

## *THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD.*

### *A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION.*

THOSE of us whose theological memory goes back fifty years probably grew up with the conviction that the primary motive, or rather the chief end of the Incarnation was atonement for human guilt; our children are taught that the fundamental purpose of the Incarnation was the revelation of the Divine Fatherhood. To read a volume of sermons by representative popular preachers respectively of the middle and close of the nineteenth century, would make this clear. The contrast thus afforded is doubtless an illustration of the familiar fact that different aspects and portions of the one body of truth appeal with varying force to different generations of men; but it means more than this. It surely implies a new vision of truth, such as Christ promised when He said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John xvi. 12, and cp. v. 14, and xvii. 26). And so it has come to pass that no teacher gains to-day the ear of the educated world, who does not make the Divine Fatherhood the keynote of his message. To the religiously minded then of the present day the Fatherhood of God is a subject of supreme interest.

So much has been said, and so well said, upon this truth, that it may seem almost presumptuous on my part to say anything. My apology for so doing is that every individual looks at a subject from his own standpoint, and that, as a consequence, every one may contribute something, however small, to the fuller understanding of any great subject.

We approach the matter, it is hardly necessary to say, as believers in revelation,—moreover, in a progressive revelation culminating in the Incarnate Word of God. It

does not follow from this that we can give a complete account of the truth under consideration. Its germ and budding are in the dim and prehistoric past; nor, though the final word has been spoken by God, can we think that the final word has been spoken by the Church. The illuminating Spirit may have much yet to unfold from the Divine Word; and, in the knowledge of this truth, the Church of the future may be as much in advance of the Church of to-day as the Church of to-day is in advance of the Schoolmen and Reformers. Incomplete, however, as our knowledge is, we are able to trace, at least to some extent, the progressive realisation of the Divine Fatherhood in the religious consciousness of the world.

Our data for such an inquiry in its earliest stages are very scanty, for we know very little as to the religious condition of man in prehistoric times. Science and archæology have put it beyond question that man made his appearance upon earth far earlier than the traditional chronology of our Bible would lead us to suppose; nor do the records of Holy Scripture carry us far in our inquiries into the religious belief and practice of early man. Giving the amplest possible credit to those records, we gather that God left not Himself without a witness in those primeval days,—that in the darkest times there was an Enoch or a Noah who led a purer life, and held a truer faith than those around them,—that when polytheism had become universal, Abraham was called to a higher, purer belief, which was handed down, though somewhat precariously and tentatively, to the third and fourth generation; the story of Jacob and his sons showing how feebly the belief was held and what a narrow line of demarcation divided the posterity of Abraham from surrounding heathenism. Views, however, differ as to the historical value of the Book of Genesis, and many who accept its teaching as inspired cannot resist the impression that

those who compiled the Book read into the narrative some of their own thoughts and convictions, i.e. the thoughts and convictions of an age long subsequent to the events related. This being so, it would not be wise to draw confident conclusions from the Book of Genesis as to the religious belief and spiritual condition even of the patriarchs.<sup>1</sup> Still more hazardous is it to form definite opinions as to the religion of *primitive* man from the Bible, since the unhistorical character of the narrative before the call of Abraham is undisputed.

If we turn from the Bible to scientific and historical research for information, great as is the interest and importance of much that has been written on the origins and beginnings of worship and creed, it is with a sense of disappointment that we weigh the results of the inquiry. No well equipped student of the subject ventures to speak dogmatically. In dealing with primitive man we are in the region of conjecture, and the fundamental fallacy of many anthropologists has been the attempt to draw a portrait of primitive man from the modern savage.<sup>2</sup> The question of primitive religion belongs to history, but there is no history to solve it.<sup>3</sup> At best "primitive man is but a hypothesis reconstructed from the traces he has left."<sup>4</sup>

It may, however, be confidently said that the trend of thought at the present time is distinctly against those animistic conceptions of the origin of religion, which are

<sup>1</sup> This is not to be taken as implying that the patriarchs are the almost purely ideal, not to say fictitious, characters that many modern critics would make them.

<sup>2</sup> Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religion*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> "Where we cannot investigate, we must be content to speculate; and so all inquiries into the origin of early beliefs and institutions, however disguised in archæology or in history, are really philosophical. Our modern anthropologies are in heart and essence as speculative as mediæval scholasticism, or as any system of ancient metaphysics." Fairbairn, *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 204. See also *Making of Religion*, Andrew Lang, pp. 47, 58.

<sup>4</sup> Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religion*, p. 6.

pressed upon us in the writings of Mr. Herbert Spencer and other writers, whether representative of agnosticism or materialism. An increasing body of evidence is forthcoming in support of the view that there was present to the mind of primitive man the abstract conception of God, as a Supreme Being, a beneficent Creator and a moral Governor. If this was so, then there was from the first the germ, at least, of theism in the mind of man, and, apart from the Bible, neither Abraham nor any other early monotheist is the impossible anachronism that some writers have maintained.<sup>1</sup> This is as far as we can go, and it must be admitted that it is impossible to trace with confidence any of our religious conceptions from its earliest phase in human consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

When, however, we come to the history of Israel, the darkness to a great extent clears, and we are able to watch the evolution of spiritual truth. The many affinities of belief and ritual that connected Israel with neighbouring Semitic peoples may, in some degree, have been the result of syncretism,<sup>3</sup> but far more largely were the survivals of an earlier faith and practice. The historical books of the Old Testament make it clear that the mass of the

<sup>1</sup> As Professor Jevons and others remind us, "the progress of religion has depended on the intuitive powers of the few—inward intuition, direct perception of things not apprehended by the senses. We may explain this as due to revelation or to greater powers of spiritual insight, or in some other way; but religious progress moves wholly on one line, that of personality." Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religion*, p. 397.

<sup>2</sup> The history of religion has only to deal with man as a religious being. There may have been man upon earth from a scientific point of view long before the human race existed in a religious sense. This has been ably maintained by Mr. Hugh Capron in *The Conflict of Truth*. The difficulties, however, raised by the contention are very serious, especially as argued by Mr. Capron from the record of Scripture, and, like all attempts to lift the veil from the origin of things, it fails to carry conviction.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Jevons suggests the possibility of syncretism for the affinities collectively. *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 388 ff. Dr. A. B. Davidson, in his Article on *God* in *Hastings' Bible Dictionary*, appears somewhat to favour this view, but it is not the general one. See also *Making of Religion*, A. Lang, p. 281.

people were not far raised in their ethical and religious conceptions above the neighbouring heathen. The prophets of Israel had no easy task in planting among them those germ-thoughts which were to issue in such precious fruit; they were, it is evident, dealing with those who were much more at home with the idolatrous ritual of high places and hill altars than with the stately worship of the Temple.

All positive or founded religions, i.e. religions which, in their present form, can be traced to a personal teacher, work upon pre-existing beliefs and convictions. No positive religion starts with a *tabula rasa*.<sup>1</sup> Just as our Lord built upon a Jewish foundation, so did Moses upon a pre-existing Semitic basis, and the greater part of the Old Testament is occupied in showing the steps by which the people of Israel were led onward and upward from crude and rudimentary conceptions of God and worship to the noble and spiritual views which find expression in the prophetic literature. Thus, then, we find the Hebrew faith, preparatory though it was for the religion of the Incarnation, grafted upon a heathen stock. Scores of parallels might be named between the worship and cult of Israel and those of other Semitic tribes;<sup>2</sup> and their ritual being what it was in the earliest days of their history, nothing was more natural than that the Israelites should mingle themselves with the heathen. But, whilst there was much in common between the Hebrews and other branches of the Semite family, an ever-widening gulf in the providence of God was, in reality, separating the seed of Abraham into a peculiar people, for there was a purifying, transforming, elevating process at work in Israel which was absent from other Semitic centres. Under

<sup>1</sup> See Fairbairn's *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 260; also Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> For points of contact and coincidence between heathen Semites and Israel, see Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 111, 138, 142, 143, 165, 171, 177, 207, 220, 314, 325, 387, 389, 428.

Divine guidance, the traditional heathen ritual, in the hands of Israel, threw off that which was gross and materialistic. The human sacrifice was abolished, the partaking of blood became an abomination, the idea that the deity participated in the material offering was repudiated, self-mutilation was left to the worshippers of Baal and Moloch.

But, in addition to this negative and prohibitive side of the Divine education, a far more important work of positive and evolutionary instruction was going on. We see the rude and childish tenets of savage society becoming instinct with moral and spiritual power. Contrast, for example, the heathen conception of the Divine jealousy with that which was fostered by the Jewish prophets: the heathen worshipper picturing his god as standing stiffly on a sense of personal dignity that could be satisfied with a strict observance of sacrifice and ritual; Jehovah's jealousy viewed by the prophets from a purely moral and spiritual standpoint, and constantly urged as an incentive to a purer and higher life. Or take the conception of holiness. To the ordinary Semite there was nothing ethical in it, and it is best interpreted by the well known practice of taboo.<sup>1</sup> What clearer proof can we have of a Divine education than the way in which the prophets of Israel took this low and ignorant conception, and made it the starting point of teaching which proclaimed a God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and whose purpose it is that men should do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God? The same process of ethical and spiritual development is to be found in the doctrine of the atonement. The

<sup>1</sup> For instances of the survival of this conception amongst the Israelites, see Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 140-143, and Note C, Appendix, p. 428. Also Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, s.v. *Holiness in the O.T.*, vol. ii. p. 395. Professor Ives Curtiss assures us that holiness has no ethical meaning among the Semites of the present day. *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day*, pp. 66, 149.

subject is indeed a difficult one, because our knowledge is so slight and fragmentary, but the most recent study of modern Semitic religion leaves little doubt that the shedding of blood had a vicarious intention and significance among the ancient Semites.<sup>1</sup> And as we listen to the language and observe the customs of the Ismailiyeh and Aramæans of to-day we are carried back in thought more than three thousand years and stand with Moses beneath Mount Sinai, as he sprinkles first the altar and then the people with the blood of the sacrifice; or with the Israelites on the Passover night, as they stain the door-posts and lintels of their dwellings with the blood of the sacrificial lamb. From such beginnings we are permitted to trace the gradual realization of the need of a sacrifice essentially Divine, and to watch the growth of a sense of sin which finds its expression in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

Nor is it otherwise with the truth of the Divine Fatherhood. Almost incredible as it may seem to us, the very basis of religious thought, outside the Bible, in the earliest times of which we have any definite knowledge, was the physical unity of the god and his worshippers.<sup>2</sup> The ancient heathen Semite accepted, without question, the traditional view that the god he worshipped was in a physical sense the father of his family or tribe.<sup>3</sup> Going back, as far as we can, to the origins of things, we gather that the relation of God to man was conceived as twofold, viz., that of father and king; the former relation expressing His relation to

<sup>1</sup> See *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day*, Prof. Ives Curtiss, pp. 174, 178, 214, 224, 227, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The flesh of the sacrifice was eaten with the view of reinforcing the physical bond, and was regarded as equally the food of God and man. In a gross and materialistic way, therefore, primitive religion was intensely sacramental. On the connexion of this crude sacramental conception with the mysteries of the Christian faith, see the striking words with which Professor Jevons closes his *Introduction to the History of Religion*, p. 414.

<sup>3</sup> The fatherhood of God, in a physical sense, is not alien to the mind of the modern Semite. *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day*, Ives Curtiss, p. 112 ff.

the family, the latter His relation to the state. Such, so far as we can ascertain, were man's germinal conceptions of his relation to God, and if his conceptions were crude and imperfect, they were so only in the sense of being rudimentary.<sup>1</sup> From the first—the first, that is, of which we have any knowledge—man's religious ideas were bound up with a sense of the Divine Fatherhood and of responsibility to a Superior Being.<sup>2</sup> The study of history teaches us not to despise the day of small things, and, in the growth of Hebrew thought, we trace the advance, by a process of spiritual evolution, of these conceptions of sonship and responsibility towards their goal in the teaching of Christ, which centred in the kingdom and the family.

Turning from the ancient heathen Semite to the Hebrew people, we at once become aware of a remarkable change in teaching and belief. Jehovah is the Father of Israel, not of the individual Israelite primarily, but of the nation. From the very first the people collectively are taught to regard Jehovah as their Father, because treated with a Father's love. "Israel is My son, even My firstborn." Exod. iv. 22 (cp. Hos. xi. 1). By the prophets God is represented both as the Husband and Father of His people.

<sup>1</sup> "It would be hard to exaggerate the rudeness of the form which religion assumes in the lower stages of culture; but this ought not to conceal from us the fact that the process which produced it was, in its own order, if not as fine, yet as rational and real as that to which we owe the art, the poetry, and the philosophy of to-day. Man produced it because he was struggling to express or realize himself within a system that forced him to be rational in order that he might be man while the system remained Nature. And the real continuity of religion lies in the continued activity of the creative process, the thought which is ever refining the forms it has inherited, and seeking fitter vehicles for its richer and sublimer ideas." Fairbairn's *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> We can perhaps hardly say moral responsibility. There was no ideal of righteousness present to the mind of those of whom we speak, nor any code of personal morality. Their god was a clan-king, and the only divine sanction they recognized was that which enforced their tribal duties and made them faithful to the traditions and precedents handed down from the past. Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*, p. 249.

Such a treatment of the subject would, of itself, close the door against the thought of physical descent. But independently of this, great care was taken to insist upon the fact that Israel had been made God's child by an act of redemption and a covenant of grace. "Is not He thy Father that hath bought thee?" Deut. xxxii. 6 (cp. iv. 20, 34; ix. 29; Exod. xx. 2; Ps. lxxiv. 2; Isa. xliii. 3).

It is the nation, then, rather than the individual, that claims the privilege of the Divine Fatherhood. Yet no one can read the Old Testament without seeing that the more spiritually minded amongst the Jews rose above the teaching of their times and grasped something of the sense in which the Fatherhood of God is understood by the Christian. In Psalm lxxiii. 15<sup>1</sup> the pious Israelite is distinctly accounted the child of God. In Psalm lxxxix. 26 the king says (no doubt officially and representatively), "Thou art my Father." This is in strict agreement with the word of the Lord concerning Solomon, "I will be his Father and he shall be My son" (2 Sam. vii. 14; 1 Chron. xxii. 10; cp. Ps. ii. 7). And when the Psalmist says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him," he does something more than suggest the idea of individual fatherhood.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the general trend of religious thought was in this direction. From the time of the Captivity onwards the Jew was familiar with the truths of moral freedom and personal responsibility, and men whose religious thought had been formed on the basis of Ezekiel's teaching<sup>3</sup> could not altogether fail to make personal application of language addressed by Hosea and Isaiah to the

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Deut. xiv. 1; Prov. xiv. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Sanday is surely justified in saying that there "has been a tendency to minimize too much the part which the conception of God as a Father plays in the O.T." See his article on *God in the N.T.*, in *Hastings' Bible Dictionary*, vol. ii. p. 208. And Dr. Watson is not justified in saying that the individual Fatherhood of God had not dawned upon the mind of the Jew in O.T. times. See *EXPOSITION*, Series V. vol. i. p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel xviii., also iii. 16-21, xxxiii. 1-20; and cp. Jer. xxxi. 29-35.

nation at large ; the sense of the Divine Fatherhood would, under favouring conditions of character and environment, become, at least in some measure, individualized. A defective sense of individual and personal right prevailed amongst the Hebrew as amongst other nations of antiquity, and this undeveloped sense of individualism would naturally manifest itself in an inability to realize, except very imperfectly and tentatively, the individual Fatherhood of God.<sup>1</sup> It would perhaps be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the view of life expressed and urged by Ezekiel in the 18th chapter and other parts of his prophecy in preparing the way for Him who made individual character the aim of His mission, and, at the same time, taught that true sonship consists in true character. In the same prophetic spirit did John the Baptist make ready the way of the Lord, by preaching personal repentance and pouring contempt upon the boast of descent from Abraham.<sup>2</sup>

Thus was the way prepared ; but when we turn from the work of preparation to the teaching of the Gospels how marked a difference is seen ! The teaching of the later prophets, which made personality a part of human thought and life, invested it with a religious significance and moral responsibility. Our Lord took this newly awakened religious sense, and, through it, brought into consciousness the sense of individual sonship. The New Testament presents no greater contrast to the Old than in its treatment

<sup>1</sup> I cannot remember to have seen this undeveloped sense of individualism, which was such a marked feature in the early world, brought forward in the discussion of the Fatherhood of God as presented in the O.T., but it surely touches the question very closely, and is essential to the right consideration of the subject. On undeveloped individualism, see Maine's *Ancient Law*, p. 122 ff. ; Mozley, *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages*, p. 37 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The conception of the individual Fatherhood of God is not prominent in the apocryphal scriptures, but is by no means absent from them. See *Wisdom* xiv. 3 ; *Ecclesi* iv. 10, xxiii. 1, 4. *2 Esdras* i. 28, cp. ii. 2, is believed to be from a Christian source. The growing belief in personality can be best traced in the apocryphal and apocalyptic scriptures by the increasing definiteness of conception as to final judgment.

of the Divine Fatherhood. Read the Sermon on the Mount, and set it side by side with the words of the most evangelical of the prophets, and how clearly is it seen that we have entered upon a new dispensation.<sup>1</sup> Not without pregnant purpose and meaning was it that the Divine Fatherhood should have been emphasized in the first recorded utterance of our Lord; and, to the Christian, easy and natural is the transition of thought from the words spoken in boyhood, "Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" to those spoken after the Resurrection, "Go unto My brethren and say to them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God."

From the very opening of his ministry our Lord speaks to His disciples as, individually, the children of God; their relation of sonship is constantly rising to the surface of His teaching. The Fatherhood of God is the basis of His appeal alike to the conscience and the heart. Dr. Sanday is doubtless right when he says that "in the uncertainty which attends the exact circumstances of His discourses it may be often doubtful as to how far the phrase *ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν* extends beyond these."<sup>2</sup> Yet, as one reads the Gospel narrative, one certainly gets the impression that the phrase was not so indiscriminately used as some writers would maintain.<sup>3</sup> Unquestionably, as I shall presently point out, the universal Fatherhood of God is both implied and

<sup>1</sup> On the whole subject of the Divine Fatherhood see Westcott's *Historic Faith*, p. 205 ff. On the broad distinctions between the O.T. and N.T. conception of Fatherhood, see pp. 206, 7; also Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, "Children of God," s.v. *God*.

<sup>2</sup> Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. *God*, vol. ii. p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> As, e.g., Dr. Watson. "People with dogmatic ends to serve have striven to believe that Jesus reserved Father for His disciples; but an ingenuous person could hardly make the discovery in the Gospels. One searches in vain to find that Jesus had an esoteric word for His intimates and exoteric for the people." *Expositor*, Series V. vol. i. p. 26. But the only passage he adduces in support of his view is Matt. xxiii. 1, 9; he might have added some others, e.g. Matt. vii. 28, 29; Luke vii. 1. The same exaggeration is found in a remarkable book, anonymously published, *Pro Christo et Ecclesiâ*, p. 46 ff.

declared in the teaching of Christ. That He came to reconcile the children of disobedience to their Heavenly Father, that all men are regarded as, at least potentially, the sons of God, can hardly be disputed. But it is just as much beyond dispute that He never failed to impress upon His hearers the fact that the filial relation of man to God was of a moral and spiritual nature,—that the essence and reality of sonship consist in likeness to God. The teaching of our Lord indeed anticipated the statement of St. Paul, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”<sup>1</sup> The “sons of the kingdom” are the sons of His Father.<sup>2</sup> It is the “little flock” to whom it is their Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom.<sup>3</sup> It is the peacemakers who shall be called the “sons of God.”<sup>4</sup> In strict accordance with such sayings are the words recorded by the three Synoptists, “Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in Heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother.”<sup>5</sup> The relationship is one of likeness. And this is made the more clear by the startling contrast in which such language stands with that which was addressed to those whose eyes were blinded with pride and prejudice. “Ye,” said our Lord, “are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do.”<sup>6</sup> So, too, the tares in the field are the “sons of the evil one.”<sup>7</sup> The Pharisees make their proselyte twofold more the “son of hell” than themselves.<sup>8</sup> With these sayings of our Lord, we may compare the following expressions in other parts of the New Testa-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 14. Our Lord always used *υἱός*, indicating the position and privilege of sonship, not *τέκνον*, which denotes community of nature, that which is *born*. On the use of *υἱός* and *τέκνον* in the N.T., see Westcott’s Notes on John i. 12 and I John iii. 2; also Hastings’ *Bible Dictionary* on “Children of God,” s.v. *God*.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xiii. 38, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xii. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. v. 9. cp. Luke vi. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xii. 49, 50.

<sup>6</sup> John viii. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. xiii. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. xxiii. 15.

ment; "son of the devil,"<sup>1</sup> "sons of disobedience,"<sup>2</sup> "children of wrath";<sup>3</sup> also "children of the devil"<sup>4</sup> and "children of cursing."<sup>5</sup> If we examine the teaching of the New Testament as a whole, we find that this main thought runs right through it, viz.: that the filial relation to God is realized and expressed in likeness to God; or rather, likeness to Him, who, in a perfect human life, revealed the Divine character. "As many as received Him to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His Name, which were born . . . of God."<sup>6</sup> "In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God."<sup>7</sup>

If we direct our attention for a moment to St. Paul's teaching on this subject, we shall find that it is in strict accordance with what we have seen to be the general tenor of our Lord's. St. Paul introduces the idea of *adoption*. The earliest use of this term is in Galatians iv. 5; but it is necessary to bear in mind that he is speaking "after the manner of men." He speaks in parables; he explains his meaning by analogies, he illustrates spiritual processes and relationships from the experiences of family and social life—the covenant, the legal disabilities of infancy and slavery, the guardian, the steward, the tutor. There can be no question that this conception of sonship was suggested by the Roman law of adoption, which included an act of fictitious sale (*mancipatio*), and what the Apostle intended to emphasize was the fact that sonship is the result of an act of Divine grace and redemption. St. Paul thus accentuates the redemptive rather than the creative aspect of sonship and carries into the Christian covenant

<sup>1</sup> Acts xiii. 10.<sup>2</sup> Eph. ii. 2, v. 6, Col. iii. 6.<sup>3</sup> Eph. ii. 3.<sup>4</sup> 1 John iii. 10.<sup>5</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 14.<sup>6</sup> John i. 12, ep. iii. 3-8.<sup>7</sup> 1 John iii. 10. "Life reveals the children of God." Westcott, *First Epistle of St. John*, p. 105.

the conception of the Hebrew prophets, who taught that Israel was God's child, not by creation, still less by physical descent, but by an act of grace.<sup>1</sup> It is in strict agreement with this Old Testament view that St. Paul uses this very term *adoption* of ancient Israel. (Rom. ix. 4.)<sup>2</sup>

And this sonship is regarded, throughout the New Testament, as a Divine gift to man in the Incarnate Son of God, and to be enjoyed only in union with Him. The explicit teaching of St. Paul is that membership in the Body of Christ carries with it adoption into the family of God. To be in Christ is to be a part of God's family. To become united by a living faith to the Only Begotten Son is to take one's place amongst the children of the living God. This truth might be proved and illustrated from every part of the New Testament;<sup>3</sup> it underlies and inspires the creeds of Christendom.

From what has been said, it will be seen that there is in the New Testament an uncompromising, not to say exclusive, attitude towards the unregenerate mass, the world that "lieth in the evil one."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it is equally undeniable that, at the back of all this emphatic teaching as to sonship, there is the vision and revelation of a love that embraces all. Words have come down to us from the lips of Christ and the pen of His apostles, which tell us it was a true instinct which bade the earliest

<sup>1</sup> St. Paul also associates the position of the Christian believer with that of faithful Abraham and his spiritual children. Gal. iii. 6-9.

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, by using the analogy of adoption, the apostle guards the unique sonship of Jesus Christ. "Adoptionem propterea dicit, ut distincte intelligamus unicum Dei filium." St. Augustine. See Lightfoot on *Gal. iv. 5*.

<sup>3</sup> John i. 12, iii. 16, 36, and *passim* in the Fourth Gospel. Cp Matt. xi. 27, Rom. vi. 23, James i. 17, 18, 1 Pet. i. 3, 21, 1 John v. 11, etc. Any attempt to correlate the sacrament of baptism with what is revealed to us of the Fatherhood of God would carry us far beyond the limits of our space, but it is important to note that the writers of the New Testament uniformly presuppose newness of life as well as of privilege in the case of the baptized.

<sup>4</sup> 1 John v. 19.

worshippers offer sacrifices to an unseen Father, and that, however crude and materialistic their thoughts of God, there was a living germ of truth in the hearts of those who spoke of *Zeὺς πατήρ* and All-Father. Whatever other wealth of meaning the parable of the *Prodigal Son* may contain, the wanderer from home and father represents the nations that have gone out from the presence of God;<sup>1</sup> nor can any one read the Gospels and doubt that the heart and aim of Jesus embraced the world.<sup>2</sup> So, too, in various ways, and from varying points of view, the writers of the New Testament recognize the universal love and fatherly purpose of God. Adam is described by St. Luke as the son of God,<sup>3</sup> with no hint or suggestion that, by the Fall, he had altogether ceased to be a son. St. Paul quotes approvingly the words of a heathen poet which claim for all men a Divine Fatherhood (Acts xvii. 29).<sup>4</sup> St. John sees the whole human race as the object of redeeming love (John iii. 16; 1 John ii. 2). To the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews God is "the Father of spirits" (xii. 9);<sup>5</sup> to St. James He is the Father after whose similitude man, as man, is made (iii. 9). So we have witness after witness

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the parable of the *Two Sons*, Matt. xxi. 28 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Matt. viii. 11, xxi. 41; Luke iv. 25-27, xxiv. 47; John iv. 21-24, x. 16, xii. 24, 32. The universal Fatherhood of God is implicitly taught in Matt. v. 45, Luke vi. 35.

<sup>3</sup> iii. 38.

<sup>4</sup> The late Dr. Candlish, in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. ii. p. 219, rather unduly depreciates the force of this endorsement on the part of the apostle. It is quite true that St. Paul does not use the term *υἱός* or *τέκνον*, but, when we compare his use of the word *γένος* in this passage with its use in Rev. xxii. 16, it is clear that the universal Fatherhood of God was in his mind when preaching at Athens. Further, in treating of divine sonship by adoption in Gal. iii., iv., St. Paul includes Gentiles with Jews in having undergone an elementary discipline. "The heir, in his non-age, represents the state of the world before the Gospel. In drawing out the comparison St. Paul seems to include Gentiles as well as Jews under this tutelage." "Potentially, indeed, men were sons before Christ's coming (iv. 1), but actually they were only slaves (iv. 3). His coming conferred upon them the privilege of sons." Light-foot on *Galatians iv.*

<sup>5</sup> The writer somewhat modifies, but does not nullify, this conception by introducing the thought of bastardy in the preceding verse.

to the truth that all men are, at the least potentially, the sons of God.

Indeed, it is not too much to say that, in the logic of the heart, the universal Fatherhood of God is the corollary of the Incarnation, as the Incarnation is its true and eternal expression. "To conceive the typical Man as essentially Son was to be driven to think of humanity in the terms of sonship. If, by the very constitution of His being, God was a Father, man by the very fact of his creation in Christ was constituted a son. And if collective man was God's son, it followed that God was man's Father, and so there stepped into the place of tribal deity the universal Fatherhood."<sup>1</sup> At the same time it is easy to drift into an anthropomorphic presentment of the subject, and much popular teaching has erred in this respect. It must be obvious that the language of Scripture is an accommodation to our thought and experience. The Divine Fatherhood is but most imperfectly represented, shadowed forth rather than expressed, in the parental relation. It belongs to a different plane of thought and existence from that of earthly parentage. It is, therefore, at the most, analogy, not identity, that we look for, and all that we can claim is that earthly fatherhood is the analogue of a Divine Fatherhood, which with our present powers and attainments it is as impossible accurately to define as fully to experience. Nor must we lose sight of a further consideration; and here again how often has popular teaching misrepresented the truth! What God, in His condescension to our infirmity, describes as His Fatherhood is part of His essential Being. God is love. God does not become love. God does not become our Father. God is what He is (Jas. i. 17). Very clearly is this taught in the parable of the Prodigal Son.<sup>2</sup> The father is father from first to last. The

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn's *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 543.

<sup>2</sup> The term *υιός* is applied to Jew and Gentile alike; so in Matt. xxi. 28 ff.

son might, indeed, leave the paternal home, and so lose the privilege and position of sonship, but the filial tie is represented as unbroken throughout the story. The son is in the far country wasting his substance in riotous living, but the father is in the old home waiting to receive, to pardon, to re-instate. In that parable the heart of man is represented as unsatisfied save by the realization of the Divine Fatherhood; and this was to declare that Fatherhood universal; for the love of God must be commensurate with the need of man; if the need is universal, the love that supplies it can be nothing less. And in thus declaring the truth of God's immutable love, our Lord anticipated the experience of man. Go where you will, this is the teaching that draws forth a thankful response from man's heart. The first and last word of the spiritual life is *Abba*, Father. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight." "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

G. S. STREATFIELD.

*THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES OF THEMISON :*  
*A STUDY IN 1 AND 2 PETER.*

THE rise of Montanism is closely connected with the decay of Christian prophecy. The warnings uttered against false prophecy in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (c. 140 A. D.), and the *Didache* (c. 131-160) point to the reality of the danger in the middle of the second century. The opponents of Montanism, especially the anonymous author<sup>1</sup> of the anti-Montanist work dedicated to Avircius Marcellus (c. 193 A. D.) were careful to distinguish between the practice of the Montanist prophets and the prerogatives of those of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding this distinction, the danger seems to have led to a shrinking of the gift of pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Eus. H. E.* v. 162.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 17, 3.