

beginner, and I was lifted up and linked on to him. That was gentleness, and it made me great. It saw not the copy only. It was not ashamed of the blundering little pupil; it came down to be a child that it might help the child up towards the artist. Look at it. Is not that the very gospel of God? God hath made Himself one with us that He may make us one with Himself.—MARK GUY PEARSE.

**Tempted like as we are.**—They tell us that in some trackless lands, when one friend passes through the pathless forests, he breaks a twig ever and anon as he goes, that those who come after may see the traces of his having been there, and may know that they are not out of the road. Oh, when we are journeying through the murky night and the dark woods of affliction and sorrow, it is something to find here and there a spray broken or a leafy stem bent down with the tread of Christ's foot, and the brush of His hand as He passed, and to remember that the path He trod He has hallowed, and that there are lingering fragrances and hidden strengths in the remembrance, 'in all points tempted as we are,' bearing grief for us, bearing grief with us, bearing grief like us.—A. MACLAREN.

THE sin lies not in evil solicitation, but in sympathy with the solicitation, in the wish that it might be yielded to, that the gratification were possible. We do not conquer temptation when we merely refuse to yield to it, when some urging of conscience, some fear of consequences, some sense of stern law restrains us. A man may not dare to do, and yet may wish that he might do. A man conquers temptation only when his very desire repels it, when his whole nature rises up against its wrong, when the sense of law is lost in strong moral feeling, and he would not do it if he might. This was our Lord's victory; His entire soul was antagonistic to wrong. The tempter had nothing in Him. It follows from this that a moral nature suffers from temptation in proportion as it is pure and perfect. It is not the mere temptation that causes the suffering, but the moral refinements and sensitiveness of the nature that is tempted. It may abhor the suggestion, may be far removed from all fear of yielding to it, and yet from its very perfection suffer most intensely. In this way Christ suffered being tempted. His power of suffering from evil suggestion was infinitely greater than that

of a man whose feeling is tainted by sinful sympathy; just as some men are both physically, emotionally, and morally far more sensitive than other men. The greatest nature is capable of the greatest feeling; the purest nature endures the most from the suggestion of sin.—H. ALLON.

WHEN man was foiled in Paradise, he fell  
From that fair spot, thenceforward to confess  
The barren and the thorny wilderness  
Was the one place where he had right to dwell.  
And therefore in the wilderness as well  
The second Adam did that strife decide,  
And those closed gates again set open wide,  
Victorious o'er the wiles and strength of hell.  
Thou wentest to the proof, O fearless Lord,  
Even to the desert as Thy battlefield,  
A champion going of his free accord:  
We had no fears, for, unlike him of old,  
Who lost that battle for us, Thou did'st wield  
Arms of unearthly temper, heavenly mould.

R. C. TRENCH.

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## The Judaean Ministry of Jesus.

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### IV.

#### The Teaching in the House.

NICODEMUS and his contemporaries lived at the crisis of the religious history of the world, and were standing on the threshold of the expected kingdom of God. They ought to have been prepared for it, by a just understanding of the Scriptures, and now by a fresh testimony, in their

own day, appealing to the conscience and the heart. For the want of this preparation this teacher of Israel has received a just reproof; and then the discourse passes on to disclose the situation, by a larger announcement of advancing revelation, with intimation of the responsibilities

which attend it. The Amen, Amen, for the third time repeated, denotes the certainty and importance of this communication. Few and brief are the pregnant sentences which mark, first, the actual level which the divine teaching has reached, and then the higher level to which it is to rise in the word and work of the Son of man, who now appears, far above the rank of teachers sent from God, in His own person through the mystery of His nature, uniting heaven and earth, and therefore the revealer of heavenly things and achiever of redemption for mankind.

'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but He that descended out of heaven, the Son of man, which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life.'

First it is said, There is a testimony already before you, and you receive it not. Nicodemus is addressed as representing 'the Jews,' and especially his own class, the Pharisees and leaders of opinion. Plainly these are the persons intended in the plural forms of *Ye* and *You*. It is not so easy to say, on the other side, who are included in our Lord's exceptional use of the plural forms *We* and *Our*. What is the testimony of which He speaks? and who are they that give it? In respect of this testimony, Jesus ranks Himself with others, or associates others with Himself. The variety of suggestions by leading commentators shows the difficulty that has been felt. Great names might be cited as supposing the intention to express the partnership of the Holy Spirit, of the prophets, of John the Baptist, or of the disciples then present; in which last interpretation Godet and Westcott are content, yet scarcely content, to acquiesce. But these had been His disciples but a few weeks, and had scarcely spoken yet. In offering an explanation of my own, I have the comfort of thinking that it includes those which have been mentioned, the first two virtually and the second two definitely. It appears to me that Jesus makes Himself here the Spokesman of the great religious movement of the time, authenticating the witness which it

bears. I use the term 'movement' in the sense which it has obtained among us, as for divers religious revivals or reforming efforts in the Middle Ages, for the early developments of the Reformation, or for the Wesleyan, the Evangelical, or the Oxford movements. It expresses that stage of rising opinion not yet a society, a sect, or a school, which is distinguished by certain prominent doctrines and pregnant ideas, which has a bond of union and a life and spirit of its own, and finds its forms of expression in significant words and acts. Such a movement there was then in Israel, and it was the great phenomenal fact of the time. It originated in the preaching of John, or rather in the Spirit which was upon him, and which by a spiritual contagion wrought around him in other hearts, finding expressive shape in his baptism. To this movement Jesus joined Himself on His first appearance, submitting to its baptism, and receiving His first disciples from its ranks. It was, in fact, the ordained preparation of His way. But before elevation to the higher level, it was itself a substantive doctrine and definite development of faith and righteousness, in striking contrast with the prevailing system. How distinct was its character and how intense its vitality may be judged, not only from the contemporary notices, but from its appearances in after years, on the edges, as it were, of the Christian Church, in such instances as Apollos and the twelve converts at Ephesus. It was a confession of moral and spiritual truth which a later writer calls 'the foundation' doctrine and 'the word of the beginning of Christ' (He 6<sup>1,2</sup>). This testimony the Lord identifies with His own, and avers that it is inspired by conscious certainty and the vision of truth. 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.' No; 'the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God,' and turned it 'against themselves.'

But in the teaching of Jesus, Nicodemus has felt the attraction of this witness, as well as seen its credentials in His works, and therefore is he here. To him accordingly the higher communications may be made; but they involve a preliminary condition. 'If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?' The *We* is now changed to *I*, the united testimony to the personal ministry. That has been hitherto a ministry of earthly things,

so called by comparison. Its subjects are ἐπίγεια, not earthly in their nature, but having their origin and sphere here below in human conscience and active life. On this moral world the word of Jesus has thrown a fresh light of truth and grace, of the kind which on a larger scale and in fuller form the Sermon on the Mount exhibits. A greater light is now to come in the revelation of heavenly things,—truths which transcend natural thought, only to be known by communication from above, having their origin in the counsels of God, and their effect in a divine economy of salvation. Those who do not receive the first teaching, are, in the nature of the case, still less able to believe the second. Both are indeed necessary to each other, and in the complete revelation form together the doctrine of Christ, not to be separated either in delivery or reception.

But who is it that speaks thus? That is one question in the mind of Nicodemus, indeed the chief question; and it becomes more urgent, now that the Speaker makes these larger claims on faith. Who can tell heavenly things but one who hath gone up to heaven to see and learn them there? The question is anticipated and the answer is supplied, 'And no man hath gone up into heaven, but He that came down out of heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven.' The exception made is more than an exception. It announces a far more intimate and mysterious relation to heaven than the question seemed to postulate. Conceivably a man might be taken up into heaven (2 Co 12<sup>2</sup>); but earth would be his home, and heaven a place that he visited; but he that comes down from heaven has his proper home there, and earth is the place that he visits. If such a one tells heavenly things, he does so, not from a transient sight granted to him, but from his own inherent knowledge of the world to which he belongs. Heaven is his origin and dwelling-place, and thither will he necessarily return, for the coming down for a purpose implies the going up when it is accomplished. It is of Himself that Jesus predicates these things, and, in so doing, names Himself 'the Son of man.' So He distinguishes Himself among all the millions of the sons of men, asserting a perfect manhood, but yet implying a manhood assumed, in fact, revealing Incarnation.

The words, 'which is in heaven' (ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ), are doubtful, the weight of evidence

being as much against as for them. 'But whether original or a very early insertion, they affirm the truth that the Son of man on earth had not only a past but an ever-present relation with heaven, in the Eternal Life with the Father, which is not itself suspended by being manifested to us (1 Jn 1<sup>2</sup>). Of all heavenly things revealed the greatest, and that on which all else depends, is the mystery of the nature of the Revealer. So the Son of man 'come down from heaven,' or 'come forth from the Father,' is the keynote of His revelations, as to the Jews in a critical contention (6<sup>38-51</sup>), or to the disciples in those last affirmations, to which they respond, as with fresh and final assurance, We believe that Thou camest forth from God (16<sup>28-30</sup>).

He has come down from heaven, He has become the Son of man, and for what end? To be Revealer? Yes, but also Redeemer; not only to tell of heavenly things, but also to achieve them; to work out in His own person the counsels and decrees of heaven. One word declares the necessity, δεῖ, it must be so. In order to accomplish the purpose of God, to fulfil the promise of prophecy, and to satisfy the needs of men, 'The Son of man *must* be lifted up' (ὑψωθῆναι δεῖ). What this lifting up will be in its entire process, events will prove; but its first stage will be the lifting up upon the cross. That is a chief end of Incarnation, the decisive event in the manifestation on which all else depends. Therefore does Jesus keep it in view through all His course as the predestined and accepted goal to which His steps advanced. This appears in many a saying on the way, and here in words which show it present to His mind from the very beginning of His ministry. That the Son should be lifted up above the world, raised on high in the sight of men, was a thing to be expected; but who could have imagined exaltation in such a form as this? Yet this is the form in which the prospect is ever before Him, and this is the sense in which He speaks of being lifted up; as when He says, to the Jews, as agents in the fact, 'When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know.' (Jn 8<sup>28</sup>); and again, when the hour was near, 'Now shall the Prince of this world be cast out, and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself' (12<sup>32</sup>). To interpret and fix the meaning, the evangelist adds, 'This He said, signifying by what manner of death He should die.' The word

may be used afterwards by apostles (as Ac 11<sup>36</sup>) of the subsequent elevation to glory, but in the mouth of Jesus it had the distinct reference which is marked in these sayings, and even more distinctly in the similitude here employed. It expressed the manner of death, the visible elevation on the cross, a spectacle for evermore; but it also expressed the unseen exaltation in the victory thereon achieved over the Power of evil, in the redemption of the world, and the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. As the true exaltation of the conqueror is in the dread moment of decision on the bloodstained field, more than in the splendours of the after-triumph, even so it is here. It would have been hard to foreshadow in words the mystery of that death, what it would be in itself and what it would be to men. But both had been vividly exhibited in a typical scene of old. Nicodemus knew it well. It was therefore enough to say, 'And as Moses lifted up (ὑψώσεν) the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up (ὑψωθήναι δεῖ), that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life—or, whosoever believeth in Him may have eternal life.' A strange exaltation this! represented by a serpent, a creature noxious and abhorred, at that very time dealing death around,—but a brazen serpent, itself innoxious, placed on high and hanging on a tree,—by the will and ordinance of God imparting life and health to despairing dying men, who in new-born hope turn their eyes towards it. How exact the type of One counted as an evil-doer, and condemned and gibbeted as such in the sight of all, Himself without sin, yet, 'in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin,' 'made sin for us,' and 'bearing our sins in His own body on the tree.' The eyes of men who feel themselves in death are fixed upon Him; the poison of sin that is in them is stayed of its effect, and it comes to pass that they live. The look is the look of faith, the life is life eternal. There is some uncertainty as to the reading of the closing words. 'Should not perish' is certainly to be omitted; but there is doubt whether to read (εἰς αὐτὸν or ἐν αὐτῷ) 'believe in Him,' or 'in Him have life,' though the last reading is slightly the more probable. In either case the meaning is the same, for the faith supposed is faith in Christ, and the life assured is life in Christ. Once only in the O.T. had the great word Eternal Life been heard (Dan 12<sup>2</sup>). Now it is spoken by Him who

is the Author and Giver of that life, its author by the act of redemption, its Giver in the dispensation of grace. Thenceforth it is often on His lips, as expressing a future inheritance which is also a present possession. It seized on men's minds with attractive power. Inquirers came to ask, 'What must I do to have eternal life?' Disciples, tempted to depart, could not leave His side, saying, 'To whom shall we go? words of eternal life Thou hast.' Vague and vast was the idea, beyond definition and exposition, but it recognized the deepest needs and responded to the highest desires of the human heart, and became the supreme hope which the teaching of Jesus inspired.

Here, then, in this short passage we have the first utterance by the Lord of the foundation truths of His kingdom,—Incarnation, uniting earth with heaven; Redemption by the Cross and Passion, and Eternal Life given to believers. The conversation here recorded is thus an anticipatory answer to the speculations in which recent writers have indulged on changes in the mind of Jesus and suppositions of an advance from the position of a spiritual teacher to Messianic pretensions and transcendental claims. It is shown that all the history and all the doctrine were known to Him from the beginning. Then, in the retirement of the house and the stillness of night, the outline of the future gospel was delivered to an inquiring Pharisee and in the audience of some listening disciples. Were these heavenly things enigmas to him and to them? Largely so, no doubt. It was in enigma, paradox, and parable that the Lord saw fit to open His revelations of things which were beyond men's apprehension at the time; since these communications rested and wrought in minds which received them, awakening wonder and stimulating thought, and unfolding themselves in measure, till events unfolded them in fulness. So we may be sure it was in the present instance. The narrative ends abruptly, the writer passing to his own reflections; for he had not the purpose to describe an interview, but to record the great sayings which occurred in the course of it. We are not told how it ended, or how Nicodemus was dismissed. Only we know what words he carried away to ponder in his heart during the following years in which the kingdom of God was being preached by Him who came down from heaven, up to the darkened day when he saw the Son of

man lifted up, and the type in the wilderness fulfilled on Calvary. Then he came to join his fellow-councillor in laying the sacred body in the tomb. The evangelist notes his prodigal supply of spices for the burial. It was all the honour he could show. But they were not needed. The Holy One could not see corruption. On the third day Nicodemus would hear strange rumours, which soon became assurance—that the Lord had risen indeed; and, after a while, he with the other disciples would know the meaning of all that had happened, and rejoice in the certainty of faith and the fulness of revealed salvation.

It is from the standpoint of that later time that St. John adds to his record of the memorable interview the words which follow. It is his frequent habit to carry on the thought in his narrative by explanation or reflection, such as accomplished revelation supplied. So it is here; and accordingly there is a sudden change in the language from the prophetic intimation of the discourse to the clear enunciation of truth as known, and to the past tenses proper to a retrospective review. It is not within the present purpose to pass beyond the narrative and comment on the words of the evangelist. But his first words here cannot be passed over. Were they not familiar, they would come upon us as a flash of glory. They are introduced as giving the larger account of things, and as answering questions latent in the final saying. Why must this be? Who is this Son of man? What is this lifting up? How has it virtue for eternal life to men? There is ample reason. '*For*,' says the writer, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world through Him should be saved.' Then follows a review of the situation thus created, in its testing consequences involving the judgment which men pass on themselves. All is seen in the glory of a divine scheme of things. The Son of man is the Only begotten Son of God. God gave Him—not sent Him only, as a messenger, but gave Him, for all that was to be done and borne; and that because He loved the world, so loved it as to bestow this unspeakable gift. It is the great thought of 'the world' on which St. John

insists, four times repeating the word. In like manner, in his Epistle he will not rest in any narrower thought. 'He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world' (1 Jn 2<sup>2</sup>). There is more in this than we can clearly see or tell. But at least there is a healing saving power abroad in a world which dates history from the birth of Christ, and recognizes the attraction of the Cross, and knows that there is a voice of love from heaven. It is a better world for having the witness of the Church and the preaching of the gospel in the midst of it, and for the Christian element in its thought and opinion, its governments and institutions, and for the living presence of true Christians who are its light and its salt. But the purpose of God finds its fulfilment not in the collective life of the world, as it is, or as it may be, but in men who are in the world, each a world in himself, in the mystery of his separate personality. The salvation in the Only begotten Son is a salvation, not for the world, nor for the Church, but for the individual man,—'that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.' The faith and the life are facts in the history of individual souls. The unbelief and the judgment are so too. Alas! the latter fact is the more general, and was so from the first. St. John had seen it in the days of the Son of man, and afterwards, when the scheme of grace was finished and revealed. 'The light,' he says, 'is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light.' In a few searching words he traces back this preference of the darkness and shrinking from the light to its moral origin in the practical admission of evil and the defect of the spirit of truth; and follows it on to its judicial effect in judgment which men pass on themselves. It is a sad review, and is written for our admonition. But it ends by reverting to the better side, and leaves us under the happier thought of 'him that doeth truth and cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God.' So ends the episode of the visit of Nicodemus, in words which, in their application to himself, may serve to distinguish this 'man of the Pharisees' from his class in general, and which remain for ever like a ray of kindly light upon his name.