

takes to Himself indeed the *work* of Elijah, the "restorer," the preacher of repentance, the raiser from the dead, the gatherer of the outcasts of Israel; but as to His own *personality* says only, "Blessed is he that findeth none occasion of stumbling in me." Then, if we will, we may take the utterance to the multitudes, after the disciples of John had gone their way, in its most exact and literal sense: *αὐτός ἐστιν Ἡλείας ὁ μέλλων ἔρχεσθαι*, "he (John) is *himself* Elias that was to come"; or, as we may venture to paraphrase, Not I, but John himself is the great Restorer, of whose coming he asks. As for *my* personality, blessed is he that will not let it be an impediment to his approbation (cf. verses 16-19) of the work he sees me engaged in.

B. W. BACON.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO ST.
MARK.¹

XXVII. WANDERINGS IN GENTILE LANDS, VII. 24-37,
VIII. 22-26.²

AFTER the bold step described in the last section, Jesus felt it desirable to withdraw from Jewish territory for a time, and betook Himself to the Gentile districts of Tyre and Sidon. He sought not only security, but also rest and seclusion. As St. Mark tells the story, Jesus' recent repudiation of Mosaic Law does not seem to have been premeditated, but rather a spark struck from the mind of Jesus

¹ These studies do not profess to be an adequate historical and doctrinal account of Christ, but are an attempt to set forth the impression which St. Mark's narrative would make on a reader who had no other source of information, and was not acquainted with Christian dogmatics.

² The section VIII. 1-21 is omitted here. It contains the Feeding of the Four Thousand, the Saying as to the Sign from Heaven, and the Discourse on the *two* Feedings. It seems to be out of place in this context; the story of the Four Thousand is apparently another version of that of the Five Thousand; and the section may be a later addition.

in the clash of controversy. When He came to reflect upon His words in cold blood, and realized all that they meant, He would be somewhat startled. At the outset Jesus had sought to remain loyal to Judaism, its worship, organization, and officials; but now He could not be blind to the fact that rejection of the observances as to clean and unclean foods involved a breach with Judaism. As at other crises, Jesus would wish for leisure and quiet to meditate on the path which lay before Him. Possibly He might find in a Gentile district a welcome obscurity which would be impossible amongst Jews; and the abominations of the heathen might stimulate His zeal for the Law of Israel. Accordingly He went northwards into the districts of Tyre and Sidon. With Divine simplicity Jesus supposed that He would not be recognized, that men would pass without notice the face from whose eyes the love of God looked out upon the world. He came to some Phoenician town, found a lodging there, and hoped to be left to Himself; but He was disappointed, "He could not be hid." If He had hoped to renew His zeal for Judaism, He was disappointed in that also, for His first experience in Gentile territory tended to draw Him farther away from the Law. He was found out by a woman who was "a Greek, a Syrophenician"—St. Mark is careful to make it quite clear that she was a Gentile. She had a daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit, and she came to Jesus for deliverance and cleansing. His answer suggests that His recent utterance as to foods had led to a reaction of feeling which made Him hesitate to do anything which might seem to imply lack of loyalty to the Chosen People and their religion.

"Let the children first be filled," He said, "for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."

"Yea, Lord," she answered, "even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs."

Her humility might have soothed the sectarian jealousy

of the most bigoted Pharisee, and before such an appeal the kindly nature of Jesus was helpless ; He surrendered unconditionally.

“For this saying,” said He, “go thy way ; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.”

And she went home and found it so.

Natural and inevitable as the conduct of Jesus was, it involved another important development away from strict Judaism. He had hardly ventured beyond the borders of Jewry when He found that He must extend His mission of healing to the Gentiles. Clearly, therefore, unless barriers were built round Palestine, and all Gentiles kept outside, and all disciples of Jesus inside, the message of the Kingdom would reach the Gentiles and they would demand admission. Moreover, the phrase “let the children *first* be fed” shows that Jesus had been meditating on this problem. Israel had a prior claim, but the turn of the Gentiles would come ; by-and-by, when He had more light and wider experience, He would fix the time. At the first shock the woman’s appeal seemed premature, an unwarrantable attempt to force His hand ; a moment later He realized that new light and wider experience had come, and He discerned and followed the Divine leading.

After this incident Jesus left the neighbourhood of Tyre and went northwards along the coast to Sidon ; passed through that city, and then turned inland to the south-west, and made His way to Decapolis, the half-Gentile district east of the Sea of Galilee. We are told nothing more of His journey ; there was no proclaiming of the message in these Gentile lands ; and, no doubt, as He got further from home, He found leisure to think out anew His relation to Judaism and also to the world.

When He reached Decapolis, and only the lake separated Him from the scene of His active ministry, we find Him once more surrounded by a multitude. There was brought

to Him a deaf man with an impediment in his speech. The case presented special difficulties. Faith was usually a condition of healing; how could a deaf man's faith be quickened? Jesus took him aside privately; put His fingers in his ears; spat, and touched his tongue. By such gestures, by looks, and by general manner, Jesus suggested to the sufferer that he was about to be healed, and made a successful appeal to his faith. Then He looked up to heaven and sighed, and said to him, "Be opened"; and the man's ears were opened and his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. Once again Jesus made a futile attempt to keep His gifts of healing a secret but "the more He charged them, the more they published it."

One or two features of the incident just dealt with are best considered in connexion with the next¹ incident, the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. Probably this is the Bethsaida to the north-east of the Sea of Galilee, and both these cures were wrought in half-Gentile districts and perhaps upon Gentiles. The two incidents are also similar in other respects. In both (i.) the patient was brought to Jesus; (ii.) He took him apart to some retired spot; He took the blind man outside the village. As we have seen before, Jesus seeks strength for His mighty works in retirement, and does not rely upon the stimulus of an excited and expectant crowd. (iii.) Blindness, like deafness, hindered the appeal to the man's faith; he could not *see* Jesus, or feel the influence of His expression, and especially of His eyes. Hence in this case, also, Jesus seeks to stimulate faith by His acts and gestures; He spit on his eyes and laid His hands on them.

(iv.) The use of spittle in these two cases seems to be a use of means, like the anointing with oil by the disciples on their mission. Saliva was regarded in the east as having healing power. Here, therefore, is another illustration of

¹ See the note at the beginning of this section.

the fact that neither Jesus, nor the disciples, nor the Evangelist drew any sharp line between the natural and the supernatural. The essence of the "mighty work" was not exactly that which we call miraculous. It was a "mighty work," a "sign," a "wonder," something that no ordinary man could do; but no one thought of the "laws of nature" and their relation to such deeds, nor did the use of means affect the impression made.

(v.) In the previous case the sigh of Jesus is a sign of effort on His part; and here the effort is still more marked. At first the cure was only partial. "Dost thou see aught?" said Jesus; and the man looked up and said, "I see men, for I behold them as trees walking." A second exertion of healing energy was necessary; again He laid His hands upon his eyes, this time with complete success; the man exerted himself to look, and was restored, and saw everything clearly. The record of effort and of temporary partial failure is another illustration of the frankness of the Evangelist.

(vi.) Finally, there was yet another effort to keep an act of healing secret. Jesus sent the man away to his home, saying, "Do not even enter into the village."

XXVIII. PETER'S CONFSSION, VIII. 27-IX. 1.

From the time when Jesus repudiated the Levitical doctrine of clean and unclean meats, He had avoided the scenes of His earlier ministry and the centres of Jewish population; He had been wandering in Phœnician territory as far north as Sidon, and He had appeared in the Gentile district of Decapolis; He now turned north again to the village of Caesarea Philippi, which was practically a Greek city.

On the way thither He held a conversation with His disciples, which was the supreme crisis of the religious history of the race. A time was chosen when perfect privacy could

be secured. The hospitality of an Eastern village was public. When it was known that the sheikh was entertaining strangers, his guest-chamber was thronged with neighbours. Hence it was on the journey itself, at some solitary part of the road, probably when they were resting in some secluded spot, that Jesus put a crucial question to the disciples. Gradually He had been compelled to abandon all expectation of winning the nation at large or its religious leaders, and His hopes had become more and more centred in His immediate followers. Now the time had come for Him to test this last hope. He began with a preliminary question: "Who do men say that I am?" St. Mark has already¹ given the answer in words almost identical with those which we find here. All were agreed that He was no mere man, but that in Him the spirit of some ancient worthy lived again; He might be Elijah, or some other of the prophets, or possibly John the Baptist. Even now it seemed as if no one—except the demoniacs—thought of Him as the Messiah. But the Jews were very ready to welcome pretenders to Messiahship, so that their failure to ascribe this title to Jesus is remarkable. It measures alike the success and the failure of His popular ministry; He had succeeded in teaching the people that He was not the mere conqueror and king of the vulgar imagination; but He had failed to convince them that they ought to change their ideas of the Messiah, and that the true Messiah would be a spiritual hero and redeemer.

One hope was left. How far had the Apostles understood Him? "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter, spokesman as usual, answered, "Thou art the Messiah."

The Evangelist implies that Jesus accepted the title, that He Himself therefore had become conscious that He was the Messiah, and that He desired that His disciples should believe in His Messiahship. It is easy to understand that

¹ Mark vi. 15 f.

the disciples would be ready to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah if He gave them the least encouragement. His repudiation of popular ideas could not neutralize the effect of His personality on those who knew Him best. They might not know how to reconcile His teaching or His policy with what they had learnt as to the expected Saviour and King ; but they felt no lower, no less unique rank, could properly belong to Him.

But the reader whose impressions we are trying to reconstruct would also ask how Jesus came to believe Himself the Messiah, and what He understood by the term. St. Mark has given no explanations, neither does he quote any saying of Jesus on either topic. Probably he would not feel that the data enabled him to answer these questions satisfactorily ; but the kind of answers suggested might be somewhat as follows. The social position and education of Jesus imply that His ideas would start from the popular views of the Messiah as the social and religious reformer and the restorer of the independence and empire of Israel. Some such words would serve as a common formula for the ideas of the Jews in general as to the Messiah ; but the ideas would be variously shaped and coloured in the minds of different individuals. For Jesus of Nazareth, the Reformer and Saviour, would become an ideal figure corresponding to the nobility of His nature. How then did Jesus come to identify Himself with this ideal ? We can hardly think that Messiahship was looked upon as a destination to which a youth of exceptional endowments might naturally aspire ; and no careful reader of St. Mark's Gospel could credit Jesus with such reasoning as "Because I am specially gifted I must be the Messiah." Nevertheless there had been much in His experience to make Him feel that He was marked out from other men ; He found that He possessed unique powers over the bodies, minds, and souls of men ; He had a sense of close fellowship with God as His Father ;

and in the experiences of the Baptism and the Temptation He had realized that He was the beloved Son entrusted with a supreme Divine mission. Doubtless, too, the idea that He was the Messiah was often suggested to Him from without, as when John the Baptist spoke of Him as "He that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." But, according to St. Mark, such suggestions were made most frequently and explicitly by demoniacs, whose utterances would hardly be recognized by Jesus as a Divine intimation; though it might well be supposed that demons possessed supernatural knowledge. Perhaps some clue may be found in the position of this incident in St. Mark; it comes when the complete failure of the public ministry was patent, when Jesus had been compelled to withdraw for a time into Gentile territory, and when His most recent acts of healing had only been accomplished after special effort. Then, and not till then, did He seek and obtain from His disciples a recognition of His Messiahship. May we not believe that His experience of failure led Him to ponder afresh the story of those whom Israel had rejected before Him—Jeremiah, the Servant of Jehovah, Job—such reflections would suggest that the triumphant inauguration of a new era might not be part of the work of an ideal teacher, reformer, and redeemer—at any rate till his earthly career had ended in apparent failure; such examples would rather suggest that death, even a disgraceful death, might be the means by which the Messiah would accomplish His mission. The conviction of His Divine commission and the assurance of final achievement remained unshaken. Three courses were open to Him: either to seek safety by abandoning His mission and withdrawing into obscurity; or to bate somewhat of His ideals and compromise with popular expectations by trying to play the part of a more spiritually-minded Judas Maccabaeus; or to declare publicly that He, rejected

as He had been by the people, by the religious leaders, by His fellow-townsmen and His own family, that He was the Messiah, and to accept the fate which would be the prompt answer to such a claim. To follow this last course was the only way to perpetuate the influence of His personality and to secure the fruits of His ministry for Israel and for the world. Thus the call to the Messiahship came in the form of an appeal to Him to sacrifice His life for God and man. The most modest soldier may offer to lead a forlorn hope when no one else is able or willing. Emerson wrote once: "I am only a sort of lieutenant in the deplorable absence of captains." There may have been a time when some such words might have expressed the feelings of Jesus, but there are crises when it is criminal for a born leader of men to profess to be a mere lieutenant, and to refuse the responsibility of captaincy. Jesus, therefore, avowed Himself the Messiah, the Captain of the world's salvation.

This conversation was the crucial moment of a supreme crisis, and Peter recognized its importance. Surely now the Master would assert Himself and would use His miraculous powers to drive out the Romans, to restore the independence of Israel, and establish the Kingdom of God. But Peter was once more disappointed in Jesus; once more He failed, in the Apostle's judgment, to rise to the occasion. He bade the disciples tell no one of His Messiahship; He would choose His own time for the avowal which would be the signal of His doom; and He must first prepare them for the tragic ending of their hopes. He began to teach them that He must endure much suffering, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be put to death. The "elders and chief priests and scribes" represented the ruling classes at Jerusalem, the Jewish government as far as the Jews had a government—chiefly in matters ecclesiastical—the official priesthood of the Temple, and the other classes which made up the Sanhedrim. At one time Jesus

had hoped to win over the official heads of the people ; but He soon found that such hopes were futile. The Sanhedrim consisted of Pharisees and Sadducees ; the Pharisees had rejected Him at the outset ; and the Sadducees were the party of the Jerusalem priesthood. Jesus must have discovered early in His career that ecclesiastical dignitaries do not sympathize with the reformer who disturbs a comfortable *status quo*. The Pharisees, being in a sense the opposition, would have welcomed a Messiah after their own heart who would have placed them in power ; but the Sadducaic priestly government had no use for a Messiah. His appearance would have been as obnoxious to them as the return of an absent sovereign to a council of regency. If Jesus presented Himself in Jerusalem as the Messiah, He thrust upon the priesthood the alternative of acknowledging or suppressing Him ; and virtually compelled them to put Him to death. All this Jesus understood ; yet as He explained to His disciples His purpose of crowning His ministry by the sacrifice of His life, there arose before Him perhaps for the first time a vision of the glorious future which lay beyond. When He had told them that the Son of Man must die, He added, " And after three days He shall rise again."

St. Mark notes that Jesus spake " openly " ; He did not veil His meaning in parables. Hence the prompt protest of Peter, who took His Master aside and began to rebuke Him. The Apostle's conduct suggests that he was an older man than Jesus. It is easy to imagine the nature of the Apostle's rebukes :—if Jesus were the Messiah, it was absurd to suppose that He was to die as a criminal ; such an idea could only be due to the morbid depression of a moment of reaction from the exaltation and exultation due possibly to Peter's recognition of Him as the Messiah ; Peter, the decided practical Peter, had noticed such tendencies before ; he would feel called upon to rebuke His

Master's weakness, and to brace His spirit at the turning-point of his career. Peter's vigorous common sense would grope helplessly for the possible motives behind the extraordinary utterance of Jesus; but his rebuke frankly suggested that if the Master came to an untimely end, it would be due to some fault of temper or judgment on His own part.

Thus for the moment Peter's zeal and affection ranged him with the worst enemies of His Master. After an inner struggle Jesus had accepted death and apparent failure, and had committed Himself to this sacrifice by His words to His disciples. He would be worn by the effort of decision and threatened with reaction; the insinuating voices of invisible tempters told Him that His sacrifice was futile and foolish. Now His faithful friend and devoted follower unconsciously made himself the spokesman of these powers of darkness. Jesus broke from him, and turned and looked back to the other disciples; doubtless they thought what only Peter had ventured to say, and His reply was for them also. In His turn he rebuked Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou judgest as men judge, and not as God judges."

The next paragraph describes an address to the multitude with the disciples which can hardly have been delivered immediately after the rebuke to Peter, but is nevertheless the sequel to the conversation which has just been considered. Jesus was preoccupied with His coming death; for the first time He refers to the Cross; He seems to be preaching to Himself as much as to the people. He had been tempted to save His life for noble ends, but "whosoever would save his life should lose it"—to have drawn back now would have destroyed the whole value of His ministry. "Whosoever shall lose his life for the sake of the Gospel¹ shall save it."

¹ The words "for my sake" are not certainly part of the original text.

Naturally, however, the words of Jesus are equally adapted to the audience He addressed : the disposition which led Peter to rebuke Jesus for His intended sacrifice might lead him to shrink from sacrifice himself; and Peter was a type. Hence Jesus insisted that His own conduct was to be an example to the disciples. They too were to deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Him. If they were tempted to deny the condemned criminal as their Master, they were to be encouraged by the assurance that the Son of Man would be manifested in glory.

Another saying is given here to the effect that this assurance did not refer to some indefinitely remote future: "There were some amongst the bystanders who would live to see the Kingdom of God come with power."

W. H. BENNETT.