

For the inheritor of the Christian moral tradition I cannot see that there is any other alternative than one of these two courses :

(1) Either, to receive and use, in utter ingratitude and selfish pride, this gift of a body of moral teaching, and end in being that most contemptible of human types, the sordidly upright, thankless, godless Pharisee ;

(2) Or, humbly recognizing the Divine origin of his moral quipment, and owning his debt both to God and to his brethren in their need, to seek, with others his fellows in moral aspiration and moral service, the face of that God as revealed in Jesus Christ, in contrition and surrender and the quest of inspiration, and with the homage of a grateful praise.

G. A. JOHNSTON ROSS.

OPERA FORIS.

MATERIALS FOR THE PREACHER.

V.

JOHN ii. 1-2. *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee . . . and both Jesus was called, and his disciples to the marriage.*

Nathanael had been promised the vision of *greater things* in Jesus, and this opening scene of the ministry forms the first revelation of the new order which was being inaugurated. It was to be free from the narrow and arbitrary abstinence of asceticism. Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus took his disciples freely to a country wedding, as if to mark the genial spirit of his religion. The significance of the incident, in this aspect, does not need to be underlined. But it acquires additional and unsuspected emphasis if we connect it with the words immediately preceding it in the first chapter of the Gospel. There, as was suggested in an

earlier series of these notes, Nathanael seems to be regarded as a better Jacob, to whom, as "Israel" or "seeing God," a better union of the Divine Being is vouchsafed. *Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.* The allusion is not to any appearances of angels but to the life of Christ on earth regarded as a continuous revelation and communication of God to men. "La vie de Jésus va être comme une continuelle révélation du ciel, un commerce pareil à celui que vit Jacob dans sa fameuse vision, où les anges allaient et venaient pour accomplir les ordres de Dieu. Ce commerce a été inauguré par l'incarnation du Verbe et la descente de l'Esprit; il ne cessera plus désormais tant que durera sur la terre la manifestation du Christ. Les anges sont donc le symbole réel de l'assistance divine qui éclatera dans les miracles du Sauveur" (Loisy).

Now the interesting thing is that this Jacob, whose vision of God at Peniel is thus employed to figure forth the fuller revelation of the Son of man to Christians, was regarded by Philo as the typical ascetic. In some circles of Jewish Hellenism, ascetic discipline was held to be the supreme condition of beholding God. Anti-social rigour was the motto of the elect. The body had to be kept down, social ties broken, and all joys sternly crushed, if the soul was to attain the beatific vision of the things divine. Philo, who voices this feeling, displays real ingenuity in interpreting Jacob's life along this line. To him "Jacob," says Dr. M. Friedländer (in *Die religiösen Bewegungen innerhalb des Judentums im Zeitalter Jesu*, 1905, pp. 256 f.), "is the ascetic *κατ' ἐξοχήν* who has to fight hard against all that is earthly, in order to attain the vision of God." The stone on which he pillows his head at Peniel (Gen. xxviii. 11) represents the rigour of life which prepares one for the sight of God. So Philo argues (*de Somn.* i. 446), if the ascetic is eager

in the practice of this discipline, then, instead of being called Jacob the supplanter, he will be hailed as Israel \acute{o} $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\nu$ $\acute{o}\rho\acute{\omega}\nu$.

This association of Jacob's vision with asceticism would obviously lend point to the promise of Jesus in John i. 51 as well as to his action in ii. 2f. The conditions of beholding God's glory were no longer to be considered as implying a strict, unsocial asceticism, which was possible only to an élite of distinguished pietists or recluses like the Therapeutæ. To all true disciples Jesus revealed God upon earth in his own person, and the revelation led them not away from but into the simple and natural life of men. However much self-denial and strictness and discomfort his calling involved, whatever special sacrifices might be demanded of individuals for special ends, Jesus refused to bind any false asceticism as a yoke upon his followers. He declined to identify purity of heart with mortification of the flesh. The ascetism which came naturally in the line of Christian service and self-control was one thing. But asceticism for its own sake, the contempt felt for the body and for the body's desires as if these must be a standing hindrance to the vision of faith, this was an anti-social and a misdirected aim, with which the Son of man had no sympathy himself and desired his disciples to have none. The first of the *greater things* which dawned on Nathanael and the erstwhile disciples of the Baptist was the presence of the Son of Man at a wedding-feast.

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Heb. vi. 4-5:—*Those who have tasted of the heavenly gift . . . and the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.*

The *heavenly gift* is God's loving forgiveness of sins, the supreme boon of the Christian dispensation, in which all believers participate. The *good word of God* means the sure, kind promises made by Him to human faith for the

future, and this is bound up with the experience, here and now, of *the powers of the world to come* which are already operating within the present age. Such a description of the normal Christian experience of God's Spirit is intelligible enough in the first century, when the strong eschatological hope of Christendom still throbbed within the churches. But is the latter a reasonable element for ourselves? Is this "l'avant-goût de l'éternité," as Reuss calls it, this ardent eschatological expectation possible and desirable still? Cannot the taste of forgiveness which restores us to our place with God suffice by itself, without the other taste? Does not the modern outlook on the world compel us to drop the forward anticipation and to content ourselves with the present assurance of a heavenly Father's love such as Jesus taught? Instead of looking for a new heaven and earth, why should we not be satisfied with a God who has numbered the very hairs of our head? Would not this be at once more spiritual and more consonant with that view of the universe which we are bidden accept from modern science?

Dr. Kölbing, the distinguished Moravian scholar, raises this crucial question in a recent pamphlet on *Die bleibende Bedeutung der urchristlichen Eschatologie* (Göttingen, 1907, pp. 25 f.), and seeks to answer it in the negative. Whatever details of the primitive eschatology have a merely temporary value, he does not believe that we are obliged to curtail this description of the Christian position, as if "eschatological faith, in the strict sense of the term, were merely the expression of a specifically Jewish and antiquated view of the universe." His reasons are as follow.¹

He begins by pointing out that, wherever the apocalyptic

¹ For a persuasive statement on the same lines, but with greater breadth, see Mr. Scott Lidgett's volume on *The Christian Religion* (1907), pp. 467 f.

ideas of primitive Christianity may have been quarried, the religious source of its eschatology lay, as it still lies, in the sure knowledge of God's fatherly love to men which Jesus brought into the world. He then points out that this forward look of faith is justified for ourselves to-day by the believing man's experience of the world as a hindrance to the full development of spiritual life. "In the light of the knowledge of God which Jesus has conferred on men, the Christian must ever and anon have the feeling that this earthly world has a variety of ways in which it can hinder any one who lies within its sphere from entering into fellowship with the Father in heaven." The Christian can indeed experience the supernatural reality of God, but it is an experience which is exposed to thwarting doubts and recurring obstacles. The witness of history and the record of the church are enough to prove this up to the hilt. Furthermore, as "the Christian recognizes that the dominating element in the spiritual life of Him who is Lord of the world is His holy and fatherly love," he must also admit the conscious and unconscious opposition to God's moral will which starts up in society and in the individual. The progress of God's good reign is slow, and the actual facts seem often to contradict the idea of His royal love. "Few are chosen," and even the few meet difficulties of all sorts in the practice of their fellowship with God. What can justify the Christian's confidence, as he faces such untoward facts, and "overcomes the world," but the glad certainty, now as in the primitive days of Christianity, that a new world of unclouded vision and unhindered service awaits God's children? This certainty of hope, with its perspective of the future, Dr. K lbing argues, springs always from the faith of Jesus. It enables the weak and sinful here to glory already in the coming bliss, since such people know that God's forgiving and

controlling grace can enable them, even through the trials and evil of the present, to inherit the world to come. "If this is so, then we must decide that *to taste the powers of the world to come* is an element essential to the moral and religious faith of Christianity in God's holy love to sinful men. In other words, the eschatological character of primitive Christian faith is not a merely adventitious and transient element which was due to the Jewish view of the world; it possesses a permanent significance for the religious life of the Christian church." On this view, those who *taste the heavenly gift* of God's forgiveness do so, in the fullest sense, as they also *taste the good word* of God's promise for the future and *the powers of the world to come*, since the experience of forgiveness involves a reach and a range of faith in God's holy purpose which extend beyond the limits of a world-order where His power and love cannot fully come into play. The present experience thus stands in a vital relationship to the future hope.

The stars come nightly to the sky,
The tidal wave unto the sea,
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me.

And part of this *own* possession is the future. The present experience of the Spirit, with its assurance of divine forgiveness and fellowship, not only transmutes the trials of to-day into opportunities of moral growth for the life of God, but provides a foretaste of that new order which will correspond, as this world cannot, with the just requirements of the believing soul.

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