

'Seven years after his consecration he was discussing titles with his chaplain, and said how greatly he disliked the more than necessary use of "My lord." "I experience," he said, "the sensations of that man described in some southern

climate where elementary bleeding is practised, who has to sit on a stone in the river while a number of very little arrows are shot into him. Each one draws just a little blood. It is said to be wholesome, but it is certainly unpleasant"' (ii. 367).

The Teaching of Jesus concerning Himself.

BY THE REV. GEORGE JACKSON, B.A., EDINBURGH.

'Who say ye that I am?'—Matt. xvi. 15.

I.

THIS was our Lord's question to His first disciples; and this, by the mouth of Simon Peter, was their answer: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And in all ages this has been the answer of the Holy Catholic Church throughout all the world. In the days of New Testament Christianity no other answer was known or heard. The Church of the apostles had its controversies, as we know, controversies in which the very life of the Church was at stake. Division crept in even among the apostles themselves. But concerning Christ they spoke with one voice, they proclaimed one faith. The early centuries of the Christian era were centuries of keen discussion concerning the Person of our Lord; but the discussions sprang for the most part from the difficulty of rightly defining the true relations of the Divine and the human in the one Person, rather than from the denial of His Divinity; and, as Mr. Gladstone once pointed out, since the fourth century the Christian conception of Christ has remained practically unchanged. Amid the fierce and almost ceaseless controversies which have divided and sometimes desolated Christendom, and which, alas! still continue to divide it, the Church's testimony concerning Christ has never wavered. The Greek Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the various Protestant Churches, Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Christian men and women out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation—all unite to confess the glory of Christ in the words of the ancient Creed: 'I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,

begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.'

This, beyond all doubt, has been and is the Christian way of thinking about Christ. But now the question arises, Was this Christ's way of thinking about Himself? Did He Himself claim to be one with God? or, is it only we, His adoring disciples, who have crowned Him with glory and honour, and given Him a name that is above every name? To those of us who have been familiar with the New Testament ever since we could read, the question may appear so simple as to be almost superfluous. Half a dozen texts leap to our lips in a moment by way of answer. Did He not claim to be the Messiah in whom Old Testament history and prophecy found their fulfilment and consummation? Did He not call Himself the Son of God, saying, 'The Father hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father'? Did He not declare, 'I and My Father are one'? and again, 'All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him'? And when one of the Twelve bowed down before Him, saying, 'My Lord and my God,' did He not accept the homage as though it were His by right? What further need, then, have we of witnesses? Is it not manifest that the explanation of all that has been claimed for Christ, from the days of the apostles until now, is to be found in what Christ claimed for Himself?

This is true; nevertheless it may be well to remind ourselves that Christ Himself did not thrust

the evidence on His disciples in quite this wholesale summary fashion. It is an easy thing for us to scour the New Testament for 'proof-texts,' and then, when they are heaped together at our feet like a load of bricks, to begin to build our theological systems. But Peter and Thomas and the other disciples could not do this. The revelation which we possess in its completeness was given to them little by little as they were able to receive it. And the moment we begin to study the life of Jesus, not in isolated texts, but as day by day it passed before the eyes of the Twelve, we cannot fail to observe the remarkable reserve which, during the greater part of His ministry, He exercised concerning Himself. When first His disciples heard His call and followed Him, He was to them but a humble peasant teacher, who had flung about their lives a wondrous spell which they could no more explain than they could resist. Indeed, there is good reason to believe, as Dr. Dale has pointed out, that the full discovery of Christ's Divinity only came to the apostles after His Resurrection from the dead. At first, and for long, Christ was content to leave them with their poor, imperfect thoughts. He never sought to carry their reason by storm; rather he set Himself to win them—mind, heart, and will—by slow siege. He lived before them and with them, saying little directly about Himself, and yet always revealing Himself, day by day training them, often perhaps unconsciously to themselves, 'to trust Him with the sort of trust which can be legitimately given to God only.' And when at last the truth was clear and they knew that it was the incarnate Son of God who had companied with them, their faith was the result not of this or that high claim which He had made for Himself, but rather of 'the sum total of all His words and works, the united and accumulated impression of all He was and did' upon their sincere and receptive souls.

Are there not many of us to-day who would do well to seek the same goal by the same path? We have listened, perhaps, to other men's arguments concerning the Divinity of our Lord, conscious the while how little they were doing for us. Let us listen to Christ Himself. Let us put ourselves to school with Him, as these first disciples did, and suffer Him to make His own impression upon us. And if ours be sincere and receptive souls as were theirs, from us also He shall win the adoring cry, 'My Lord and my God.' Let us

note, then, some of the many ways in which Christ bears witness concerning Himself. In a very true sense all His sayings are 'self-portraits.' Be the subject of His teaching what it may, He cannot speak of it without, in some measure at least, revealing His thoughts concerning Himself; and it is this indirect testimony whose significance I wish now carefully to consider.

II.

Observe, in the first place, how Christ speaks of God and of His own relation to Him. He called Himself, as we have already noted, 'the Son of God.' Now, there is a sense in which all men are the sons of God, for it is to God that all men owe their life. And there is, further, as the New Testament has taught us, another and deeper sense in which men who are not may 'become' the sons of God, through faith in Christ. But Christ's consciousness of Sonship is distinct from both of these, and cannot be explained in terms of either. He is not 'a son of God'—one among many—He is 'the son of God,' standing to God in a relationship which is His alone. Hence we find—and we shall do well to mark the marvellous accuracy and self-consistency of the Gospels in this matter—that while Jesus sometimes speaks of 'the Father,' and sometimes of 'My Father,' and sometimes, again, in addressing His disciples, of 'your Father,' never does He link Himself with them so as to call God 'our Father.' Nowhere does the distinction, always present to the mind of Christ, find more striking expression than in that touching scene in the garden in which the Risen Lord bids Mary go unto His brethren and say unto them, 'I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'

This sense of separateness is emphasized when we turn to the prayers of Christ. And in this connexion it is worthy of note that though Christ has much to say concerning the duty and blessedness of prayer, and Himself spent much time in prayer, yet never, so far as we know, did He ask for the prayers of others. 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not.' So did Jesus pray for His disciples; but we never read that they prayed for Him, or that He asked for Himself a place in their prayers. How significant the silence is we learn when we

turn to the Epistles of St. Paul and to the experience of the saints. 'Brethren, pray for us'—this is the token in almost every Epistle. In the long, lone fight of life even the apostle's heart would have failed him had not the prayers of unknown friends upheld him as with unseen hands. There is no stronger instinct of the Christian heart than the plea for remembrance at the throne of God. 'Pray for me, will you?' we cry, when man's best aid seems as a rope too short to help yet long enough to mock imprisoned miners in their living tomb. But the cry which is so often ours was never Christ's.

It has further been remarked that, intimate as was Christ's intercourse with His disciples, He never joined in prayer with them. He prayed in their presence, He prayed for them, but never with them. 'It came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, that when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples. And He said unto them, When ye pray, say—.' Then follows what we call 'The Lord's Prayer.' But, properly speaking, this was not the Lord's prayer; it was the disciples' prayer: 'When ye pray, say—.' And when we read the prayer again we see why it could not be His. How could He who knew no sin pray, saying, 'Forgive us our sins'? The true 'Lord's Prayer' is to be found in the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. And throughout that prayer the holy Suppliant has nothing to confess, nothing to regret. He knows that the end is nigh, but there are no shadows in His retrospect; of all that is done there is nothing He could wish undone or done otherwise. 'I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do.' It is so when He comes to die. Among the seven Words from the Cross we are struck by one significant omission: the dying Sufferer utters a cry of physical weakness—'I thirst'—but He makes no acknowledgment of sin; He prays for the forgiveness of others—'Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do'—He asks none for Himself. The great Augustine died with the penitential Psalms hung round his bed. Fifty or sixty times, it is said, did sweet St. Catharine of Siena cry upon her deathbed, *Peccavi, Domine miserere mei*, 'Lord, I have sinned: have mercy on me.' But in all the prayers of Jesus, whether in life or in death, He has no pardon to ask, no sins to confess.

We are thus brought to the fact upon which of recent years so much emphasis has been justly laid, namely, that nowhere throughout the Gospels does Christ betray any consciousness of sin. 'Which of you,' He said, 'convicteth Me of sin?' And no man was able, nor is any man now able, to answer Him a word. But the all-important fact is not so much that they could not convict Him of sin; *He could not convict Himself*. Yet it could not be that He was self-deceived. 'He knew what was in man'; He read the hearts of others till, like the Samaritan woman, they felt as though He knew all things that ever they had done. Was it possible, then, that He did not know Himself? Not only so, but the law by which He judged Himself was not theirs, but His. And what that was, how high, how searching, how different from the low, conventional standards which satisfied them, we who have read His words and His judgments know full well. Nevertheless, He knew nothing against Himself; as no man could condemn Him neither could He condemn Himself. Looking up to heaven, He could say, 'I do always the things that are pleasing to Him.' This is not the language of sinful men; it is not the language of even the best and holiest of men. Christ is as separate from 'saints' as He is from 'sinners.' The greatest of Hebrew prophets cries, 'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' The greatest of Christian apostles laments, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?' Even the holy John confesses, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' It is one of the commonplaces of Christian experience that the holier men become the more intense and poignant becomes the sense of personal shortcoming. 'We have done those things which we ought not to have done; we have left undone those things which we ought to have done': among all the sons of men there is none, who truly knows himself, who dare be silent when the great confession is made—none save the Son of Man; for He, it has well been said, was *not* the one thing which we all are; He was *not* a sinner.

This consciousness of separateness runs through all that the evangelists have told us concerning Christ. When, e.g., He is preaching He never associates Himself, as other preachers do, with

His hearers ; He never assumes, as other preachers must, that His words are applicable to Himself equally with them. We exhort ; He commands. We say, like the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'Let us go unto perfection' ; He says, 'Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' We speak as sinful men to sinful men, standing by their side ; He speaks as from a height, as one who has already attained and is already made perfect. Or, the contrast may be pointed in another way. We all know what it is to be haunted by misgivings as to the wisdom of some course which, under certain trying circumstances, we have taken. We had some difficult task to perform—to withstand (let us say) a fellow-Christian to his face, as Paul withstood Peter at Antioch ; and we did the unpleasant duty as best we knew how, honestly striving not only to speak the truth but to speak it in love. And yet when all was over we could not get rid of the fear that we had not been as firm or as kindly as we should have been, that, if only something had been which was not, our brother might have been won. There is a verse in Paul's second letter to the Church at Corinth which illustrates exactly this familiar kind of internal conflict. Referring to the former letter which he had sent to the Corinthians and in which he had sharply rebuked them for their wrong-doing, he says, 'Though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it, though I did regret'—a simple, human touch we can all understand. Yes ; but when did Jesus hesitate and, as it were, go back upon Himself after this fashion ? He passed judgment upon men and their ways with the utmost freedom and confidence ; some, such as the Pharisees, He condemned with a severity which almost startles us ; towards others, such as she 'that was a sinner,' He was all love and tenderness. Yet never does He speak as one who fears lest either in His tenderness or His severity He has gone too far. His path is always clear ; He enters upon it without doubt ; He looks back upon it without misgiving.

This contrast between Christ and all other men,

as it presented itself to His own consciousness, may be illustrated almost indefinitely. His fore-runners the prophets were the servants of God ; He is His Son. All other men are weary and in need of rest ; He has rest and can give it. All others are lost ; He is not lost, He is the shepherd sent to seek the lost. All others are sick ; He is not sick, He is the physician sent to heal the sick. All others will one day stand at the bar of God ; but He will be on the throne to be their Judge. All others are sinners—this is the great, final distinction into which all others run up—He is the Saviour. When at the Last Supper He said, 'This is My blood of the covenant which is shed for many unto remission of sins' ; and again, when He said, 'The Son of man came to give His life a ransom for many,' He set Himself over against all others, the one sinless sacrifice for a sinful world.

There is in Edinburgh a Unitarian church which bears carved on its front these words of St. Paul : 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.' I say nothing as to the fitness of any of Paul's words for such a place—perhaps we can imagine what he would have said ; I pass over any questions of interpretation that might very justly be raised ; I have only one question to ask : Why was the quotation not finished ? Paul only put a comma where they have put a full stop ; the next words are : '*Who gave Himself a ransom for all.*' But how could He do that if He was only 'the man Christ Jesus' ?

No man can save his brother's soul,
Nor pay his brother's debt,

and how could He, how dare He, think of His life as the ransom for our forfeited lives, if He were only one like unto ourselves ? There is but one explanation which does really explain all that Christ thought and taught concerning Himself ; it is that given by the first disciples and re-echoed by every succeeding generation of Christians—

THOU ART THE KING OF GLORY, O CHRIST,
THOU ART THE EVERLASTING SON OF THE FATHER.