

THE CHRIST OF PAUL.

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THE Queen of Sheba certainly deserved her exaltation as the Hebrew Athena, and the homage paid to her by Jesus, for journeying so far simply to hear the wisdom of Solomon. In Jewish and Christian folklore are many miraculous tales about the Queen's visit, but in the Biblical records, in the books of "Kings" and "Chronicles," the only miracle is the entire absence of anything marvellous, magical, or even occult. The Queen was impressed by Solomon's science, wisdom, the edifices he had built, the civilisation he had brought about; they exchanged gifts, and she departed. It is a strangely rational history to find in any ancient annals.

The saying of Jesus cited by Clement of Alexandria, "He that hath marvelled shall reign," uttered perhaps with a sigh, tells too faithfully how small has been the interest of grand people in the wisdom that is "clear, undefiled, plain." They are represented rather by the beautiful and wealthy Marchioness in "Gil Blas," whose favor was sought by the nobleman, the ecclesiastic, the philosopher, the dramatist, by all the brilliant people, but who set them all aside for an ape-like hunchback, with whom she passed many hours, to the wonder of all, until it was discovered that the repulsive creature was instructing her ladyship in cabalistic lore and magic.

There is much human pathos in this longing of mortals to attain to some kind of real and intimate perception beyond the phenomenal universe, and to some personal assurance of a future existence; but it has cost much to the true wisdom of this world. Some realisation of this may have caused the sorrow of Jesus at Dalmanutha, as related in Mark. "The Pharisees came forth and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven,

testing him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why does this people seek a sign? I say plainly unto you no sign will be given them. And he left them, and reëntering the boat departed to the other side.”

They who now long to know the real mind of Jesus are often constrained to repeat his deep sigh when they find the most probable utterances ascribed to him perverted by the marvel-mongers, insomuch that to the protest just quoted Matthew adds a self-contradictory sentence about Jonah. That this unqualified repudiation by Jesus of miracles should have been preserved at all in Mark, a gospel full of miracles, is a guarantee of the genuineness of the incident, and of the comparative earliness of some parts of that Gospel. The period of sophistication was not far advanced. Miracles require time to grow. But the deep sigh and the words of Jesus, taken in connexion with the entire absence from the Epistles—the earliest New Testament documents—of any hint of a miracle wrought by him, is sufficient to bring us into the presence of a man totally different from the “Christ” of the four Gospels.¹

Those who seek the real Jesus will find it the least part of their task to clear away the particular miracles ascribed to him; that is easy enough; the critical and difficult thing is to detach from the anecdotes and language connected with him every admixture derived from the belief in his resurrection. To do this completely is indeed impossible.

Paul, probably a contemporary of Jesus, knew well enough the vast difference between the man “Jesus” and the risen “Christ”; he insisted that the man should be ignored, and supplanted by the risen Christ, as revealed by private revelations received by himself after the resurrection. The student now reverses that: for he must ignore those post-resurrectional revelations if he would know Jesus “after the flesh”—that is, the real Jesus.

In an age when immortality is a familiar religious belief we can hardly realise the agitation, among a people to whom life after death was a vague, imported philosophy, excited by the belief that a man had been raised bodily from the grave. Immortality was no longer hypothesis. If to this belief be added the further conviction that this resurrection was preliminary to his speedy reappearance, and the world’s sudden transformation, a mental condition could not fail to arise in which any ethical or philosophical ideas he might have uttered while “in the flesh” must be thrown into

¹ The name Jesus is used here for the man, Christ being used for the supernatural or risen being.

the background, as of merely casual or temporary importance. Such is the state of mind reflected in the Pauline Epistles. In them is found no reference whatever to any moral instructions by Jesus. And when after some two generations had passed, and they who had expected while yet living to meet their returning Lord, had died, those who had heard oral reports and legends concerning him and his teachings began to write the memoranda on which our Synoptical Gospels are based, it was too late to give these without reflexions from the apostolic ecstasy. His casual or playful remarks were by this time discolored and distorted, and enormously swollen, as if under a solar microscope, by the overwhelming conceptions of a resurrection, an approaching advent, a subversion of all nationalities and institutions.

The most serious complication arises from the extent to which the pretended revelations of Paul have been built into the Gospels. The so-called "conversion of Paul" was really the conversion of Jesus. The facts can only be gathered from Paul's letters, the book of "Acts" being hardly more historical than *Robinson Crusoe*. The account in "Acts" of Paul's "conversion" is, however, of interest as indicating a purpose in its writers to raise Paul into a supernatural authority equivalent to that ascribed to Christ, in order that he might set aside the man Jesus. The story is a travesty of that related in the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, concerning the baptism of Jesus: "And a voice out of the heaven saying, 'Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased': and again, 'I have this day begotten thee.' And straightway a great light shone around the place. And when John saw it he saith to him, 'Who art thou, Lord?'" John fell down before Jesus as did Paul before Christ. "At midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them that journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.' And I said, 'Who art thou, Lord?'" (Precisely what John said to Jesus at the baptism.)

This story (Acts xxvi. 13-15), quite inconsistent with Paul's letters, is throughout very ingenious. Besides associating Paul with the supernatural consecration of Jesus, it replies, by calling him Saul, to the Ebionite declaration that Paul had been a Pagan, who had become a Jewish proselyte with the intention of marrying the High Priest's daughter. There is no reason to suppose that Paul was ever called Saul during his life, and his salutation of two

kinsmen in Rome with Latin names, Andronicus and Junia (Romans xvi. 7), renders it probable that he was not entirely Hebrew. The sentence, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad," is a subtle answer to any who might think it curious that the story of the resurrection carried no conviction to Paul's mind at the time of its occurrence by suggesting that in continuing his persecutions he was going against his real belief—kicking against the goad.

Paul, however, knows nothing of this theatrical conversion in his letters. But in severe competition with other "preëminent apostles," who were preaching "another Christ" from his, he pronounces them accursed, supporting an authority above theirs by declaring that he had repeated interviews with the risen Christ, and on one occasion had been taken up into the third heaven and even into Paradise! The extremes to which Paul was driven by the opposing apostles are illustrated in his intimidation of dissenting converts by his pretence to an occult power of withering up the flesh of those whom he disapproves (1 Cor. v. 5). He tells Timothy of two men, Hymenæus and Alexander, whom he thus "delivered over to Satan" that "they may be taught not to blaspheme,"—the blasphemy in this case being the belief (now become orthodoxy) that the dead were not sleeping in their graves but passed into heaven or hell at death. In the book of "Acts" (xiii.) this claim of Paul's seems to have been developed into the Evil Eye (which he fastened on Bar Jesus, whose eyes thereon went out), and may perhaps account for the similar sinister power ascribed to some of the Popes.

In this story of Bar Jesus, Christ is associated with Paul in striking the learned man blind (xiii. 11), and the development of such a legend reveals the extent to which Jesus had been converted by Paul. In 1 Cor. ii. he presents a Christ whose body and blood, being not precisely discriminated in the sacramental bread and wine, had made some participants sickly and killed others, in addition to the damnation they had eaten and drank. He does not mention that any who communicated correctly had been physically benefited thereby; only the malignant powers appear to have had any utility for Paul.

That this menacing Christ may have been needed to intimidate converts and build up churches is probable; that such a being was nothing like Jesus in the flesh, but had to come by pretended posthumous revelation, as an awful potentate whose human flesh had been but a disguise, is certain. We need not, therefore, be surprised to find that nearly everything pharisaic, cruel, and

ungentlemanly, ascribed to Jesus in the synoptical Gospels, is fabricated out of Paul's Epistles. Paul compares rival apostles to the serpent that beguiled Eve (2 Cor. xi. 3, 4), and Christ calls his opponents offspring of vipers. The Fourth Gospel, apostolic in spirit, degrades Jesus independently, but it also borrows from Paul. Paul personally delivered some over to Satan, and the intimation in John xiii. 27, "after the sop, then entered Satan into Judas," accords well with what Paul says about the unworthy communicant eating and drinking damnation (1 Cor. xi. 29).

The Eucharist itself was probably Paul's own adaptation of a Mithraic rite to Christian purposes. There is no reason to suppose that there was anything sanctimonious in the wine supper which Jesus took with his friends at the time of the Passover, and Paul's testimony concerning the way it had been observed is against any sacramental tradition.¹ The two verses preserved by Epiphanius from the Gospel according to the Hebrews show that he desired to draw his friends away from the sacrificial feature of the festival: "Where wilt thou that we prepare for the passover to eat?" . . . "Have I desired with desire to eat this flesh, the passover with you?"² Had it been other than a pleasant wine supper it could not in so short a time have become the jovial festival which Paul describes (1 Cor. xi. 20), nor, in order to reform it, would he have needed the pretense that he had received from Christ the special revelation of details of the Supper which he gives, and which the Gospels have followed. Having substituted a human for an animal sacrifice ("our passover also hath been sacrificed, Christ," 1 Cor. v. 7), he restores precisely that sacrificial feature to which Jesus had objected; and in harmony with this goes on to show that human lives have been sacrificed to the majestic real presence (1 Cor. xi. 30). He had learned, perhaps by "Pagan" experiences, what power such a sacrament might put into the priestly hand.³

¹About 1832 the Rev. Ralph Waldo Emerson notified his congregation in Boston Unitarian that he could no longer administer the "Lord's Supper," and near the same time the Rev. W. J. Fox took the same course at South Place Chapel, London. The Boston congregation clung to the sacrament, and gave up their minister to mankind. The London congregation gave up the sacrament, and there was substituted for it the famous South Place Banquet which was attended by such men as Leigh Hunt, Mill, Thomas Campbell, Jerrold, and such women as Harriet Martineau, Eliza Flower, Sarah Flower Adams (who wrote "Nearer, my God, to Thee"). The speeches and talk at this banquet were of the highest character, and the festival was no doubt nearer in spirit to the supper of Jesus and his friends than any sacrament.

²Dr. Nicholson's *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*, p. 60. In all of my references to this Gospel I depend on this learned and very useful work.

³It has always been a condition of missionary propagandism that the new religion must adopt in some form the popular festivals, cherished observances and talismans of the folk. It will be seen by 1 Cor. x. 14-22 that Paul's eucharist was only a competitor with existing eucharists, with their "cup of devils," as he calls it.

It is Paul who first appointed Christ the judge of quick and dead (1 Tim. iv. 1). He describes to the Thessalonians (2 Thes. 1) "the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God," and "the eternal destruction" of these. Hence, "I never knew you," becomes a formula of damnation put into the mouth of Christ. "I know you not," is the brutal reply of the bridegroom to the five virgins whose lamps were not ready on the moment of his arrival. The picturesque incidents of this parable have caused its representation in pretty pictures which blind many to its essential heartlessness. It is curious that it should be preserved in a Gospel which contains the words, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." The parable is fabricated out of 1 Thes. v., where Paul warns the converts that the Lord cometh as a thief in the night, that there will be no escape for those who then slumber, that they must not sleep like the rest, but watch, "for God hath appointed us not unto wrath."

The Christian dogma of the unpardonable sin, substituted for the earlier idea of an unrepentable sin, was developed out of Paul's fatalism. He writes, "For this cause God sendeth them a strong delusion that they should believe a lie" (2 Thes. ii). Although this is not connected in any Gospel with the inexpiable sin, we find its spirit animating the Paul-created Christ in Mark iv. 11: "Unto them that are without all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand: lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." This is imported from Paul (Rom. xi. 7, 8): "That which Israel seeketh for, that he obtained not; but the elect obtained it and the rest were hardened; according as it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this very day."

Whence came this Christ who in the very chapter where Jesus warns men against hiding their lamp under a bushel, carefully hides his teaching under a parable for the express purpose of preventing some outsiders from being enlightened and obtaining forgiveness?

Jesus could not have said these things unless he plagiarised from Paul by anticipation. Deduct from the Gospels all that has been fabricated out of Paul (I have given only the more salient ex-

amples) and there will be found little or nothing morally revolting, nothing heartless. Superstitions abound, but so far as Jesus is concerned they are nearly all benevolent in their spirit.

But even after we have removed from the Gospels the immoralities of Paul and the pharisaisms so profound as to suggest the proselyte, after we have turned from his Christ to seek Jesus, we have yet to divest him of the sombre vestments of a supernatural being, who could not open his lips or perform any action but in relation to a resurrection and a heavenly office of which he could never have dreamed. Was he

“The faultless monster whom the world ne'er saw?”

Did he never laugh? Did he eat with sinners only to call them to repentance? Did he get the name of wine-bibber for his “salvationism,” or was it because, like Omar Khayyám, he defied the sanctimonious and the puritanical by gathering with the intellectual, the scholarly, the Solomonic clubs?

To Paul we owe one credible item concerning Jesus, that he was originally wealthy (2 Cor. viii. 9), and as Paul mentioned this to inculcate liberality in contributors, it is not necessary to suppose that he alluded to his heavenly riches. At any rate, the few sayings that may be reasonably ascribed to Jesus are those of an educated gentleman, and strongly suggest his instruction in the college of Hillel, whose spirit remained there after his death, which occurred when Jesus was at least ten years old.

To a Pagan who asked Hillel concerning the law, he answered: “That which you like not for yourself do not to thy neighbor, that is the whole law; the rest is but commentary.” It will be observed that Hillel humanises the law laid down in Lev. xix. 18, where the Israelites are to love each his neighbor among “the children of thy people” as himself. Even Paul (Rom. xiii. 8, Gal. v. 14) quotes it for a rule among the believers, while hurling anathema on others. But Jesus is made (Matt. vii. 12) to inflate the rule into the impracticable form of “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them.” By which rule a wealthy Christian would give at least half his property to the first beggar, as he would wish the beggar to do to him were their situations reversed. This might be natural enough in a community hourly expecting the end of the world and their own instalment in palaces whose splendor would be proportioned to their poverty in this world. But when this delusion faded the rule reverted to what Hillel said, and no doubt Jesus also, as we find it in

the second verse of "*Didache*," the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. It is a principle laid down by Confucius, Buddha, and all the human "prophets," and one followed by every gentleman, not to do to his neighbor what he would not like if done to himself. But it is removed out of human ethics and strained *ad absurdum* by the second adventist version put into the mouth of Jesus by Matthew. I have dwelt on this as an illustration of how irrecoverably a man loses his manhood when he is made a God.

Irrecoverably! In the second Clementine Epistle (xii. 2) it is said, "For the Lord himself, having been asked by some one when his kingdom should come, said, When the two shall be one, and the outside as the inside, and the male with the female neither male nor female." Perhaps a humorous way of saying *Never*. Equally remote appears the prospect of recovering the man Jesus from his Christ-sepulchre. Even among rationalists there are probably but few who would not be scandalised by any thorough test such as Jesus is said, in the Nazarene Gospel, to have requested of his disciples after his resurrection, "Take, feel me, and see that I am not a bodiless demon!" Without blood, without passion, he remains without the experiences and faults that mould best men, as Shakespeare tells us; he so remains in the nerves where no longer in the intellect, insomuch that even many an agnostic would shudder if any heretic, taking his life in his hand, should maintain that Jesus had fallen in love, or was a married man, or had children.