

there is emphasis laid, in the first line, on the idea of the Son's sonship. In the second line emphasis is laid, first of all, on the correlative idea of the Divine paternity, and then the chronological origination of the sonship is noted. A particular day is referred to—the day when the filial relation began. Pre-existence, however, is obviously implied; for, on the very day when the Son was begotten, he was addressed by the Father. A glorious halo of Divinity thus surrounds the entire representation. J. MORISON.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

ST. MATTHEW v.—vii.

III. The Originality of the Sermon.

WE have already seen that the Sermon on the Mount has a theme which is logically developed, thought rising out of thought, one saying suggesting another; that it does not consist of a collection of detached and unconnected maxims, but that it runs through the successive stages of a single argument, is pervaded and dominated by a remarkable unity of thought, and mounts to a noble and impressive close.

We have also seen that in style it is both authoritative and paradoxical; and that Jesus cast the truths He came to teach into the form of paradoxes in order that men might be for ever unable to degrade them into mere rules, in order that they might be compelled to search for the broad general principles which underlie them.

We have now only to consider the *Originality*

of this Divine Discourse; and on this point, if we may for a moment adopt the paradoxical manner of the Sermon itself, our main endeavour will be to shew that it is at once original and not original, that it is all the more original because it makes no pretension to originality.

Two tendencies are observable in those who, having studied this Discourse, have laid the results of their studies before the world. On the one hand, there are those who have ransacked ancient literature in order to discover sayings which resemble those of our Lord, who have found, or fancy they have found, that He was anticipated even in his most characteristic utterances, and who take a keen delight in announcing their conviction that He said nothing new, nothing which had not been said, and said as well, before He opened his lips. And, on the other hand, there are those who think they honour Him by affirming his teaching to be absolutely new, with no roots in the past, unparalleled, unprecedented, unanticipated—not a development of ancient wisdom, whether Heathen or Hebrew, but a wisdom which contradicted and reversed all that seers and sages had taught. We must be on our guard against both these tendencies, against both the conclusions in which they have landed men. To affirm that He was not in the world, nor in the thoughts of men, until He took flesh and dwelt among us, is no more to honour Him than it is to affirm that, when He came into the world, He shewed Himself to be no wiser than the men whose thoughts He had previously guided and inspired. It is not to honour Christ to maintain that He was not that “Light” by

which the heathen sages caught glimpses of the truth and Hebrew seers gazed on it more steadfastly and continuously; nor is it to honour Him to maintain that "the Light of the world" was no brighter than his scattered and communicated beams. He *is* the Light of every man that cometh into the world,—the light of all their seeing; but, if all their light is from Him, is not He more than they? All that they knew of truth they learned of Him; but must not He, who is "the truth" itself, have more to teach us than they knew? His teaching we may be sure will not be new in the sense of having no connection with the truths He had already taught by them; but it will be new in this sense, that it will perfect that which in them was imperfect; that it will gather up their scattered thoughts, free them from the errors with which they had blended them, and harmonize, develop, and complete them. That is to say, his teaching will be original, yet not original; *original*, in that it will be pure, authoritative, complete; *not original*, in that it will simply claim and recover the lessons which He had aforetime moved men to utter, disentangle them from the intricate network of error which vitiated them, shake them loose from the dust that had gathered upon them, evolve their hidden stores of meaning and carry them to their proper perfection.

This indeed is precisely what He claims for Himself, and this is all that He claims. Nineteen centuries before we had formulated that doctrine of evolution of which we are just now so proud, He announced that his teaching was to be an evolution, a development and a fulfilment of the Law. "Think not,"

He said, "that I have come to destroy the law : I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Only such a destruction as is necessarily involved in development was contemplated by Him. From the beginning God had made known his will to men ; He had told them what they must be and do if they would rise to their true blessedness by becoming of one will with Him. In the earliest books of the Bible we find traces of a great primitive Tradition, known to Melchizedek as well as to Abraham, to Balaam as well as to Moses, to the Egyptians as well as to the Hebrews ; not confined to any one clan, but the common property of the human race. What Moses did was not to bring in a revelation wholly new, but to trace out and define the application of that primitive Tradition to the wants and circumstances of the Hebrew nation. And, in like manner, what Christ did was not to bring in a revelation wholly new, distinct from and other than that formulated by Moses, but to trace out and define the application of the Law to the whole family of man. He resolved the Law, as ramified and applied by Moses, into its simplest and most spiritual elements, and then brought these simple spiritual elements to bear on the universal conscience, on all the varied aspects of human life and duty. When Moses took up the great primitive Tradition, which first conveyed the Will of God to man, he destroyed much—many idolatrous conceptions and immoral customs which had been entangled with it ; nevertheless, his mission was not to destroy, but to fulfil—to detach the original Revelation from the errors which encrusted it, to purify and to expand it. And, in like

manner, when Christ took up the Law which came by Moses, He destroyed much—much that was merely local and ceremonial and for a time; yet, none the less, his mission was not to destroy, but to fulfil—to carry out and complete the Revelation of the kind and holy will of God, to detach it from Hebrew as well as from Heathen incrustations, to set it free, to make it pure, luminous, influential, catholic. All development implies destruction of earlier and imperfect forms; yet development is not destruction but fulfilment. The seed is not destroyed, on the contrary its function is discharged, when it springs up into a plant or tree: the bud is not destroyed, its mission is accomplished, when it bursts into a flower: nor is the flower destroyed, although we no longer see it as a flower, when it becomes a fruit; rather, it has been developed into a higher form, its end has been attained. And even so the Lord Jesus did not destroy either the primitive religious Tradition some remnants of which still lingered in the heathen world, or the Mosaic Law which had been overrun and hidden beneath a rank growth of Rabbinical glosses and additions; on the contrary, He came “to carry them forward by growth to the higher forms and the better fruit that were contained within them,” to fulfil the ideals which they concealed as well as contained.

Nothing therefore can be more foolish and vain than the endeavour to detract from the originality of Christ's teaching by citing sentences like his, whether from heathen literature or from the Hebrew Scriptures. In claiming the thoughts of the sages and prophets who were before Him, He simply

claimed his own ; for whence did they derive them if not from Him, the Light of every man and the Glory of Israel ? To reclaim these truths, to detach them from the connections which vitiated them, to carry them to their perfection, and to weave them into a large and harmonious whole, was the work which, as a Teacher, He came to do. And, therefore, we are not careful to deny, we are eager to admit, that many even of the most admirable sayings in the *Sermon on the Mount had been anticipated by heathen moralists and poets. Confucius anticipated the Golden Rule when he summed up the whole duty of man in the single word, "*Reciprocity.*" Rabban Hillel anticipated it still more exactly ; for while the Lord Jesus said, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them ; for this is the law and the prophets ;" Hillel said : "*Do not unto another what thou wouldest not have another do unto thee ; this is the whole law, the rest is mere commentary.*" If Christ bade us love, not "our brethren" only, but all men, even "the evil and the unthankful," the Greek sage Menander said : "*I am a man, and therefore nothing human is alien to me ;*" Cicero, the Roman orator, said : "*Men were born for men, that each should assist the rest ;*" and, again, "*Nature ordains that a man should wish the good of every man, whoever he may be, for the simple reason that he is a man ;*" and Seneca both bade us "*confer benefits even on the unthankful,*" and "*give aid even to our enemies,*" and laid down the rule : "*Let us give as we would wish to receive.*" If Christ bids us "Do the will of our Father who

is in heaven," Epictetus affirms that then only is man truly good and free "*when whatever is the will of God is his will too, and whatever is not God's will, is not his will.*"

It would be easy to multiply similar quotations. It would not be impossible, perhaps, to find some parallel in the ancient heathen philosophers and poets for every leading thought in the Sermon on the Mount; more than a dozen such parallels have been cited by Canon Lightfoot¹ from the writings of Seneca alone. And, therefore, we should only betray a pitiful lack of culture, or an impudent disregard of facts, were we to claim originality for this Discourse in any sense which would imply that its noble and characteristic sayings had never been uttered till Christ opened his mouth. What we do claim for Him, what we can honestly claim for Him, is that He has never left Himself without witness among men; that it was He who, by his Spirit, gave these wise and true thoughts to the men who were before Him. And what we still further claim for Him is that, while in the Confucian Analects, in the Talmud, and in the works of the great writers and orators of Greece and Rome, these noble anticipations of his words are blended with much that is erroneous in thought and vicious in morality, and while, moreover, they received but a poor and halting commentary from the lives of those who uttered them, from the lips of Christ they come unmixed with any taint of vice or error; that He first made them ruling principles in the hearts and lives of

¹ In his invaluable essay on "*St. Paul and Seneca*," appended to his Commentary on "*The Epistle to the Philippians*."

men by supplying them with motives of an adequate force; and that He incarnated them "in the loveliness of perfect deeds," in the chaste and winning beauty of a blameless life. Compared with these large claims, it is but a small thing that we should assert the literary originality of Christ. Yet even this claim might be vindicated were it worth the while. Shakespeare borrowed much,—the plots of his dramas sometimes, and sometimes both the very characters which move through them and the very words they utter; and it can hardly be pretended that *he* inspired the chroniclers and poets who came before him. But does any sane man call Shakespeare's originality in question? If he had made the whole antecedent world of literature pay tribute to him, would he have gone beyond his clear right? Did he not pay back every loan with usury, and with an usury so enormous as to add almost infinitely to the value of that which he condescended to take? But for the teaching of Christ we may claim far more than this. We may claim that He added quite infinitely to the worth of the sayings He borrowed from the lips of men; and that He only borrowed of them that which He Himself had first given them.

The Sermon on the Mount is original, then, and it is not original; it is all the more original because it makes no pretension to originality.

But if in this Discourse we find many sayings which had been anticipated, or partly and imperfectly anticipated, by the Heathen poets and sages, we also find that the Divine Preacher took much more from the Hebrew Prophets and Psalmists, and

that; because He had given them more. They were *inspired* by Him, inspired to give a law which contained the statutes of life, and a promise of the advent of One in whom those statutes should receive a full obedience, his obedience giving the hope and assurance of obedience to mankind. And now that He had come to obey the law and to fulfil the promise, it was but natural that He should repeat and recast many of the words He had moved them to speak. Accordingly; throughout the Sermon we can see that "the law and the prophets" were in his mind, giving shape to his thoughts and words even when He does not openly cite them or refer to them. Any good reference Bible marks hundreds of passages in the Old Testament, the influence of which is felt in the successive sentences of this Discourse. Considerations of time and space forbid us to go through the whole series; and it will suffice for the purpose of our argument if we note only the Old Testament parallels to the opening sentences of the Sermon, the octave of Beatitudes.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," said Christ; "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." But David had said, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise;" and Isaiah had portrayed Jehovah as making and inhabiting two heavens—one, "the high and holy place," and the other, "the poor and contrite spirit." "Blessed are they that mourn," said Christ; "for they shall be comforted." But Isaiah had long since promised to those who mourned in Zion, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." "Blessed are the meek," said

Christ; "for they shall inherit the earth." But David had used the very same words before Him: "The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness," said Christ; "for they shall be filled." But Isaiah had invited as many as thirsted to come to the waters, even though they had no money, and as many as hungered to come and eat that which was good, instead of spending their money on that which was not bread. "Blessed are the merciful," said Christ; "for they shall obtain mercy." But the Psalmist had said, "Blessed is he that sheweth mercy to the miserable; the Lord will deliver him in the day of his misery." "Blessed are the pure in heart," said Christ; "for they shall see God." But David had warned the Congregation of Israel that only he who had "a pure heart" and clean hands, could ascend the true hill of the Lord and abide his holy presence. "Blessed are the peacemakers," said Christ; "for they shall be called the children of God." But even in the old warlike times of Israel the children of God were exhorted to "seek peace and pursue it;" they were taught that "the work of righteousness is peace;" they had no higher promise than "an abundance of peace." "Blessed," said Christ, "are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake;" and what was the whole story of the Jewish heroes and prophets but a commentary on the blessedness of those who loved righteousness well enough to suffer for it?

In the Beatitudes, then, as in the whole Sermon, we find no truths absolutely new; the truths taught

in them had been taught aforetime by the holy men of the Hebrew race. And yet, after all, was there not "a noble strangeness" in them, and even a striking originality? That they simply enunciate the choicest truths of "the law and the prophets" we frankly admit; but with the admission we couple the question, *Who*, till Christ spake, had discovered that *these* were the choice, the sovereign, and ruling truths? They were hidden away amid a mass of laws, maxims, ceremonial prescriptions. When He drew them forth from their obscurity, they were as fresh and strange to the Jews as they would have been to the very heathen. No man, Heathen or Hebrew, so much as dreamed of acting on them; their lives were moulded on principles the very contrary to those which Christ pronounced to be the secrets of a blessed life. In uttering these Beatitudes, He may have been "sounding old bells," but He made the old bells ring a new tune, and ring in a new time. Sounded by Him, their tones fell clear and spirit-like, as from an upper purer world, on the proud and heated hearts of the blind followers of blind rabbinical guides.

Original! No, the Beatitudes are not original in the sense that nothing like them had ever been heard before: every one of them has its parallels in the scriptures of the Old Testament. Yet who but Christ would have been original enough to select *these* words out of the vast bewildering maze of Old Testament sayings? Who but He would have passed by all that men then most honoured and admired—wealth, pedigree, courage, power—to pronounce a blessing on the very qualities they most

despised—on poverty, sorrow, meekness, aspiration, mercy, purity, peace, persecution, and the hatred of men? When before did such a ragged crew of calamities and misfortunes find themselves mustered and renamed, set in the face of the sun, and compassed about with the Divine favour? If it be original in a moral teacher to ignore the qualities and aims which men admire and most eagerly pursue, and to lift to the very pinnacle of honour the aims and qualities which they most despise and dread, then we may fearlessly claim originality for Christ, though we admit that his Beatitudes were shaped by the influence of words which He had inspired the seers and poets of Israel to utter.

Nor is it difficult to see *why* the teaching of Christ is not original in the other sense, why it is not wholly new in conception and language. For, as one of the ablest of modern preachers has pointed out,¹ "all growth must spring from roots pre-existing in the soil. There can be no *new*, except by the help of some *old*." If the Lord Jesus had "spread out a novel field of unfamiliar truths" before the Jews, He might have led them to speculate and argue, but He could not have aroused their consciences by convicting them of sinning against the truth they already knew; He could not have made them ashamed of the narrowness of their thoughts and the sordidness of their lives, by applying to them a standard of thought and conduct which they admitted to be Divine. And, therefore, as it was his aim to arouse their consciences and amend their life, He sought to

¹ *Beecher*, in his "Life of Jesus the Christ," vol. i. chap. 14. This and the two following paragraphs are simply a paraphrase or a citation from this fine work.

bring out the great spiritual truths contained in "the law and the prophets," to place them in the clearest light, and so to prepare the way for the still higher truths which as yet they were not able to receive.

By taking this course He gained a great and obvious advantage. "He put himself in the confidence of his own people." They saw that He did not ask them to break with the past. They felt that He was a genuine Hebrew prophet, standing on the very ground which their fathers had occupied, and uttering truths with which they were familiar, while yet He gave them a scope, a force, and a spiritual elevation altogether new.

By taking this course He also avoided a great and obvious danger—that of plunging those who listened to Him into the depths of scepticism and moral indifference. "If men's moral beliefs were the result of a purely logical process, they might be changed upon mere argument, and with as little detriment to the moral nature as an astronomer experiences when, having recalculated a problem, he corrects an error." But men's beliefs spring from the heart as well as from the brain, and are often strangely independent of logic. Even if they have been argued into a certain creed and its corresponding form of worship, their creed and worship are soon covered all over with the associations of the household, with the fancies of childhood, the hopes and fears of manhood, the charities of domestic love. When this natural process has taken place, when a man's religion is blended with all that makes life fair and sacred to him, to change his religion is to reconstruct the man himself. Such a change is full of peril. "Only the

strongest moral natures survive the shock of doubt which dispossesses them of all that they have trusted from childhood. Most men, when once they are cut loose from what they have always deemed sacred, find it impossible to transfer their reverence to new objects, and sink either into indifference or doubt. Nothing new can be safely given to men unless it preserves all that was valuable in the faith or the institution it supersedes. It is *the old in the new* which saves it from doing more harm than good."

So that if any ask why the Lord Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfil, why He affirmed that no jot or tittle of the law could ever pass away, why He warned us that, should we teach men to break even one, and that the least, of the old commandments, we should thereby condemn ourselves to the lowest place in his kingdom,—we reply, It was because He would not unsettle the minds of his hearers that He made no abrupt transition from Law to Gospel, that He shewed an invariable respect for the ancestral faith of those to whom He spake, that He handled their very prejudices with gentleness, insomuch that they felt his very rebukes of the Pharisaic glosses and traditions to be inspired by his love for the Law which was being corrupted and made void.

And in this, as in all else, we shall do well to follow Him,—to aim, as He aimed, at fulfilling rather than destroying. He came to reveal truth rather than to assail error, to win men to righteousness rather than to denounce their sins. Even in the worst, even in the outcast publican and the lawless harlot, He found a little goodness, and made it more by his recognition and approval of it. Men are not

to be driven or denounced from evil ; they may be won to good by kindness. We cannot curse their errors out of them ; we may bring them to renounce their errors by blessing and serving them. Yet the method of denunciation comes naturally and easily to us. We are quick to detect evil, slow to recognize and commend that which is good, at least in others. We find it so much easier to condemn error than to live by the truth, to rebuke sin than to shew charity, that we are more prone to destroy than to fulfil. 'Tis a proneness that must be restrained if we are to breathe the spirit of our Master. The heretic is more likely to be restored, the doubter to beat his music out, the sinner to be reclaimed, if we lay hold of that which is good in them and try to foster it, than by any logical assault that we can deliver against their errors, or any anathema that we can fulminate against their sins.

So, finally, in that interior rule over our own spirits which is our hard but noble and inevitable task, we should seek to fulfil rather than to destroy. Many, alas, are the imperfections which cleave to us, many the sins which pollute and degrade us. And, sometimes, in our endeavours to amend, we set ourselves definitely to resist a sin by which we are much beset, to subdue an evil affection by which we are often betrayed. Possibly we do well. But possibly we should do even better were we deliberately to cherish that which is good in us, and leave this to contend with the evil affection or habit. To fulfil the good is the best way to destroy the evil. If one would be in health, it is better to take food and exercise than to take medicine—though even the strongest of us

must take medicine at times. And our spiritual health and soundness depend rather on our souls being fed by a constant fellowship with God, and trained by an habitual obedience to his will, than by our direct attempts to cure this disordered function or that.

CARPUS.

*CRITICAL SCEPTICISM.*¹

CHRISTIANITY differs from all other religions in this, that it is the interpretation of a history. The Revelation is given completely, and once for all, in the facts of a Life. The Religion is the practical embodiment of man's apprehension of the facts gained little by little according to his present powers. Other religions have been historical, taking their rise, that is, from the teaching of a definite founder, or slowly shaped from point to point by successive messages accepted as Divine. But Christianity is not simply historical; it is the proclamation of facts whereby the relations of man to God, to the world, and to humanity, are placed in a new light.

This being so, Christianity stands in a definite and wholly peculiar relation toward historical inquiry. We cannot take for our guidance the principles of Christian morality, or the broad generalizations which flow directly from the Christian

¹ This paper was read by the Rev. B. F. Westcott, D.D., Canon of Peterborough and Regius Professor of Divinity, Cambridge, at the Church Congress, held at Brighton in October, 1874. Canon Westcott has kindly consented to its reproduction in the pages of THE EXPOSITOR, "in whole or in part"; and our readers will, I am sure, be impressed with the value of its cogent argument and fine expository suggestions.—EDITOR.