

*THE SON OF MAN.*

IN the wonderful summary of the beginnings of earthly life, found in the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis, we read, "And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowls of the air, and to every beast of the field." This is the first recorded deed of the new Adam, or "the man"; and it is somewhat singular that, even before a helpmeet is provided for him, and before he has tilled the soil of his new Eden, he looks over into the outlying world; he recognises forms of animal life differing from his own, and forthwith he adjusts his relations with these earlier creations. He throws out a name, as a sort of lasso, and in that nominal way binds them to himself, as his servants and underlings; but whether those names were given randomly, or by some heavenly illumination, we have no means of ascertaining now. But names, as a rule, are not given randomly; they are significant and suggestive. The name is often the index of a character, the epitome of a life. Cut it open, and you will often find crystallized within it some far-off historic fact; as the name "England" tells of the migration of the Angles, or as the marches of the Danes may be traced in the names of our villages and hamlets. And to a greater extent still is this the case with Scripture names. Facts, characters, and prophecies are embedded in them. Indeed, Heaven sometimes steps in to alter a name already given, as when "Jacob" became "Israel," or as "Simon," re-named by Jesus himself, became "Peter," and James and John became the "Boanerges."

We might therefore expect that when the Messiah did make His appearance, Heaven would lay special emphasis upon His name, and such indeed was the case. True, the name "Jesus" was but the old name of "Joshua," but it had an angelic announcement, and it was now invested

with a far deeper meaning, for it meant that He should save His people—humanity at large—from their sins. “Jesus” was the name of the Emmanuel, God with us. This was the name that absorbed the name of “Mary”—for in familiar speech she was only “the mother of Jesus,” so losing her individuality in the greater glory of her Divine Son, this was the name, the only one, the law recognised, and that was spelt in large letters in the trilingual inscription of the Cross. But gradually the “Christ” was added as a surname, and when we get beyond the Acts of the Apostles we find the two names indissolubly united, the one showing His earthly relation, the other His heavenly; the one indicating His mission, the other His commission.

But the names and titles given to Jesus are many. He is the “Nazarene,” the “son of Joseph,” “Elias,” “the risen Baptist,” “a prophet mighty in deed and word,” “a teacher sent from God,” “the Son of David,” “the Son of God”; until Thomas, standing in the glory of the resurrection days, gives the crowning note of all, than which angels can go no higher, “My Lord and my God.” But it will be noticed that Jesus Himself uses none of these. He never once calls Himself “Christ,” for when He says, “Behoved it not Christ to suffer these things” (Luke xxiv. 26), He was speaking rather of the impersonal Christ, the Christ whose features were portrayed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in the vision of the Prophet and the song of the Psalmist. But Jesus passes by these titles of honour, to select one which, like Himself, was of no reputation, and whose only suggestion was that of humanity and humility. Almost invariably He calls Himself “the Son of Man,” until we count the title nearly eighty times in the pages of the Gospels. But while Jesus uses it so frequently, the disciples never ascribe it to Jesus, at any rate before the resurrection. It was the new and mysterious name their narrow thought could not spell; and even after the Ascension we only find

it given three times to Christ, and then it was as Stephen and John looked through the opened gates of heaven, in the supreme moment of their apocalypse. Then only do we find the word, so sacred to humanity, coming to earth as it were in heavenly echoes. Why then does Jesus use it so repeatedly and so exclusively? Shall we pass the word through the prism of our analysis, and so make it give up the secrets of its hidden light, the silent music of its deep harmonies? We may indeed try, but the sunlight is too vast in its widths and depths for our little prism; and with all our searching we shall only arrest a few fugitive beams.

And first we may notice that the use of the title "Son of Man" is the formulated claim of Jesus to the Messiahship. It was not a new phrase, but one already familiar to the Hebrew mind. Their psalms had spoken of "sons of men," but here it was mainly a reminder of their humanness, as was also the "son of man" who was made a little lower than the angels. In the prophecy by Ezekiel we find the title constantly given by Heaven to the prophet himself, though he never assumed it, or made use of it except as repeating the heavenly designation. In the prophecy by Daniel (vii. 13) we read of "one like unto the Son of man," who should possess all "dominion and glory"; an "everlasting dominion which shall not pass away," and "a kingdom which shall not be destroyed." From this time the title "Son of man" became one of the favourite designations of the coming Messiah; and like another ark of gold, it moved downward through the centuries, carrying within it all their national hopes and longings, and their bright Hebrew dreams. When Jesus then took up this prophetic name, wrapping it about His own person in frequent iteration, shutting out effectually every other possible claimant as He called Himself "*the* Son of man"—for there could be but one—it could be nothing less than His formal claim to the Messiahship. He thus put Himself right in the focal

point of all the histories. He stepped up at once to David's vacant throne, and gathering up the scattered lights of prophecy, He drew them as a rainbow about Himself,—and with no air of presumption either—who in His own person was Balaam's Star, Jacob's Shiloh, and Isaiah's Immanuel. He is the "Son of man" among men, but separated by infinite distances from all other sons of men.

And let us observe further how Jesus laid stress upon Humanity, making Himself familiar with our human nature in all its phases and its changes. Why did He not come like the first Adam, wrapping the red clay of earth about His perfected manhood, and then standing by the gate to call man back to his lost paradise? He might even then have been a man among men, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, human yet Divine. But that was not His mode. He preferred to take His humanity as we do ours; to have a human birth, and to put about Himself the weakness, the helplessness of infancy. That is, the Divine Man consented to have thirty years of growth and waiting, that He might be a child among children, and that He might reach His perfected manhood through the slow processes of infancy and youth. The first Adam had no need of mental discipline and training; he read the secrets of nature as by intuition. The Garden was to him an open volume, and though in its leaves there were meanings deeper than he knew, yet he could read enough for his own purposes and need; and that he could name the animals of the field shows that he could read their differing natures, prophesying their uses, and that with commanding voice he could teach them to obey. But not thus was the coming of the "Son of man." He came as the "infant of days." His body was that most helpless of all lives, a human infancy, whose muscles have not yet learned to vibrate to the pulsations of the will; an infancy that has no power of self-help whatever, but that needs the swaddling clothes to support it from its own

weakness, and that must needs be "mothered" into self-consciousness and strength. Strange as it appears, the child Jesus was but a child among other children. Angels might sing His advent as they hovered about the Bethlehem hills; He did not hear their song, or notice the adoration of the shepherds. The wise men might spread out their gold and frankincense, the child Jesus did not salute them, or even give them a smile of recognition, for it takes an infant at least a month to weave its first smile. The first three years of the Divine Childhood were passed in Egypt, hard by the Nile, and within the shadow of the Pyramids, and yet in all His words we find no Egyptian colouring. In the still, clear deeps of His speech-depths which have not been sounded yet, we can trace easily the reflections of His boyhood's life, the pastoral scenes of Galilee, the *clay* cottages, the spring floods, the hillside shepherding; but there is no mention of that higher civilization that Egypt knew. Strange it is, and yet not strange, but a thing most natural and human; for where are our recollections of our three earliest years? They must be somewhere in our past—so many units in the lengthening sum—but we have no lien upon them. Memory cannot even recall them; they are and yet are not. They are but as the shelving shore, covered by the tides of the deep silence out of which our life emerges; but they slope up to the *terra firma*, where identity becomes apparent, and memory asserts her claim to all manorial rights. And so we are not surprised that when the Divine Son is called out of Egypt its scenes should all drop away from the memory like the shell of the chrysalis.

It is true we know little about the Divine Childhood, though tradition, here as elsewhere, is garrulous enough. The only glimpses of the boyhood the Gospels give us are in Luke ii. 40-52, where we read that "He was subject to His parents," that "the grace of God was upon Him," that "He increased in stature and in wisdom"; and where we have

the Temple episode, the Boy, now twelve years old, sitting in the midst of the doctors. The whole Gospel of the Boyhood is thus embraced within the limits of thirteen sentences, and in none of its statements do we find anything of the superhuman. He had, indeed, a special endowment of grace, as is implied in the phrase, "the grace of God was upon Him"; He had rare mental powers, as the incident of the Temple shows; He was possessed of a wisdom and dignity far beyond His years; but with all this, the mental and the physical development were thoroughly human, the body increasing in stature, and the mind in wisdom, imperceptibly, and under the ordinary conditions of physical and mental growth.

Just so is it, if we follow up the Boyhood into Youth and Manhood. The very silence of the eighteen years is instructive, for it leaves no room for anything abnormal, or unhuman, if we may be allowed that prefix. His life grew up configuring itself to its environment with as perfect a naturalness as when the bud expands within its calyx. The home, the school, the shop, the synagogue, were the four sides of the perfect square that measured the life in its earthly limits; in its height it touched the heavens, reaching up among the infinities. He was the perfect Man, a Son of nature, as well as a Child of grace. It is not likely that every one in Nazareth knew Him, for it was a city of, probably, ten or twelve thousand inhabitants; but He evidently was well known. His fellow-townsmen could recognise Him directly as "the son of the carpenter," and with true Eastern neighbourliness could run over the names of mother, brothers, and sisters (Matthew xiii. 55).

And not only did Jesus dignify our humanity by voluntarily assuming it, going with it along its several stages as far as hate and sin allowed Him, but he seemed to delight in emphasizing, or underscoring the word, that He might teach the world to spell it large. Usually our human life is

something detached and separate. It has its blood relations, and its outside world-relations; but in its orbit it keeps in the main to its own plane, with but little intercourse with those of adjacent, higher or lower, planes. In India these social differences are formulated into what is called "caste," and whole groups of humanity are shut out from each other by impassable barriers, and that too under the sanction of religion, or what they call religion. In countries civilized and Christian the same thing appears under a slightly altered name, as "caste" becomes "class." But Jesus knew nothing of these distinctions; He simply ignored them. It mattered nothing what the dress might be; whether it bore the badge of this or that rank, this or that school. He looked only at the human heart that was beating underneath, and which had all the greater need when it was unconscious of that need. And so we find the very poor crowding around Him, sure of some beatitude. Nor was it the "common people" only who heard Him gladly. Roman officials believed in Him with a faith at which He Himself marvelled; rulers of the Jews were among His following, bold to avow His cause even when the Cross had done its worst; while the palace itself had an invitation and an open gate for Him—though He preferred *not* to cross the courtyard of a Herod. Rank was nothing to Him. He Himself might have out-ranked them all, for He was probably the rightful heir to David's throne, and had He cared for the throne it would have been His with but little more than the mere asking for. But to His heart, titles such as king, ruler, priest, were but the small dust of the balance. "Son of man" was more than all; humanity greater and higher than royalty itself.

And how Jesus loved the people! We do not mean by this any separate class, as modern thought seems inclined to interpret the phrase; but we mean human kind in its aggregate, its larger, voluminous groups. It seems strange

to us at first sight that, with His rare native gentleness and His fondness for the solitudes of nature, He should care at all for the excitements of a crowd. And yet in Jesus the seeming paradox was true. He sought His days and nights of quiet retirement, and He loved the seclusions of the mountain or the garden ; but this was only one side of His life—what we might call its interstices, its avocation, as opposed to its vocation. He loved the crowds ; He Himself made them if they were not there. He sought them in the cities and villages, and in Jerusalem itself ; and never was He more the “ Son of man,” never more at home, as we should say, than when on the Galilean hill He had the hungry thousands—a myriad probably—all placed in orderly rows. Flower-beds the “ ranks ” mean, and the flowers that had such a charm and fascination for Him were a massed humanity. No word perhaps occurs more frequently in the Gospels than the word “ multitude.” It follows Jesus like a halo round the sun, from the crowded inn of Bethlehem to the crowded Mount of Sacrifice ; nor do the waters of the ocean heap themselves in tides towards the moon more regularly and universally than the tides of humanity were rolled up in heaps around Him who was to the world “ both moon and sun,” the Son of man.

We spoke just now of blood relations ; and with us the tie of kith and kin is a tie necessary and sacred. But Jesus seems to step over the ordinary relations of human life, as if they were barriers too narrow, too exclusive. One little circle claimed His boyhood and His youth ; one, “ blessed of the Lord ” and “ highly favoured among women,” as she watched His development and pondered His strange words in her heart, called Him Son. But while we read that He was in subjection to His parents, a child dutiful and loving, yet we never hear Jesus addressing Mary as “ mother.” At Cana it was the respectful, though somewhat abrupt and distant, “ Woman, what have I to do with thee ? ” while,



from the Cross, as He commends the weeping Mary into the hands of the weeping John, it was, "Behold thy mother," with a strange substitution of the pronouns. The same self-exclusion from blood relationship we see in Capernaum, in the incident related by St. Matthew (xii. 55). When the message was passed through the close-standing crowd that His mother and His brethren stood outside desiring to speak with Him, He replied with the question, "Who is My mother, and who are My brethren?" Then pausing a moment, as if to set them listening for the strange answer, and stretching out His hand toward the inner circle of apostles, and the outer, over-lapping circle of disciples, He said, "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." It is as if He had outgrown these old-world relations; they were bonds too short, and bounds too narrow for His heart. He could not yield Himself up to any monopoly. To His mind there were relationships more real and more sacred than any affinities of birth and blood. The Fatherhood He recognised was heavenly, not earthly; and brotherhood to Him—who knew the heart of the all-Father as none else could—was the kinship of related *souls*, that in its outward sweep embraced a redeemed humanity, and that swept forwards to the great eternity. Said an African woman once, "We are all alike in the dark." Yes; and we are all alike in the light, in the face of Him who is the Light of the world; and if we would find the true, the eternal blood relationship, it is the "one blood," of which all the nations of the earth were made, and the one Blood by which they were redeemed.

And further, what a significant humanness there is about His words! Others called Him the Son of David, but He never called Himself either David's or Abraham's Son. He did not even call Himself an Israelite, a name that some Anglo-Saxons will move all histories to borrow, as they

play on their little Jew's harp! No; He was more than an Israelite, He was an Adam-son; Son of God, in His heavenly relations, but in His earthly, nothing less—He could not be anything more—than the "Son of man," of humanity itself. If Peter spoke, his speech at once betrayed him, for it was the provincialism of Galilee. But the speech of Jesus was not provincial; there was no shibboleth of local accent about His tone. What an absence of local colouring there is about His words! How thoroughly homely and human are His parables! They speak to all races and to all times alike; spanning our separate lives—no matter what zone we inhabit, or what years we call our own—like a wide-reaching sky,—a sky serene and still in its far depths, and lighted up with stars. It is strange, when we consider His Hebrew environment, the cramping narrowness of Jewish thought, how little of the Hebrew accent we can detect in His speech. Did He speak of the temple, that marbled centre of the Hebrew faith? It was not with exclamations of surprise that such great stones were there; it was not to laud its imposing ritual; 'it was rather to show that there was One among them, whom they knew not, who was greater than the temple; that it was not the exclusive property of the Jews, but that it was His Father's house, and so the home of all the Father's children; and that the day was near when its songs would become silent, and pinnacle, porch, and altar would disappear in an utter, irrevocable ruin. Did He speak of Moses and the sanctities of the law? It was to give to that law new interpretations and new appendices. He did not tear down Moses' seat, or weaken its authority; but He set Himself above it, condensing the Decalogue of negations into a Duologue of positives, in which was the new word "Love." How He trampled down the race-barriers, those middle walls of partition that Hebrew thought had built so high and strong! working His miracles of mercy for Samaritan lepers, for the

daughters of Syro-Phœnicia, and the sons of Italy, just as readily and just as fully as if all alike were children of Abraham! And how He sought to broaden out their horizon; lowering their mounts of Moriah and Gerizim that they might see over and beyond them; teaching them that the mounts of God were everywhere, and that all places were holy to him who should worship God "in spirit and in truth"! Jesus was no nationalist, but a cosmopolitan. His words were meant for the ages; and so there is the freshness of youth upon them; they never become antique; and they were meant for the great Father's children everywhere, their equal heritage. And when Jesus struck out the personal "my" from His human relationships, it was that He might insert it in the wider relationship, as He calls *us* His own, His friends, His brothers. Or as it is beautifully expressed by our poet-artist, "Christ, as He was a Jew among Jews, and a Galilean among Galileans, was also, in His nearness to any—even the poorest—group of disciples, as one of their nation, their own "*Beau Christ d'Amiens*," as if He had been born of a Picard maiden."<sup>1</sup>

And so we find the different nations early saluting the Christ and tendering their varied ministries. A Roman emperor prepares His cradle, an imperial decree waiting on the unborn Christ; the Eastern *Magi* throw about Him the accents of a foreign speech, with an Eastern accompaniment of frankincense, myrrh, and gold; a "city of Samaria" gives Him His warmest welcome; Italian centurions implore His help, and by the Cross confess His Messiahship; Greeks press into the temple, asking as a boon that they may have just one brief look at Him, who to their mind is greater than the temple, and higher than the highest priest; while at the last, Simon, the Cyrenian, bears the Cross that the Romans fashioned and the Jews demanded. "Unto Him shall the obedience of the peoples be," said Jacob,

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin.

when he prophesied of the "latter days"; and in "the obedience of the peoples," which was given to the Son of man on earth, we find the prophecy and promise of another homage, when a "great multitude, which no man could number," will stand before the throne and before the Lamb, crowning Him, "the Lamb in the midst of the throne," with eternal alleluias.

We have seen how completely Jesus identified Himself with humanity in its physical, mental, and social relations; now we must take one step more, and see how He identified Himself with its moral relations. St Luke in his genealogy carries up the line of descent to the beginnings of human life, speaking of Jesus as the "Son of Adam," so unfolding His universal kinship. St. Paul too speaks of Jesus as "the second Man," the "last Adam" (1 Cor. xv. 45, 47), and in his argument upon the resurrection he places the two "Adams" side by side, in their likeness and in their contrast. Both represent humanity, the one in a natural, the other in a spiritual sense; the one giving us a "fall," the Other a "rising again"; the one bringing in death, the Other eternal life. And so Jesus, the "last Adam," as He comes to repair the ruin of the fall, steps into the place of the first Adam, as Head and Representative of the race. He too is "born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law" (Gal. iv. 4). He moves steadily along the path of obedience, the same path on which the "first Adam" faltered and fell, on to its farthest goal, which was a wilderness and a Cross. But, there gathering its thorns and wearing them as His crown, and dying upon its Cross, He comes up out of the wilderness, leading the redeemed sons and daughters of Adam back into their forfeited Paradise. And how completely He identified Himself even with the sins of humanity! This was His mission, the prophecy of His name, to "save His people from their sins"; and He took them upon Himself,

making them His own, from the very first. He sought the baptism of John, not that He had any sin that needed absolution, but that He might "fulfil all righteousness"; He was tempted, not only "like as we are," but because we are. He was the divinely-elected Champion of humanity, throwing down the gauge of battle in the name of an entire race, meeting the Adversary on his own chosen ground; meeting him who had conquered the first Adam, and overcoming him, and that too with the same sword the first Adam had thrown away—the "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." He was "the Lamb of God," bearing in His own Person the "sin of the world"; and when He was in an "agony" in the Garden, with a sweat of blood upon His face, and when from the shadows of the Cross He sent forth the "exceeding bitter cry," "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" it was as our Surety He suffered, as our Ransom He died, taking "the bond" that was against us away, "nailing it to the Cross."

And so it was as Son of man that Jesus lived, and as the Son of man He died. He preferred a Cross, with a redeemed humanity behind it, even to the crown of the highest heaven, with man outside its gate. To Him, heaven, with its innumerable hosts of angels, seemed lonely and strangely silent with no human face to reflect its glories, and no human voice to swell its songs. And so He becomes the Son of man that man may become the son of God. He comes down to earth that man may ascend to heaven. He seeks a Cross that man may wear a crown, becoming both king and priest. He seeks a tomb that man may have a throne, even a share of His own eternal throne. He dies that man may live; here on earth with a truer, nobler life; and there with the life that knows no death, even immortality.

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