

*JESUS MIRRORED IN MATTHEW, MARK,
AND LUKE.*

I. THE PROPHETIC PICTURE OF MATTHEW.

THE three first Gospels present essentially the same view of Jesus as a preacher, a teacher, and the uncompromising foe of Pharisaism. Yet on closer study distinctive features reveal themselves in their respective delineations. In Mark, which may with much probability be regarded as the earliest Gospel, Jesus is presented realistically as a *man*, with marked individuality in experience, speech, manner, and action. In Matthew He is presented as the *Christ*, in His Messianic dignity, yet as a very human, winsome Messiah. In Luke He appears as the *Lord*, the exalted Head of the Church; still a true man, yet bearing the aspect of a saint with an aureole round His head; near us in His grace towards the sinful, yet in some ways wearing a look of remoteness like a distant range of hills softly tinged with blue.

The first Evangelist, as is well known to all readers, loses no opportunity of verifying his thesis: Jesus the Christ. Some of his prophetic citations are unimportant, referring to matters purely external, of no significance for the characterisation of Jesus. An extreme example of this class may be found in the closing words of the second chapter: "He shall be called a Nazarene." Apologists have busied themselves in trying to discover the Old Testament basis of the reference, and some in their despair have had recourse to the hypothesis of some lost book of prophecy whence the quotation was taken. Their labour is well meant but vain. Far better to confess that this is one of the weakest links in the prophetic chain of argument, and try to make an apologetic point of its weakness. That really can be done. It is obvious that no one would ever have thought of a prophetic reference in the instance before us unless the fact had

first been there to put the idea into his mind. If the home of Jesus had not been in Nazareth, who would have dreamt of searching among the Hebrew oracles for a prophetic anticipation? The fact suggested the prophecy, the prophecy did not create the fact. And this remark may apply to many other instances, where we have not, as in this case, independent means of verifying the fact. Sceptics have maintained that not a few of the Gospel incidents were invented to correspond with supposed Messianic prophecies. The truth probably is that in by far the greater number of cases the historical data were there to begin with, stimulating believers in Jesus as the Christ to hunt up Old Testament texts fitting into them as key to lock.

Some of Matthew's quotations reveal delicate tact and fine spiritual insight. Whatever may be their value as proofs that Jesus was the *Christ*, there can be no doubt at all about their value as indications of what the Evangelist thought of *Jesus*. These indications are all the more valuable that they are given unconsciously and without design. The Evangelist's aim in making these citations is to satisfy his first readers that He of whom he wrote was the Great One whose coming all Jews, Christian and non-Christian, expected. But in pursuing this design he lets us see how he conceives the character and ministry of Jesus, and this is really for us now the permanent religious use of these prophetic texts.

Three of these texts stand out from among the group as specially serviceable for this purpose. The first, quoted from Isaiah ix. 1, 2, is introduced in connection with the settlement of Jesus in Capernaum at the commencement of His Galilean ministry. The important part of the quotation lies in the words: "the people which sat in darkness saw a great light."¹ *Jesus of Nazareth, the Light of the dark land of Galilee*—such is the Evangelist's comprehensive concep-

¹ *Matt. iv. 16.*

tion of the memorable ministry he is about to narrate. On examining his detailed account we perceive that in his view Jesus exercised His illuminating function both by preaching and by teaching: understanding by the former the proclamation to the people at large of the good news of the kingdom as a kingdom of grace, by the latter the initiation of disciples into the more recondite truths of the kingdom. But it is to be noted as characteristic of the first of our canonical Gospels that while the preaching function (*kerygma*) of Jesus is carefully recognised, it is to the teaching function (*didache*) that greatest prominence is given. "Jesus," we are told, "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom."¹ But beyond such general statements little is said concerning the Preaching. On the other hand, of the Teaching, especially that given to disciples who were indeed its chief recipients, copious samples have been preserved. The "Sermon on the Mount," brought in immediately on the back of the general announcement just quoted, belongs distinctively to the Teaching. However many more might be present, disciples were the proper audience, insomuch that the more appropriate name for the discourse would be, not the *Sermon* on the Mount, but the *Teaching* on the Hill. There Jesus was the light of the few that they might become the light of the world. And He was their light by being their Rabbi. At the close of the discourse the Evangelist makes the comparison between Jesus and the scribes given in Mark in connection with the first appearance of Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum.² The comparison implies resemblance as well as contrast. Jesus in the view of our Evangelist was a scribe or Rabbi in function, anti-Rabbinical in spirit, and in virtue of both facts the spiritual light of the land. Because He was a Teacher He might be compared with the other religious teachers of the people whose professed aim it was to com-

¹ *Matt.* iv. 23.

² *Matt.* vii. 29; *Mark* i. 22.

municate to their countrymen the knowledge of God. Because He differed utterly from these teachers in method and spirit, the light He offered was light indeed. For their light the Evangelist believes to be but darkness, the deepest, most ominous phase of the night that brooded over Galilee and other parts of the Holy Land, as he will take pains to show in the course of his story.

The conception of the Christ as the Light-giver implies that the leading Messianic charism is *wisdom*. But that the author of the first Gospel took no one-sided view of Messianic equipment, but fully recognised the claims of *love*, is shown by the prophetic quotation now to be noticed. It also is taken from the Book of Isaiah, and is in these words: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."¹ In his general preliminary description of the Galilean ministry, Matthew gives a prominent place to a healing function: "healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people."² The words just quoted from the prophet show us the light in which the healing ministry presented itself to his mind. What struck him most was not the marvellous power displayed therein but the sympathy, the phenomenal compassion. This was not a matter of course; ordinary people did not so view the remarkable cures which were taking place among them. What gained for Jesus fame among them was, beside the benefit received, the preternatural power evinced by His healing acts. Only a deep glimpse into the heart of Jesus could enable any one to see in these acts something more and better than power, and to find in His curative function a fulfilment of the striking Hebrew oracle. Such a glimpse had the Evangelist. He read truly the innermost meaning of the acts, some of which he reports, and so laid his finger on the grand distinction of Jesus. And one who saw the central significance of love in the character of Jesus was not likely to suppose

¹ *Matt.* viii. 17, from *Isa.* liii.

² *Matt.* iv. 23.

that its manifestation was confined to healing acts. He would expect it to reveal itself also in "gracious words" spoken for the healing of sin-sick souls. And though fewer such words are reported in Matthew than we might have desired, there are some that mean much to one who duly considers them.

By far the most important of our three prophetic oracles is the one remaining to be mentioned. It presents, so to speak, a full-length portrait of Jesus, in prophetic language, which will repay detailed study, feature by feature. This citation, like the other two taken from Isaiah, occurs in Matthew xii. 18-21, and is in these terms: ¹

"Behold my servant, whom I have chosen;
My beloved in whom my soul is well pleased:
I will put my Spirit upon Him,
And He shall declare judgment to the Gentiles.
He shall not strive, nor cry aloud;
Neither shall any one hear His voice in the streets.
A bruised reed shall He not break,
And smoking flax shall He not quench,
Till He send forth judgment unto victory,
And in His name shall the Gentiles hope."

The attractive picture is introduced by the Evangelist at this point in his narrative to show the true Jesus in opposition to the Jesus of Pharisaic imagination—a miscreant deserving to die for Sabbath-breaking and other offences against an artificial religious system. He sees in Jesus the realisation of one of the finest ideal conceptions in Hebrew prophecy—the Servant of God, beloved of God, filled with His Spirit, gentle, peaceable, sympathetic, wise, cosmopolitan, capable of winning the confidence and satisfying the aspirations not of Israelites only but of all mankind. It is the retiring non-contentious disposition of Jesus, manifested in connection with a sabbatic conflict, that recalls the prophetic ideal of Messiah to his mind. The

¹ I quote the Revised Version. The original is in Isaiah xlii. 1-4.

baffled foes of Jesus had left the scene of strife in a truculent temper, taking counsel "how they might destroy Him." Perceiving their threatening mood, Jesus withdrew from the place to avoid giving further offence and precipitating a crisis. In this procedure the Evangelist recognises the Messianic trait: "He shall not strive nor cry aloud, neither shall any one hear His voice in the streets." But he is not content to quote this one sentence: he reproduces the passage in full. Instead of a single trait he shows us the complete picture. It is not a case of loose quotation without considering whether the quoted matter be relevant or irrelevant. Of set purpose he brings in this fair portrait of Jesus just here, skilfully using as a foil to set off its beauty the hideously distorted ideas of Him current in the religious world of Judæa. He takes into his hand the sketch of the ancient Hebrew limner, holds it up to his readers, and says: Look on this picture and on that. This is Jesus as I see Him, that is Jesus as Pharisees misconceive Him. Which think you is the true Jesus?

How shall we qualify ourselves for judging what is to be the basis for verification? Must we confine ourselves to the immediate context, or may we roam over the evangelic narrative from its beginning up to this point? I think the Evangelist himself has the whole foregoing story in view, and that that may be the reason why he quotes at length and does not restrict his citation to the one point apposite to the immediate occasion. If so, then we may travel over the preceding pages, that by broad, large observation we may satisfy ourselves that the prophetic delineation answers to the character of Him whose story has thus far been told. The very position of the picture in the book—in the middle, instead of at the commencement—invites us to use the knowledge we have acquired for this purpose. Another Evangelist, Luke, has also presented to his readers an ideal portrait of Jesus, painted in prophetic colours. But his

picture comes in very early, serving as a *frontispiece* to his book.¹ Matthew's picture stands right in the centre, so that we cannot help asking, Is the painting like the original as we now know Him ?

Let us then study the goodly image in the light of the history going before. "Behold My servant!"

The first trait is the Divine complacency resting on the person whose character is delineated: "My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased." The detested of the Pharisees is the beloved of God. A strong thing to say; what evidence of its truth? The evangelic historian points in reply to the baptismal scene at the Jordan with the accompanying voice from heaven: "Thou My beloved Son."² This, of course, would have been no evidence for Pharisees who were not there to hear, and who would not have believed on the report of another that the voice had really been spoken; even as there are many now to whom it is no evidence because of their unbelief in the miraculous. For minds of the Pharisaic type no evidence of any sort could avail to show that such an one as Jesus could possibly be the well-beloved of God. Such minds judge men by external tests and by hard and fast rules, with the inevitable result that they often mistake the best for the worst, and the worst for the best, and say of one who is a true servant and son of God: "Thou hast a devil." Happily there is evidence as to the character of Jesus available for all men of open, honest heart, whether they believe in miracle or not. There is the testimony borne by the unsophisticated spiritual instincts of the soul, which can recognise goodness at sight. Can we not see for ourselves, without voices from heaven, that Jesus of Nazareth, as revealed in His recorded words and acts, is a Son of God, if not in the metaphysical sense of theology, at least in the ethical sense of possessing a God-like spirit? Behold My

¹ Luke iv. 16-30.

² Matt. iii. 17.

servant! Yea, a servant indeed: of God, of truth, of righteousness, of *true* truth, of *real* righteousness, with rare capacity for discerning between genuine and counterfeit—a brave, heroic, prophetic Man, fighting for the Divine in an evil time, when godlessness assumed its most repulsive and formidable form under the guise of a showy, plausible, yet hollow zeal for godliness. Truly, in the words of the Hebrew oracle, God had put His Spirit upon Him. The descent of the Spirit at His baptism, if not an objective fact, was at least a happy symbol of the truth.

The second trait in the picture is the retiring disposition of Jesus, described in the words: "He shall not strive nor cry aloud, neither shall any one hear His voice in the streets." Interpreted in the light of the immediate situation these words refer to the peaceable spirit of Jesus evinced by His retirement from the scene of recent conflict to avoid further contention, and the intensification of existing animosities likely to result therefrom. But we may give to this part of the picture a larger scope, and find exemplifications in portions of the evangelic history having no direct connection with Pharisaic antagonism. May not the Evangelist have in view here the ascent to the mountain top and the teaching there given to an inner circle of disciples? The love for retirement among nature's solitudes and for the special work of a master instructing chosen scholars was characteristic of Jesus. He did not indeed shun the crowd or the kind of instruction that tells upon, and is appreciated by, the popular mind. His voice *was* heard in the streets, in the synagogue, from a boat on the lake addressing an immense crowd on the shore. He gave Himself with enthusiasm to evangelism, visiting in succession all the synagogues of Galilee, and never grudging gracious speech to the people wherever they might chance to assemble. Still this was not the work He preferred, nor was He deceived as to its value. "Much seed little fruit"

was His estimate of it in the Parable of *the Sower*. He got weary at times of the crush of crowds, and longed for privacy, and made sundry attempts to escape into solitude. He felt the passion of all deep natures for detachment and isolation—to be alone with God, with oneself, with congenial companions capable of receiving truths which do not lie on the surface.

The retirement to the mountain top was one of these escapes, and the "Sermon on the Mount," as it has been called, shows us the kind of thoughts Jesus gave utterance to when His audience was not a street crowd, but a band of susceptible more or less prepared hearers. "When He had sat down, His *disciples* came unto Him, and He opened His mouth and taught them."¹ His first words were the Beatitudes, spoken in tones suited to their import—not shouted after the manner of a street preacher, but uttered gently, quietly, to a few men lying about on the grass, breathing the pure air of the uplands, with eyes upturned towards the blue skies, and with something of heaven's peace in their hearts. In these sayings of the hill we see Jesus at His best, all that is within Him finding utterance in the form of thoughts concerning citizenship in the kingdom, the righteousness of the kingdom, and the grace of the Divine King and Father, which are very new in emphasis and felicity of expression, if not altogether new in substance. "Why," we are tempted to ask, "should one capable of saying such things on mountain tops ever go down to the plain below to mingle with the ignorant, stupid mob, not to speak of descending lower still into unwelcome profitless controversy with prejudiced, conceited, malevolent religionists?" But such a question would reveal ignorance of a very important feature in the character of Jesus; viz., that He was not a one-sided man—a mere Rabbi, sage, or philosopher, caring only for intimate fellow-

¹ *Matt.*, v. 1, 2.

ship with the select few—but a man who had also a Saviour-heart, with a passion for recovering to God and goodness lost men and women, hungering therefore for contact with the weak, the ignorant, the sinful; making the saving of such His main occupation, and seeking in the companionship of disciples only His recreation.

To this Saviour-aspect of Christ's character the third trait points: "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench." Broadly interpreted, these words describe the *compassion* of Jesus. The pathetic emblems denote the objects of that compassion: poor, suffering, sorrow-laden, sinful creatures in whom the flame of life temporal or spiritual burnt low, and who in body or soul resembled bruised reeds, frail at the best, rendered frailer still by grief, pain, or moral shortcoming. The pity of Jesus is expressed in negative terms. It is declared that He will not do what many men are prone to do—crush the weak, blow out the flickering flame. The whole truth about Jesus is that He habitually did the opposite with reference to all forms of weakness represented by the bruised reed and the smoking wick. For verification of the statement we have only to look back over the history. Consider *e.g.*, the ministry of healing. Think of the multitudes of sick in Capernaum¹ and elsewhere cured of diseases of all sorts — fever, leprosy, palsy, blindness, insanity. Miracles or not, these are facts as well attested as anything in the Gospels. And the subjects of these healing acts might very appropriately be described as physically or mentally bruised reeds. Take, *e.g.*, the man sick of palsy borne of four—what a wreck physically!² or the demoniac of Gadara—what a sad tragic wreck mentally!³ Of moral wrecks also there is no lack of examples. The palsied man is one; a wreck morally not

¹ *Matt.* viii. 16, 17.

² *Matt.* ix. 1-8.

³ *Matt.* viii. 28-34.

less than physically, a man in whose life vice and disease appear to have been closely intertwined. How then did Jesus treat that man? Did He shun him, or blow out the little flame of goodness that might still be in him, or utterly crush the spirit of hope that was already sorely broken by a hard unfeeling word, or a merciless rebuke? No! He healed the wounded conscience and revived the drooping heart by the gracious word cordially spoken: "Courage, child; thy sins are forgiven." Or look in at that large assembly of "publicans and sinners" in the court of Levi's house in Capernaum.¹ Here is a motley collection of bruised reeds and smoking wicks of all sorts: social outcasts, drunken men, frail women, irreligious, profligate, scandalous people. What is to be done with them? Throw them out into the social refuse heap to rot, or take them out in boats and drown them in the lake? Such may have been the secret thoughts of respectable inhuman people in Capernaum, as such are the thoughts of cynical persons now in reference to similar classes of our modern society. Not such were the thoughts of Jesus. Capable of salvation and worth saving even these, said He. Bruised reeds, yes, but the bruise may be healed; smoking wicks doubtless, but the flame may be made to burn clear. Was He too sanguine? No. How strong the reed may become witness the story of Zacchæus, thoroughly credible, though not told in Matthew;² how bright the dying flame witness the woman in Simon's house with her shower of penitent tears, and her alabaster box of precious ointment.³ "Much forgiven, much love," was the hopeful creed of Jesus. His ideas on this subject were very unconventional. Religious people as He saw them appeared to Him very far from God, and not likely ever to come nigh. On the other hand, those who seemed hopelessly given over to immorality and irre-

¹ *Matt.* ix. 9-13.

² *Luke* xix. 1-10; *vide* especially v. 8.

³ *Luke* vii. 36-50.

ligion He deemed not unlikely subjects for the kingdom. The average modern Christian does not quite understand all this, and perhaps he hopes that Jesus did not altogether mean what He seems plainly to say. But He did mean it, and He acted upon it, and history has justified His belief and policy.

The last trait in our picture is what may be called the cosmopolitanism, or the universalism, of Jesus. "In His name shall the Gentiles hope." That is, He is a Christ not for Jews alone, but for mankind. The Hebrew original, as faithfully rendered in the English Bible, means: "the isles shall wait for His law." The two renderings coincide in sense in so far as they express the universal range of Messiah's functions; they differ only in so far as they point to varying aspects of His work. The one exhibits Him as a universal object of trust, *i.e.*, a universal *Saviour*; the other exhibits Him as a universal *Legislator*: the Saviour of the world, the Lord of the world. Now, let it be noted, Jesus could be neither unless He possessed intrinsic fitness for these gigantic tasks. It is not a question of "offices" in the first place, but of character, charisms, endowments. It boots not to tell men that Jesus is Christ, and that as such He exercises the functions of prophet, priest, lawgiver, king, so long as they do not see that He possesses the gifts and the grace necessary for these high functions. He must have it in Him by word, deed, spirit, experience to inspire trust, and to make men look to Him for *law*, *i.e.*, for the moral ideal of life. When men are convinced of His power in these respects, they will accept Him as their Christ; possibly not under that name, for some fastidious disciples may be inclined to discard the title as foreign and antiquated, and unsuited for the vocabulary of a universal and eternal religion. So be it; it matters not about the name (though it will always have its value for theology and the religious history of the

world), the vital matter is what the name signifies. If Jesus can be the spiritual physician, and moral guide of mankind, He is what the people of Israel meant by a Christ, one who satisfies the deepest needs and highest hopes of men. And so the great question is, Can the Jesus of the Gospels do this? The question is not to be settled by authority, or by apologetic evidences based on miracles and prophecies. Trust and moral admiration cannot be produced by such means. Orders to trust are futile, injunctions under pains and penalties to admire vain; proofs that a certain person ought to be trusted and admired inept, unless those to whom the commands and arguments are addressed perceive for themselves in the person commended the qualities that inspire trust and admiration. And if these qualities be there, the best thing one can do for his fellow-men is to let the object of faith and reverence speak for Himself. Hold up the picture and let men look at it. Set it in a good light, hang it well on the wall, remove from the canvas obscuring dust and cobwebs if such there be; then stand aside and let men gaze till the Friend of sinners, the Man of sorrow, the great Teacher, begin to reveal Himself to their souls.

Jesus has so revealed Himself to multitudes in all ages, and of all nationalities; He continues so to reveal Himself to-day. The success or non-success of His self-revelation has no connection with race, but only with moral affinity. Jesus came first to His own people, and for the most part they received Him not. The result condemned not Him but them. They had a veil of religious prejudice on their face, and they could not see Him. It needs an open eye and an open heart to see Jesus truly. The open eye and open heart may be found in any quarter of the globe; sometimes in very unlikely quarters: among barbarians rather than in the great centres of culture and civilisation. The proud, the vain, the greedy, the slaves of fashion,

however religious, know nothing about Jesus. Jesus was always on the outlook for the open eye and simple, open, honest heart, and He was greatly delighted when He found them. The classic example of this quest and delight is the story of the centurion of Capernaum, a Pagan, not a Jew, first-fruit of Gentile faith.¹ What beautiful, sublime simplicity in that Roman soldier's trust! And what a thrill of pleasure it gave Jesus! "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Not in Israel, the very people for whose benefit the Messianic portrait was painted in the olden time. Strange that the same people should produce men capable of such splendid artistic work in the sphere of moral delineation, and be so lacking in the power of appreciating the historical realisation of the prophetic ideals. They devoutly, fanatically believed in the Messiah in the abstract, but could not recognise Him in the concrete. We have to thank Jewish blindness for the unearthing of this ancient prophetic picture by a Christian historian, by way of protest against hideous caricatures of Jesus by His religious contemporaries. We have to thank Jewish unbelief for the tragic result of these deplorable misunderstandings, the crucifixion. Faith in a Pagan soldier, unbelief in the most religious Jews. Faith where you did not look for it, unbelief where faith should have been. As it was then, so it is still, so probably it always will be. All turns on the state of the heart. The pure heart, the unsophisticated conscience, is implicitly Christian everywhere. The men of impure heart, lacking in moral simplicity, may be very Christian in profession, fiercely on the side of Jesus, yet all the while they are really on the side of the Pharisees.

Wisdom, sympathy, modesty, gentleness, wide-heartedness, combined, such is the Evangelist's conception of the

¹ *Matt.* viii. 5-13.

Christ, and of Jesus. Surely a most winsome Jesus and a most acceptable Messiah!

“Behold My servant, whom I uphold,” so runs the oracle in the English version of the Hebrew original. Whom I *uphold*: Jehovah backs His servant, ideal Messianic Israel, however despised, against all comers. So may we Christians feel in reference to our Lord Jesus. We may well uphold Him; we may with good right hold up our heads as believers in Him, as men who support a good cause. Comparative religion teaches nothing to make us ashamed of Him. The only thing we have cause to be ashamed of is our miserably mean, inadequate presentation of Him in theory, and still more in life. Two things are urgently required of us modern Christians: to see Jesus truly and to show Him just as we see Him. “Behold My servant.” Try hard to get a fresh sight of Jesus, to behold Him “with open face.” Then what you have seen show with absolute sincerity, not hiding your light for fear of men who are religious but not Christian. Clear vision, heroic, uncalculating sincerity, how scarce in these days of time-serving! And what power goes with them! Give us a few men whose hearts have been kindled with direct heaven-sent insight into the wisdom and grace of Christ, and who *must* speak what they know and testify what they have seen, and they will bring about a moral revolution, issuing in a Christianised Church and a righteous social state.

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