

the Greeks, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth fruit" (John xii. 24); but in neither passage has the image anything to do with sepulture or burial of the dead, and in both passages the central thought is the same, that the true life of the seed of human faculty can only be reached through death.

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*(To be continued.)*

### *HE THAT CAME BY WATER AND BLOOD.*

THE idea from which the apostle starts in this passage (1 John v. 6-8) is that of the victory of faith. Who, he asks, is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? So to believe makes us partakers in Jesus' own victory (John xvi. 33). In faith, however, the object is everything; if we are really to overcome, we must be very sure of Christ. To convey such an assurance is the apostle's aim in the passage. He seeks to show that Jesus is evinced or demonstrated to be the Son of God by the most conclusive tokens; and when he has summed up what may be called the external evidences by which we identify Him as what He is, he clinches them by adding, He that believeth hath the witness in himself.

It is from this point of view that we must read the opening sentence, This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ (or perhaps Jesus the Christ). The past tense makes it quite clear that the reference is to the historical Jesus, and that the water and the blood allude to incidents and experiences of His life on earth in which His character as Son of God, the object of a world-subduing faith, is revealed. Looking to the Gospel and the Epistle of John as a whole, it can hardly be doubted what the incidents or experiences in question are. Jesus came

through water when He was baptized by John in Jordan. It is beside the mark to argue that John's baptism, which was one of water only, was no proof that Jesus was Son of God; it was submitted to or bestowed upon multitudes to whom it bore no such testimony. This is not the point of view of the apostle. "For this end," he represents the Baptist saying, "did I come baptizing with water, that He might be manifested to Israel" (John i. 31). It is quite true that ordinarily baptism with water is opposed by John to baptism with the Spirit; but in the case of Jesus they are not contrasted, they coincide. This is the proof, or an essential part of it, that Jesus is what Christian faith holds Him to be. "I knew Him not, but He that sent me to baptize in water, He said unto me: On whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding on Him, the same is He that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (John i. 33 f.). This is John's primary conception of the Son of God; the Son is the person who has the perpetual fulness of the Spirit and the perpetual power to bestow it, and Jesus is attested by the historical event and experience of His baptism—by His coming by water—to be this person.

From the same point of view it is apparent that the coming by blood must refer to the death of Jesus. He came by blood when He died upon the cross. Like His baptism, His death must be conceived as demonstrating Him in some way to be the Son of God. We know that this was one of the great difficulties of the first believers. To a superficial view the Cross was anything but an evidence that Jesus was what the apostolic Gospel declared Him to be. To Jews it was an offence, and to Greeks folly. We seem even in the New Testament to see Christian minds which felt its power groping uncertainly for the means of

explaining it. It is perhaps an instance of such groping when the evangelist, referring to the spear thrust into the side of Jesus, points out that the law regarding the paschal lamb—a bone of it shall not be broken—was thus fulfilled in Him, finding, to to speak, in Jesus the reality of which the ancient covenant sacrifice was only a symbol. But whatever intellectual embarrassments it may once have occasioned, the death of Christ is not a mere mystery to the writer of this Epistle. He tells us again and again of its meaning, and its power. “The Blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (i. 7). “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world” (ii. 2). “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (iv. 10). That the propitiation is made in the blood of Jesus can only be questioned by those who refuse to admit that the New Testament writers had any cohesion in their thoughts at all. It is in virtue of its propitiatory meaning and power that the death of Jesus is pointed to in the Epistle as proving Him to be the Son of God. No one will overcome the world if he faces it under the crushing weight of a bad conscience ; it is because Jesus, who died for sins, can lift this weight, that we recognize Him to be what the gospel declares. Because, to this wonderful intent of being a propitiation for the whole world, He came by blood, we say He is the Son of God. It is the work of atonement which reveals Him as what He is, and holds Him up as the object for a faith which has the world to overcome.

In this interpretation water and blood are taken literally ; the reference is to the historical events of the baptism and death of Jesus. But literal or historical is not synonymous with accidental, or spiritually insignificant and powerless. The water and the blood could not be thought of by John

except as implying and declaring the possession and communication of the Spirit by Jesus, and the expiation and conquest of sin. How the baptism and the death of Jesus, with the powers involved in them, are related to one another there is nothing here to explain. They were separated in time, but Jesus Himself spoke of His death as an awful baptism (Luke xii. 50; Mark x. 38 f.), and there is a passage in the Gospel (xix. 34) where John brings the water and the blood into the closest connexion with one another. "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and straightway there came out blood and water. And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe." The extraordinary solemnity with which this is attested shows the importance it had for the evangelist, and it is impossible to agree with Godet that the passage in the Epistle has nothing whatever to do with the one in the Gospel. Surely it is clear that in Gospel and Epistle alike incidents and experiences in the history of Jesus are being emphasized which prove Him to be the true object of faith. And surely it is clear further that in Gospel and Epistle alike a protest is being made against those who not merely distinguished but separated the water and the blood, and claimed the benefit of the one while disowning any obligation to the other.

This is evident in the Epistle at all events. When John writes, "Not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood," he has unquestionably before his mind people who admitted that Jesus came with the first, but not with the second.<sup>1</sup> It is not legitimate, perhaps, to say that

<sup>1</sup> The difference between *διὰ* and *ἐν* in *διὰ ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος* and *ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι* is not to be pressed. The *διὰ* is more appropriate to the historical incident or experience through which Jesus *passed*, the *ἐν* to the spiritual virtue involved in it, in possession of which Jesus *abides* as the object of faith; but the two prepositions are used indistinguishably in a very similar connexion in Hebrews ix. 12, 14, 25.

these were people who accepted regeneration but rejected the atonement, who consented to receive from Christ a new life, but not to be in debt to Him for the expiation of sins. We may have grounds for believing that this attitude to Christ is not uncommon, and even for holding that of all causes which contribute to the misunderstanding of the New Testament the most profound and far-reaching is the failure to see that nothing but the atonement can regenerate; but it is necessary to look to the writer's own age for more precise illustration of his meaning. He tells us himself in chap. iv. 1 ff. of false prophets, in whom the spirit of the Antichrist is at work, and who deny that Jesus Christ has come in flesh. The very early gloss in iv. 3—*omnis spiritus qui solvit Jesum*—points to teachers like Cerinthus, "the enemy of the truth" (Eus. *Hist. Ecc.* iii. 28. 6) as the truth was preached by John. Cerinthus, according to Irenæus (i. 26), held that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary, that after His baptism the Christ descended on Him in the form of a dove from the supreme God, that He then revealed the unknown Father and worked miracles, but that at the end the Christ departed from Jesus; so that Jesus suffered and was raised, while the Christ as a spiritual being continued impassible. This seems to be precisely what the apostle is striking at—a Saviour, an object of faith, a Son of God, who comes by water only. Cerinthus (it might be put) saw divinity in the life of Jesus, but not in His death. He acknowledged the redemptive power of all that He did in virtue of His baptism, of all the teachings and healings which He accomplished in the power of the Spirit He received at the Jordan; but it seemed to him incredible and unworthy that a Divine being should be dragged through the squalid tragedy of the Crucifixion. His Son of God did not come by blood: the passion of Jesus had nothing in it redemptive or

divine. Formally this belongs to the first century and is grotesque enough, but in reality, as has been suggested above, it is widely represented in our own world. There are many who are glad to acknowledge a general debt to the teaching and example of Jesus, but not a special debt to His death; many to whom regeneration, or moral stimulus, is as attractive as expiation is repellent, and who fail to see that in the Christian religion the two cannot be separated. The Person who makes propitiation in His blood is the same who baptizes with the Holy Spirit; it is because He does the one as well as the other—because He came not with the water only but with the water and with the blood—that we know Him to be what He is, the Christ, the Son of God, who has overcome the world and can enable us to overcome, the one adequate object of faith.

For a believer, it may be said, this is presumably convincing: but what of one who does not believe? What of the man who looks at the life of Jesus and at the death of Jesus as they are attested by the apostles—who contemplates Him as He came with the water and the blood—who tries to realize in some vague fashion what is meant by words like propitiation and regeneration—and who after all remains quite unmoved? It is perhaps in the sense of his own ineffectiveness and helplessness that the apostle, after emphasizing the water and the blood as realities which attest Jesus as the Redeemer, appeals directly to God. “And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth.” It is not enough that the facts should be there in indubitable historical reality, it is not enough that an apostle should be there to interpret and enforce them on the conscience in the full assurance of his own faith; if faith is to be born in sinful souls, even under these propitious circumstances, *God* must be there to bear the supreme testimony to His Son. There is this point of mystery in all true religion, the point

at which God and the soul meet. Not indeed that it is mere mystery : the Spirit does not work in the dark, but takes the things of Christ, the water and the blood, and makes them real, significant, present and powerful to the soul. Only the Spirit can do this. All the essential facts, all the presuppositions of faith, so to speak, may be present, yet faith itself is not born till the touch of God completes the spiritual circuit, and the heart is suddenly thrilled with the atoning and regenerating power of Him who came by water and blood. What was remote, inert and unintelligible flames up under the witness of the Spirit into the present, living, all-powerful love of the Redeemer.

In a sense the Spirit is the only witness : it belongs to it alone to make the past present, the historical eternal. We call the New Testament an inspired book because as we hearken to its testimony to Christ the past ceases to be past, and everything is transacted before our eyes, and in relation to ourselves. Time disappears, and Christ is with us in His Spirit which is the Truth. It is not our experience that He spoke these words, but that He speaks them ; not that He received sinners and ate with them, but that He receives sinners and spreads His table for them ; not that He prayed for His own, but that He makes intercession for us. We do not even say, He came by blood, but He is here, clothed in His crimson robe, in the power of His atonement, mighty to save. This is what the Spirit, which, properly speaking, is the supreme and sole witness, does for us in attesting, interpreting and applying the historical facts of the life of Jesus. But the apostle has also another way of looking at the matter. There are three, he says, who bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood ; and the three agree in one. At first the Spirit is a witness to the water and the blood, sealing their meaning and their power upon the soul ; but it is possible also to think of all three as

bearing one concordant testimony to the Son of God. How are we to understand this ?

It does not seem possible to explain it unless we admit at this point an allusion to the Christian sacraments. Sometimes this has been very strongly denied. Dr. Charles Watson, for example, in his profound and beautiful commentary on this Epistle, writes : " St. John neither in his Gospel nor in his Epistles takes any notice whatever of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This fact makes it unlikely that he was thinking of them when he speaks of the water and the blood as witnesses to Christ." Even Bishop Westcott says no more than that we are led to the ideas which underlie the two sacraments. When we remember the time at which John wrote, and the place which Baptism and the Supper, as we see from almost every New Testament writer, soon came to hold in Christian worship, it seems fair to use much stronger language. It is to the writer quite incredible that any Christian reader should ever have heard John iii. without thinking of baptism, or John vi. without thinking of the Supper, or this passage without thinking of both. Baptism and the Supper are perpetually present in the Church, and they are a perpetual attestation of the water and the blood. They remind us unceasingly of those great events in the life of Jesus by which He is identified as the Son of God and Saviour of men—His Baptism in water, with which His Baptism with the Spirit coincided, so that it became the type of all Christian baptism, in which also the coincidence of water and spirit is conceived as normal ; and His death upon the Cross, in which He became a propitiation for the whole world. The sacraments are a standing testimony to these great facts and to their meaning and power. They guard the realities which are vital to the Christian religion. They speak ceaselessly of Christ as able in virtue of His life and death



to regenerate men and to atone for sins. In them, to put it strongly, we have the water and the blood always with us. We need not hesitate to say so because the words are capable of being abused. They are true when spoken at the moral temperature at which their meaning is realized; they are not true as a theological doctrine, defined in cold blood. Very probably superstitious ideas had gathered round the truth even before John wrote, just as they had gathered round the sacraments at Corinth (see 1 Cor. x.), but it is as absurd to make John responsible for this in the one case as Paul in the other. The representatives of the religio-historical method, who interpret everything *in malam partem* and who are never so sure they are right as when they convict the apostles of religious materialism or primeval superstition, have lost their balance. In St. John's words about the sacraments in this passage there is a mingling of history, of symbolism, and of the spiritual experience of fellowship with the Son of God in the power of His life and death; but it is only an unsympathetic, one is almost tempted to say an unchristian, reader, who can find any trace in them of the magical sacramentalism of the pagan mysteries. It is far more plausible to argue that in every place in his writings in which John touches on the sacraments he is careful to leave the primacy with the Spirit. Thus in the third chapter of the Gospel he speaks once of being born of water and spirit, because that is the Christian norm as illustrated by the baptism of Jesus, but afterwards omits the water, and says born of the Spirit only. In chapter six, after saying the strongest things about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of man—which the writer believes to be sacramental language—he precludes misconception (or tries to do so) by adding, It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. And finally, in the Epistle, while the water and the blood, perpetuated in the sacraments,

are themselves witnesses to Christ, the supreme witness is that of the Spirit, apart from which neither the water and the blood as historical facts, nor their perpetuation in the sacraments, have any power at all. Taking his words, however, as they stand, their effect is not to disparage the sacraments but to magnify their work as witnesses to the great experiences of Jesus by which He is evinced to be the proper object of faith.

It is in this connexion also that we become conscious of the value of the passage for all time. The apostle's interest is not, in the sacraments, but in the historical realities on which the life of Christianity depends, and he refers to the sacraments only because they guarantee these realities and keep them in evidence in the Church. History will always have its difficulties, and there will always be efforts made to free religion from any dependence upon it. The Spirit, or what is called the Spirit, will always be appealed to against the more or less uncertain facts. Even a religion like the Christian, which from the beginning rested on a narrative of historical events, is subjected to this treatment. The important thing in Christianity, men say to themselves, is its ethical principle; grasp this, and everything else is indifferent. Jesus may have been the first to apprehend it clearly, but in essence it is quite independent of Him; once we realize it in its purity and truth, we do not need to vex ourselves about the truth or falsehood of the Gospel story. Die to live, as He no doubt did, or had it as His principle to do; sacrifice the lower life for the sake of the higher, and what question remains to be asked? It is not the business of any one who pleads the cause of Christianity to condemn those who seek to live by a Christian rule; but if the apostle is any authority upon the subject, this substitution of abstract principles for the Passion of the Son of God is not Christianity at all. It is not the

reality of abstract principles, however true or sublime, on which his faith leans ; it is the reality of blood. It is no poetic or philosophic *Stirb und werde*, nothing which can be learned from Goethe or Hegel, which makes us Christians ; it is the pierced side, the thorn-crowned brow, the rent hands and feet of Jesus. Our faith is evoked by one who came by blood, and it rests on Him alone. What can a religion of ethical principles merely do to provide a propitiation ? What can it offer to lost men ? What are the ethical principles from which we can deduce that profound and grateful assurance of the forgiveness of sins which inspires the doxologies of the apostolic Church ?

These considerations are of special importance at present when the historical criticism of Scripture is raising so many problems for faith, and when attempts are made to allay anxiety on lines which are substantially those here denounced by the apostle. Often we hear it said to perplexed souls, "There is really nothing to be anxious about. Faith and criticism move on different planes ; they can never touch, and therefore can never come into collision. Criticism may come to any conclusion whatever about the truth of facts or what are alleged to be facts in the Bible, and it will make no difference to religion." It is difficult to understand how this is believed by those who say it, and it is certainly not believed by those who hear it. It never mitigated any Christian's anxiety, but it has often added exasperation to alarm. To a simple and earnest spirit it means too obviously that religion is only to have the kind of reality which belongs to ideas and principles, not the reality of blood ; and with the change all the specifically Christian virtue has departed from it. To say that faith cannot be affected by any critical result is to say that religion is independent of any historical basis, and that is to teach the false spirituality which the apostle here rejects. The Chris-

tian religion, at all events as he knew it, lives and has its being in the historical. Instead of saying to men, "nothing historical matters," we ought rather to say, "See how unimpeachable is the evidence by which the essential historical facts are guaranteed. Look, to go no further, at the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They were celebrated universally in the Church before any part of the New Testament was written. They bear witness still to Him who came by water and by blood. Every one of the countless millions who since the day of Pentecost to this day has been baptized in the name of Jesus is a witness to the baptism of Jesus Himself. Every one who since the night on which He was betrayed has eaten the bread and drunk of the cup in the Lord's Supper is a witness to the reality of His passion." There are things which cannot be shaken, and it is absurd to speak as if they could be shaken and leave our religion untouched. It is because the Spirit of God has these historical realities to attest that there is such a thing as Christianity in the world. Without them preaching is vain and faith is vain; there is no love of God known to us on which we can lean as Christians have leaned hitherto on the Passion of their Lord.

The emphasis which the apostle lays on the blood, when he speaks of the coming of Jesus, should have something which reflects it in the life of the believer. Christianity should be as real as the Passion of the Saviour on which it rests. No deliberate aim at a sheltered life is Christian. It is possible to fall short here with the most amiable intentions. Often this is the result when the Christian life is lived in coteries, and the relations of believers are all to each other and none to the world. The sanctification of the soul then takes the place of the consecration of the life, and passion disappears. So few make holiness in any sense their chief end that it may seem rash to speak against this,

yet it is painfully true that even Christian faith becomes insipid and ineffective unless it confronts the world, comes with blood, and is proved in the actualities and conflicts of life. But coteries and conventions do not perhaps mislead so many as the charm and happiness of what is probably counted a Christian home. It is not uncommon to see life narrowed in such circumstances to the circle of the domestic affections. It is pure, beautiful, amiable, truly happy; but it has no interests beyond itself. The conflicts of the world rage around it but it is not troubled by them; all that calls for effort, sacrifice, blood, is ignored. The Lord's battle is going on against powerful forces of evil—pride, sensuality, secularism, false patriotism, drunkenness, greed—but the members of such families are not in it. Their life is refined, retired, accomplished perhaps, but bloodless. Is that Christian? Can One who came by blood see in lives like these of the travail of His soul? Or does not reality like that of His Passion call for something far more intensely and vividly real in those who believe in His name?

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### *THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.*

#### V.

CREDIBILITY *contd.*—“THE EASTER MESSAGE.”

PROFESSOR HARNACK, in his lectures on Christianity, bids us hold by “the Easter faith” that “Jesus Christ has passed through death, that God has awakened Him to life and glory,” but warns us against basing this faith on “the Easter message of the empty grave, and the appearances of Jesus to His disciples.”<sup>1</sup> On what, then, one asks, is the faith to be based which connects it peculiarly

<sup>1</sup> *What is Christianity?* pp. 160-3.