

ARTICLE VIII.

CRITICAL NOTE.

THE MOTIVE FOR THE MIRACLES.

IN a recent conversation, the interest taken in all plans for the elevation of the poorer classes,—socially and physically, as well as intellectually and spiritually,—was based by one upon the opinion that, among the miracles of Christ, many were performed as ends in themselves, as efforts to alleviate suffering for compassion's sake simply; that a statement made by Professor Drummond in "The Greatest Thing in the World," is literally true: "Have you ever noticed how much of Christ's life was spent in doing kind things—in merely doing kind things? Run it over with that in view, and you will find that he spent a great proportion of his time simply in making people happy, in doing good turns to people." Many agree with this, and the object of this note is to ascertain, if possible, if it be the true view of the case.

It is possible to get at truth from two standpoints: one, the accounts of the miracles themselves, with their explanations and applications; the other, the teaching of our Lord and his word regarding his work here, the purpose for which he came, and the details of that work as it was accomplished.

The stories of the miracles seem to come first, and we will therefore consider each separately, and as fully as possible.

1.¹ *The Water Turned into Wine* (John ii. 1-11).—So far as the simple narrative is concerned, no indication of a motive is given, if we except that natural unwillingness of a guest to refrain from ministering to the pleasure of the feast. So the result (verse 11, R. V.) must be examined: "This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed on him." This was then a "sign," manifesting the glory of the incarnation (i. 14), and produced an increase of faith on the part of his disciples.

2. *The Nobleman's Son Healed* (John iv. 46-54).—To the urgent beseeching of the father, our Lord replied (verse 48): "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe"; which can only mean that the works were regarded as faith-producing, though not sufficient in themselves. The father was too anxious for his son to consider the point, and

¹These numbers are simply for convenience in referring to the accounts later on, and are not to be understood to indicate an opinion as to chronological order.

simply asked again the needed help. He believed the reply of Christ, and went his way trusting, manifesting no surprise when he found complete cure, instead of mere improvement. Here the result alone tells the motive, and that result was salvation to the nobleman and his whole house.

3. *The First Draught of Fishes* (Luke v. 1-11).—If the motive for this work was more than a remuneration for the use of the boat as a platform, verses 8, 10, and 11 indicate it. It was a revelation of divinity to Peter, and led to the call of the three leaders of the twelve to forsake all for his service.

4. *The Tempest Stilled* (Matt. viii. 23-27; Mark iv. 35-41; Luke viii. 22-25).—If the cause here was more than either to allay the fear of the disciples, or to overcome real and imminent peril, then in Matthew (verse 26), the act seems to answer faith, even if "little"; and from Mark (verse 40), and Luke (verse 25), to turn them to faith in him. It certainly awakened deepening interest in him and his power, as appears from the closing words of all the accounts, reminding us, as perhaps it did them, of Ps. lxxxix. 8-9.

5. *Healing of the Gadarene Demoniacs* (Matt. viii. 28-34; Mark v. 1-20; Luke viii. 26-39).—The account in Matthew is simply of a manifestation of power and authority. But when the healed man is found sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke, verse 35); when he desires to be henceforth with him (Mark, verse 18; Luke, verse 38); when he returns, at Christ's word, to his own home, there to preach the love and power of God (Mark, verses 19 and 20; Luke, verse 39); when, in short, salvation and service are the results of the miracle, the motive for this one, at least, seems apparent.

6. *Jairus' Daughter Raised* (Matt. ix. 18-19, 23-26; Mark v. 22-24, 35-43; Luke viii. 41-42, 49-56).—Here no motive is given. We may say that compassion was the motive, but cannot say that it alone prompted the act, for there is to be observed the fact that it was conditioned on faith (Mark, verse 36; Luke, verse 50).

7. *Healing the Woman with the Issue of Blood* (Matt. ix. 20-22; Mark v. 25-34; Luke viii. 43-48).—This is ascribed to faith; "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (Matt., verse 22; Mark, verse 34; Luke, verse 48). The result, besides healing, was public confession (Mark, verse 33; Luke, verse 47).

8. *Opening the Eyes of Two Blind Men* (Matt. ix. 27-31).—This was plainly in answer to faith (verses 28 and 29).

9. *Healing the Paralytic* (Matt. ix. 1-8; Mark ii. 1-12; Luke v. 17-26).—Taking the account in Matthew only,—and the truth is exactly identical in each,—it is to be noticed that, in answer to faith (verse 2), Jesus pronounced the forgiveness of sins. When his right to do this was questioned, he answered with the miracle and the words of verse 6: "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive

sins," and the act of healing is performed. Fisher speaks of these words as "This one observation, defining the motive of the miracle, making it subordinate to the higher end of verifying his authority to grant spiritual blessings."¹

10. *The Cleansing of the Leper* (Matt. viii. 1-4; Mark i. 40-45; Luke v. 12-15).—This is ascribed to compassion (Mark, verse 41), and as an answer to faith (Matt., verse 2; Mark, verse 40; Luke, verse 12), neither of which contradicts or excludes the other.

11. *The Centurion's Servant* (Matt. viii. 5-13; Luke vii. 1-10).—Here our Lord's divinity was recognized, and his power and willingness fully trusted. This was added to a faith "so great" that its like had not been met before by Jesus, and the healing desired came in answer to that faith (Matt., verse 13).

12. *The Demoniac in the Capernaum Synagogue* (Mark i. 23-27; Luke iv. 33-36).—The motive suggested by Mark (verses 22-25) is that this work was wrought to stop questionable testimony. The result (Mark, verses 27 and 28) is to awaken interest in him and to spread abroad his fame.

13. *Simon's Wife's Mother* (Matt. viii. 14-15; Mark i. 29-31; Luke iv. 38-39).—No reason is given except the request (Luke, verse 38), which implies faith.

14. *Raising the Widow's Son* (Luke vii. 11-16).—Verse 13 states that the Lord had compassion on the mother. The result (verse 16) is glory given to God, the ultimate purpose of all creation.

15. *The Impotent Man Healed* (John v. 1-16).—Had the account stopped at verse 9, no motive save compassion would have been evident. So far as the man is concerned, verse 14 tells us that there came to him the assurance and the warning: "Thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." The incident is the cause of the wonderful words of the remainder of the chapter (verses 17-47).

16. *The Five Thousand Fed* (Matt. xiv. 15-21; Mark vi. 34-44; Luke ix. 12-17; John vi. 5-14).—Mark (verse 34) speaks of our Lord's compassion, but this seems to be because of the ignorance and shepherdless condition of the people, hence the teaching. The event is led up to by Matthew xiv. 14 (see also John vi. 2). In John (verse 14), he is considered the promised prophet (Deut. xviii. 15-18), in short, the Messiah, because of his work (see also verse 15). On the other hand, the words of John vi. 26 indicate that most of the spiritual teaching which he would have impressed by the miracle was lost in mere physical gratification: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the sign (of my Messiahship), but because ye did eat." Still, this work was the point from which came the discourse (John vi. 27-40), and after the interruption and return to Capernaum,—the additional one of verses 43-65, and if it had no immediate result except to separate to himself his true followers from the mass

¹Ground of Theistic and Christian Belief, p. 161.

which believed heartily in a Messiah and king who simply provided for all their physical needs, without any effort on their part (verses 66-69), it has a wealth of worth in golden truth for us.

17. *Walking on the Sea* (Matt. xiv. 22-33; Mark vi. 45-52; John vi. 15-21).—That this was more than to allay fear or ease toil, seems evidenced by Matthew (verse 33), in the worship of the disciples and their clear testimony: "Of a truth, thou art the Son of God."

18. *Opening the Eyes of One Born Blind* (John ix.).—Verse 3 has been taken to indicate the cause of the man's condition. It means, not that the man was made blind that the works of God should be manifested, but that, being blind, the works should be manifested. In other words, it suggests that we should be helpfully interested in the condition of those we can aid, not coldly philosophizing as to the cause of their condition. Yet, does this teach that he was healed simply because of his helplessness, and of our Lord's kindness? Notice the progress in faith on the part of the now-seeing man: "a man" (verse 11); "a prophet" (verse 17); "a man of God" (verse 33); "Lord" (verse 38). The result of the miracle is triumphant faith (verses 33-38).

19. *The Withered Hand Restored* (Matt. xii. 9-13; Mark iii. 1-5; Luke vi. 6-11).—The occasion is united with teaching relative to the observance of the Sabbath, which seems to be the sermon from the incident as a text.

20. *Restoring the Woman with the Spirit of Infirmity* (Luke xiii. 10-17).—Here was done in part that which he was manifested to do,—loose from the bonds of Satan (verse 16; see 1 John iii. 8). It results in the woman glorifying God (verse 13), and all the people rejoicing (verse 17).

21. *Healing Man with the Dropsy* (Luke xiv. 1-6).—United with teaching regarding Sabbath observance, as in the case of the man with the withered hand.

22. *The Ten Lepers Cleansed* (Luke xvii. 11-19).—They called for mercy (verse 13), indicating faith; one returned glorifying God (verses 15 and 18); and the result was (verse 19), "Thy faith hath made thee whole," first from leprosy, then from sin.

23. *The Daughter of the Syro-Phœnician Woman Healed* (Matt. xv. 21-28; Mark vii. 24-30).—Here would seem to be an utter absence of compassion, and a yielding only to a faith which could be characterized as "great" (Matt., verse 28). Faith alone caused the healing here (Mark, verses 28-29).

24. *Healing One Deaf and Dumb* (Mark vii. 31-37).—Faith asked this (verse 32). The result was those truthful words of commendation, applying to all his life (verse 37), "He hath done all things well" (see Luke iii. 22; John viii. 29; xvii. 4).

25. *The Four Thousand Fed* (Matt. xv. 32-39; Mark viii. 1-9).—This is ascribed unqualifiedly to compassion by our Lord himself.

26. *Opening the Eyes of One Blind at Bethsaida* (Mark viii. 22-26).—This is requested by faith unquestionably (verse 22), and it has been suggested that the progressive character of the cure was due to imperfect faith on the part of the blind man.

27. *Healing the Lunatic Child* (Matt. xvii. 14-21; Mark ix. 14-29; Luke ix. 37-42).—The father asked with some faith (Matthew, verse 15; Luke, verse 38), and the work is ascribed wholly to faith on his part (Mark, verses 23 and 24).

28. *The Coin in the Fish's Mouth* (Matt. xvii. 24-27).—The motive is stated to be a desire to avoid giving offense, which would hinder his work (verse 27). While never unwilling to run counter to his surroundings in advocating right, it is to be noted that he never gave unnecessary offense.

29. *Lazarus Raised* (John xi.).—That this incident was for the glory of God, and that every detail was arranged for that purpose, connected as that is with the glorifying of the Son of God, is indicated in verse 4, which may be said to state the cause of the condition of Lazarus. Our Lord says that he is glad that all this happened, to the end that they might believe (verse 15). All was done to strengthen faith on the part of the disciples, and produce it in others (verses 25, 26, 40, 41, and 42), and accomplished this (verses 45 and 48).

30. *The Blind Man at Jericho* (Matt. xx. 29-34; Mark x. 46-52; Luke xviii. 35-43).—They had faith (Luke, verses 38-41), and his compassion is recognized as prompting (Matt., verse 34). The miracle produced faith, and called to service (Mark, verse 52; Luke, verses 42-43).

31. *The Barren Fig-tree Cursed* (Matt. xxi. 18-22; Mark xi. 12-14).—This seems to have been to encourage faith (Matt. 20-21; Mark, verses 22-23). There must have been impressed the value and necessity of fruit-bearing as distinct from mere appearance.

32. *Healing the Ear of Malchus* (Luke xxii. 49-51).—A practical illustration of Luke vi. 27, for the benefit of the disciples, and only incidentally for the benefit of Malchus (verse 51).

33. *The Second Draught of Fishes* (John xxi. 1-23).—While demonstrating his divinity and proving his resurrection (verses 7, 12-13), the miracle opened the way for the instruction of verses 15-22.

There are two other miracles narrated in detail; the blind and dumb demoniac (Matt. xii. 22-30; Luke xi. 14-26), in which the exclamation of the people (Matt., verse 23), "Is not this the Son of David?" may help us to decide as to the motive, and in which particular attention is to be called to the words which follow the work; and the dumb demoniac (Matt. ix. 32-35), which produced amazement simply.

The following are accounts of healing and blessing bestowed by our Lord, not fully detailed, and giving us no hint as to their motive, save that which may suggest itself to us as either compassion or salvation, or both; Matthew iv. 23-24, viii. 16-17, xii. 15, xiv. 35-36, xix. 2, xxi. 14;

Mark i. 32-34, 39, iii. 10, vi. 55-56; Luke iv. 40-41, v. 15, ix. 11. It is always interesting to note, however, how often these gatherings for physical benefit were taken advantage of by Jesus to teach his great truths, and it may also be suggested that there may be included in these accounts, some of the works of our Lord, narrated more fully elsewhere, and already so considered by us.

Regarding Luke vi. 17-19, which is usually considered as the parallel of Matthew iv. 23-25, it is especially to be noticed that there follows the teaching of verses 20-49, as the account in Matthew leads to the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew ix. 35-36 and xiv. 14, Christ's compassion is given as the motive for his work, though in the former, his sympathy is inspired rather by the shepherdless condition of the people, their lack of spiritual leadership, than by disease or needs of the physical nature. In Matthew xv. 30-31, the result is the glorifying of God by the people.

We have now reached the end of our examination of the accounts of the miracles, and will stop only to roughly classify those narrated in detail. There are five of these wondrous works in which compassion is unquestionably a leading motive, perhaps the only one—the raising of the daughter of Jairus (6), in which there is no motive save that intimated, though faith seems to have been a necessary condition to the result; the leper cleansed (10), which also unites faith with compassion; the widow's son raised (14), which ends in glory being ascribed to God; the impotent man healed (15), in which the work ends in salvation; and the four thousand fed (25), which is unqualifiedly ascribed to compassion. In thirteen of the accounts (6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 30, and 31), the works seem to be in answer to faith, or to produce it. As proofs of divinity, the works seem to have been performed in twelve cases (1, 3, 4, 9, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21, 29, and 33), while in five (2, 5, 15, 16, and 18), salvation is the clearly defined result. In the coin in the fish's mouth, avoidance of what might interfere with his mission, and in the healing of the ear of Malchus, other motives still, caused the works. To five (6, 10, 14, 15, and 16), two motives are given, both being evident, neither contradicting nor excluding the other.

Turning now to the statements of our Lord and the Scriptures, regarding his work, as they apply to our subject, they may be considered under two heads; what is said regarding the miracles, their purpose and value, and what is asserted as the purpose for which our Lord came to earth.

In Isa. xxxv. 4-6 and xlii. 6-7, healing is promised as a sign of the Messiah, and to these Jesus evidently refers when he responds to the inquiry of John (Matt. xi. 2-6; Luke vii. 19-23). He says, in effect, "Here is proof of my claim. I am he." His works are quoted as evidence of his Messiahship, in John vii. 31, and as evidence of God's presence and approval of his work, in John iii. 2, ix. 16, 33; Acts ii. 22, x. 38. He

cast out demons in demonstration of the presence and power of the King (Matt. xii. 28).

That faith was a necessary condition to the performance of his works is clearly stated in Matt. xiii. 58 and Mark vi. 5, and implied in his repeated refusals to perform any miracles for unbelieving curiosity (Matt. xii. 38-42; xvi. 1-4; Mark viii. 11-12; Luke xi. 29-32). That his works produced faith we have seen from our examination of them, and find stated in John ii. 23, vi. 2. That some of the wondrous acts were performed to lead to repentance, is the teaching of Matt. xi. 20-24; Luke x. 13-14; and with these should be considered John xv. 24, "If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin" (R. V.), which declares that sin is to some extent at least dependent upon regard for the evidential value of the miracles. Yet the suggestion from Luke xvi. 27-31 is that miracles in themselves are not sufficient to convince one who is unwilling to be teachable.

Our Lord says (John v. 36), "The works which I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me," and expresses the same truth in John x. 25. To be sure, he does not say here that the works were done solely or even chiefly to bear witness; but it is different with John x. 37-38, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him." This to the Jews, and similar words to his disciples in John xiv. 10-11, closing with, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake." In both these cases he affirms that the miracles are for the purpose of demonstrating the truth of his claims. As Fisher says, "The gospel miracles are for the express purpose of attesting revelation."¹ And he also says, after quoting the last passage referred to (John xiv. 10-11), "That is, if you cannot take my word for it, *then* let the miracles convince you. It would almost seem that Christ performed his miracles under a protest. He refused to do a miracle where there was not a germ of faith beforehand."²

The failure of this method of bringing others unto himself, noted in John xii. 37, might seem to imply that the "signs," as the word is here, were performed as ends in themselves; but they were "signs" and mighty, in so far as they revealed and manifested his presence and power and goodness, and if they were ever utterly ineffectual, they were so only to those who esteemed them for their own sakes, who merely wondered at them.

In closing this division of the subject, which has regard directly to the words concerning the works, notice John xx. 30-31, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life

¹ Ground of Theistic and Christian Belief, p. 281. ²*Ibid.*, p. 154.

through his name." It is here declared that the purpose for which, at least, a record is given of the "signs" is that belief may be produced, and through that, life secured. As one says, "Each of these signs declares—all of them together declare—that Jesus is the Son of God. Their design is to awaken belief in him as the Son of God."¹

The clear teaching of the word of God about the miracles would seem to be that they were signs of the love and power and presence of God, and meant to be understood as such, intended to teach men truth which concerned their eternal welfare, performed to turn men from darkness to light, to demonstrate the possibility of intimacy, communion, and everlasting relationship between God and man. If we will now look at the statements made regarding the purpose for which our Lord came into the world, we will find our last conclusion most strongly confirmed. He came to preach the kingdom of God (Mark i. 38; Luke iv. 43); to call sinners to repentance (Mark ii. 17; Luke v. 32; Matt. ix. 13). He came to save that which was lost (Luke xix. 10; John iii. 16-17); to save sinners (1 Tim. i. 15); to redeem them that were under the law, i. e., condemned by it (Gal. iv. 4-5); to save the world (John xii. 47; 1 John iv. 14; 1 Tim. ii. 6); that he might redeem from all iniquity (Titus ii. 14).

There are, it is true, two passages which seem to indicate that his work here necessarily included the performance of miracles of helpfulness, even if done as ends simply. These are the two well-known references (Matt. xx. 28; Mark x. 45), "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." In view of all the accumulated evidence just presented, it would seem that the passage just quoted must present the same thought as Phil. ii. 5-8, where "he humbled himself" to serve, even becoming "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

To all this should be added, he came to accomplish a certain work (John ix. 4), which was not finished (John xvii. 4, xix. 30), until he died upon the cross. His love was mighty, vast, and rich, beyond measure or comprehension; yet it was commended unto us only *by* his death (Rom. v. 8, viii. 32; 1 John iii. 16; Gal. ii. 20; John xv. 13); and he came, for no other purpose, to take away our sins (1 John iii. 5; Rom. iv. 25).

With the evidence all in so far as the records go, the only conclusion possible would seem to be, that from first to last the work of Christ had but one ultimate end, the salvation of the world, or all those in it who should believe in him, and every statement regarding that which called him from the presence of the Father in glory, to this earth here to suffer and die, but affirms and confirms this. And so we would decide that Professor Drummond was stating only a half-truth at most, and that very capable of suggesting what is untrue, in the words quoted from him on the first page. Our Lord did make people happy, but he never *merely* did good turns to them.

¹ Maurice, *The Gospel of John*, p. 460.

Yet we may be too hasty in our conclusion. While all the evidence points one way, a problem remains. The question will surely arise, Have we interpreted the record correctly? or, in other words, Can we determine purpose by the examination of result? This is, after all, the crucial point.

The great underlying motive of the life of Christ was the revelation of God for the salvation of man, and the life was spent for that purpose; yet, when the specific acts which are called the miracles were performed, was the great motive the conscious motive of each specific deed, is the question. Even if so, then, to some degree, the joy and the healing which resulted may have formed a part of the conscious motive from whence the deed sprang. Yet it must be admitted that Jesus regarded spiritual well-being as of higher importance than good feeling or health, and that it may somewhat safely be inferred that the former occupied the first place in the impelling forces which resulted in any of his acts of grace. To be sure, we find it impossible to conceive of Christ as being other than ever willing to do men all the good he could, good of every kind, willing and anxious to do kindnesses even when no spiritual result would be produced in the person to whom the kindness was done or in others. No Christ who is the creature of our conceptions can excel the real, the revealed Christ, yet there remains the possibility that the Christ of our conceptions may differ from the real Christ. And if we are assured that he had one specific purpose in coming to earth, that he was here solely to accomplish that purpose, that his whole life was spent in carrying it out, then surely it could never have been absent from his thought as propelling to every deed, or (an impossibility), he would have been acting at times independently of his great purpose. If a certain act performed by infinite wisdom accomplishes a certain result, it would seem to be absurd to search elsewhere for the intended object of that act. If, in addition, relative to that act, there should be a plain declaration that for such a purpose it was performed; if, further, there should be the added revelation that for such specific purposes did the Father send the Son, there could be no further evidence demanded. Such is the evidence in this case, hence we must hold that the conclusion arrived at above is true. Everything which our Lord did, had his great underlying motive as its consciously propelling power, and this one purpose in primal view, full of other incidental blessing, though his work truly was. "He unfolded the utmost consideration for the physical necessities, but always in subordination to the higher wants of the soul."¹

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¹ Stalker, *Imago Christi*, p. 205.