

ON THE OMNISCIENCE OF OUR LORD.

THERE is no question touching the Person and Nature of Christ which is to-day of more importance than this. That there were questions far more crucial, more vital, goes without saying; but these have been cleared out of the way, for the great majority of us, by the controversies and researches of past ages. If we accept the Catholic doctrine of Christ, both God and man (as Hooker, e.g., accepted it in his immortal work), we are saved from the necessity of trying to think out any of the *greater* problems which inevitably confront a devout believer in Christ. That tremendous clash, which wrought as much distress to individuals as it wrought confusion in the world, between those who asserted and those who denied the co-equal Godhead of the Son, was bound to come. No amount of charity, or of wide-mindedness, could have prevented it. The necessity lay in the New Testament writings themselves, which raised the question without dogmatically settling it. It is apparently contrary to the genius of the inspired Scripture to settle anything dogmatically. What it does is to present the elements and principles freely and fully, and to leave it to the living experience of the Society to find the theological formula which will combine and harmonize these elements and principles. But the long and melancholy struggle which is associated with the name of Athanasius did its appointed work. Individuals may still be found who occupy the same intellectual standpoint as the Arians: but for the vast majority of Christians the controversy is closed; the attempt to assign to our Lord a secondary and inferior

divinity was honestly made, and it broke down ; the devouter Arians themselves became semi-Arians, and from among the semi-Arians arose the new and more successful champions of that Nicene faith which seemed to have been overthrown. So also it was with those other great questions which men had successively to face as they went on trying to make intelligible to themselves the mysterious union of Divine and human in the Saviour of the world.

It is, however, true that the difficulties which beset the accepted doctrine (i.e., the doctrine which has stood the test of time, experience, and controversy) of our Saviour Christ, both God and man, are endless. Some of them, no doubt, are purely intellectual, or scholastic, and of little or no practical concern. I venture to think myself that the controversy which separated the "Monothelites" from their brethren was of this nature. Whether our Lord had, properly speaking, two wills or one depends entirely upon the metaphysical question whether the will belongs to the personality or the nature—a question which can be argued either way. It makes no practical difference because every one agrees that our Lord always subordinated His human will to that of the Father—which was also His own as the Son and Word of God. Agreed that our Lord had the two wills, it is also true that the lower will left no trace upon His earthly life.¹ It is only intellectually that we can contemplate the question at all.

It is quite different when we speak of the omniscience of our Lord, because it is obviously of the most practical concern possible. If He was omniscient He was in that respect utterly unlike ourselves : He lived, spoke, acted,

¹ It is hardly necessary to point out that a passage like St. Luke xxii. 42 has in it nothing decisive : the two wills here in question are not the two wills of Christ, but the will of the Father on the one hand, and of the Man Christ Jesus on the other hand.

under conditions so foreign to the common life of men that (if we have not done so before) we shall be compelled to look at Him afresh, to reconsider Him (as it were), and to try to understand Him in this new light. On the other hand, if we deliberately reject the notion that He was omniscient, it will open the door to a number of probable or possible consequences which may profoundly modify our conception of His manifestation. It is not, surely, a theological subtlety, a logomachy. In striving to realize, and to make our own, the Jesus of the Gospels, it makes all the difference whether we suppose that He knew everything all the time, or whether we suppose that He only knew (by intuition, experience, or revelation of the Spirit) what was needful for us men and for our salvation. I do not hesitate to avow that I hold the latter with all the strength of my religious conviction. But I know, of course, that the question is at present (informally) before the Church and cannot be settled off-hand. What I wish to do, therefore, is to examine it dispassionately by the light of Scripture and of the Catholic Faith. The appeal must lie to *both*, because each is paramount in its own sphere. The appeal may safely be made to *both*, because they cannot ultimately contradict one another. The mind of the Spirit is declared (in different ways and under different limitations) both in Scripture, and in the general assent and consent of Christians as to the faith that is in them. No Anglican, at any rate, can very well deny this, although he may by instinct or habit prefer the one appeal to the other. It might be much better if we regarded both with the like reverence as divinely appointed means of guidance: but since they both agree in one, it is (comparatively speaking) immaterial to which we are most disposed to listen.

Let us begin with Scripture. And here we have, if possible, to do justice to three things. Firstly, the general

picture of our Lord as He appears in the Gospels. Secondly, certain sayings concerning His knowledge. Thirdly, the dogmatic teaching about His humanity in the Epistle to the Hebrews. These are, avowedly, the chief things to be attended to.

I. Even devout people vary very much in their power of taking in the outstanding features of that human life which is sketched for us in the Gospels. Many lose the general effect, to a great degree, in the contemplation of details, the consideration of texts. Few, however, would deny that the picture set before us is in general so thoroughly human, so unaffectedly the picture of one like unto ourselves (sin only excepted) that any other exception, any further difference, needs to be clearly substantiated: *a priori* the assumption is against it.¹

More than this: it seems impossible that the Evangelists (at any rate, the Synoptical Evangelists) should have used the language they do use concerning our Lord, if they had thought of Him as omniscient. In the only record left of His boyhood (St. Luke ii. 52) He is said to have "advanced in wisdom and stature," which is as much as to say that His intellectual and physical development kept pace with one another. In that Gospel which is almost universally believed to contain the liveliest picture of the Son of Man, and the one drawn at nearest hand (St. Mark vi. 6), He is said to have "marvelled because of" the "unbelief" of the people at Nazareth. How could He have been surprised if He had known exactly what to expect? In the narrative of that dread scene in the garden wherein our Lord appears to us

¹ I have no space to do more than lodge an emphatic protest against the common (but most mistaken) notion that our Lord was differentiated from other men by His power to work miracles and to absolve from sin. The mere fact that He deliberately handed on both these powers (or authorities) to His followers disposes of any such assumption (St. John xiv. 12, xx. 23). He *could* only have handed on powers which can be lodged in human agents.

so pathetically human, it is written that He "began to be greatly amazed, and sore troubled" (St. Mark xiv. 33). What is here intimated by St. Mark, what explains the "exceeding sorrow" of St. Matthew, the agony and bloody sweat of St. Luke, is surely that sense of *consternation*, of encountering something which is as unexpected as it is awful, which is impossible to an omniscient being. It is a combination of surprise and horror, raised to their highest pitch.

It may, no doubt, be urged that the language used by St. Mark and the others need not be pressed. It may be said that He only *seemed* to have these feelings of astonishment and consternation: that they only represent what He *would* have felt if He had not been omniscient. It is, however, necessary to say that nothing in the world can be more dangerous than such "docetic" teaching concerning our Lord. If we once admit that our Lord was playing a part, that His whole manifestation in the flesh was not absolutely genuine and sincere, we let go the beginning of our confidence in Him. Indeed, the whole "docetic" interpretation of our Lord's life is condemned root and branch by the history of Christian thought. It was apparently the earliest heretical tendency which brought men into conflict with the "truth as it is in Jesus." It is the one (in all probability) which is so fiercely condemned in 1 St. John iv. and in 2 St. John. Like its successors, it was, no doubt, honest and well meant enough, and had plenty to say for itself. Men brought up in heathen philosophy could not for a moment allow that their Incarnate God really suffered pain and agony of mind and death. The Divine is impassible. He suffered, therefore, and died, as He had lived, only in a semblance which served, on the one hand, to manifest His Presence to His friends, on the other to deceive His foes. It may be that He fled away to the Father from the Cross; it may be that Simon of Cyrene took his place. Anyhow,

whatever in His career spoke of suffering, shame, or loss, was only apparent, not real. He did not come "in the flesh," i.e., under the actual conditions of human life, but only in an (unreal) appearance of them. Such was the "docetic" heresy, once very popular and widely spread, and even yet active enough in the underlying error of it in quarters where the very name of heresy is abhorred. For it founded itself upon the axiom that a Divine Being cannot lay aside the attributes of Deity. Impassibility and immortality are confessedly Divine attributes. Wherefore, if the Divine Saviour *seemed* to suffer and to die, He *could* only seem to do so—He could not really. Substitute omniscience for impassibility, and limitation of knowledge for suffering, and you have precisely the old difficulty, the old falsity, over again. Whatever happens we must stick to the genuineness of our Lord's whole manifestation: we must *believe* that picture of Him which is drawn by St. Mark and the others.

II. There are certain sayings, chiefly in the Fourth Gospel, which look another way. "He knew all men," "He knew what was in man" (St. John ii. 25). He showed an apparently supernatural acquaintance with their circumstances (St. John i. 47, 48, iv. 17, 18; St. Matt. xvii. 25), and their thoughts (St. Mark ii. 8, ix. 33-37; St. Luke vii. 40; St. John vi. 61). There can be no doubt that this mysterious power did differentiate Him to some extent from those around Him. It would not be right to make light of this fact. He had a reach and a depth of insight into men's hearts and minds which often enabled Him to read them like an open book. But other men have possessed *something* of this unusual insight, founded partly upon experience, partly also upon some peculiar mental endowment. As a supernatural gift it passed over in some measure to the apostles. SS. Peter and John saw, by some secret intimation, that the

expectant beggar had faith to be saved ; and St. Paul saw the same thing in the cripple at Lystra. St. Peter knew of the crooked dealings and wretched fate of Ananias and Sapphira, and St. Paul was similarly informed concerning Elymas. It is not at all necessary, in order to do the fullest justice to these facts and to the strong words of St. John, to throw the rest of the picture into the shade—much less to discredit it. It is evident from such a narrative as St. Mark v. 30–32 that our Lord had within His human nature sources of information more or less peculiar to Himself. Apart from these we are certain that things were continually being revealed to Him by the Father, with whom He walked in unbroken submission and communion (compare St. John xi. 41, 42). They went always “both of them together” ; and whatever was needful for His mission as Saviour of the World was “shown” to Him, or “given” to Him, as the need arose. But this was absolutely consistent with His being as little *omniscient* as we are, in a general sense.

III. The testimony of the writer to the “Hebrews” is curiously emphatic and far-reaching. It is not easy to guess what it was which led him to lay such tremendous stress upon the fact of our Lord being really and truly one of ourselves. He begins by exalting Him—in His origin and essential glory—far above all angels ; and then He puts Him down on the common level of the children of men. He insists that He was exactly like us, with the solitary exception of sin (Heb. ii. 10–18, iv. 15, v. 7–9). Sin, of course, is no part of human nature, no condition of human life. It is like a fungoid disease in animal or tree, nothing original or proper to it, but something which has attached itself to it, to its injury and (if not cured) to its ultimate destruction. Our Saviour was sinless just because He was perfect man. Otherwise He was exactly like us. He was even tempted just as we are. Now this is really much more hard

of credence than that His knowledge was limited. It seems so discreditable in itself, so unfitting for a Divine Being, to be *tempted*—to feel the draw, the urgency, the insistence, of those solicitations of the world, the flesh, or the devil, which distress and disgust us all the more if we are resolute not to follow them. Consider for a moment what St. James says about it : “ God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man ; but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed ” (chap. i. 13, 14). How is it possible to maintain, in the face of such testimony as this, that the Holy One of God was “ tempted in all points like as we are ” ? I know a devout, well-read, and singularly intelligent native Christian in India who cannot receive this. God forbid, he says, that the Divine Saviour should be tempted to sin ! But it is so written, and it is not possible for an orthodox Christian to get away from it.¹ But surely, surely, to admit that He was tempted with evil, and at the same time to deny that His knowledge was or could be limited, is to strain out the gnat and to swallow the camel !

The writer to the Hebrews, therefore, does everything but say in so many words that our Lord—like ourselves—was not omniscient. His general statements, emphatic as they are, include it. His special statement about temptation goes beyond it. One only exception—sin : no room for any other either in his words, or in the profound convictions which underlie the words. Each of the sacred writers has his proper gift from God the Holy Ghost ; and it seems to be the peculiar privilege of this man to realize more than others the ineffable dignity and splendour of the Incarnation from the point of view of poor, distressed, suffering and tempted humanity. When *He* stepped down into

¹ I make no comment on the records of “ The Temptation ” in the Gospels because it is possible to read them as allegories or parables rather than as ordinary narratives of fact.

our ranks who was the Immortal and the Eternal, He made no reservations, retained no immunities, whatsoever. He became our very Brother, not in word only but in deed. His glory was not in being different from us, but (precisely) in being like unto us. His dignity was manifested in what seemed to carnal minds to depress Him even below the common level. Thus, e.g., in Hebrews ii. 9: "We behold . . . Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man." With a curious blindness to the writer's real meaning (which is obvious enough, once it is pointed out) Christian commentators have persisted in trying to see here the "glory and honour" of the Ascension into Heaven; and the Authorized Version has (quite unwarrantably) *altered the order and connection of the words* in order to read this meaning into them. A moment's comparison of our two versions with the original Greek will make this plain. What the author had before his mind's eye was certainly *not* that "crown of pure gold" with which He was (figuratively speaking) crowned when He sat down at the right hand of God, King of kings and Lord of lords. It was obviously that other crown, of thorns, with which His mother, the Jewish Church, crowned Him in the day of His espousals—when He purchased to Himself the universal Church to be His Bride for ever. What the sacred writer saw was Jesus as Pilate led Him forth wearing the crown of thorns and the robe of mockery. Pilate had a sense of scornful humour, and cried aloud, "Behold your King." We do behold Him, in that guise, and we recognize at once, beyond any possibility of mistake, that no conceivable "glory and honour" could ever come near to the moral dignity of that supreme self-sacrifice, intimated by that crown of thorns. It may be that "all the crowns of empire meet upon that brow" in Heaven above. I do

not hesitate to say that whatever they may represent is as nothing compared with the glory and honour of that utter self-abasement, of that vicarious sacrifice. It is the *moral* splendour, the *spiritual* dignity, of the Redeemer which must hold and fascinate every Christian eye, and that shines out resplendent, as everybody knows, in the Crucifixion. We do not do common justice to ourselves and to our undoubted convictions when we pretend to think otherwise. It was "by the grace of God," by virtue of that singular favour which the Father bestowed upon His only-beloved Son, that the Son tasted death upon the Cross for every man. The Father had, could have, no higher grace, no greater honour, to bestow even upon Him. The writer to the Hebrews saw this, and said it, because it was given to him to realize what the Incarnation meant, viz., the absolute identifying of Himself on the part of the Eternal Son with that human race which He came to save, for which He was destined to die. The gifts of God, such as man can receive, He could and did receive: albeit the greatest of them was typified by the crown of twisted thorns. But to be *different* from men (save only in the matter of sin), *that* He could not receive. He was made like unto His brethren *in all things*.

We are now to look at this question of omniscience from the point of view of the Catholic faith. The doctrine of our Saviour Christ, both God and man, was elaborated through a long period of controversy such as must have cost an inconceivable amount of mental and spiritual misery to countless individuals, not to speak of the physical sufferings of many. Such was the will of God that the Church, which is the mother of all living, should bring nothing to the birth save through long agony. One can only say that it was (even humanly speaking) worth while. Had the Catholic doctrine of Christ been simply, unmistakeably, set down for

us in Scripture, it had been of far less value. As it is, the living Society, the Body of Christ, had to fight its way to the truth through blood and tears, through loss and shame and scandal and disaster immeasurable. The doctrine of Christ, both God and man, is, of course, drawn from the New Testament writings. But it was tried and tested and found true, under the good hand of God, through centuries of toil and travail. When people point the finger of scorn at the hateful bitterness and oppression and wrong, at the secret cabals and the open scandals, which accompanied the shaping of the Church's creed, they forget that such is the universal law. It is part of the price. Birth-pangs are not only painful: they are sordid and humiliating too. But when they are past they do but serve to enhance the joy of possession. It was worth while.

What is the foundation truth in this doctrine of Christ? It is twofold: it is that He is consubstantial with the Father; it is (and just as much) that He is consubstantial with us. This word consubstantial (*homoousios*, "of one substance") stands to-day in the Nicene (or Constantinopolitan) Creed, on the one side only, in reference to the Father. It used to stand there also in reference to us:¹ and if it was omitted, it was certainly not because any doubted it, but because it lay outside the then present field of controversy. One may venture to wish that it had been retained. Consubstantial with *the Father*: consubstantial with *us*. Those are the two terms which must for ever balance one another. It was the failure to keep her grasp upon this fundamental truth—the emphasizing of the former term to the practical voidance of the latter—which led the Church into the endless mazes of the Monophysite movement. No one can fully

¹ So in the Chalcedon confession: "We believe in Jesus Christ . . . truly God and truly man . . . consubstantial with the Father as touching His Godhead, and consubstantial with us as touching His manhood."

appreciate the Catholic doctrine who has not followed this controversy with sympathy; sympathy especially for the side which was wrong, which was condemned. They were so deeply in earnest, these Monophysites of Egypt and of the East; so zealous to do honour to our Lord, so jealous of the "crown-rights of Jesus," so convinced that they were on His side in the long strife with the Princes of this world. Morally and religiously they stood, as far as we can now discern, far higher than their opponents—at any rate their *official* opponents. Above all, they *suffered*, with infinite patience and firmness, accepting poverty and persecution without flinching, for the truth of Christ as they saw it, for the glory of the Divine Saviour. The life-story of Jacob Baradai, Bishop and Beggarman, recalls the career of an Athanasius, of a St. Paul, not merely in its amazing catalogue of adventures, labours and sufferings, but still more in the unwearied passion of disinterested zeal and self-devotion which animated and ennobled it. If, however, one's sympathy, one's admiration, is almost wholly engaged in behalf of the Monophysites, one can the more unhesitatingly thank God that their error was rejected.¹ They made the usual mistake of heretics, albeit quite honestly and out of the purest loyalty—the mistake of seizing half the truth eagerly, passionately, and making it their all. They did not indeed deny the humanity of our Lord in word, but they practically made it of no account. It was swallowed up, they said, in His divinity as a drop of honey might be in an ocean of water. For them the Lord Christ was the Word of

¹ Most writers who concern themselves with "heretics" seem to assume one of two things. Either (1) the men *must* have been bad because their creed was at fault, or (2) their heresy *must* have been immaterial because the men were at least as good as their opponents. History makes it abundantly plain that not a few teachers of ruinous errors (and such as time has shown to be ruinous) have been amongst the most admirable and lovable of mankind.

God made visible and audible in the likeness of men ; living, acting, suffering, dying, under the outward conditions of human life. These conditions were necessary for His manifestation ; they prevailed so far, but only so far, as that necessity held ; beyond that they were lost in the glory of His Godhead. Now that left room, abundant room, for a most beautiful and inspiring faith, for a passion of love and zeal. But it was not the Catholic faith : it ignored, it denied in great measure, the “ consubstantial with us ” which was to balance the “ consubstantial with the Father.” All the same the Monophysite spirit is always among us, and in proportion as men are zealous for our Lord’s co-equal Godhead, so will they be tempted to minimize the truth and reach of His manhood.

Let us see how far the Monophysites succeeded in carrying with them the assent and consent of Christendom. It was conceded to them, at the instance of Justinian,¹ that it was quite orthodox to say, “ One of the Trinity was crucified for us ” : the concession was accepted by the Church, and holds good for all time. He who suffered, was tempted, died, was personally the Word of God, and no one else. It is true, of course, that God cannot be tempted, or die. But by the Incarnation these impossibilities become not only possible but actual. We fancy indeed that we explain the impossibility when we add “ in His human nature.” In truth, we explain nothing : the impossibility remains as before. God cannot be tempted—only He *was* : God cannot die—only He *did*. One of the Trinity was crucified for us : it is incredible—only we know that it happened. We must not let ourselves be deceived into supposing that we have escaped the contradiction by adding, “ in His human nature.” God did not cease to be God when He was made man. He did not take to Himself a human *Person*

¹ See Hefete’s *History of the Councils*, vol. iii., pp. 457, 458.

who could be tempted, and die. That was the error imputed to Nestorius. It was One of the Trinity, *and no one else*, who was crucified for us—through weakness, as St. Paul says. I insist on this (but not an atom more than I am entitled to do) because it makes it clear as daylight that human logic utterly fails before the mystery of the Incarnation. It is altogether vain to say *a priori* of the Incarnate One, “He must be this,” or “He cannot be that.” What He is, or is not, falls to be determined entirely by the mode in which He is actually “found in fashion as a man.” He was tempted, and He died: two impossible things for God. We need have no hesitation in adding “His knowledge was limited,” however incompatible that may seem with His Godhead. People say (not infrequently) that God the Son *could not* lay aside His omniscience. It is not well to venture on these “could nots” when one speaks of God. It is easy and natural (as well as true) to say that God could not die: but He did. In truth the primary impossibility which includes all the rest is the impossibility that God should really be incarnate, for how can One be God *and* man—two contrariant and at least partially repugnant things—at the same time? It is only credible and only possible because it actually came to pass. So when we bow the head, or fall upon our knees, at the “*homo factus est*” we abjure all right to set limits of human logic to the self-humiliation of God the Son. In working out the consequences of that supreme act of love and sacrifice reason must be exceedingly modest and tentative, abandoning as inapplicable all her *a priori* assumptions, and suffering herself to be guided exclusively by that which was actually found in Him. Well, it was actually found in Him (along with other incredible things) that His knowledge was limited. He testified Himself that “the Son” did not know (any more than the angels) the day or the hour of the Second Advent (St. Mark

xiii. 32). If we like, we may add to "the Son" the formula "in His human nature." But we really gain nothing thereby. The *Person* who is ignorant is the Son, the Word: and that the Word of God should be ignorant of anything is impossible. Only, in the Incarnation the impossible is continually coming true, and we have no difficulty in believing it since He tells us it is so. For we can see that the processes of human reasoning do not apply to God, being gathered from and adapted unto human affairs and conditions only. Indeed, they do not apply altogether to anything that is strictly supernatural. It is the attempt, always going on, to apply human logic to heavenly mysteries which has led to half the confusion and half the superstition existing in the Church.

We have found, then, first, that the witness of Scripture is decidedly, if not decisively, in favour of the contention that our Lord's knowledge was limited.

We have found, second, that there is no presumption whatever against it from the side of the Catholic Faith. On the contrary, the analogy of the Faith would lead us to assume that our Lord humbled Himself to our level in every way which did not touch His sinless perfection. That great and glorious passage in Philippians ii. 5-11 may of course be controverted so far as the precise scope of certain words is concerned; but in general it affirms that our Lord in the mystery of the Incarnation was prepared to go, and did go, all lengths in the way of self-humbling and self-emptying. It is not explained, nor does any one pretend to understand (for we are not capable of understanding) how these things can be. They really stand, all of them, on the same level. Our Lord, being man, was ignorant by the same divine right by which He suffered, was tempted, died. There is no reason whatever, in human nature, in Scripture, in the Creed, to doubt of one of these more than of another.

And if there be no such reason, then we choose to believe it, and are bound to believe it, on the general principle that it is precisely the "weakness of God" which in the Incarnation is so much "stronger than men" (1 Cor. i. 25). The more He humbled Himself for us, the more did the Father exalt Him once, the more do we exalt Him for ever. It is for His lowliness, His helplessness, His being of no reputation, that we love Him so devoutly and are so keen to serve Him. His greatest claim upon us is exactly that He reserved for Himself no immunities, no prerogatives—save of suffering; that He gave Himself away so entirely; that He identified Himself with us in all the limitation of our created and dependent nature. In a word, we love and trust Him to the uttermost precisely because He became unreservedly one of ourselves—because He is our very Brother. It is *not* a theological question, wholly or mainly: it is a religious question: it touches that relationship between the Saviour and the individual disciple which is the inmost thing in religion.

His knowledge, as man, was limited. Let us see what this implies.

First, it rids us of the really appalling fancy that as a baby-child He knew (and consciously knew) everything. For as there is no ground for the omniscience of Christ except His being God, He must have been omniscient (if at all) from His birth, and before His birth. But a baby-child who should know all about everybody and everything would be a monster such as one does not like to think of. Over all his childhood and youth there would brood an atmosphere of unreality and of incongruity, shocking to contemplate. And his development, as he grew in years, would be hopelessly prevented and spoiled. The very beauty of man's opening years is that as he passes from stage to stage he is at home in each. It must (when we come to think of it) have been possible for Him also to say,

“When I was a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child, I spake as a child.” Otherwise His child-life had been only a form of imprisonment, grotesque and horrible indeed.

Secondly, it leaves it open to us to feel sure that His own knowledge did not bring Him into useless conflict with the ignorance of those around Him. I say *useless*, because there *was* a conflict which was useful and therefore unavoidable. As to where true religion lies, as to the way of salvation, as to all the great problems of spiritual life, as to the Father, our Saviour knew while the religious leaders of the nation did not know. Here was an inevitable conflict which led to His temporary and to their final overthrow. But there was no sign of any conflict between Him and His contemporaries on any topic of ordinary knowledge. Had He been omniscient, had He even possessed the knowledge which we possess, it is impossible to see how such conflict could have been avoided. Suppose, e.g., a scientific man of to-day carried back into the middle ages. Unless he purposely secluded himself, he must needs find himself in a very false and painful position. He could not honestly conform to the thought and the language of the day, because it rested continually on assumptions which he knew to be untrue. If, however, he thought and spoke on the basis of modern knowledge, he would either be utterly ridiculous or else he would incur the gravest suspicion. And all this would be to no purpose because neither his friends nor his foes could learn from him. The growth of knowledge (in all earthly things) is bound to be slow and gradual. As far as we can see, therefore, our Saviour’s short ministry would have been wasted in disputes and misunderstandings about things which *do not belong to salvation*, had He been omniscient. As it was, He could and did use the common language of His age and people about all things not of the essence of religion, because His human knowledge of these things was

acquired in the schools of Palestine ; in other words, it was the same as that of the men around Him. For Him, as for them, the sun really " rose " in the morning and " set " in the evening. For Him, as for them, the Pentateuch was " Moses," and the Psalter " David." True religion (let us observe) is no more dependent upon, no more connected with, the literary character of the Old Testament than the facts of astronomy. True religion is the same always, everywhere : the same for men and women in every stage of intellectual development. Increasing knowledge, whether of astronomy or of Old Testament criticism, serves to illustrate religion from the intellectual side—but that is all. Our own enormously superior position in that respect, as compared with that of our Saviour's age, probably does not really compensate us for the accompanying loss of simplicity and directness. That our Lord willed to go without the intellectual treasures of science and knowledge which we possess, was all of a piece with His deliberate foregoing of wealth and place and power. If His own oft-repeated words—aye, and if the world-wide experience of to-day—mean anything, they mean that progress and greatness in *His* kingdom have no more to do with scientific knowledge (about the Scriptures, or about anything else) than with money or rank or genius. Since then, for *His* purposes, the matter was quite indifferent, why should He have been hampered with a knowledge which He could not use to any profit ? We are surely at liberty to follow the indications of Scripture itself, and to assume that our Lord's knowledge of things earthly was simply that of His age and race—that of the people unto whom He was sent.

Such a conviction as this, as it serves to rid us of other difficulties, so in especial it goes far to solve one of the great cruxes of Scripture which few thoughtful students of the Gospels have been able to look at without misgiving. It

is almost impossible to resist the evidence that our Lord believed, and led others to believe, that He would come again within a short time.¹ It is possible to believe that the Evangelists misreported Him. It is possible to believe that He *did* come again, and take away the first generation of Christians to Heaven. But both these assumptions are extremely difficult, in the face of the admitted facts. It is equally unsatisfactory to give some non-natural twist to His words in order to explain their apparent non-fulfilment. All these expedients must seem to the candid student counsels of despair. What are we then to believe? May we believe that in respect of prophecy our Lord's human mind worked even as did the minds of the Prophets by whom the Holy Ghost spake in the Old Testament? May we understand that He foresaw (and therefore foretold) the end of the Dispensation and His own Second Coming in such a way that it seemed to lie *immediately* behind and beyond the Fall of Jerusalem? It is not enough, assuredly, to exclaim, "If that was the case, our Lord was in fact mistaken, and that is incredible." We have to face the undoubted fact that the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Life-giver, the very Spirit of truth, spake by the Prophets; these Prophets constantly foresaw and foretold "the day of the Lord," and as constantly foresaw and foretold it in the near future, in connexion with political events then pending. It was the will of God, it was the work of the Holy Ghost, that they should thus see it, and thus speak of it, in strongly foreshortened "prophetic perspective." To disparage, as unworthy of God the Holy Ghost, such a method of revelation, because it offends our preconceived notions of what is fitting, comes perilously near to profanity. But if we have to allow it and accept it

¹ Compare the very frank but reverent treatment of this topic in Mr. Allen's volume on St. Matthew's Gospel in the *International Critical Commentary*.

humbly and reverently in the case of the older Prophets, why not in the case of The Prophet who stood confessedly in a certain predestined relationship towards the Old Dispensation as a Minister of the Circumcision? It is acknowledged that our Lord was "sent," not only to the whole wide world to bring all men back to God, but also in a special way to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. It fell to Him as Son of Abraham and of David, in inaugurating a universal dispensation, to wind up the former local dispensation. If in this capacity He foresaw and foretold the end after the same fashion as the Prophets before Him, it is not surely to be wondered at. For reasons which we may recognize in part, it pleased the Father (who ever keeps the times and seasons within His own authority) that the end should always seem close at hand until the former Dispensation was swept away, until the Church Catholic was firmly settled upon its own base. In a word, the Spirit of prophecy saw its objective (and especially that consummation toward which it ever hastens) with extraordinary clearness of vision; but it did *not* see the long tracts of time which lay between. It was by this Holy Spirit of prophecy that Jesus was anointed at His baptism. The limitation of knowledge which we find in the Incarnate Son, as it left Him true man in the presence of His brethren, so it enabled Him to reveal to them the things of God according to the will of God. It is probably true to say that man (being what he is) *could* not learn direct from an omniscient Being, but only from one whose knowledge is more or less limited and relative like his own. We conclude, with devout humility, that whatsoever was needful for us was shown to Him by the Father through the Spirit; that the rest was left to the action of those laws which would determine (and, in determining, limit) the knowledge of a perfect man in that age and amongst that people. RAYNER WINTERBOTHAM.