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The Teaching of the Transfiguration.

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THE events of our Lord's life and the character of His teaching were in vital relation with His own developing spiritual experience. In studying His life it is as necessary at every step to penetrate to this spiritual experience as is the case with our study of St. Paul or St. John. The present paper is an attempt to apply this principle to the Transfiguration, an event recorded in all three Synoptics, but not in the Fourth Gospel. The conclusions I reach do not require any critical reconstruction of the synoptic account, though I am aware that Professor B. W. Bacon, in an article on 'The Transfiguration Story' in *The American Journal of Theology*, April 1902, has argued with great ability that the story is derived from a source other than the surrounding narrative, and is indeed a duplicate of it, presenting the same data under the form of vision—a literary device of which Professor Bacon finds wide use made in the Gospels and the Acts. Professor Bacon shows clearly that the surrounding narrative and the Transfiguration story do in large measure duplicate one another; but it is obvious that this part of his argument is equally consistent with the view here advocated, that the Transfiguration was a real event arising out of the spiritual experiences which preceded it. I have accordingly on several points found his paper of service in the preparation of the present article.

The Transfiguration is not the only superhuman episode of its kind in our Lord's human life. The Baptism is in several respects a parallel event. In it we see the voluntary acceptance by Christ of all that belonged to His career of redemptive service (see especially Mt $3^{14.15}$ and the passage in the Ebionite Gospel given in Epiph. *Hær.* xxx. 13), and the voice of divine approval authenticating the mission on which He was entering. The Transfiguration has at least equal significance. It comes at the culmination of the public ministry, and at the time when the shadow of the Cross first falls across Christ's life. If the Baptism is the prelude to the Ministry, the Transfiguration is surely the prelude to the Passion and the Resurrection.

The surrounding narrative must be carefully studied. Jesus and His disciples are in the way to the villages belonging to Cæsarea Philippi (Mk 8^{27}, Mt 16^{13}, Lk 9^{18}; Luke mentions no place, having only resumed in this verse his Marcan source. His copy may have had a *lacuna* in it extending from Mk 6^{46}, which verse seems to suggest the phrase 'praying alone' in Lk 9^{18}). Our Lord's mind is occupied with thoughts of Himself as the suffering Messiah. He asks the disciples, 'Who do men say that I am?' and then more pointedly, 'But who say ye that I am?' Peter confesses Him as Christ; and in Matthew the special message to Peter as the Rock follows as an interpolation in the Marcan account. Just as Isaiah, when he realized that the nation would reject his message, became conscious of the 'remnant' who would preserve it in a new fellowship of faith, so our Lord's growing sense of approaching rejection and suffering seems to have given fresh definition to His thoughts about His disciples and their future work. He now begins to teach them about the necessity of His rejection, passion, and resurrection, according to Mark (8^{32}), speaking the matter freely (παρρησίᾳ). In Matthew (16^{21}) the word δεικνύειν is used, which may well mean 'demonstrating from the Old Testament.' At this point a most significant incident occurs. Peter takes Jesus and begins to remonstrate with Him, 'as though he pitied him,' adds the Sinai Syriac in Mark (cf. the reading of the Arabic Diatessaron). Matthew (16^{22}) gives Peter's words, Ἵλεώς σοι κύριε· οὐ μὴ ἔσται σοι τοῦτο. Jesus turns, and seeing His disciples rebukes Peter, saying,

'Get thee behind me, Satan' (Matthew adds, 'Thou art a rock of offence to me'); and Mark and Matthew go on, 'for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.' Christ's words startle us; but as we ponder them the sharpness of the rebuke reveals to us the strength of the temptation which was assailing Him, and which made Peter, for the moment, the mouthpiece of Satan. Christ must have had in His own mind a haunting doubt whether His forebodings of shame and death were not a mistaken view of God's purposes, and Peter's suggestion reinforced these doubts, and brought Him into deep spiritual conflict. He seems to have won triumphantly in this conflict mainly through meditation upon the meaning of Old Testament passages, which, as we know from their use in Acts and Romans and Hebrews, had supreme argumentative value according to the habit of the age, which would be the habit of our Lord's own mind. In proof that this was the channel of help, note the use of δεικνύειν already referred to, also the Old Testament accompaniments of the Transfiguration itself and the explanation given immediately afterwards to the disciples, 'How it is written,' etc. (Mk 9^{12}, where the special allusion is perhaps to Ps 22, the psalm used by Christ on the Cross). We have other evidence that our Lord's mind became steeped in the Old Testament foreshadowings of the Messiah's rejection. See Mt $26^{54.\,56}$, Mk 14^{49}, Lk 22^{37} $24^{25.\,26.\,44.\,46}$.

The same intense spiritual exercise which brought victory, brought also to Christ a new insight into the redemptive purposes of His Father. This is expressed in the striking teaching which immediately follows Peter's rebuke (Mk 8^{34}–9^{1}, Mt $16^{24\text{-}28}$, Lk $9^{23\text{-}27}$). The lesson the Lord has learnt is passed on to the disciples. Following Him means self-renunciation and taking up the cross. Behind the words addressed to the disciples we can see Christ Himself freshly devoted to a life of lavish self-sacrifice, and looking beyond the shame that awaits Him as the Son of Man to the glory that shall follow.

Thus naturally, through clearly traceable stages of spiritual experience, which are faithfully reflected in the synoptic narrative, is Christ brought to the brink of Transfiguration. And though the remainder of the story transcends human experience, I venture to suggest that it is to be regarded as an extension of human experience made possible by the presence amid humanity of Christ's unique personality. My view that this must be the case is largely due to the clear way in which the Transfiguration is linked by a definite chain of cause and effect with the events that preceded it. Tempted, victorious, illuminated as to the meaning of His rejection and suffering, and freshly dedicated to endure them, our Lord was already in spirit offering Himself up for the redemption of the world, and the Transfiguration would seem to have an organic relation to this offering of Himself in spirit, in the same way as the Resurrection may possibly itself have an organic relation to the Crucifixion. The Transfiguration, in fact, is to be regarded as an effect of our Lord's unique personality in its hour of unique dedication. (See the fine sermon by Professor A. B. Davidson in *The Called of God*, T. & T. Clark, referred to in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, February 1904.)

The synoptic account interposes a space of six days (eight days in Luke), a note of time surely intended to indicate a vital relation between the preparatory incidents and the Transfiguration itself. We cannot say whether the duration of the interval is more correctly given in Mark or in Luke; but Luke's difference in this point and the other important variations that occur in his narrative show, as my friend Professor J. Vernon Bartlet has reminded me, that he is here basing his narrative not only on the Marcan document which he used, but also on some other source, written or oral, which in his judgment was sometimes to be preferred to the Marcan document. The occurrence of this second source in the narrative of the Transfiguration is, of course, a strong confirmation of the historicity of the event. While Christ was in prayer (Luke only), His heart burning in intense dedication to His Father's will, the Transfiguration came, 'the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became white and dazzling' (Lk 9^{29}, cf. Mk 9^{3}, Mt 17^{2}). Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Him, and, according to Luke, narrating the departure which He was about to fulfil at Jerusalem. [ἔλεγον τὴν ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ, ἣν ἤμελλεν πληροῦν ἐν Ἰερουσαλήμ.] This appearance of the two witnesses is the most difficult part of the narrative, but would seem to have resulted in some way from the circle of thoughts in which Christ's mind was moving. The reference to the exodus to be fulfilled according to Scripture, taken with the other indications

already referred to, show us that Christ was revolving the subject of His rejection and suffering under the illumination which the Old Testament threw upon it. May He not also have been dwelling upon the personalities of the great Old Testament prophets who, according to current Jewish conceptions, were to be forerunners and witnesses of the Messianic coming? Moses, the saviour of Israel, whom our Lord might well be regarding from the standpoint taken in He $11^{25.26}$, is the one witness, Elijah is the other. (See especially Rev 11^{3-11}; in Jewish Apocalyptic literature Enoch often replaces Moses.) Elijah would be regarded by Christ as clothed with the character and person of John the Baptist, for in a neighbouring verse, Mk 9^{13} (cf. Mt 11^{14}), he speaks of John under the name of Elijah as one to whom 'men had done whatsoever they listed.'

We can in this way understand how Moses and John the Baptist would be subjectively present to our Lord's mind, their lives eloquent of His own sufferings. Their objective presence to the sight of the disciples is the real difficulty, though the current Messianic expectation of the appearance of the two witnesses would make the disciples quick to see what they found that Christ Himself was seeing. It is also to be noted that according to Luke the disciples were at first heavy with sleep (Lk 9^{32}), and the vision of Christ's glory and of the two men that stood with Him came to them therefore as a waking dream. (In Mt 17^{9} the word ὅραμα is used to describe it.) It is only when the two men seem to be leaving Jesus (Lk 9^{33}) that the spell is broken, and Peter impulsively and indiscreetly calls out, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three booths; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' But even while he was speaking (Lk 9^{34}) the overshadowing cloud of Jehovah's presence came upon them all, and there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, my chosen: hear him' (Lk 9^{35}). Mark's form of words, 'This is my beloved Son: hear him' (Mk 9^{7}), seems to be assimilated to the words spoken at the Baptism, and so to be less authentic. In Mt 17^{5} and 2 P 1^{7} the assimilation has been carried still further. The divine presence, with its attesting voice addressed to the disciples, is the climax of the scene. According to Matthew ($17^{6.7}$), the disciples fell on their faces sore afraid; and Jesus touched them, and bade them rise. And, looking round, they saw no one any more with them, save Jesus only. The intercourse with the two witnesses was evidently a phase of the Transfiguration primarily concerned with Christ Himself: the divine voice, on the other hand, was primarily concerned with the disciples, pointing out Jesus in this hour of perfected dedication and manifested glory as the Son of God, chosen for the great work of redemption, and the authentic channel through which the heart and mind of the Father should be declared to man. One of those disciples may have drawn from this experience the wonderful statement (Jn 1^{14}), 'And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us; and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.'

To sum up results: the Transfiguration was, I suggest, an effect of our Lord's dedication; and the appearance of the two witnesses a result of the circle of thoughts in which His mind was moving; while the divine voice came in approval of His dedication, and to certify the disciples of His authority and His redemptive mission.

Dedication of heart has brought a measure of transfiguration to other lives (see, for example, the case of Stephen in Ac 6^{15}); and in the Fourth Gospel, which contains no account of the Transfiguration, there is a remarkable equivalent incident. As students of its structure know, the Fourth Gospel divides into two nearly equal parts at the end of the 12th chapter, the one concerned with our Lord's public ministry, the other with His more intimate instruction to His disciples on the eve of His Passion, and with His glorifying by His death and resurrection. A summary of Christ's public teaching and its effect (Jn 12^{37-50}) closes the first part of the Gospel, and immediately before this summary we find the culminating scenes of the ministry, as conceived by the writer. Here, then, at a point corresponding alike in position and meaning with the place taken by the Transfiguration in the synoptic Gospels, we are given its Johannine counterpart (Jn 12^{20-36}). In this later event of our Lord's life the experience of the Transfiguration is reproduced step by step, suggesting again in the strongest way a vital connexion between Christ's spiritual state and the effects that followed. A vivid sense comes over Him of His approaching death as a necessary beneficent means to the redemption of the world. He applies to Himself the very words about saving our life by losing it which He applied to His disciples at the Transfiguration.

There is a similar conflict of soul: the temptation to say, 'Save me from this hour,' issuing in full dedication to the divine purpose, 'but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.' There is also a similar divine response, a voice out of heaven, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.' There is, indeed, no transfigured face, but instead we have hints of a transfigured inner life, bringing into Christ's soul the light of assured victory over the prince of this world, and of assured success in drawing all men unto Himself,—a fitting prelude to the second part of the Fourth Gospel, which is to show us the Saviour reigning and triumphing from the tree. Lastly, in both cases the voice is primarily given for the sake of the bystanders to reveal to them the divine glory which attended the life of the Son of man. Here, again, the true explanation of the incident seems to lie in regarding the features which transcend human experience as the consequence of dedication of heart freshly achieved after deep conflict of spirit, a consequence made possible, perhaps even natural, in the case of a being of Christ's unique personality.

In the view I take the Rev. A. T. Fryer, in his article on the Transfiguration in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, January 1904, is straining the situation by supposing Moses present as typical high priest and Elijah as typical prophet, in order that from them our Lord might assume at the Father's bidding the double office of priest and prophet. The view taken by the Rev. H. A. A. Kennedy (*J.T.S.*, January 1903), that the Transfiguration prepared the disciples for the Resurrection, is in line with my conclusions, though he seems to push the argument too far when he suggests that it had the specific purpose of making it easier for them to recognize Christ in His risen life. There is also force in the view expressed by the Rev. R. Holmes (*J.T.S.*, July 1903), that the Transfiguration had an important place in the Training of the Twelve, by showing them the ultimate blessing, the ultimate glory which for the disciples as for their Lord attended the way of the Cross.

The Pilgrim's Progress.

By the Rev. John Kelman, Jun., M.A., Edinburgh.

The Hill Difficulty.

This hill is put in the allegory for one of those tests of reality which life is sure to supply to every pilgrim, and the test is here applied to Christian, Formalist, and Hypocrisy. The way of Christ, like the ancient Roman roads, runs straight on over everything, and there is no doubt how Christian will do, if he remains in the way. But there are other ways to go; there is almost always the chance of somehow avoiding Difficulty. In the interval since the *Pilgrim's Progress* was written, the advance of civilization has been, in one aspect of it, one long scheme for making life in all departments easier. Every new machine which is invented supplants a more by a less strenuous day's work. The same tendency is apparent in the field of religion also, and there is much meaning in Nathaniel Hawthorne's sending the train of the Celestial Railroad through a tunnel bored beneath this hill. To a certain extent, no doubt, this is rather to be welcomed than regretted, for life, religious and otherwise, has in the past suffered much from unnecessary obstruction and unreasonable difficulties. Yet there is a very real and serious danger of losing strenuousness with difficulty, and degenerating muscle by disuse of climbing.

Formalist and Hypocrisy are quite in character when they avoid this hill. Both of them represent devices for avoiding the spiritual and finding an easier way in religion. 'Formalist and Hypocrisy may be a ridiculing and persecuting religion—never a suffering one.' It is, however, striking that while formerly they took a short cut to avoid the Cross, here they have to take a way round about to avoid the hill; which things are also for an allegory—many of the longest wanderings in life have been begun to avoid a very little hill.

Even before we knew the names of the two roads by which they went, we note that the hill has separated them. Difficulty is the common