

*THE SON OF MAN AS THE LIGHT OF THE
WORLD.*

TOWARDS the close of that memorable scene described in St. John's Gospel (ch. xii. 20-36), when certain Greeks were brought to our Lord in the Temple courts by St. Philip and St. Andrew to be introduced to Him, the multitude asked : " Who is this Son of man ? " Both the circumstances out of which the question arose, the question itself, and the answer given to it are profoundly interesting, and, as the last words of the public ministry of Jesus as narrated by St. John, have special significance. It is in the hope of possibly throwing further light on the meaning of our Lord's answer to the question that this paper is written.

We are not told that this discourse of Jesus was especially directed to the Greeks who had come to hear Him. But it is impossible not to think of them as among the crowd of eager listeners ; though, as far as it appears, they were silent listeners ; for the question itself was put by men who had a theory about the Messiah (*v.* 34), and therefore Jews. There are, however, indications in our Lord's words which seem to show that they were intended especially for those Greeks who stood there as representatives of the Gentile world thus brought into contact with Him. While other discourses of Jesus are not to be understood without reference to the history or customs or institutions of the Jews,¹ the teaching of this discourse is based on facts as wide as human nature itself. It is a revelation, not so much about the Jewish Messiah, as about the Son of man, who is glorified through sacrifice,—a title of which more will be said

¹ See, for instance, the historical and local allusions in conversation with Nicodemus (ch. iii. 1-15) ; with the woman of Samaria (ch. iv. 5-42) ; in the discourse at Capernaum (ch. vi. 25-66) ; and in the parable of the Good Shepherd (ch. x. 1-18).

below. Here it is sufficient to note that whatever may be the origin or precise meaning of the title, it is one which can be translated into the thought and language of other nationalities more easily and intelligibly than any other Messianic name. It implies at least in Him who assumes the name a presentation of complete and perfect manhood, and of man created in the image of God. This was, to begin with, a thought not impossible to be brought home to a Greek intellect. And the sublime doctrine of sacrifice, which follows, is universal in its application. Moreover it is illustrated by a parable which would be quickly apprehended by the Greek. For the mysteries of Demêtêr, which furnished him with the deepest and most beautiful of his religious conceptions, were much concerned with the death and resurrection of the grain of wheat. The thought itself—the sacrifice of the lower life in order to gain the higher—was indeed opposed to the ideal of Greek civilization, in which the absolute perfection of the human form and the human intellect was the foremost aim. Still, when Christ applied to His own experience the glory and attraction of sacrifice, as the summit of human excellence, exhibited in the Son of man, he said words which all history has proved to be profoundly true, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself.” They are profoundly true words, for the Cross of Christ is the secret of the attraction of Christianity.

It is easy to see that the teachings and example of sacrifice came naturally from One who claimed to be “the Son of man”; because it is teaching that has touched a chord in all humanity. It has been irresistibly and most unexpectedly convincing in the experience of mankind, after the Christian revelation, for reasons which lie deep in human nature.

As “the multitude” (of Jews) listened to these words

of Jesus, they were silently in their own minds trying to reconcile them with their [preconceived idea of the Messiah. They seem to have experienced no difficulty in interpreting the expression "be lifted up" of death, though the Evangelist finds it necessary to explain that expression to his readers by one of those "notes" which are characteristic of the Fourth Gospel. (See *v.* 33: "This he said signifying by what manner of death he should die.")

The difficulty with the Jews was how to reconcile this prediction of death with a claim to be the Messiah. The form of question also implies an identification in their minds of the Son of man with the Christ. "We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up?" More than this, the form of question also implies the identification of the Christ, and consequently of the Son of man with Jesus. For the expression in the immediate context to which reference seems to be made is not, "The Son of man must be lifted up," but "If I be lifted up from the earth." It is true that at an earlier part of the discourse Jesus had spoken of the Son of man. But then His words were, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified" (*v.* 23). And although the glory of the Son of man did in fact come through His death upon the cross, that is not an interpretation which would naturally have presented itself to the Jews. We must therefore conclude that when Jesus spoke of Himself as being "lifted up," the Jews thought of Him as "the Son of man" lifted up on the cross to die. And indeed this precise expression occurs earlier in the ministry (*ch.* iii. 14). And our Lord's mysterious converse with Nicodemus might well have been reported in Jerusalem to many disciples of Jesus, or inquirers about His doctrine.

The question which was asked here, partly perhaps with

a touch of scorn, "Who is this Son of man?" is one of intense interest, and not even to this day completely probed and answered. It is at least certain that Jesus designated Himself by this name, and it is probable that it was one by which He was widely known in Galilee. It is a name that at once concealed and explained the Messiahship. When Jesus inquired of St. Peter, "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?" He received an answer that implied wonder and expectation, and a possible realization of high hopes, but not the true answer, which it was reserved for St. Peter alone to give. That answer was accepted as the revelation "not of flesh and blood, but of the Father in heaven" (St. Matt. xvi. 16, 17). And it is to be noted that this first confession of Jesus, as the Christ, is made under His own designation of Himself as the Son of man. St. Peter's answer is in effect that the Son of man is "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

On the occasion we are considering Jesus makes no direct answer to the question addressed to Him. On the other hand, is it necessary to regard our Lord's words as throwing no light whatever on the significance of the title by which He had condescended to be known? It is true that the commentators seem to agree in an interpretation which dissociates the words from any but an indirect connexion with the question asked. Bengel, for instance, notes: "*Jesus non respondit interpellationi eorum sed subiecit ea quae maxime sunt necessaria.*" Alford to the same effect: "He does not answer them, but enjoins them to make use of the time of His presence yet left them." Meyer (Eng. Trans.): "Jesus does not enter upon the question raised, but directs the questioners to that one point which concerns them, with the intensity and seriousness of one who is on the point of taking His departure." Godet: "*Jésus au lieu de répondre à la question qui lui est faite*

adresse aux Juifs une dernière sommation." Westcott has : "*Jesus therefore said . . . meeting their difficulties by charging them to use the opportunities which they still had for fuller knowledge. . . . The words are not described as an answer (v. 30), but as an independent utterance.*"

While admitting the weight of this consensus, and the truth of the interpretation in one direction, we still venture to think that the words implicitly convey an answer which would lead thoughtful minds to trace in these words an intention to identify Christ the Son of man with Christ the Light of the world. If this could be proved, it would be an additional example of this Evangelist's method, by which a truth once stated is never lost sight of. In the forefront of his revelation of the Christ St. John sets Him forth as the Light of the world ; and the closing words of the ministry of Christ are cited to show that the life of the Son of man which was sacrificed was indeed the "light of men." (See ch. i. 4, 9.)

Again, if we could find in these words our Lord's answer to the question, "Who is this Son of man?" the value of them would be immeasurably enhanced, as conveying an illustration by Christ Himself of the significance of the name.

That the words should suggest, rather than definitely explain, is characteristic of our Lord's way of answering questions. Not a few instances may be cited in which our Lord makes His reply a means or occasion, as here, of giving a needed warning or counsel to His hearers. When, for instance, one said unto Him, "Lord, are they few that be saved?" our Lord's reply, "Strive to enter in by the narrow door" (St. Luke xii. 23, 24), is suggestive rather than direct and definite. Again, when the disciples ask, "Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus suggests, without precisely stating, the true nature of the Kingdom : "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost

is come upon you ” ; and then gives the royal injunction : “ Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth ” (Acts i. 6-8). And, like these last words, the very first recorded words of Jesus furnish another example of this characteristic : “ How is it that ye sought me ? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business ? ” Possibly the first revelation to Mary of her Son’s consciousness of His Divine nature, not explicitly stated, but wonderfully suggested.

The passage before us is inspired by the same suggestiveness, and in the same way carries with it the veiled answer. Jesus leads His disciples on to think of the Son of man as the Light of the world. And further consideration will show in how many points the one Messianic title illustrates the other.

The title of “ The Son of man ” and its use by our Lord of Himself, have been traced by some writers to Daniel vii. 13 ; where, however, the expression is not “ the Son of man,” but “ One like unto a son of man ” ; and by others, on surer grounds, to Psalm viii. 4-6. (Comp. Heb. ii. 7.) But, as Bishop Westcott observes (additional note on St. John i. 51-7), “ The title as we find it in the Gospels, *the Son of man*, absolutely was a new one.” And it is not to be supposed that our Lord would have appropriated to Himself a title which in popular estimation directly pointed to Him as the Messiah.

But in St. Matthew xvi. 17 He sanctions the interpretation of this title as the Christ, the Son of the living God ; and here He implicitly identifies it with Himself as the Light of the world. The first was in a special sense a revelation to the Jew, the second in the fulness of its meaning a revelation to the Gentile. Jesus was to be “ a light to lighten the Gentiles,” as well as to be “ the glory of His people Israel.”

There are at least three aspects in which the two Messianic titles, the Son of man and the Light of the world, mutually illustrate one another: (1) In regard to the Incarnation; (2) As a revelation of truth; (3) In respect of guidance and example.

1. The universality of the Incarnation, which is the gift of the Son of man, is illustrated by the universality and all-pervadingness of light. Bishop Westcott has pointed out¹ that in all the passages where the title "Son of man" occurs the Incarnation is an essential part of the teaching which they convey. It is probable that in St. John ix. 35 the true reading is "Son of man," and not "Son of God." In that passage the title has a special significance, closely akin to that which it bears in the message to the Greeks, which we are now considering. Jesus is there revealing Himself to the man, whom He had cured of blindness, and who by his brave adherence to the logic of facts had incurred the wrath and condemnation of the Jewish authorities. He was the first disciple of Christ who had suffered excommunication, and was therefore in a sense the first member of a purely Christian Church. Now, however little this convert, or the Greeks in the temple afterwards, apprehended the significance of the name of the "Son of man," it would at least convey the thought of salvation coming from One who had something essentially in common with all mankind. The name itself suggested a movement, which passed beyond the limits of Judaism. Belief in the Son of man is, says Bishop Westcott, "the elementary form of the confession of the Incarnation on which the Universal Church rests." Further Christian teaching and experience showed that in a true and deep sense the "Son of man" gathered within Himself all humanity. And by virtue of

¹ Additional note on St. John ix. 35.

God in Him taking flesh, all mankind had a potential share in the Divine nature.

Now this great thought of the new birth which is the effect of the Incarnation, itself the gift of the Son of man, is never more vividly expressed than by the symbol of "the true Light, which lighteth every man coming into the world" (St. John i. 9).

Whichever of the two possible grammatical constructions be given to that passage, the sense of universality remains, nothing can destroy the significance of "every man." Either the true Light, coming as a continuous, uninterrupted stream, illuminates every child of man not only at his birth but throughout his life, as the sunlight falls continuously on leaf and flower; or else, the true light lightens every man as he comes into existence. As in nature light is the universal source of vegetative life, so the true light, the incarnate Son of God, is the Universal Cause of the new birth to men.

2. Again, as light reveals the truth of things, the Son of man reveals the truth of humanity. As the Son of God is the express image of God, one with Him in nature and essence, so the "Son of man" is the express image and type of perfect manhood—the perfection into which those who have put on the new man are growing (Col. iii. 10). Jesus Christ came to show what human nature is capable of at its best and holiest. This is the meaning of "truth as it is in Jesus." Truth in all its variety of meaning found its ideal expression in Him. In this sense the Son of man is the light of the world. For light is essentially a revealer of truth. "Everything that is made manifest is light" (Eph. v. 13).

3. But light not only illuminates; it also guides. And the Son of man is not only the mirror of the perfection of human nature, He also guides His people in the way of

truth. He sets before us an ideal, a possibility of perfectness, which it is our duty not only to admire but to imitate and realize. This ideal of human nature and perfectness of manhood Jesus, in the passage we are considering, calls the light. The change made in R.V. in *v.* 35 is worthy of note—"Jesus *therefore* said unto them," not as in A.V., "Then Jesus said unto them." Therefore, i.e. in answer to their question, and in order to explain the meaning of "the Son of man." The explanation is conveyed in the words that follow. "Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not; and he that walketh in the darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." The revelation, then, is of the Son of man, who is Christ our example (1 Peter ii. 21), as the Light that guides—the thought which Newman has so beautifully expressed in the familiar hymn:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
 Lead Thou me on;
 The night is dark, and I am far from home;
 Lead Thou me on.

ARTHUR CARR.

THE AMORITE CALENDAR.

It is well known that in early Babylonian times month names are found to have been in use which rarely appear later. The names of the months which are most generally known are those of the native "Babylonian" Calendar, as we may call it here for distinctness. These are in order—Nisânu, Aiâru, Simânu, Du'ûzu, Âbu, Ulûlu, Tišrîtu, Arahsamna, Kislîmu, Tebêtu, Šabâtu and Addaru. It is agreed that the Hebrews borrowed these names in the forms Nisân, Iyyâr, Sîwân, Tammûz, Âb, Elûl, Tišrî, Marhešwân, Kislew, Tebêt, Šebât, and Adâr. The correspondence is very close indeed, and presents some interesting points, such as the