

to him with supreme authority: *i.e.* he is bound, under penalty of loss of self-respect and of moral degradation, to obey at any cost the voice of conscience. This is to him, until better instructed, the law of his being. But erring human nature is very apt to misread both the letters written within and the words of Holy Scripture. Consequently, the moral sense needs education and development. This it receives from all external and sound moral teaching, and especially from the teaching of the Bible. The word within and the words of the sacred volume need each to be read in the light of the other. Each is supreme in its own sphere, the one is our subjective rule of action for the moment: the other is the objective and historical basis of the Christian Faith. Each needs the other. For full intellectual and spiritual certainty, the testimonies must coincide. But we must not impatiently reject either because it seems to contradict the other. Apparent discord should prompt suspension of judgment until the obscured harmony appears.

In my next paper I shall discuss St. Paul's statement of his fundamental doctrines of justification through faith and through the death of Christ.

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## *THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD.*

### II.

In the Fourth Gospel, as I have already said, there are many instances in which Christ speaks of God as "the Father," though not "your Father," when addressing men who were not His disciples, and some of whom were His open enemies. In a very large number of these cases, however, you will find that He first speaks of Himself as the Son, or of God as being in some great and wonderful

sense His own Father; and *then* calls God "the Father." The instances are too numerous to be quoted; and to bring out their real force I should have to cite long passages from the 5th, 6th, 8th, and 10th chapters of St. John's Gospel. One illustration may indicate what I mean. In John v. 19, 20 He says: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing: for what things soever He doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth." Further on in the chapter, He says: "I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." . . . And then two verses later:—"Think not that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, on whom ye have set your hope."<sup>1</sup>

In such passages as these it is not clear that Christ is describing God as being in any sense a Father in relation to men: He has just claimed God as being His own Father in a very special sense, and when He speaks of God as "the Father," that claim seems to interpret the title.

But in our Lord's words to the Samaritan woman the title "Father" receives no such limitation from what He had said before.<sup>2</sup> He has not just spoken of Himself as "Son"; if He had, we might have thought that when He spoke of God as "the Father" He was only speaking of God's relation to Himself. But there is nothing in what He said to impose upon the title any such restriction. The whole story is wonderful. The woman to whom He was speaking belonged to a race on which the Jews looked down with religious contempt. She herself was living an evil life. She had come to Jacob's Well to draw water and found a Stranger there—a Jew. How well I remember the vivid impression which I had of the story when I sat, nearly

<sup>1</sup> John v. 43, 45.

<sup>2</sup> John iv. 21.

twenty years ago, by the well where Christ Himself once sat! We had encamped the night before at Bethel, and had mounted our horses and started at six in the morning. The road lay at first among limestone hills of no great height, covered with the remains of ancient terraces, on which, no doubt, in our Lord's time there were fruitful vineyards. We passed Shiloh, and noticed the remains of ancient foundations all about the hill. Then came a steep and rocky road on which the horses could hardly keep their feet, and on which, if I remember aright, the horse of one of my friends slipped and fell: but cultivation extended to the very top of the pass. As soon as we reached the top there was a most beautiful view below us—the Plain of Samaria, seven miles in length and varying in breadth from one mile to two, covered with the ripening wheat and with lentils and with occasional olive trees; one unbroken sea of green, without a fence or a hedge visible. There were villages on the neighbouring hills. Then came the descent; and after a ride of about three or four miles we came to the valley on the left leading to Nablous, the ancient Sychem. And then, just where the valley opens, we found Jacob's Well. The heat of the sun as we rode over the bare rocks of the pass was very great and rather exhausting, and when we reached the well, I remembered that our Lord had *walked* over the pass through which I had ridden; and the words "Jesus, therefore, being *wearied*, sat as He was by the well" had a new meaning for me. In the valley towards Nablous I saw men at work in the fields, and I thought that perhaps the woman might have been drawing water for the midday meal for the men who were working in the same fields more than 1,800 years ago. I read the conversation between the woman and the Stranger. He had reminded her of her five husbands—had told her that the man with whom she was living was not her husband. "Sir," she answered, "I perceive that Thou art a prophet.

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain"—and here she would turn and point to Mount Gerizim, that rises just above the well—"and ye—ye Jews—say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Then began our Lord's wonderful reply. He was weary with His journey, but new life and strength came to Him when He saw that He had the opportunity to bring this woman home to God.

"Woman," He said, "believe Me, the hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father."

The Father! The whole of the passage is so familiar to us that we are hardly able to conceive the strangeness, the wonder of it, when it was first spoken.

Observe: she had said that the fathers of the Samaritan people worshipped on Mount Gerizim, on the summit of which, as you know, the small remnant of the Samaritan race year by year still celebrate the Passover. For all men the religion of their fathers has something sacred in it. To be insensible to the power of religious traditions, to be able to break with them without distress, never to think with emotion of the faith which our fathers held, and of the place where they worshipped—this is the sign of a poor shallow nature.

"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain," said the woman. "You are a prophet, a Jew. Do you want me to cease to worship where our fathers worshipped?" The answer of our Lord is like an echo of the woman's words, an echo from the heights of Heaven. It is as if He had said: You are thinking of your fathers; in worship it is of the great, the eternal, the Divine Father that you should think first and last and always. "The hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father." The strong and sacred ties which have bound different races of men to worship where their

fathers worshipped must now give place to ties still stronger and more sacred. God reveals Himself as the Father, and wherever He is men may worship Him. In the presence of this revelation national distinctions vanish, the religious traditions which separated race from race vanish. Men are no longer to be divided from each other by the memory of their dead ancestors; where worship gave sacredness to mountains, altars, temples, they are to be drawn together by their common worship of the loving Father, and they are to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.

This was an amazing disclosure to make at such a time and to such a person. The interest of it for ourselves lies in the fact that to this poor sinful woman our Lord spoke of God as "the Father."

And now we have to ask, What are the contents of this Revelation? How is the name illustrated and interpreted by what our Lord has taught elsewhere concerning the relations of God to all mankind. Of God's relations to those who, in the Christian sense of the words, have become His children, His sons, I have already spoken; now I have to speak of His relations to those who are not His children, not His sons; to whom, nevertheless, Christ describes Him as "the Father."

Perhaps we shall reach the answer to the question soonest, and by the surest path, if we follow the suggestion contained in our Lord's own words to this poor woman about the Jews. He told her that although Jerusalem was not to retain its ancient sanctity as being in a special sense the home of God, the Jews knew God as the Samaritans did not: "Ye worship that which ye know not; *we* worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews." That revelation which God had given to the Jewish race—a revelation in the law and a revelation through the prophets—was true as far as it went; and the parts of it which

the Samaritans rejected gave life and power to the rest. But let us contrast that revelation to the Jews with the gospel which is God's revelation to us. The ancient revelation was founded, as Paul reminds us in the Epistle to the Galatians, on God's gracious promise to Abraham. The splendid prerogatives of the nation were conferred, not as the reward of obedience to law, but as the crown of Abraham's faith in the goodness and power and fidelity of God. They were the free gift of God to the man who trusted Him. But the event in the history of the Jewish people which appealed most powerfully to their imagination was the giving of the law on Sinai; and the institution of the laws which were gradually extended till they covered every department of their religious and domestic and personal life, gave shape to all their conceptions of God. The flagrant sins of which the people were guilty through generation after generation had the effect of making the law press more and more heavily upon their conscience and their heart. They were punished with famine and pestilence and invasion and exile for transgressing the law. Prophets denounced their crimes, and told them that not until they were obedient would they enjoy peace and prosperity, and that if they continued to revolt they would continue to suffer.

The people had come to think of their relations to God as resting on what theologians used to call *a covenant of works*. God's defence and blessing and favour had to be bought by obedience, and would be forfeited by sin. They had to deserve His blessings or they would not receive them. Even in those prophets who had the clearest vision of a better and happier time there was very much to confirm this impression. They spoke with exultation of the future kingdom of God; and in a kingdom the pure and equitable administration of law,

by punishing the bad and defending the good, is one of the chief glories of the sovereign, and one of the chief securities of the stability of the state. In the time of our Lord the conception of law as determining the relations between God and man was the most conspicuous and energetic element in the belief of the Pharisees, whose zeal for religion gave them the highest religious authority in the nation.

Our Lord Himself began His ministry by proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and this might have strengthened the impression that the relations of God to men were to be altogether of the same kind as the relations of an earthly king to his earthly subjects. In a kingdom, whether human or divine, the majesty of law must be maintained; there must be authority on one side and obedience on the other. But, as I have already reminded you, all human analogies to the relations between God and man are imperfect; they are true at a point, at two points, perhaps more, but at last they break down. It was a divine kingdom with its authority, its laws, and its penalties, that Christ proclaimed; and yet it was something very different from an earthly kingdom, and the difference was most emphatically marked by the revelation of God as being, not the King merely, but the Father. In any system of religion the conception of God determines everything else; and in the gospel God is revealed as Father. We are not, therefore, under "a covenant of works," to use the old phrase once more. The ancient words of the Psalmist touch the very heart of the truth concerning God's relations to all men in Christ: He does not deal with us after our sins nor reward us according to our iniquities. He is a Father—not merely a King and a Judge. God maketh His sun to rise on the evil as well as on the good, and sends rain both on the just and on the unjust. All men sit at the same

table, like children who have obeyed their earthly father and children who have disobeyed him—children who have delighted and children who have grieved him. In a kingdom those who have revolted against the king, those who have broken the laws, are imprisoned, and only the loyal and law-abiding are allowed to go about free in the pleasant sunlight and the wholesome air. But God is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy; He bears with men's imperfections and their sins. He is eager, not to punish, but to forgive, to save.

He loves all men with a love infinitely transcending that of an earthly father for his children; "God so loved the world—not the Church merely—that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life." Those who imagine that the old theology does injustice to the divine love sometimes tell us that we are under automatic laws, laws which promptly avenge every violation of them, and inflict on the transgressor all the penalty that he deserves. If that were our position, we might be living in a righteous kingdom under the rule of a righteous king, but we should not be living under a Father. In a family there is no such prompt and relentless infliction of penalty for every offence that any member of the household may be guilty of. It is not the habit of an earthly father to govern on that principle, nor is that the principle on which the Heavenly Father governs. God Himself—in the person of His Son—has died, the righteous for the unrighteous, and Christ is the propitiation for the sin of the world. That is the foundation of the relation of all men to God. Their sins are atoned for before they are committed. The eternal laws have had their awful vindication in the death of Christ, and God deals with all men, not as a king—a judge—deals with the criminals who stand at his bar, though we have all sinned, but



as a father deals with his sinful children. He entreats us to repent and to amend. He is more ready to forgive our sins than we are to confess and forsake them. He deals with those who are sinning most flagrantly as a father deals with his children, doing His best and His utmost to rescue them from sin, to draw them to a better life, to bring them home to Himself. A father loves his children apart from their desert; and God loves men apart from their desert: it is in the power of His love that He makes men worthy to be loved.

Finally, in our original creation, we were so made as to be capable of receiving the eternal life of God which dwells in our Lord Jesus Christ; those who receive that life share the Sonship of Christ, and to them God is in the highest and deepest sense their Father. That life is a life of righteousness, purity, holiness and love; if we receive it, we must love it; and we can love it only as we are righteous, pure, holy and loving. "Love your enemies," our Lord said to His disciples, "and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be the sons of your Father who is in Heaven." To realize your sonship to God you must share the highest life of God, for it is of the essence of sonship that sons share the life of their father; and if you share the highest life of God, you must live that life; as He is loving even towards His enemies, you too must be loving towards your enemies. So, and only so, according to Christ, can we become the sons of our Heavenly Father. By selfishness in all its forms, envy, jealousy, covetousness, vanity, ambition, hatred, malice, we suppress the higher life even if we have received it: we may suppress it altogether, and when we cease to have the life of God we cease to be the sons of God. Or we may always refuse to receive that life, and so may never be His sons.

But this is our fault—ours only. This is our supreme

sin. It is the most awful offence of which we can be guilty against God ; it is the root of all other offences. On God's side there is the deepest and strongest desire that we should become His sons—share His life, share His righteousness, share His joy. It is we who refuse to be His sons, not God who refuses to be our Father.

And so we speak to all men of God as the Father, as Christ spoke of Him to the woman at the well. Poor woman ! She had sunk into the dark depths of sin, but her heart was touched when she learnt that a Prophet of God cared enough for her to talk to her about her sin. She must have been still more deeply moved when she heard Him speak of God, not as an awful Judge, but as a Father. Her emotion must have been still deeper when this great Prophet went on to speak to her of such high matters as the very nature of God and the spiritual worship which God desires from mankind. Who was she that a Prophet should talk of such great mysteries as these ? There was the hope of a better life for her in all that He said. If God was the Father, she might appeal to His pity and mercy ; yes, even she might appeal with hope : and, since the Prophet spoke to her of a high spiritual worship, it was surely possible even for her to know something of the blessedness of those who had seen the glory of God. And when she learnt that the Stranger who was speaking to her was the Christ for whom Samaritans and Jews had been waiting for centuries, her astonishment and joy must have been unmeasured.

Ah, perhaps you say, if Christ would but come and speak to us in that way, we too should have hope and joy, and all things would be possible to us. But are you clear that the woman at the well was in a position more favourable than yours for forsaking sin and living to God ? She had, no doubt, the vivid impression of the senses : she actually saw and heard the Jewish Stranger whose knowledge of her past life assured her that He was a prophet. But how infinitely

unlike He was to the Christ for whose coming she and her fathers had been waiting! How easily she might have lost the faith in His authority as a prophet which had been suddenly created by His knowledge of her sins! Nor did she know half that we know of all the wonder of His grace and power.

*We* know that the Unseen Christ who is among us still is the eternal Son of God—that He appeals to each of us as directly as He appealed to the woman at the well, that He knows our sins as He knew hers, that He charges *us* to think of God as the Father and to appeal to God that we may begin to live the life and enter into the blessedness of sons. All this we know; but as yet I fear that some of us have refused to give Him the answer He longs for, and the great revelation which has come to us has left us impenitent and unsaved. It is not yet too late! Remember the words of the ancient Psalmist: “To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”

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