

SOME MINOR MIRACLES.

THERE is a question which few students of the Gospels can have failed to ask themselves. What end is served by those brief and passing narratives which give, in the merest outline, some work, the duplicate of which we find elsewhere recorded more fully, amid more picturesque surroundings, with more impressive and edifying details? Does not the greater imply the less? Why has the evangelist spent some priceless verses, among an aggregate of so few pages, to tell very briefly such an event as is related elsewhere at full length? Nor does this criticism apply to these outline drawings only. We have an elaborate picture of the feeding of four thousand persons, by a writer from whom we knew already that Jesus could and did feed five thousand in just the same way. And one cannot but notice that when a commentator has shown that these two miracles are distinct events, he has not much more to say about the second, finding in it little or no distinct and original spiritual suggestion. An unwary Christian might easily be entrapped into a barter of this whole paragraph, if such a thing were possible, for the story of some new action more unique, more remote from what he had already learned.

But the foolishness of inspiration is wiser than man. It is far more important that we should know Jesus well than that we should know much of what He did; and one is better known when we discover what is characteristic, what repeats itself almost instinctively, than by noting a larger variety of actions, some of which are exceptional and unwonted.

Of course, this is a rule which may not be pressed too far. We scarcely realize the character or the powers of a man at all, until we know how he will bear himself in varied

circumstances ; and Moltke will never take rank beside Napoleon as a commander, if only because we have not seen him contending against adverse fortune.

But our Gospels entirely satisfy this requirement. We see Jesus in privacy, and amid acclaiming multitudes, and in the upper room, and at the bar of Pilate. His miracles "are a complete revealing of His power and nature, so far as everything known to man is concerned. We find them including examples of His power over nature, His power over external objects, His power over man's bodily frame, His power over man's mind, His power over death and him that hath the power of death."¹ We also find them to include all circumstances of private friendship, of hostile observation, of surprise, and of deliberate purpose.

Now when this much is secured, it is thenceforward much more important to deepen and strengthen our impressions by reiteration than to diversify and leave them faint. A real addition is made to our conception of His work and character by these narratives, which are criticised for contributing little or nothing of new incident, if by them we are helped to discern, not only that He did one such work, and did it in such a manner, but that such were the works He used to do, and such His manner in doing them.

Even their evidential value is greater than we suspect ; and it may be measured by the eagerness of the same sceptics, who sometimes labour to show that one miraculous narrative is but a variant of another, at other times to discredit a miracle, simply because it resembles nothing that we find elsewhere. Such narratives, therefore, may be regarded as buoys which indicate the main channel, the central flow of the miraculous activities of Jesus.

They are also valuable as showing in their variety, amid all similarities, the freshness and vitality of a narrative not

¹ Nicoll: *The Incarnate Saviour*.

evolved by theology, but reproducing a life. For it may safely be affirmed that not even the briefest of them is deficient in such differences as our own experience knows full well, wherein one day is never so like another as to lack the spontaneity and freshness which are the very salt of our lives.

THE TWO BLIND IN THE HOUSE.

(Matt. ix. 27.)

Every traveller in the East observes the terrible prevalence of blindness, because the sun is glaring, the sand and dust are everywhere, many persons sleep in the open air under pernicious dews, and the helps of medicine and surgery are seldom available.

Nor is any malady better calculated to express that moral darkness which follows upon the toleration and indulgence of sin, the misery of those whose feet stumble on the dark mountains, who grope for the wall in the day, whose eyes are darkened that they should not see.

In the New Testament blindness has almost completely taken that place, which once seemed to be destined for leprosy, as a type of sin, and of the death-in-life of the sinner. The god of this world hath blinded the eyes of the disobedient. Christ is the true light which lighteth every man. We were sometimes darkness, but now are we light in Him. And, therefore, none of His miracles can be more appropriate than the opening of darkened eyes.

But on this very account, scepticism hopes to explain these works as spiritual imagery frozen into cold matter-of-fact assertions. Isaiah had promised that the eyes of the blind should be opened: it was, therefore, an article in the predicted programme; and when Jesus was supposed to be the promised Messiah, prosaic folk believed that He had actually wrought the miracles, because they could not credit

a Messiah who had not done so, because they did not understand poetry. The marvel was not created through excess of imagination, but by the dearth of it.

And yet, as we saw when considering leprosy, the same passage could promise streams in the desert without forcing into belief any such miracle as the striking of the rock by Moses. These unimaginative people were quite able to accept the spiritual and mystic interpretation of this assertion; they divined that the rock was Christ Himself. But they were, at least, as conscious that Christ was the Light of the world as that He was the Well of living Water. If the latter could satisfy them, so could the former, and the alleged necessity for the creation of such miracles entirely disappears.

It was perhaps natural that blind men were not among the first to seek help from Jesus. For themselves there were difficulties, and their friends had learned to acquiesce in their condition, which was settled, and threatened no further aggressions to disturb them.

At all events, it was not until Jesus left the house of Jairus that He was accosted by two blind men, the first who are known to have brought this grief to Him. It was just then easy to find Him, for a great crowd had followed Him from the table of Levi, and enough of delay had since ensued to enable the most helpless to seek Him out. But to gain close access was not so easy, for the multitude would "throng and press Him" even more eagerly on His successful return than when He went. Accordingly they could only follow at some distance; and as they did so, they uttered an invocation hitherto unheard, "Have mercy on us, Thou Son of David." The same title was afterwards given Him in the appeal of the woman of Canaan, and of Bartimæus and his companion in Jericho; but cautious men will draw no inference from so narrow and precarious an

induction as the fact that in two out of three recorded instances the speakers were blind. The phrase was perhaps derived from the promise to "set one shepherd over them, even My servant David" (Ezek. xxxiv. 23), and its thoroughly Old Testament view of the Messiah was suitable to persons whom little of the new teaching had reached. Renan indeed asserts that the first group of men and women who adhered to Jesus said to Him, Thou art the Messiah, and because the Messiah should be son of David conceded to Him this title also, which was synonymous with the first. "Jesus with pleasure allowed it to be given to Him, although it caused Him some embarrassment, His birth being perfectly notorious" (*V. de J.*, p. 137). All this is gratuitous invention, and Christians may indulge themselves in the luxury of scepticism when asked to believe that folk who knew that the Messiah should be the Son of David, in whose circle also it was quite notorious (*toute populaire*) that Jesus was not so, should choose this title above all others by way of affirming His Messiahship. As to the pleasure with which Jesus received it, we know of but three cases where suppliants used it (it was addressed to Him a fourth time on His triumphant entry to Jerusalem), and two of these three are marked off from all His other miracles by the fact that the answer was only granted to a long continuance of importunity.

It is, therefore, with a singular recklessness, generalizing not only from insufficient data but in direct contradiction of the facts, that Renan asserts again that, "He performed with greater readiness those miracles which were asked of Him by this appellation"¹ (p. 248). Nor may we forget

¹ "Il faisait de la meilleure grâce les miracles qu'on lui demandait en l'interpellant de la sorte." It is odd to notice that one of Renan's proofs of this is Matthew xii. 23, where, only after the miracle was wrought, people, speaking among themselves, said, "Is this the Son of David?" A curious inducement to the working of it!

that Jesus formally and explicitly refuted the notion that Son of David was an adequate description of the rank of the Messiah.

For whatever reason, and possibly for more reasons than one, Jesus gave no answer to their prayer, and entered "the house," probably that of Peter, and without doubt His own home in Capernaum. For the crowds, more than enough of wonder had already marked this day, and it had been needful to suppress the details of the raising of the ruler's daughter. For the Pharisees there would be an especial provocation, and perhaps a tempting opportunity for mischief, in a miracle publicly yielded to an invocation so political in its import. For the blind men themselves something was yet required to elicit their half latent faith, to shape it in rendering it articulate, to convert desire and hope more thoroughly into reliance, consciously recognising His ability. This process, presently to be completed by a direct question and answer, was begun when they refused to be shaken off, following Him not only along the road but into the house, which doubtless they could only reach by waiting until the crowds had melted. The formal confession of their faith which He there demanded of them is highly instructive, for it is not that He is Son of David (or for that matter that He is Son of God) but that He is qualified to meet their own needs, the Saviour whom they require. Believe ye that I am able to do this? It is the first time when such a formal profession is exacted; and it is to be explained not chiefly by the growth of opposition (on the contrary, at this hour all was enthusiasm) nor altogether by the progress of events, (because much had now been done, and a higher standard of faith might fairly be expected) but above all by their own spiritual condition. They needed to have their faith drawn out: they proved their unsatisfactory condition afterwards, when even the

urgent command of Jesus could not restrain their wilful garrulity.

Yet, since their faith was real, Jesus helped it. And very remarkable is this, that since no blind man could have that spiritual stimulus and incitement which other sufferers drew from His loving and kingly face, so merciful and strong, therefore Jesus, when treating the blind, always added to His words some curative action, sometimes anointing their eyes, never omitting at the least to touch them. Such a coincidence is too slight to be designed, and it extends over all the Gospels; from one point of view, therefore, it is an evidence, while from another it is an edifying example of His matchless wisdom in treating little things. That profound mind, which fathomed all the depths of religion, of ethics, and of human nature, was alert and practical as well, and did not omit to supply by a gesture the encouragement which His bearing could not supply. And as He touched their eyes, He said, According to your faith be it done unto you. To their belief in His power, these words added an equal sense of His readiness, the circuit of spiritual electricity was completed, and now their eyes were opened. It was not human faith which wrought this, and yet the action of heaven was according to the trust of man. Such is the principle on which God is wont to deal with us, and S. Paul exhorted his Roman converts to prophecy "according to the proportion of 'their' faith." For, he said, their gifts differed according as God had dealt to each a measure of faith. (Rom. xii. 6, 3.)

And now Jesus strictly charged them, saying, "See that no man know it." The word is very emphatic (*ἐνεβριμήσατο*); we shall meet it again in more remarkable circumstances by the grave of Lazarus; and as it certainly conveys the notion of something hostile to be confronted, we may suppose that Jesus was rebuking within them the shallow impulse which would fain talk to others, noisily and

egotistically, instead of giving such lowly and earnest thanks to God as rise up in solitude and quietness, the praise which is silent before God. (Ps. lxx. 1.)

They ungratefully and wilfully disobeyed Him, perhaps persuading themselves that in so doing they glorified Him better than by obedience, and thus resembling all who allow themselves to break any laws of God by way of furthering His cause. In no such case do we read of a blessing revoked, a gift cancelled, because of its abuse. Yet such retribution, totally unknown in the actions, is frequent in the teaching of Jesus. The servant who would not forgive another was delivered to the tormentors till he should pay what had been frankly forgiven. From him that hath not shall be taken away even that he hath.

If the miracles were a kind of fungus growth from the beliefs of the Church, why did they not conform to the general law which He laid down? How came they to be so finely and accurately consistent with the present position, rather than the abstract principles of Him who shall some day say, "Depart, ye cursed," but who had not yet come to judge? Nor even now has the rule taken full effect.

For the present, endowments of intellect, rank and affluence are not snatched away from one who abuses them, although he may gradually waste them, as one whom Jesus healed, might bring "a worse thing" upon himself than what for the moment he had escaped.

THE DUMB MAN WITH A DEVIL. THE BLIND AND DUMB DEMONIAK.

(Matt. ix. 32, xii. 22.)

These narratives are so closely similar, that if they occurred in different Gospels, it might seem ridiculous to deny their identity.

The first tells us that one was brought to Jesus to have a devil cast out, who was not only "possessed," but also

dumb. When He expelled the devil, it became apparent that He had not merely soothed and calmed a cruel agitation, but had mastered a tyrant by whom the bodily powers had been oppressed, for the dumb man spake. Is it wonderful, on the assumption that such an event once took place, that another sufferer of the same kind, but even more unhappy, since he was blind as well as dumb, should soon afterwards be led to Him? If this more deep affliction also were removed, is it not certain that the crowd would still be amazed, and would ask among themselves, "Is this the Son of David?" What they could not repeat a second time is precisely what they are recorded to have said at first, for now it had been once already "so seen in Israel."

There is, therefore, exactly at the proper place, one significant variation in the accounts. But it was just this feeling that their own attempts at exorcism had been surpassed, that nothing like this had been seen before, which stung the Pharisees to utter their worst of blasphemies, and to explain, by the help of the devil, His superiority over them—who had but the help of God to rely upon! And if the indignant and crushing rebuke of Jesus were spoken on the first occasion, the repetition of this blasphemy would be much more surprising than when we find Him answering only the second attack.

To sum up, it does not seem that the repetition of such an application for help creates the slightest addition to difficulty; while it is almost certain that if we have here two versions of the same story, collision and confusion would arise. But what we actually find is perfect harmony.

It is perfectly open, therefore, to a student who knows how events repeat themselves, without any hard and fast theory of inspiration, certainly without any desire except to look at the facts with candour, to believe that we have here the story of two similar but not identical events.

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*THE RELATION OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION
TO OUR JUSTIFICATION.*

It has recently been asserted by Prof. Everett, of Harvard, in his *Gospel of Paul* (pp. 199 ff.), as an objection against the doctrine of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, that it does not enable us to recognise an objective effect of Christ's resurrection towards our justification, such as Paul teaches. For, he argues, if it is by Christ bearing the penalty of our sin on the cross that we are forgiven, His rising again may have value as confirming our faith, but cannot be, as Paul declares, for our justification (Rom. iv. 25), or indispensable to our forgiveness (1 Cor. xv. 17). He therefore holds, as if opposed to the generally accepted doctrine, the view, which is also propounded as a new one by M. Ménégos, that the resurrection was of essential importance, because by it Christ was justified, having paid the penalty due to sin; and Dr. Bruce¹ states this view as a new and strange one, a novel and ingenious explanation of the apostle's doctrine, which, though deserving respect, is, he thinks, at fault in several respects.

But the strange thing in all this is, that this view of Christ being justified, and we in Him, by His resurrection, whether it be right or wrong, is, in the first place, not a new theory at all, but one that has been held and fully expounded, both in doctrinal and practical treatises, by some of the best known divines. For instance, Amesius says: "Sententia haec (justificationis) fuit i^o in mente Dei quasi concepta, per decretum justificandi (Gal. iii. 8); ii^o fuit in Christo capite nostro a mortuis jam resurgente pronunciata (2 Cor. v. 19); iii^o virtualiter pronunciat ex prima illa relatione, quae ex fide ingenerata exurgit (Rom. viii. 1); iv^o expresse pronunciat per Spiritum Dei testantem spiritibus

¹ See EXPOSITOR, August, 1893, pp. 92-5.

nostris reconciliationem nostram cum Deo (Rom. v. 5).” *Theologia Medulla*, Lib. I. cap. xxvii. § 9.¹ Still more distinctly writes Bishop Pearson: “By His death we know that He suffered for sin, by His resurrection we are assured that the sins for which He suffered were not His own; had no man been a sinner, He had not died; had He been a sinner, He had not risen again; but dying for those sins which we committed, He rose from the dead to show that He had made full satisfaction for them, that we believing on Him might obtain remission of our sins, and justification of our persons; ‘God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,’ and raising up our Surety from the prison of the grave, did actually absolve, and apparently acquit, Him from the whole obligation to which He had bound Himself, and in discharging Him acknowledged full satisfaction made for us (Rom. viii. 33, 4).” *Exposition of the Creed*, Art. v. The same view is also taken by Thomas Goodwin in *Christ Set Forth*, (Works, vol. iv.), sermons on Rom. viii. 33, 4; by Bishop Horsley, in his sermon on Rom. iv. 25; and by Principal Candlish, in his *Life in a Risen Saviour*, on 1 Corinthians xv.

Surely a view held by so many theologians of different times and schools is no novelty, but might rather be regarded as a commonplace of divinity. But a second strange thing is, that it should be supposed, as it is by Prof. Everett, that it is at all at variance with the substitutionary view of Christ’s death to ascribe such an effect to His resurrection. For all the writers above cited held that doctrine; and both Bishop Horsley and Dr. Candlish expressly argue in support of it, from the efficacy which Paul ascribes to Christ’s resurrection. This is an instance of the way in which objections to the doctrine generally held

¹ This passage is the more memorable, as it is on it that the statement of the Westminster Confession (ch. xi. § 4) as to the time of justification is modelled.

in the Church proceed from a too narrow and inadequate conception of what it really is. The aspects of the truth as presented in Scripture are manifold, and the great theologians have really endeavoured to do justice to them all; but it is not possible to include every one in a single representation; and if critics fasten upon partial statements without trying to enter into the system of thought as a whole, they are liable to grave errors.

But the more important question remains, whether this view of the effect of Christ's resurrection is really Paul's, and not a notion gratuitously forced upon his words by the ingenuity of expositors. In favour of the former alternative must be reckoned the frequency with which he uses expressions that cannot naturally be otherwise understood. The statement in 1 Corinthians xv. 17, "If Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins," is an express assertion, that His resurrection was indispensable to our forgiveness. For it should be observed, that the word translated "vain" here is not the same as in verse 14 at an earlier stage of the argument. There he used the word *κενή*, empty, *i.e.* hollow, untrue; but here he says *ματαία*, useless, to no purpose. Though we believe in Christ, yet if He has not been raised from the dead, it will not profit us; we should be still in our sins. Why this is so, Paul does not deem it necessary to explain; but as this forms part of a chain of reasoning, he must have thought it obvious to his readers; and since he had said before that Christ died for our sins, the inference is natural, that His resurrection was needful to show that He had fully atoned for and made an end of them. Again, the words in Romans iv. 25, "who was delivered up for our trespasses, and raised for our justification," express such a close connection, and are so parallel to that of our trespasses with His death, that Meyer's explanation, that the resurrection is the ground of the faith by which we are justified, seems a

very far-fetched one, and that of Horsley preferable, "delivered on account of our trespasses, *i.e.* because we had trespassed, and raised up on account of our justification, *i.e.* because we in Him had been justified, by His atonement for our sins." Thus we can see why, in Romans viii. 34, the resurrection is mentioned, in addition to the death of Christ, as a distinct ground of our freedom from condemnation; and in Romans x. 9 the fact that God has raised Christ from the dead is the object of that faith which is unto righteousness. Further, in 2 Corinthians v. 15 the words, "who for their sakes died and rose again," import that the resurrection was as truly *ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν*, on their behalf, as the death of Christ; He was a public person acting for us in both alike. This text has sometimes been alleged to prove that the statement, "He died for them," does not imply substitution: but it implies that representation, which is the ground of what we call substitution, though it is rather vicarious action of the Head for the members. Once more in 1 Timothy iii. 16, Jesus is said to have been "justified in the Spirit"; and if the antithesis is to be understood like that in Romans i. 3, 4, the reference will be to the resurrection. So in Romans viii. 34, the exclamation in the mouth of believers, "It is God that justifieth; who is he that shall condemn?" is taken from the words of the servant of Jehovah in Isaiah l. 8, 9; and in Romans vi. 7, "He that died hath been justified from sin," apply both to Christ and to us. Thus it seems clear, that Paul does really speak of Christ being justified, and our being justified in Him, as well as for His sake (Gal. ii. 17); and the act by which God acquitted Christ and declared Him righteous was His raising Him from the dead on the third day.

Indeed it seems to have been just the resurrection that convinced Paul that Jesus had died for our sins, and that we have forgiveness and acceptance for His sake. For, as

Prof. Everett well says, the cross had been his offence ; he had held Jesus to be accursed, only not merely because of his being hanged on a tree, but because put to death thus by the condemnation of those who were the guardians of God's law and justice. If Jesus was not the Christ, the Son of God, He was justly condemned, and His crucifixion was really the curse of God, and so Paul held it. But when he saw Him risen again, he perceived that God had reversed the judgment of the Sanhedrin against Him, and declared Him innocent. Since then God had delivered Him up to death ; it cannot have been for any sin of His, but, as had been said of the Servant of Jehovah who was to justify many, "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities." These were the grounds of His death ; and His resurrection proved that these had been done away, and that when we believe in Him our faith is not vain, for we trust in one whom our sins killed, but exhausted their power in doing so, and could not prevent His rising and our salvation in Him.

But it is objected this gives a different sense to justification in the case of Christ and in ours. I cannot see that it does. Justification in every case is acquittal and absolution from guilt ; that is the simple and uniform meaning of the word ; and the difference in the two cases is simply that in the one the guilt is personal, in the other only imputed ; and in the one the acquittal is for the sake of another ; in the other for His own innocence. Even this difference disappears in view of Paul's conception of the believers' oneness with Christ ; He made our guilt His own and died for it, and by His being raised to life He and we in Him are absolved from that guilt for His righteousness' sake. The double meaning of death, too, is only apparent, and due to the difference between the holy Son of God and the sinful children of men. Paul describes the death that is the wages of sin as involving "tribulation and anguish" ; the

endurance of that by impenitent sinners can never cancel guilt, because they are going on in sin ; but the endurance of it by the Holy One of God does cancel the guilt of all who believe in Him ; He died for our sins, as truly bearing their penalty as the finally impenitent shall do ; but He did what no sinner can do, "He died to sin" (Rom. vi. 10), and therefore, having thus died, He was justified from our sin and on our behalf. According to M. Ménégos' view, indeed, that Paul held the death that is due to sin to be simply destruction, there does lurk in the apostle's teaching a double meaning of death ; but that view is far from being self-evident, and it is certainly not necessary to the belief, that he attributed to the resurrection of Christ an objective bearing on our justification. The general Biblical idea of the death that is the wages of sin would seem to be, separation from God ; and though it cannot perhaps be certainly shown that Paul held this view, it is quite consistent with his statements, and would remove any ambiguity in his use of it in this connection.

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