is gathered below; they jostle Jesus, the centre of attraction, in their eagerness to get near Him. He is weary and heart-sick, and wishes to get away from this confusion and excitement, in which it is impossible to do any real good. He resolves to ascend the hill; and He takes with Him a band of men, perhaps volunteers, who understand His purpose, and act under the instinctive guidance of spiritual affinity. Out of these He ultimately selects the twelve, to whom, either alone or along with the outer circle of companions who had joined Him from

¹ Mark iii. 9-19.

the crowd, He communicates the precious instruction reported by Matthew and Luke. All present are *hearers of promise*, offering to the Teacher a more or less good soil for the doctrine of the Kingdom.

Incomparable doctrine! Only once in the whole history of the world have such simple yet profound words of wisdom been spoken in the ears of men. How amply they justify the expression, "a great light"! A great light, indeed; fit to be the light not of Galilee alone, but of the whole world. Compare this discourse on the hill with Plato's *Republic*, 'also in its way a discourse on the Kingdom of God—brilliant, wise, and in the main morally wholesome, yet long, elaborate, wearisome, and a strange mixture of wisdom and folly, valuable and valueless, and with only a percentage of the perennial in its many pages. How much is said here in small compass! and how well said, the highest thoughts spoken with the ease of common conversation, in language Jewish in colour, but cosmopolitan in import, all valid still, and hardly needing translation into modern dialect to be perfectly intelligible! What variety of topic, and how complete the composite whole! the citizen of the Kingdom depicted in a few strokes; righteousness counterfeit and true set before our eyes in vivid contrast; the religion of ostentation exhibited in its hollowness and vanity side by side with the pure religion of the heart; God at last truly and adequately named, the golden rule enunciated in happiest terms, the royal law of love persuasively proclaimed, the care-free life of child-like trust commended in golden sentences which read like a lyric poem.

4. Jesus performed an illuminating function in reference to the religious teaching of the scribes and the religious practice of the Pharisees. These together formed the darkest feature of the spiritual night that brooded over the land of Israel. "If the light that is in thee be dark-

ness, how great is that darkness!" One who was able to be the true light of Israel manifestly could not escape the unwelcome task of a moral and religious critic. To what purpose come as a light and leave the deepest darkness unattacked? Even if the darkness prove impenetrable, the attempt to illuminate must be made; nor will the light be wasted; it will lighten ingenuous souls, if not the perverse religionists for whom it is primarily intended. Jesus did not shrink from the perilous duty, but spoke the needful words of exposure and rebuke as occasions arose, not a few of which have been preserved.

The anti-Rabbinic, anti-Pharisaic manifesto of Jesus is the least understood and appreciated part of the evangelic tradition. If they were frankly to speak their minds, some might express themselves about it in this fashion: "It is not light but lightning, at most it is light for that time, not for all time, and it is only by accident a part of Christ's light even for His own time and nation; therefore it may now safely be neglected." Not one of these positions is true. Our Lord's criticism of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is both light and lightning; it was emphatically light for His own time and people, but it is none the less very needful light for all time; it was not merely occasional and accidental light, but systematic and deliberately intended. Jesus spoke didactically to His disciples concerning the evil system in vogue, as well as polemically, as occasion arose, to its representatives; witness the elaborate contrast between true and false religious ideas and practices in the Sermon on the Mount. His didactic statement was certainly light, if His polemical utterances were scathing lightning. Even those stern words, which were blinding, destructive thunderbolts to the scribes and Pharisees, were, and still are, words of eternal life to all who know how to use them. What great emancipating utterances, brief, memorable, piercing to the heart

of things, as valid and valuable now as then, Jesus spake in His encounters with the religious guides and models of Israel! "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"; "New wine must be put into new bottles"; "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath"; "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice"; "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out." What a loss to Christendom had these great words not been recorded, or had no occasion arisen for their being spoken! We cannot afford to treat them as the *obiter dicta* of a famous combatant in an extinct religious controversy. They concern us; it concerns us to understand them; we do not even yet understand them too well. The controversy is not extinct; in changing forms it is ever being revived. Rabbinism and Pharisaism are hard to kill; while the world lasts true Christianity, the religion of the spirit, will have to reckon with their deadly opposition, if not as open avowed foes, then under the more dangerous guise of special friends—traditionalism and formalism zealous for the letter, killing the spirit, betraying the sacred liberties of the religion of good hope, through which we draw nigh with filial confidence to God.

The polemical element in the Gospels possesses high value as a revelation of personal character. It shows the heroic side of Jesus: His absolute sincerity, His fearless courage, His masterly skill in using the weapons of defence and offence, combined with sublime superiority to the petty chicanery of religious controversy. What a boon to the world if those who bear His name had more of His moral temper, and less of the time-serving spirit which avoids the cross and works no redemption!

5. The Sadducees occupy a very subordinate place in the Gospels, and one might easily imagine it possible to render an adequate account of the light-giving function of Jesus

without taking them into consideration. That they are so much in the background is due to the temper of the party. They lacked religious zeal. They were "moderates" in religion, and were content with a very scanty creed and a minimum of pious practice. They were more live and let live, in their attitude towards men of a different type, than the Pharisees and scribes. They did not, like the latter, watch for Christ's halting. Many of the things He did contrary to existing religious custom were no offence to them; for they no more than He had faith in the Mosaic origin of the Oral Law, or attached importance to its innumerable prescriptions. They would see nothing amiss in the nonconformity of Jesus and His disciples. The one respect in which the life of the Jesus-circle would be distasteful to them was its unworldly, spiritual tone. With that, wherever it appeared, whether in the society whereof John the Baptist was the centre or in that which gathered around Jesus, they could have no sympathy. To a Sadducee John and Jesus would appear simply curious, unaccountable phenomena, creating a kind of philosophical surprise that any rational being could be so much in earnest about matters wholly visionary. In this these Jewish secularists were at one with the Pharisees, for they too, notwithstanding their devotion to religious punctilio, were secular in spirit, and valued the substantial goods of this life far more than the Kingdom of Heaven. Hence these two extremes sometimes met in common antagonism to the vital religion of the day; *e.g.*, at the Jordan, as unsympathetic spectators of John's baptism, and on the occasion when they united in a demand from Jesus of a sign from heaven, so revealing their common blindness to the signs of the times that were all around them.

The priests from of old were of the Sadducaic party. Sacrificial rites, not the traditions of the elders, were

their concern, and they combined attention to sacerdotal duty with a Sadducaic temper. Their moral tone was accommodating. The commercial traffic that grew up in the temple precincts in connection with the sacred feasts gave no trouble to their consciences.

Jesus bore witness against this phase of Jewish religious life as He had opportunity, sufficiently if not abundantly. First, didactically, though afar off and without naming the party in the Sermon on the Mount, when He pointed to the pagan solicitude about secularities as a thing to be shunned by disciples.¹ The Sadducees were the pagan element in contemporary Israel, as their predecessors had been philo-pagan in the days of old. Then, occasionally, as when He reproached the sign-seekers with spiritual blindness, and, again, when He gently charged the propounders of the resurrection-riddle with ignorance of the true sense of Scripture and of the power of God.² The sacerdotal Sadducees He more severely rebuked by a magisterial deed, the cleansing of the temple. That act of zeal was an outrage of conventional proprieties, and of course it was loudly condemned; yet, if there was any conscience left in the temple officials, they would feel that Jesus was right. It did not, we may be sure, cure the evil—that is not so easily and summarily done. But it was an effective protest. For once the light of heaven had flashed its dazzling rays into the murky darkness.

The light shone in the darkness, but the darkness apprehended it not. The Jews loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. They hated the light, and passionately sought to extinguish it. They succeeded, but their success was a failure. The cross only gave the light a commanding position and intensified brilliancy. In one sense the darkest fact in human history, the crucifixion, is

¹ Matt. vi. 32.

² Matt. xxii. 29.

in reality the most light-giving. A great light in life, Jesus became a greater in death, for Israel, for mankind.

“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.”

A. B. BRUCE.

THE FAITH OF SCIENCE.

ARE religion and science antagonistic and mutually exclusive terms? Is religion fundamentally opposed to science and science essentially destructive of religion? Within quite recent years theological and scientific journals have resounded with records of wars and rumours of wars, of alternate victories and defeats, in the battle between these combatants. And although for the moment the voice of the tumult is almost hushed, and the flag of truce waves gently on the wind, yet it is probably only a truce, and not an abiding peace, which has been arranged between these long-contending rivals. For the basis of the truce is feeling and desire rather than principle and fact. On both sides there is a benevolent wish for a clear and strict delimitation of frontier in order that each combatant may have a definite and exclusive territory assigned to it. After these boundaries have once been settled there seems to be a general hope that each party in the long conflict will severely protect its own, and honourably abstain from invading the other's territory. It appears, moreover, to be taken for granted by large numbers of persons that the proposed treaty will provide that the territory of what is called “knowledge” shall become the exclusive domain of science, and that religion shall be absolute sovereign in the territory of “faith.”

But what if no such fixed delimitation of frontier be-