

## Caesarea.

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ACTS X.

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### II.

HAVING followed the narrative of the Baptism at Cæsarea, we are left to reflect upon that pregnant story.

The first reflexion is on the immense importance of the event. In the kingdom of Christ it is not an incident, it is a revolution; yet the consummation of a purpose, in which the King, by His own act and deed, enfranchises the whole race of mankind. To us that seems natural. Was not the salvation one for all men? and was it not wrought by the Son of man? Yet it came as a strange unexpected truth to the first citizens of the kingdom. It was 'the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it has now been revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the Body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel' (Eph 3<sup>5,6</sup>). It was a revelation, and this revelation was first made at Cæsarea.

1. In the whole transaction we distinguish the act of the author and that of the agent. We see how the Lord in glory has His hand on the first movements of the gospel, and Himself directs its promulgation to the world. Where there is cause this intervention is made clear, as by the visit of the angel to Cornelius, by the vision and the Spirit to Peter, and by the coming of the Holy Ghost on the hearers of the Word. There was no gainsaying these facts, and the conclusion was inevitable. 'Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life' (11<sup>18</sup>). That Roman baptism carried with it the baptism of converts from every nation under heaven. From that moment it was established that equally for all there is 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism.' At the same time the method taken made it manifest that the divine plan of communication was also a plan of derivation. 'Salvation is of the Jews' in the sense, not of possession, but of origination (*ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων*). 'Theirs were the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the law-giving, and the

service, and the promises; theirs were the fathers, and of them as concerning the flesh Christ came' (Ro 9<sup>4</sup>). Among them He accomplished His work in life and death. There was the birthplace of His Church, and not until sufficient time had been given for settlement of the gospel in Israel was it allowed to pass out into the world. We can see the necessity. Had the Word consisted only of ideas and abstract truths, it might have been sown broadcast at once. But it consists fundamentally in a Person and in facts; then its historic origin is at the root of its life. And this historic origin involves a doctrinal origin, in its inheritance not only of monotheistic truth, but of ideas embodied in a great economy associated with it,—ideas of divine intervention, of election and calling, of redemption and sacrifice, of covenant relation and the predestined Christ—typical and rudimentary elements of the future creed. Thus was it provided that Christianity should come to us in the way of derivation, and the Gentile believer has need to be reminded, 'Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.' In Cæsarea was the first grafting on this root, soon to extend into 'a fruitful field, and the fruitful field to be counted for a forest.' We see this grafting as manifestly the act of God, and its chosen instrument is the chief apostle of the circumcision. His ministry, conspicuous in the foundation of Judaic Christianity, is now employed in the foundation of Gentile Christianity, in fulfilment of the declared purpose, 'I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.' Now the second part of the great fabric is founded, in derivation from and conjunction with the first, the Lord Himself the builder, St. Peter the workman employed.

2. If the narrative is one of divine action, it is one of human action too; and there is much instruction in what St. Peter does and says. He receives intimations, but draws his own conclusions and acts upon them. He shows himself a considerate, open-minded, clear-judging man.

Old ideas do not confuse his mind or make him hesitate under new convictions. These he is ready to receive, prompt to acknowledge, prompt to obey; as we see in the readiness with which he complies with the sudden call, enters into the man's house, utters all his mind, and commands the immediate baptism. His subsequent statements of his reasons for action (11<sup>18</sup>) and of his view of the whole matter (15<sup>7-12</sup>) show with what clearness he remembered his Lord's words and apprehended his Lord's will.

His address on this unique and momentous occasion has its suggestive lessons, though the abstract is brief in the extreme, and the discourse is abruptly cut short. We have observed in the first sentences the sudden break in which, having begun with language natural to himself, he changes his tone to suit his hearers. There is double suggestion here. To whomsoever the Christian preacher speaks, he needs to have present to his own mind the full sense of the gospel as it is in itself and as it is to him, the revealed Word sent from God to Israel, 'good tidings of peace through Jesus Christ.' That is the heading of the chapter, and that will be its conclusion, though in particular cases it may have to be unfolded by degrees. Again, in the foundation word, '*ye know*,' there is a lesson to all teachers, to take that which is already known as the basis of what they have to communicate, and to appeal to what is in men's thoughts, in order to lead them further into truth. The abstract given of the discourse shows sufficiently how that which was partially known was set forth in fulness and put in its true light, with the power of original witness to all that was done in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, and in the manifestations which attested the Resurrection. And so it is for evermore. The gospel revelation is always 'the Word which began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached,' based on historic facts and actual events 'in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem.' All teaching and preaching has its source and power in the scenes and incidents of that brief life on earth, in the words and acts of Jesus of Nazareth, sealed and certified by the resurrection from the dead.

From the manifestation in the world the discourse ascends to the Judge and Saviour in heaven. St. Peter said afterwards that he was arrested when he '*began to speak*' by a power

greater than his word; but he had time to impress two foundation truths of the relations of Christ with men, and to set us an example to do the same. We may note the orders of these truths. He claims allegiance before he testifies forgiveness. We place the judgment of quick and dead far on in the Creed, at the end of human history. But the office is not assumed in the day of its consummation. It is the present prerogative of the Lord as head and ruler of the moral life of man among the living and among the dead. 'Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether therefore we live or die, we are the Lord's' (Ro 14<sup>8</sup>). Our relations are with Him to whom 'the Father hath given all judgment' in both stages of our existence, as will be fully and finally manifested in the day of His appearing (Jn 5<sup>22-29</sup>). This truth, which He testified Himself, He charged His apostles to testify, with all its consequences to conscience, character, and conduct. It may be questioned whether it has quite the place in our missions and ministries which St. Peter gives it in his opening of the gospel message to men, to whom it was new.

That message blossoms out in a moment into the grace which is a gospel indeed—the grace which is the first necessity to the awakened soul—the grace of forgiveness. It is found in the same Person who is ordained as Judge; it is bestowed through His name; it is enjoyed by the believer in Him. Never were the several points in the doctrine of forgiveness more distinctly and compactly given than they are here. They await development in the larger teaching which will follow, and in the experience of the first hearers, and in that of unnumbered souls. They are too large for present reflexion. One thing only it is right to notice as bearing on the preaching of our times,—St. Peter's appeal to prophecy. He is himself the proclaimer of this forgiveness; but associates with himself a larger company: 'To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.' Why the prophets? and this in an address to Gentiles! The great evangelical promise shall not appear as a novelty. Has it not been transmitted through all generations assuring the gracious purpose of God to meet the deep necessity of man? As promise, it has shed its comfort on every age; but as prophecy,

it bears directly on the Person and Work of Messiah. 'In Him we have redemption—the forgiveness of our sins' (Col 1<sup>14</sup>), not only as publishing it, which the prophets did, but as procuring it, which they did not. There was a twofold reason for this introduction of the prophets. They expressed the old faith and expectation of Israel, and they extended the participation in it to the Gentiles.

'The words spoken by the prophets were not for themselves alone, nor for their own countrymen or contemporaries alone, but for the Gentiles, and for the whole future. In making known the appearance of the Messiah, the apostles found the old prophetic Word endowed with new power and instructiveness, as the Acts and Epistles abundantly attest. Its place in their teaching is distinctly marked, Rom. xvi. 26. Their faith was not a new religion, but a new stage in the old religion of Israel, and it derived a large part of its claim to acceptance from this appeal to the past in conjunction with the present. The dream of a Christianity without Judaism soon arose, and could not but arise; but, though it could make appeal to a genuine zeal for the purity of the gospel, it was in effect an abrogation of apostolical Christianity. When robbed of his Messiahship, our Lord became an isolated portent, and the true meaning of faith in Him was lost' (Hort, *Notes on 1 Peter*, p. 57).

St. Peter's view of prophecy is known, illustrated in his earliest speeches in the Acts, thought out and impressed in his latest writings (1 P 1<sup>11-12</sup>, 2 P 1<sup>19-21</sup>). As there explained, it has ever been held in the Church, and some tendencies of present criticism detracting from it definiteness and fulness warn us to hold it fast. In the occasion at Cæsarea it was natural indeed that the prophets should be in his thoughts, for he was in the act of fulfilling their predictions. The day which they foretold for the nations was breaking before his eyes.

He knew it was so when the Spirit fell on those who heard the word. That gift at Cæsarea corresponded to the pentecostal gift at Jerusalem. That was not a single event, but the manifestation of a new order of things. It was a *baptism* which constituted the Church. This also had like meaning and effect for Gentile believers, as being equally a part of the whole Society, 'buildd together for an habitation of God in the Spirit.' The sudden and sensible illapse of the Spirit was to these first converts the seal of their faith and the sign of their acceptance, being also their first experience of a power which dwelt in the kingdom they were entering. It was a revelation of the will of God, yet such as to make a demand on the

intelligence and concurrence of the apostle. He acted on his own judgment and responsibility when he drew the practical conclusion, without any question of preliminary proselytism or circumcision, 'Can any man forbid the water that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?' What passed in his mind he tells us afterwards (1 P 1<sup>16</sup>). He remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, and saw that this perceptible gift of the Spirit was a baptism, a passage from one spiritual state to another. But the sacramental act had its part in the passage, an effective part; and to withhold it would be a withstanding of God. 'What was I that I should withstand God?' He was not going to count the symbolical act superseded and superfluous. To him the water had by divine ordinance an essential part in the new birth of those who 'enter into the kingdom of God.' After that the question of Gentile baptism was closed. Only there was soon a strong effort to recover the lost ground, by the contention that one who was baptized should also be circumcised, and that one who had become a Christian should also become a Jew. On this question St. Peter became the decisive authority (1 P 1<sup>17-11</sup>), though the stress of the controversy was committed to a more practised hand than his. So by the inclusion of the truth of doctrinal Judaism and the exclusion of the virus of ceremonial Judaism, the safety of Christianity was secured.

3. Our reflexions have been on the action of the Lord and of His apostle in which the importance of the narrative consists; but its interest is largely increased by the character of the man chosen to be the firstfruits of the Gentile Church; a just man of high repute, generous, and beneficent; a religious man, fearing God with all his house; a man of prayer, fervent and habitual; one who has embraced such truth as he has encountered, who has gained the esteem of the nation where he sojourns, and who exerts a happy influence on kinsmen and comrades; and there is nothing superficial in all this; for his sincerity is witnessed in heaven, where his prayers and alms come up for a memorial before God. This remarkable character exists outside the Covenant system, and apart from revelation, save some partial and refracted light from neighbouring Judaism. What shall we say of such a case? At least we must say as frankly and cordially as St. Peter, 'In every

nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him.' 'Them that are without God judgeth;' and in the vast area of human life, in which the responsibilities of man and the judgment of God are beyond our cognizance, Cornelius suggests thoughts of comfort. 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil—and the good.' Who can tell what may be before those eyes, in quarters unlikely and unknown, of moral attainment and spiritual aspiration? What grace of God, what work of the Spirit, is present in these cases we have no warrant to affirm. In the present instance we have to do with believers, men who have all the faith that is possible, outside revelation and the Covenant. As to Cornelius, we have this testimony that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him; 'for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek Him out' (Heb 11<sup>6</sup>). Those are few and elementary articles. But the faith which fastens on them may be more intense and practical than that of some believers, who have all the treasures of truth in possession. So it plainly was with Cornelius; and God was a rewarder of

one who diligently sought Him by bringing him to know the unsearchable riches of Christ. One can scarcely imagine a mind more qualified to receive them by existing capacity of faith, and desires poured forth in prayer. The full apprehension of what he had received would come by degrees, perhaps in the experience of a long Christian life. But there would be an immediate consciousness that in the union given him with the living Lord the needs of the soul were met, its desires satisfied, the past cancelled, and the future secured. The justice and charity, the faith and prayer, which had beautified former days, were now to be continued on a higher plane of life in the power of the Spirit of Christ, and in the fulness of a hope which had been unknown before. We bid farewell to the firstfruits of the Gentiles as they vanish from our view, confident that the later words of their teacher would become their own:

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for (them), who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time' (1 P 1<sup>3-5</sup>).

## Contributions and Comments.

### Emmaus Mistaken for a Person.

I HAVE in my possession a folio copy of the works of S. Ambrose printed in 1492, in which, in three places, the companion of Cleophas is called 'Amaus.' The volume, unfortunately, is not quite perfect, lacking, *inter alia*, the *Expos. Evang. Luc.*, but it contains the following eight references to the Emmaus incident. *De Isaac et anima*: 'sicut testatur cleophas dicens.' *In Psal.* 118, *sermo* 3: 'Denique duobus ex his euntibus in castellum cui nomen emaus.' *Idem, sermo* 13: 'Hoc igne cleophas cor suum dicebat ardere cum ipsi et socio ejus christus scripturas aperiret.' *Id. sermo* 17: 'Illi qui dicebant, Nonne,' etc. *Id. sermo* 18: 'Cleophas et ille alius . . . dicebant.' *De grano sinapis, sermo* 1: 'Sicut in sancto evangelio: amaon (in the margin is printed, Al. Amaus) et cleophas dixerunt.' *Sermo* 72, *de Natali Sancti Laurentii*: 'Quo igne succensi

amaus (marg. Al. Amaon) et cleophas dixerunt'; and again in the same sermon, 'sicut amaus (marg. Al. Amaon) et cleophas dixerunt.'

The book from which these passages are taken was printed by John de Amerbach, and is a finely executed specimen of early printing. John, a Carthusian monk, who wrote the printer a pre-fatory epistle and divided the work into sections, probably supplied the marginal readings. I know nothing of the MSS on which this printed text was based; the strange reading in question, however, must have had some considerable attestation in North Italy. On the other hand the 'socio ejus' and the 'ille alius' of two of the passages, with their obvious avoidance of a name, if not later corrections, indicate that S. Ambrose was also acquainted with other texts which did not call the companion of Cleophas 'Amaus.'

It may interest book-lovers to know that the copy of S. Ambrose above referred to belonged