

message from God which He announced to men. As His servants, we are bound, especially those who are recognized teachers in His Church, to announce these solemn truths to all who will hear us. To go further is to overstep the limits of the revelation given to us in Christ, and to announce in His name that which He has not spoken. To add to, is as perilous as to take away from, "the words of the prophecy of this Book." We have no right to assert in God's name anything more than we can trace by abundant and decisive evidence to the lips of Christ and the pen of the Apostles and Evangelists. And the teaching which can be so traced is all that we need.

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*THE AUTONOMY OF JESUS: A STUDY IN THE
FOURTH GOSPEL.*

THE Fourth gospel is a study rather than a biography of Jesus, and not so much even a study of his actual life as an artistic and symbolic exposition or application of great Christian ideas, which are conceived for the most part under the categories of Jewish Hellenism and presented in an historical form already current throughout the Christian communities. On page after page we have an interpretation of Jesus. Besides being an implicit refutation of the pretensions and criticisms advanced by contemporary Judaism, as well as of certain phases in Jewish Christianity, the book possesses a peculiar inward aspect; its primary aim is not to instruct outsiders upon the elementary facts and principles of Christianity, but to edify people who are already members of the church (xix. 35; xx. 31),¹ in view of certain widely diffused modes

¹ The latter passage is not quite unexampled (cf. Josephus, *Vita*, 76); but, taken with others (e.g. i. 14, etc.), it corroborates the internal evidence of the book. Here we have to do with a Christian preacher and his audience of

of thought and features of life. It is a devotional comment upon the primitive tradition. In technical language it may be rightly described as esoteric, no less than didactic and apologetic: and it is didactic in one sense pretty much because it is apologetic.¹ The author is endeavouring as a rule to exhibit certain aspects of Christ and Christianity which may serve, in his opinion, to meet difficulties felt by others, if not by himself, in the contemporary situation; while at the same time his characteristic conception of Jesus is to some extent modified by the very tendencies of gnosticism and of theosophy to meet which he employs ideas, earlier and hitherto comparatively alien, drawn from Alexandrian or Palestinian Hellenism. As the first century closed, he wrote this study in order to bring out in a timely fashion what he conceived to be the permanent significance of Jesus for the church and age; arguing that Christ was the real Logos, the Logos in person, no less than the genuine Messiah. He wrote also, it is to be observed, for men who, breathing an atmosphere which was to a large extent saturated with Greek speculation, often found themselves unable either to adjust the old faith to these new moral and mental conditions, or to discover in the synoptic gospels² adequate materials for such a *rapprochement*.

hearers or readers. He interprets, as he instructs, the consciousness of the local church, whether he was the final editor of the book or not.

¹ The apologetic aspect of the Fourth gospel is elaborately drawn by Wernle (*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums*, 1900, pp. 52-65); negatively, à propos of (a) the death of Jesus, (b) his limitations, (c) his eschatology, (d) his attitude to the depraved, (e) the sacraments; positively, in connexion with (a) his miracles, (b) his self-witness, and (c) his ideal of the true Christian. "Will man den Autor mit Schlagwörtern Bezeileum, so müsste er im Evangelium kirchlicher Apologet, im Brief anti-gnostischer Moralist heissen. Er ist fast in jeder Zeile ein praktischer Kämpfer für die Sache der Kirche gegen ihre äusseren und inneren Feinde." Apart from the local antagonisms and the recent expansion of Christianity in Asia Minor, the contents of the Fourth gospel are unintelligible; apart from the semi-historical methods of Alexandrian thought, its literary form is apt to be repeatedly misconceived. Theological reflexion dominates it thoroughly.

² That these were familiar to the original audience of the Fourth gospel may

From no other standpoint can the Fourth gospel be orientated in relation to Judaism, Alexandrianism, Old Testament prophecy, the synoptic tradition, and especially prior Christologies such as are represented in Paulinism and a book like Hebrews. Through all these affinities a distinct apologetic element is to be traced; and although this must not be unduly pressed—as if every sentence were written with a covert purpose of attack or indirect allusion—it cannot safely be overlooked. From prologue to epilogue there is a deliberate projection of Christian ideas into the author's sketch of Jesus. His book is, in one important aspect, a manifesto. It is in essence historical; but even taken as a historian he is to be judged by the fact that his account is introduced by a sketch of what he understood was an adequate philosophy of his religion, just as it is rounded off by an undisguised confession of religious endeavour. His tastes and sympathies were speculative, his purpose spiritual. Hence his treatment is dominated by his aim; Christianity is construed and presented as a faith in philosophic setting, history being, as it were, "used solely as a plastic material for setting forth religious ideas" (Pfleiderer). "Narrative is shot through and through with idealisms and mysticisms, and with symbolisms of the spiritual, making a half epic, half dramatic literature; a literary phenomenon, the likeness to which is found in Deuteronomy in the Hebrew literature."¹ In consequence of this the author's prepossessions often lie upon the surface, and this is particularly the case with the leading idea of the

now be taken as an axiom of criticism. The evidence has been recently stated with much force by Zahn (*Einleitung in das Neue Test.* ii. pp. 498-527) and Wendt (*das Johannes-Evangelium*, pp. 6-44), more radically by Wernle (*die Synoptische Frage*, pp. 234-248), Abbott (*Encycl. Bibl.* ii. 1765 f.), and Schmiedel (*ibid.* 1578 f.).

¹ W. W. Peyton, *The Memorabilia of Jesus*, p. 14. The general data for the apologetic and polemical element are collected with care and (upon the whole) with good judgment by Baldensperger in his monograph on *das Prolog des vierten Evangeliums* (1897), e.g. pp. 152-165.

volume. The connexion between the historical Jesus and the semi-speculative Logos of Alexandrianism, which had been fostered by the amalgamation of Jewish and Hellenic speculation, was already in danger of abuse in Asiatic circles. It required to be defined, reset, illuminated. The Fourth gospel was therefore composed to confirm, but also to correct and purify, that contemporary faith in Jesus which loved to view him under the category of the true Logos. The result is that the human career of Jesus is chiefly transformed into an episode in the eternal existence of the Logos, through which he passes in a victorious and independent progress; for, with his speculative presuppositions, it was almost inevitable that the author should regard the life of Jesus in this world under the aspect of an assured triumph rather than a sustained and arduous struggle.

Starting from this position, observant critics have more than once noticed, among the tendencies and characteristics of the Fourth gospel, a disposition to lay stress upon what may be roughly but not improperly called the Autonomy of Jesus. It is pretty obvious that a number of passages, mainly narrative but occasionally reflective, are arranged in such a way that they betray a strong predilection for the spontaneity or self-determination of Christ, i.e. a desire to prove that his fountains of force and insight lay wholly within the serene control of his own consciousness. So keenly is this feature emphasized that it has been thought to almost impair the simplicity and beauty of his human character, and in one or two cases it is pressed very close to the verge of destroying moral causation altogether. Put briefly, it dilates upon the fact that Christ's motives were not drawn from outward circumstances, but purely from within, proceeding from a calm mysterious law by which his whole being was directly regulated. Independent and self-reliant, as the Fourth gospel pictures him, he is never determined by the world; he determines it. *Habere, non*

haberi, is the motto of his career. So far as his relations to mankind are concerned, he is absolutely a law to himself. He carefully dissociates himself from any attempt at influencing his conduct. He is represented, in a word, as too elevated to require any suggestions or assistance from outside, nor can any person anticipate his movements or mould his actions. Unhampered and unruffled by anything extraneous, he lives and moves from his inner consciousness, a centre to which he constantly returns, which cannot be reached by any influence or agency without, but maintains itself "beyond the arrows, shouts, and views of men."

The simplest method of understanding this engrossing conception in the Fourth gospel is first of all to watch its reappearance at point after point throughout the narrative. There are four passages especially in which it comes to the surface with quite unmistakable lucidity. The first (i.) is the story of the wedding festivities at Kana (ii. 1-11), which forms the opening incident of Christ's public ministry. Here the author represents Mary appealing to her son on behalf of host and guests. He puts her aside.¹ Then, after an interval which contains no change of situation and offers no fresh motive for action (so far as the narrative is concerned), Jesus does of his own accord what she expected. The water is turned into wine, not because he responded to a human request but (as the writer explicitly warns us) simply because he chose to do so; the initiative was all his own. The pragmatism of the gospel supplies other more or

¹ It is scarcely accurate to declare that this narrative "asserts emphatically a truth which is repeated again and again throughout this gospel, that there was a higher law for Christ's actions than could be derived from mere external circumstance—the law of a being whose guiding impulses were from within and from above" (R. H. Hutton, *Theological Essays*, p. 182). The phrase "mere external circumstances" is, in such a connexion, somewhat inadequate; for this case was just one of those natural needs which often formed the occasion for Christ's help in the synoptic narratives, without compromising his dignity. Besides, it was backed by a mother's entreaty, and in itself was quite innocuous.

less mystical motives¹ by which the origin and aim of this story can be explained, but this psychological reason maintains its place among them all. At the *début* of Jesus, he is distinctly brought forward as the creative and self-determining Power of God, emancipated from anything like human suasion, one whose "light of life was not, like other men's, reflected back from the mere visible circumstances of his earthly lot."

Similarly (ii.) in the anecdote of his journey to Jerusalem, it is hardly possible to miss a desire upon the part of the writer to make his readers aware that Jesus was never merged in the stream of influence and motive (vii. 1-11). Here again Jesus repudiates advice or pressure from his family, this time from his brothers. In reply to their appeal, he refuses to move. Afterwards, despite his former denial, he undertakes the journey *suâ sponte*. Yet (be it noted) in the circumstances narrated by the author no clue is furnished for this abrupt change of programme. The point of the tale is missed, in fact, until one sympathizes with his aversion to admit any outside impact upon Jesus, whose course of action here as elsewhere is dissociated from the natural suggestions and motives which might be supposed to have rippled upon his personality.²

Once more (iii.), in the speech delivered at Jerusalem (x. 1-18) Jesus is represented as emphasizing the spontaneity of his death. It is his own choice, due neither to the will nor to the plots of men, but to his own initiative, and therefore not inconsiderate or accidental. "No one takes my life away from me; I lay it down of myself."

¹ Such as the desire to represent Christ's actions as altogether apart from the Old Testament theocracy (Apoc. xii. 1-5), the sphere of the latter unable to control the Logos of Christianity. Otherwise Abbott: *Encycl. Bibl.* ii. 1800-1801.

² This view of the passage is simpler and more satisfactory than Wendt's subtle theory that verses 8-9 are a secondary addition by the evangelist, who misconceived the original and deeper sense of the words in verse 6 (= ii. 4): *op. cit.* pp. 134-136. To play upon the double sense of a term is characteristic of this author's method in dealing with the historical tradition before him.

The same idea (*emisit animam, non amisit*) is put with pathetic beauty in the later narrative, where the author gives special prominence (xviii. 4-7) to the activity and self-possession of Jesus in Gethsemane. "He went forth," we are told, without waiting to be sought for and discovered by his opponents. He overawes them, even physically, by his bold front. He does not wait to be addressed; he speaks first (xviii. 4). Up to the very end he is master of the situation, determining his course, possessed of free-will, and exercising powers of choice even within the limits of apparent necessity. It is consonant with this attitude that he alone speaks from the cross (xix. 26-30); no one ventures to address him there (as in the synoptic gospels). In short, the majestic dignity of the last days, and the absence of anything that might suggest weakness or agony, combine to illustrate the idea already expressed in x. 18, or in Barnabas viii. 5, ἡ βασιλεία Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ξύλου.

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(To be continued.)