

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

*THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS AND THE WOMAN
WITH AN ISSUE OF BLOOD.*

MATT. IX. 18.

MARK V. 22.

LUKE VIII. 41.

IT was while Jesus was at table with many publicans and sinners, and when orthodoxy was shocked at His freedom in such company, that Jairus came to Him. He was one of the rulers of the synagogue; but conventionalities vanish in the presence of grave calamities, whereas real and strong convictions come out like stars in the darkness. The difference is exhibited in every storm at sea, when sectarian estrangements melt away, but the common belief in God grows fervent. Accordingly no unorthodox surroundings could prevent a ruler whose daughter was in her death agony from prostrating himself before Jesus. And it is edifying to observe the perfect readiness for any call, the easy transition from social pleasure to tenderest sympathy with affliction, with which Jesus went from the house of feasting straight to that of mourning.

It is gravely objected that St. Matthew represents Jairus as declaring his daughter was actually dead, and therefore gives him faith enough to expect a resurrection, while in the other narratives she is only at the point to die. There would be no real contradiction, even if we supposed that the evangelist abbreviated the story, by combining the first words of Jairus with the message which came later, since we know that St. Paul in like manner, not to weary Agrippa, amalgamated the later revelation which sent him to the Gentiles with that first vision which struck him down before Damascus (Acts xxvi. 17, 18).

But the true answer is that of which one never wearies; namely, that critics of a life require to know something

about human nature. When a man, full of mental agony, and above all things desiring haste, says that his daughter is at the point to die, he does not really contradict himself if he cries out also that she is dead by this time (*ἄρτι ἐτελεύτησεν*). When a vessel is on the rocks, is there any real difference of opinion between the women who cry that the crew is all lost and the men who run to man the lifeboat? Or when Ebedmelech, with the express object of rescuing Jeremiah from the horrible pit, told Zedekiah that "he is dead," and was consequently bidden to rescue him "before he die," does the critic discover any startling incoherence? (Jer. xxxviii. 9). One is ashamed to argue what is so transparent. As for the further puerility which detects a confusion between the sick woman and the dying girl, because one has been twelve years afflicted and the other is twelve years old, one can only marvel at the ignorance of affairs betrayed by critics who are incredulous of coincidences like these. Let them consult the experiences of a barrister or a postmaster, or, better still, let them keep their own eyes open for a week.¹ In the same helpless way, the name of Jairus is treated as mythical, because it means "the Lord illuminates," which clearly refers to the dissipation of the night of death. Not one Hebrew name in a dozen could be substituted which might not be attacked as plausibly—Peter would allude to his stability of faith, John to the special grace which God bestowed on him, and James to the supplanting of death by victory—and it is plain that a myth would not thus have named the father, but the girl to whom this illumination came.

Amid these follies, it is interesting to find Strauss himself laying down principles which fairly demolish the sceptical position. His object is to show that the aspirations and

¹ Mr. Swinburne lavishes verse upon the fact that Marlowe and Shelley died at the same age.—*In the Bay*.

convictions of the early Church created these resurrection myths. But what he actually affirms (and what we may very readily concede) is not that such aspirations and convictions would gradually weave the narratives; it is the reverse. He peremptorily asserts that the aspirations and convictions could not flourish unless the narratives were already there. "The faith in the resurrection of Christ—*i.e.*, in the fact that He had been raised to life by God—involved indeed the principal guarantee for the future resurrection; but together with this passive resurrection men desired to see also active proofs of the exercise of this power on the part of Him who was to raise the dead; He must not merely have been raised from the dead Himself, but have also Himself raised the dead. . . . Present spiritual awakening could not suffice as a guarantee for the future corporeal resurrection of the dead. Jesus, during His life on earth, must also have raised the corporeally dead, at least in some cases. *Then, and not before, could it be known for certain that there dwelt in Him a power to recall all the dead to life.*" (*New Life*, ii. 205-6.)

"Then and not before!" It follows, if there is any meaning in words, that the miracles of raising the dead supported the belief in a general resurrection, and even in its possibility (in "a power to recall"), and it was not the belief which originated the miracles. Whence it follows again that the stories in dispute were fully accepted as early as the date of the Apocalypse or the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. We accept with modest gratitude this testimony from Saul among the prophets, this benediction from Balaam of the tents of Israel.

Not less astonishing is Keim's suggestion that the story in St. Matthew does not compel us "to exercise an absolute faith in miracles. When Jesus distinctly says, 'the maiden is not dead but sleeps,' it is possible . . . that He was seriously convinced that the maiden's apparent death was

not a real fact, though the superficial multitude did not perceive this" (in which superficial multitude we are to include the experienced professional mourners, as well as whatever medical aid had been invoked) "and that He based upon the presence of the slumbering life the hope of a renewed activity. . . . We know the childlike condition of these people and their medical knowledge, the exaggeration of popular conversation and tradition; and we have a protecting bulwark against both in the preserved verbal utterance of Jesus, which mocks every attempt to establish the decisively miraculous view. This assumption, then, permits us to apply to this incident, *which is on the whole so well attested* by its connection with the healing of the woman, the same explanation as to other healings. . . . Since the nature of the disease and the deathlike weakness are not definitely described, there remains open the possibility that a lethargic faintness, at once the result of exhaustion and the critical point of the development of fresh energy, was, by the entrance of Jesus and the parents, chiefly by Jesus' vigorous and reviving taking hold and lifting up of the patient, shaken off at the most favourable moment." (Keim, *Life*, I. iv. 170-1.)

All this is wonderful enough. The earnest but mistaken appeal, the venturesome and compromising consent of Jesus to restore her by the imposition of His hands, His quick perception of a mere swoon where the experienced and professional attendants upon death were certain of dissolution (but then "we know their childlike condition"), His arrival "at the most favourable moment," the rousing effect of the reverential entrance of six people where the hired mourners had clamoured in vain, these, and the universal conviction, which Keim admits to be correct, that the narrators meant to record a resurrection, and the bystanders took the event as such, all combine to make a singular chain of successful ventures and fortunate coinci-

dences. It seems as easy to believe a miracle, a "decisive miracle"; and one marvels at the credulity which can accept all this, but refuses to suppose that twelve years might be the age of a dying girl, and also the duration of a woman's ailment in the street outside (p. 169).

And yet the absurdity of this version of the story, looked at by itself, is a little thing. To these strange coincidences must be added numberless others which beset the whole life of Jesus. The woman who touched Him happened also to be in a desirable psychological condition; so were the demoniacs at Gadara and elsewhere; so was the man with a palsied hand. No accidents of an opposite kind ever happen to refute His claims. Wherever, as in the first quelling of the storm, it is too hard a thing to deny entirely a historical basis for the story, there is assumed a coincidence between the act of Christ and the operations of nature, or the mind of man, of so extraordinary a kind that gradually a narrative is put together as "contrary to nature" as ever a belated theologian supposed a miracle to be.

From these fantastic speculations we turn to the inspired Word. Jairus makes a natural and pathetic appeal, "My one little daughter is at her last gasp—that coming Thou wouldest lay Thy hands on her, so that she may be saved and live" (*τὸ θυγάτριόν μου ἐσχάτως ἔχει ἵνα ἔλθὼν ἐπιθῆς, κ.τ.λ.* Mark v. 23). His words are choked by a sob in the middle; and they dwell wistfully on the benign process and the much desired result. The neuter form (*τὸ θυγάτριον*), which we ourselves use of a very young child, calling it a "little thing," explains the unexpected, and at first sight unnecessary, statement farther on that "she was twelve years old." In his preaching the Evangelist had perhaps observed the need of mentioning that she was not so young as the passionate words of her father had been taken to imply. How far is this from the manner of a myth! And

how natural that in such a mood the suppliant should also have exclaimed, as in the first Gospel, "she is dead by this time."

Jesus, who elicited the faith of the centurion by saying, "I will come and heal him," rose now, apparently without a word; the father led the way, and His disciples followed. Again, we are bidden to see exaggeration in the assertion that a great multitude also followed, which is not stated in the first Gospel. As if it could have been otherwise when He rose from public controversy to perform a marvel; or as if a miracle is really exaggerated by saying, not even that many people saw it, but that they came as far as the door.

As Jesus pressed through the surging streets, He was conscious of another contact than that of the crowd; and though a life was supposed to hang upon His speed, He deliberately stopped and turned around. For the haste of Jesus never was precipitate: He could always respond to a providential call; and so sensitive was He to the wants of humanity, that no influence, no "power," went forth from Him unobserved. Do we not sometimes think of our prayers, as if they operated by virtue of some spiritual law of nature, automatically, without any direct individualizing act of the divine volition, as if the blessing were obtained, as electricity is discharged from a machine, by contact rather than from a living heart of love, consciously responding to our appeal. It is not so. Because He slumbereth nor is weary, and there is no searching of His understanding, therefore our way is not hid from Him. All the prayers of the universe are (to use the only language possible, though miserably inadequate) considered and granted in detail. So it was now. The usual upper garment of a Jew would have four sacred tassels, one at each corner; and being square, and folded over at the top, the two upper tassels could be touched even in a crowd. And it was not a "pull," however stealthy, that Jesus

observed :¹ it was a touch so gentle, that He inferred it from its effect, from the beneficent influence which it evoked. "Some one did touch Me, for I perceived that power had gone forth from Me." It was a woman, pale with long waste of vital force, worn with anxiety, with disappointment, with the humiliation of constant ceremonial uncleanness, with the sure approach of poverty, as she wandered from one physician to another, suffering torture at their hands, until now her substance was all spent, and she rather grew worse. (Or, as Luke the physician puts it with the greater mildness of one who understood the difficulties of the case, she "could not be healed of any"; it was no fault of theirs.) This nervous and sensitive sufferer must have been quite close to Jesus when He turned, for how could she have drawn away in such a crowd, and surely her features betrayed her agitation, "trembling" to find herself discovered; but Jesus would not point her out; His object being that she herself should be inspired with courage to confess Him. And before even this much is demanded, she is allowed to feel in her body that she is made whole, and strengthened in faith by the mighty reinforcements of joy and gratitude. Thus she gained strength to acknowledge that she had endeavoured to obtain healing unobserved, being thus the counterpart of too many men as well as women, who would fain receive pardon and peace without confessing Christ. He, for his part, makes it as impossible for them as for her to keep silence without disobedience. Yet He sympathises much more with this too sensitive retirement than with the blatant self-assertion of any Pharisee who thanks God that he is not as other men. To her, therefore, alone of all the women who cross His path, He gives a name of personal tenderness, elicited by compassion for her shrinking weakness, and sympathy for her suffering and her appeal: the pure and affectionate, yet

¹ As Keim, iv. 164, and others.

masterful name of Daughter. And he instructs her that not her touch but the faith in her soul had healed her. It only provokes a smile when Keim charges the narrative with healing her a second time, because it adds that she was made whole from that hour.

This incident, no doubt, passed very rapidly, and the nature of it was encouraging; yet the delay must have sorely tried Jairus, and it speaks well for his faith that as yet he needed no words of reassurance.

But a messenger now arrived from one who had no hope, "Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the Master"; and instantly Jesus, who does not suffer men to be tempted above what they are able to bear, puts all His reassuring energy of spirit into the words, "Fear not, only believe, and she shall be saved." This promise had not been formally given until now, when its support was so much needed, and when, without it, the condition upon which it depended would have become impossible. So, in the day of our weakness, His spirit breathes the confidence which He requires.

And now Jesus refused admittance within doors, not only to the multitude but also to nine of the twelve. It is the first time that such a distinction was made; and since there cannot be partiality in Jesus, it showed that even among the Apostles, different grades of zeal and efficiency were marked and rewarded. Such exclusion of the unworthy from solemn revelations attained its highest development when after His resurrection He Himself appeared not unto all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before. And both the danger of privilege and the coherence of the whole narrative was shown when one of the honoured three presumed to separate himself from all others, saying, "though all men should deny Thee, yet will not I," and when the other two endeavoured to supplant even the third in the highest places in the kingdom.

While thus excluding nine of His chosen, Jesus fully recognised the claim of natural affection, and admitted to the house (for the chamber is not yet in question) "the father of the maiden and her mother," whom we thus incidentally discover to have also, in her agitation, wandered out of doors to meet Him (Luke viii. 51).

Within the house, they found the apparatus of an artificial mourning, and St. Matthew specifies the flute players, two of whom were a social necessity. We may assume that professional mourners were not invoked for the sake of any value attached to their hired lamentations, nor yet to supplement with apparent sorrow the heartlessness of survivors; their function was very real; it was to relieve by expression woes which their own intensity struck dumb, to "give sorrow words" when—

". . . The grief that doth not speak,
Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."

Yet seeing that their lamentation was so hollow that words of hope, which if rejected always intensify a real grief, converted their wailing into scornful mockery, it is no wonder that He who was truth incarnate expelled them as resolutely as He had excluded others. They should neither agitate the minds of the parents by their incredulous mockery, nor the child, when she returned to consciousness, by their equally irreverent astonishment. May it not be added that Jesus Himself, at such a crisis, desired the quiet which they made impossible? Accordingly, He drove them out. Nor is it on record that any such masterful act of his was ever resisted by any one, not even when He cleansed the temple with a scourge.

Strauss is right in contending that the expression, "she is not dead but sleepeth," are a kind of watchword of the New Testament. "It was Jesus who had brought light and immortality to light; Christians were not like other

men who had no hope beyond the grave." But then he must explain how Jesus wrought this wondrous revolution, and "put an end to the inconsolable sorrow for the dead felt by the ancient world." Common sense will continue to believe that He did something adequate to the effect which He produced, and that men would not suddenly imagine the grave to be shallow, and the veil spread over all people to be only a curtain, unless the grave were explored for them, and the veil upraised. Thus the phrase is now applied to those who still sleep, exactly because when He used it first He made the sleep of death so transient. But what an ironical light is thrown by this contention, that the word "sleep" means here what it means of all the dead, upon the contention of a later sceptic that Jesus could not have used the word had He supposed her to be really dead at all. Yet he who argues thus admits that the Evangelists who record it supposed it to be figurative.

And now the silent father, his heart sustained by the lofty and serene composure of the Lord, which overbore the opposition of the crowd, and the mother who shared his agony of hope, beheld Jesus approach the bed of death as quietly as a couch of slumber, not, like Elijah or Elisha, stretching Himself again and again over the corpse, mouth to mouth, and eyes to eyes, and hands to hands, with laborious and continued effort. Serenely, as if it were an ordinary sleep, taking her by the hand, He called, saying, "Maiden, arise." Is it wonderful that the very words which awoke the dead remained in the ears of Peter, and were known to Mark? Is it pardonable that scepticism should intrude itself where those scorners were expelled, with such petty cavils as that, in repeating the original Aramaic, "the object can only be to invest the act with greater mystery?" As if there was any mystery in speaking to a child of twelve in the vernacular of the country. As if any suggestion of charm or incantation could possibly attach to

a word which is published for all the world. The Friend of children did not whisper in her ear any occult formula, but awoke her gently, with a courteous hand as well as a most loving word, calling her by the sweetest name for a child, which is derived from the Hebrew for a lamb.¹

Of course they were swept off their balance by delight, "they were amazed." Of course the child was in danger of being overwhelmed by lavish and demonstrative endearments, of becoming mentally dizzy, perhaps of conceiving some dark and paralysing sense of the danger which had so nearly swallowed her, some apprehension which would disturb her dreams. Apart then from her physical requirements (because her body, long unfed, was now vigorous and needed to be sustained), it was better for the parents, and urgently necessary for the child, that their natural endearments should be interrupted. And yet how could such a one as Jesus bid a mother at this moment think of anything but her girl? His tact was equal to His power; He did not turn their attention elsewhere, but called for exertion on her behalf, which was sweet to them; He commanded that something be given her to eat. This baffles all the ingenuity of myth or legend. The notion that He must outstrip ancient prophets would never have invented this exquisite and subtle stroke. But it is exactly in the manner of the Jesus whom the Church adores.

"He doeth all things well,
Great things and small are one,
To Him who governs heaven and hell:
So when this deed was done
The quiet voice which woke the dead
Desired us give our darling bread."

Yet another cavil. He charged them to tell no man

¹ Compare Blake's poem:—

"I a child and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name."

what was done, and Keim has discovered that the secret was not one which could possibly be kept, which indeed is pretty obvious. It was inevitable that this child of twelve should grow up, remarked everywhere, an object of profound curiosity and surmise, being one (as Lamb finely said of Lazarus)¹ who "has to tell of the world of spirits."

All this is very palpable. And might not Keim bethink himself that it was good for her to have a refuge where the subject was absolutely interdicted; that at least in her father's house she might be as other children are, free from posing as the heroine of a thrilling adventure, being only dearer, and more tenderly treated, for the thought that she had been lost awhile.

For them, also, silence was better than the telling of a story which did such real and deserved honour to their own faith. And we shall do well, in our daily life, to mark the closeness with which this command to be silent about a miracle follows upon the refusal to allow to a shrinking woman a silence which was ungrateful.

G. A. CHADWICK.

¹ Whence Tennyson perhaps derived one of the loveliest passages in *In Memoriam*.