

"BOTH LORD AND CHRIST."

THE examination to which modern criticism has in recent years submitted the writings of the Old Testament, as literature, has brought into prominence some questions concerning the manner in which these older Scriptures are used in the New Testament. There has been discussed, among other matters, the way in which the names of authors are given to some of the books, notably the Psalter and the Law. In what sense, it is asked, do Christ and His Apostles assign the first five books to Moses and the Psalter to David? Is their language to be accepted as a direct assertion that the works so assigned were verily written by David and Moses? Or are they merely using the titles which tradition and popular judgment had given to the books? With regard to the books named "of Moses" most men are now agreed that, while they contain matter which had its origin with Moses, their present form is due to later hands. The case of the Psalter presents more difficulty. And in connexion with that part of the enquiry, men's minds have been specially exercised by Christ's application, as it is reported in the Gospels, of some words from Psalm cx. Moreover, out of the discussion of our Lord's language, on the occasion referred to, an enquiry has arisen concerning the nature and limitation of His human knowledge.

Now, that God does condescend to limit Himself, we know. For He has bestowed on each one of us freedom of will. He sets before us life and death, good and evil, but He puts no constraint upon our choice, to compel us to

His law. And, as has been well said,¹ "Divine truth becomes many times in Scripture incarnate, debasing itself to assume our rude conceptions, that so it may converse more freely with us, and infuse its own divinity into us." There will therefore be no irreverence if we speak of our Lord's human knowledge as willingly limited: if we conceive Him to have assumed, for a time, and for the purposes of His grace, the level of those whom He addressed. His love is our warrant for believing that, while He would teach nothing but what was true, He would yet frame His speech in such wise that His hearers should fully comprehend His meaning. According to the Jewish dictum,² "The law speaks with the tongue of the children of men," employing anthropomorphic terms in reference to God Himself, because in no other way could the Infinite be at all revealed to the finite capacities of mankind. And if this be true of the Law, how much more true may we believe it to be of Him who came to fulfil the Law!

With this thought in mind let us look first at the words which Christ has quoted from the Psalm in question: then consider His manner of using them, and the purpose which He had at heart, and note at the same time the effect which they produced on the Pharisees to whom He was speaking. The last appears to be the most likely path in which to seek some solution of the difficulties which have been raised respecting the Gospel narratives.

The language of the Psalm is of the most lofty and solemn character. The writer, whether he be David or another, is full of a heaven-sent message, "The oracle of Jehovah unto my lord" forms his unique preface. We find no parallel to this elsewhere in Scripture. Thus introduced, the prophecy is stamped with a special importance. Now, who is intended by אֲדֹנָי my lord? It is a

¹ *Select Discourses of John Smith*, p. 173.

² Talm., Bābli. Jebamoth, 71a.

form of address applicable, and often applied,¹ to merely human dignitaries, as is also the Greek *κύριος*,² by which it is translated in the Septuagint and in the New Testament. The possibility of such an application should be kept in mind, for it may help us to a fuller interpretation of this important verse.

But the august person to whom the oracle of the Psalmist is addressed is one in whose destiny and triumph God Himself is intimately concerned: one who, while He may be spoken of by a title such as other men bear, is marked, by the message of Jehovah, as something more than man, as about to be highly exalted, to be raised to such a dignity, that while He sits on the throne of Heaven, the Almighty Father will undertake for Him, and bring all His foes into subjection.

And here it should be observed that it forms no part of the revelation of this divine oracle in Psalm cx., that the exalted person with whom it is concerned is to be the son of David. Nor does the language depend for any of its force on being the utterance of David. The glorious words which the Psalmist publishes would bear the same import whether they were delivered to the world "by the hand of" David, or of Haggai, or Zechariah, or any other divinely commissioned herald. He who is here called "lord" would be lord alike to all "the goodly fellowship of the prophets."

Nor is the Psalm a description of some earthly triumph, meant to be further interpreted as prefiguring a grander spiritual conquest. We are carried by it at once into the heart of a spiritual warfare. Jehovah hath put on His apparel and girded Himself with strength. We may not interpret as if a primary reference were made to some potentate of the Psalmist's day, while the words are to be

¹ Cf. Gen. xxiii. 6, 11, 15; xxxiii. 13, 14; 1 Sam. xxii. 12; xxiv. 8.

² Cf. John iv. 11; xii. 21.

applied in a loftier sense to the Messiah. To no mere human ruler could such exaltation be offered. Still less could such a one be spoken of as raised to an eternal priesthood. The language fits Him alone, in whom the Father was well pleased, His own, His only Son, in whom the Divine and human were hereafter to be united, and to whom alone both the human title and the heavenly exaltation could belong.

Hence the Psalm stands alone¹ among the Messianic prophecies. Other predictions of the Christ bear a meaning and a direct lesson for the times in which they were uttered. Here the voice of Jehovah brings from the council-chamber of heaven a message, the key to which can only be found when He appears, who wears the two-fold nature mysteriously implied in the solemn words. And commentators² have been constrained to acknowledge that for this sublime Psalm no double application is possible. Once, and only once, has humanity been united with divinity.

When we turn to examine the account of our Lord's interview with the Pharisees, during which He made reference to this Psalm, we find some variations in the narratives³ of the Synoptists, by whom alone it is recorded. And it is only from St. Matthew that we learn the effect produced by Christ's questioning. "No one was able to answer Him a word, nor durst any one from that day question Him any longer." It is St. Matthew too who gives us a report of what occurred in the direct form, recording the questions just as they were put to the Pharisees gathered around Him. And it is not unimpor-

¹ This uniqueness is marked in the New Testament too, where no Scripture is so frequently quoted. Beside the citations in the Gospels, parts of it are quoted in Acts ii. 34; 1 Cor. xv. 25; Heb. i. 13 v. 6; vi. 20; vii. 17, 21; 1. Pet. iii. 22

² See Perowne on Ps. cx.

³ Matt. xxii. 41-46; Mark xii. 35-37; Luke xx. 41-44.

tant to notice that in this direct account our Lord's language is all in the form of questions. He makes no formal statement, but wishes by interrogation, if it may be, to lead them upward unto truth. He begins, “What think ye of the Christ? Whose Son is He?” Had they answered the first of these questions, their reply would doubtless have expressed their expectation of a purely human descendant of David, who should be pointed out by the unction¹ of Elijah, as the adopted of God, and thus be constituted the Messiah. But they only respond to the second. “They say unto Him: The son of David.” But it was a human son of David that satisfied all their aspirations. The whole race, as was seen even in the disciples who had been so long with Jesus, was looking for one to sit upon an earthly throne, and restore the kingdom to Israel.

The words of the other Evangelists make clear for us the point towards which the questions of Jesus were tending. “*How* say they (the scribes, *Mk.*) that the Christ is the Son of David? In what sense do they understand this sonship? Shall the Christ be sprung from David's line even as Solomon was, and be in nothing greater than he? The ‘*How*’ makes clear for us the drift of St. Matthew's ‘What think ye?’ which the Pharisees had refrained from answering. Jesus would fain correct the error in which the scribes, in common with nearly all the nation, had become confirmed. They had grown blind to the meaning of one-half of the Divine revelation, and looked for the promised Messiah to be a mere human leader. Human indeed, the seed of the woman, their Scriptures promised from the first page that He should be; human, that He might sympathise with mankind: but the same Scriptures proclaimed Him as one who could be acknowledged as the very Son of God. This is the lesson which our Lord endeavours to make them read for themselves.

¹ Cf. Justin, *Dialogue*, c. 8.

And in this wise does He bring them to their lesson-book. "How then does David in spirit call Him lord: saying, The Lord said unto my lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I put thine enemies beneath thy feet? If then David call Him lord, how is He his son?" In St. Luke the quotation is prefaced thus: "David himself saith in the book of Psalms," and by St. Mark it is introduced still more solemnly, "David himself said by the Holy Ghost."

At this point of the narrative there are several matters which call for notice. It is here, and here only, by our Lord's employment of Psalm cx., that the Messiah's sonship to David is placed in close connexion with the lordship mentioned in the Psalm. But it is of set purpose that these two terms of relationship are set side by side. The Pharisees had admitted that the Christ would be David's son. For this they had God's promise to the king himself, and the confirmation thereof in the prophetic message of Isaiah (xi. 1). But they had halted in their reading of the Divine promises. So to bring them to a true conception, Christ points them to this other Scripture, which they held to have reference to the Messiah, and which, if rightly understood, would rid them of their misconception. In doing this, He does not intend to institute any contrast between the sonship and the lordship. The titles are coordinate. Both have reference to the human nature of the Messiah. But in the Psalm there is an addition. The Divine aspect of the Christ there is linked with the title which will belong to Him as Man. The lordship, the designation of a human dignity, is ascribed to One whom Jehovah will call to His own right hand. This union of the divine and human is the profound message of the Psalmist's revelation. This an oracle from Jehovah could alone disclose.

And it is noteworthy that in Christ's question the Divine and the human attributes are kept in immediate conjunc-

tion. Jesus does not break up the sentence: "The Lord said unto my lord, Sit thou on my right hand," but gives it as the picture of God's complete purpose that in the Messiah the two natures will be combined. It was not needful for Him to repeat the whole verse, when he asked the question the second time. "David himself calls Him lord," he says, in the manner in which you have heard, joining to that title words which proclaim his heavenly exaltation; "how then is He his son?" How may a son of David, who can be addressed as human dignitaries are, be also One whom God can raise to His own throne, and appoint Him to be an eternal High Priest?

Into this do the questionings of Jesus resolve themselves. He accepts the answer that the Christ will be the Son of David. It was truth, but only a part of the truth. In the Psalm there had stood written for generations a foretokening of the great mystery of God manifest in the flesh. To this the eyes of the Pharisees were closed. Out of their own mouths, by His interrogations, Jesus would fain draw a loftier and truer confession than was contained in their first answer. Is it alien to the spirit of His teaching to think that, for giving such a lesson, He would condescend to place Himself for a moment on the level of those whom He desired to instruct? He, whose whole life was stooping to lift up the fallen? Need it seem strange to us that He calls the Psalter by the name of David, as did all those who were listening to Him. It was but for a moment. The sentence is not closed before He applies the corrective. "David said by the Holy Ghost." A greater than David is here. Questions concerning the limitation of our Lord's human knowledge may be dismissed from our minds. On the words of the Psalm He bestows the noblest title to acceptance. The true author is the Divine Spirit. It is direct from the eternal presence-chamber that the oracle comes concerning that Son, through whom God was

about to speak to the world in the last days, and who, when He had by Himself purged our sins, was to be enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The Pharisees felt, it may be dimly, but they felt, whither Christ's questions were leading. And for the time they were afraid of what they felt, and durst ask Him no more questions. For as He came to reveal the Father, so, in words like these, He was the Revealer of Himself. But though He had come to bring this light to His own, they received Him not. The Psalm, however, as thus expounded by the Master, has been much employed by His messengers in the New Testament as containing in itself a proclamation of the Divine and human in the nature of our blessed Lord. The apostle to the Hebrews thus interprets it. Jesus who on the human side took hold upon the seed of Abraham was He to whom God said " Sit thou on My right hand." And St. Peter (Acts ii. 26) takes it for the text of his sermon on the day of Pentecost, declaring that in it God had shown that the Jesus whom the Jews had crucified, was Divine as well as human, was made both Lord and Christ: a Lord whom men may acknowledge and pay him their allegiance, and the Christ, the beloved Son of God.

Jesus had been inviting His generation, both by words and works, to accept¹ this mystery. In His miracles the disciples beheld His glory, and believed on Him. They found that His words were the words of eternal life. Not so the Pharisees. The eyes of this people were blinded, their ears they had stopped. And they had grown to be boastful of their blindness. " Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" was their question (John vii. 48) to the officers who reported " Never man spake like

¹ It was accepted, as Christ would have it accepted, by St. Thomas (John xx. 23) when he acknowledged the Jesus, whom he had long called Lord, to be also verily God. " My Lord and my God."

this Man.” But the words which Jesus had spoken were remembered against Him. And we can understand, from what subsequently happened, why He attempted no more at first than to guide them to the truth by questionings. His hour was not yet come. A time, however, arrived ere long when He was asked in set terms (Mark xiv. 62), “ Art thou the Christ, the son of the Blessed ? ” And He answered, “ I am.”

This answer they must have expected, nay they probably courted it, because of the opposition which, among men like-minded with themselves, it was sure to evoke. The high-priest rent his clothes. The language of Jesus he declared to be blasphemy. And the popular voice was with him. They all condemned Jesus to be worthy of death. He had expounded to them now, no longer by questions, but plainly, the doctrine of the Psalm : “ Ye shall see the Son of Man, sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.” Aforetime they had tried to stone Him (John x. 33) for this teaching. “ Because that thou being a man makest thyself God.” In the end they crucified Him. And it was a heathen centurion, and not a Jew, who at the crucifixion saw and declared the truth, published of old in the oracle of Jehovah : “ Truly this *man* was the son of God ” (Mark xv. 39).

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