

*WENDT ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL.*

WENDT'S work on the Teaching of Jesus is well known to English readers, at least so far as that portion of it is concerned which deals with the substance of the Saviour's doctrine. But this, the part of the work which has been translated into English, is only the second of the two volumes of which the original consists. Of the first volume, which contains a critical examination of the Gospel records, Dr. Stalker has given an account in the *EXPOSITOR* of June 1896. In the portion of this volume dealing with the Fourth Gospel, Wendt maintained that in this Gospel, particularly in the speeches of Jesus, there were traces of older written records which had been worked up by the Evangelist. Further study of the subject has convinced him of the truth of this hypothesis; and in a book recently translated into English, he has sought to verify it by a more detailed examination of the Gospel than was possible within the limits of his former work. We propose to give a brief criticism of the argument now brought forward by Wendt in proof of the composite character of the Fourth Gospel.

The traces of the employment of a written Source which Wendt believes he can detect are of two kinds. First, there are differences noticeable between the point of view of the Evangelist and the recorded speeches of Jesus. And secondly, there is, in many cases, a distinct inconsistency between the speeches of Jesus and their historical setting. In both cases Wendt maintains that his hypothesis gives the best explanation of the facts in question, which are, he believes, inexplicable on the theory either that the Gospel as a whole is the work of an Apostle, or that it is a free composition of later date.

First, as to points of difference between the Evangelist and the speeches of Jesus. The most important is the

place assigned by the Evangelist to the miracles. They are to him the chief witness to the Messiahship of Jesus, the "signs"—thus he designates them—whereby the claims of Jesus are attested. He says at the end of his Gospel that the "signs" which he has written in his book are written that his readers might believe that Jesus is the Son of God (xx. 30 sq.); and throughout the book there are frequent references to the part they play in inducing belief in the man who wrought them (ii. 11, 23, iv. 45, 53 sq., vi. 2, 14, xi. 45, xii. 11, 18). The important point with regard to these "signs" is, according to Wendt, their supernatural character. It is in virtue of this that they witness on behalf of Jesus. Many of them are works of love, but it is not as such, but as proofs of the miraculous power of the worker that, according to the Evangelist, they testify to Him. Many again have an allegorical character, setting forth in the language of fact spiritual truths presented by Jesus in His teaching. Thus, for instance, the miraculous opening of the eyes of the blind man (ix. 1 sqq.) is symbolical of the enlightenment of the spiritually blind (ix. 39-41), the raising of Lazarus from the dead symbolical of the resurrection to eternal life to which Jesus refers in His conversation with Martha (xi. 23 sqq.). But still Wendt maintains that such miracles are called "signs," not with reference to the symbolical significance attached to them, but in virtue of their supernatural character. It is this importance assigned to the miracles as proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus that is, according to Wendt, one of the outstanding characteristics of the Evangelist.

But when we come to the speeches of Jesus Himself, we breathe quite a different atmosphere. He makes no appeal to those "signs," of which so much is made in the narrative. The witness to His Messiahship is, according to Himself, no external sign, but the life-giving character of His ministry. He is the bread of life: that is the answer

He gives to those who ask a sign, virtually refusing to give them such a sign as they desire. True, He appeals to His "works." But when we examine the passages in which He makes such appeal, we find that He means not specially His miracles, but His labours in the preaching of the Gospel, what He calls "the work that is given Him to do" (xvii. 4; cp. iv. 34). How are we to explain the difference between the Evangelist and the speeches he records on such a vital question? If John was the author, how did he appeal to "signs," while he cherished such a lively recollection of how Jesus refused to give any such witness to His claims? Again, if the Gospel is a free composition of later date, why did the Evangelist introduce no reference in the speeches of Jesus to those "signs" on which he laid so much stress in the historical portions? The only satisfactory explanation, Wendt thinks, is that the Evangelist was reproducing the speeches of Jesus from an older Source, in which, though he did not recognize it, a different standpoint was assumed from his own.

There is much plausibility in this explanation. Let us see if it will bear investigation. The first point to be considered is whether Wendt is right in his statement as to the importance attached by the Evangelist to the "signs." Does he regard a faith based upon these "signs" as the true type of belief? Certainly we meet with many instances in the narrative where reference is made to the belief in Jesus which followed the performance of certain miracles. But it does not follow that the Evangelist regarded such belief as satisfactory. He is merely stating a fact, which we can well credit, that the immediate effect of the miracles upon the people who beheld them was an enthusiasm for Jesus which, in a loose sense, may be described as belief. From various points in the narrative we gather that the Evangelist recognizes the inadequacy of such a ground of faith. Thus, for instance, he tells us (ii. 23, 24) that Jesus did not commit

Himself to those who believed in His name because of the miracles which He did. True, Wendt maintains that this remark is introduced by the Evangelist with the object of showing that Jesus was not deceived in the enthusiasm displayed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but knew from the beginning that they would prove unfaithful to Him. But even if we admit that, it contains a remarkable criticism of a type of faith which, according to Wendt, it is the purpose of the Evangelist to emphasize. Again, to take another instance, in the interview with Nathanael, which Wendt assigns to the Evangelist, the supernatural knowledge displayed by Jesus leads to the recognition of His Messiahship by the disciple. This is exactly the kind of faith that we are to believe the Evangelist approves of. Yet, strange to say, he makes Jesus in His reply recognize the inadequacy of it, and promise to give a still higher revelation of His glory. Wendt can find no place in his written Source for this word of Jesus; but he thinks it may be traced to some authentic oral tradition. But even then it is difficult to see why the Evangelist should have introduced it here. Did he not realize that it involved a criticism of the position which, according to Wendt, he was seeking throughout his narrative to establish? Or did he take the statement about the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man literally, and interpret the saying as a promise of still higher miraculous testimony? If so, it is strange that, with the fertility of invention with which Wendt credits him, he should have introduced no episodes in his narrative confirmatory of the promise here given. The man who, according to Wendt, made up the story about the healing of the blind man from the mere hint given in ix. 4 sq., and worked up the saying to Martha xi. 23, 25 sq. into the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection, would have had no hesitation in inventing a miracle on the lines of this saying of Jesus.

Again, in the account of the effect produced among the Samaritans by the preaching of Jesus, which Wendt assigns to the Evangelist, we have a contrast between the lower and the higher type of faith. Many of the Samaritans, we are told, believed in Him because of the witness of the woman to His supernatural knowledge (iv. 39). But after He had preached among them, we read that many more believed because of His own word, and said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (iv. 41, 42). According to Wendt, this account of the preaching of Jesus in Samaria is a piece of pure invention on the part of the Evangelist, who misunderstood the words, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (iv. 35), and, taking the prophetic present literally, concluded that Jesus must have reaped some immediate harvest, for the description of which he drew upon his imagination. He was perfectly free, then, to give what account he pleased of the work of conversion which followed. He might have introduced fresh miracles to explain the great success which attended the work of Jesus among the Samaritans, and, as we have seen, he is supposed not to have had any hesitation in inventing miracles to suit his purpose. Yet, strange to say, this Evangelist, who is alleged to have such a predilection for faith based on miracles, in a case where he has a perfectly free hand, represents a great work of conversion as depending not upon the performance of any miracle, but upon the preaching of the word. He makes the Samaritans recognize a higher type of faith than that which is based upon the supernatural knowledge of Jesus testified to by the woman. Their faith rests not upon any outward "sign," but upon the living word of the preacher. Surely a strange admission from a man who regards a belief based upon "signs" as the true type of faith!

The same chapter contains a further disparagement of this kind of faith, and again in a passage which Wendt would assign to the Evangelist. When asked by the nobleman to come and heal his son, Jesus replies, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (iv. 48). Wendt endeavours to prove that this saying is not directed against the tendency to base one's faith on miracles. He would put the emphasis on the word "see." What Jesus objects to is, not that men require miracles as the ground of their faith, but that they insist on seeing the miracles with their own eyes, instead of being satisfied with the evidence of others. But the syntax does not justify this interpretation. Had the emphasis been on the word *ἴδητε*, it would, as B. Weiss says, have come first, or would have been supplemented by some words such as *τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς*. As the verse stands, the emphasis naturally falls on the *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα*. What Jesus is speaking against is a faith which requires such miraculous manifestations for its foundation. The use of the plural in the form of address confirms this conclusion. In answer to the nobleman, Jesus says, "Except ye see signs and wonders," etc., referring to the attitude of the bystanders as well. Are we to understand, then, that they were waiting for the evidence of their own senses before they would believe? Why, just a few verses before, the Evangelist tells us that they *had* seen, having been at Jerusalem at the feast (v. 45). On Wendt's interpretation the plural in the answer to the nobleman is unintelligible in view of the statement of v. 45; but if we take the word of Jesus as a protest against the tendency to base one's faith upon miracles, the plural form of address suggests a reference to the former verse in which we have read of the prevalence of the form of faith here criticized.

These passages serve to prove that the Evangelist recognizes a higher type of faith than that which rests upon the miracles alone. Still we have his distinct statement

(xx. 31) that the signs he has recorded "are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." In view of this statement, there is no denying that the Evangelist does attach a certain value to the witness of the miracles. They reveal the glory of the Word made flesh (i. 14). They are the features in the life of Jesus most calculated to arouse attention and draw men to Him. That men should survey them with indifference, and in spite of them refuse to believe in Jesus, the Evangelist regards as a proof of their hard-heartedness (xii. 37 sqq.). Is there anything remarkable in this attitude? If Jesus actually worked miracles, is it not exactly the position we should have expected a writer to take up? If He actually rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples, is it not natural that they should have laid emphasis on such a "sign," as a witness to the truth of His claims? If the Evangelist was to record the miracles at all, what more natural than that he should do so in the hope that they might inspire belief in Jesus? But, as we have seen, he has a higher conception of belief than that which is based upon the "signs" alone; and even when he says that he has recorded the "signs" that men might believe in Jesus, he points us forward to this higher type of faith in the words which follow, "and that believing ye might have life through His name." The miracles may be the beginning, but they are only the beginning. The true faith is that which rests, not upon the witness of the miracles, but on the experience of the life-giving power of the Saviour. The Evangelist may have written the "signs" that men may believe in Jesus, but he knows that men do truly believe only when they have life through His name, only when they can say of the "signs" as the Samaritans said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

So far of the position of the Evangelist. We turn now to the speeches of Jesus, and consider whether the standpoint there is essentially different. The fact that Jesus, when asked by the people to give them a sign (vi. 30), refused to accede to their request, is taken by Wendt to indicate a different attitude upon this question from that assumed by the Evangelist. Does it really do so? Surely not. Because the Evangelist finds in the miracles "signs" witnessing to the glory of Jesus, does he therefore stand on the same plane as those who refuse to believe without a sign? There is an ambiguity in the word "sign," as applied to the miracles, that may lead to confusion. They may be called "signs" in the sense that they have merely an evidential value in relation to the revelation given in Christ, that they are outward vouchers for the truth of Jesus' claims to Messiahship. Or again, they may be regarded as "signs" in the sense that they are not merely outward guarantees of the truth of Jesus's claims, but an integral part of His work as Messiah, and as such bear witness to Him. It is in the former sense that the word is used when the people ask Jesus to give them a sign, and in this sense He consistently refused to comply with their request. But it is in the latter sense that the Evangelist regards the miracles as "signs," and his position must not be confounded with that of those who demand of Jesus some external sign to attest His claims. The fact, then, that Jesus resists this demand on the part of the people for a sign is no proof that the position taken up in the speech in question (vi. 32 sqq.) is opposed to that of the Evangelist, so strongly opposed that we cannot imagine him reproducing it from memory. For the Evangelist, too, although he sees in the miracles of Jesus "signs" witnessing to Him, is opposed to the spirit of those who will not believe except they see signs and wonders (iv. 48).

In spite of the fact that the Evangelist regarded the



miracles as "signs," there is no inconsistency, then, in his recording the speech in which Jesus refused to give a sign to the people. Nay, I think we may go farther, and say that, even if there were no reference at all in the speeches of Jesus to the miracles as bearing testimony to Him, it would be quite unnecessary to have recourse to a theory of two-fold authorship, assigning the speeches to a different Source from the narrative. We can well conceive Jesus making no appeal to the miracles. He will have men believe in Him because of the truth of which He is the bearer; and it is natural that, face to face with the people, He should strive rather to convince them of the truth of His doctrine, than appeal to anything else which may serve to confirm it. But with the Evangelist it is different. He looks at the life of Jesus from without. He records not only the speeches but the wonderful works of Jesus. Is it inconceivable that he should assign to them a significance which Jesus did not attribute to them, and which he was aware Jesus did not attribute to them? Must the biographer assume exactly the standpoint of his hero on peril of having his book dismembered by the critic? Is it not rather natural that a writer, narrating the life of Jesus, should seek to swell the volume of testimony by an appeal to these wonderful works, in which the claims of Jesus appeared to receive further justification, even though he was aware that Jesus Himself laid no stress upon them?

But does Jesus make no reference to the miracles in His speeches in the Fourth Gospel? That is a point upon which there may be difference of opinion. With the exception of vi. 26,—which Wendt believes to be an attempt on the part of the Evangelist to connect the speech of Jesus about the bread of life with the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, with which it had originally nothing to do,—there is no reference in the speeches of Jesus to the *σημεία*. But there is frequent appeal to

His works, and the question is, in what sense these "works" are to be understood. Let us first take Wendt's interpretation. In v. 36 Jesus appeals to the witness of His "works":—"But I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me." The "works" of which Jesus here speaks must be the same, Wendt thinks, as the "work" to which He refers in iv. 34, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work," and in xvii. 4, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." And from the context in both these passages we learn that the work referred to is the preaching of the Gospel (iv. 35-38; xvii. 6-8). This conclusion, that by His "works" Jesus means specially His preaching, is confirmed by the fact that in two passages in which He appeals to the witness of His "works," xiv. 10 sq. and xv. 24, these works are so closely associated with His words, that "works" and "words" may be regarded as almost synonymous. Thus, in answer to Philip, Jesus says, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the very works' sake" (xiv. 10 sq.). Words and works are not, Wendt thinks, here co-ordinated. Jesus is not referring to two different things, but to one and the same. The works of the latter part of v. 10 are the same as the words of the former. And so also in xv. 24, where Jesus says, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin," He is only repeating in stronger form the statement of v. 22, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had

not had sin." The conclusion that Wendt reaches, then, is that when Jesus thus refers to His "works," He is not thinking only or specially of His miracles, but of His Messianic work in general, and specially of His labours in the preaching of the Gospel.

We may admit that in v. 36 the "works" refer to Jesus' Messianic work as a whole, without special reference to the miracles, yet, if Jesus actually wrought miracles, including the miracles as well. But, with regard to the other passages, one cannot help feeling suspicious of the attempt to prove that the distinction between "words" and "works" is a distinction without a difference. If "words" and "works" are the same, how can Jesus say, "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake"? Where does the alternative come in? Does not the supposition reduce the statement to the meaningless, "Believe My words, or else believe My words"? And, again, in xv. 22-24, if "words" and "works" are the same, there is no *crescendo* in the argument. The second verse is merely a repetition of the first. Wendt seeks to repel this objection by pointing out that there is an advance, inasmuch as in the second verse the idea of speaking is replaced by the more general idea of working, while at the same time the incomparable grandeur of the works is emphasized. But if "words" and "works" are practically the same, the substitution of the one term for the other can make little difference, so that virtually the whole climax of the passage lies in the phrase, "which none other man did." This is something, certainly; but it will hardly be disputed that the effectiveness of the passage is much enhanced if the "works" of the second verse really mean works and not words, if Jesus is here referring to something which, even if His words were without avail, might have been expected to make an impression

on the people. It is in this spirit that Jesus appeals to His works in x. 37 sq., "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in Me and I in Him." Wendt thinks he is justified in arguing from the passages already referred to to the present verse, and concluding that the term "works" must bear the meaning here which he would elsewhere assign to it. It were more reasonable to reverse the process, and to argue from the plain meaning of the word here to its meaning in those other passages. Jesus urges the people who will not believe His own testimony to accept that of His works. He speaks of belief in His works as a matter easier of attainment, a thing to be expected even of those who refuse to listen to His own testimony. Is it not plain that by these "works" Jesus must mean something different from His words?

The arguments of Wendt in support of the narrower meaning he would assign to the "works" in the speeches of Jesus do not, then, appear conclusive. When Jesus appeals to His "works" as bearing testimony to Him, which it is an additional proof of the hardheartedness of the people not to receive, we find in the reproach an analogy to the saying of the Evangelist that "though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him" (xii. 37). Not that we understand the "works" as referring merely to the miracles. The term is more general, and it is for this reason, no doubt, that Jesus uses it rather than the *σημεῖα* of the Evangelist. But if the "works" include more than the miracles, if they refer to the whole labours of Jesus in the course of His Messianic activity, they include the miracles as well (vii. 21, ix. 3 sq., x. 32). The appeal which Jesus makes to His "works" in the Fourth Gospel finds its parallel in His reply to the question of John in Matthew xi. 4 sq.

There Jesus refers to His miracles and works of healing. But not to them alone. He includes also the preaching of the gospel to the poor. In a word, His answer to John is an appeal to His Messianic works as a whole, inclusive of the miracles. Such also is the meaning of the appeal to His "works" in the Fourth Gospel.

So far as the question of the miracles is concerned, we do not, then, find such vital difference between the standpoint of the Evangelist and that of the speeches of Jesus as Wendt endeavours to prove. We turn now to another of the points of difference between the two to which Wendt draws attention. Certain sayings of Jesus, he points out, are interpreted by the Evangelist in a sense which there can be little hesitation in deciding to be incorrect. Thus the word of Jesus at the cleansing of the temple, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (ii. 19), is taken as prophetic of the resurrection *vv.* 21, 22). The saying, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (xii. 32) is applied to the crucifixion (*v.* 33, *cp.* xviii. 32). Other instances of a like misinterpretation are to be found in *vii.* 37-39 and xviii. 8 *sq.*, *cp.* xvii. 12. All these instances indicate the same tendency. Sayings of profound spiritual import are interpreted literally. Words which are true only in an ideal sense, but have nothing to correspond to them in outward fact, are supposed to find their fulfilment in later events. They are thus converted into miraculous predictions, and as such the Evangelist evidently attaches to them great value (ii. 22). This misconception on the part of the Evangelist of the meaning of the words he records is best explained, Wendt maintains, on his theory that there are two hands at work, that of the original recorder of the sayings of Jesus and that of the Evangelist.

Certainly Wendt's theory gives a satisfactory explanation

enough of the cases under consideration; and were there valid grounds for assuming the existence of a written Source, they might serve to confirm them. But in themselves the passages referred to require no such elaborate theory to account for them. Wendt himself admits that, were there no other evidence of a difference between the point of view of the Evangelist and that of the speeches of Jesus, they might be explained on the ground that the interpretative comments are interpolations. But even this hypothesis is unnecessary. The Evangelist finds in certain later events remarkable fulfilments of words spoken by Jesus. He draws attention to the fact as he records the words in question. Is there anything extraordinary in the fact? When we find him regarding the words even of a Caiaphas as an unconscious prophecy (xi. 51), is it surprising to meet with something of the same kind with reference to the words of Jesus? But Wendt objects that the interpretation given by the Evangelist is offered not as the secondary, but as the primary meaning of the words in question. To which we reply that the evidence which leads us to conclude that the meaning assigned by the Evangelist is not the correct one proves also that the Evangelist could not have designed his interpretation to be regarded in other than a secondary sense. He must have been as well aware as any critic of the present day that the phrase ἐκ τῆς γῆς in xii. 32 proved that the interpretation he gave to the saying could not have been that originally intended by Jesus, and that the ἐγερῶ in ii. 19 did not exactly agree with the explanation he offered. The fact that he did not alter the words to suit the interpretation he suggested proves that he regarded that interpretation, not as an exhaustive explanation of the meaning of the saying, but as a passing remark on a notable coincidence.

So far of the first group of facts on which Wendt

finds. We turn now to the second,—a series of alleged inconsistencies between the speeches of Jesus and their historical setting. We shall confine ourselves to the instances which Wendt himself singles out as the most striking.

The speech (v. 17 sqq.) proceeds on the assumption that Jesus is accused of working on the Sabbath (v. 18). But in the historical introduction (vv. 1-16), we do not read of Jesus doing any work. All He does is to command the impotent man to rise, take up his bed, and walk. Yet in His speech He refers repeatedly to His working, comparing it to that of His Father (vv. 17, 19, 20-27). Wendt thinks that in the Source there must have stood the story of how Jesus, on the Sabbath, rendered some practical help to a sick man, and restored him to health. A later generation conceived Jesus' healing of the sick, not as a matter of such practical intervention as is described in Mark vii. 33 and viii. 23-25, but as the mere issuing of a command. It is in this more striking aspect that the cure is represented in John v., with the result that the speech of Jesus on the occasion is deprived of all its point.

The criticism here does not appear very serious. In the first place it is to be noted that the Jews who persecuted Jesus had not seen the miracle themselves, and when they heard from the man, who was carrying his bed on the Sabbath, that he was doing so at the command of the man who had healed him, they may well have conceived of the cure as a piece of such medical work as Wendt seems to think necessary to cause offence. If it be objected that this explanation does not account for the reference to His working in the speech of Jesus, we reply that such distinction as presented itself to the Pharisaic mind between a cure wrought by a mere command and one performed by the laying on of hands would not have appealed to Jesus. We cannot imagine Him defending

Himself against the charge of Sabbath desecration on the ground that He had done no work, but had merely commanded the impotent man to rise. To Jesus the question with regard to Sabbath observance was not, How much or how little is it lawful to do? but, Is it lawful to do good or to do evil? (Mark iii. 4). To maintain that He had done no actual work would have been to accept the standpoint of the Pharisees. But is it the case that even if the Jews had been present at the miracle, they would have taken no offence at it as a breach of the Sabbath? Wendt says that the mere utterance of a command and the resultant cure of the person afflicted could not have been regarded as an offence against the law of the Sabbath. One hesitates to assign any limits to casuistical refinement. According to Wünsche (*Neue Beiträge zur Erläuterung der Evangelien aus Talmud und Midrasch*, p. 150), even sympathy with the sick was forbidden. But what avails Wendt's statement as to what could not be, when we have the evidence of the Gospels as to what was? In Mark iii. 1-6 we have an account of a Sabbath cure similar to that of the present passage, the cure of the man with the withered hand. Jesus lays no hand upon him, does no work in the strict sense of the term, but simply commands the man to stretch forth his hand and he is healed. But the hostility of the Pharisees is roused, presumably on account of the breach of the Sabbath involved, and they forthwith resolve to destroy Him. How can Wendt maintain, in the face of such evidence, that a cure brought about by the mere utterance of a command could not, even on the strictest interpretation, be regarded as a breach of the Sabbath?

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(To be continued.)