

Paul here is betrayed into a mistake, and is thinking of the other and infinitely more important sense of the words, "God is one"—as in *Rom.* iii. 30—"He is one and the same God in all His acts, one God makes both the Promises and the Law." The argument would then be a fallacy, "a mediator implies (two parties), but God is one." I may be wrong; but, if one speaks, one must say what one thinks. Here, while Paul aims at a great truth, he reaches it, I think, by a mistaken argument.

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THE REVELATION OF THE SON OF MAN  
TO NATHANAEL.

ONE clear glimpse, and one only, of the character and inner life of Nathanael is given us in the Gospel narrative. The occasion is that of his introduction to Jesus. The story, as told in the opening chapter of St. John's Gospel, overflows with interest. And yet we feel that something is lacking. Our wonder is aroused, and we are eager to know one thing that is not told us. What was it that had taken place underneath the fig tree before Philip found his friend?

Now such wonder may be something better than idle curiosity. For we inevitably feel that this is an essential part of the whole, and that if our wonder were gratified we should have a key that might unlock the inner meaning of the incident. If we knew what Nathanael must have known, then the revelation to him would be also a revelation to us. Without that knowledge we can have but a partial understanding of the occurrence.

Earnest endeavours to perceive what is not definitely expressed in terms of sense must be made if the gospel is to be to us an unveiling of the eternal. The incidents recorded by the Evangelists are successive revelations,

within the limits of space and time, of the one eternal life. They are given to us in order to enable us to behold that life. We must use the word spoken and the deed done as aids to penetrate into the unseen world, where the thoughts and feelings of the actors are at work, where the real life is lived, where God draws near to man. Until we perceive something of the inner spiritual movement in each incident it cannot be to us a manifestation of the eternal.

This is clearly true with regard to the story of Nathanael. We feel instinctively that the real movement takes place far below the surface. And we can scarcely doubt that the enlightening process through which Nathanael was led to recognise in Jesus the Son of God and King of Israel began when he was under the fig tree. What, then, was the nature of this beginning, this spring of spiritual action? We are not told. And it may naturally be urged that if a knowledge of his experience there were necessary for a true and complete interpretation of the narrative, it would have been clearly recorded. The argument, though plausible, has no real weight. It would apply with even greater force to our Lord's teaching by parables. The reason for that form of instruction applies here. There is always a danger of our seeing without perceiving, and being satisfied therewith; and that danger must be guarded against. We must by some means be raised from the low spiritual level where we think we see to a loftier standpoint, whence the truth can really be discerned. Nay, rather, we must be induced to raise ourselves by our own mental and spiritual efforts. Now a strong inducement of this kind is created by the very reticence shown in the story of Nathanael. It is suggested that something took place under the fig tree which had an important bearing on the relation between Jesus and His new disciple, but nothing definite concerning its nature is recorded. Such reticence cannot be observed for the mere purpose of tantalizing us. It is surely meant

to stimulate our faculties of spiritual inquiry, so that by using them we may rise step by step to that same point of view from which the guileless Israelite looked with opened eyes upon his King.

We must look, then, in the narrative for the stepping-stones by which we may attain to this true point of view. Now we may take it for granted that the Evangelist is economical of his materials. He gives just what is needed, nothing more. No suggestion must be neglected. Each word has its purpose; each has its vital relation to the whole. Bearing this in mind on our introduction to Nathanael, we pay special attention to the words with which Philip addresses him, "*We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write.*" The form in which he announces his discovery throws a clear light on the customary lines of thought of the speaker and his friend. It may reasonably be inferred that Nathanael was in the habit of studying the Pentateuch and the prophetic writings of the Old Testament with special reference to one pre-eminent person there made known. That was a subject to which his thoughts would naturally turn in his hours of quiet meditation.

The story, as we follow it further, appears to suggest also that there were favourite passages in these sacred writings over which the student specially loved to linger. Throughout it there is repeated reference to the history of Jacob. We find this in our Lord's first words concerning Nathanael. We find it in the new disciple's confession of faith. We find it in the glorious promise which crowns the interview between the Israelite and his King. Jacob's history, then, has a prominent place in the composition of this picture of Nathanael. Now if, as we may well believe, St. John gives us in this picture not only a faithful likeness, but also an example of the truest art, then we are driven to the conclusion that the story of the patriarch had a

special meaning in the case of this man of Cana. This is most clearly shown in our Lord's introduction of the new comer to the other disciples, which moreover indicates that one critical incident in Jacob's career bore a peculiarly close relation to his descendant's spiritual history. This introduction is a brief description of the character of Philip's friend. "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.*" A true descendant of Israel! Our thoughts are at once carried back to the time when one of whom Moses wrote appeared to Jacob in the night-watches, and bestowed upon him the new name of Israel. That this reference was deliberately intended is evident from the concluding words of Christ's description—"in whom is no guile." For in Jacob's case the change of name answered to a change of character. The supplanter, the deceiver, the guileful one, was transformed into the prince, or soldier, of God.

The man of Cana, it would seem, was his descendant spiritually as well as physically. He too had been freed from guile; but whether through so complete a change of character as in the case of Jacob we do not know. That his single-mindedness, however, was in some degree acquired is clearly indicated. The fact stands revealed in Nathanael's reply to the greeting of Jesus, "*Whence knowest Thou me?*" He evidently accepts as true our Lord's description of his character. His words express an amazed recognition of a knowledge which penetrated through outward appearances and discerned the thoughts and intents of the heart. Now such words as these are not the words of a man whose guilelessness has always been so natural to him that he is almost unconscious of it. They are the words of a man who has striven earnestly after that same purity of heart which, won through many tribulations, enabled his great ancestor to see God face to face.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxii. 30; cf. St. Matt. v. 8

If, then, this struggle after guilelessness was a salient feature of Nathanael's spiritual history, we need not wonder if he took a peculiar interest in the story which told how Jacob wrestled with a heaven-descended man, and won for himself a new name. And we naturally ask, Had he been thinking of this before Philip found him? Had he then been praying for the blessing which he so earnestly coveted? Had he been striving in spirit with One who, though unseen, was near? Had he been yearning to see Him face to face?

If this were so, then the objection which Nathanael makes to his friend's announcement is most natural. We can readily understand his troubled perplexity when Philip identified the one of whom Moses wrote with a man of Nazareth. His own thoughts were full of one who came direct from God, from heaven. How incongruous this new idea! How poor in comparison! Could a small country town, contemptible because of his very familiarity with it, if for no worse reason, be the source of the blessings for which he looked? Could a man of Nazareth fulfil his glorious hopes?

The objection is so natural under these assumed conditions that it affords a slight justification of the truth of our conjecture as to the nature of Nathanael's thoughts. But we stand on surer ground when we find the question clearly decided by our Lord's answer to Nathanael's surprised inquiry as to the source of His knowledge. "*Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.*" Thus Jesus definitely connects His discernment of the man's character and inner life with a particular time and place. Before Philip called him, when he was under the fig tree, Christ had looked into his heart. Then and there He had seen Jacob's struggle repeated. Then and there He had seen Nathanael's striving after guilelessness.

The evidence is overwhelming, and Nathanael cannot but

believe. Jesus must have been present with him in spirit underneath the fig tree, and have read his very thoughts. The invisible being with whom he had striven for a blessing must be identical with this man of Nazareth. Flesh and blood had not revealed this unto him. Philip's words had had no convincing effect. But his Father in heaven had borne witness in his heart with resistless power. He sees the truth by a flash of inspiration, and makes his enraptured confession, "*Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art King of Israel.*"

Now in the form of this confession we find a striking justification of the preceding line of thought ; for it is a brief description of the mysterious being who appeared to Jacob. This person is called a "man" in the account in Genesis, and is referred to by Hosea as an "angel";<sup>1</sup> but both by the historian and the prophet he is regarded as partaking so intimately of the Divine nature that his self-manifestation is equivalent to a revelation of God. Jacob *had power with God*, we are told ; and when the event was over, declared in solemn awe that he had *seen God face to face.*<sup>2</sup> To such a person the title "Son of God," implying the divine origin of him who bore it, and marking him out as representing God, would naturally be given by the thoughtful Israelite who diligently studied Moses and the prophets. And how would this same person be described in his relation to the patriarch ? He gave Jacob a new name. He enrolled him as his prince or soldier. To Israel, therefore, he was a King.

Thus the spiritual history of Jacob was repeated in all its essentials in the experience of his descendant. Nathanael had striven to gain from God a clean heart. He had seen God's representative, his own Lord, face to face. He had won a new name, as the true Israelite,

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxii. 24 ; Hos. xii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Hos. xii. 3 ; Gen. xxxii. 30.

free from guile. But the revelation which had been given to Israel was not merely repeated ; it was extended, completed, crowned. And herein perhaps we find the surest confirmation of the view which has been set forth. The patriarch, we are told, asked that the name of the God-man might be made known to him. "*Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.*" But his prayer received no answer. The hour had not then come. The name would have been in no way understood. At last, however, in the fulness of time, the revelation is given. To Nathanael, though he asks it not, the true name is declared. But it is not told to him only ; for it is to be the exclusive possession of no one person, or no one race. The true Israelite, typical member of the chosen people to whom the oracles of God were intrusted, is addressed ; but all the disciples, the representatives of the world-wide Israel that is to be, are included in the promise. "*He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*"

Thus the two visions which mark Jacob's departure from and return to the promised land are connected, completed, and made permanent. In the vision of the ladder he became conscious of a connecting link between heaven and earth. In the vision of the God-man he learned that this connecting-link is a living person. It is now made manifest that that person is one who is called the Son of Man.

The Son of Man ! For the first time Jesus describes Himself. He gives Himself that name which, save on one occasion only within the limits of the New Testament, is used by Himself alone. It is a title which asserts the reality of His manhood. But it implies also that He is something more than one man among many. He is *the* Man, the ideal Man, who fulfils in Himself God's idea of manhood. He is the representative Man, who sums up in Himself all that there is in humanity as God has created it.

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Through this name, then, the truths that were revealed to Jacob, and the promises that were sealed, are extended to the human race. That which was true for Israel and his descendants is also true for man as man. In every hour of loneliness, in every struggle after a nobler and purer state, there stands beside us One who shares our nature, and knows what is in man. He feels our temptations, realizes our weaknesses, and discerns our thoughts and hopes. He has lived on earth, was born of a woman, has been called a man of Nazareth. Yet He is not of the earth. He is a visitant from heaven, whence all true manhood comes, and whither it returns when it has learned obedience through the things which it suffers. Through Him heaven and earth are united. All the human hopes and aspirations which are set on this ideal man are carried upwards to the presence of Him in whose image we are made. All the answering strength and love which are bestowed on Him in abundance by the Father are brought down to us, to enable us to rise to that heavenly state. To each of us He will give at last a new name, answering to a purified and ennobled character. And when the dawn appears, He will not vanish, but will reveal Himself and His Father more and more clearly to us in the fulness of the eternal day.

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