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THE MARRIAGE IN CANA OF GALILEE.

(S. John, chapter ii., verses 1–11.)

(v. 1.) "The third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee." This story has ever been especially dear to the heart of Christendom. It is, as it were, the benedictory smile of our Lord upon all Christian nuptials, and it affords promise of the sanction of His presence at all happy, simple, social gatherings. It is the first note of the teaching which proclaims again and again that the religion of Christ is, in truth, joyous and light-hearted; and that the sober-sadness which some of us associate with our religious profession suggests an element of distrust. We have one other mention of Cana of Galilee as the city of Nathanael, of whose call we have been reading.¹ Two sites, both within easy distance of Nazareth, are both claimed as Cana. "The mother of Jesus was there," apparently as an honoured guest, perhaps a kinswoman.

(v. 2.) "Jesus was bidden" and the five newly-called disciples, who had begun that course of literally following their Master which was customary in the East as well as in the West. We observe that Christ, with royal graciousness, accepts every invitation that reaches Him.

(v. 3.) "The wine failed." No greater disgrace could happen to the abounding hospitality of the East. A wedding-feast still lasts for some days, perhaps a week. All comers are entertained, not only invited and honoured guests, but the poor and the halt and the stranger within the gates share in the bounty of the feast. Small wonder that the wine failed. The mother of Jesus, who, we may believe, was waiting with intense expectation for some fulfilment of the great promise she had with her Son, thought that here was His opportunity. "They have no wine," she said, not asking anything, but stating the need, which was her need also, in her sympathy with her embarrassed hosts.

(v. 4.) "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" We wonder as we read, and the explanation that this form of address is friendly and even tender in the East does not do away with the fact that it places the Virgin Mother at a certain remoteness from her Son; that is, however deep she is in His love, she is not any more in His counsels. We can see how inevitable and how tender was this decision of the Son of man, and how it saved all that jarring of contrary wills and opposing aims which spoils the peace of many a home. Would it not be well if young people who are of an age to form opinions, and who find in themselves aims, desires, modes of thought, which are not those of their parents, should frankly talk the vexed question over with father or mother; and, with all reverence and gentleness, beg to be allowed to go their own way, so long as it is a good and right way. There are few parents who would not respond to such an act of frankness and real dutifulness; and the misery of households divided, not only in purpose but in heart, would be avoided by the simple following of our divine Example. "Mine hour is not yet come." His time may be late, or so soon as to be almost immediate; intervals of time do not count in the divine mind.

(v. 5.) "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." How well the Mother understood her Son. What perfect reticence and dignity and sympathy she shows. She is conscious of no rebuff, but

waits the event. Her position of authority in the house is interesting; she gives orders to the servants.

(v. 6.) "Six waterpots of stone." It is a curious fact that in one of the supposed sites of Cana in Galilee, a number of huge stone vessels, to hold about thirty gallons each, have recently been discovered. Just such waterpots, we may suppose, were collected for the wedding. Jewish ritual demanded much purifying, washing of platters and of hands, during the progress of the feast; and, no doubt, one special preparation for the wedding was the laying in of a large supply of water which could be drawn off as it was wanted.

(v. 7.) Already, we may suppose, a good deal of water had been used. The kingly largess was to be bestowed with no niggard hand. "Fill the waterpots," and the servants with right good will filled them to the brim. "Draw out now." There are no steps in the miracle, no point at which we can say, "then it happened." We only know that water went in and wine came forth. The ruler of the feast seems to have been a friend who acted the part of master of ceremonies.

(v. 9, 10.) He expresses his opinion of the wine in a popular proverb, but feels no surprise as he supposes that this wine also comes from the same source as the rest. The servants knew, but an eastern servant is a "Caleb Balderstone" to whom the credit of the family is everything; of course they would not betray the facts. We all know Tintoretto's *Marriage in Cana*, with the beautiful (Venetian) ladies, and the amazed guests, and the general sense of stir and *éclat* about the miracle; but we get no hint of the kind in the narrative.

(v. 11.) We are told as the only result of the miracle that "His disciples believed on Him"—believed more, that is, for living faith is ever feeding and growing from more to more. "This beginning of His signs." The Revised Version gives us "signs" instead of "miracles," and the change is significant. A miracle is a portent, a marvel. The beholders wonder at it and their thoughts go no further. A sign, on the other hand, arrests the attention, directs thought beyond itself to the thing signified; and the thing signified in this case was the glory of Christ which He manifested forth that day. How? we ask. In the first place it was a kingly act of, as has been well said, "supreme courtesy." We, narrow and niggard of soul, can appreciate the grace of kindness which saved the host from being put to confusion; but, we ask, with the man in the Gospel, why this waste? what need for perhaps something like a hundred and fifty gallons of wine for a single feast? But was it not a wedding gift, a supply that would last the family (on the choicest occasions) for a generation? And was it not also a mute witness for Christ; for, however unobtrusively the wonder was wrought at the time, the tale would be told a thousand times in the coming years; and among the future hearers there might ever be those who would accept the wonder as a "sign." Further, this act is a "sign," as showing kingly power over what we call the forces of Nature; that very power which the Centurion claims for Christ when he prays Him to send His messenger Health to his house, just as he himself would send a soldier or servant. There is a strong inclination to-day to explain away, leave out of consideration, the miracles of Christ; as being, any way, unnecessary, not an integral part of His teaching or even of His sacrifice. A generation ago, the Gospel miracles were accepted as evidence, *proofs*, in support of the claims of Christianity. To-day, they are proofs in quite another sense. They prove, test, the faith of Christians. Can we, in very truth, receive this history as a fact? Does the simplicity and courtesy and fitness of the act commend it to our hearts as just the very thing that Christ would have done? Well for us if this is so. For indeed the question of miracles is no by-issue, but is the *crux* of Christianity; we cannot accept the one without the other. This is a

hard saying; but happily every one of us is provided with the means of testing whether these things can or cannot be so. Our Lord Himself gives us a scale whereby to measure the greatness of a miracle. "Whether it is easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, rise up and walk?" The inward spiritual miracle commends itself at once as greater than any material sign. Wherefore, whenever we pray—"Give us our daily bread and forgive us our sins," we concede the possibility of all miracles, for the lesser is included in the greater. "Lord, I believe, but alas, I do not understand"; nor shall we probably in our present state of being. The doctrine of mystery is a wholesome one for the Christian soul. It is a doctrine which every scientist, every philosopher, has long ago accepted, though he may refuse to apply it to the things of the Christian life. Who has solved for us the least of the mysteries of birth and death and life? and why should we make a stumbling-block of the lesser mystery of "miracles"?

¹ S. John xxi., 2.