

## STUDIES IN THE "INNER LIFE" OF JESUS.

### XII. THE LIMITATION OF KNOWLEDGE.

(1) THE scope and the content of the knowledge of Jesus is a problem of urgent interest and supreme importance for Christian scholarship to-day. The traditional orthodoxy has with absolute confidence appealed to the authority of Jesus against the results of the Higher Criticism in relation to the Old Testament; and has forced on the Christian Church the choice between Christ and the higher critics. These have replied by affirming that on all the questions with which scholarship is concerned Jesus shared the opinions of His own age and people, as information on such subjects was not included in the revelation of God as Father, which was given to Him. The *kenosis* or self-emptying of the Son of God in the Incarnation necessarily involved the limitation of His knowledge on all matters not directly relating to His fulfilment of His vocation. Without denying the humiliation of the Word in the flesh, the traditional orthodoxy hesitates about accepting this practical application of the doctrine, and with the grounds of this hesitation those who cherish their Christian faith as their most precious possession cannot but sincerely and cordially sympathise. If Jesus, it is urged, is only a man of His own age and people as regards His knowledge, what assurance can be given that His revelation of God is true, and His redemption of man is real. The tendency of modern Christian thought to abandon not only the infallible *Church* of Catholicism, but even

the infallible *Bible* of Protestantism as the seat of authority in religion and morals, and to take refuge in the infallible *Christ* for certainty as regards faith and duty, adds force to this plea. Can we from the data afforded by the Gospels derive such a view of the mind of Christ as will free scholarship of all galling fetters, and yet give faith the assurance it craves?

(2) Setting aside all merely logical inferences drawn from the ecclesiastical dogma of the Person of Christ, we turn to the facts of the evangelical history, on which alone the Christian doctrine ought to be based. Jesus Himself fixes the centre and describes the circumference of His own knowledge; and it is not Christian reverence to disregard His own witness to Himself in favour of our own theories of His person. In Matthew xi. 25-30 He claims to be known as Son by God as by no other, to know God as Father and to reveal Him as no other can; the secret of His own nature is hid with God, as the secret of God's nature is given to Him alone to reveal. The condition of His intimate relation to God is absolute dependence, for all He hath has been delivered to Him by His Father, and entire submission, for He desires only what is well-pleasing in His Father's sight; in short the meekness and lowliness in heart that He claims for Himself (verse 29). We are warranted then in assuming that the condition of His receiving the revelation of the Father is the same as the condition of receiving that revelation from Him. It is hidden from the wise and understanding, and is received by babes; it is by taking His yoke and learning of Him, that is, by becoming meek and lowly as He was, that the rest the knowledge of the Father gives is found. Filial dependence and filial submission are the conditions of filial communion; as these conditions necessarily imply, as will afterwards be shown, limitation of knowledge, the denial of such limitation is implicitly the denial of those

very conditions on which according to Jesus' own testimony the revelation of God as Father to Himself as Son depends. On this point it need only be added that the Fourth Gospel, which lays so great emphasis on the revelation of God in Christ, is as definite as this passage in asserting the communicativeness of the Father, and the receptiveness of the Son as distinctive of their relation.

(3) If we may claim that the centre of the knowledge of Jesus is fixed in this passage, we may also affirm that its circumference is described in the confession of ignorance regarding the time of His return in Matthew xxiv. 36. "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." (Also Mark xiii. 32.) If we look closely at this utterance, we shall surely discover that it expresses surprise. We do not put a strain upon the words greater than they can, or should bear, when we infer from them that it seemed to Jesus wonderful and even bewildering that on a matter that so closely affected Himself the Father, who so freely imparted to Him, should withhold this knowledge from Him. These words are not only a confession of ignorance, but also a confession of the surprise that He felt regarding His ignorance; the passage is thus a double proof of limitation of knowledge. With this saying we may associate the first prayer in Gethsemane in Matthew xxvi. 39. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The necessity, if not of His death, yet of the darkness and desolation that He feared in His death, was not absolutely certain to Jesus. In a matter so vitally affecting the fulfilment of His own vocation, He walked by faith, and not by sight; not even the Son, but only the Father knew why the Son must thus, and thus only, fulfil the Father's will. The cry of desolation on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt.

xxvii. 46), bears witness to an interruption, if only momentary, of the revelation of the Father to the Son, due not surely to the cessation of the Father's communicativeness, but to the failure of the Son's receptiveness in the absorption of His mind, heart, and will in His sacrifice, His vicarious experience of the curse of the world's sin.

(4) These passages suffice to prove not only the Son's ignorance, but even His ignorance on matters that seem most closely connected with the revelation and redemption entrusted to Him, and also the necessity of that ignorance to the fulfilment of His vocation, for to omniscience the experiences of Gethsemane and Calvary would have been impossible. Before giving further evidence of the limitation of the knowledge of Jesus, we must pause to remove a difficulty for Christian faith which this recognition of the ignorance of Christ seems to raise. In a subsequent study the effort will be made to show that the whole divine revelation of God and man, sin and salvation, which is essential to human faith radiates from this filial consciousness of Christ as from its luminous centre, so that it possesses the same certainty for us as Christ's assurance that He alone was known by, knew, and made God known. Here it can only be pointed out that the authority of Jesus as regards faith and duty depends, on His own testimony, on the Father's communications to Him as Son. That for the fulfilment of the Son's vocation the Father withheld from the Son some knowledge closely related to that which He imparted does not lessen the meaning or lower the worth of the knowledge given. The authority of Christ relatively to men is not invalidated, because, in accordance with the filial relation, it was relatively to God, derived, dependent, limited, subordinate. We have the assurance of Christ Himself that in the Son the Father is seen and that the Son is the true and living way for men unto the Father (John xiv. 6-9); and that sufficeth us, for that

meets all our moral difficulties and spiritual necessities. The knowledge that the Son possesses and imparts does not include, as some have inferred, all that the Father knows, but only such knowledge as is necessary for filial dependence, submission, communion. This is the principle by means of which we can not only fix the centre, but also describe the circumference of the knowledge of Jesus.

(5) A very brief summary of the other proofs of the limitation of Jesus' knowledge is all that need here be given, as the subject has been fully discussed by Dr. Adamson in *The Mind in Christ*, Chapter I., and by Bishop Gore in *Dissertations: II. The Consciousness of our Lord in His Mortal Life*. He was surprised by His parents' anxiety regarding Him when He was left behind in the Temple (Luke ii. 49). When He visited Nazareth He marvelled at their unbelief (Mark vi. 6). His disciples by their dulness of understanding disappointed Him when they were bewildered by His teaching about outward and inward pollution (Matt. xv. 17) or when they blundered so grievously about His allusion to the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. xvi. 9-11). He was perplexed by the desire for a sign of His generation (Mark viii. 12). He was filled with glad wonder by the faith of the centurion (Matt. viii. 10), and of the Syro-phœnician woman (Matt. xv. 28). He did not anticipate, though His faith was not disturbed by the storm on the sea of Galilee (Matt. viii. 24); nor was it with intention that He sent His disciples into peril after the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. xiv. 22). He expected to find fruit on the barren fig-tree (Mark xi. 13). He obtained the information He needed and desired by asking questions: "What seek ye?" of the two disciples (John i. 38); "Who touched my garments?" regarding the woman in the crowd (Mark v. 30); "What is thy name?" of the Gadarene demoniac (Luke

viii. 30); "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" of the man born blind (John ix. 35); "Where have ye laid him?" regarding Lazarus' grave (xi. 34); when He wished to know the popular opinion and His disciples' belief regarding Himself He made a direct inquiry (Matt. xvi. 13, 15). It is expressly stated that He developed mentally (Luke ii. 52), and His knowledge of men during His ministry was gained by experience. (John ii. 24, where the verb *γινώσκειν* is used. See Westcott in loco.)

(6) There are recorded in the Gospels some exceptional cases of extraordinary knowledge on the part of Jesus. Some of these instances on closer examination prove to be only apparent. The procuring of the ass for the Triumphal Entry (Matt. xxi. 2-3), and of the upper room for the Last Supper (Mark xiv. 12-16) may be explained by previous arrangement with secret sympathisers, if not disciples, in Jerusalem. The finding of the money in the fish's mouth (Matt. xvii. 27) seems to be an instance of a figurative saying misunderstood, as it would be altogether contrary to the uniform practice of Jesus to perform a miracle of knowledge or of power to meet His own or His disciples' needs. The command of Jesus to His disciples about casting their net for the extraordinary draught of fishes (Luke v. 4) was probably an act of faith in God, even as was the command to the storm (Mark iv. 39). The statement to the woman of Samaria about the number of the husbands she had had (John iv. 17-18) raises a serious difficulty. That the presence of Jesus should disturb the conscience of the woman, and that Jesus should be aware of her discomfort, and should infer its cause is only in accordance with His moral influence and discernment, of which other instances are recorded. But the mention of the number "five" shows a knowledge of a mere fact in the woman's history, to which no exact parallel in the other instances can be produced, for the knowledge of Peter's character (John i. 42)

and of Nathanael's aspirations (verse 48) is explicable as such discernment. The difficulty may be relieved if we remember that there were no other witnesses of the conversation, and that probably the record was derived from the woman herself, who exaggerated in the story she told the people, "He told me all things that ever I did" (iv. 39), and who, therefore, may legitimately be supposed to have blended together the witness of Jesus and the testimony of her guilty conscience. Be this as it may, the instance is too peculiar and solitary to be the basis of any general conclusion regarding the extent of Jesus' ordinary knowledge.

(7) All the other instances are either prophetic anticipations or exercises of moral insight and spiritual discernment. To the former class belong the predictions of His own death and resurrection, of Peter's denial and martyrdom, of Judas' betrayal, and of the fate of Jerusalem. The two last cases must be held over for later consideration. Was not His expectation of death and resurrection bound up with His consciousness of His relation to God, and His vocation for men? The prophecy of Peter's denial, if not altogether explicable by insight into his character, and foresight of the circumstances into which His rashness would probably carry him, is made more intelligible by being connected with this permanent capacity of Jesus. The prediction of Peter's martyrdom is found in the Appendix to John's Gospel (xxi. 18), about which Christian scholarship cannot but cherish some doubts. But even if we accept the record as substantially historical, this prediction proves no more than the prophetic endowment of Jesus. Another instance mentioned by Adamson—"the knowledge of Lazarus' death and resurrection"—may be more apparent than real. The silence of the Fourth Gospel regarding the source of Jesus' knowledge of Lazarus' death does not warrant our assumption of its supernatural character; the confidence that Jesus had that His Father heard Him

always (John xi. 42) explains the certainty with which He foretold the awakening of Lazarus from his sleep. It is doubtful whether the instances of Jesus' knowledge of the character and aspirations of others (as Peter and Nathanael) prove its supernaturalness. His moral perfection and His spiritual transcendence of all mankind would lead us almost inevitably to assume that that sympathetic discernment of the thoughts, feelings, and wishes of others, which is the secret of personal influence, would be developed in Him in the highest possible degree. But even if the knowledge was supernatural, it is no proof of absolute Divine omniscience, but only of divine equipment for His work of dealing with human souls for their salvation.

(8) The previous discussion has not been intended to dim the glory of Jesus as the Christ, but by exhibiting the human limitations under which He fulfilled His vocation to display more clearly its moral and spiritual significance. We must distinguish fact and truth, knowledge and wisdom, the apprehension of fact by knowledge, and the appreciation of truth by wisdom. The one exercises the intellect (observation, memory, conception, inference); the other expresses the whole personality, and implies moral purity as the condition of spiritual vision (Matt. v. 8). There is knowledge that is no evidence of moral excellence or spiritual elevation. But wisdom begins with the fear of God and the departure from iniquity. The saint and the seer even may know very little about the laws of nature or the course of history; and the learned man may be as regards God and the soul a fool. The moral and spiritual perfection of Jesus, the wisdom by which He knew the truth which constitutes the revelation of God in Him, is quite independent of, is not increased or decreased by the extent of His knowledge of facts. On the contrary, as has already been suggested, He could not have fulfilled His vocation without the limitation of His knowledge. That

He might be a high priest "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" it was necessary that He should be "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"; that He might condemn sin in the flesh, His flesh had to be victorious in temptation over sin; that He might give us an example, He must needs learn obedience by the things that He suffered; to omniscience this entire moral experience and development would have been impossible. Had He shared completely and constantly His Father's omniscience the filial relation of dependence and communion would have been excluded. His agony in Gethsemane and His desolation and darkness on the cross, would never have been, had He not emptied Himself to be limited in knowledge as man.

(9) There are four questions, connected with the extent of the knowledge of Jesus, that press very heavily for answer on Christian thought to-day, on which the conclusion of this discussion throws some light. It used to be taken for granted that Jesus, when He called Judas to discipleship, knew that He would be the betrayer; but such a supposition ought to be intolerable to the Christian conscience. It is morally wrong to place another man in a position that involves not only his possible moral peril, but even his certain moral ruin. Probably, as soon as Judas became estranged, Jesus detected the change, and began to fear the outcome. The statement in John vi. 64, "Jesus knew from the beginning . . . who it was that should betray Him," may mean that the first germs of discontent, distrust, disloyalty in His disciple were discovered by His sympathetic discernment. If the words mean that from the choice of Judas Jesus had this knowledge, moral interests compel us to reject what is but the Evangelist's inference from the knowledge Jesus afterwards displayed. Even when Jesus began to foresee the betrayal, and by warnings and pleadings tried to reach and change the heart of Judas, he was

under no fatal necessity to sin. Like all prophecy Jesus' foresight was conditional. The relation between God's foresight and man's freedom is usually explained by referring to the difference between eternity in which God dwells, and time in which man acts; but as Jesus was subject to the condition of time, His foresight cannot without intellectual confusion be regarded as absolute as the divine omniscience is, but only as relative. He foresaw what a certain disposition would, under given circumstances, result in, unless either the disposition or the circumstances were changed. It may be that with His deeper moral insight He discovered in Judas a dominance and persistence of evil that made it morally certain that he would not change; but till the end Judas continued a voluntary agent, on whose liberty Jesus' anticipation put no compulsion. Certainly Jesus did not desire the moral ruin of His unworthy disciple.

(10) Among the miracles wrought by Jesus the most prominent were the cures of persons who were supposed to be possessed by demons. The subject of demonic possession has been investigated by Dr. Alexander, who comes to the conclusion that all the phenomena, except the confession of Jesus as Messiah, can be accounted for naturally as some form of insanity or idiocy. While he insists that "this confession is a residual phenomenon which is not reducible by any means to the purely natural," those who have gone with him so far will be able to take one step more, and maintain that, as the environment in which these insane persons were placed was charged with the excitement stimulated by the current Messianic expectations, they, with less self-control than the sane in the presence of Jesus, said what many others were thinking and feeling. An extravagant belief in angels and demons was characteristic of contemporary Judaism, and any disease which displayed symptoms mysterious to the imperfect

medical knowledge of the age was attributed to demonic possession. As Jesus' references to angels and demons may often be taken as figurative, it is doubtful how far He shared the common belief. His conversation with the Gadarene demoniac, for instance, may be regarded as the wise physician's accommodation to the consciousness of the sufferer, in whom He was seeking to evoke the desire for healing, and the faith that He could heal, which seems to have been in most cases a necessary condition of cure. A comparison of the record in Matthew viii. 28, where Jesus is reported as simply uttering the command "Go," and in Mark v. 13, where the Evangelist himself infers "that he gave them leave," justifies the conclusion that Jesus neither desired nor anticipated the destruction of the swine, for which some other explanation than the narrative suggests must be found. But even if Jesus shared the common belief regarding demonic possession, pathology does not fall within the scope of the divine revelation given in Him, but is an earthly knowledge with which His heavenly wisdom has no direct connexion. Even the belief in angels and demons, in so far as Jesus may have shared it, was received by Him from His temporary and local environment; it is not an essential element in the revelation that He as Son received from the Father; it is never claimed by Him as distinctive of His teaching; it is never required of His disciples as necessary to their faith in Him. In this matter the authority of Jesus forges no fetter, and imposes no burden on the Christian reason and conscience.

(11) The eschatological teaching of Jesus has caused not a little perplexity to many believers. It is certain that He definitely foretold the fall of Jerusalem, and this is an instance of prophetic prediction which is not fully explicable, but is made more intelligible by His insight into the moral and religious condition of His people, and by the political

circumstances of His age. The cursing of the fig tree may be regarded as a prophetic parable; as the people deserved, so the age made probable, a terrible judgment. It is not improbable that the reports of the Evangelists have been coloured by contemporary events. As regards the prophecy of His second coming and the end of the world, it seems impossible altogether to deny the possibility that the authentic sayings of Jesus have been modified and supplemented by the apocalyptic literature current in the Church. Be this as it may, even if the reports are authentic, the characteristics of prophecy are to be looked for in the teaching of Jesus regarding the future. The language is poetical, and not prosaic; the conditions of the present are in some measure necessarily projected into the future age; the perspective is shortened, as the long historical process which separates the starting-point and the goal is ignored. If Jesus confesses ignorance of the time of fulfilment, have we any right to expect from Him exact knowledge of all the circumstances? Consistently with the *kenosis*, could Jesus in the flesh anticipate fully and clearly the conditions of His life and work for the Church in the world after His Resurrection? For would He not thus have walked by sight and not by faith, and would not His filial discipline have been hindered? His claim to supreme authority in earth and heaven, His command to gather all nations into His Church, His promise to be ever present with His followers (Matt. xxviii. 18-20) are surely the post-Resurrection fulfilment of His pre-Resurrection prophecy, and the fulfilment as much transcends the prophecy as Jesus' life, teaching and work transcended the Messianic hope of the Old Testament. The spread of His Gospel, the growth of His Kingdom, the life of His Church, the glory of His Name are His triumphant Advent in, His final judgment, His ultimate salvation of the world. History interprets prophecy; and

as Jesus' knowledge of the future in His earthly life had the characteristics, and was subject to the conditions of prophecy, we may apply to His eschatological teaching the same principles of interpretation. In His own teaching in parables regarding the "mystery of the Kingdom" He Himself anticipated this moral and spiritual process of the fulfilment of His prophecy in Christian history.

(12) Only a few words need now be added in answer to the question stated at the beginning. What the higher criticism is concerned with is facts of date, authorship, literary character, and historical value of the writings which make up the Bible. As regards all these facts Jesus possessed, and gave expression to the knowledge of His age and people, a knowledge which, unless we are prepared to maintain the infallibility of the traditions and conjectures of the Jewish scribes, must be subject to revision and correction, as knowledge in all other departments is, by subsequent investigation. His perfect wisdom was not in any way affected by His imperfect knowledge. The revelation of God as Father was complete without adding anything to human information on this or kindred topics. As the significance and the value of the Old Testament as the literature of divine revelation is unaffected for Christian faith by the answers given to all these questions of fact, it was not at all necessary that Jesus, in confirming and completing this divine revelation, should give a final authoritative answer to any of these questions. His own references to the Old Testament do not lose any of their force or cogency because on these matters He shared the knowledge of His contemporaries. His reference to the Davidic authorship of the 110th Psalm as an *argumentum ad hominem* remains effective, whether David was the author or not (Matt. xxii. 41-45). The significance of His Resurrection does not depend on His allusion to the story of Jonah, even if that be authentic.

(As Matthew xii. 40 does not occur in the parallel account in Luke xi. 29-32, interrupts the course of the argument, and is inaccurate in its reference to the circumstances of the Resurrection, it may be regarded as a later gloss.) It appears then, on close inquiry, that it is not a reverent Christian faith which demands our submission to Christ's authority on these matters, as the evangelical testimony warrants no such demand. It is at the root prejudiced ecclesiastical dogmatism, which knows only the bondage of the letter, and not the freedom of the Spirit; it is a Bibliolatry, such as Christ rebuked in the scribes when He declared, "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me" (John v. 39).

ALFRED E. GARVIE.

### THE REVEALING OF THE TRINITY.

THE purpose of this paper is to suggest, with much diffidence on the part of the writer, a theory as to the principle of Revelation, especially Christian Revelation, which may supply a natural explanation of the various changes through which Christian dogma has passed in the course of the ages.

In the first place, we may note that as in literature, art, and science so in theology it is the supply that creates the demand, and not *vice versa*. The history of inventions, of literature, and of art supply many instances in which a completely original genius strikes out a new line for himself, presents to mankind an idea, a style, a type, a manner hitherto unheard of, and which after passing through the stages of ridicule, of opposition, and toleration becomes eventually universally accepted. It falls to the lot of very few indeed to witness the immediate success of their