

LESSON SIX

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST APOSTLES.

VICTORIOUS over that concentrated temptation, safe from the fiery ordeal, the Saviour left the wilderness and returned to the fords of Jordan.

The Synoptical Gospels, which dwell mainly on the ministry in Galilee, and date its active commencement from the imprisonment of John, omit all record of the intermediate events, and only mention our Lord's retirement to Nazareth. It is to the fourth Evangelist that we owe the beautiful narrative of the days which immediately ensued upon the temptation. The Judæan ministry is brought by him into the first prominence. He seems to have made a point of relating nothing of which he had not been a personal witness, and there are some few indications that he was bound to Jerusalem by peculiar relations. By station St. John was a fisherman, and it is not impossible that, as the fish of the Lake of Galilee were sent in large quantities to Jerusalem, he may have lived there at certain seasons in connection with the employment of his father and his brother, who, as the owners of their own boat and the masters of hired servants, evidently occupied a position of some importance. Be that as it may, it is St. John alone who narrates to us the first call of the earliest Apostles, and he relates it with all the minute particulars and graphic touches of one on whose heart and memory each incident had been indelibly impressed.

The deputation of the Sanhedrin (to which we have already alluded) seems to have taken place the day previous to our Lord's return from the wilderness; and when, on the following morning, the Baptist saw Jesus approaching, he delivered a public and emphatic testimony that this was indeed the Messiah who had been marked out to him by the appointed sign, and that He was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Whether the prominent conception in the Baptist's mind was the Paschal Lamb, or the Lamb of the morning and evening sacrifice; whether "the world" (*κόσμος*) was the actual expression which he used, or is merely a Greek rendering of the word "people" (*עַם*); whether he understood the profound and awful import of his own utterance, or was carried by prophetic inspiration beyond himself—we cannot tell. But this much is clear, that since his whole imagery, and indeed the very description of his own function and position, is, as we have already seen, borrowed from the Evangelical

prophet, he must have used the expression with distinct reference to the picture of Divine patience and mediatorial suffering in Isa. liii. 7 (cf. Jer. xi. 19). His words could hardly have involved less meaning than this—that the gentle and sinless Man to whom he pointed should be a Man of Sorrows, and that these sorrows should be for the salvation of His race. Whatever else the words may have connoted to the minds of his hearers, yet they could hardly have thought them over without connecting Jesus with the conceptions of sinlessness, of suffering, and of a redeeming work.

Memorable as this testimony was, it seems on the first day to have produced no immediate result. But on the second day, when the Baptist was standing accompanied by two of his disciples, Jesus again walked by, and John, fixing upon Him his intense and earnest gaze, exclaimed again, as though with involuntary awe and admiration, “Behold the Lamb of God!”

The words were too remarkable to be again neglected, and the two Galilæan youths who heard them followed the retreating figure of Jesus. He caught the sound of their timid footsteps, and turning round to look at them as they came near, He gently asked, “What seek ye?”

It was but the very beginning of His ministry; as yet they could not know Him for all that He was; as yet they had not heard the gracious words that proceeded out of His lips; in coming to seek Him thus they might be actuated by inadequate motives, or even by mere passing curiosity; it was fit that they should come to Him by spontaneous impulse, and declare their object of their own free will.

But how deep and full of meaning is that question, and how sternly it behoves all who come to their Lord to answer it! One of the holiest of the church’s saints, St. Bernard, was in the habit of constantly warning himself by the solemn query, “*Bernarde, ad quid venisti?*”—“Bernard, for what purpose art thou here?” Self-examination could assume no more searching form; but all the meaning which it involved was concentrated in that quiet and simple question, “What seek ye?”

It was more than the two young Galilæans could answer Him at once; it meant more perhaps than they knew or understood, yet the answer showed that they were in earnest. “Rabbi,” they said (and the title of profound honour and reverence showed how deeply His presence had impressed them), “where art thou staying?”

Where it was we do not know. Perhaps in one of the temporary

succôth, or booths covered at the top with the striped *abba*, which is in the East an article of ordinary wear, and with their wattled sides interwoven with green branches of terebinth or palm—which must have given the only shelter possible to the hundreds who had flocked to John's baptism. "He saith to them, Come and see." Again, the words were very simple, though they occur in passages of much significance. Never, however, did they produce a result more remarkable than now. They came and saw where Jesus dwelt, and as it was then four in the afternoon, stayed there that day, and probably slept there that night; and before they lay down to sleep they knew and felt in their inmost hearts that the kingdom of heaven had come, that the hopes of long centuries were now fulfilled, that they had been in the presence of Him who was the desire of all nations, the Priest greater than Aaron, the Prophet greater than Moses, the King greater than David, the true Star of Jacob and Sceptre of Israel.

One of those two youths who thus came earliest to Christ was Andrew. The other suppressed his own name because he was the narrator, the beloved disciple, the Evangelist St. John. No wonder that the smallest details, down even to the very hour of the day, were treasured in his memory, never to be forgotten, even in extreme old age.

It was the first care of Andrew to find his brother Simon, and tell him of this great Eureka. He brought him to Jesus, and Jesus, looking earnestly on him with that royal gaze which read intuitively the inmost thoughts—seeing at a glance in that simple fisherman all the weakness but also all the splendid greatness of the man—said, giving him a new name, which was long afterwards yet more solemnly confirmed, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Kephas;" that is, "Thou art Simon, the son of the *dove*; hereafter thou shalt be as the rock in which the dove hides." It was, indeed, a play upon the word, but one which was memorably symbolic and profound. None but the shallow and the ignorant will see, in such a play upon the name, anything derogatory to the Saviour's dignity. The essential meaning and augury of names had been in all ages a belief among the Jews, whose very language was regarded by themselves as being no less sacred than the oracular gems on Aaron's breast. Their belief in the mystic potency of sounds, of the tongue guided by unalterable destiny in the realms of seeming chance, may seem idle and superstitious to an artificial cultivation, but has been shared by many of the deepest thinkers in every age.

How was it that these youths of Galilee, how was it that a John

so fervid yet contemplative, a Peter so impetuous in his affections, yet so timid in his resolves, were thus brought at once—brought, as it were, by a single look, by a single word—to the Saviour's feet? How came they thus, by one flash of insight or of inspiration, to recognise, in the carpenter of Nazareth, the Messiah of prophecy, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world?

Doubtless in part by what He said, and by what John the Baptist had testified concerning Him, but doubtless also in part by His very look. On this subject, indeed, tradition has varied in a most remarkable manner; but on a point of so much interest we may briefly pause.

Any one who has studied the representations of Christ in mediæval art will have observed that some of them, particularly in missals, are degradingly and repulsively hideous, while others are conceived in the softest and loveliest ideal of human beauty. Whence came this singular divergence?

It came from the prophetic passages which were supposed to indicate the appearance of the Messiah, as well as His life.

The early Church, accustomed to the exquisite perfection of form in which the genius of heathen sculpture had clothed its conceptions of the younger gods of Olympus—aware, too, of the fatal corruptions of a sensual imagination—seemed to find a pleasure in breaking loose from this adoration of personal endowments, and in taking as their ideal of the bodily aspect of our Lord, Isaiah's picture of a patient and afflicted sufferer, or David's pathetic description of a smitten and wasted outcast. His beauty, says Clemens of Alexandria, was in His soul and in His actions, but in appearance He was base. Justin Martyr describes Him as being without beauty, without glory, without honour. His body, says Origen, was small, and ill-shapen, and ignoble. "His body," says Tertullian, "had no human handsomeness, much less any celestial splendour." The heathen Celsus, as we learn from Origen, even argued from His traditional meanness and ugliness of aspect as a ground for rejecting His divine origin. Nay, this kind of distorted inference went to even greater extremities. The Vulgate rendering of Isa. liii. 4 is, "*Nos putavimus eum quasi leprosum, percussum a Deo et humiliatum;*" and this gave rise to a wide-spread fancy of which there are many traces, that He who healed so many leprosy was Himself a leper!

* Shocked, on the other hand, by these revolting fancies, there were many who held that Jesus, in His earthly features, reflected the charm and beauty of David, His great ancestor; and St. Jerome and St.

* See Ed. Note on the next page.

*** Ed. Note:** The descriptions of Jesus in the next few paragraphs must be considered as mere fancies and hopes of the hearts of those who love Him and want Him to have some transcendent appearance to distinguish Him from mere mortal men. However, the Bible is plain in its statements concerning His appearance.

The paragraphs describing His appearance are left in the textbook for continuity and to show the hopes of the hearts of those who love Him. However, they should not be considered as in any way reflecting the true appearance of Jesus. The fancies of beauty are no more truthful than the fancies of ugliness.

It is true that His appearance would have lacked the ravages of sin that mark all human beings, but aside from those aging and degrading distortions of feature and form, His appearance was unremarkable.

We must always revert to the Scriptures to find the truth of such questions as “Of what form, or beauty, or comeliness, was our Saviour, Jesus Christ, while in the flesh?”

Read Isaiah 53:2

Dr. VBK

Augustine preferred to apply to Him the words of Psalm xlv. 2, 3, "Thou art fairer than the children of men." It was natural that, in the absence of positive indications, this view should command a deeper sympathy, and it gave rise both to the current descriptions of Christ, and also to those ideals, so full of mingled majesty and tenderness in—

"That face
How beautiful, if sorrow had not made
Sorrow more beautiful than beauty's self,"

which we see in the great pictures of Fra Angelico, of Michael Angelo, of Leonardo da Vinci, of Raphael, and of Titian.

Independently of all tradition, we may believe with reverent conviction that there could have been nothing mean or repugnant—that there must, as St. Jerome says, have been "something starry"—in the form which enshrined an Eternal Divinity and an Infinite Holiness. All true beauty is but "the sacrament of goodness," and a conscience so stainless, a spirit so full of harmony, a life so purely noble, could not but express itself in the bearing, could not but be reflected in the face, of the Son of Man. We do not indeed find any allusion to this charm of aspect, as we do in the description of the young High-priest Aristobulus whom Herod murdered; but neither, on the other hand, do we find in the language of His enemies a single word or allusion which might have been founded on an unworthy appearance. He of whom John bore witness as the Christ—He whom the multitude would gladly have seized that He might be their king—He whom the city saluted with triumphant shouts as the Son of David—He to whom women ministered with such deep devotion, and whose aspect, even in the troubled images of a dream, had inspired a Roman lady with interest and awe—He whose mere word caused Philip and Matthew and many others to leave all and follow Him—He whose one glance broke into an agony of repentance the heart of Peter—He before whose presence those possessed with devils were alternately agitated into frenzy and calmed into repose, and at whose question, in the very crisis of His weakness and betrayal, His most savage enemies shrank and fell prostrate in the moment of their most infuriated wrath—such an One as this could not have been without the personal majesty of a Prophet and a Priest. All the facts of His life speak convincingly of that strength, and endurance, and dignity, and electric influence which none could have exercised without a large share of human, no less than of spiritual, gifts. "Certainly," says St. Jerome, "a flame of fire and

starry brightness flashed from His eye, and the majesty of the Godhead shone in His face.”

The third day after the return from the wilderness seems to have been spent by Jesus in intercourse with His new disciples. On the fourth day He wished to start for His return to Galilee, and on the journey fell in with another young fisherman, Philip of Bethsaida. Philip had a Greek name, which had been derived, perhaps, from the tetrarch Philip, since the custom of naming children after reigning princes has always been a common one. If so, he must at this time have been under thirty. Possibly his Greek name indicates his familiarity with some of the Greek-speaking population who lived mingled with the Galilæans on the shores of Gennesareth; and this may account for the fact that he, rather than any of the other Apostles, was appealed to by the Greeks who, in the last week of His life, wished to see our Lord. One word—the one pregnant invitation, “*Follow me!*”—was sufficient to attach to Jesus for ever the gentle and simple-minded Apostle, whom in all probability he had previously known.

The next day a fifth neophyte was added to that sacred and happy band. Eager to communicate the rich discovery which he had made, Philip sought out his friend Nathanael, exercising thereby the divinest prerogative of friendship, which consists in the communication to others of all that we have ourselves experienced to be most divine. Nathanael, in the list of Apostles, is generally, and almost indubitably, identified with Bartholomew; for Bartholomew is less a name than a designation—“*Bar-Tolmai*, the son of Tolmai;” and while Nathanael is only in one other place mentioned under this name (John xxi. 2), Bartholomew (of whom, on any other supposition, we should know nothing whatever) is, in the list of Apostles, almost invariably associated with Philip. As his home was at Cana of Galilee, the son of Tolmai might easily have become acquainted with the young fishermen of Gennesareth. And yet so deep was the retirement in which up to this time Jesus had lived His life, that though Nathanael knew Philip, he knew nothing of Christ. The simple mind of Philip seemed to find a pleasure in contrasting the grandeur of His office with the meanness of His birth: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write;” whom think you?—a young Herodian Prince?—a young Asmonæan priest?—some burning light from the schools of Shammai or Hillel?—some passionate young Emîr from the followers of Judas of Gamala?—no, but “*Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*”

Nathanael seems to have felt the contrast. He caught at the local

designation. It may be, as legend says, that he was a man of higher position than the rest of the Apostles. It has been usually considered that his answer was proverbial; but perhaps it was a passing allusion to the word *nazora*, "despicable;" or it may merely have implied "*Nazareth*, that obscure and ill-reputed town in its little untrodden valley—can anything good come from *thence*?" The answer is in the same words which our Lord had addressed to John and Andrew. Phillip was an apt scholar, and he too said, "*Come and see.*"

To-day, too, that question—"Can any good thing come out of *Nazareth*?"—is often repeated, and the one sufficient answer—almost the only possible answer—is now, as it then was, "*Come and see.*" Then it meant, come and see One who speaks as never man spake; come and see One who, though He be but the Carpenter of Nazareth, yet overawes the souls of all who approach Him—seeming by His mere presence to reveal the secrets of all hearts, yet drawing to Him even the most sinful with a sense of yearning love; come and see One from whom there seems to breathe forth the irresistible charm of a sinless purity, the unapproachable beauty of a Divine life. "Come and see," said Philip, convinced in his simple faithful heart that to see Jesus was to know Him, and to know was to love, and to love was to adore. In this sense, indeed, we can say "come and see" no longer; for since the opening heavens closed on the visions which were vouchsafed to St. Stephen and St. Paul, his earthly form has been visible no more. But there is another sense, no less powerful for conviction, in which it still suffices to say, in answer to all doubts, "Come and see." Come and see a dying world revived, a decrepit world regenerated, an aged world rejuvenescent; come and see the darkness illuminated, the despair dispelled; come and see tenderness brought into the cell of the imprisoned felon, and liberty to the fettered slave; come and see the poor, and the ignorant, and the many, emancipated for ever from the intolerable thralldom of the rich, the learned, and the few; come and see hospitals and orphanages rising in their permanent mercy beside the crumbling ruins of colossal amphitheatres which once reeked with human blood; come and see the obscene symbols of an universal degradation obliterated indignantly from the purified abodes; come and see the dens of lust and tyranny transformed into sweet and happy homes, defiant atheists into believing Christians, rebels into children, and pagans into saints. Ay, come and see the majestic acts of one great drama continued through nineteen Christian centuries; and as you see them all tending to one great development, long predetermined

in the Council of the Divine Will—as you learn in reverent humility that even apparent Chance is in reality *the daughter of Forethought*, as well as, for those who thus recognise her nature, *the sister of Order and Persuasion*—as you hear the voice of your Saviour searching, with the loving accents of a compassion which will neither strive nor cry, your very reins and heart—it may be that you too will unlearn the misery of doubt, and exclaim in calm and happy confidence, with the pure and candid Nathanael, “*Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel!*”

The fastidious reluctance of Nathanael was very soon dispelled. Jesus, as He saw him coming, recognised that the seal of God was upon his forehead, and said of him, “Behold a true Israelite, in whom guile is not.” “Whence dost thou recognise me?” asked Nathanael; and then came that heart-searching answer, “Before that Philip called thee, whilst thou wert under the fig-tree, I saw thee.”

It was the custom of pious Jews—a custom approved by the Talmud—to study their *krishma*, or office of daily prayer, under a fig-tree; and some have imagined that there is some significance in the fact of the Apostle having been summoned from the shade of a tree, which symbolised Jewish ordinances and Jewish traditions, but which was beginning already to cumber the ground. But though something interesting and instructive may often be derived from the poetic insight of a chastened imagination, which can thus observe allegories which lie involved in the simplest facts, yet no such flash of sudden perception could alone have accounted for the agitated intensity of Nathanael’s reply. Every one must have been struck at first sight with the apparent disproportionateness between the cause and the effect. How apparently inadequate was that quiet allusion to the lonely session of silent thought under the fig-tree to produce the instantaneous adhesion, the henceforth inalienable loyalty, of this “fusile Apostle” to the Son of God, the King of Israel! But for the true explanation of this instantaneity of conviction, we must look deeper; and then, if I mistake not, we shall see in this incident another of those indescribable touches of reality which have been to so many powerful minds the most irresistible internal evidence to establish the historic truthfulness of the Fourth Gospel.

There are moments when the grace of God stirs sensibly in the human heart; when the soul seems to rise upon the eagle-wings of hope and prayer into the heaven of heavens; when, caught up, as it were, into God’s very presence, we see and hear things unspeakable.

At such moments we live a lifetime ; for emotions such as these annihilate all time ; they—

“ Crowd Eternity into an hour,
Or stretch an hour into Eternity.”

At such moments we are nearer to God ; we seem to know Him and be known of Him ; and if it were possible for any man at such a moment to see into our souls, he would know all that is greatest and most immortal in our beings. But to see us then is impossible to man ; it is possible only to Him whose hand should lead, whose right hand should guide us, even if we could take the wings of the morning and fly into the uttermost parts of the sea. And such a crisis of emotion must the guileless Israelite have known as he sat and prayed and mused in silence under his fig-tree. To the consciousness of such a crisis—a crisis which could only be known to One to whom it was given to read the very secrets of the heart—our Lord appealed. Let him who has had a similar experience say how he would regard a living man who could reveal to him that he had at such a moment looked into and fathomed the emotions of his heart. That such solitary musings—such penetrating, even in this life, “behind the veil”—such raptures into the third heaven during which the soul strives to transcend the limitations of space and time while it communes, face to face, with the Eternal and the Unseen—such sudden kindlings of celestial lightning which seem to have fused all that is meanest and basest within us in an instant and for ever—that these supreme crises *are* among the recorded experiences of the Christian life, rests upon indisputable evidence of testimony and of fact. And if any one of my readers has ever known this spasm of divine change which annihilates the old and in the same moment creates or re-creates a new-born soul, such a one, at least, will understand the thrill of electric sympathy, the arrow-point of intense conviction, that shot that very instant through the heart of Nathanael, and brought him, as it were, at once upon his knees with the exclamation, “*Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel !*”

We scarcely hear of Nathanael again. His seems to have been one of those calm, retiring, contemplative souls, whose whole sphere of existence lies not here, but—

“ Where, beyond these voices, there is peace.”

It was a life of which the world sees nothing, because it was “*hid* with Christ in God ;” but of this we may be sure, that never till the day of

his martyrdom, or even during his martyr agonies, did he forget those quiet words which showed that his "Lord had searched him out and known him, and comprehended his thoughts long before." Not once, doubtless, but on many and many a future day, was the promise fulfilled for him and for his companions, that, with the eye of faith, they should "see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST MIRACLE.

"On the third day," says St. John, "there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee." Writing with a full knowledge and vivid recollection of every fact that took place during those divinely memorable days, he gives his indications of time as though all were equally familiar with them. The third day has been understood in different manners: it is simplest to understand it as the third after the departure of Jesus for Galilee. If He were travelling expeditiously He might stop on the first night (supposing Him to follow the ordinary route) at Shiloh or at Shechem; on the second at En-Gannim; on the third, crossing the plain of Jezreel, He could easily reach Nazareth, and finding that His mother and brethren were not there, might, in an hour and a half longer, reach Cana in time for the ceremonies of an Oriental wedding.

It is well known that those ceremonies began at twilight. It was the custom in Palestine, no less than in Greece,

"To bear away

The bride from home at blushing shut of day,"

or even later, far on into the night, covered from head to foot in her loose and flowing veil, garlanded with flowers, and dressed in her fairest robes. She was heralded by torchlight, with songs and dances, and the music of the drum and flute, to the bridegroom's home. She was attended by the maidens of her village, and the bridegroom came to meet her with his youthful friends. Legend says that Nathanael was on this occasion the paranymp, whose duty it was to escort the bride; but the presence of Mary, who must have left Nazareth on purpose to be present at the wedding, seems to show that one of the bridal pair was some member of the Holy Family. Jesus, too, was invited, and His disciples, and the use of the singular (*ἐκλήθη*) implies that they

were invited for His sake, not He for theirs. It is not likely, therefore, that Nathanael, who had only heard the name of Jesus two days before, had anything to do with the marriage. All positive conjecture is idle; but the fact that the Virgin evidently took a leading position in the house, and commands the servants in a tone of authority, renders it not improbable that this may have been the wedding of one of her nephews, the sons of Alphæus, or even of one of her daughters, "the sisters of Jesus," to whom tradition gives the names Esther and Thamar. That Joseph himself was dead is evident from the complete silence of the Evangelists, who after Christ's first visit to Jerusalem as a boy, make no further mention of his name.

Whether the marriage festival lasted for seven days, as was usual among those who could afford it, or only for one or two, as was the case among the poorer classes, we cannot tell; but at some period of the entertainment the wine suddenly ran short. None but those who know how sacred in the East is the duty of lavish hospitality, and how passionately the obligation to exercise it to the utmost is felt, can realise the gloom which this incident would have thrown over the occasion, or the misery and mortification which it would have caused to the wedded pair. They would have felt it to be, as in the East it would still be felt to be, a bitter and indelible disgrace.

Now the presence of Jesus and His five disciples may well have been the cause of this unexpected deficiency. The invitation, as we have seen, was originally intended for Jesus alone, nor could the youthful bridegroom in Cana of Galilee have been in the least aware that during the last four days Jesus had won the allegiance of five disciples. It is probable that no provision had been made for this increase of numbers, and that it was their unexpected presence which caused the deficiency in this simple household. Moreover, it is hardly probable that, coming from a hasty journey of ninety miles, the little band could, even had their means permitted it, have conformed to the common Jewish custom of bringing with them wine and other provisions to contribute to the mirthfulness of the wedding feast.

Under these circumstances, therefore, there was a special reason why the mother of Jesus should say to Him, "They have no wine." The remark was evidently a pointed one, and its import could not be misunderstood. None knew, as Mary knew, who her Son was; yet for thirty long years of patient waiting for this manifestation, she had but seen Him grow as other children grow, and live, in sweetness indeed and humility and grace of sinless wisdom, like a tender plant

before God, but in all other respects as other youths have lived, pre-eminent only in utter stainlessness. But now He was thirty years old; the voice of the great Prophet, with whose fame the nation rang, had proclaimed Him to be the promised Christ; He was being publicly attended by disciples who acknowledged Him as Rabbi and Lord. Here was a difficulty to be met; an act of true kindness to be performed; a disgrace to be averted from friends whom He loved—and that too a disgrace to which His own presence and that of His disciples had unwittingly contributed. Was not His hour yet come? Who could tell what He might do, if He were only made aware of the trouble which threatened to interrupt the feast? Might not some band of hymning angels, like the radiant visions who had heralded His birth, receive His bidding to change that humble marriage-feast into a scene of heaven? Might it not be that even now He would lead them into His banquet-house, and His banner over them be love?

Her faith was strong, her motives pure, except perhaps what has been called “the slightest possible touch of the purest womanly, motherly anxiety (we know no other word) prompting in her the desire to see *her Son* honoured in her presence.” And her Son’s hour *had* nearly come: but it was necessary now, at once, for ever, for that Son to show to her that henceforth he was not Jesus the Son of Mary, but the Christ the Son of God; that as regarded His great work and mission, as regarded his Eternal Being, the significance of the beautiful relationship had passed away; that His thoughts were not as her thoughts, neither His ways her ways. It could not have been done in a manner more decisive, yet at the same time more entirely tender.

“*Woman, what have I to do with thee?*” The words at first sound harsh, and almost repellent in their roughness and brevity; but that is the fault partly of our version, partly of our associations. He does not call her “mother,” because, in circumstances such as these, she was His mother no longer; but the address “Woman” (*Γύραι*) was so respectful that it might be, and was, addressed to the queenliest, and so gentle that it might be, and was, addressed at the tenderest moments to the most fondly loved. And “what have I to do with thee?” is a literal version of a common Aramaic phrase (*mah lâ velâk*), which, while it sets aside a suggestion and waives all further discussion of it, is yet perfectly consistent with the most delicate courtesy and the most feeling consideration.

Nor can we doubt that even the slight check involved in these quiet words was still more softened by the look and accent with which

they were spoken, and which are often sufficient to prevent far harsher utterances from inflicting any pain. For with undiminished faith, and with no trace of pained feeling, Mary said to the servants—over whom it is clear she was exercising some authority—“Whatever He says to you, do it at once.”

The first necessity after a journey in the East is to wash the feet, and before a meal to wash the hands; and to supply these wants there were standing (as still is usual), near the entrance of the house, six large stone water-jars, with their orifices filled with bunches of fresh green leaves to keep the water cool. Each of these jars contained two or three *baths* of water, and Jesus bade the servants at once fill them to the brim. They did so, and He then ordered them to draw out the contents in smaller vessels, and carry it to the guest who, according to the festive custom of the time, had been elected “governor of the feast.” Knowing nothing of what had taken place, he mirthfully observed that in offering the good wine last, the bridegroom had violated the common practice of banquets. This was Christ’s first miracle, and *thus*, with a definite and symbolic purpose, did He manifest His glory, and His disciples believed on Him.

It was His first miracle, yet how unlike all that we should have expected; how simply unobtrusive, how divinely calm! The method, indeed, of the miracle—which is far more wonderful in character than the ordinary miracles of healing—transcends our powers of conception; yet it was not done with any pomp of circumstance, or blaze of adventitious glorification. Men in these days have presumptuously talked as though it were God’s duty—the duty of Him to whom the sea and the mountains are a very little thing, and before whose eyes the starry heaven is but as one white gleam in the “intense inane”—to perform His miracles before a circle of competent *savans*! Conceivably it might be so had it been intended that miracles should be the sole, or even the main, credentials of Christ’s authority; but to the belief of Christendom the son of God would still be the Son of God even if, like John, He had done no miracle. The miracles of Christ were miracles addressed, not to a cold and sceptic curiosity, but to a loving and humble faith. They needed not the acuteness of the impostor, or the self-assertion of the thaumaturge. They were indeed the signs—almost, we had said, the accidental signs—of His divine mission; but their primary object was the alleviation of human suffering, or the illustration of sacred truths, or, as in this instance, the increase of innocent joy. An obscure village, an ordinary wedding, a humble

home, a few faithful peasant guests—such a scene, and no splendid amphitheatre or stately audience, beheld one of Christ's greatest miracles of power. And in these respects the circumstances of the First Miracle are exactly analogous to the supernatural events recorded of Christ's birth. In the total unlikeness of this to all that we should have imagined—in its absolute contrast with anything which legend would have invented—in all, in short, which most offends the unbeliever, we see but fresh confirmation that we are reading the words of soberness and truth.

A miracle is a miracle, and we see no possible advantage in trying to understand the *means* by which it was wrought. In accepting the evidence for it—and it is for each man to be fully persuaded in his own mind, and to accept or to reject at his pleasure, perhaps even it may prove to be at his peril—we are avowedly accepting the evidence for something which transcends, though it by no means necessarily supersedes, the ordinary laws by which nature works. What is gained—in what single respect does the miracle become, so to speak, easier or more comprehensible—by supposing, with Olshausen, that we have here only an accelerated process of nature; or with Neander (apparently), that the water was magnetised; or with Lange (apparently), that the guests were in a state of supernatural exaltation? Let those who find it intellectually possible, or spiritually advantageous, freely avail themselves of such hypotheses if they see their way to do so: to us they seem not “irreverent,” not “rationalistic,” not “dangerous,” but simply embarrassing and needless. To denounce them as unfaithful concessions to the spirit of scepticism may suit the exigencies of a violent and Pharisaic theology, but is unworthy of that calm charity which should be the fairest fruit of Christian faith. In matters of faith it ought to be to every one of us “a very small thing to be judged of you or of man's judgment;” we ought to believe or disbelieve, or modify belief, with sole reference to that which, in our hearts and consciences, we feel to be the will of God; and it is by His judgment, and by His alone, that we should care to stand or to fall. We as little claim a right to scathe the rejector of miracles by abuse and anathema, as we admit *his* right to sneer at us for imbecility or hypocrisy. Jesus has taught to all men, whether they accept or reject Him, the lessons of charity and sweetness; and what the believer and the unbeliever alike can do, is calmly, temperately, justly, and with perfect and solemn sincerity—knowing how deep are the feelings involved, and how vast the issues at stake between us—to state the

reason for the belief that is in him. And this being so, I would say that if we once understand that the word Nature has little or no meaning unless it be made to include the idea of its Author; if we once realise the fact, which all science teaches us, that the very simplest and most elementary operation of the laws of Nature is infinitely beyond the comprehension of our most exalted intelligence; if we once believe that the Divine Providence of God is no far-off abstraction, but a living and loving care over the lives of men; lastly, if we once believe that Christ was the only-begotten Son of God, the Word of God who came to reveal and declare His Father to mankind, then there is nothing in any Gospel miracle to shock our faith: we shall regard the miracles of Christ as resulting from the fact of His Being and His mission, no less naturally and inevitably than the rays of light stream outwards from the sun. They were, to use the favourite expression of St. John, not merely "portents" (τέρατα), or powers (δυνάμεις), or signs (σημεία), but they were works (ἔργα), the ordinary and inevitable works (whenever He chose to exercise them) of One whose very existence was the highest miracle of all. For our faith is that He was sinless; and to borrow the words of a German poet, "one might have thought that the miracle of miracles was to have created the world such as it is; yet it is a far greater miracle to have lived a perfectly pure life therein." The greatest of modern philosophers said that there were two things which overwhelmed his soul with awe and astonishment, "the starry heaven above, and the moral law within;" but to these has been added a third reality no less majestic—the fulfilment of the moral law *without* us in the Person of Jesus Christ. That fulfilment makes us believe that He was indeed Divine; and if He were Divine, we have no further astonishment left when we are taught that He did on earth that which can be done by the Power of God alone.

But there are two characteristics of this first miracle which we ought to notice.

One is its divine unselfishness. His ministry is to be a ministry of joy and peace; His sanction is to be given not to a crushing asceticism, but to a genial innocence; His approval, not to a compulsory celibacy, but to a sacred union. He who, to appease His own sore hunger, would not turn the stones of the wilderness into bread, gladly exercises, for the sake of others, His transforming power; and but six or seven days afterwards, relieves the perplexity and sorrow of a humble wedding feast by turning water into wine. The first miracle of Moses

was, in stern retribution, to turn the river of a guilty nation into blood; the first of Jesus to fill the water-jars of an innocent family with wine.

And the other is its symbolic character. Like nearly all the miracles of Christ, it combines the characteristics of a work of mercy, an emblem, and a prophecy. The world gives its best first, and afterwards all the dregs and bitterness; but Christ came to turn the lower into the richer and sweeter, the Mosaic law into the perfect law of liberty, the baptism of John into the baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire, the self-denials of a painful isolation into the self-denials of a happy home, sorrow and sighing into hope and blessing, and water into wine. And thus the "holy estate" which Christ adorned and beautified with His presence and first miracle in Cana of Galilee, foreshadows the mystical union between Christ and His Church; and the common element which He thus miraculously changed becomes a type of our life on earth transfigured and ennobled by the anticipated joys of heaven—a type of that wine which He shall drink new with us in the kingdom of God, at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE SCENE OF THE MINISTRY.

CHRIST'S first miracle of Cana was a sign that He came, not to call His disciples *out* of the world and its ordinary duties, but to make men happier, nobler, better *in* the world. He willed that they should be husbands, and fathers, and citizens, not eremites or monks. He would show that he approved the brightness of pure society, and the mirth of innocent gatherings, no less than the ecstasies of the ascetic in the wilderness, or the visions of the mystic in his solitary cell.

And, as pointing the same moral, there was something significant in the place which He chose as the scene of His earliest ministry. St. John had preached in the lonely wastes by the Dead Sea waters; his voice had been echoed back by the flinty precipices that frown over the sultry Ghôr. The city nearest to the scene of his teaching had been built in defiance of a curse, and the road to it led through "the bloody way." All around him breathed the dreadful associations of a guilty and desolated past; the very waves were bituminous; the very