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ARTICLE II.

THE GOSPEL OF CANA.

THE CHRISTIAN AFFIRMATION OF LIFE.

BY DAVID BAINES-GRIFFITHS, M. A.

THE wonder at Cana of Galilee is the symbol of a service which Jesus Christ is always ready to render to his friends. He enriches the feast of life by turning its water into wine. He glorifies the commonplace, and calls us to the sacrament of a deep and quiet joy.

It is true that the Wonder-Worker was also a sufferer who marched with unfaltering step on a perilous road. We have never completely described him, however, until we have seen the lighter and gladder side of his life, until we have learned that he is worthy to be called not only a Man of Sorrows, but the "Joyous Comrade." For although he was acquainted with grief, he yet knew the meaning of bounding life and happy work in a world which he believed was his Father's world, a world blessed with a myriad of pleasures not necessary to mere existence. He was like ourselves in his appreciation of sheltering human friendships; and in the wider social life he could give himself to the occasion without grudging. The Gospels nowhere say in so many words that Jesus ever smiled. That his face was lit with smiling kindliness we nevertheless surely know, for is it not written that mothers brought their young children to him, and did he not carry the lambs in his arms? The "pale Galilean" was poor, no doubt, but never so poor as to be beggared of gladness. There was a high joy he could speak of even when he was standing in the shadow of the tree whereon he was slain at last.

1. The Gospel of Calvary and the Gospel of Cana are in essence one. Too often an emphasis has been placed on suffering as an ingredient in Christian experience, in such wise as to distort the evangel of Jesus, and to hide the true glory of the life of faith. Against the Gospel of Joy men have preached a Gospel of Pain, pain as the price of blessedness and the key of heaven. Now while this ascetic view of life has no true place in the Christian program, it has played a part in the history of the church from the beginning even until now.

In the days of the early church, conditions were somewhat favorable for a false insistence on sacrifice and abstinence. The gospel had come to men in Palestine who shared the oriental tendency to retirement, contemplation, and self-denying rigors. They felt also the moral pressure of the Essenes' earnestness as manifested in the rejection of luxury, in sexual abstinence, and in communistic withdrawal from society. Moreover, traditions had not entirely died out respecting the austere Nazarites and Rechabites. When therefore a man suddenly appeared, clad with leathern girdle and camel's-hair coat, and eating a sort of food that was palatable only to the starving, it required no great leap for the popular imagination to see in John the Baptist an Elijah *redivivus*.

Advancing from Palestine to the wider world, the Christian message made its appeal to the man who retained something of the old Roman respect for hardness and discipline. Of this type Professor George Santayana says, "He did not wish his passions to be flattered, not even his pride or the passion for a social Utopia. He wished his passions to be mortified and his soul to be redeemed. He would not look for a Messiah unless he could find him on a cross."

When the Christian teaching reached Alexandria, it found a field where Neoplatonism had been offering itself as a re-

vealed religion, with an ascetic morality. Neoplatonism preached salvation by syllogism; but this saving dialectic required for its exercise a purification of the intellect, and this purification could be obtained only through abstention from physical indulgence. So far did the Alexandrian Platonists go in this prohibitive direction that they came to speak of the body more contemptuously than the Christians had spoken of the flesh.

Thus by various avenues, the sense of sin, or world weariness, or a dualistic philosophy, strange, pain-loving practices made their way into the Christian church.

Negation of life, this has been the chief note of the monastic influence that has in many guises persisted from the dawn of Christianity to the present. Under its *régime,* and here we may quote Professor Harnack, "Not only culture, but nature itself is to be escaped; not only social regulations, but also man. Everything that can give an occasion to sin—and what cannot?—is to be done away; all joy, all knowledge, all distinctions of human rank."

Let us look at some of the ways in which the joyous message of the Guest at Cana has been opposed by a message of monkish gloom. The first instance is that quoted by Mr. Lecky in his "History of European Morals":—

"A man named Mutius accompanied by his only child, a little boy eight years old, once abandoned his possessions and demanded admission in a monastery. The monks received him, but they proceded to discipline his heart. He had already forgotten that he was rich; he must next be taught to forget that he was a father. His child was separated from him, clothed in dirty rags, subjected to every form of gross and wanton hardship, beaten, spurned and ill-treated. Day after day the father was compelled to look upon his boy wasting away with sorrow, his once happy countenance forever stained with tears, distorted by sobs of anguish. 'But yet,' says the admiring biographer, 'though he saw this day by day, such was his love for Christ and for the virtue of obedience, that the father's

heart was rigid and unmoved.' He thought little of the tears of his child. He was anxious only for his own humility and perfection in virtue. At last the abbot told him to take his child and throw it into the river. He proceeded, without a murmur or apparent pang, to obey; and it was only at the last moment that the monks interposed and on the very brink of the river saved the child. Mutius afterwards rose to a high position among the ascetics, and was justly regarded as having displayed in great perfection the temper of a saint."

Saint Macarius of Alexandria, we learn,

"was one day stung by a gnat in his cell, and he killed it. Then regretting that he had allowed himself to be irritated by an insect, and that he had lost an opportunity of enduring mortification calmly, he went into the marshes of Scete and stayed there six months, suffering terribly from the insects, as if they had known he had killed a brother gnat. When he returned, he was so disfigured by their bites that he was only recognized by his voice. When a younger disciple once asked leave to drink a little water because of the parching thirst, the old hermit, under whose care and tuition he had put himself, told him to be satisfied with resting a little in the shade and to encourage him, said that for twenty years he had never once eaten or drunk or slept as much as nature demanded."[1]

Another and a classic instance of this world-and-flesh-denying temper is afforded in the meek and ardent St. Simeon Stylites, most literally an exponent of the higher life.

"Three winters, that my soul might grow to thee
I lived up there on yonder mountain side."
"Then, that I might be more alone with thee,
Three years I lived upon a pillar, high
Six cubits, and three years on one of twelve;
And twice three years I crouch'd on one that rose
Twenty by measure; last of all I grew
Twice ten long weary years to this,
That numbers forty cubits from the soil."

"I fear," said St. Francis of Assisi, "I fear that I have ill treated my brother the ass." This he said only a few hours before his death, and thus was his way of speaking of his emaciated body worn out by austerities practiced in the name of religion.

[1] Hugh Black, Culture and Restraint.

As we know, the self-denying severities have been practiced by women also. "*Aut pati aut mori,*" said St. Teresa, "who was wont to go out of her way in search of further sufferings, to regard them as pearls of great price to be earnestly sought for . . . .She was restless, uneasy, fretful if ever she were wholly free from pain or sorrow or humiliation, from the cross in one form or another." And it was the same joy-denying spirit that captured Madame Guyon, who, in her beautiful youth, in order to hate herself, scourged herself till the blood would flow. She would lick the matter from a sore; she would put wormwood into her food. She had sound teeth extracted, and used to drop melted sealing-wax on her hands.

It would give us much satisfaction if we might suppose such sad distortions of the Christian idea to belong exclusively to a bygone time. Unfortunately we are not allowed any such comforting reflection. The self-torturing zeal of medieval flagellants is matched by the present-day penitents in New Mexico. There is contemporary ecclesiastical sanction for the wearing of the hair-shirt. Canon Jerome Ribet, in his book "L'ascetique Chrétienne," published in 1902 with the warm approval of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII., has a chapter devoted to eulogistic consideration of "The Austerities." An English Jesuit, Father Tyrrell, has recently put out a volume of meditations under the title "Hard Sayings." He extols the angelic virtue of purity, by which he means celibacy, and eloquently preaches what he calls a Gospel of Pain. "What force can resist a people whom love teaches not merely to endure pain but to seek it and revel in it?"

Nor need we look to the Roman Church alone for examples of pagan pain-worship. A strain of ascetic repression has lingered here and there in the sons of the Calvinistic faith. This

admission must be made with an accompanying tribute of reverence to the sturdy strength of character which that faith has produced. As a system of truth and as a social force, Calvinism has been one of the gifts of God to men. How can one speak otherwise than with profound respect of that belief in Almighty God, that revival of religion, which gave to the world the Huguenots and Covenanters and Pilgrims and Puritans? Great causes have always demanded great sacrifices, and the Puritan, since he feared God and had no other fear, was ready to suffer in order that righteousness and freedom might prevail. His task was so lofty, he felt clearly called "to scorn delights, and live laborious days." It was the excess of his virtue that led him to scorn delights when there was no justifiable reason for so doing, and he came at last to demand as an end in itself what had been at first only a means to an end. The kill-joy Puritan has been no small boon to the wags of literature. Macaulay insisted that if the Puritans suppressed bear-baiting, it was not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.

We who are children of the Puritans have not been entirely free from the ancestral influence, and in some instances the revolt against that influence has been bitter. For example, Mr. W. J. Stillman in "The Autobiography of a Journalist," speaks in unforgiving terms of the cramping Calvinism of his good mother's creed; a belief that involved, so he tells us, "the hanging on the Cross of everything she most valued in life."

The injunction, "Find out what you don't like, and then do it," does not have such a very far-away sound, after all. We seem to have seen people who took this rule as a guide for conduct. The moral rectitude resulting from the belief that whatever is not a duty is a sin may be firm and uncompromising, but it is too frigid and loveless to be a fair repre-

sentation of Jesus Christ. In the name of a Christian faith men and women have exalted the miserable, have made a fetish of sacrifice until it has become not self-sacrifice but selfish sacrifice. They have imagined that they were practicing repression of joy, when in reality they were revealing an atrophy, a loss of capacity for pleasure.

2. What the genius of asceticism is, and how far removed from the affirmative note of the gospel, the examples cited may have served to show. Ignoring for the moment any question regarding the saintliness of the ascetics, let us try to scrutinize the asceticism of the saints. What underlying motives, what principles are revealed by the ascetic theory of living? It stands for what the pietists have called the excision and crucifixion of the natural life, taking forms of celibacy, poverty, obedience to ecclesiastical superiors, renunciation of domestic ties, the cultivating of pain, the repression of the pleasure-giving instincts.

As its basis there is often found a vicious dualism which makes matter essentially evil, and calls the body the home of sin. The five senses are so many gateways of wickedness. Some of the fathers could define to a nicety the characteristic perils attaching to each of the senses. Two of the animal functions are held especially under suspicion, though it is not denied that they have legitimate uses. Pleasure is certainly not one of these uses. *Nescit cupiditas ubi finitur necessitas,* says Augustine.

Consistent with such a separation of matter as evil from spirit as good, asceticism might be expected to find the gulf impassable. It is strange, therefore, to discover that asceticism treats sin pathologically, as if sin were after all physiologically derived and yet spiritually controllable.

A deeper fault in such a theory of life is its encouragement of unworthy ideas of God. One such unworthy conception is the notion, traced by Herbert Spencer from the worship of cannibal ancestors, that human pain and privation are in themselves a source of pleasure to God. Of the consequences of the view Mr. Spencer has used strong language. "Led by the tacit assumption common to Pagan stoics and Christian ascetics that we are so diabolically organized that pleasures are injurious and pains beneficial, people on all sides yield examples of lives blasted by persisting in actions against which their sensations rebel."

Too often has God been thought of as exclusively a private individual. God and the race have been so divorced that a worshiper could think of pleasing God by some service or suffering that had no consequences for society. And so, frequently the religious actions of the ascetic are without ethical value or else are immoral. The devotee makes fruitless sacrifices, or his devotion involves injury to those whom he ought to protect. Surely devotion has gone wrong when the contemplation of God is unrelated to the service of man.

A further instance of the faulty representation of God is seen in the exaggerated use of a doctrine of divine sovereignty which made self-will in man the blackest of sins. The issue of such a doctrine would be to starve and crush human personality. That the history of Calvinistic Protestantism does not abound with fearful examples of such human wrecks may be due to the fact already alluded to, that the content of Calvinism is not exhausted by this particular phase of teaching.

Once more, the ascetic confuses the accidental with the essential. "Lord, that I might suffer!" is his pious prayer, and the means of grace is taken to be the grace itself. God is to be found in prayer, prayer is furthered by abstinences; and we end

in honoring disproportionately what is only a means to a means.

Singular beauty of character has often marked these mistaken worshipers of sorrow. We may go farther, and say that in their endurance of suffering, their flouting of creature happiness, their example has often had a tonic influence on those who have been prone to be at ease in Zion. So far: but the nobility of many of its advocates and exemplars does not avail to redeem asceticism from its crimes. With its ruthless rupturing of natural bonds, its inflictions of unnecessary misery, its "sentimental coquetting" with wretchedness, and above all its ignoring of the Immanent Presence in the world, this Gospel of Pain may well be called "a blasphemy against the order of Nature and of Nature's God."

3. Now has such a negation of gladness any place in the program of the Master who was a happy helper at a wedding feast? According to Renan, Jesus made no concession to necessity. "He boldly preached war against nature and a total rupture with the ties of blood." Another critic of Christianity has defined it as "a world-denying ascetic idealism."

When we turn to the Gospels to test such definitions of the Christian religion, we soon discover a number of precepts and incidents that seem to support the idea that our Lord's turning of water into wine was an unusual deed, and by no means symbolical of his achievement in general. The maintainers of the austere view are sure that the rigid pleasure-effacing life is exemplified in Jesus. All that an inquirer can do is to go to the Gospel narrative with a willingness to lay aside prepossessions as far as possible. To get back to the simple Jesus may not be an easy task, yet we must endeavor to do this if we sincerely desire to know the mind of Christ. Our adoration of the Master should be based on what we have really learned

of him, and not because we have made him a convenient repository for our indolent idealizations. That is a poor worship whose incense serves only to hide the face of Christ.

Without attempting any new systematization of the teachings of our Lord, it may be well to take the sayings as reported in one Gospel, and group them according to their emphasis on world-renunciation or world-service. For this purpose let us choose the Gospel according to Matthew.

COUNSELS OF RENUNCIATION

Fishers of men (iv. 19–22).
Right eye, hand (v. 29 and xviii. 8, 9).
Resist not; thy cloak (v. 39).
Narrow gate (vii. 13).
Foxes have holes (viii. 18–22).
Let the dead bury their dead (viii. 18–22).
No gold nor staff (x. 9, 10).
Hated for my name's sake (x. 22).
Not peace but a sword (x. 34, 35).
Father or mother (x. 37).
Cross (x. 38).
Losing life (x. 39).
Kingdom seized by violence (xi. 12).
Who is my mother, who are my brothers? (xii. 46–50).
Hid treasure: all that he hath (xiii. 44).
Goodly pearls, all relinquished (xiii. 46).
Renounce self: lose life (xvi. 24).
Celibacy for some, for Kingdom's sake (xix. 11).
Sell all thou hast and give (xix. 21).
Riches a hindrance (xix. 24).

Here is world-renunciation indeed; here is voluntary poverty, voluntary celibacy, surrender of home, breaking of natural ties. Here surely are demands for devotion that can be evaded by no exegetical expedients. Then is not the call of Christ a call to the complete negation of the natural life; is not the Man of Nazareth the archetypal monk, and is not the essence of Christianity a self-impoverishment that sees the

glory of God in the hectic flush of emaciation and in a cadaver nailed to a cross?

Before closing in with this suggestion, it behooves us to note that these sayings of Jesus have not been exempted from the trials that beset the teachings of other masters. It is at least fair to suppose that these words should be considered with reference to the exigencies of the occasion in which they were first spoken. The speech is oriental, the temper poetic. Pregnant and brief are the sayings, original and therefore impressive; having a sifting purpose and therefore severe, and then of a confirming character to such as have responded to the appeal to the heroic. With such sharp pictures and daring expressions the literalist with his morbid love of clearness is bound to come to grief. Furthermore, these hard sayings do not constitute the entire message of Jesus, they offer one of the varied aspects of the one countenance; and finally, all that he said must be reviewed in the light of what he did.

In the same evangelist we hear Jesus speaking of the happiness of his gospel, and we find abundant evidence of the constructive renewing power of his message.

THE GOOD NEWS.

Happy are the poor (Matt. v. 3–12).
Happy are the sorrowful, in view of being comforted.
Happy are the gentle.
Happy are the hungry for righteousness.
Happy are the merciful.
Happy are the pure in heart.
Happy are the peacemakers.
Happy are the persecuted.
Happy are the abused.
Be glad and rejoice.
When you fast, do not put on gloomy looks (vi. 16).
Courage, my son, your sins are forgiven (ix. 2 and ix. 22).
I did not come to invite the pious but the godless (ix. 13).
The bridegroom's friends do not fast (ix. 15).

Cure the sick, raise the dead, heal lepers, drive out evil spirits (x. 8).
The blind are gaining sight.
Good news is being told to the poor (xi. 5).
Here is a glutton (xi. 19).
My yoke is easy and my burden light (xi. 30).
I will refresh you.
The Son of Man is Master of the Sabbath (xii. 8).
It is right to do good on the Sabbath (xii. 12).
Happy are your eyes (xiii. 16).
Treasure. "In his delight he went and sold all that he had" (xiii. 44).
The five thousand fed (xiv. 15).
Sanctity of home (xv. 6).
Corban. A cancelling of the Word of God (xv. 6).
Internal purity, not bodily (xv. 16).
The Temple Tax (xvii. 24).
Sanctity of marriage (xix. 9).
A hundredfold reward (xix. 29).
To Cæsar, Cæsar's (xxv. 29).
The talents to be used (xxv. 29).
"This is a beautiful action that she had done to me." The alabaster-box extravagance (xxv. 29).

Looking to our Lord's conduct, we see that he surrendered home and "merged" the family interest in a greater brotherhood. But he so regarded the home that the surrender of it was a surrender indeed. Similarly in choosing celibacy he is aware both of the sanctity and joy of the marriage relation. The fourth Gospel account of the crucifixion makes Jesus think and speak in his last moments of his mother and earthly home. As preachers, he and his disciples were in their journeys dependent on the hospitality of the villagers; but this does not seem to have aroused any unfavorable comment. Jesus was not rich; though of course there is no warrant for reading dire poverty into every moment of his life; as for instance à Kempis does in his Meditations. The saying "The Son of Man hath not where to lay his head" would seem to refer not to any actual homelessness, but rather to the fact that his message was

not everywhere appreciated. There were homes open to our Lord, and some, like the home at Bethany, had especial charm for him. We all have a feeling of gratitude toward Martha and Mary when we remember the rare service they rendered Jesus, although their gift of hospitality was so slight compared with the boons he bestowed on them. Wherever he went some one was made better in body and soul, and his presence never carried gloom. Jesus called sinners from their slavery into the freedom of the Spirit, and they were made happy by being made free.

4. We are now able to discover an answer to the question raised as to whether Christianity is the negation or affirmation of life. According to the Gospels, the Christian program is, to bring in the Kingdom of God among men. The Kingdom is the *Summum Bonum*, greatest good and highest happiness. To the bringing in of that Kingdom, Christ and his people are committed. The greatest good of the individual will be attained as he thus furthers that Kingdom of blessedness for all. Adjusting himself to this lofty task, he will "deny" himself, will put out of the way whatever he knows would hinder his progress toward the supreme happiness. Such self-denial, being always for the Kingdom's sake, will in reality be the noblest form of self-assertion. Only the lower self is denied; the better self is affirmed. "Art is a jealous God," said Michael Angelo. "It requires the whole man." What the scholar will forego for science, and what the patriot will endure for the sake of his country, the saint will do for the holiest cause. Family, private property, complete independence, each of these may be sacrificed in some emergency by patriot or Christian disciple. But the surrender of them, as Ritschl points out, does not in itself assure a more positive and rich development of the moral nature, but rather threatens

it, since these blessings are the generally essential conditions of moral health and the formation of character.

To court pain is not the Christian's business. The Son of Man endured sufferings because he had a work to accomplish, yet he never prayed that he might drink of a bitter cup. At some time or other, pain and grief are the portion of us all. Our Lord, who had sounded the deeps in life, knew of the inevitable tribulations in store for man, and so great is his redeeming might that in the midst of tribulation his people find an inward peace and overflow with joy in all their affliction. A refreshing Saviour enables them to run without weariness, to walk and not faint. The dreary desert is made to bloom for those who live by the faith of Jesus Christ, for his gospel is the affirmation of enduring life.

It may be in a trivial round of menial tasks that the disciple of Jesus will be called to render quiet persistent service. Even there he will discover the presence of the Guest of Cana who turns monotony into benediction, and water into wine. And if the disciple is granted the rarer honor of being called to some enterprise involving great sacrifice he will see a wisdom in what to the world looks like martyr-madness. His faith tells him that the crimson rains never water the earth in vain, and he can look with happy patience to the hour when Master and servant shall meet in what a modern mystic has so nobly named "the last reconciliation, when the Cross shall blossom with roses."