

Of what then did He empty Himself at His Incarnation? The answer is contained in the next clause, the consideration of which must, however, be reserved for a future number of THE EXPOSITOR.

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### THE CULTUS OF FATHER ABRAHAM.

THAT any such cultus was ever developed among the Jews in the way of external observances is without proof, and is in itself improbable. No disposition seems to have existed among them to pay any excessive honours to the departed heroes of their race. They did, indeed, build the tombs of the prophets in our Lord's time—and that, no doubt, on the (real or reputed) sites of their decease or martyrdom. But there is no evidence that they went further. It is not even known that they resorted to these tombs for purposes of prayer, as the present inhabitants of the land (whether Moslem or Christian) habitually do. The sternness of the Old Testament monotheism and the horror of anything which savoured of heathenism no doubt suppressed any outward manifestations. But for all that, I believe there was a very real cultus of Father Abraham in the popular Judaism of our Lord's time. Men had learned to put their trust in Father Abraham for religious protection, relying for his good offices upon their relationship to him, and relying for the efficacy of those good offices upon his relationship to God. *They* were his children, identified with him as his seed both by parental affection and by God's sure word of promise. *He* was the Friend of God, whose intercession could not but command a gracious answer. That it was really so, we have (as it seems to me) sufficiently clear evidence in the Gospels.

It is not necessary to dwell upon such passages as

Matthew iii. 9; John viii. 33, 39, 53, in order to show that the Jews cherished with much self-complacency the fact of their physical descent from Abraham. They relied upon that fact in a way which made them comparatively indifferent to better grounds of religious confidence. This is obvious; and it is abundantly borne out by the sayings of St. Paul, both about himself and about his fellow-countrymen. What I want to establish goes farther than this. I believe that the ordinary Jew of our Lord's time had come to recognise Father Abraham more or less definitely as the patron and protector of his future life in such a way as practically to exclude the thought of God, the righteous Judge, who shall give unto every man according to his works. It was, indeed, when we come to think of it, almost inevitable that a religious confidence in descent from Abraham *should* assume this form as soon as the doctrine of a future life had developed itself and taken definite shape among the mass of the people. It was conceded that having Abraham for their father was an unspeakable privilege. It was, indeed, the one great boast of the Jew, his patent of religious nobility in the world. In this world, however, it stood him in little stead; and the whole trend of history had for long time been forcing his religious faith and hope into that unseen world which to David and the psalmists, and to Hezekiah too, had been so gloomy and so cheerless. Beyond the dark portals the Kingdom of Heaven opened to him now its visionary glories, and then he saw the faithful of Israel continually arriving and sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at an endless feast of good things. That the language used, that the ideas cherished, concerning these good things, were frankly materialistic goes without saying. Nor is the fact in itself deplorable, because it is inevitable. People must not only speak of religion in the vocabulary, they must also think of religion in the ideas and associations, which they actu-

ally possess. Our Lord Himself, as we know, did not disdain to use the same frankly materialistic (and from our point of view very unworthy and inadequate) vocabulary when He talked about the future state to the men of His day.

In this better world, then, the prospect of which cheered the heart of the Jew under the discouragements of this world, Father Abraham presided over the joys of the faithful. Isaac and Jacob were there too, of course; but they were subordinate personages, as in the sacred writings. The one, indeed, was but a pale copy of his father, without distinctive character or merit. The other was remarkable enough, but only satisfactory in that he won and kept the precious birthright which made him at once inheritor and transmitter of the great promise, the promise made to Father Abraham. Practically, I take it, Father Abraham was supreme, and the others were negligible quantities. Father Abraham, sitting for ever at the head of the feast, was very much alive. None of his descendants, numerous though they were, was forgotten. One by one, as they passed from earth, they were distinguished, were received, were welcomed, were made at home by the father of the faithful, the friend of God; one by one he took them to his bosom. What made this view of things the more popular was no doubt its democratic character. On earth, the poorer kind of Jew was kicked and cuffed by uncircumcised heathen; he was also pillaged and despised by wealthy Israelites. Father Abraham would not make any difference: they were equally *his* children, equally possessed of the one patent of everlasting nobility, the one passport to the favours of heaven. It will not be forgotten that our Lord Himself recognised for certain purposes this democratic aspect of Judaism, within its own limits. He did this while continually protesting against its exclusiveness as regarded the rest of the world. "This woman being a

daughter of Abraham," ought to be delivered from the thralldom of the adversary even on the Sabbath; for surely religious privileges common to all the children of Abraham were never meant to be forfeited or suspended on the Sabbath! Zacchæus, too, "forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham," in spite of the deserved unpopularity of his business, is not to be excluded from the favour of Him who came as a minister of the circumcision. One can hardly doubt that in both these cases our Lord put forward not His own deepest reason for acting as He did, but the reason which was most fit for His critics then and there. For Himself, whilst He loyally respected the limits imposed upon His present mission, He cared nothing for the distinction between Israel and non-Israel. Both Zacchæus and the cripple-woman were above all things to Him children of the Heavenly Father, not children of Abraham. But since His Jewish critics recognised only the latter fact, let them at least be consistent. Thus on these occasions He vouchsafed to turn to good account that very pride of descent from Abraham, which made the Jews so exclusive against outsiders. They might at least (He intimated) be frankly *inclusive* within their own limits.

With these popular views about Abraham as the patron of Jews in the world to come, we must surely closely associate the expression "Abraham's bosom." Christian writers have taken it, curiously enough, as a mere synonym for "Paradise" or the seat of the happy dead before the resurrection. No doubt if you insist on reducing all these popular phrases of the future state to a dogmatic propriety and regularity, "Abraham's bosom" may be ordered into line with Paradise and other place-names of the kind. But it is much better to treat them separately and historically according to the popular ideas out of which they sprang. If you think of the parable of Dives and Lazarus, and then of the Last Supper, you perceive at once

what "Abraham's bosom" means. Lazarus is Abraham's dear child. He is the last that has come home, and he has had a very bad time of it. All the same—nay, all the more—he shall lie on his father's breast, as his father's favourite whom he delighteth to honour. Had he been a famous Rabbi, or a successful merchant, he could not possibly have fared better. "Abraham's bosom" was the place of honour (for the time being) at the celestial supper. To understand it one has only to remember how the disciple whom Jesus loved lay on His breast at the supper, and looked up in his Master's face and asked, "Who is it, Lord?" The phrase embodied the comfortable assurance—not, of course, that all Jews would be located at once in the capacious lap of Father Abraham, according to certain absurd mediæval pictures—but that each, as he passed into the unseen, would have his equal turn of welcome and of cherishing. There is a whole world both of social custom and of religious thought gathered up in the phrase "Abraham's bosom." The custom and the thought are alike perished; but one must recall them and make them live again, if one would use the phrase with any intelligence.

It will of course be seen that I take the well-known parable of Dives and Lazarus as more than any other passage letting us into the secret of the popular belief of the Jews concerning Father Abraham and his place in the other world. That it speaks entirely in the language of the Jews, and moves wholly in the circuit of their thoughts, is to me absolutely certain. Christian writers and preachers, indeed, have not ceased to attempt to draw from it some information about the conditions of the future life. It is enough to say that they have been hopelessly baffled. Nothing Christian can be made out of it for the simple reason that there is nothing Christian in it. There is no Saviour, no repentance, no forgiveness, no God even. Father Abraham is the divinity of the piece. Nothing

looks higher than to him. He cannot possibly represent the Father of our souls as does the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son: rather he is the substitute for Him. The language, the scenery, the whole form of the parable, is not Christian, but Jewish—and Jewish, not of the psalmists and prophets, but of the degenerate and superstitious teachers who misled the people in our Lord's time. If one had to take this parable as expressing the mind of Christ, one would have to admit that He fell below the level which was reached by not a few of those who in days of old had found refuge from the tormenting obscurity of the future in the love and strength of God.

The explanation of this singular fact, and its abundant justification, lies in this, that our Lord chose in this parable to turn the popular religious belief and religious language of the Jews against their own errors and superstitions. Doubtless the teachers of His day told stories exactly like this in form—and, indeed, stories very similar in character might easily be quoted from the pulpits of Italy or of Spain to-day. By the aid of a lively imagination, and an unhesitating confidence of statement about things unseen, it is so easy to impress upon ignorant hearers the enormous advantages of certain religious privileges or practices or precautions which you wish to recommend. Just as St. Paul (in Gal. iv.) met the Judaizers who delighted in allegorical renderings of "the Law" with an allegory which was better than any of theirs, and cut exactly the other way; so our Lord told a story of the unseen in the language of popular religion, which conveyed the most tremendous and unmistakable warnings against popular superstitions. If it be objected that our Lord cannot be thought to have spoken anything but the language of absolute truth, one can but answer that in that case one must give up the attempt to understand His teaching. He was not surely so timid Himself. The

splendid boldness with which He clothed His doctrine in any figures of speech, in any kind of utterance, which might serve to bring it home to the hearts and minds of His hearers is one of the very things which so profoundly convince us that He spake as never man spake. Unlike ourselves, He was infinitely more concerned that His teaching should be positively true than that it should be negatively harmless. Apparently He never hesitated to lay Himself open to any amount of misconstruction if only He might drive home some saving truth, or some needful warning, in such a way that it should stick.

The parable stands in Luke xvi. without a word of introduction. It will probably suggest itself at once that by some accident of transcription *vv.* 16-18 (which seem quite irrelevant here) have displaced some other words which served to introduce the parable. But there is no use in setting up a guess of that kind for which there is no evidence. If we fall back, in the absence of any other clue, upon the first part of the chapter and especially upon *vv.* 14, 15, we get the following situation. Our Lord had dwelt in His teaching upon two great ideas as to which the Pharisees found themselves totally opposed to His views. One was money; the other was God. To our Lord money appeared not as a good thing in itself, but as a trial and responsibility which prudence and piety might convert into a means of great and lasting good. To the Pharisees money appeared an eminently desirable thing, the possession of which enabled them to secure numberless enjoyments and immunities. To our Lord, God appeared as the supreme Ruler and Judge by whom actions and motives are weighed, who will take account of the use which every man has made of His gifts. To the Pharisees, God appeared practically as One far above out of sight, who might almost be left out of account. Father Abraham would take care of their eternal interests, so that they might

enjoy their riches without disagreeable anticipations of another world. Everybody knew how kindly he had interceded, even upon earth, for those uncircumcised sinners in the cities of the plain. They knew too how graciously God had listened to his intercessions, and had five times reduced the number of the righteous who should be the saving of Sodom if found therein. How much more, when Abraham was promoted to preside over those heavenly regions, would he intercede for his own children! and how much more graciously would he be heard! Surely no child of Abraham could fail to be gathered to his bosom, except he had played the apostate and forfeited his portion in Israel! The Friend of God might be trusted to see to the spiritual interests of his own flesh and blood. So the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, but were also pledged to a belief in another life, sneered at Him. Then He told them this story. It was about a man who—like themselves when fortune favoured—had plenty of money and used it selfishly. It was about Father Abraham in whom they trusted. He told the story in the language of the hardest realism. There is no attempt to distinguish between the conditions of this life and of that. The details of the disembodied state are crudely impossible. There is no attempt to introduce any moral or spiritual considerations, except those negative ones: money isn't of any use in that world, and Father Abraham isn't of any use either. He looks on cold, immovable, totally unable to assist his unhappy "son" in the least. He can only play the disagreeable and unwelcome part of an external conscience. If I am right, Lazarus is introduced merely as a foil to the rich man's misery. Here he had been supremely wretched; there he lies on Abraham's breast as the last wanderer come home, as the favourite of the hour. But his being there is absolutely without moral significance, because he is not represented as having been virtuous or devout, and



because to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was only what every Jew expected to do. The unexpected thing, and the truly awful thing, was that money selfishly used involved a frightful retribution, and that Father Abraham could do nothing at all. So then one may find the climax of this story in that pitiful cry, "Father Abraham, have mercy upon me." It is really pitiful because it is the one instance in Scripture of the invocation of saints, and because it stands undistinguished in error and in uselessness from a million other cries which go up from terror-stricken souls in their anguish. Is it possible to think that our Lord invented this terrible cry? Is it not morally certain that He took it, if not from the lips, at any rate from the hearts, of His hearers? Doubly wrong, and twice deceived, they trusted, in this world, not to goodness and courage, but to money; in that world, not to God, but to Father Abraham. They had made lies their refuge, and under falsehood hid themselves; but as our Lord drew for them this picture, so hard, so inexorable, the hail swept away their refuge of lies and the waters overflowed their hiding place.

I am bound to say that the latter part of the parable (*vv.* 27-31) is not altogether of the character for which I have argued. It also is negative: it is intended to shatter a vain hope; but the hope, the prayer, which it coldly puts aside, is not evil or selfish. It seems to me to have been added, sorrowfully, in response to very different thoughts from those of the purse-proud or of the superstitious. It is a not infrequent feature of our Lord's parables that He added something to what one may call the original design of the parable. Sometimes the addition appears incongruous, and, from a literary point of view, weakens the effect. So it is here. But that only means that He, who was the best judge of the need, thought it worth while to sacrifice a little of the effectiveness in order to add more

to the usefulness of the story which He told. As it is, that story stands unrivalled, even among our Lord's discourses, for the extraordinary incisiveness with which it deals with certain popular untruths.

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### THE INTERCESSION OF THE SPIRIT.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us ward. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

"And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."—ROMANS viii. 18-23, 26-27.

THESE verses cast an intense light on some of Paul's deepest thoughts concerning God, the universe and man. To those who had not yet received the Christian salvation he preached a simple gospel; and he preached simply to those whose religious life was as yet very imperfectly developed,—to persons whom he described as "carnal," "babes in Christ"; but for those in whom the religious life had reached the maturity of manhood, he had teaching of a very different order. "We speak wisdom among the perfect—the full grown."

In this passage he speaks with a majesty and daring that touch the very heights of sublimity concerning some of the greatest mysteries which can exercise human speculation; and if the substance of his teaching is lodged firmly in our thoughts, we shall be enriched with a divine wisdom