

## CHAPTER III

### THE GOSPEL MIRACLES

WE are now in a better position to understand the view of the signs of Jesus which is uniformly held by the Synoptic Evangelists. In this volume I have confined myself in the main to the Synoptic Gospels for exegetical proof of the positions advanced. There are in the Fourth Gospel traces of the purely evidential view, but these, it seems to me, have been gravely exaggerated. The broad general view is practically the same as that in the Synoptics, and in certain points is even more strongly stated. But discussion of the Fourth Gospel can only be carried out in view of its place at the end of the Apostolic age and the development of Apostolic thought. That the Synoptic Gospels have a perfectly clear and consistent view of their own, and that that view is different from both the Traditional and the Modernist views, I hope to make clear in this part of our argument. I do not suppose that almost any competent scholar will so far to-day question the main drift of what has been said above. Now for our further purpose it is not necessary at this point to go into the critical question of the sources of the Synoptic Gospels. It could, I believe, be easily shown that the view in question is that taken in all the sources, in Q, in the

primitive Mark document, and in the additional matter used in the First and Third Gospels alike.

For clearness I propose to take the Gospel according to S. Matthew, as it is here that the general view comes most impressively to light.

What is that general view? It is that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom has already come actually and potentially, that the "signs" are manifestations of the Kingdom, and that they are wrought by the Spirit of God through the ideal faith of the Founder and in response to the faith of those who, through Him, enter into the Kingdom. As such they are anticipations and proleptic manifestations of the Kingdom in its perfection when the reign of sin and death shall have been finally broken. The author of the First Gospel, instead of the term, the Kingdom of God, uses the term, the Kingdom of Heaven. The "signs" of the Kingdom of Heaven are manifestations of the heavenly life, fragments of heaven in the life of time.

The first point to notice here is the extraordinary emphasis put by Christ everywhere in the Synoptic narratives on the necessity of faith. This is the element in His teaching which is as it were blurred and half suppressed under both the Traditionalist and Modernist views. It is necessary to go into this with some detail, for its truly remarkable character seems to me to-day to be as a rule quite inadequately recognised, and to carry far-reaching consequences for Christian theology.

The First Gospel, then, after the introductory sections dealing with the ancestry and infancy of

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Jesus, and carrying the narrative to Nazareth, tells of the appearing and mission of the Baptist, the descent of the Spirit, and the Temptation. Then comes the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom, "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The call of the first two disciples follows, and the first missionary journey with its broadcast healings of disease—"healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people." Then comes the Sermon on the Mount, containing material, probably, that is drawn from several periods in our Lord's ministry. What we are concerned with mainly here, however, is S. Matthew's general presentation of the history, and it is noteworthy that he begins with the simple announcement of the coming advent of the Kingdom, and the record of its characteristic signs, the signs that people of that age and creed would naturally expect from a Deliverer from the sway of the evil one over the bodies and minds of men. Then comes the fuller unfolding of the kind of life which the Kingdom demands.

Then follow the eighth and ninth chapters, which are almost entirely taken up with the records of the healing of disease, the story of the leper (leprosy being for the Jew, on account of its malignity, much what cancer is to-day for the Western peoples), of the centurion's servant, of Peter's wife's mother, and of the scene in Capernaum, "at even when the sun did set," of the stilling of the storm, of the healing of the Gadarene demoniac, of another paralytic, of Jairus's daughter, of the woman with the issue of blood, of the two blind

men, and of a dumb demoniac. The section closes with another journey, like the first, of broadcast healing and of teaching. Not content with this, Jesus finally calls the complete circle of the twelve disciples, and gives them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness, transferring, as it were, His powers to His followers.

Now let us for a moment revert to the details of these stories. Nine of them are concerned with the healing of diseased persons. In the first the leper's faith in the power of Jesus to help him is emphasised. In the story of the centurion's servant the faith of the centurion is the real point of the story. Jesus marvels at it, and sees in it the promise of the ingathering of the Gentiles into the Kingdom. He then cures the servant, explicitly associating that cure with the centurion's faith. Nothing is said of faith in the next narrative, the healing of Peter's wife's mother, but it is presupposed, as the appeal for aid comes from the household of His leading disciple. Then comes the stilling of the storm on the lake and the rebuke of the disciples for their alarm, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" There was no reason for alarm, they would neither sink nor drown.

In the case of the Gadarene demoniac, nothing is said of faith. Indeed, in all such cases of possession, faith is impossible on the part of the patient, and is never required of him. Again, in the next story, the healing of the palsied man, the motive is the same as elsewhere. "Jesus, seeing their faith," announces the man's forgiveness, and having given

the greater gift, proceeds to give the less, and heals him.

Then comes the very remarkable double story of the raising from the dead of the ruler's daughter, and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. In both cases, in the faith of Jairus and in the faith of the woman, the principle is emphasised, and in the second, Christ says in so many words to the woman, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." Next comes the healing of the two blind men. Here we are told that Christ asked of them if they had faith, and that in bestowing sight He said to them, "According to your faith, be it unto you."

The last of the "signs" in these chapters is the healing of another demoniac which comes under the rule referred to above.

Now the meaning of this whole section is surely perfectly clear. Yet, if it had been rightly considered, the Traditional theory of miracle, which, as we have seen, regards the miracles of Jesus as evidential portents of mere Divine power, could hardly have come into being. Such portents elsewhere are explicitly refused by Jesus. They correspond to the "signs" for which the Jews asked, and of which He said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given it save the sign of Jonas the prophet."

The "signs" of these two chapters are something much more than portents, they are revelations of the presence of the Kingdom of God, not, as has been said, seals attached to the document, but parts of the document itself. To those who saw and understood them, they were revelations of

the ideal will of God for man, and of man's ideal destiny, assurances, also, that God was with Jesus to make that ideal a reality even here in the world of time.

Of capital importance, also, is the continual emphasis given by Christ to faith as the condition of these "signs." There is no evading the clear testimony of the Synoptic Gospels as to this point in the great majority of the miracles of healing. Yet on the Traditional theory it is impossible to account for this. On that theory, which emphasises Divine Power as the essential evidential point, all such human co-operation in the "signs" detracts from the Divine wonder. The inability of Jesus to work any mighty works in Nazareth for instance does not harmonise at all with the view on which the signs are signs above all of the unconditional Divine power of the Son of God.

Hence the prevalence of the Traditional view has had unhappy effects in blinding many interpreters of the Gospels to the remarkable and far-reaching character of our Lord's teaching about the creative power of faith. But on the view of the signs of Christ supported in these pages, it is easy to see why just this emphasis should be laid on man's co-operation with God, or rather man's receptiveness to God. The Old Testament view of faith being what it was, this is precisely what we should expect.

We have here, in fact, a development of the view which we find in the Old Testament throughout. The announcement of the Kingdom corresponds to the founding of the Covenant. It is the new

and final advance of God's grace to men, a great deepening and widening of the old relation, initiated by God with the old Israel. But as in that Old Covenant, all its blessings are mediated through faith. Faith is the root virtue of both, and that is why throughout the whole teaching of Jesus there is an incessant call above all other things for faith, with the continually repeated assurance that there is nothing in the way of goodness that faith cannot attain, and nothing in the way of blessing in breaking the mortal powers of evil that it cannot achieve. The essential point to notice here is that, according to these Gospels and their presentation of the teaching of Jesus, both the realm within the soul and the realm without, both the sin within man and the tragic element in human life, are regarded as alike spheres for conquest by the victorious energy of faith. Modern theological thought has held to the first, but hesitates as to the second, or even denies the power of faith over the physical world at all. The far-reaching importance of this will become obvious as we proceed with our discussion. We return now from this digression to our examination of the narrative in the Gospel of S. Matthew.

Having made this point as to faith and its inseparable and vital connection with the great deeds of Jesus, the Evangelist does not deem it necessary at every stage in the rest of the narratives of the signs to make it explicit. It is not necessary to do so in these highly condensed narratives. But none the less the idea runs through the whole story, and comes again and again to the surface.

The section of the Gospel which follows that containing the Sermon on the Mount and the two great chapters recounting the mighty deeds of Jesus, opens with the calling of the twelve and a discourse to them: then follows the message from the Baptist asking them for assurance as to His Divine mission. "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?" In effect this was an appeal for some sign that the Kingdom of God had really come.

Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter at once. He does not, as He might well have done, send John a personal assurance of the sympathy and admiration for him that He unquestionably felt, and expressed to His own disciples immediately after. That would have been but superficial comfort for the great spirit of the Baptist. He gives eloquent proof of His appreciation of the greatness of John by His deeds. "In that hour," we are told, in the parallel passage in S. Luke, Jesus "cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind He bestowed sight." And He answered and said unto them, "Go your way and tell John what things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in Me" (Matt. xi. 4-6). It may seem to a superficial reader as if we had here simply the portent theory of miracle back again. But that is not so. Not even for John would He have given a useless

astronomical sign to prove the truth of His teaching. He does better than give him convincing external evidence of the truth of His teaching about the Kingdom. He actually shows him the Kingdom as present in the healed bodies and renewed spirits of men.

The "things which they see" are obviously the acts of healing, with a reference back to the two preceding chapters of such signs; "the things which they hear" are the verbal teaching as to God, man, and the Gospel of the Kingdom, with a reference back to the Sermon on the Mount.

In the fourteenth chapter of S. Matthew we have the teaching as to faith still further illustrated in the story of Christ walking upon the water. When He comes to the disciples across the sea, Peter desires to come to Him out of the boat. And when he turns his gaze away from Jesus, and realises the fury of the storm, he begins to sink. Whereupon Jesus says to him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" The implication is clear. Had he had faith like his Master, he would have been in no danger from the mortal powers of nature.

The next story of healing is that of the Syro-phœnician woman. Surely the whole point of this story is that when Christ finds that vital thing, faith, even in a woman outside the historic Covenant, He grants to her the hidden wealth of the Kingdom even as to His own countrymen. We have here the germ of the whole Pauline universalism. "O woman, great is thy faith. Be it done unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was healed from that hour."

This follows the story of the feeding of the five thousand, and then for the second time Jesus refuses to work a mere marvel and disposes beforehand of the type of miracle beloved by eighteenth-century apologists and mediæval legend mongers, with the austere words, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign."

The next healing is that of the epileptic boy. Here Jesus is reported as filled with sorrow and condemnation that such misery should not have been removed already. "O faithless and perverse generation! How long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you! Bring him hither to Me!"

Then follows a pregnant paragraph which, even had it stood alone, would have been absolutely conclusive as to the main point which I am seeking to establish. The disciples, after their failure to heal the demoniac, come to Him and raise the central issue, "Why could not we cast it out?" The answer is equally direct. Jesus does not say, "Because of God's immutable decree." He says, "Because of your little faith, for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place: and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

This is one of the few places where the briefer narrative of S. Mark is even fuller than that of the other two on the question at issue. According to this narrative the father says to Jesus, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus saith unto him, If thou canst. Believe! All things are possible to him that

believeth. Straightway the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help Thou my unbelief!" The heart of the tragedy being now laid bare, "the boy was cured from that hour."

It is surely now perfectly clear that there is one great principle running through all these sayings about faith, that the Synoptic Gospels regard the whole realm of sin within the heart and of tragedy from without which strike at and poison the life of man as not being part of the unchangeable order of God. They are intruders, and since Christ has come, they can be dispelled by faith. Take, for instance, the crucial case of disease. Jesus never seems to have hesitated in treating it as something alien to the Kingdom of Heaven, and to have struck at it whenever He found faith to be healed.

We cannot otherwise account for the narratives of what I have called broadcast healing, the waves of life-giving energy that seemed to go out of Him among the multitudes of sick who gathered round Him. Indeed, He seems, as in Nazareth, at least to have wished to strike at it where the general unbelief prevented it. There is not one single instance recorded in which He refused the appeal of a sick man on the ground that it was God's will that he should continue to suffer. And unquestionably He approved of, indeed delighted in that will to be healed and faith to be healed, and gloried in the powers of healing that God had given Him. It is, of course, true that He put far more importance on the healing of the soul than on the healing of the body, and where

He found that the work of the latter prevented the practice of the former, or encroached on the time essential for the keeping open of the channel of communion with His Father, He retired from the practice of healing, or forbade the healed to spread the news of it, and to create unmanageable or intrusive crowds of wonder seekers. But to exaggerate this wholly intelligible action into a certain disparagement on His part of the healing gift is an absolute travesty of the plain meaning of the narratives. It is perfectly clear that He gloried in the work of healing the bodies as well as the souls of men, and that He regarded the overthrow of disease as an essential part of His mission and of His manifestation of the Kingdom. It may be said that all this is quite alien to our modern ways of thinking. Even if it were, we have no right when we are dealing historically with the documents to impose our modern ideas upon them. There is only one question that we have the right, as honest inquirers, to ask: What did this writer think and what did he mean to say? That is the first principle of all sound interpretation. In this case the thoughts and the meaning of the Evangelists, I submit, are plain.

But if this be admitted, the question may fairly be asked, Is this way of looking at, for example, disease in any material way different from the way of any good physician to-day? He is always out against disease on principle, and never hesitates when he is face to face with any malady, to strike at it by any means in his power. To him it is simply an evil to be attacked and destroyed by drugs, by

diet, by treatment of all kinds, by surgery, or by sanitation, in a word by the liberating in every way possible of the vital powers, the *vis medicatrix naturæ*. His assumption always is that disease is against sound nature, and therefore something which ought not to be. He never asks whether it might not be for his patient's spiritual good to remain physically diseased. Neither, so far as I can see, did Jesus. The only real difference is that the modern physician attacks it, or used to attack it (for a change has of late been obviously coming over the scene) from the side of the body only. The New Testament men, and above all Christ Himself, believed it could be attacked more powerfully from within, and put their hopes on reinforcing indefinitely the powers of the spirit. And the whole tendency in modern medicine, if a layman in medicine has read the position rightly, has been for the modern mind to make a tentative advance towards the older view. The whole development of psycho-therapeutics is significant. It is much too early in that movement as yet to lay down any hard and fast views as to the limits beyond which it may not go. Modern medical thought and practice is not a fixed, but a moving thing. Sober thought may yet revert to Luther's saying, that if we have faith enough to be healed, there is no disease from which we may not recover. The dictum of the *British Medical Journal*, that there is no tissue of the human body wholly removed from the influence of spirit, is at least a significant step in that direction. We may close our brief review of the teaching of the Synoptic Gospels on the vital part that faith plays

in the signs of Jesus by saying that it should be noted that Christ says that great faith enables great deeds to be done, that too scant a faith and still more its absence can check even His own activity of blessing, and that in one instance He even says, "According to your faith be it unto you." The strongest saying as to the power of faith to change the courses of things and overthrow all that stands in the way of the Kingdom of Heaven is repeated in these Gospels in different contexts and in slightly varying forms of expression. In S. Matthew, as we have seen, when the disciples ask the reason of their failure to cast out the evil spirit, He replies, "Because of your little faith," and continues, "Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible to you." In Luke (xvii. 5), shrinking from the call to unlimited forgiveness, the disciples say, "Increase our faith"; and the Lord said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye would say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou rooted up and be thou planted in the sea : and it would have obeyed you." It is true that, as the alarmed commentators laboriously point out, we have here vivid Oriental metaphor. But the metaphor *means* something for all that. Just how much it means, the record of the signs, the victories over disease and death, the feeding of the multitudes, and the control of the storm and the waters give abundant proof. When we are at the task of interpreting what Matthew or Luke really believed that Jesus meant,

we have to remember what the same writers report Him to have done.

We pass on now to the further question as to whether the Evangelists mean us to look upon this same principle of faith as enabling Christ to work His own "signs," or whether we are to think of them as signs rather of some inherent and unconditional Divine energy, or simply apart from His faith altogether, as sovereign acts of God, who uses Him as instrument of His creative power and love and wisdom.

In pursuance of this inquiry, then, we have now to consider the question of our Lord's teaching about prayer as we find it set before us in the Synoptic Gospels, and in particular His view of the power of the right kind of petitionary prayer.

In nothing is the contrast between the New Testament and the prevailing theory and practice of our own day more sharply in contrast than as to the power of petitionary prayer. We shall consider in another context the reasons for this, which are deeply rooted in much of the thought of our time. The pressure on the religious, and in particular the Christian thought of our time, of the idea of an unalterable course of nature, has been so great as to make this teaching of Jesus almost mute, to suppress its meaning so as to make us even unconscious of its force. In an impressive passage of his book on *The Kingdom and the Messiah*, Professor E. F. Scott shows that Jesus believed that the coming and victory of the Kingdom could be accelerated by the believing and importunate prayers of the faithful, and says, "By His welcome

of importunacy in prayer, Jesus implied that God Himself accepted it and would refuse nothing to an insistent faith. This aspect of the thought of Jesus can be seen even more clearly in His explicit sayings about the power of prayer. Prayer, as He conceives it, is much more than a waiting on God, in passive self-surrender to an inevitable will. The prayer of faith will assure its own fulfilment. 'Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.' The will of God is not wholly fixed and unalterable. It is the will of our Father, who is aware of our needs and longings, and who desires that we should plead with Him and prevail. By granting us access to Himself in prayer, He has given us control over the mightiest of all powers. We have the right to use this power, and to win for ourselves the interposition of God even when He seems most unwilling. Jesus Himself was strong through prayer. He believed that by means of it He had the might of God to support Him; and He sought to impart His own assurance to His disciples."<sup>1</sup>

It is unnecessary to give all the passages illustrating this conception of the power of prayer to influence and change the ordinary course both of nature and of the circumstances of human life. It will be sufficient to call attention to the remarkable catena of passages in the eleventh chapter of S. Luke. Let us consider the sequence here. Jesus, being asked for a method in prayer, gives His disciples "the Lord's Prayer," which includes not only prayer for inward and "spiritual" blessings,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Appendix C.

but for the historic coming of the greatest of all events, the Kingdom of God, which, as we have seen, includes the outer as well as the inner blessings, the abolition of both sin within and tragedy without, and also for the plain obvious outward good of "daily bread."

Then comes the parable of the importunate friend, of which the point obviously is the persistence of the friend, the refusal to take a refusal.

Then comes the triad of imperatives. Ask, seek, knock. You are to ask, and if you do not get what you want by asking, you are to do everything you can to find out the causes of the rejection, and finally you are to beat at the closed door!

Then comes the sweeping statement of the principle, "Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Finally comes the saying that clinches the whole, compares God with man, and asks how if a human father can be trusted to satisfy plain human wants, we can distrust the willingness of the Almighty Father to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. In the parallel passage in S. Matthew, we have the reading "good things" instead of the Holy Spirit. The difference, however, is immaterial, for, according to the Synoptics, the Holy Spirit is the all-inclusive gift, including ideally the whole range of the "miraculous."

Now, if we let this remarkable group of passages with its crescendo of promises have its full force upon our minds, we get some estimate of His idea of the range and power of ideal human prayer. It is a window into His own inner life, into the kind

of faith which He had in God, and the expectations of His succour in which He lived. It is clear that this kind of prayer presupposes, and has as its animating spirit the kind of faith by which He wrought His own mighty works. If all this be true of ideal prayer, then we can understand how Jesus was able to heal the sick, and still the storm, and raise the dead. The teaching and the deeds fit one another like hand and glove.

He is obviously dealing with the same kind of force as He was thinking of when He said that if the disciples had faith as a grain of mustard seed they would move mountains. He is thinking of prayer electrically charged, as it were, with faith, of faith as expressing itself in believing prayer. Indeed He repeatedly and expressly associates the prayer which prevails with God with faith. It is not mere obstinate despairing importunity of which He is really thinking, the mechanical repetition of despairing petitions to an unwilling God. "Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." According to His wont in teaching, He isolates and emphasises one aspect after another of the idea He is seeking to express. He speaks now of importunacy, and now of faith as the essential thing. But to get at His whole meaning we have to combine both the aspects in a whole, and therefore in ideal prayer we have to think of importunacy as starting from and as charged with faith, and of faith as persisting against apparent rebuff, as the Syrophenician woman did.

But this is not all. The prayer that prevails is a prayer charged with hope. "Believe that ye

have received the things ye ask for, and ye shall have them." We have to "expect great things from God" if we are to "attempt great things for God."

And, finally, prevailing prayer must be charged with love. "When ye stand praying, forgive if ye have aught against any." "Verily I say unto you, if two of you shall agree as touching anything that ye shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven." The only thing that can make men really forgiving, and can completely unite their wills, is love.

If we let all these passages have their full and natural weight with us, it is surely impossible to evade the conclusion that He is letting us into the secret of His own "miracle"-working powers.

He does His mighty deeds by prayer, sustained and carried home by His unique faith, hope, and love. The roots of His unique power over nature lie therefore in His unique spiritual character, not in His metaphysical Divinity, but in His perfect humanity. All this seems irresistibly implied in His sayings about prayer. Have we over and above this any explicit assertion that His supernatural powers come through prayer? We have one such unambiguous saying in the Synoptic Gospels.

At the moment of His arrest He rebukes the violence of Peter, and tells him that there is no need for it, that if He wished He could at any moment deliver Himself. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father and He should presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" That this belief that our Lord's works

were wrought by prayer was the underlying view of the early community and the Apostolic circle is still further evidenced by the fact that the Fourth Gospel, which is the most explicit of them all on the inherent Divinity of our Lord, ascribes His greatest work, the raising of Lazarus, to the direct prayer of Christ to His Heavenly Father. What was believed to be true of this "sign" must clearly also have been true of all the rest.

The cumulative case seems to me irresistible. The Gospel theory of the "miracles" of Jesus is that they are the answers of God to the prayers of the Ideal Son, the Man who is the supreme instance, in history, of Faith, Hope, and Love; and they say with unambiguous plainness that that ideal Man invited His disciples to similar enterprises of faith, encouraging them to believe that in proportion to their faith would be the manifestation of God's order, the revelation of man's life as God meant it to be.

But we have not yet completed our survey of the thought of the Gospels. We have been looking at the signs of Jesus mainly from the human side, and so have dwelt upon the moral and spiritual conditions of their appearance. We have now to complete that survey by taking into account their origin in God, the supreme Creative Power by whom they were ultimately wrought. We have therefore, finally, to consider at this point the Synoptic and early Apostolic idea of the Holy Spirit.

We are concerned, first of all, with the idea of the Spirit of God as it appears in the Evangelists.

In Professor Scott's admirable volume on *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, he draws a distinction between our Lord's own view of the Spirit and that of the Evangelists, who, he thinks, read back into the Gospels the thoughts and experiences of the Apostolic age, when, as is universally admitted, the idea of the Spirit acquires a new prominence. This part of his argument does not seem to me at all convincing. Indeed, of the sayings of Jesus about the Holy Spirit he admits so much to be original, that it seems unnecessary to reject the rest. But in any case, what we are here concerned with is the view set forth in the Gospels themselves, and as to this there seems no ground for dispute.

In the period between the Testaments the idea of the Spirit had been in some eclipse. It was an age of the law and the scribe rather than of prophecy; and the interest of Jewish thought, so far as it was active on the subject of the continued action of God upon the world, had been absorbed by the fascinating Logos conception, and the alluring hope which it held out of harmonious union between the finest contemporary Greek thought and the wealth of spiritual genius and experience contained in the Hebrew tradition. We can understand this when we think of the eagerness with which progressive Christians looked in the last generation upon the theory of Evolution, and that with which younger thinkers are in our day turning to the idea of the Unconscious Mind.

But the faith that the Messiah would be richly endowed with the Spirit of God, and that through

Him that Spirit would be abundantly poured forth on all the faithful, persisted.<sup>2</sup> The source of this plenitude of Divine life, according to the Psalms of Solomon, is the Messiah's fear of God, a reverent trust in Him, from which comes all His confidence and hope (xvii. 34, 39).<sup>3</sup> The life of the devout Jew was too deeply rooted in the Old Testament for the faith in the coming of the Divine Spirit to have been lost. These Scriptures, as we have seen, anticipated with the coming of the Messiah an outpouring of the Spirit of God, the Spirit which raised all man's higher activities to their noblest power, and which lived at the very springs even of man's physical life.

Into this situation came the apparition and the call of John the Baptist. We have now briefly to review the teaching of the Evangelists on the relation of the Holy Spirit to the signs of Jesus. We shall follow here for convenience the same method as in dealing with the prominence given by these writers to faith. There is no real divergence between the Evangelists in this matter any more than there is any real difference on the matter of faith. They all obviously take the same view. But just as S. Matthew lays peculiar emphasis

<sup>2</sup> "In the future must all the devout be bearers of the Spirit. . . . It will be the task of the Messiah to pour forth the Spirit on all believing ones" (Testt. Lev. xviii. 7; Jude xxiv. 2); cf. Sibylline Oracles, iii. 582; Bousset, *Religion des Judenthums im N.T. Zeitalter*, 2nd ed., p. 453.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Volz, *Jüdische Eschatologie*: "The source of the Messiah's power is the fear of God. His confidence is in the Lord, therefore can no one do anything against Him. His trust is not in horse or rider . . . but the Lord is His hope" (p. 232).

on faith, S. Luke lays peculiar emphasis on the Spirit, both in his Gospel and in the Acts, and so we shall take his narrative as exhibiting with emphasis the general view. In the introductory sections of this Gospel we have first the promise of the coming of the Baptist as one "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." Then comes the story of the Annunciation and of the Virgin Birth by the power of the Spirit. The story of the mission of the Baptist follows. In his announcement of the coming of the Christ, he specifically describes His work as follows: "He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Then comes the Baptism of Jesus. "And it came to pass, when all the people were baptised, that Jesus also having been baptised, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit in answer to His prayer descended in a bodily form as a dove upon Him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased." This Baptism of the Spirit is obviously, as we shall see, the vital point in the whole narrative. It is probably the key to the story of the Temptation. Every Divine gift carries with it, as history shows, the possibility of the most tragic misuse, and that even the gift of the Divine Spirit carries with it temptations seems to be the point of the narrative. If that gift of the Spirit lay solely, as we sometimes suppose, in an exaltation of the moral and spiritual nature, it would be difficult to see how this could be the case; but if, as is our argument, it included control over the destroying and "evil" element in nature, and the power to

work "signs" of that control, it is quite otherwise. Having emerged from the Temptation, Jesus (Luke iv. 14) returned "in the power of the Spirit" into Galilee. In Galilee, He comes into the synagogue, and declares the nature of His mission to His fellow-citizens.

It is decisive that in order to do this, He selects from the Old Testament writings the passage from Isaiah lxi. 1, 2: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." Taken in the context of His teaching and deeds, this is a clear statement that He regards not only His preaching, but His mighty deeds as created and sustained by the Spirit of the Lord.

The basal and inclusive idea being thus explicitly stated at the outset, there is no need for emphasizing it in the particular narratives, any more than we saw to be the case when the Evangelists were speaking of faith as the condition of the "mighty works."

The next explicit reference to the Spirit is in x. 21, where we are told He "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." The idea here is, clearly, that His ordinary experience is carried for the moment into an even higher zone of insight and gladness by the touch of the Spirit leading Him on to see new depths of the Divine.

The next is xi. 13, where S. Luke gives us a variant to S. Mark's rendering, "How much more shall your

Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!" S. Luke probably supplies Holy Spirit for S. Matthew's "good things," as Dr Denney has suggested, simply because to him the Holy Spirit "is regarded as the inclusive gift of the Kingdom, containing in principle all its blessings."

A little later in the same chapter there is a curious variant on the other two Synoptics of an opposite kind. S. Matthew and S. Mark say, "If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you." S. Luke, instead of "the Spirit of God," reads "the finger of God." The variation is of little moment, for there is abundant evidence that S. Luke, by the "finger of God," meant essentially the same as he means elsewhere when he speaks of the Spirit. The important point for our present purpose is that all three passages alike treat the "signs" of casting out demons, as proof that the Kingdom of God is already present, and that they are not wrought by Jesus, as a "second Jehovah," acting as it were from His own inherent strength, but as the medium through which the living energy of God is able to work among men.

The next direct reference is in the twelfth chapter, where we have the passage about the unpardonable sin. According to the Lucan version of this saying, the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is said to be worse than the sin involved in speaking against the Son of Man, and to carry him who commits it out of reach even of the forgiveness of God. We seem to have here already anticipated the Apostolic view of the gift of the Spirit, the

culminating step in the progress of redemption, the end for which the Son of Man came, and lived and died and rose again. The Holy Spirit is as it were God's last and highest word to men, the word which finally interprets the Son of Man, which speaks in conscience, in man's ideals, and at its loudest and clearest in the fullest Christian experience. To have known that experience and to have destroyed it, is to kill the sense of hearing of the soul. The gravity of the warning is the measure of the supreme value put upon the gift of the Spirit. This seems to be the meaning of this difficult passage, and it is very hard to think that we have not here Christ's own words, and that we have not in them something prior to the Epistles. Yet if so, we have here implied in negative form the essence of the whole apostolic doctrine of the Spirit. The passage is followed immediately by the promise of supernatural guidance by the Spirit in all moments of emergency and danger. Nothing more is said directly of the Spirit until the close of the Gospel, where the disciples are told to wait in Jerusalem the fulfilment of the "promise of the Father," which is explained as the being "endued with power from on high."

We have here in this sequence of references, it may be granted, much less than is said in S. Matthew of the power of faith. But surely what is said is quite decisive.

The Baptism, with the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, is, in the light of the passages which have been cited, meant to give the key to the whole story, the Divine explanation of the marvellous personality and

deeds of Jesus. It takes in the Gospel of S. Luke the same place as is taken in the Acts by the narrative of Pentecost. It is as if the writer in the one case said this is what a man filled by the Spirit can do, and in the other this is what a Church baptised by the Spirit can do.

The Baptism is, further, the ultimate explanation of all the "signs" of Jesus. These are characteristic and creative works of the Spirit, the Spirit to which the later and greater Hebrew literature ascribed the origin and maintenance of life, the works of consecrated genius, and the highest ranges of insight, foresight, and the vision of God. It was fitting that that Spirit should be manifested in the healing of the blind, the opening of the deaf ears, the setting free of the paralysed, the insane, and the leper, and even in raising the dead. When the Spirit wrought this, it wrought according to its true genius and idea as surely as when it dispelled the diseases and the death of the soul, and brought men home to God.

To sum up the whole argument of these last two chapters, it seems to me quite clear that we have here a coherent organic unity of thought. It is quite impossible, given the Old Testament and Jewish presuppositions, to regard these signs of Jesus as something accidental and external to the rest of the record, if the teaching of the Old Testament and New is as I have represented it; and if Jesus were what the Gospels suppose Him to be, the ideally pure and representative Man, and as such the Founder of the new order, then it was essential that He should work just such

“signs” (to speak broadly and generally) as they represent Him to have wrought. These signs, therefore, are integral parts of the revelation, and not adjuncts to it. They are revelations of the ideal purpose of God for mankind, and therefore of His character. They must therefore necessarily influence our idea of God. Inasmuch, also, as they imply the coming into the order of nature of powers that cannot be explained in terms of mere nature, they must inevitably affect our whole conception of the world. And, finally, as they are works wrought through the Perfect Man, and are meant by Him to be imitated by imperfect men, they must affect our conceptions of the possibilities of man, and the possibilities and range of prayer.

The Synoptics sometimes approach these signs from the human side, and speak of them as wrought through faith. But sometimes they go deeper, and speak of them as wrought by the Spirit. We are just to their whole conception only when we say that they were one and all wrought by the Spirit of God through the faith of man and, above all, through the faith of the Son of Man, “the leader and the perfection of faith” (Heb. xii. 2).

We have now completed this brief sketch of the Synoptic theory of the signs of Jesus. It is surely clear that we have here something quite different from and much more than the Traditional theory has any room for, something which is of moment for the whole system of Christian thought and life. But is it really a

tenable view to-day, or has the progress of scientific knowledge rendered it a mere archaism, believable by no man touched by the modern spirit ?

This is the inquiry to which we must now address ourselves in the following chapters.