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THE
CHURCHMAN

NOVEMBER, 1903.

ART. I.—NOTES ON THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF
ST. JOHN.

THERE are difficulties recognised in this chapter, and there is a question raised concerning it. The difficulties result from the transcendental nature of the truth revealed, and from the necessarily figurative language employed. The question turns upon the relation of the teaching of the chapter to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In the evangelical narrative the present discourse and the institution of the Sacrament stand far apart from each other. Therefore it is likely that the difficulties will be best cleared, and the question best answered, by following the Scriptural guidance, and giving them separate consideration.

The study of the teaching of the discourse, as historically given, shall accordingly be first taken by itself; and it may be well to commence, before any detailed exposition, by stating the general impression we receive of the purport of the doctrine, and of the method in which it is conveyed.

The Gospel of St. John is a record of the self-revelation of Jesus Christ; and it is written that men may believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, they may have life through His name. The sixth chapter is a page in this record. The testimony thus recorded is never single. "I am one that bear witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me." Even so it is here. The witness of the Father by a great miracle sustains the witness of the Son to a great mystery. The sign of the feeding of the five thousand is in its importance adequate to the revelation, and in its significance introductory to it.

The particular relation of Christ to man which is here
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revealed is briefly contained in the words, "*I am the bread of life.*" He is the Life *absolutely* (as declared elsewhere and in chap. v. 26); also, in consequence, the Life to others, by *communication*; and that is the definite truth asserted here.

Life by communication is the rule of all Nature, a principle of the material creation well known to us. Vegetable life exists by feeding on surrounding elements, animal life by supplies from other life than its own. Man lives by appropriate nourishments, various in kind, of which the standing type is bread. In his spiritual life there is an analogous necessity, for which there is a Divine provision; and the source and secret of that provision is here revealed. It is Jesus Christ come in the flesh, who is Himself "the living bread that cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die."

In this teaching the following points are observable, and they assist in its explanation:

1. It is doctrine delivered, not properly as discourse, but *in colloquy*, given out by successive utterances in answer to the words of interlocutors, generally unsympathetic or perverse; apparently, also, with some interval, both of time and place—first, "when they had found Him," afterwards "in synagogue as He was teaching." The *hearers* are distinguished by the writer as the multitude, who show no intelligence; "the Jews," who cavil; disciples who are offended, and the Twelve who adhere.

2. Consequently *the teaching is twofold*: (1) Of Himself as the object of faith, and (2) of the faith which believes and receives Him. These two subjects are (as one may say) intertwined through the chapter; as, indeed, is the case through all this Gospel, which is at once a record of the manifestation of the Son of God, and of the reception of it on the part of man, combining revelation on the one subject with lessons and warnings on the other.

3. As a further consequence, the teaching is *gradual and consecutive*. Taking occasion from the successive suggestions of inquiry, disputation and offence, it advances step by step to the result. There is first the general promise of *food* for eternal life which the Son of man will *give*; then the identification of this food with *Himself* personally, as come down from heaven for the purpose; then more definitely with his *flesh*, which is for the life of the world; then the *participation* of this gift, by eating the flesh and drinking the blood, with its assured consequence of eternal life and resurrection at the last day; then the summary of this life, as being in the Father, given to the Son, and by the Son to participants in Him; lastly, the ruling principle of interpreta-

tion: "It is the spirit which giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing."

This course of teaching the narrative gives with an animation that makes us present at the scene.

The five thousand guests in the wilderness had concluded, "This is of a truth the Prophet that cometh into the world," and on the following day a good number of them have arrived in pursuit, full of expectation of what next He might do and they might get. Has the sign answered its purpose? Not so. He who knew what was in man immediately lays bare their meaner mind, and calls them to work for the meat which abideth unto eternal life. *Eternal life*—a word unknown to the Old Testament (save one solitary utterance in Daniel)—is the special theme of Jesus, His great proposal, the consequence of His appearing. He would evoke the desire and inquiry for it in the dull souls of men. What an elevation to human consciousness, when the idea is once in possession of the mind! If but faintly apprehended, it changes thought and life. But *whence can this eternal life be drawn, supplied, or nourished?* That is the point here. There is a provision, and the Son of man will give it, for "Him the Father, God, hath sealed." These men have just seen the seal; and He has the right to ask them for that faith in Himself which will include all. To their inquiry, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" He answers: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." They will not give that faith. They demand new proof, and of their own dictating. "What dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the wilderness; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

This demand becomes a suggestion for the doctrine which follows. In one point, at least, they are right. A supply for eternal life must be bread *from heaven*. Earth cannot afford it. The true bread, they are told, is being given now—"that which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." That sounds well. "Evermore," they cry, "give us this bread"—unintelligent, as the woman who cried, "Give me this water." That water was the Spirit which the Speaker would give. This bread is the Speaker Himself. "I am the bread of life." This is a great advance in the revelation; it is the very heart of it. Like "I am the resurrection and the life," it fixes faith, not on His gifts, but on Himself. A teacher sent from God might say, "I give the food of life," meaning the truths which he delivered. Only the Incarnate Son can change "I give" into "I am." He that comes and believes will find it true. He will not hunger or thirst as before.

Now appears a definite class of objectors, "the Jews,"

probably from among the multitude (perhaps having joined it). As always in this Gospel, they are men possessed with the spirit of the dominant Judaism. They naturally question what they hear. Jesus has said, "I came down from heaven." What can he mean? They know of his father and his mother. It is a real objection, but must wait for its answer. More is wanted than the answering of objections. There is need of a *disposition of mind*. (On this subject Divine sentences are spoken, precious for ever; but these are not within the present purpose to consider.) The statement, "I am the living bread, which came down out of heaven," is more solemnly reaffirmed, and two sayings follow which increase the difficulty and the mystery: "If one eat of this bread he shall live for ever"—*εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*; and then it is added: "And the bread which I will give is My flesh—for the life of the world." What new thoughts are these? The bread is to be *eaten*—it is His *flesh*; and His flesh is for the life of the world. Deep unexplained truths, parts of a whole revelation to come.

No wonder the Jews strove one with another in conjecture and argument. The question was: "How is this man able to give us the flesh to eat?" (not *his*, but *the flesh*—*τὴν σάρκα*, *i.e.*—of which he has spoken. Their natural uncertainty is, I think, reflected in the expression). One might have expected that perplexity would be lessened by explanatory words. On the contrary, the difficulty is augmented by language more positive and precise, and is made more emphatic by the "Amen, amen, I say unto you."

(1) The *personal* element is insisted on. The flesh is now defined as "the flesh of the Son of man," and then the previous *ἡ σὰρξ μου* becomes *μου τὴν σάρκα, μου τὸ αἷμα*, and (2) a *new* element is introduced foreign to Jewish thought and sacrificial habit—the drinking of the blood; and this twofold participation is maintained throughout. (3) The word for "eating" is suddenly changed from *φάγειν* to *τρώγειν*—an unusual word, only twice elsewhere found in the New Testament (Matt. xxiv. 38; John xiii. 18)—and this four times repeated. It is a word which most properly expresses the feeding of herbivorous animals, and may here change the idea of an occasional eating to that of a continuous or habitual feeding. (4) The spiritual connection of this participation with eternal life is asserted both on the positive and the negative side. Lastly, the history of the derivation of life is summed up in majestic words: "As the living Father has sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me (*ὁ τρώγων με*), he also shall live by Me."

The whole is followed by reaffirmation of the certain con-

veyance of the life that does not die through this feeding on this bread from heaven.

These things, it is added, were said in synagogue while teaching in Capernaum. No more is said of the Jews. But on some among them who had been disciples the effect was searching and sifting. Sounds of complaint were heard. "This discourse is hard—*σκληρός ἐστὶν οὗτος ὁ λόγος*"—harsh and offensive; makes too great a demand for submission and acceptance; "Who can hear it?" It ended in alienation and departure. Assistance was given them, if they would have taken it, in words that cast back a sudden light on all that has been spoken. "Doth this offend you"—shock and stagger your faith? "What, then, if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where He was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life."

Here is a Divine commentary on all that has passed, especially with reference to the two objections raised:

1. The first had been about the coming down from heaven, which, if admitted, would make all teaching Divine. Coming down will be proved by going up (*καταβαίνων* by *ἀναβαίνων*), and the truth will be sealed when "the Son of man ascends up where He was before." It is the same testimony as had been given to Nicodemus, which, then as now, answers questions by the assurance that it is one from heaven who speaks. "We speak that we do know—and no man hath ascended into heaven but He that came down from heaven, the Son of man which is in heaven" (John iii. 13).

2. The other contention had been upon giving the flesh to eat. Light is thrown on this by the instruction: "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."

Some read this as if it effaced what had gone before, and construe the feeding on flesh and blood as receiving words and believing doctrine. The one is a means to the other, but not the same thing. Flesh and blood, so repeated and insisted on, means flesh and blood—the entire humanity which they represent. There is nothing figurative in them. But how can flesh and blood give life? Only as the medium of another power. So the revealing word is added: The spirit is the life-giving power: the flesh by itself and of itself has no such potency. It is derived to it only from conjunction with the spirit. So it was in Christ, for it is of Himself and of His flesh and blood that He has been speaking. It was the Spirit, which in Him was the indwelling Godhead, which gave to His human nature supernatural powers, and

made His flesh and blood channels of life for man. "He was manifest in the flesh and justified in the Spirit" (1 Tim. iii. 16). "He was put to death in the flesh and quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pet. iii. 18). "Through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God" (Heb. ix. 14). Thus, the Spirit by conjunction with the flesh gave infinite worth to what was done in it, and was in its nature diffusive, making the assumed humanity communicative of life; so that whereas "The first man Adam became a living soul, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. xv. 45).

Yet further, as spirit generates spirit and communicates with spirit, it is the spirit in man which warms into life under the spirit of Christ, as St. Paul largely testifies in the eighth chapter to the Romans. Thus, in all Scripture there is the same account of the effect of the Incarnation in respect of Christ's work for us and in us, which is briefly comprehended in this saying, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

This truth the Lord uses as a principle of interpretation for the words preceding: "The words which I have spoken to you (*τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν*) are spirit, and are life"—spirit in their meaning and life in their effect. Thus, some relief was given to the offence caused by the last words—those on eating and drinking the flesh and blood. The impossibility of such action in a literal sense had been apparent, but the meaning is more clear when all is transferred into the region of spirit. Spiritual reception, appropriation, and participation, can only be expressed by words derived from the world of sense, as, in fact, all abstract language is. This eating and drinking is spiritual, the action of the soul deriving life and sustenance of Christ.

We know not what help these interpreting words may have afforded to some who were disciples; but many of them would hear no more and were gone. The Twelve at least remained. "Will ye also go away? Lord, to whom shall we go? Words of eternal life Thou hast." Whatever may be dark to them, as beyond present comprehension, words of eternal life have already sunk into their souls. They are heard from Him, and can be heard nowhere else; and with Him they will abide. If they cannot yet apprehend all the meaning of His words, they are at rest in their reliance on Himself, assured at least of this: "We have believed and know that Thou art the holy one of God."

The result of this teaching may be stated thus:

1. The eternal life is derived to man through the Son from the Father. The Father hath life in Himself. He hath given to the Son to have life in Himself (v. 26). This, as

St. John says in his Epistle, is the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us (1 John i. 2).

2. The manifestation and consequent communication to us is *through the flesh*—i.e., through the true human nature which He took, and in which all His action toward us and for us has been accomplished.

3. We have participation in the Son of God come in the flesh, and in all that He did in the flesh for us, *by faith*—i.e., by spiritual acts of coming and believing.

This coming and believing is not a single act, but a *continuous habit*, as is the support of physical life by food. And so Christ is to us not only the source of life, but the *bread of life*—i.e., its *constant supply and support*.

The apprehension, appropriation, and assimilation of Christ by faith is a spiritual eating and drinking which makes us participants of His flesh and blood, His human nature, and all that through it He does for us, and shows to us, and gives to us, and is to us.



ART. II.—CHALDEAN PRINCES ON THE THRONE OF BABYLON (ISAIAH XIII. 19).

II.

IN the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archæology* for May 6, 1884, Dr. Pinches published a facsimile of a tablet of unbaked clay from Babylon, to which reference has already been made as the Second Dynastic Tablet, and of which Professor Sayce has given a translation in "Records of the Past," New Series, vol. i., pp. 15-19. This tablet, in virtue of its contents, is so important as to merit a very careful description. It consists of four columns of cuneiform writing, two on the obverse and two on the reverse, the top of one side forming the bottom of the other. Although considerable portions at the top of Cols. I. and II., and at the bottom of Cols. III. and IV., are broken away, there are two things which enable us to determine the original size of the tablet, and so to get at the length of the columns and the number of lines in each. In the first place, the peculiar shape of the tablet, the obverse being flat and the reverse curved, enables us to fix on the thickest part as the middle point. Then the first remaining line of Col. I., which reads: "11 Kings" [of the dynasty of Babylon, etc.], shows that eleven lines have been broken off, whilst the size of the writing enables us to calculate the space occupied by