

*THE LAMB OF GOD.*

WE may now ask if there are any expressions in the teaching of Jesus which are akin to the conceptions of the Messiah as Lamb. In all the four Gospels frequent reference is made to sheep and flocks. As in the prophetic literature the people are represented by Jesus as a flock of sheep. The phrase "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" occurs twice in Matthew x. 6, xiv. 24, and it is illustrated by the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew xviii. 12; Luke xv. 4, 6. In Luke xii. 32 we read, "Fear not little flock," and in the shepherd similitudes of John x. Jesus describes His followers as "My sheep," with which we may compare John xxi. 15, "My lambs," "My sheep."

There is a suggestion of sheep as strong, masterful creatures in Matthew vii. 15, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves." Here only sheep can be meant which lead the flock ("*als Widdler.*") Similar ideas lie behind the word of Jesus to the Apostles: "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matt. x. 16; Luke x. 3). Luke has expressly the strong masculine word *ἀρνας*. Here, as in Matthew vii. 15, the apostles are represented as sheep in the midst of wolves not to characterise the danger of the position into which they are sent, but rather to show how the service which they are to render to the flock is distinguished from that which the wolves do to the flock; as God-sent leaders they are to lead and guide the flock instead of oppressing it as the false prophets do. As Luke has the strong word *ἀρνας*, so in keeping therewith is the phrase in Luke xxii. 35, 38, "And he that hath none let him sell his cloke and buy a sword," which does not suggest the image of sheep led to the slaughter, or of lambs defenceless among wolves; but rather that of rams able to fight. Thus Jesus

describes His emissaries, His missionaries, as leaders of the flock ; and if He does not characterise Himself by this image, this is because the image of the shepherd can be more fruitfully applied to His activities : of seeking the lost (Matt. xviii. 12, etc. ; Luke xv. 4, etc.), reviving the faint (Matt. ix. 36 ; Mark vi. 34), risking his life for the sheep (John x. 11).

Is there, then, no roundabout way in the utterances of Jesus from the image of the shepherd to even the beginning of that of the slain lamb, the lamb of sacrifice, which in later times pushed the image of the strong lamb into the background ? Spitta thinks there is none. The Synoptics as well as the Fourth Gospel always speak of the death of the shepherd. In Matthew xxvi. 31, Mark xiv. 27, we read, " I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad." But the shepherd's death is not to the advantage of the flock, and there is not even a hint that the shepherd takes upon himself willingly the fate of death. It is different in the shepherd parables of the Fourth Gospel. In John x. 11 we read, " The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The hireling fleeth, betakes himself into a safe place, instead of staking his life in conflict with the wolf. When Jesus came up to Jerusalem to the feast of Tabernacles, though according to chapter vii. 1 He had to leave Judaea for Galilee on account of the murderous designs of the Jews, He showed that He staked His life for His own. That and other occasions of facing the hostility of His enemies justify His being compared to a shepherd who does not flee from the wolf, but like a hero assails it. The phrase *τιθέναι τὴν ψυχὴν* has thus the meaning, as in xiii. 37, xv. 13, of staking life, not of giving up life. It goes ill with the sheep if the shepherd loses his life in battle with the enemy.

Another way of interpreting the phrase is found in x. 17, 18a, " Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down

my life that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." Here the phrase means to "give up," "surrender," as the anti-thesis "to take it again" proves. The author of verses 17, 18a regards the death of the shepherd as an offering on behalf of the sheep. Spitta thinks that he thus abandons the clear meaning of the parable. The words at the close of verse 18, "this commandment received I from My Father," are referred to the giving up and the taking again of life. But how, asks Spitta, can the latter be understood in the sense of a command imposed by God? In verse 16, on the other hand, there is mention of a command laid upon Jesus, "them also I must bring." Accordingly verses 17, 18a are to be taken as an elaboration of the original text of John. Just as in chapter i. 29 the reviser of the Gospel introduced the later dogmatic conception of the sin-bearing lamb of sacrifice, so here he has expanded the thought of the shepherd courageously adventuring his life for the sheep into the thought of his sacrificing his life for their sake, a thought which contradicts the parable. But this reviser has done nothing else than what exegesis still does, when it explains the kindred words of Matthew xx. 28, Mark x. 45, "The Son of Man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many" as referring to the saving effects of Jesus' death. In the connexion in which they stand the words speak not of his death, but of his service, and should be understood from this point of view. They recall Genesis xlv. 33, which reads, "Now therefore let Thy servant, I pray thee, abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brethren," where the question is not of his death but of his willingness to give himself as a bondman. To give oneself as bondman that the many may be set free is the highest example of service. Jesus made Him-

self the servant of His people in order to deliver them that were bound in the bondage of Satan.

There remains but the Last Supper as a point of possible connexion between Jesus' own utterances and the image of Him as the Lamb of sacrifice ; but the Last Supper is not meant to be the Christian paschal meal, and has originally no connexion with the death of Jesus at all. Spitta here merely repeats the conclusion which he reached in an earlier work upon the Last Supper.

If, then, to conclude, there is no approach in the words of Jesus to the image of the slain lamb, and if in the other writings of the New Testament, with the exception of the Apocalypse, which is a motley mixture of Christian and Jewish elements, there is not a trace of the image of the lamb as leader, at what point did Christian reflection set about making the image of the lamb of sacrifice out of that of the lamb as leader ? It cannot be said with certainty. John i. 29 has clearly been influenced by Isaiah liii. 7, " As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb, yea, He opened not His mouth." And the same passage is connected in Acts viii. 26 with the conversion of the eunuch. The transference of the image of the suffering servant of Isaiah liii. to that of the historical Jesus was easily accomplished in Christian doctrine and without much reflection. Here, chiefly, lay the opportunity of transforming the warlike into the patient suffering lamb.

This change could not come about so easily, where the death of Jesus was regarded from the point of view of sacrifice. The Book of Hebrews is dominated all through by the idea of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice, the one sufficient and effectual sacrifice. Here, however, Jesus does not appear as the lamb of sacrifice, but as the High Priest who offers His own blood, like the shepherd who sheds his

blood for his sheep. That is intelligible enough. In the sacrifices of the Old Testament, which appear as types of the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the lamb as animal of sacrifice is not mentioned at all, but only the bull, the goat, the calf (cp. ix. 12 ; x. 4). The sacrifice of Christ could not possibly be symbolised by a lesser animal as victim. Even the relation in which the blood of Christ is brought to that of the sacrifice of the covenant of Exodus xxiv., in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper, gave no occasion to present the sacrifice of Jesus as that of an innocent lamb ; there the question is of bullocks.

On the other hand, the paschal lamb offered a point of connexion. In 1 Corinthians v. 7, 8 Paul uses the preparations for the feast of Passover as symbolic of what the Corinthians should do : " Purge out the old leaven, etc." " For our Passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ." As to the passage 1 Peter i. 19, its interpretation depends on whether one finds therein a reference to the history of the paschal lamb (Exod. xii.) or to the picture of the patient servant of Jehovah (Isa. liii.). There are points which seem to have reference now to the one and now to the other. If in such connexions Christ appears as the antitype of the paschal lamb, yet this one trait is not so fraught with meaning as that it alone could have given rise to the general conception of Christ as the lamb. Even the feature mentioned (Isa. liii. 7) does not in itself possess the power of creating the strongly defined image of the Lamb of God. In the one case as in the other the question is of comparing Christ with the lamb so far as it lets itself be slain without any wish of its own, and gives up its blood for the deliverance of men. From these comparisons the strong conception of Christ as lamb could scarcely arise, the conception which the Apocalypse sets before us, and which is presented in the

word of the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John i. 36).

We have shown where it has its origin. To it have attached themselves in Christian literature the conceptions of the patient lamb and the blood of the paschal lamb. In the New Testament Apocalypse the two views stand side by side, yet relatively unharmonised. There is no need of any further attempt to show why the earlier view must succumb to the later. In the measure in which the death and resurrection of Christ became the central ruling point of Christian doctrine, the conception of the guiding and protecting activities of the Messiah and the corresponding image of the lamb as leader of the flock must needs retire.

Spitta rounds off his discussion with the remark that the kindred representations of Christ as lamb and as shepherd serve as the typical expression for the widespread sentimental view of the person of Jesus, which regards Him as a really passive, tender being, giving Himself up patiently and meekly to His destined sufferings. In the representation of the shepherd the weak caressing of the lambs and the will-less dying for the flock have no place in the words of Jesus, but rather the leading of the sheep, the toilsome search after the wanderer, and the heroic conflict on their behalf against their enemies; likewise in the representation of the lamb, it is not the meekness, the passivity, the uncomplaining, quiet, patient suffering which originally are brought to expression, but, on the contrary, the activity of one who goes before the flock and whose strong horns are raised against the foe. If Christianity is often felt to be as if it were forbiddingly effeminate, this does not go back to Jesus or to the image of Messiah adopted by Him, which is above all things manly. And in keeping with that is the record given by the earliest tradition of the life

and suffering of Jesus before it was altered by later interpretations of Old Testament types.

One hopes that out of an able, if somewhat difficult, discussion with very little of the grace of style to commend it, one may have been able to present some at least of the points that are fresh and helpful. One cannot but have sympathy with the author's aim to rebut the charge of effeminacy sometimes brought against Christ and Christianity. There is no ground, as he shows, for the charge, so far as the sayings of Jesus are concerned, and so far as the representations upon which the charge is based are concerned, when these are fully and fairly understood. Without any of Spitta's learning, but with a great deal more than Spitta's force, the latest advocate<sup>1</sup> of "Orthodoxy," with these leaping words, flings himself upon the same anti-Christian charge that Christ "was a gentle creature, sheepish and unworldly, a mere ineffectual appeal to the world." "Instead of looking at books and pictures about the New Testament, I looked at the New Testament. There I found an account not in the least of a person with his hair parted in the middle, and his hands clasped in appeal, but of an extraordinary being with lips of thunder and acts of lurid decision, flinging down tables, casting out devils, passing with the wild secrecy of the wind from mountain isolation to a sort of dreadful demagogy, a being who often acted like an angry god and always like a god. Christ had even a literary style of His own, not to be found, I think, elsewhere; it consists of an almost furious use of the *à fortiori*. His 'how much more' is piled one upon another like castle upon castle in the clouds. The diction used about Christ has been, and perhaps wisely, sweet and submissive. But the diction used by Christ is quite

<sup>1</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, pp. 269-270.

curiously gigantesque ; it is full of camels leaping through needles, and mountains hurled into the sea. Morally, it is equally terrific ; He called Himself a sword of slaughter, told men to buy swords if they sold their coats for them. That He used other even wilder words on the side of non-resistance greatly increases the mystery ; but it also, if anything, rather increases the violence. Here we must remember the difficult definition of Christianity already given. Christianity is a superhuman paradox whereby two opposite passions may blaze beside each other"—the writer means fierceness and gentleness, the lion and the lamb.

That is an effective, an almost hyper-effective answer to the view which Spitta contests. In his own way, as we have seen, a way which will, perhaps, appeal to many rather than the other, Spitta sets himself to prove that it is a mistake to represent Christ as in any true sense a quiet, docile, passive creature, a lamb in the sheepish, sentimental meaning of the word, a victim with no will of its own. For what the image of the lamb suggests rather, as the sources show, is not passivity, but activity ; not submissiveness, but supremacy ; not dumb subjection, but fearless leadership ; the victor more than the victim. Spitta has done a service in sifting out the elements contained in the image and in giving value to an element which has often been forgotten out of deference to another. It may be questioned, indeed, whether Spitta has always ground enough for the statements or arguments upon which he builds up his contention. It is far from being a matter of agreement, e.g., that there are two parallel accounts in the first chapter of John—a point upon which, naturally, the critic lays a great deal of stress. No doubt there are indications, lying on the surface, of two narratives, perhaps an earlier and a later, and there is the difficulty of

understanding how the Baptist could possibly speak as he speaks in i. 29 of the Messiah, in terms of suffering and sacrifice which are terms of later experience and reflection. That difficulty, along with the other, do seem to lend some support to the hypothesis of parallels. The hypothesis is fundamental to the discussion, as it enables the critic to distinguish, as he thinks, between a Jewish and a Christian usage of the title Lamb of God and to trace the former to its source in Jewish literature. But if the hypothesis itself is open to question, so also is the attempt to establish a connexion—at least a Messianic connexion—with the Book of Enoch. It is true that in the imagery of the Book of Enoch reference is made to the horned lambs or rams, and in chapter xc. 9 we read, “And I saw till horns grew upon those lambs, and the ravens cast down their horns; and I saw till a great horn of one of those sheep branched forth and their eyes were opened.” The horned lambs are the Maccabees and “in the great horn,” as Charles says, “it is impossible to find any other than Judas Maccabaeus.”<sup>1</sup>

Spitta contends, however, that it signifies the Messiah, and supports his contention with a line of criticism which proves that the Messiah appears not merely after but before the judgment, and is the conqueror referred to in the text. On the other hand, Charles shows<sup>2</sup> that the Messiah is described as “a white bull to mark his superiority to the rest of the community of the righteous who are symbolised by sheep. . . . He has absolutely no function to perform, as he does not appear till the world’s history is finally closed. Accordingly His presence here must be accounted for through literary reminiscence, and the Messiah-hope must be regarded as practically dead at this period. The nation,

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Enoch*, R. H. Charles, 1893, p. 251.

<sup>2</sup> *Book of Enoch*, pp. 30, 31, 258.

in fact, felt no need of such a personality so long as they had such a chief as Judas." Here is a wide difference between Charles and Spitta, which the latter can scarcely be said to overcome by his argument that the reference to the "white bull" is an addition, a doublet, etc. His argument is highly problematic. One may therefore doubt whether there is evidence enough in the Book of Enoch to allow of it being used as the direct source of the *ἀρνίον* of the New Testament. But even if Spitta fails to make good his critical findings, or some of them, it can scarcely be denied that there is evidence of a Jewish and a Christian usage of the title "Lamb of God," and Spitta has done well to distinguish them.

May we not say that there is continuity between them and not contradiction, that each needs the other as parts of one whole? Is it not just the paradox of Jesus that He is both victor and victim, leader and led? Granted that Spitta's main contention is established, that the thought underlying the image of the Lamb is that of leadership, and that this is the thought in the Baptist's mind<sup>1</sup> and the utterances of Jesus, yet that does not prevent other thoughts or other images flowing to it and fusing with it in the powerful solvent of Christian experience and reflection. There is nothing more significant in the New Testament than the way in which forms widely different from each other and remote in their origin are found combining together in order to express as adequately as possible the overpowering conviction of the worth and meaning of Jesus. Under the constraining inspiration of His Person we see the writers feeling out after the largest and most commanding symbols of their own and other times

<sup>1</sup> The point is not referred to by Spitta, but might not this give a fresh sense and setting to the Baptist's question in Matt. xi. 3?

and forcing them into the mould of their emotion and belief. It is one of the miracles of His Person that it exhausts all forms but is exhausted by none. It marvellously holds together a mass of antitheses which otherwise fly apart and never fuse. "What most of all impresses me in the man Christ Jesus," once wrote Martineau, "is a singular harmony of opposites, a union of contrasted attributes which I nowhere else behold or hear of." Now we find this union of contrasted attributes, this harmony of opposites from the first in the consciousness and afterwards in the utterance and action of the Person Himself. Thus the voice at the Baptism, "Thou art my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased," blends the ideal king of the 2nd Psalm and the servant of the Lord of Isaiah xlii. As it has been well put, "it was His own figure, His own calling and destiny that rose before Him in the ideal king of the Psalmist and the lowly servant of the Prophet; it was His inmost conviction and assurance from this hour that both ideals were to be fulfilled in Himself. The voice of God addressed Him in both characters at once."

It was in this consciousness of Himself, and because of it, that Jesus entered on the work which the Gospels describe. Towards the end it comes vividly into view. Thus the last of the sections in Mark dealing with the Messiah and the Cross contains the striking reminiscence, "And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was striding on in front, and they were amazed, and they that followed were afraid." Thus pre-occupied, absorbed, intent, as we are told, "He took again the twelve and began to tell them the things that were to happen unto him." Deliberately He addressed them yet again on the one absorbing theme. He was conscious there was a divine necessity in the things at hand, and He sought to enlighten the disciples concerning it. One indication that even yet they

did not understand is shown by the request of James and John. Their minds were pre-occupied too, but with *other* "things." "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand in thy glory."

He accepts, as it has been said, "their implied homage to Him as the King" but He comprehends as they do not the way which leads to the throne. It is, of course, the way of service culminating in sacrifice. "Verily the Son of Man—who is to sit on the throne of His glory—came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many." We have seen that Spitta compares this passage with Genesis xlv. 33, but the same idea, as Dr. Denney says, is found in Psalm xlix. 7; Job xxxiii. 22, and "pervades Isaiah liii., where there is the same contrast as here between one and many—the one Righteous Servant and the many whom He justifies and whose sins He bears at the cost of giving His life for them" (Isa. liii. 10–12). It was only carrying service to its utmost limit when He gave His life a ransom for them. "The ideas were not new, the new thing was that He felt they were to be fulfilled in *His* Person and through *His* Passion."

But one need not proceed any farther along this familiar line of thought. Enough that in His own consciousness of Himself Jesus brought and blent together the conceptions of ideal king and lowly servant committed to death. He is both victor and victim. He carries the spirit of the king into His death as servant. His necessary death is a death of freedom, a death in which He does not cease to be leader though led to the slaughter. Spitta may be quite right in contending that John i. 29 is later than John i. 36, that "Behold the Lamb of God" simply, in the meaning he gives to the phrase, is quite conceivable as uttered by the Baptist, but it is going too far to say that the other phrase, "that taketh away the sin of the world,"

is the importation of an idea alien to the Fourth Gospel, and that the last Supper has no reference or relation to the death of Jesus at all. Professor E. F. Scott, in his able study of the Fourth Gospel, seems to agree with Spitta when he says that in John i. 29 "we have nothing but a vague concession to the earlier doctrine" (the Pauline doctrine of forgiveness and atonement). "Against the single text in which Christ is regarded as the great sacrifice for sin, we have to set the whole Gospel, which not only leaves this idea to a side, but moves in a world of thought quite alien to it." I rather think that that is less than the truth, and that the phrase "taketh away the sin of the world" represents that deepening or broadening of the Christian consciousness through the illumination of the Spirit "guiding into all the truth" by which it drew together in a way the Baptist could not do, and fused in one, ideas or images which, though known to prophecy and later thought, became possessed therein of a new and rich significance. And as such it has a fitting place in the Gospel. It would be strange indeed if the Fourth Gospel, whose thought is kindred to the thought of Paul, should have nothing to say as to the sacrificial nature of the death of Christ or as to its connexion with the fact of sin. Spitta may rule out chapter x. 17, 18a, but that and chapter i. 29 are not the only passages—if our appeal is to passages—which bear upon His death. Have we not a striking allusion in the author's comment on the counsel of Caiaphas (chap. xi. 50 f.), "You do not take account that it is expedient (*συμφέρει*, profitable, of advantage) for you that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perish not. Now . . . he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad." It is a comment, one would think, the Evangelist would

never have made unless his mind had been familiar with the thought of the saving significance of His death.

May we not claim, further, that we meet with the same thought in connexion with the new birth in chapter iii. and in connexion with the Supper in chapter vi.? There is the statement in the former that "as Moses . . . even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life," which the Evangelist in chapter xii. 33 tells us Jesus used to signify "by what manner of death He should die," and in the latter there is the statement that "as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me," which points to the connexion, the mystical connexion, between the life of the Christian and the death of Christ. We have not only these and other allusions in the Gospel to the saving import of the death, but in the First Epistle of John, which cannot be separated from the Gospel, belonging as it does to the same tendency or school of thought, we find a series of declarations which point in the same direction. As, e.g., in the great passage in the fourth chapter, "Herein was the love of God manifested in our case, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John iv. 4-10). It is Jesus Himself and not His blood or His death that is described as "propitiation." The same designation occurs in 1 John ii. 2, and in iii. 5 it is said, "Ye know that he was manifested to take away sins," the term "take away" being the same term as in John i. 29. No doubt the emphasis in the Fourth Gospel and the Epistle is not so strong upon the relation of Jesus to sin and the sinner as in the Synoptics and Paul, but it will not do to say that in the Gospel with which we must connect the

Epistle this side of His activity almost disappears. "Christ is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," He is the Son of Man uplifted on the Cross. He is the *ἰλασμός*, the source of which is God Himself; Who is faithful and righteous to forgive the penitent and cleanse from all unrighteousness.

From all this it may emerge that the title Lamb, as applied to Jesus, is touched with the richness and variety of Christian experience itself. It cannot be limited to the one aspect which Spitta labours to define. That aspect needed to be defined, it needed to be brought back to a position of prominence, it needed to be reaffirmed in view of the one-sided prominence of another aspect. The "Lamb" tells of the Leader, the Protector, the hero-king, one who is conscious both of His duty and worth to others, but naturally and of necessity other allusions bearing on the lamb of sacrifice were drawn into contact and mixed with it in the anxiety of men to find the most complete and comprehensive expression of their faith in Jesus. Yet the lamb of sacrifice in Christian theology has tended to absorb the lamb as leader, an exaggeration which finds no justification in the teaching of Jesus or the theology of John. Just as in Jesus' consciousness there was a harmony betwixt the conceptions of ideal king and lowly suffering servant, so in the term or title Lamb there is a similar commingling of opposites, lamb as leader, and lamb as led; lamb as victor, and lamb as victim. He does not lay aside His leadership in being led, nor His power to vanquish, in becoming a victim. Rather in being led to death He rises to the climax of His activity, in giving Himself as victim, He obtains the victory which is virtually the life of the world.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> F. Spitta returns to the same theme in his more recent work, *Das Johannes-Evangelium als Quelle der Geschichte Jesu*, 1910.

It was impossible but that in the extraordinary expansion of thought, the extraordinary assimilation of opposites, which Jesus brought about in men's minds, the conceptions of lamb as leader and lamb as victim should come together and coalesce. But the one should not be lost in the other. Each is an element in the whole. It is possible to give such emphasis to the lamb as victim that the lamb as leader is lost to view. It has to be admitted that this is often what has happened through the ages of Christian theology. But Christ has other relations than to the fact of sin. Sin does not cover the whole activity and purpose of His life and death. It does not cover the whole extent of the title Lamb. It is just as much an extreme to say that His career had no relation to sin as to say that it had no relation to anything but sin. We must preserve the balance. Perhaps the author of the Hebrews brings us as near as possible to the whole truth when he says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through Eternal Spirit offered Himself to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." Christ is not only the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, but also the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne; He shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life.

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