

# THE EXPOSITOR.

---

## *THE HOLINESS OF JESUS CHRIST.*

THE Supernatural, in its most elevated form, is not miracle—it is holiness. In miracle we behold Omnipotence breaking forth to act in the physical world in the service of moral order. Holiness is moral goodness itself, in its most sublime manifestation.

What is the absolute good? It has lately been said, with an accuracy which leaves nothing to be desired, “The absolute good is not an entity or a thing. It is an order determining the relations of things—relations which are to be realized by the action of free wills.”<sup>1</sup>

The perfect good is therefore the realization, at once normal and free, of the true relations between all beings; each creature, in virtue of this relative state, occupying that position in the great whole and performing that part which is fitting for him.

Now, as in a human family there is one central relationship upon which all the others depend—that of the father to each member of the little community, so in the universe is there one supreme position which constitutes the support of all the others, and which, in the interest of all creatures, should be

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Naville, *Le problème du mal*, p. 17.

guarded before all else—that of God. And in the general sphere of goodness, the place of the special province of holiness is just here.

Holiness in God Himself consists in his immutable will to preserve intact the order which should exist amongst all creatures, and to bring them all to realize the relation which should unite them to each other ; consequently, before all else, to maintain the integrity and dignity of his own position in the face of free beings. Holiness, thus understood, includes two things :—the communication by God of all the wealth of his divine life to every free being who shall consent to recognize his sovereign position, and sincerely acquiesce in it ; the denial at first of this perfect life to, or the withdrawal of it afterwards from, every creature who attacks or denies this position, and who endeavours to break that bond of dependence which should unite it to God.

Holiness, in a created being, consists in its voluntary acquiescence in the supreme position of God. The man who, with all his power, affirms God to be the absolute, the only self-existent, Being ; the man who in his presence voluntarily abases himself in the feeling of his own nothingness, and endeavours to draw all his fellows into the same state of voluntary self-suppression, is invested with the true characteristics of holiness.

This holiness includes in his case, as it does in God, love and righteousness : love, by which he joyfully acknowledges God and all the creatures which surround him as placed where they are by God—he loves them, and wills their existence, because he loves and wills both God and all that God loves and wills ;

and righteousness, by which he respects, and, as much as in him lies, causes to be respected, God and the province assigned by God to each created being. Such is holiness in God and in man: in God, the immutable affirmation of Himself; in man, the unvarying affirmation of God.

This supreme goodness has been wanting among the heathen. The Divine Being was not understood among them in such a way that He could occupy so high a position in their consciousness. Their gods were not worthy to stand in such a relation to men. In Israel there was a presentiment and an imperfect realization of holiness. For Jehovah was there recognized as the Being of beings, and man was enabled in self-humiliation to reach to the feeling of his own nothingness before Him. But it was never actually realized save in Jesus Christ, and it is only from his person and history that we gather our ideal of holiness. It is in Jesus that mankind perceives how it is possible for us to affirm God and all that God affirms, not only in humility, but in joyfulness and in the spirit of sonship, with all the powers of our being, even to the complete sacrifice of ourselves.

In Christ, man became, by the annihilation and voluntary dedication of himself, a medium sufficiently transparent to allow the glory of God to shine forth in him in perfection. Thus it was that the life of Christ was the advent of the kingdom of God.

But here the question arises: Was this self-dedication of Christ to God really perfect? Was it in no degree alloyed by human imperfection, by sin, selfishness, evil desires, pride, impatience? Did it retain

its integrity in every moment of his life, from the manger to the cross? Was the body of Jesus always completely subject to his soul, and his soul, with all its faculties, always completely subject to the spirit—that higher principle, through the instrumentality of which man communicates with God, and subordinates himself voluntarily to Him? This is the question upon which we are now about to enter. It is a vital one for Christianity. For if we cannot answer it in the affirmative, Christ differs from us only in degree, and we are called to live *like* Him but not by Him. But if we can so answer it, his condition differs in kind from ours, and in order to be like Him, we must begin by tracing our being *in* Him and *from* Him.

Three principal objections are commonly raised against this fundamental truth of the Christian faith.

1. It is impossible to affirm with certainty the perfect holiness of Christ, because neither we ourselves nor those who lived with Him have had the power to read his heart deeply enough to know whether everything passed in it in conformity with the absolute Law of Right. The adversaries of our faith even cite certain words and actions in the life of Jesus, from which they claim the right to infer that He too was not exempt from sin.

2. Supposing that the perfect holiness of Christ could in some way be demonstrated, we are then met with the objection that so lofty a condition is something superhuman, and that this perfect Jesus would be no longer a true man.

3. A holiness different in nature from ours, even if it were real, would be useless to us, since it could

not serve as a model for us, moving, as it would, at a height inaccessible to our weakness.

In presence of these objections, my business will be to inquire: (1) Whether the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ cannot still, even in our day, be positively *demonstrated*? (2) Whether, perfect as it is, it does not remain, nevertheless, a *human* holiness? (3) Whether, as such, it is not still *accessible* to every one among us?

### I.

“Are we in a position,” asks M. Pécaut, “to pronounce a verdict of perfection upon the character of one of our fellow-creatures, when we do not know all the specialities of his life, and cannot reach to the depths of his heart? . . . The difficulty is enhanced if the subject of our investigations is an historical personage separated from us by eighteen centuries.”<sup>1</sup>

Who could have believed that we should ever arrive at measuring the distance which separates the earth from the moon, from the sun, from the fixed stars, without quitting the surface of our globe? Nevertheless we have done so. It was only necessary to measure upon the earth’s surface a base and two angles, and the problem was solved with all the strictness of mathematical evidence. We can obtain a result not less certain with regard to the problem now before us by an analogous method. By means of two incontrovertible facts, and of a principle which

<sup>1</sup> *Le Christ et la Conscience*, p. 237. A few paragraphs in which Professor Godet states and answers some petty objections to the character of Christ are here omitted. As these objections seem “frivolous” even to such critics as Dr. Keim, it can hardly be worth while to expend time and space in refuting them.  
—EDITOR.

unites them, we shall succeed in demonstrating the perfect holiness of Christ.

The first of the two facts to which we refer is the *relative* holiness of Jesus. Those even who dispute his absolute perfection do not deny that He was one of the best, if not the best, amongst men.

We may cite at this point the testimony of the contemporaries of Jesus, which though certainly insufficient to demonstrate his absolute holiness, does nevertheless suffice to prove his relative purity and goodness. The declaration of Pilate, his judge, "I find no fault in this man;" the confession of his companion in suffering, "We receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss;" the exclamation of the Roman centurion who had presided at his execution, "Certainly this was a righteous man;" the despairing cry of the traitorous disciple who had delivered Him up, "I have betrayed innocent blood"—all these sayings reveal to us clearly enough the impression made by Jesus upon all those who found themselves brought into relation with Him.

We also know the impression which his life produced upon his intimate friends, who had observed Him closely for three years. One of them calls Him simply, "Jesus Christ the righteous;" another, "The Lamb without blemish and without spot."<sup>1</sup>

The attachment even to death which they entertain towards Him, the office of Mediator and Advocate which they assign Him between the holy God and their guilty souls, prove that in their eyes Jesus was at any rate the best of men, a man with-

<sup>1</sup> 1 John ii. 1; 1 Pet. i. 19.

out sin. No doubt they had not seen everything; their sight could not pierce to the secret purposes of the heart; but this impression produced upon them all leaves no doubt in our mind as to the eminent moral qualities of the life and of the mind of Jesus. His teaching itself, the ideal of purity which is there presented to us, the law of charity inculcated in it, are also proofs of the personal character of Him who so speaks. None but a good man could so wonderfully discern and reveal that which is good. So much as this, Strauss himself, the greatest enemy Christianity has had to encounter in our time, acknowledges, and expresses in the following words. After having cited that sublime passage in the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus pictures the heavenly Father making his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sending rain on the just and on the unjust, he adds: "This ideal of a God good to all men, Jesus could only have drawn from his own consciousness; it could only be an emanation from that universal benevolence which was the fundamental feature of his own nature, and in virtue of which He felt Himself in perfect harmony with God. To withstand, like God Himself, the provocation caused by wickedness, to vanquish an enemy solely by beneficence, and to overcome evil with good only—these were principles which He drew from the character of his own heart. He pictured God to Himself such as He felt Himself to be in the best moments of his life. The ruling characteristic of his own being was a love which comprehended all creatures, and He makes of this the fundamental characteristic of the Divine essence." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Leben Jesu*, 1864, pp. 206, 207.

Again, the same author says, in the chapter with which he concludes his work: "Every man eminent for morality, every thinker who has occupied himself with the moral activity of man, has contributed, within a sphere more or less wide, to the purification, the completion, the development of the ideal of morality. Amongst the personages to whom mankind is indebted for the perfecting of its moral conscience, Jesus occupies at any rate the highest place. He has introduced into our ideal of goodness some features in which it was deficient before He appeared. By the religious direction which He impressed upon morality, He gave it a higher consecration; and, by incarnating goodness in his own person, He imparted to it a living warmth. With reference to all that bears upon the love of God and of our neighbour, upon purity of heart and upon the individual life, nothing can be added to the moral intuition which Jesus Christ has left us."<sup>1</sup>

You see that if I call Jesus one of the best of men, I shall not come under any suspicion of partiality. The acknowledgments made by Strauss, which I have just quoted, could only have been extorted from him by the irresistible force of historical truth.

This is the fact upon which we take our stand in this argument; it is conceded by the most declared enemy of Christianity:—Jesus was a man pre-eminently good. But between that and a state of perfect holiness there is, no doubt, a wide gulf to be passed over. Can we cross it? Yes; and it is a principle to which moral experience conducts us which shall

<sup>1</sup> *Leben Jesu*, 1864, p. 625 *et seq.*



serve us for a bridge. The principle is this,—The more holy a man is, the more clearly does he discern evil. The nearer he lives to God, the better does he recognize, the more vividly does he feel, everything that separates between him and God.

At every step of progress which we make in goodness, our conscience gains a keener sagacity in detecting sin, and our heart a greater honesty in deploring it. You can all ascertain for yourselves at any moment the truth of this law of our moral nature. A child who has become used to lying, at last lies without being conscious of it, and without feeling any regret for it; whilst upon the conscience of a truthful child the first lie prints itself like a red-hot iron, and burns a deep wound. A girl who is light-minded, and given up only to her pleasure, absents herself from her mother from morning to night, following her plans and her pursuits, and yet she would be quite astonished if some one who had observed her conduct came to her in the evening to tell her that she had cause to reproach herself; while another who is devoted to her duties, will, on account of a mere act of heedlessness, or of a hasty word uttered to one of her companions, which others may not even have noticed, shed in solitude bitter tears, and refuse to forgive herself.

The more high-principled a merchant is, the deeper will be the uneasiness he will feel under the sense of the slightest act of injustice into which he may have fallen; while the most unprincipled speculations do not cost a sigh to him who has accustomed himself to cross without scruple the boundary lines of ordinary honesty. A man who has made any progress

in the life of holiness will not fail to take notice of every sinful thought, of every movement of self-love which comes across his mind; while a man less advanced will live from morning to night under the dominion of pride, of jealousy, or of some other evil passion, without even suspecting it.

Thousands of stains may pass unnoticed upon a garment already soiled, while on a perfectly pure garment the slightest spot draws attention. Strauss has himself given expression to this law in the following words: "In proportion as a man advances in moral perfection, does the inner sense, by which he perceives the slightest deviation from it in himself, become keener."<sup>1</sup>

What is the result of all this with reference to the subject now before us? It is that if Jesus was one of the best or the best of all men, He must have perceived more clearly than any one else the slightest evil existing within Him, supposing that evil really to exist. In vain would sin have hidden itself within the deepest recesses of his heart; in vain would it have been reduced within that heart to a minimum; still that conscience, clear-sighted and delicate as none other, would not have failed to have apprehended it as it passed, and that sensitive and filial heart would have suffered from it more than ours have ever suffered from the greatest sins.

Well—and this brings us to the other fact upon which we rest our case,—Is this what we find in the life and in the sayings of Jesus? Does He ever accuse Himself of the slightest sin? Do we ever see in his eyes one of those tears of penitence which

<sup>1</sup> *Leben Jesu*, p. 195.

wetted the cheeks of the greatest of the Old Testament saints, and which still, in our day, flow from the eyes of the most devout of Christians? Do we ever see Jesus smite upon his breast like the publican, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner"? I hear St. Paul exclaiming in the bitterness of his soul, "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Can your ear detect a syllable of the kind from the lips of Jesus.

Socrates, the wisest and best of men outside the people of Israel, seeing his disciples ridiculing a physiognomist who said he could trace in his features indications of every vice, declared that he had within him the germ of all these evil tendencies.<sup>1</sup> Was ever any such confession made by Jesus Christ?

No, the sigh of a contrite heart is altogether foreign to the life of Jesus. Could it then be that He was ignorant of what his disciple St. Paul knew so well, that evil exists, in man especially, in the desires, in the secret springs of the heart, and that He allowed Himself to be caught in the same snare as the Pharisees—that of being satisfied with a mere external righteousness? So far from it, that it was He who pronounced those immortal words which brand a single impure look as incipient adultery; the emotion of anger, or of mockery of another, as incipient murder; an oath added needlessly to the simple yea or nay, as incipient perjury. Again, is it not He who teaches us to see in acts of ostentation or of self-conceit something hateful in the sight of God, and in a lie an act of submission to a Satanic im-

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De fato*, c.

puise? Or, will some one perhaps say that it was because He understood so completely the goodness of God, that He did not impute to Himself imperfections which He well knew were at once forgiven? But in that case why did He so severely reprehend in others that which He condemned so slightly in Himself?

You see the mind of Jesus with regard to sin. He who unveiled to mankind its existence under the most spiritual and subtle forms, and who thus once for all overthrew the throne of Pharisaism upon earth, never dreams of charging Himself with it. He speaks of sin—He does so continually—but never as attaching to Himself. “If ye, being evil,” He says; not, “If we, being evil.” Or again, “Ye must be born again;” but not, “We must be born again.” Once more: “When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, . . . forgive us our trespasses;” but never, “My Father, forgive me,” nor any similar exclamation. Nay, more—He addressed once to the Jews this challenge: “Which of you convicteth me of sin?” No doubt the silence of his auditors when thus questioned proves nothing: they might be ignorant of the secret faults, the inward sins, of Him who thus challenged them. But the question of Jesus itself proves much—proves all. For how, with a sensitive conscience such as his, if He felt Himself burdened with the slightest sin, could He, without hypocrisy, put to others a question which between Himself and God He must answer in a way different from theirs, and then claim a victory by their silence?

It is with this same feeling of perfect innocence that, addressing Himself to the women of Jerusalem

on his way to the cross, He utters this piercing sentence, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" which can only mean, "If God's judgments fall so heavily upon the righteous, with what a weight will they not one day descend upon sinners!"

Not only does He feel Himself free from any act chargeable with sin, from any sinful or even idle word, from every guilty feeling, from every desire which can stain the soul, from every wish contrary to the Divine will; but He is certain that He has never neglected any good action which He was called to do, never been guilty of the smallest omission in fulfilling the work entrusted to Him by his Father. "I have glorified thee on the earth," He says, at a time when other mortal men breathe to Heaven a sigh over a life which they feel has contained so many moments, if not ill-spent, yet at least wasted; "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." In these supreme moments He found his consolation in this: "The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please Him." <sup>1</sup>

On his way to Gethsemane, to meet the invisible enemy whose approach He already feels within Him, "The prince of this world cometh," He says, "but hath nothing in me." Such is the verdict of the conscience of Jesus with reference to Himself. That conscience of Jesus is indeed, as M. Keim says, "the only conscience without a scar" in the whole history of mankind.

In presence of this unexampled moral fact, there are but two alternatives: either Jesus was indeed

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 4; viii. 29.

perfectly holy, as his conscience bears witness; or He was the blindest and most hardened of men, since his conscience did not reveal to Him the most elementary fact of morality, the fact with which every child is acquainted by his inward experience before his attention is drawn to it by others—the presence of sin. Between these two alternatives, I suppose we shall not find it difficult to decide.

Do not even free-thinkers acknowledge Jesus to have been one of the most moral men the world has ever produced? They therefore absolutely exclude the latter alternative, and, according to the laws of logic, to which free thought, notwithstanding all its freedom, is still compelled to submit, they have no choice but to concede the former and to say with us, We have here a moral miracle; Jesus was absolutely holy.

The result obtained from these testimonies of the conscience of Christ is completely in harmony with the nature of the mission which He attributes to Himself towards mankind. He calls Himself the *Physician* of mankind, sent to those that are sick: could He be that, were He sick Himself? He calls to Himself those who *travail and are heavy laden*, promising to give them comfort: could He do so had he not felt Himself to be free from the burden which oppressed them? He came to seek and to save that *which was lost*: how could He accomplish this mission if He were Himself lost? unless we say that no one is really lost, which would annul, on the other hand, the testimony of the conscience of Christ respecting the moral condition of mankind.

He is not only the Physician of diseased humanity,

He is the Victim whose blood is to make atonement for it. "He is come," He says, "to give his life a ransom for many."<sup>1</sup> Could this be, if He needed redemption Himself? Shortly before his death He uttered these sacramental words, "This is my blood which is shed for the remission of sins." The law allowed none but victims without blemish and without spot. Could Jesus have thought He could offer Himself upon the altar of expiation, had He recognized in Himself the slightest stain of sin? To attribute to Himself the office of a sacrifice for the sins of the world, without having in Him the consciousness of perfect holiness, would have been the height of folly.

The height, do I say? But there would have been on earth a degree of insanity more marvellous still. Jesus declares, in several of his discourses, that He is to return to judge the world, and to summon before his bar all mankind. "Watch ye, therefore," He says, "and pray always, that ye may be able to stand *before the Son of man.*"<sup>2</sup>

He attributes to Himself this character of Judge of the world even in that Sermon on the Mount, to which free-thinkers would reduce the whole of his teaching. There we read, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. . . . Many will say to me in that day, . . . Have we not done many wonderful works in thy name? . . . Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity."<sup>3</sup>

And must not He who thus places Himself before

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xx. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxi. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. vii. 21-23.

the world as the representative of the holiness of God, and the organ of perfect justice in the solemn act of the universal judgment, have felt Himself to be clear of all sin? What! would the sentence not die out upon the lips of the judge who felt himself a transgressor? Taking his place among the multitude, from whom He was distinguished by but a shade of difference, must He not have said to them, "Let us kneel together and pray for mercy"? Once more we repeat, Logic has its rights, to which free thought must submit itself. Either Jesus was insane, or else He was perfectly holy!<sup>1</sup> Let us conclude this part of our subject with the words of Keim, the author of the latest work, and the most learned, on the life of Jesus. "Any one who gives himself up to the discourses and acts of the Lord, comes forth from that contemplation with this irresistible impression: Here we behold a conscience which never underwent the stings of the sense of sin. And this is not because we have here a moralist satisfied with a low and easy standard. Oh, no! He even charged with guilt a mere look, an idle word, and—hidden behind the screen of outward acts—the impure heart. He rebuked energetically the age in which He lived; He made his disciples ashamed of

<sup>1</sup> We are not ignorant of the attempts which have been made to eliminate by processes and hypotheses of criticism those words in which Jesus declares Himself judge of all. But after these excisions have been made, we shall have further to eliminate the words in which He declares Himself to be the Sacrifice, the Physician, the Saviour; and, after that, those in which He testifies to his own moral purity. And after all this, what would there be left to account for the faith of the apostles and the foundation of the Church, not to speak of the complete arbitrariness which characterizes these excisions of criticism? Men first sketch a Jesus such as they would have Him to be, then they cut and hack at the documents, as at a piece of cloth, till they shape out the teaching of Jesus after their pattern. Then they tell us, This is the history. But is it not a mere conjuring trick?



their weaknesses ; He made them pray for the forgiveness of their sins. But He Himself, the man of the most absorbing of vocations, charged with the vastest mission, called day by day to submit his lofty spirit to the duties imposed upon Him by the life of humility and of self-renunciation, of gentle sympathy and silent submissiveness, which He had voluntarily undertaken, asks for no forgiveness for Himself, not even at Gethsemane or Golgotha ; He ever walks in the bright sunshine of the fatherly love of God ; He draws others into the belief of his perfect goodness ; He forgives sinners in the name of God ; He dies for them, and prepares to take his seat on the judgment-throne of the all-holy God." <sup>1</sup>

F. GODET.

---

ST. JOHN'S VIEW OF JESUS ON THE CROSS.

ST. JOHN xix. 28-37.

IT may be taken for granted in the following pages that, in the view of St. John, Jesus on the cross is the true Paschal Lamb. To say nothing of other passages of his Gospel, the quotation by the Evangelist in Chapter xix. 36, 37 of the two Old Testament texts there given is sufficient to establish this, and further argument may be dispensed with.

The point now immediately before us is a different one, and the question which we propose to answer may be stated in the following terms. Does St. John, seeing in Jesus on the cross the Paschal Lamb, see it at the moment when it was slain for the feast of the following night, or at that when it was placed upon

<sup>1</sup> *Der Geschichtliche Christus*, p. 109 et seq.