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THE PARALYTIC.

MATT. IX. 1; MARK II. 1; LUKE V. 17.

WHEN Jesus healed the leper, his disciples must have had strange hopes and convictions stirred within them. The shadow of death, "the veil spread over all people," was visibly shaken. The doom of sin, in its deadliest and most loathsome type, was turned aside. We know how long it was before they shook off their dream of temporal dominion, but such hopes were surely now tinged with some expectation of a more spiritual dominion, an empire over sorrow and disease and sin, already becoming visible, as often as their Master said to the direst curses of humanity, Go, and they went. He had words of everlasting life, attested by temporal healing.

When the leper violated his instructions, and blazed abroad the story of his recovery, it is true that he may have aroused, here and there beyond the circle of the disciples, some reflections, some hopes, like these. But since the larger public was utterly unprepared to feel anything better than astonishment, his disobedience forced upon them issues for which they were quite unripe. And because they could not advance to a true discernment of the import of the marvel, its announcement was premature and mischievous. To explain our Lord's retirement we do not need any gratuitous assumption, such as that the contact with uncleanness had inconvenient consequences, and forced Him to seclude Himself for a time. We have seen already that a man "full of leprosy" was unclean no longer; and we shall find no trace of any such consequences, even from contact with the dead, and at a time when hostile criticism was much more embittered. It suffices that His intentions were frustrated, His work vulgarized, and the popular feeling was over-stimulated, and far from

spiritual in its near expectations. The true work of Jesus was not done through excited sensationalism, but in spite of it.

Accordingly we read that He withdrew Himself, and was without in desert places.

Moreover the miracle thus made notorious, and the ceremonial irregularity which He had strenuously forbidden, drew down upon Him the hostile attention of the Jews in Jerusalem. This would be still more inevitable if we could be certain, with Edersheim, that the feast without a name had already passed, in which Jesus healed the impotent man in the metropolis itself, and brought upon Himself a controversy, first about Sabbath observance, and then about His claim to infer His own immunities from those of God. But apart entirely from this hypothesis, it was perfectly natural that Jesus should henceforth be jealously watched by men who valued their own prerogatives much more than any evidence of a divine benevolence. Accordingly we read, for the first time, that the next miracle was performed under the jealous eyes of "Pharisees and doctors of the law which were come out of every village of Galilee and Judæa and Jerusalem." Such a concourse was evidently premeditated, and the place and time of its occurrence are exactly what we should expect, as also is their supercilious whispering among themselves, upon the smallest provocation, that He is guilty of a capital offence.

Jesus has now returned to Capernaum, where such an inquisition would naturally seek for Him; and St. Mark alone tells us that He was in "the house," probably His accustomed dwelling in "His own city." St. Matthew does not so much as inform us of any proof of special faith on the part of the bearers of the paralytic; and yet he mentions that Jesus recognised and rewarded it; and although Keim insists that his simple story has been exaggerated and elaborated "in a forced manner" by the

other two, yet it would puzzle him to explain the behaviour of Jesus in St. Matthew, without using the reflected light from them. Moreover, the great inquisitorial concourse of doctors and Pharisees, only recorded by St. Luke, is the simplest explanation of their hostile attitude, their mutual confidential reprobation, and the resolute manner in which our Lord confronts and refutes them. Very signal and significant is this interdependence and reciprocal support of the three narratives, such as comes out under a searching cross-examination in the narratives of truthful witnesses.

There is not the slightest ground for Schenkel's assertion that Jesus had now retired from the ministry of healing, having had melancholy experiences of the insincerity, selfishness, and ingratitude of men, the individuals cured having mostly disappeared again (many of them, be it observed, having been expressly ordered back to their own homes, where alone their witness would have any special value), and even the leper, who promised silence, when hardly out of sight of Jesus, having broken his pledge. It therefore required "peculiar circumstances" to induce Jesus to work this cure, contrary to His new policy. All this is quite a different thing from saying that as our Lord stood more prominently forward, and had increasing claims upon the public faith, He more expressly required some evidence of confidence from His supplicants. Even this would be harder to establish than is commonly supposed, some of the most triumphant examples of faith being early in His ministry.

But it is one thing that healing should now be granted upon conditions, and quite another thing that it should be exceptional, and as a rule discontinued as having missed its mark. This is insinuated with no facts to go upon, except a quotation which proves nothing; namely, that Jesus now preached, He "spoke the word," an assertion which would be more to the point if it were not closely

linked with this other, that the "power of the Lord was present to heal."

And yet Schenkel's criticism interests one through its direct and valid contradiction of that of Strauss and Keim. He feels and is "touched" by the eagerness and the pains taken by the four bearers of the sufferer; this is, indeed, in his view, what wins the exceptional grace of his recovery, but this is the very point in the story which the others assail, even though Keim is quite content to admit the healing of the paralytic. What he fails to see is the connection between our Lord's words of absolution, words quite unlike anything elsewhere spoken in such a connection, and the action, the only distinguishing and signal action, which raised their faith above the common level.

We are to think of a great crowd surging all around the house, the same modest house perhaps in which Peter's mother-in-law had been healed of her fever, and at the doors of which, that evening also, all the city had been gathered. Jesus had not gone out to them, either because His comparative retirement had begun already, or else, more probably, because He was already encompassed by the doctors, who were present more or less officially. (A formal embassy had, not long before, cross-examined the forerunner both about his person and his baptism, John i. 19.) These we find proudly seated in the centre of a crowd which densely filled what we may suppose to have been a large upper room, low-built, and extending over all the lower apartments of the house. It is just possible that, according to Dean Plumptre's conjecture, our Lord stood so as to address, from such a vantage ground, a concourse in the courtyard around which the rooms were grouped. For the roof of the house, poles had been laid about three feet apart, according to the present usage, and across these, short sticks covered with brushwood. Mortar was spread over this, and on it sometimes a coating of thick earth, and sometimes tiles.

St. Luke distinctly tells us that in this case the tiles had to be taken up, (*διὰ τῶν κεράμων*), and this may be added to the many indications that the apostles lived in humble comfort.

Dr. Thompson tells us that he has himself seen stone slabs used for the purpose, which could be quickly removed, and that grain and other commodities are still introduced into upper rooms in this very way, by the outer stairs and the roof. The idea, therefore, would not be unfamiliar to these people, urged by a dire necessity, and debarred by the crowd from any other access.

It was, nevertheless, an expedient of despair. The noise, the falling rubbish, the inconvenience inflicted upon that dignified and haughty group in the centre (if the bearers knew of them) made such an interruption as no common teacher would have endured. When the veneration for Jesus deepened, long before sceptical theories could suppose it to have risen to adoration, so audacious an intrusion could never have been invented: the story attests itself as primitive. And it bears a glorious witness to the true character of Him, whom suffering could not think of as rejecting its appeal, in the most untoward circumstances, at the most inconvenient time. But how does Schenkel suppose that such confidence was attained when, as he tells us, numbers of the suffering were actually being repelled ? [1]

The faith which Jesus honours is not distinguished by its scientific theology. The plan of salvation, or even the doctrine of His own Person, is not what it is most concerned about. Human want and His power to relieve it, and, above all, that effort of strong volition which brought the want into immediate contact with His power, this was the essential thing throughout His earthly story. May it not be still the same? Is it not more likely that the Plan

[1] "Of those who gathered around Him seeking help, He resolved to heal only this man."

of Salvation, and the doctrine of the Incarnation have been revealed to us to strengthen our trust, to encourage our fears, to persuade us to rely upon Him, than merely to remove inadequacies of intellectual conception? God only knows how abjectly inadequate are even the most subtle of our formulæ. Presently our knowledge shall vanish away. Yet faith, we read, abideth. And whoever knows, whoever can draw fine distinctions and demonstrate delicate theorems —that man has need, perhaps more than most, to search whether he has actually brought his own sin, the plague of his own heart, to Christ the Healer.

When faith is real, it goes beyond itself. God has joined us together in families, friendships, nations and the church, in order than none may live to himself or die to himself only. And it is quite clear that the most isolated unit in a nation is better, through its organization, than if he had grown up alone, a wild man of the woods. The rearmost man in that vast army has marched some way from absolute savagery. And so it is in religion. There may seem to be theoretical hardship, for the isolated, for the friendless, in the advantage enjoyed by the child of many prayers; but he is himself the better for it; and his soul is stronger than if the knot were untied which binds others in a closer sympathy than he experiences.

Accordingly Jesus, seeing the faith of five, spoke words of grace to one of them. This is the principle on which our children are holy, as St. Paul plainly tells us; and therefore we gladly receive them into the visible church of God.

But the words of Jesus are startling. He gives no apparent heed to the malady which brought them there, but pierces deeper, and says, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Here it is right to observe a characteristic of the teaching of Jesus. Not one example can be produced of His dragging religious truth by violence into contexts where

it does not easily and gracefully suggest itself. Often He waits for another to give the cue, as when the woman said, "Blessed are they that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." The vulgar and rude attempt to edify by injecting into any conversation whatever, anything whatever that has a religious sound, the stupid notion that good is done because folk are too polite to resent an interruption and an impertinence, the coarse and selfish notion that even if resentment is provoked that matters nothing because the speaker has borne his testimony—who has not groaned under these? who has not longed to point out how unlike they are to the exquisite courtesies of Jesus?

Yes, but some of us groan also for a very different grief. Without clumsy violence, how hard it is to speak to edification at all! How often are we ashamed and self-condemned, because we must either do outrage to social use, or else be dumb in our Master's cause! And the reason is indeed a sad one. It is lack of that deep and clear-sighted spirituality which discerns the spiritual bearing of many subjects, and the spiritual desires which lurk in many hearts, as deep answers unto deep; which finds its opportunity quite as instinctively as a truly kind and graceful nature finds constant occasion for suave and gracious utterances, and acts of unobtrusive love—as instinctively too as a man of sour temper and loveless heart finds numberless chances to shoot out his arrows, even bitter words which are wondrously unforced and apposite.

Jesus never was at fault. As He never forced religious talk artificially and unspontaneously into unsuitable collocations, so always, out of the good treasure of His heart, He brought forth good things. Out of the abundance of His heart, His mouth spoke naturally and without strain. His words were always apposite and sympathetic. Least of all is it credible that He should speak, to an unfit hearer, the assurance of sins forgiven. And this hearer proved his

fitness by receiving, in silence and content, perhaps awe-struck, perhaps adoring, the blessing which had not been his professed and apparent object. Christ's further word and act were not evoked by remonstrance from him, but by an unworthy criticism of the bystanders.

We have to think, therefore, of one to whom bodily trouble has become a revelation. Instead of querulous murmurings against Providence, he had learned the great lesson of his own demerit. The shadow of a depressing and melancholy complaint, its gloomy memories and yet more gloomy forebodings, had taught him self-knowledge. Perhaps his malady was directly connected with some act of sin or course of excess ; perhaps he had only discerned the more subtle connection between all suffering and all sin. It is clear that when the news of a great and gentle Teacher, who was also a supreme Healer, reached him, his soul connected pardon with recovery, and longed for health as being indeed one thing with salvation.[1] Who can tell how much this profound desire, inspired of God, had to do with the ingenious and audacious pertinacity by which at last his spiritual hunger reached the Bread of Life. As Jesus looked on him, and saw all this sacred sorrow, this hunger and thirst after righteousness (which desire He had already blessed) appealing to Him out of hollow eyes, the first two Gospels tell us with what a word of love He first broke silence. In St. Luke it is "Man, thy sins are forgiven to thee"; but doubtless the true word is "Son,"

[1] Observe the double use, all through the Gospels, of the word σώζω, as for example, "He shall save His people from their sins." "If I may but touch His garment I shall be saved." (Matt. i. 21, ix. 21). Besides ambiguous passages, the secular use is, as I reckon, indisputable in St. Matthew in eight cases out of a total of fifteen ; in St. Mark in seven out of fourteen ; and in St. Luke in eight out of eighteen. In St. John it occurs only once (of Lazarus, "He shall do well," John xi. 12) ; and in the epistles twice (1 Tim. ii. 15 ; Jas. v. 15). This is good evidence for the early date of the synoptics, before the word had begun to settle down into its theological meaning. The double sense of σωτηρία also is instructive (cf. Acts iv. 12, xxvii. 34).

τέκνον, the same affectionate epithet with which His own mother had once addressed her lost son in the Temple.

The appeal was to Christ, and it was Christ who answered it, taking to Himself the place of a father, and forgiving sins with authority. This the bystanders felt. This He presently avowed; and it is quite unreasonable to quote, against their censoriousness, such words as those of Nathan, "The Lord hath put away thy sins, thou shalt not die." What mention of pardon from Jehovah is here? Especially would they feel certain of His meaning, if the miracle and the controversy of John v. had already taken place, which must not however be assumed.

There is much dramatic propriety in the contrast between the full rich flow of our Lord's expostulation with the scribes, and the short, broken, snapping words they speak among themselves, as given by St. Mark, "He blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins but one, God?" But it is more important to remark in these words the first sign (at least in Galilee) of the hostility which hunted Him to the cross. For blasphemy was a capital crime; and what they now speak guardedly among themselves is the same that we hear openly when they drop the mask, and avow to Pilate the true motive of their hostility to Jesus: "By our law He ought to die, because He said I am the Son of God." In opposition to this charge of blasphemy, and as if defying it, Jesus sets a title which Schenkel is probably right in believing that he now employs for the first time; for although he omits to mention that in St. Matthew's arrangement we meet it once before (Matt. viii. 20) yet there is good reason for preferring the sequence in St. Luke. But nothing can be more unhappy than Schenkel's treatment of the tremendous phrase "The Son of Man." He tells us that by it Jesus could not have meant to claim the Messiahship, both because he would have chosen some less ambiguous phrase, and because at this time He was found-

ing upon inner and moral principles a community quite opposed to the theocratic system, a kingdom of God, a community of the saints, which He sought to establish among the poor. He appeals to the fact that Ezekiel is called son of man, and even to the mention of daughters of men, in opposition to sons of God. He therefore infers that Jesus used the phrase in a sense diametrically opposed to its use in the Messianic prophecy of Daniel, and that Jesus claimed to forgive sins as a lowly and gentle man, a mere son of the race, declaring the clemency of God. But His arguments are utterly beside the mark. We grant that a phrase built on the same model, such as daughters of men, need imply no special dignity, and that Ezekiel was a son of man. What concerns us is not so much to know the meaning of a son of man, but how there comes to be one sole and emphatic bearer of the title, "The Son of Man." Thus if we are all kings and priests unto God, this only heightens the dignity of Him who bears the same title after a unique fashion, being the King, the High Priest of our profession. Moreover, when the name was claimed after this unique fashion, it is impossible that any hearer should not remember how illustrious a rank had been predicted for the bearer of this title. The Scribes and Pharisees had the Book of Daniel in their hand. They knew that One like unto a son of man should come nigh unto the Ancient of Days, and should be brought near unto Him, and His kingdom should last for ever. It is simply incredible that they should fail to recognise the most sublime of all descriptions of human glory. It was impossible for Jesus to use the phrase without claiming messiahship, and much more than the mere word messiah carried with it. As a matter of fact we know that He did claim, as the Son of Man, to execute judgment and to come in His Father's glory, surrounded with angels, exactly as Daniel foresaw.

It is true that He was now establishing a gentle kingdom

of God, a community of the Saints, most unlike the vulgar notions of the theocratic system. But this is so far from refuting the reference to Daniel, that it explains and justifies it. For what is there? Other monarchs might bear sway by violence. As earthly kingdoms still compare themselves to brutes—the lion of England, the American and German eagles, the Russian bear—so were these ancient monarchies like unto a lion, a bear, a leopard, a dread creature without a name.

In the same sense, the divine kingdom, which rose not from the stormy waters of human politics, but descended in mystery from the clouds of heaven, was like unto a son of man; its character, motives and suasions were all humane: it was the kingdom of the Good Physician, of the Gentle Shepherd. And it is in this last kingdom alone that the personal element becomes prominent, the kingdom becomes a king, unto whom there is given dominion to a kingdom.[1]

It was surely this accurate characterization of His rule as well as Himself the ruler, which made this title so dear to Jesus. It is a humble epithet, but only upon the lips of Him who held a divine title in reserve. In itself, it was the loftiest name which could be claimed by mortal, and implied the bringing of Him nigh unto the Ancient of Days. As Son of Man, Jesus now claimed to forgive sins, as elsewhere to raise up and to judge the dead; and the phrase no more proves that He has delegated one of these functions to His ministers than the rest. It does not prove anything upon the subject.

But when they accused Him of blaspheming, He was quite ready to submit His pretensions to the test. To carnal men, it was easier to say to the fearful heart, "Fear

[1] This passage was written before the appearance of an interesting article in THE EXPOSITOR for December, with which I am glad to think that it is in substantial agreement.

not," than to strengthen the feeble knees. To us, the pardon of sin is the last and highest victory of divine grace, and to the fatalism of modern science there is no pardon anywhere for the past: its retributions are inevitable: the chessplayer of Professor Huxley knows nothing about revoking a move. But to Jesus the two were on one level. All healing conveys a pledge of pardon, pardon which is only lost by failure to discern the reality of the love which speaks in recovered health, as in every innocent joy.

Therefore He bade the impotent man arise and walk; and now there is no difficulty in moving through the admiring crowd.

Clearly the multitude, which glorified God, who had given such authority to men, did not suppose it to be given broadcast. No doctrinal ecclesiastical inference can be safely drawn from their joy that the gift was in human hands, for human benefit. But their view of it was quite inconsistent with the notion that it was exercised grudgingly, in this exceptional case only, and had been all but withdrawn from use.

It remains to be observed that the recovery of this man is seldom denied, simply because it is not so high in the scale of marvel as many others. There are many well-established cases of nervous failure and long debility, which a sudden shock or violent excitement has restored. Why not this case? And therefore Keim, and most sceptics, are willing to accept the narrative, while denying its evidential force.

It is no concern of the Christian apologist to dispute the point with them.

If Jesus were kind in miracles only, He would not be the Jesus of our faith; nor would He be truly and vigorously dealing with the sorrows of our stricken humanity, if the boundary between the natural and the miraculous in His story were always broad and high, a kind of Chinese wall.

There is no such line of severance, in fact, between incurable ailments and maladies, in other respects equally deplorable, which yield to treatment, and our Lord was not likely to restrict His benevolence to actions which could not be explained away.

What interests the wise apologist is to observe how readily the evidence receives credence, the very moment it is supposed that credence does not involve submission to the divine claim. Up to this point (which differs for different sceptics), the "touching" eagerness of the friends, and the verisimilitude of the behaviour of our Lord and of the people, these and such like evidences are admitted to carry conviction with them. This conviction is only withheld when the pressure of the miraculous becomes crushing. That is to say, it is withheld entirely upon *a priori* grounds, in flat defiance of the evidence. But what would any jury think of an advocate who admitted the evidence as quite convincing at all points except where it palpably refuted his case, and then impeached it for no other reason than that his brief must not be compromised? Neither the behaviour of Jesus nor of the people, nor the general colour of the narrative, is one whit more convincing here than in many of the most astounding narratives, pre-eminently the most wonderful of all, the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

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