

In a second paper I shall endeavour to show that this all-important subject is surrounded by special difficulties; and shall make suggestions with a view to overcoming them. I shall also begin to expound what seems to me the best method of theological research, a method in strict harmony with the essential constitution of the human mind and with the special nature of our object-matter. This method will be further expounded in a third paper. And a fourth paper will investigate the true relation between the results thus obtained and the dogmas of the Christian Church.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

---

### JOSEPH AND MARY.

THE first and third Evangelists tell us all we know of Mary. They tell us that she was the espoused wife of Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth, and that the Divine call came to her after her espousal and before her marriage. What a call it was, and what a prospect it opened up! No sooner was Mary left alone with her own thoughts than she began to realize something of what had been appointed her, and what she must now prepare herself to pass through. The sharp sword that Simeon afterwards spoke of with such pathos, was already whetted, and was fast approaching her exposed heart. On a thousand canvases throughout Christendom we are shown the angel of the annunciation presenting Mary with a branch of lily, as an emblem of her beauty and a seal of her purity; but why has no artist stained the whiteness of the lily with the red blood of a broken heart? For no sooner had the transfiguring light of the angel's presence faded from her sight, than a deep and awful darkness began to fall around Joseph's espoused wife. Surely if ever a suffering soul had to seek its right-

eousness and strength in God alone, it was the soul of the Virgin Mary in the weeks and months that followed the annunciation. Blessed among women as all the time she was, unblemished in soul and body as a paschal lamb, yet, like that lamb she was set apart to be a sacrifice, and to have a sword thrust through her heart. With all the assurances and hopes she had to rest upon, she would pass through many dark and dreadful seasons when all she had given her to lean upon seemed like a broken reed. "Hail, highly favoured of the Lord," the angel had said to her, but all that would seem but so many mocking words to her as she saw nothing before her but an open shame, and, it might be, an outcast's death. And, so fearfully and wonderfully are we all made, and so fearful and wonderful was the way in which the Word was made flesh, that who can tell how all this bore on Him who was bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh, to whom Mary was in all things a mother, as He was in all things to her a son. For,—

"Hers was the face that unto Christ had most resemblance."

"Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. These are the beginnings of sorrows."

Joseph's part in all this is told us by Matthew alone. And as we read that Evangelist's account of that time we see how sharp the sword was which pierced Joseph's soul also. His heart was broken with this terrible trial, but there was only one course left open to him. Take her to his home he could not, but neither could he consent to make Mary a public example, and there was only left to him the sad enough step of putting her away privily. Joseph's heart must have been torn in two; for Mary had been the woman of all women to him. She had been in his eyes the lily among thorns. And now to have to treat her like a poisonous weed—the thought of it drove him mad.

Why is it that whosoever comes near Christ has always to drink such a cup of sorrow? Truly they who are brother, or sister, or mother to Him must take up their cross daily. These are they who go up through great tribulation.

Amid these circumstances, if thus indeed they came about, what a journey that must have been from Nazareth to Hebron, and occupied with what thoughts. Mary's way would lead her through Jerusalem, and no doubt she tarried in the holy city for a night that she might rest herself and restore her heart in the temple service. She may have crossed Olivet as the sun was setting; she may have knelt at even in Gethsemane; she may have turned aside to look on the city from Calvary. If Joseph and Mary had already parted when "she went into the hill country with haste," what a heavy heart she must have carried through all these scenes. Only two, out of God, knew the truth about Mary,—an angel in heaven, and her own heart upon earth, and thus it was that she fled to the mountains of Judea, hoping there to find a kinswoman of hers who would receive her word and understand her case. As she sped on, Mary must have recalled and repeated many happy Scriptures, well-known indeed, but till then little understood. The husbandmen and vine-dressers saw passing them, in those days, a Galilean maiden who seemed blind and deaf to everything about her as she hastened southwards. Only she would be overheard communing with her own heart, and saying to herself, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass; and He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. . . . Thou shalt keep them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of men; Thou shalt keep them in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." Such a pavilion Mary sought and for a season found in the remote and retired household of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

It is to that meeting we owe the Magnificat, the last Old

Testament psalm, and the first New Testament hymn. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." We cannot enter into all Mary's thoughts as she sang that song, any more than she could in her day enter into all our thoughts as we read and sing it. Noble melody as her Magnificat is, it draws its deepest tones from a time that was still to come. The spirit of Christian prophecy moved her to utter it, but the noblest and fullest prophecy of Christ fell far short of the evangelical fulfilment.

"And Mary abode with Elizabeth about three months." She is a happy maiden who has a mother or a motherly friend experienced in the ways of the human heart to whom she can tell all her anxieties; a wise, tender, much experienced counsellor, such as Naomi was to Ruth and Elizabeth to Mary. Was the Virgin an orphan, that she did not open her heart to her own mother? or was Mary's mother such a woman that Mary could have told it all to any stranger rather than to her? Be that as it may, Mary found a true mother in Elizabeth of Hebron. Many a holy if dreamful hour the two women spent together sitting under the terebinths that overhung the dumb priest's secluded house. And if at any time their faith wavered, and the thing seemed impossible as they looked at it in the uncongenial and disenchanting light of daily life, was not Zacharias there beside them with his sealed lips and his writing table, a living witness to the goodness and severity of God? How Mary and Elizabeth would object and reason and rebuke and comfort one another, now laughing like Sarah, now singing like Hannah, let loving and confiding and pious women tell.

Sweet as it is to linger in Hebron beside Mary and Elizabeth, our hearts are always drawn back to Joseph in desolate and darkened Nazareth. "The absent are dear just as the dead are perfect." And Mary's dear image became

to Joseph dearer still when he could no longer see her face or hear her voice. Nazareth was empty to Joseph, it was worse than empty, it was a city of sepulchres in which he sought for death and could not find it.

All the weary week his bitterness increased, and when, as his wont was, he went up to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, that only made him feel his loneliness and distress all the more. Mary's sweet presence had often made the holy place still more holy to him, and her voice in the psalms had been to him as when an angel sings. On one of those Sabbaths which the exiled virgin was spending at Hebron, Joseph went up again to the sanctuary in Nazareth, seeking to hide his great grief with God. And this, I shall suppose, was the Scripture appointed to be read in the synagogue that day: "Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." What a multitude of thoughts rushed into Joseph's astonished heart as the minister read the great prophecy. Many had heard these words, but no man had ever heard them as Joseph heard them that day. When he laid himself down to sleep that night his pillow became a stone under his head. Not that he was cast out, but he had cast out another, and she the best of God's creatures he had ever known; she, perhaps, how shall he utter it even to himself at midnight, the virgin-mother of Immanuel!—a better mother He could not have. So speaking to himself till he was terrified at his own thoughts, weary with a week's labour, and aged with many weeks of uttermost sorrow, Joseph fell asleep. Then a thing was secretly brought to him, and his ear received a little thereof. There was silence, and he heard a voice saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the

Holy Ghost." Gabriel had been sent to reassure Joseph's despairing heart, and to announce the Incarnation of the Son of God. Did Joseph arise before daybreak, and set out for Hebron to bring his outcast home? There is room to believe that he did. If he did, the two angel-chastened men must have had their own counsels together, even as the two women had. And as Joseph talked with Zacharias through his writing table, he felt that dumbness, and even death itself, would be a too light punishment for unbelief and cruelty like his. But all this, and all that they had passed through since the angel came to Zacharias at the altar, only made the re-betrothal of Joseph and Mary the sweeter and holier, with the aged priest acting the part of a father, and Elizabeth more than the part of a mother. The unbelief of Zacharias, and his consequent infirmity have no doubt despoiled us of a doxology over Joseph and Mary that would worthily have stood on the Evangelist's page beside Mary's Magnificat and his own Benedictus.

There are many things in Mary's character and example that deserve the attention, and invite the imitation, of all the readers of her history. But there is one thing not found in every one of her age and sex that should command all women's attention and imitation, and that is her early thoughtfulness, sobriety, and seriousness of mind. For my part I do not know the virtue that woman ever had that I could safely deny to Mary. The Divine congruity of things compels me to believe that all that could be received or attained by any woman would be granted beforehand to her who was so miraculously to bear, and so intimately to nurture and instruct, the Holy Child. We must give Mary her promised due. We must not cherish a grudge against the mother of our Lord because some have given her more than her due. There is no fear of our thinking too much either of Mary's maidenly virtues, or of her motherly duties and experiences. The Holy Ghost in guiding the

researches of Luke, and in superintending the composition of the third Gospel, specially signalizes the depth and the placidity and the thoughtfulness of Mary's mind. Thus at the angelic salutation she did not swoon or cry out, she did not rush either into terror on the one hand or transport on the other, but like a wise and believing woman she cast in her mind, the Evangelist tells us, what manner of salutation this should be. And later on, when all who heard it were wondering at the testimony of the shepherds, it is instructively added, "but Mary kept all those things, and pondered them in her heart." And yet again, when another twelve years have passed by, we find the Evangelist still pointing out a distinguishing feature of Mary's saintly character, "They understood not the saying which Jesus spake unto them; but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart."

But again, if we are to apply the principle to Mary's case, "according to your faith so be it unto you," then Mary must surely wear the crown as the mother of all who believe on her son. If Abraham's faith makes him their father, then surely Mary's faith entitles her to be called their mother. If the converse of Christ's words holds true, that no mighty work is done where there is unbelief; if we may safely reason that where there has been a mighty work done there must have been a corresponding and co-operating faith; then I do not think we can easily over-estimate the measure of Mary's faith. If this was the greatest work ever wrought by the power and grace of God among the children of men, and if Mary's faith entered into it at all, then how great her faith must have been. Elizabeth saw how great it was. She saw the unparalleled grace that had come to Mary, and she had humility and magnanimity enough to acknowledge it. "Blessed art thou among women; blessed is she that believeth, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the

Lord." "Blessed is she that believeth," said Elizabeth, no doubt with some sad thoughts about her dumb husband sitting beside her.

"Blessed is the womb that bore thee," on another occasion cried a nameless woman, a nameless but true woman, as her speech bewrayeth, "and the paps that thou hast sucked." But He said, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." And again, "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother."

ALEXANDER WHYTE.

---

## THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

### II.

#### THE PRELUDE.

"We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have toward all the saints, because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing, as it doth in you also, since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth; even as ye learned of Epaphras our beloved fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit" (Col. i. 3-8).

THIS long introductory section may at first sight give the impression of confusion from the variety of subjects introduced. But a little thought about it shows it to be really a remarkable specimen of the Apostle's delicate tact, born of his love and earnestness. Its purpose is to prepare a favourable reception for his warnings and arguments against errors which had crept in, and in his judgment were threatening to sweep away the Colossian Christians from their allegiance to Christ, and their faith in the gospel as it had been originally preached to them by Epaphras. That