

STUDIES IN THE "INNER LIFE" OF JESUS.

III.

THE GROWTH IN WISDOM AND GRACE.

1. IN the development of personality heredity is probably not the most potent factor; environment has at least as great, if not greater influence. What heredity gives is the possibility of powers of mind, habits of will, and dispositions of heart, which becomes a reality only through the environment fostering or hindering. As the individuality develops, it becomes more definite and fixed, and consequently the environment becomes less and less the decisive factor. In personal maturity character should not be shaped by, but should hold sway over, circumstances. In the years of childhood and youth, however, when the individuality is being only gradually realized, environment is of the greatest importance. A good inheritance may be marred by a bad environment, and a good environment may do much to prevent the injurious consequences of a bad inheritance. In the previous Study the attempt was made to show how the Divine grace evoking the human faith of the mother of Jesus secured for Him a religious inheritance, which linked Him to the believers and saints of the Old Covenant. It now has to be shown that by the same means there was prepared for Him an environment, which fostered and did not hinder the realization of His holy individuality. His mother's mood in the conception was trust in and surrender to God; the prenatal influence of the mother on the child was a channel of grace, confirming the tendency to faith; the same attitude of devotion and obedience to God determined the surroundings of the growing child in His mother's love, and care and training. For we cannot but believe that the illumination of the vision, in which God gave her the trust and the task of being the mother of His holy

child, did not at once fade into "the light of common day," but lingered with her to guard her from error and to guide her into wisdom in dealing with her son. How easily may a good disposition be hindered or marred by a mother's foolish fondness or hasty temper, and how greatly may good tendencies be fostered and strengthened by the wise encouragement and skilful guidance of a mother's word or look! Was motherhood ever more highly favoured, and therefore more heavily burdened, than in Mary? For so high and holy a calling there was surely given to her the sufficient grace, the Divine strength made perfect in her human weakness.

2. In the education of Jesus we must not forget the function of Joseph. Some theologians have found offence in the description by the Evangelist of both Joseph and Mary as the parents of Jesus; some critics have discovered in that word an implicit denial of the virgin-birth; some exegetes have imagined that Jesus in His answer to His mother was correcting her error in speaking of her husband as His father. But the language need offer no difficulty if we recognize, as we should, that the physical relation, if the primary, is yet the subordinate element in fatherhood; that a man is father not simply because he begets, but still more because he watches over, and cares for, trains and teaches the child whom he has begotten; that the use of the term Father for God lays the stress on the subsequent spiritual and moral influence on the child, and not on the initial physical connexion. Joseph is rightly described as one of Jesus' parents, and referred to as His father, for in the home he provided and protected, he filled a parent's place and played a father's part. For this position and function he too was Divinely prepared. To him also God committed a trust and task; on him as well God made a demand for confidence and submission. His perplexity regarding his betrothed was removed by a Divine communi-

cation, which he received trustfully and obediently. The effect of this communication would not be confined to securing for Mary a husband's care and kindness, but would determine the attitude of Joseph to the child when born. In the education of Jesus Joseph could not be forgetful of the privilege and the obligation laid upon him, and would strive to be faithful in the fulfilment of the call to a Divine service which had thus manifestly come to him. In basing our conclusion on the assumption that a real communication of the mind and will of God was made to both parents of Jesus, we need not be at all disturbed by the difference in the mode of revelation, a day-vision for Mary, a night-dream for Joseph. For even if the difference is wholly due to the literary peculiarity of the evangelical sources, the original fact is not affected by the imaginative embodiment. As it seems to the writer even more probably the case that the mode of communication does belong to the original fact, and can thus be best explained, he cannot admit any valid objection to this assumption for this reason. Does not the psychological peculiarity of the subject of a Divine revelation affect the mode of the communication? God can in each case choose the most effective method of approach to the human soul. As Mary and Joseph were unlike, God did not reveal Himself to both in the same way. Does not this difference even suggest that the spiritual influence of the two parents would be complementary, and so more adequate than if there were less individual distinctiveness?

3. The Divine revelation, which came to Joseph and Mary presupposed a preparedness of mind and heart. To the selfish and worldly, the wicked and godless neither vision nor dream would prove an effective revelation, calling forth confidence and commanding obedience. We may conjecture that the parents of Jesus were among those who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel." This

conjecture is confirmed by the characteristics of the song of praise sung by the mother of Jesus, and by the language of the other persons among whom we move in the Story of the Infancy. The terms "poor," "meek," "humble," "needy," first used in some of the Psalms to describe the condition, oppressed and persecuted, of God's faithful people, had come to be applied to lowly and true believers, who in quietness of soul waited upon God, trusted His promises, submitted to His providence, and sought the fulfilment of His purpose of grace, not by political agitation, but by the spiritual exercises of prayer and fasting. These were the living links with the prophets and psalmists of old in an age which had almost entirely lost their spirit. That Jesus grew up in such a spiritual atmosphere, purified and vivified by the special revelation which accompanied His birth, is shown by His own utterances. He pronounced blessed "the poor in spirit," "the meek," "the mourning," "the hungering and thirsting after righteousness." He called to Him "the labouring and the heavy laden." He called Himself "meek and lowly in heart." By His early training He belonged to the class He welcomed, blessed, and whose characteristics He claimed as the most attractive ornament of His own spirit.

4. A question as regards the early influences in the personal development of Jesus, which has not received the attention which it deserves, is this, Was any disclosure made to Jesus regarding the mode of His birth, the dignity of His person, the glory of His vocation? Although we cannot attain any certainty about the answer, yet we may reach a high degree of probability by close study of the narrative. We may be sure that there were given to Mary and Joseph the wisdom and tact not to make any intimation which would disturb the quiet growth of Jesus in wisdom and grace, loosen the bonds of affection and submission which bound Him to them, or trouble His mind

with questions which were beyond the understanding of His years. But when He reached the age when, according to Jewish customs, a boy became a son of the Law, was in some degree released from entire dependence on his parents and assumed some measure of personal responsibility, it is not improbable that some communication was made to Jesus. Was it not likely that, prior to His visit to Jerusalem, when He was twelve years of age, some intimation was made to Him as regards His position and vocation? This communication did not probably contain any account of the mode of His birth, as a subject still unsuitable to be dealt with at His age. Mary's words, "Thy father and I," would be less natural and appropriate if He had just been told how marvellous had been His entrance into human life. But this intimation may have contained the explanation of His name given in dream to Joseph, and His title Son of God as told by the angel-voice to His mother. If Jesus went up to Jerusalem with not only the thoughts and feelings which might be stirred in the mind and heart of any Jewish boy who had had a good and godly upbringing, but the consciousness of a more intimate relation to God than any of His fellow-pilgrims, and a higher duty and greater task than any of His boy-companions, due to this communication, then His action and utterance as recorded become to us more intelligible; they are psychologically mediated by the testimony of His parents to the revelation made at His birth.

5. If we now look more closely at His own words, "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" we may learn with some probability the characteristics of His consciousness. What first of all becomes evident is the thorough confidence of the boy in His parents. He is surprised that they did not understand His action, that they could cherish any doubts about His

designs, that they were in any perplexity as regards His whereabouts. Surely this shows how well fitted for the child Jesus had the environment of the home in Nazareth hitherto been. We are prone in our thoughts of His youth to let the shadow of His after years fall backward over His early days. We think of Him as a lonely child, moving in "worlds unrealized" by those to whom the guidance and guardianship of His life was committed. But in such thoughts we probably both misunderstand the character of His personal development, and do wrong to both Mary and Joseph. His words on this occasion at least suggest that He had not hitherto been conscious of any isolation of spirit, of any separation of His interests and aspirations from the desires and purposes of His parents, of any perplexities of mind which they had not been able to understand and relieve for Him. Still more significant does this appeal for understanding become, if His consciousness of God's Fatherhood did not come to Him as an original intuition, unmediated by His home training and teaching, but if the inward certainty was evoked by the outward communication. His action seemed to Him the necessary and appropriate result of the intimation His parents had made to Him; why should they be so surprised by it? They might be expected to understand the consciousness which their words had evoked, and to foresee the action to which it had by inherent necessity prompted Him. It seems more probable than that Jesus did not make a discovery for Himself and then expect His mother to understand it, but as the truth had come to Him through her or Joseph's words He with good reason expected that she would draw from it the same conclusion for the guidance of His conduct as He Himself had done.

6. Secondly, the utterance of Jesus shows that He had come up to Jerusalem and the Temple with the innocent and ingenuous expectancy of youth. On the way, doubtless,

He had sung gladly and heartily some of the Psalms of Ascent, with which the pilgrims cheered their journey. To Him Jerusalem as God's chosen city would be very dear; to Him the Temple as God's abode would seem the most blessed spot on earth; to Him even the priests and scribes and all who had any share in the Temple worship, or waited on its ordinances, would seem highly favoured. The disillusionment that had to come in His manhood had not yet begun. Jerusalem was not yet for Him the murderess of the Prophets. The Temple was not yet "a house of merchandise," still less "a den of thieves." In the Holy City He sought His Father's House. The teachers, who although they did not conduct any formal instruction in the Temple area, yet might be often found with an eager throng around them discoursing on the meaning of the Scriptures, still seemed to Him worthy of attention, and He sought by respectful questions their aid in solving the problem of His conduct which His fresh consciousness had raised. He had not yet discovered how vain and barren were their subtleties, and how perverse and even pernicious their applications of the law. His denunciation of the scribes still lay in the hidden future. He was in the Temple, not as a critic, still less as a cynic, but as a worshipper and an inquirer. For Him piety and patriotism could still seek in Jerusalem and the Temple with its worship and witness inspiration. Although the dispersion of the illusion, and the discovery of the reality still lay in the future, was there, we may ask, any disappointment in the present? It is not at all improbable that the teachers failed to satisfy His mind with their answers to His questions, and that their failure as well as the failure of His parents to understand His motive and action, did throw Him back more upon Himself, did drive Him to lonely musings on His own duty and destiny, did lead Him to seek, as He had not done before in the same degree, the guidance of the Holy Scriptures as regards His

Father's mind and will. On this occasion was at least begun that process of painful discovery of human imperfection which he had to pass through to qualify Himself for His work. Before He began His work He had to realize the conditions under which it had to be done, and the methods of doing it. That He might be able to save, He had to discover how great was the need of salvation. That sad lesson was not improbably begun at this first visit to the Temple.

7. Thirdly, we may find in this utterance a prophecy of the life that was to be. The moral imperative had spoken in His soul, had been heard and heeded, and was henceforth to rule His life. Necessity was laid upon Him to be in His Father's house, a necessity so absorbing and compelling that all else was forgotten, the convenience of His parents, their anxiety on account of Him, nay, even for the time the authority which they claimed, and He heartily at other times rendered. We have already here the same moral consciousness which afterwards found expression in such sayings as these. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish His work." "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." "Not My will, but Thine be done." In the youth already conscience was supreme, and its supremacy was not recognized with a grudge, but heartily. His duty was His delight. His conscience, though imperative in mood, was not imperious in tone. There are conscientious men who refuse enlightenment, and so fail in moral development, but he sought enlightenment and gained development. His questions in the Temple, we may be sure, were not about the foolish subtleties and vain trivialities in which the scribes delighted. Can there be any doubt that His only concern was to find out His Father's will in His house? That His conscience was not imperious

is further suggested by the statement of the Evangelist, that on His return to Nazareth He was subject to His parents. While conscious of the absolute claim of the Divine will, and while doubtless using all the means in His reach to find out what that will for Himself might be, He was willing to accept the guidance and even control of the moral standards and religious convictions of His home. Throughout His youth there continued a union of originality and dependence, which affords one of the best evidences for the position which has been insisted on in this and the previous Study, that the total divine operation in the Incarnation embraces not only the human individuality of Jesus, but also the inheritance by which through His mother He was united to the religious life of previous generations, and the environment in which by subjection to earthly parents He was able to grow in the knowledge and fulfilment of His heavenly Father's will.

8. Fourthly there is in these words of Jesus, what was most characteristic in His consciousness, His conception of God as His Father. This, as has already been indicated, need not have included any knowledge of the mode of His birth. Neither is it likely that there was as yet an intuition of pre-existence; when and how that intuition emerged in consciousness must be the subject of a future inquiry; meanwhile it may be said that the gradual development of the consciousness of Jesus seems at this stage to exclude it. There was a fit place in His consciousness for the sense of pre-existence only when He had reached His maturity, for that was one of the last consequences of His unique relation to God which would present itself to His mind. We cannot suppose that the metaphysical implicates of His consciousness, which have so bewildered and baffled Christian theology, were in His thoughts, as to His growing mind they could have caused only perplexity. We seem warranted in saying that it was a distinctively religious

consciousness of God's Fatherhood which Jesus at this stage had reached. He thought of, trusted in, loved, and served God as Father. He was sure of God's love, care, bounty, guidance, guardianship, authority and approval. At first not fully conscious of the absolute uniqueness of that relation, as He came to know His fellow men better, He doubtless gradually realized that His consciousness did isolate Him from others, and that among men He was alone with the Father; yet His confidence in His parents' understanding, and His expectation of instruction from the teachers in the Temple seem to involve that He did not yet fully and clearly know how exceptional His relation to God was. Still more gradual must we conceive the process to have been if, as has been previously assumed, His consciousness was evoked by some communication from His parents. But it may perhaps be objected that we have no right to assume any such communication, and to assign to it such significance, for we are bound to consider this consciousness as absolutely original. But this objection involves a false antithesis. The consciousness could be both original and mediated by a communication from others. Just as in regard to conscience we can recognize that it is an original endowment from God, and yet its development is mediated by the evolution of social standards of morality, so we may maintain that had Jesus not been "the Word made flesh," no human testimony could have aroused in Him that consciousness of God's Fatherhood; and yet as His whole individual development was conditioned, and necessarily if there was to be a real Incarnation, by heredity and environment, that consciousness must first be awakened by outward testimony.

9. This consideration suggests a principle which must be faithfully applied in the interpretation of the person of Jesus. His personal development was not isolated, independent, unrelated, an evolution of inherent forces under

immanent laws, without any stimulus or direction from the race to which He belonged, the society in which He did His work. There had been a Divine preparation for His coming, and the entire mediation of His personal development by His heredity and His environment was not less than His unique individuality a Divine gift. The communication about His Divine Sonship, although by human instrumentality, was ultimately due to a Divine revelation. The education which He received and which enabled Him to make that communication His own, was guided and ruled by the impression made and the influence wielded on His parents by a Divine revelation. The inheritance which came to Him in a mother's faith in, and surrender to, God was no gift which the race bestowed on Him, but the response to, and result of a Divine revelation. God Himself by His Spirit purified and sanctified the earthly tabernacle for His holy Child, the Son of His love. This same principle must be applied in tracing the further development of Jesus from youth to manhood, with this difference only, that in His childhood and boyhood that revelation had come to Him through His mother and home, and that in youth and manhood He consciously and voluntarily sought the enlightenment and quickening of Divine revelation in the Holy Scriptures. Looking forward we cannot conjecture what that development will be, but looking backward from the Baptism, the consciousness which it reveals may enable us in the next Study of this series to disclose how Jesus nourished the life divine in Himself by the study of the Word of His Father in the Holy Scriptures.

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