

STUDIES IN THE "INNER LIFE" OF JESUS.

X.

THE FUNCTION OF THE MIRACLES.

1. ON His return to Galilee from Judaea through Samaria Jesus was welcomed by the Galilaeans, as some of them had been witnesses of His brief ministry in Judaea, and had been as much impressed by His miracles as the Judaeans. The same distrust of the motive of their faith as had led Him not to commit Himself to the multitude in the South made Him take up a similar attitude of reserve in the North. The nobleman's request that He should come from Cana to Capernaum to work a cure, elicited an answer which shows how greatly He dreaded the same result of His miracles in Galilee as in Judaea, an interference with the fulfilment of His vocation by the desire of the people to get the benefits His supernatural power could confer, and a perversion of their faith in Him from surrender to His personal influence to surprise at His miraculous action. "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will in no wise believe" (John iv. 48). When the urgent plea of the Father showed that the appeal came from a soul in great need and deep distress, His pity conquered His doubt and fear about the possible effect of the miracle, and He promptly and confidently gave the assurance that the cure was granted. To evoke the faith which He ever desired, He bade the father undertake the homeward journey, relying solely and wholly on His words, "Thy son liveth"; and the suppliant stood the test. It is not necessary for the present purpose to discuss the critical question, whether the narrative (John iv. 43-54) is a varying tradition of the same incident as is reported in Matthew viii. 5-13, and Luke vii. 1-10, the cure of the centurion's servant, as we are meanwhile concerned only with the significance of the utterance of Jesus in relation to the *Function of the Miracles* in His Life and Work.

2. In the *Temptation* Jesus Himself was tested in regard to the use to be made of the supernatural power of the possession of which He seems first of all to have become conscious at His *Baptism*. During His ministry there were always many who wanted the succour and help of His miraculous power. Whenever genuine need and real suffering appealed to Him, He was always ready to give His aid ; and the plea was never addressed to His pity and grace in vain. But still there are some indications that He felt that these appeals for His compassion and assistance interfered with the fulfilment of His vocation. After a Sabbath evening spent in healing in Capernaum He escaped to a solitary place for prayer, and when urged by His disciples to return to the waiting multitudes, answered : " Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also ; for to this end came I forth " (Mark i. 38). In preaching, rather than in healing He saw His calling. When at a later stage in the ministry this preaching to the multitude was gradually being abandoned, that He might devote Himself to the training of the Twelve, this popular desire for miracles did once and again interfere with His purpose. The retirement with the disciples after their first mission was invaded by the multitude, and although moved with compassion, He not only wrought cures, but even fed the hungry crowd ; yet on the morrow He rebuked their desire for a repetition of the miracle, and exhorted them to seek spiritual nourishment rather than physical sustenance (John vi. 26, 27). While the language of His refusal of the Syrophenician mother's request was probably intended (as was shown in the previous Study) as a rebuke of the Jewish exclusiveness of His disciples (Matt. xv. 24-27), yet it is not at all unlikely that His desire to be alone with His disciples that He might prepare them for His departure and their continuance of His work made Him at this time very unwilling to enter on any healing ministry among the Gentiles. If we

carefully read what is written between the lines in the Gospels, we shall probably come to the conclusion, that while on the one hand the sympathy of Jesus with human need, and His confidence in the Divine power in and through Him urged Him to work miracles ; yet, on the other hand, His desire not to confer temporal advantage only, but above all to communicate spiritual benefit, made Him hesitate about the exercise of supernatural power, as the popular desire that He should always be a Healer was opposed to His own purpose that He should ever be a Teacher.

3. By His miracles He did secure a kind of faith from the healed or the witnesses of the cures, but it was not the faith which He wanted or would accept. It was possible without any moral repentance or religious aspiration ; it might be cherished along with indulgence in sin, and indifference toward God ; it could be accepted by a superstitious spirit and a corrupt conscience, and leave the one as superstitious and the other as corrupt as before. Jesus appealed to reason with His truth, to conscience with His holiness, and to affection with His grace ; but He would not coerce the spirit of man by using the wonder or the terror which His miracles as acts of supernatural power evoked, to secure acceptance of His claims or allegiance to His cause. He knew how fickle and feeble at its best such a belief is, how soon it will yield to doubt, when its compelling cause ceases, and how incapable it is of sustaining the loyalty and devotion, and constraining the service and sacrifice, which, in the interests of the kingdom in conflict with the forces of the world, are necessary in all His disciples. In itself valueless, this belief was dangerous as hindering a genuine and intense faith. Hence during His ministry Jesus dreaded it as a result of His miracles.

4. Jesus steadily refused to work miracles as credentials of His mission, as evidences of His authority. When the priests, after the *Cleansing of the Temple*, demanded a sign,

the only sign which He would give them was the assurance of His spiritual power to restore the religion which they were destroying by their secular policy (John ii. 19). When the same demand was pressed upon Him in Galilee by scribes and Pharisees, He showed clearly His indignation at the request by describing those who made it as "a wicked and adulterous generation," and the only sign He offered was "the sign of Jonah," the call to repentance and the threat of judgment (Matt. xii. 39). (There seems to be little doubt that the reference of the sign to the Resurrection in verse 40, is inconsistent with the context, and intrinsically improbable. It is absent from the parallel passage in Luke xi. 29-32). It is true that He did appeal to the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem to believe, if not Him, yet His works (John x. 38). It is doubtful whether He is here appealing to the miraculous character of His works or to the moral qualities which these works displayed, by which they betrayed their origin in the Father. But, even if the former view is taken, yet the context shows that He is not commending faith in His works instead of His person. This might be the best the Jews could offer; it was certainly not the best which for Himself He desired.

5. While we admit, as the evangelical records demand, that the popular desire for miracles did interfere with Jesus' fulfilment of His vocation, that the faith which the miracles evoked was not one on which He could rely, that He refused as a wicked and impure desire the demand that He should prove His claims by a sign, yet we must not, in our reaction from the old apologetic method, which gave the miracles of Jesus a foremost place among the evidences of the truth of Christianity, go to the opposite extreme of the critical position and assert, that "Jesus expressly repudiated the position of a worker of miracles" (Gardner's *A Historic View of the New Testament*, 155). For the narratives of the miracles are so woven into the texture of

the Gospels, that we cannot deny their substantial accuracy in these records without surrendering the testimony which they bear to the teaching and work of Jesus. And there are sayings of Jesus which give to the miracles a deep significance and a high value for the interpretation of His person. To a closer study of some of these let us now address ourselves. To begin with the most external aspects of the function of miracles in the ministry of Jesus, the report of the cures He wrought brought many men and women within the reach of His teaching, the range of His influence, who otherwise would have remained ignorant and indifferent. Not all who came to seek or to witness His healing stopped short at the belief in Him as a wonder-worker, which He condemned. Some of them came to know and trust the truth and grace which dwelt in Him. The imperfect belief served in some cases as the protecting husk for the developing kernel of genuine faith. While He refused to work a miracle to overcome unbelief, yet He allowed the confirmation of a genuine faith by a miracle, if necessary. The cure of the palsied man whom four friends brought into His presence seems to prove this (Mark ii. 1-12). The faith which Jesus approved was the desire of the sufferer and his helpers that his burdened conscience might be eased of its load; for Jesus did not give him something which he did not want as a preparation for getting what he did want, when He said, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." The usual supposition that the man needed forgiveness, although he did not wish it, more than a cure, and that Jesus therefore gave it him, is inadmissible. For His forgiveness of sin was always morally conditioned; it was not and could not be conferred where there was no desire for it, and the penitence for sin, and purpose of righteousness, without which forgiveness is not a benefit but an injury to the soul. A study of the cases in which faith gained His commendation justifies the supposition that He did not specially commend belief, however strong, in His power to

work miracles, but only the faith which included the recognition of the moral and spiritual conditions of His ministry. He approved the faith in this case because it was directed towards Himself, not as Healer, but as Saviour from sin. When His right to forgive sin was challenged, then it was needful for Him to assert His authority, not so much probably for the sake of the enemies who had thrown down the gage of battle, as for the sake of the man whose spiritual interests were at stake in the conflict. His faith, however genuine, might have been made to waver and fail by the challenge of the right of Jesus to forgive made by those who were regarded as the highest authorities in religion. Not only to confute His opponents, but still more that the sufferer might have in the cure of his body a proof of the saving of his soul, Jesus said, "Whether is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed and go unto thy house" (Mark ii. 9-11). As it is probable that the miracle would have been wrought even if the challenge had been unmade, this case does not break the rule that Jesus did not work miracles to prove His claims. Need demanded, pity constrained the cure, to which there was then assigned the significance which the occasion required, a refutation of unbelief, and a confirmation of faith.

6. The miracles could serve as signs in the Seen of the power which Jesus exercised in the Unseen, and as a means of leading the thoughts of those who were helped by them, or were witnesses of them, from the Seen to the Unseen. They were a picture-language, or acted parables. The manifold forms of disease cured lead men's thoughts to the varied manifestations and consequences of sin; while Jesus' power over even the worst forms of disease could

offer them a pledge of the almightiness of His grace. It was His aim in dealing with all whom He cured to lead their desires from the physical to the spiritual, from His healing action to His saving person. Hence the demand which He ever made for faith, not only in His ability, but also in His willingness to cure—faith not only in His power, but also in Himself as exercising it in pity, kindness, and love. When He found faith which showed insight into His character and purpose, as in the case of the Roman centurion and the Syrophenician mother, He was generous in praise. When the leper expressed his confidence in His power, but some distrust of His will in the request, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," His words in answer, "I will; be thou made clean," not only met that doubt; but the tender touch on the diseased body, which had been a loathing and a dread to others, was doubtless intended to convey still more convincingly the assurance of affection (Mark i. 40, 41). When the father of the epileptic boy appealed to His compassion, but was uncertain of His ability, there is remonstrance in the echo of the distrustful words, "If Thou canst"; and confidence is opposed to diffidence in the assurance, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark ix. 23). The faith of each of these suppliants needed completion: in the one, distrust of His pity, in the other, doubt of His power had to be removed. The woman who, coming behind, touched the hem of His robe, needed to be lifted above her belief in the magic virtue of His garments to the faith inspired by personal contact with Himself. If she had been allowed to steal away with her stolen cure, would not doubt and fear have visited her, lest the boon so suddenly snatched might as suddenly slip from her grasp? Only the look of His eyes and the tones of His voice, as He said to her, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke viii. 48), could give her the perfect assurance of healing, as therein was revealed to

her, not only the power which was the means, but also the love which was the motive of her cure. Where this faith in Himself could not be evoked, there He did not exercise His power. Unbelief was a restraint upon Him. In Nazareth, where familiarity with His earthly relationships did breed contempt of His heavenly vocation, "He could do no mighty works, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marvelled because of their unbelief" (Mark vi. 5, 6). The desire to evoke faith as a condition of cure is probably the reason for the use of other means than the spoken word in a few cases. The deaf man who had an impediment in his speech could not be awakened to a desire for healing, or confidence in Jesus' power to heal by any spoken words. But the touch of Jesus on his ears and tongue would suggest to his mind that a cure was being attempted, and would awaken in his heart the desire that it might succeed. Do the look to heaven and the sigh indicate that there was some hindrance to the cure in the indifference or the distrust of the sufferer (Mark vii. 33-34)? Similar considerations may apply to the case of the blind man (Mark viii. 23-25), whose partial cure was due to his imperfect faith, and could be only gradually completed as his faith developed. If we ask for the reasons for this insistence on faith as a condition of cure, the first which suggests itself is this, that Jesus came to deal with men personally. He desired the assent of the mind, the confidence of the heart, and the consent of the will to the exercise of His miraculous power on behalf of any sufferer. As far as possible every bodily cure must be accompanied by a spiritual change in the person cured. He claimed as His own, in trustfulness and thankfulness, all whom He helped. Thus His miraculous activity was kept in vital unity with His spiritual influence. He always acted as Healer so that at the same time He might prove Saviour.

7. There seems to be another, and less obvious reason for

this insistence on faith. There are some cases recorded where the person cured could not be expected to exercise faith, but faith was vicariously exercised by another. Thus the epileptic boy was not in a condition either to desire deliverance from his disorder, or to recognize in Jesus a deliverer; his father did intercede for him, but his intercession was made less potent by the unbelief struggling with the faith. "I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." Jesus had to overcome the hindrance of the father's unbelief instead of getting the help of his faith. The scribes standing around were sceptical and hostile; the multitude was inclined to unbelief on account of the disciples' failure; the disciples themselves were incapable of the exercise of faith. It was of this case that Jesus used the pregnant words, "This kind can come out by nothing save by prayer" (Mark ix. 24-29). In the case of the Syrophenician woman's daughter, the mother's faith had vicarious value. These instances suggest a law to which Jesus' miraculous activity was subject. Even as God's gifts of grace come in answer to prayer, and cannot be enjoyed where there is no desire for them, and even as God recognizes human solidarity, so that the prayer of the righteous man availeth much to bring blessing to others, so the working of miracles by Jesus was conditioned by the presence and potency of prayer for self or others. His miraculous power was no physical force, it was a reasonable and righteous will, in all its exercise morally and spiritually conditioned as God's rule of the world is. God's power must be invited by man's prayer.

8. We have still firm ground under our feet, when we take a step further, and affirm that the miracles were conditioned not only by the faith of the persons benefited, or those who interceded for them, but even by faith in Jesus Himself, His confidence in His Father's will and power to work in and through Him. The prayer to which He alluded in the case of the epileptic was not offered by the

sufferer, or by the father, or by the disciples ; Jesus Himself triumphed over all conflicting doubt in others by His own courageous faith. In the instance, already alluded to, of the heavenward glance and the sigh can there be any doubt that He was praying ? For here, too, unbelief had to be overcome by still stronger faith. When at the grave of Lazarus He was " moved with indignation in the spirit " (John xi. 33, R.V. margin), at the unbelief which pursued Him even to the grave of His friend, He gained confidence in prayer, as His words show : " Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me " (v. 41). The words which follow—" I know that Thou hearest Me always "—may legitimately be taken as a proof that prayer was habitual with Him in the exercise of His supernatural power. We need not suppose that there was always explicit petition, but there was always the attitude of dependence on, confidence in, and submission to His Father, which is the essential feature in prayer. This spirit of prayer may have become articulate only in the face of unbelief to be overcome.

9. This conclusion, however, brings us only to the threshold of another inquiry regarding the relation of the miracles to the person of Jesus, about which it would be unbecomingly rashly to speculate, but fitting reverently to follow any guidance which the Gospels may offer us. The words, " Some one did touch Me, for I perceived that power had gone forth from Me " (Luke viii. 46), do, at first sight, appear to require the conclusion that His supernatural power was inherent in His physical organism, and was communicable by contact. The evangelical record does suggest that the communication of this inherent supernatural power was possible without consciousness of need, or volition to help. But do we not at once feel that this view gives to the miracles a magical character, and robs them of their moral meaning and religious worth ? Are we not, then, compelled to recognize the incompleteness of the

records, to remind ourselves that they often describe the outward appearance without interpreting to us the inward reality, which is its cause and reason? It is more in harmony with the ethical and spiritual method of Jesus to assume that by His sensitive sympathy He was able to distinguish in the woman's touch the appeal of need and faith from the indifferent pressure of the crowd upon Him, and that in the gracious generosity of His love He at once responded by a conscious and voluntary exercise of His power. If even in this case the power was used with clear knowledge and free will, we need not exclude from its exercise the factor of faith in God. The necessity of faith in Jesus Himself suggests another view of the relation of the miracles to His person. We may then conceive that the Father Himself wrought the miracle in and by the Son, and that Jesus by His wish to do good to others, His sympathetic love for man, and by His trust that His Father would fulfil that wish, His filial confidence in God, afforded in His person the needed channel for the Divine activity. The miracles then become not a proof of the supernatural endowment of the physical organism of Jesus, but an evidence of the filial union with God, so assured, and constant, and perfect that He could always command the resources of omnipresence, and omniscience and omnipotence for the furtherance of His work, and the fulfilment of His vocation. This view also makes more credible and intelligible the cures at a distance, since for the Father, as absolute God, space is no limitation; while for Jesus, as the Son Incarnate, space was a necessary condition of existence and activity. The nature-miracles reveal so far-reaching a control of natural forces, that doubt is relieved and faith is helped by seeing in them the immediate response of the Father to the confident appeal of the Son. His rebuke of His disciples on the stormy lake, "Why are ye fearful? have ye not yet faith?" (Mark iv. 40) might imply that He expected such faith in Himself

as would assure them of safety amid the greatest danger, but, as in His teaching trust in God's care and bounty is being often urged, it is more probable that He is rebuking distrust of God. The words "Peace, be still" are not a command to blasts and billows which had no ear to hear, and no will to obey, but a prayer to God of heroic triumphant certainty, that the response in the very request was already given. This explanation does not divorce the miracles from the person of Jesus, or lessen His grace or glory; for is not this filial consciousness and the absolute confidence which it inspired the supreme evidence that He lived in the Father and the Father in Him? The two views that Jesus had miraculous power, and that God acted supernaturally in Him are not contradictory but complementary. He had and used the power, but not as an isolated individuality apart from God, but as united to God by His filial relation, which, whatever may have been its metaphysical basis, was manifested in knowledge of, love for, and surrender to God as Father. His receptiveness and responsiveness to God made Him not occasionally, but permanently, the open channel of Divine power, wisdom, and grace. Thus the miracles too become evidences of the union of the Father and the Son.

10. The miracles are also a revelation of the relation of the Son of Man to His brethren. In the narratives there is nothing recorded inconsistent with moral perfection. In them we find the perfect features which perfectly combine in the portrait of the Sinless and Holy which the Gospels present to us. How sensitive was His sympathy; He felt the sorrows and pains which He comforted and cured. Matthew may not be quoting the prophet accurately, but he is certainly interpreting the spirit of Jesus correctly in the words, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases" (viii. 17). A touch, however slight and swift, by a woman's hand in the thronging crowd awoke His sense of

another's need. How ready was His response! When He needed to be entreated to heal, there was always some good reason for delay. Sometimes He offered His help before it was asked, as to the impotent man at Bethesda, and the man born blind (John v. 6, ix. 6). There was sacrifice in this service. We do not strain the meaning of the words when we find in Jesus' reference to the power which had gone out of Him a confession that His miracles did cost Him effort, did put a strain on Him, not only physical, but even spiritual; for it is a universal law that the highest forms of service involve the largest measure of sacrifice, and that wherever God works most freely in any personality, there must be the fullest surrender. The miracles did not lessen the self-emptying of the Incarnation, for the conditions for the exercise of the power, intense sympathy with man, and absolute confidence in God, involved the expenditure of spiritual energy, bringing that sense of weakness and weariness, which all such use of the highest powers of the soul demands as its price. The Cross was the sign-manual of Jesus even on His miracles.

11. We may infer that no miracle would be wrought by Him on His own behalf. He could not, consistently with the human limitations accepted in the Incarnation, relieve His own needs, or shield Himself from danger by the use of His miraculous power. Even in this that He might save others He could not save Himself; as He could minister to others He could not minister to Himself. This consideration may be applied in interpreting several incidents. It is improbable, for instance, that in procuring the ass for His entry into Jerusalem, or the upper room for His last Supper with His disciples He used any supernatural power of vision; both incidents are explicable by previous arrangement with friends. For the same reason the words about the *stater* in the fish's mouth (Matt. xvii. 27) should be regarded as a figurative saying about the gains of fishing rather

than as the promise of a miracle. No miracle in His withdrawal from the mob at Nazareth (Luke iv. 30) should be assumed, only the controlling influence of a strong and calm personality over the fickle fury of a crowd. The calming of the storm, and the walking on the sea were not deliverances of Himself from danger; they taught lessons of trust to His disciples. The withering of the fig-tree (Matt. xxi. 18-22, Mark xi. 12-14, 20-24) is the most difficult of all the miracles to explain. Without taking refuge in the assumption that we have here a misunderstood parable (compare Luke xiii. 6-9), we must deny that the act showed impatience or indignation unworthy of His grace, but may suppose that, to impress His disciples, Jesus acted instead of speaking a parable, in symbol executed God's judgment on His unfruitful people. There was not only the severity of disregarded righteousness, but also the pathos of unrequited love and rejected grace in the deed. That miracle, rightly understood, also reveals the heart of Jesus, in which ever dwelt the love of the Eternal Father.

ALFRED E. GARVIE.

ON THE MEANING AND SCOPE OF
JEREMIAH VII. 22, 23.

(CONCLUSION.)

LIKE Hosea vi. 6a so Jeremiah vii. 22 has often been included in the list of passages in which לֹא־יִשְׁׁ is said to express only a *relative negation*. Passing over the earlier representatives of this opinion I may mention only the latest. Giesebrecht, in the *Handcommentar*, on Jeremiah (1894), speaks of the "rhetorical character" of the passage vii. 22, and compares 1 Corinthians i. 17. Hommel¹ also would find in the same passage the clue to the correct in-

¹ *Die altisraelitische Ueberlieferung, etc.*, 1897, p. 16.