

road was chosen to the land of Canaan. It would require more time. It would employ more hands. It would exercise more hearts. It would elicit more enthusiasms. It would supplement the gift of benefits by the richer gift of kindness, and identify the answer to prayer with the practice of human altruism.

G. MATHESON.

### RECENT NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

#### VI.

#### "NUNQUAM SIC LOCUTUS EST HOMO."

JESUS is by universal consent the greatest of religious teachers. "Never did man speak thus" was the testimony of the servants of the Sanhedrin (John vii. 46); and when He preached in the synagogue of Nazareth, "they all bare witness unto Him, and marvelled at the words of grace that proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke iv. 22). Nor is the modern world less lavish of applause, anxious often, one might imagine, to atone for lack of faith by excess of admiration. "'Christianity,'" Rénan writes,<sup>1</sup> "has become almost a synonym of 'religion.' All that is done outside of this great and good Christian tradition is barren. Jesus gave religion to humanity as Socrates gave it philosophy and Aristotle science. There was philosophy before Socrates and science before Aristotle. Since Socrates and since Aristotle philosophy and science have made immense progress; but all has been built upon the foundation which they laid. In the same way, before Jesus religious thought had passed through many revolutions; since Jesus it has made great conquests: but no one has improved, and no one will improve, upon the

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de Jésus*, xxviii.

essential principle Jesus has created; he has fixed for ever the idea of pure worship. . . . Jesus has founded the absolute religion."

Now the question is: *Was Jesus simply the greatest of religious teachers, or was He something more?* and He has Himself answered it. It is written in the Fourth Gospel that once, as He taught in the Temple, the Jews exclaimed in astonishment: "How knoweth this man letters, not having studied?" They believed that the Rabbis were the sole depositaries of sacred lore, and it puzzled them to hear one, who had never sat at their feet discoursing so eloquently and powerfully of the things of God. He replied to their wonderment: "My teaching is not Mine, but His that sent Me" (John vii. 14-16). And a still more striking declaration is recorded by St. Matthew (xi. 27): "None fully knoweth the Son except the Father, neither doth any fully know the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son may will to reveal Him." Jesus was no mere teacher but the Son of God, and His unique relation to God was the source of His unique knowledge.

Such is our Lord's claim. It has, however, been deemed possible to trace His teaching to merely natural sources and discover in His intellectual and religious environment at least the germs of His world-transforming doctrines. This is the problem to which we shall now address ourselves; and we shall endeavour to demonstrate the essential difference between Jesus and all other teachers and the absolute impossibility of classifying Him among them even as incomparably the greatest of them all. He was more than a prophet. He was, in the language of St. John (i. 18), the Only-begotten Son who came forth from the bosom of the Father and interpreted Him (*ἐξηγήσατο*), as only one could who knew His heart and had seen His face.

1. One difference between Jesus and other teachers is *His absolute independence of the past*. It is certain that, unlike St. Paul, who acknowledged himself a debtor not only to the Jews, but to the Greeks and the Barbarians both, Jesus owed nothing to the varied life and rich culture of the great world outside of Palestine. "Neither directly nor indirectly did any element of Greek culture reach Jesus. He knew nothing beyond Judaism."<sup>1</sup> His teaching would have been precisely what it is though no philosopher had ever taught in the schools of Athens, and the likelihood is that He had never heard the names of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle. But to the history and literature of Israel His relation was very different. His mind was steeped in the Old Testament. Throughout His earthly life it was to Him a fountain of refreshment. How aptly He would quote from it in His controversies with His adversaries! The Psalter was His favourite book. In that moment of awful and mysterious desolation as He hung upon the cross, His exceeding bitter cry was a sentence from Psalm xxii. (Matt. xxvii. 46 = Mark xv. 34), and it was the language of another Psalmist (Ps. xxxi. 5) that rose to His lips when he commended His spirit into His Father's hands ere He bowed His head and gave up the ghost (Luke xxiii. 46).

So saturated was our Lord's mind with the ancient Scriptures that much of His teaching has an Old Testament colouring and is cast in Old Testament moulds. St. Matthew v. 3 sq. is a reminiscence of Isaiah lxi. 1 sq.—a passage which He loved and took for His text in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke iv. 16 sqq.). Matthew v. 5 is Psalm xxxvii. 11, and His phrase, "the pure in heart" (Matt. v. 8), is from Psalm xxiv. 4. His satire on the eagerness of the guests to secure the chief places at a feast is an echo of Proverbs xxv. 6, 7. Nor did He disdain

<sup>1</sup> Rénan, *Vie de Jésus*, iii.

the extra-canonical literature. One of His most beautiful and characteristic sayings is the Gracious Invitation (Matt. xi. 28-30), and it bears a resemblance which can hardly be accidental, to the closing verses of the prayer of another Jesus, the son of Sirach (Ecclus. li. 23, 26, 27) :

Draw nigh unto me, ye uninstructed,  
and lodge in the house of instruction.  
Your neck put ye under the yoke,  
and let your soul receive instruction:  
nigh is she to find her.  
See with your eyes that little did I labour,  
and I found to myself much rest.

Even the golden rule: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, so do ye also to them" (Matt. vii. 12 = Luke vi. 31) is not without its ancient parallel. It is written in the Book of Tobit: <sup>1</sup> "What thou hatest do to no man"; and it is related that a Gentile once went to the gentle Hillel and jestingly promised to become a proselyte if the Rabbi would teach him his whole doctrine while he stood on one leg. "I will teach you the Law in one word," Hillel answered, unruffled by the scoffer's impudence: "*That which is unpleasing to thee, do not to thy neighbour. That is the whole Law, and all the rest is but its exposition.*" <sup>2</sup>

It should be observed, however, that our Lord's requirement is vastly more exacting than Hillel's. The maxim of the latter is negative: "Do nothing to others which thou wouldst not have done to thyself"; whereas His precept is positive: "Whatsoever thou wouldst have done to thyself, that do to others." It is ever thus when Jesus repeats an ancient saying. He employs the familiar language, but He enlarges its scope and puts into it a fresh and fuller

<sup>1</sup> iv. 15: δ μσεὶς μηδενὶ ποιήσης.

<sup>2</sup> *Shabb.* 31a. Cf. our Lord's answer to the scribe (Matt. xxii. 34-40 = Mark xii. 28-34).

significance. He puts *Himself* into it. His last word on the cross was a verse from a Psalm, but it makes a world of difference that He prefixed "Father." And it should be observed, moreover, that, while He revered and loved the Old Testament Scriptures, He yet declared it but a partial and imperfect revelation that had been vouchsafed to Moses and the prophets, and handled their sacred oracles with sovereign authority, now setting His seal to their truth, and anon abrogating some ancient law and setting His own perfect revelation in its place. "*Ye have heard that it was said to them of old: but I say unto you.*" He was not a disciple of Moses and the prophets. On the contrary, He proclaimed Himself their Lord, the Saviour of whom they had written and whose advent they had seen afar off.

A further and still more cogent argument may be adduced in support of the view that Jesus was merely the greatest of the prophets, and merely developed the thoughts of His predecessors. It is this, that the two ideas which chiefly dominated His mind and shaped His career had lain ready to His hand in the Jewish religion. One is "the Kingdom of Heaven," the phrase He used to describe the new order which He had come into the world to establish. It was not an original conception. Its germ is the theocratic ideal so prominent in the Old Testament, and it was greatly developed in the Rabbinical literature. For a generation before the birth of Jesus מְלִכּוּת שָׁמַיִם had been the watch-word of Jewish patriotism chafing under the Roman yoke. Jehovah was Israel's King, and it was disloyalty to Him to pay tribute to Cæsar. Such was the cry of Judas the Galilean;<sup>1</sup> and the burden of the Baptist's preaching was: "The Kingdom of Heaven hath come nigh." Jesus took up the message and proclaimed "the Gospel of the King-

<sup>1</sup> Joseph. *De Bell. Jud.* ii. 8. 1: κακίζων εἰ φόρον τε Ῥωμαίοις τελεῖν ὑπομένουσι καὶ μετὰ τὸν Θεὸν ἀσσοσι θνητοῦς δεσπότας.

dom." It was no new conception, but a thought that was in every heart and a word that was in every mouth.

The other idea is that of Messiahship. It had been in the heart of Israel for more than a thousand years, and Jesus took up the ancient expectation and proclaimed Himself the Deliverer whom the prophets had foretold and the nation had been awaiting for all those weary centuries. His claim to the Messiahship may seem a conclusive evidence that He brought no fresh revelation. His ministry was merely the performance of a rôle and the carrying out of a programme. All that He did and taught was but the embodiment of that ancient ideal to which He had served Himself heir. "Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He interpreted unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Now, while it is true that Jesus employed those ancient phrases, it must not be overlooked that He invested them with a wholly new significance. He inherited the names, but the ideals were all His own. The Kingdom of Heaven was on every lip when Jesus entered upon His ministry, but what manner of conception did it express? With the Zealots it was a political watchword, a patriotic cry. They thought to establish the Kingdom of Heaven by resisting the exactions of the Roman tyrant and casting off his yoke. On the lips of the Baptist indeed it bore an ethical significance: "*Repent*, for the Kingdom of Heaven hath come nigh"; but it seemed to him, as to the Essenes, an affair of external ablutions and ascetic observances. Jesus employed the phrase so familiar to the men of His generation, but He gave it a new meaning. "Blessed," He declared in tacit contradiction of the Zealots, "are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." "Blessed," He said again, with the ascetic Essenes in His eye, "are the poor *in spirit*; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." And, in opposition to

the externalism alike of the Pharisees and of the Baptist, He said: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you" (Luke xvii. 21). It was a familiar phrase that He used when He spoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, but the kingdom He meant was such as none had ever dreamed of before.

And how different was the Messiahship of Jesus from that of the popular expectation! The Jews looked for a victorious hero who should crush the Romans, deliver Israel, and raise in more than its ancient splendour the fallen throne of David. The disciples shared this carnal expectation, and they clung to it all the while their Lord was with them. During the last journey to Jerusalem, when the shadow of the Cross had already fallen dark and grim on their Master, they were dreaming of an approaching triumph and disputing who should be awarded the places of honour about His throne (Mark x. 35-45 = Matt. xx. 20-28). It was because it dissipated their dream that the Crucifixion seemed to them so dire a disaster. "We were hoping that it was He that would ransom Israel" (Luke xxiv. 21). The Resurrection revived their hopes, and on the way to the Mount of Ascension they asked Him: "Lord, is it at this point that Thou restorest the kingdom unto Israel?" (Acts i. 7).

Such was the Messianic expectation of His contemporaries. Jesus retained the word, but He gave it a meaning which was wholly new and which, as appears especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews, made His claim to Messiahship wellnigh incredible to Jewish minds. Had it not been necessary to satisfy Jewish expectations in order to commend Himself to Jewish hearts, it may be questioned whether He would ever have announced Himself as the Messiah. The acknowledgment of Jesus as the Christ was indeed a great confession, and when it was made by Peter as spokesman of the Twelve at Cæsarea Philippi, He hailed it with rapture (Matt. xvi. 13-19; cf. Mark viii.

27-29, Luke ix. 18-20). And no wonder; for consider what the claim to Messiahship involved. It meant that His advent was the consummation of history and His salvation the satisfaction of humanity's long yearning. "Your eyes—blessed are they, for they behold, and your ears, for they hear. Verily I say unto you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which ye behold, and did not see, and to hear the things which ye hear, and did not hear" (Matt. xiii. 16-17=Luke x. 23-24). Abraham had rejoiced to see His day" (John viii. 58); Isaiah had seen His glory and had spoken concerning Him (xii. 41); Moses and all the prophets had written concerning Him (Luke xxiv. 27). He recognized in the Scriptures a divine revelation; and this was the evidence that their every page delineated His features and their every ordinance was, as it were, a finger-post pointing forward to Him. Israel's history had been a preparation for His advent and its law a foreshadowing of His salvation.

The acknowledgment of His Messiahship meant the recognition of all this, and therefore He welcomed the confession: "Thou art the Christ." Nevertheless, so carnal and false was the Messianic expectation of His day that it may be questioned whether the rôle of Messiah was not rather an embarrassment to Him and a serious obstacle to His success. It is certain that, though He took as the text of that sermon which He preached in the synagogue of Nazareth, a prophetic picture of the Messiah's gracious work and declared, "To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke iv. 16-30), He never openly announced Himself as the Messiah, and was manifestly embarrassed when Messianic honours were thrust upon Him (e.g. John vi. 14-15). He rejoiced at Peter's great confession, but He immediately "charged His disciples that they should tell no man that He was the Christ," and, in order to disabuse their minds of carnal expecta-



tions, proceeded to announce His approaching Passion (Matt. xvi. 20-23 = Mark viii. 30-33, Luke ix. 21, 22). He never styled Himself "the Son of David," and from the dialectical use He made of it on one occasion (Matt. xxii. 41-46 = Mark xii. 35-37 = Luke xx. 41-44) in order to bring home to the Pharisees the illogicality of their notions, it would seem that the title was distinctly distasteful to Him. "As long as the people thought of the Messiah as belonging to the line of David, so long would they also represent the Kingdom as being a day of vengeance on the Gentile, an enlargement of their own borders, an enriching of Jerusalem, and the dominion over the circle of the earth. The purple robe and sceptre of David must also be first completely driven out of the thoughts of the disciples before Jesus could avow a name which otherwise could only be an occasion of misunderstanding. Therefore was it that Jesus, in presence of the people and in the hearing of the Rabbis, opposed this expectation of the Son of David, and did so even with the weapons of the schools and on the ground of Scripture."<sup>1</sup>

Our Lord's Messianic rôle was a gracious *οἰκονομία*. Indeed it is hardly too much to say that it was part of His humiliation that the necessity was laid upon Him of expressing His undreamed-of revelation in terms of the prevailing theology and employing language which could not fail to be misunderstood. It was a deep saying of the Rabbis that "the Law spoke in the tongue of the children of men," and Jesus, in His gracious desire to reach the hearts of His Jewish hearers, employed the language wherewith they were familiar. But He transfigured it and invested it with a wholly new significance. He adopted the ancient formulæ, but He gave them new values; He used the old skins, but it was fresh wine that He poured into them. His seeming debt to the past was

<sup>1</sup> Hausrath, *Neutest. Zeitgesch.* ii. 229 (E.T.).

in truth—if an expression so inadequate and misleading be allowed—a supreme triumph of originality.

Our Lord's adoption of ancient ideas was a providential necessity, and the essence of His revelation was His doctrine of God. This it was that chiefly distinguished Him from every religious teacher of the past and proved Him in very truth the Son of God. While it is true that wondrous visions of the divine grace and tenderness had been vouchsafed to prophets and psalmists, the fact remains that the God of Israel had ever been an awful King, jealous of His glory and swift to avenge, exalted far above His creatures, and caring only for one family of mankind. These two ideas of transcendence and particularism dominated the Jewish mind and narrowed its theology. In later days the thought of God had become little better than a burden and a terror. He was pictured as a hard taskmaster demanding a righteousness impossible to weak mortals. And religion was a laborious performance of endless ceremonies which, even when duly performed, brought no peace; for the apprehension always remained that perchance everything had not been done and something was still lacking.

Into a world oppressed by such thoughts of God Jesus came with His revelation of the Heavenly Father, the Lover of men, the Friend of sinners, who grieves over a stricken sparrow (Matt. x. 29 = Luke xii. 6) and pours His mercy, like the sunshine and the rain, with impartial benediction on the whole wide world, making no difference between Jew and Gentile but owning every son of Adam as His child and feeling a peculiar tenderness for the sinful and the weak (Matt. v. 45; Matt. viii. 11; Luke xv. 7, 10). Jesus was the first to proclaim the Fatherhood of God. "This," says Rénan,<sup>1</sup> "was his great act of originality; in this he had nothing in common with his race." Whence

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de Jésus*, v.

was the conception derived? Assuredly it did not steal into His mind from the external beauty which surrounded Him in Galilee, that "very green, shady, smiling district, the true home of the Song of Songs and the songs of the well-beloved";<sup>1</sup> for others had dwelt amid those charming and idyllic scenes, yet no such vision had ever dawned upon their souls. Nor was it the protest of His heart against the ferocious deity of Judaism, "that tyrannical master who kills us, damns us, or saves us, according to his pleasure";<sup>2</sup> for many a soul had groaned beneath that cruel bondage, yet none had ever learned to cry *Abba, Father!* The source of our Lord's conception of the Divine Fatherhood was His own unique relation to God. It could never have been attained by any child of the sinful human race. It is the sense of guilt that distorts the soul's vision of God and makes it tremble before Him, owning its ill desert and dreading His just wrath. To none save the Holy One of God, His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased (Matt. iii. 17, xvii. 5), was such a conception possible. Never would we have been delivered from the spirit of bondage and received the spirit of adoption (Rom. viii. 15), had not the only-begotten Son come forth from the bosom of the Father and interpreted Him to us. It is the spirit of His Son which God hath sent forth into our hearts that cries, *Abba, Father* (Gal. iv. 6). *Hoc constanter tenendum est, nunquam vel angelis vel hominibus Deum fuisse patrem nisi unigeniti Filii respectu; præsertim homines, quos propria iniquitas Deo exosos reddit, gratuita adoptione esse filios, quia ille est natura.*<sup>3</sup>

It was not by His teaching, however, but by His person that our Lord's profoundest revelation of the Divine Fatherhood was made. Greek literature abounds in fables of gods appearing in human form, and it would have been no surprise had the doctrine of the Incarnation been proclaimed

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de Jésus*, iv.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v.<sup>3</sup> *Calv. Inst.* ii. xiv. 5.

on pagan soil. It was in Lycaonia that the scene of that classical story of Baucis and Philemon was laid,<sup>1</sup> and it was doubtless in the thoughts of the people of Lystra when, on seeing the miracle wrought by Paul and Barnabas, they exclaimed, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!" But the dominant idea of Jewish theology was *the transcendence of God*. It seemed to the Hebrew mind that God was infinitely exalted above the world; and so wide did the gulf appear to the Jews of later days that they devised mediators to bridge it over. They deemed it impossible for God to hold direct intercourse with men, and taught that when the Law was given it was through the agency of angels.<sup>2</sup> It is written in the Book of Exodus (xxv. 8): "And I will dwell (וְשָׁכַנְתִּי) among them," and they conceived His presence as an overshadowing cloud (שֶׁכֶׁנֶת). They personified the Word of God, and this personal מִימְרָא did extensive service in softening those passages which seem to encroach on the idea of Divine transcendence. Where it is written: "The Lord shut him in" (Gen. vii. 16), Onkelos paraphrases: "The Lord protected Noah by His Word when he entered into the ark"; and for "He spake unto him" (Num. vii. 89) the Jerusalem Targum has: "The Word was talking with him."

It was to minds dominated by this conception that Jesus taught His doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood and presented His claim to be the Son of God. It had been believed that God reigned on high, disdaining to abase His greatness or soil His purity by intercourse with mortals; and now it appeared that He was the Father of men, loving all with a love unutterable, and so little disdaining them that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth He had assumed their nature and come down to tabernacle among them and bear the burden of their sin and sorrow. Such was the revela-

<sup>1</sup> Ovid. *Metam.* viii. 611 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. iii. 19; Acts vii. 53, cf. v. 38; Heb. ii. 2; Jos. *Antiq.* xv. 5. 3.

tion which Jesus brought into the world; and it was a new thing, such as eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had entered into the heart of man.

2. Another and even more striking evidence of the difference between Jesus and other teachers is *the permanence of His Teaching*. "The heaven and the earth shall pass away," He declared, according to the triple tradition, in His discourse on the Last Things, "but My words shall in no wise pass away" (Matt. xxiv. 35 = Mark xiii. 31 = Luke xxi. 33); and the prediction has come to pass. It is a remarkable and truly unique circumstance that the Teaching of Jesus has survived all the changes of nigh two thousand years. Not a statement of His has been discredited by the progress of human knowledge, and no word of His has lost its freshness and charm. His Teaching is truly a *εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον*.

This marvel is absolutely unparalleled. There have been wise teachers who held dominion for a season over the minds of men, but just as each had superseded his predecessors, so he has been superseded in his turn. His teaching, which seemed to his generation so wondrous and complete, has presently been found imperfect, needing to be supplemented and restated, and has at length been relegated to "the history of philosophy—that herbarium of dead and dessicated ideas." Indeed his dethronement is the glory of a great teacher; for it is he that has quickened the minds of men and inaugurated that intellectual movement which leaves him behind in its onward march.

Reference has already been made to our Lord's singular disengagement from contemporary ideas. He never uttered a word which entangled His teaching with any of the crude and erroneous theories, scientific, political, or ethical, which prevailed in His day. Consider the difference in this respect between Him and His great Apostle. St. Paul had been

trained in the Rabbinical schools, and even after he had become "a new creature in Christ," he retained their principles and employed their methods. Very strange to modern minds are the Jewish ideas regarding the constitution of the physical universe. It was supposed that there were several heavens rising above each other in successive tiers.<sup>1</sup> The general belief was that they were seven in number, and each had a name.<sup>2</sup> From that passage where he tells how he had been "rapt away even unto the third heaven and heard unutterable words," it appears that St. Paul held this fantastic theory of the universe.<sup>3</sup> In another well known passage (Gal. iii. 16) the Apostle demonstrates from the use of the word "seed" in the singular that the promise to Abraham (Gen. xvii. 7) had reference to Christ: "To Abraham were the promises spoken 'and to his seed.' He saith not 'and to seeds' as of many, but as of one 'and to thy seed,' which is Christ." This is a genuine piece of Rabbinical dialectic, and it is exactly matched by the following passage from the Talmud: "In the story of Cain, who slew his brother, we find it said, 'Hark! the bloods of thy brother crying.' He does not say 'the blood of thy brother' in the singular, but 'the bloods of thy brother,' his blood and the blood of his seeds (וְרַעֲיוֹתָיו) in the plural. Man was created single to teach that whoever destroys one life from Israel, it shall be reckoned to him as if he had destroyed the whole world (עוֹלָם), and whoever uplifts one life from Israel, it shall be reckoned to him as if he had uplifted the whole world."<sup>4</sup>

So truly was St. Paul the child of his age, imbued with

<sup>1</sup> Cf. שְׁמַי שְׁמַי (1 Kings viii. 27).

<sup>2</sup> Chag. 9. 2: שְׁבַע רְקִיעֵי הַן וְיֵלֶן הֵן רְקִיעַ שְׁחָקִים זְבוּל מְעוֹן מִכּוֹן עֲרֵבוֹת וְיֵלֶן is Latin *velum*, i.e. the veil which hides the glory of God.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 2-4. It is this passage that Pseudo-Lucian (*Philopatr.* § 12) jests at: ἡνίκα δέ μοι Γαλιλαῖος ἐνέτυχεν, ἀναφαλαντίας, ἐπίρρωος, ἐς τρίτον οὐρανὸν ἀεροβατήσας καὶ τὰ κάλλιστα ἐκμεμαθηκώς.

<sup>4</sup> *Mishna Sanhedrin*, iv. 5.

its spirit and subject to its limitations. With our Lord, however, it was very far otherwise. His Teaching is for all time and for all mankind and exhibits no trace of affinity with the intellectual order which prevailed in Palestine during the first century. It may be urged by way of explanation that this was natural, since Jesus was only a Galilean peasant and had never, like St. Paul, sat at the feet of the Rabbis and learned their methods. But His scathing philippic (Matt. xxiii. 1-39) proves how well He was acquainted with their doctrines, and more than once He made masterly use of the Rabbinical dialectic in order to put His adversaries to confusion, with keen sarcasm turning their own weapons against themselves and answering them according to their folly. One occasion was when the Jews made to stone Him, "because He, being a man, made Himself God." In reply he quoted Psalm lxxxii., where the judges of the people are upbraided for their corruption and almost in the same breath are styled "gods." So it had been customary to entitle the judges in ancient<sup>1</sup> Israel, and Jesus, imitating the casuistical logic of His assailants, argues: "If those judges are called 'gods' in your Law, why should you think it blasphemy that I call Myself the Son of God? They were corrupt men, while the many good works which I have wrought before you prove that the Father hath sanctified Me and sent Me into the world." Another occasion is recorded when He routed His adversaries with their own weapons (Mark xii. 18-27 = Matt. xxii. 23-33 = Luke xx. 27-39). It was in the course of that troubled week before His arrest, when the rulers were pressing Him hard and doing their utmost to "ensnare Him in argument" in order that they might have ground for taking action against Him. In the hope of involving Him in the bitter controversy about the Resurrection certain

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxi. 6, xxii. 8: אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם = "to God" (R.V.), "unto the judges" (A.V., R.V. marg.).

Sadducees had propounded to Him that ridiculous supposition of the woman who had married seven husbands in succession: "At the Resurrection whose wife shall she be?" He quoted the words: "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob," and added: "He is not a God of dead men but of living." Of course it was no real argument, and it is impossible to imagine our Lord seriously advancing such an evidence of immortality; but it was a typical piece of Rabbinical logic. It effectually silenced His questioners and delighted the multitude.

Had Jesus been the child of His age, He must have shared its delusions, and it is surely a fact which demands explanation that not one word that He ever spoke has been discredited by the onward march of human knowledge. It may be argued that He perceived the insufficiency of contemporary ideas, but this only solves one problem by raising another. How comes it to pass that a Galilean peasant had so far transcended His age and discovered that its wisdom was but foolishness? There is only one reasonable explanation, and it is that He came forth from God and His Teaching was not His own but His that sent Him.

The Teaching of Jesus is not a transient philosophy but a revelation from Heaven, and it has proved itself such by its inexhaustible vitality. It has survived a thousand intellectual revolutions, and every accession of light from science or philosophy has only disclosed an unsuspected significance in the revelation of Christ and opened men's eyes to something more of the fulness that dwelleth in Him—the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. ii. 9). Consider how the Gospel has adapted itself to the thought of each generation. Take the central fact of the Atonement. For nigh two thousand years the mercy of God in Jesus Christ has been a glad and glorious reality in the experience of believers, but each generation has viewed it in the light of its own ruling ideas and brought it under its own categories. It hardly



appealed at all to Greek minds. They dwelt rather on the thought of the Incarnation (*ἐνανθρώπησις*), and men like St. Chrysostom spoke of the Gospel as a *φιλοσοφία*. But the idea of the Atonement was most congenial to the Jewish Christians, and they interpreted it in terms of their ancient sacrificial system. To St. John Jesus was "the propitiation for the sin of the world," the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." "Ye were redeemed," says St. Peter, "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"; "Who bore our sins in His own body on the tree." "Whom God set forth," says St. Paul, "as a propitiation through faith in His blood." "If," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled sanctified unto the cleansing of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through an Eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve a living God!" Another ruling idea of early days was *ransom*.<sup>1</sup> The usages of war and slavery had made it very real and significant to the ancients, and it was natural that it should be employed as an illustration of the Great Deliverance from the thralldom of sin. It had the sanction of our Lord Himself (Matt. xx. 28) and His Apostles (1 Pet. i. 18; 1 Cor. i. 30; Eph. i. 7; 1 Tim. ii. 6; Tit. ii. 14; Heb. ix. 12); and it was indeed a most beautiful and impressive figure; but unfortunately it was unduly pressed by theologians. As early as the middle of the fourth century Gregory of Nyssa elaborated the theory that the ransom had been paid to the Devil, the enemy and tyrant of mankind,<sup>2</sup> and in spite of occasional protests this repulsive

<sup>1</sup> *λύτρον*, *ἀντίλυτρον*, *redemptio*. Suidas: *λύτρα*: *μισθὸς ἢ τὰ παρεχόμενα ὑπὲρ ἐλευθερίας ἐπὶ τῷ λυτρώσασθαι βαρβάρων δουλείας*.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory represented the Atonement as a trick practised on the Devil. He accepted Christ as a ransom for mankind, but found that he could not retain Him, and thus lost both the price and the purchase. Peter Lombard puts the

theory held the field until Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1100) dealt it its deathblow in his *Cur Deus Homo?* the greatest book ever written on the Atonement. The mediæval mind was dominated by the great system of Roman jurisprudence, and Anselm gave the Atonement a forensic interpretation. He defined sin as withholding from God His due<sup>1</sup>; and what Christ did was to make "satisfaction" to God and pay Him the honour which had been withheld from Him.

And thus it has gone on from generation to generation. Theology is nothing else than an attempt to interpret God's revelation to the intellect; and, since each generation has a new philosophy, theology is ever changing. Just as Nature abides from age to age, while Science is ever advancing and ever discrediting the doctrine of yesterday by the discovery of to-day, so Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, even for ever, but each generation sees Him with other eyes and the old interpretation will no longer suffice. This is the difference between Jesus and all other Teachers, that He is the perfect and abiding revelation while they are but His interpreters. Every generation has had its theory of the Atonement, but it has ever been a fact in the experience of believing men that "God was in Christ reconciling a world unto Himself."

It is amazing how every fresh discovery, so far from discrediting the Teaching of Jesus, rather sheds light upon it and discloses an undreamed of significance in it. "It is little less than marvellous, the way in which the words of Jesus fit in with the forms of thought which are to-day current. They are life, generation, survival of the fit, perishing of the unfit, tree and fruit, multiplication by cell growth as yeast, operation by chemical contact as salt,

theory in one revolting sentence: "The cross was a mouse-trap baited with Christ's blood" (*Sent.* ii. 19).

<sup>1</sup> I. xi.: "Non est itaque aliud peccare quam Deo non reddere debitum."

dying of the lonely seed to produce much fruit, imposition of a higher form of life upon a lower by being born from above, grafting a new scion upon a wild stock, the phenomena of plant growth from the seed through the blade, the ear, and the matured grain, and, finally, the attainment of an individual life which has an eternal quality. The claim made for the Son of Man is that He has to do with this vital process in a vital fashion from the beginning of the ages to the end of them."<sup>1</sup> The celebrated works of the late Professor Drummond are doubtless open to grave criticism, and not their least offence perhaps is their evident assumption that the evolutionary theory is final, and that all is well with Christianity if only it be brought into harmony therewith. Nevertheless they have rendered this service at least to Christian apologetic, that they have shown how strikingly the master ideas of the evolutionists chime in with the Teaching of our Lord and how many unnoticed truths therein they bring to light.

In that recent work which has just been quoted, Dr. S. D. McConnell, following up a suggestion thrown out more than twenty years ago by Professors Balfour Stewart and Tait, has made striking apologetic use of a startling discovery of modern science, "that strange substance known as the luminiferous or interstellar *ether*, the medium through which the 'X ray' and wireless telegraphy perform their work." It has been hard for believers to hold fast by the Christian doctrine of Immortality in face of the evidence of science. "All psychical activity is associated with molecular activity in the matter of the brain and nerves," and "so far as we can see there is not only no living personality apart from a material organization, but a 'disembodied spirit' is unthinkable." It was held by some in early days, and the opinion has had its advocates in modern times, that the soul sleeps between death and the Resurrection and

<sup>1</sup> McConnell, *The Evol. of Immort.*, pp. 135-6.

awakes when it is reunited to its body (*ψυχοπαύνη(α)*). But, when the body is laid in the grave, it does not lie idle awaiting the day when it shall be reanimated by the spirit which once tenanted it. It is dissolved by the chemistry of Nature and fashioned anew into other organisms. St. Paul expressly declares that the resurrection-body is not that which the spirit inhabited during its earthly sojourn (1 Cor. xv. 44).

In that Ethereal Matter, the luminiferous ether, Dr. McConnell sees a possible fabric for the resurrection-body. "The material fabric is every moment disintegrating, and at death falls into ruin. Now, suppose that before that ruin befalls, the soul shall have been able to build up, as it were, a brain within the brain, a body within the body, something like that which the Orientals have for ages spoken of as the 'Astral Body.' Then, when the body of flesh shall crumble away, there would be left a body, material to be sure, but compacted of a kind of matter which behaves quite differently from that which our sense perceptions deal with. It is a material which, so far as science has anything to say, is essentially indestructible. It moves freely amongst and through ordinary matter without let or hindrance. . . . Such Ethereal bodies compacted with living souls would of necessity inhabit a universe of their own, even though that universe should occupy the same space that this one does. Neither earth, nor fire, nor water could in the least impede their movement. In frost and flame they would be equally at home. . . . With bodies of such fine stuff compounded, and so plastic to the uses of the spirit, their knowledge would expand until nature's secrets should be open to their eyes. Their senses would be so acute and delicately balanced as to be capable of thrills of pleasure so transcendent, and of pain so poignant, that the experience of this present life probably gives us no comparison to estimate them by."

This is only an hypothesis, but should it be established, it would be but the repetition of a wonder which has been wrought again and again in the course of these eighteen centuries, putting unbelief to confusion and attesting the Gospel as indeed the revelation of God. Again and again has the human mind after long and painful searching attained to some marvellous discovery, and, behold, it has turned out to be no new truth but a thought of the New Testament! The mystery was already manifested in the Gospel, but had been either hidden away from the ages and the generations (Col. i. 26) by reason of their blindness or derided as a thing incredible. Jesus indeed came into the world to show us the way home to the Father and not to teach us the truths of Science and Philosophy; but He was the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. i. 24) and spoke as one who knew God's heart and saw as God sees. His Teaching was the very truth unencumbered with human speculations, and it is illumined by every access of light and attested by every increase of knowledge. There is perhaps no clearer evidence that the physical world is the work of an intelligent Creator than the fact that it is intelligible and that it is possible for the human mind to comprehend its laws, discovering ever fresh traces of design and, in the fine phrase of Pascal, "thinking God's thoughts after Him." And is it not in like manner a singular attestation of the divinity of the Gospel that every fresh discovery which dawns upon the restless mind of man brings out some unsuspected truth, some hidden beauty, in the Teaching of Him who spake as never man spake, and who declared: "My Teaching is not Mine but His that sent Me"?

DAVID SMITH.