

VII. - Our elevation of power.

Until it was wholly leavened. Matthew 13:33.

It has thus been recognized: 1°. that the miracle in the days of Jesus and His apostles had a significance which ceased after the consummation of Revelation; and 2°. that therefore no one may say that the possibility of the miracle is now removed. Christ our King lives at the right hand of God as the Head of the Church and as the Head of mankind; powers emanate from Him; and there is no reason why this power should not still be able to triumph over the opposition of Nature.

But even though we therefore maintain the possibility of the miracle for the present, we readily admit that neither the miracles performed by the apostles, nor those recorded in later times, can be said to have exceeded or surpassed the miracles performed by Jesus himself. We have only to recall the miracle in Canaan and that of the feeding, the miracle on Galilee's lake and the three resurrections from the dead, to make it clear that the glory of the apostolic miracle is by no means beyond them. We do not, therefore, diminish the apostolic miracle; we do not diminish it; we do not deny its significance; but what we do deny is, that the miracles of the apostles rank above the miracles of Jesus Himself. Now that Christ has explicitly declared that a greater and higher thing would emanate from His Church than was shown in His works, the question arises, where do we have to look for this "greater" and what would constitute this "greater".

What our Kant interpreters give here is not satisfactory. They refer to four things. They refer to the fact that the apostles communicated the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands; to the speaking in unusual languages; to the spreading of the Gospel throughout the Roman empire; and finally to what we read in Mark 16:17, 18, where it says: "Those who have believed will follow these signs: In my name they will cast out devils, with new tongues they will speak, serpents they will take up, and though they will drink something deadly, it will not harm them; on the sick they will lay their hands and they will be healed." It is obvious that this cannot be the intention of every believer. It can only mean that in the course of the centuries such things would occur. However, we do not want to believe that there is anything "more important" in the things listed than what was revealed in Jesus' own miracles. This can in no way refer to contradictions. That the preaching of Jesus himself was confined to Palestine, and that Paul brought the Gospel to Spain, Peter to Babylon, is no "more work for the apostles." It is nothing but the extension and reproduction of what Jesus called to existence. The apostles are no more than

epigones here. Just because there are Christian teachers today who spread the Gospel as far away as China and Japan, it cannot be said that they are doing "more" than Jesus did. Nor can the laying on of hands be anything more than when Jesus blew on the young people, saying: "receive the Holy Spirit." The speaking of unusual languages or words is not even a miracle that can be said to have been performed by the apostles; rather, it was an expression of the soul that came naturally to their lips, without any intention on their part, more in a moment of higher ecstasy. Moreover, who will say that speaking in other languages is something "more serious" than conjuring up the storm on Genesareth's lake or the feeding of the five thousand? And as for the stoical miracles, to which, with reference to Mark 16:17, 18, attention is drawn, the taking up of snakes, the not succumbing to poisonous liquor, and the healing of the sick, all this is rather of a lower order than the miracles performed by Jesus. In no way does it exceed them. Snake charms are still practiced in India. If we do not want to be fobbed off with general words, or skim over the surface, we cannot but say that this explanation by our Kant scholars does not do sufficient justice to the word of Jesus, and cannot in any way satisfy the serious reader of Scripture.

Let us therefore recommend an entirely different approach. Here we start from a contrast in history which no one can deny; we mean the difference, the contradiction, between the instinctive unconscious and the conscious action acquired by practice in our contact with the things of Nature. In order to make this distinction immediately obvious, we will deliberately use a somewhat commonplace and flat example, but one that is within everyone's reach for that very reason. In previous centuries our Dutch cuisine was revered throughout Europe, but there were no cooking schools. Our house mothers and their helpers cooked exquisitely tasty food, but they learned this themselves; instinctively they discovered how the food had to be treated in order to deliver the best dish. Dutch cuisine revealed its own character, in that it showed the natural products of the field and of the slaughterhouse in their natural excellence much more strongly than foreign kitchens. In France, "la Hollandaise" is still called the preparation of a dish without forcing and without pouring all kinds of foreign sauces on it. Fish "a la Hollandaise" is the pure boiled fish with butter, and not the fish made unrecognizable by all kinds of foreign sauces. This way of preparing food was found by instinct by our house mothers. They did not realise how to do it and why they did it this way and not the other way around. What they did, they did instinctively, and they did it well. Today, however, this instinctive talent has been

largely lost, and the daughters who are ready to marry and the future kitchen helpers are sent to a cooking school. There they have to learn it. There it is all explained to them. Good cooking is now the result, not of a natural talent to find the right thing instinctively, but of a kind of school-based study. What used to be done unconsciously and of its own accord, is now consciously mastered.

And this same distinction applies to all of life. Look at agriculture. Isaiah speaks of agriculture: Listen and hear my voice, observe and hear my speech. Does the ploughman plough all day long in order to sow? Does he open and cultivate his land all day long? Is it not so? Where he has made the upper level, there he scatters vetches, and spreads cumin, or barley and spelt, each to his place. And his God instructeth him in the way. He teaches him. (28:23) "v.v.) Here, then, is a farming, which proceeds by experiment, entirely instinctively. It is a talent, a gift, a practical way of doing things, which God Himself teaches the farmer. There is no question of an agricultural school. Nor of intensive agriculture. But how completely different all this has become now. Here, too, unconscious actions have completely changed into conscious, learned actions, in which one takes account of one's actions. One has penetrated into the chemical knowledge of the soil, into the knowledge of the seed and into the knowledge of all the influences that influence the growth of the crop. The earlier instinctive cultivation of the field and the instinctive treatment of the dairy and of the livestock have now been replaced by a reasoned and very different way of doing things.

And as it is with agriculture, so it is with all areas of human life. In the past, people were brought up, and really not that badly, without any study in pedagogy; now one sees a newly married woman, in view of the mother's blessing, reaching for a pedagogical handbook, to learn the art of parenting from that book. All kinds of industry used to flourish here on an uncommon scale, and established our industrial fame throughout Europe, that in more than one subject we were the teachers of the whole civilized world. But there were no trade schools, industry schools, factory schools. Nowadays, on the other hand, all study for our poor industry must be taught at school, and without a whole series of schools one does not get there. Formerly, all higher expression, in whatever field, arose from life itself, of its own accord and from instinctive urges; now that instinct has been blunted and conscious learning has taken its place. Even in the field of Art one notices something similar. In the past, the great artists would unexpectedly emerge from their tents, build, chisel, paint, make their tones heard, and sing from their own spirit; and what they created is still stared at as the highest that has been bestowed

in the field of art. But they had seldom read books on art, had rarely attended art schools, and had almost no history of art at their disposal. It came to them instinctively out of holy inspiration. Now, on the other hand, our art schools and art academies have sprung up, writings on real and fake art try to explain everything, art criticism is the order of the day, entire libraries could be filled with the books on aesthetics alone. Now this turnaround in the field of art has not been able to transform the order of Nature. One never learns art. Art can only emerge instinctively from in- spiration. Art is a given or it is not art. But that is precisely why it speaks so strongly here, that even in this field the conscious life always tries to suppress the unconscious and instinctive. And all this together now points out the extremely important evolution of our life, which in the years and centuries of our unconsciousness blossomed richly out of the instinctive, and now, with the decline of the instinctive factor, is trying to raise us by a conscious penetration into the composition of the laws of nature, to a higher, more collective and much more powerful expression of life. This conscious part of our present life expression lacks the charm which was so powerfully inherent in the earlier instinctive life, but it places us on a higher plane, multiplies our strength, and enables us as reasonable beings to achieve higher things. Whereas in the past every triumph over the power of Nature was an isolated event, now our power over Nature has become a commonplace; an expression of power over all of Nature as such. We have penetrated her mysteries. We have discovered the order of its composition, the movement of its factors and the laws which govern this movement. In the transition from the instinctive to the conscious handling of Nature there is thus an uncommon advance; it places man in opposition to Nature as vested with much higher power.

Likewise, it was in the nature of things that our human life began not with conscious but with instinctive expression. Instinctive is the expression when God Himself, directly without interference, shows man his way and makes his inner strength manifest. It is precisely what Isaiah says, that in this first period God Himself teaches and instructs the farmer. It could not begin with conscious life, because the conscious knowledge of nature was still completely lacking. Had it waited for this, there would never have been any human development, because no one had the dissecting knowledge of nature, and so there was no one who could teach others. Precisely for that reason it was a wonderful grace that God the Lord enabled mankind in this first period to achieve so much greatness by instinct. The original mastery mankind had over Nature was broken by sin and the curse. Yet it

did not disappear completely at once. It worked in a weakened measure among all the people for a while, but that after-effects finally degenerated into magic and the art of witchcraft, and thus came to an end. But what remained then, and for centuries has carried our entire human development, was the inspiration of the instinctive life, which very soon brought our human life to a high level of prosperity. What we have learned from ancient Egypt and Canaan in the days of Abraham in the past century surprises us because of the high point of development at which our human life stood then. This is not to say that certain studies were not already being done at that time. Imitation began immediately, and all imitation remains study. But still, the peculiar character of our human development came then rather from genius, from the innate talent, from the instinctive urge, and study remained superficial and was of secondary importance. But it could not remain so permanently. And much greater power over Nature would be ours as soon as mankind with its research and reflection penetrated into the very essence of Nature, and thus learned to dissect the forces that lie within her, in order to make them subservient to her. It is of no avail, then, if we lament the demise of poetry, which once made our whole life shine, to make way for much cold and dry prose. This prosaic evolution was bound to happen. It could not fail to happen. The siege could not be beaten permanently at Nature's outer gate; through that gate man had to penetrate her fortress, track down her hidden powers, and thus establish our dominion over her from within.

And so, it came to pass. Whereas there was a period of the aftereffects of the forces of paradise, and then came the second period of the flowering of instinctive life, we have now entered the third period, which extends our dominion over Nature much further and establishes it in our human research and in the knowledge obtained from that research. It is like the difference between the way in which the Asian in Thibet tries to cure his patients with amulets and incantations, and the diagnosis and

medicine of today's learned physician, who has observed the body in its composition from within, and through that greater and more complete knowledge knows how to discover the seat of evil in the sick life. This is not to say that the sick are not also cured in Thibet. Even it is not denied that there were means of diagnosis and medication known in the past that are neglected nowadays. Our medicine still ignores the history of medication far too much. But everyone is aware that the knowledge of diseases and the knowledge of healing methods are nowadays, thanks to the anatomy and physiology of the human body, at a much,

much higher level, and that we therefore have a much stronger position with regard to illnesses, in this period of conscious research, than in the days when tradition and instinct were the driving force. We must not, therefore, return to the period of instinctive life, although we should honor its relative excellence. Not in the unconscious, but in the conscious life, lies our reasonable power. Only he who throws himself upon Nature with conscious knowledge possesses over that Nature a dominion, which reminds us again of our royal calling, to subject her to us. There is in that conscious doing with actuality a more, compared to before.

In this context, notice Jesus' parables of the mustard seed and the leaven.

We are used to understanding these parables exclusively in terms of spiritual effects. But do we have the right to do so? Does not the whole of Jesus' teaching show that he always gathers body and soul, matter and spirit, the visible and invisible world as one whole, in its indispensable coherence. And what right would we have to simply exclude all that which is tangible in the body, matter and visible life from Jesus' prophecy, which speaks in these parables, in order to confine ourselves to the spiritual? When Jesus speaks of the "Greater One" that would one day come, he speaks precisely of his "works", and among these "works", miracles were naturally the most prominent; miracles that revealed his power over visible Nature. So let us not separate what for Jesus was always one. He took the whole of mankind, both with his soul's needs and with his external misery, and in the face of both he acted as Saviour and Redeemer. Savior from sin, but also Savior from the misery that haunts us. In this context Jesus refers to the mustard seed. A very, very small seed. But this seed germinates, it grows up, it goes through a process, and the end of that process is an extensive tree, which offers shade and protection to the birds of the sky. And so, says Jesus, it will also be with the seed of the Kingdom. First it will germinate, seemingly small and insignificant. But then it will expand. It will go through a regular organic process, and one day the outcome will be that there will be a widespread tree in the midst of the world, to offer help and protection to mankind in his sin and misery. This does not indicate an everlasting situation, but a passing through of a series of periods, an expansion of influence, a penetration with this influence of our whole life, and a future in which the spiritually and temporally blessing effect of the seed of the Kingdom will be manifest for everyone. An ever greater one.

In the parable of the leaven Jesus then shows us that same process in its hidden operation. The miracle here is that the sourdough starter is placed in the flour and

that, once it comes into contact with the flour, it starts a powerful process. And now Jesus points us not to an external act or instinctive action of the woman, but to what happens to the flour, completely independently of her, only through the forces contained in Nature. Jesus penetrates into the secret of Nature and shows how there are forces hidden in that Nature which automatically set the process in motion and, according to the laws governing this operation, complete it.

What right would one have to limit the meaningful prophecy of this process here again to the spiritual? Is it not rather a requirement to apply this process of the Kingdom's forces to the whole of our human society here as well? Has not the power of the Kingdom made itself felt in every sphere of our lives, spiritual, social and material? And has not this working in all areas been the working of the leaven? Christianity, carried into the world, came into contact with the factors and laws of our human life and thus through that contact completely transformed and changed the face of life. Compare our human life in Christian Europe and America with the human life in Asia and Africa, and it will be preached to you from the rooftops that the leaven of the Christian religion has penetrated into the three measures of our human life, and by doing so has raised our spiritual, social and material life to a higher level, just as the flour rises through the action of the leaven that is hidden in it.

History and the present demonstrate that only in these Christian countries has that liberation and elevation of the mind come about which, in the end, also turned to the research and knowledge of Nature, has so wonderfully increased our power over Nature. Certainly, the Greeks and Romans also studied Nature, and the Arabs also made progress in this area, but science, and the study of Nature with it, only attained its highest level in those countries where the Christian principle had set the human spirit free. And even though this study of nature now turns against the Christian religion in such a reprehensible way, it is and remains no less a plant that only flourished and could flourish on the Christian soil. Think away Jesus' appearance and the entrance of Christianity into Europe, and we would still be as powerless against Nature as the Chinese in the East, or the Indians in the South of Asia. To say that Jesus would not have foreknown, guessed or known about this course of things, this coming process, would be to disregard his greatness. He would be our Cookie, he has been given all power in heaven and on earth, and when Jesus says to his disciples that the leaven, which he came to put in the three bars, would one day lift up our whole human life, did it not already appear to be fully true what he prophesied to his disciples, that however high his miracles stood,

the fruit of his entrance into the world would one day bring forth an even greater, an even more marvellous work, when the reign which we now possess over Nature would come about through the unveiling of her mysteries and the knowledge of her hidden powers?