

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

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A great French ecclesiastic when asked by his sovereign for a short but conclusive proof of divine Truth is said to have answered, "The Jew, Sire". This scattered nation remains today a phenomenon inexplicable except upon the basis of biblical history and prophecy. For full twenty centuries mingling, but never mixed, with racial currents; thrown into constant contact with all races but assimilating with none, resisting alike and equally the attrition of relentless persecution and the absorption of milder fortune, the race holds its own like a great gulf-stream amid the peoples of the earth, a nation without king or country, found every where, and wherever found, separate and distinct; a peculiar people, well nigh as manifestly marked in the twentieth century as it was in the first.

What a tribute to their intense, inveterate, invulnerable individuality!

We know that Christ was a member of this race, born and reared under all the prejudices of its unique traditions cherished from the days of Abraham, traditions whose cumulative force, even to the present mo-

ment, knows no moulding or moderating touch from the influence of the centuries. We know that he was a Jew, and yet the simple statement of the fact gives one a sort of shock because we have never thought of him as such, we find it impossible so to do, his character resists, and our feelings resent, the classification; and this, mark it, not on account of any prejudice against the Israelite, we would feel the same protest against aligning him with any nation or race whatever. He belongs to all, and in this sense he was in a unique degree, The Son of Man, the one universal man of all the ages; as his mission is world wide in its scope so was his character universal in its affinities and sympathies; he suits one race as well as another, one age as well as another; his character and his teachings fit as perfectly the peculiar needs of a complicated twentieth century occidental civilization as they did the primitive conditions of the dreamy orient two thousand years ago.

What an illustration of his limitless universality.

When we meditate upon the matter, we recognize in Christ a marked

cina two sheep are represented on either side of a rustic altar upon which rests the jug of milk and the shepherd's staff. There are somewhat similar representations in the catacomb of Domitilla, and they are all of them of a very early age. The symbolism which is here expressed is so delicate and so remote from the terms of our modern thought, that its sense could hardly have been understood but for an explanation which is furnished in the Acts of S. Perpetua, which was written in the early years of the third century. It describes a vision of the saint in these words: "I mounted and beheld a garden of vast extent, and in the midst of this garden a man seated, having white hair and a dress of a shepherd, milking sheep; and standing round about him thousands of men clothed in white. And he raised his head and looked at me, and said to me: 'Thou art welcome, my daughter'. And he called me and he gave me some of the warm milk which he had just drawn, and I received it with folded hands, and I ate it: and all about me said, Amen. And at the sound of the voice I awakened, with an indescribable taste of sweet in my mouth". It is clear from this that we have in the milk which the Good Shepherd offers, as we have likewise in the fish, a mystic symbol of the Eucharist. This passage also suggests, what is clear enough from the monuments themselves, that the favorite representation of heaven or paradise during the first three centuries was in terms of the pastoral symbolism. The olive tree here serves to denote the celestial garden, as the palm tree does in the art of the following centuries.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE INCARNATION.

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"Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." So the Apostle Paul from his prison in Rome, where he was lying "ready to be offered up," writes to his true child in faith, on whose conscience he was solemnly laying the charge to be faithful to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which had been committed to his trust. Certainly we should have to search far before we should meet with a sentence which would sum up more

succinctly the essence of the Gospel. And certainly we should search in vain through the whole New Testament for any other conception of the mission of Christ than that here so strongly asserted. Paul's own teaching had steadily represented that mission to be in order to redemption (e. g. Gal. iv. 4, 5). And our Lord Himself, even in the discourses recorded in the Synoptics, had left no room to doubt that it was so that He conceived it. Not only does He iterately declare that the object of His coming was to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10), "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mat. xx. 28), "to call not the righteous but sinners" (Mat. ix. 13); but He explains that it is only because men are sinners and lost and require a ransom that He came,—“They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick” (Mk. ii. 17, Luke v. 32). In the Johannean discourses an even sharper definition is attained: He came down from heaven, He says, solely to execute the saving will of the Father (Jno. vi. 38, 39); to give life—abundance of life—to the dead (x. 10); to save the world lying in its sinful darkness (xii. 47). The emphasis thrown upon this teaching in the great passage, John iii. 16sq., indeed, is so intense as to be almost oppressive: the gift of God's Son is accounted for, it is intimated, only by the intensity of His love for the perishing world, and it is added with explicit iteration, that God sent the Son into this sinful world only “that the world might be saved through Him.” As is His wont, so in this matter also, the Apostle John simply repeats his master's teaching: the end for which the Son of God was manifested, he declares, was specifically to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jno. iii. 8), and He was therefore sent into the world as the Saviour of the world, as a propitiation for our sins, in order that we may have life through Him, (Jno. iv. 9, 10, 14).

It is not strange, in view of this constancy of New Testament teaching that Paul, as his life drew to an end, found the reference of the Incarnation to sin as its occasion, and to salvation as its end, already in circulation among the churches as a Christian commonplace, enshrined in a current proverb; and was able to take it up from the people's lips and commend it anew to his son Timothy as a “faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.” That it was specifically in order to save sinners that Christ Jesus came into the world was obviously the heart-conviction of the

whole primitive Church. And the Church retained, for upwards of a thousand years, this its good confession, unbroken (so far as history records) by a single voice to mar its complete concord. Meanwhile, however, there were making their way in and determining the thinking of many, certain philosophical conceptions which could not fail to create sooner or later doubt and difficulty with respect to the simple Scriptural doctrine. The dignity of man claimed attention and, with a view to its establishment, the autonomy of the human will came to be strongly emphasised; and this emphasis was pushed so far that a tendency arose to deny not only the Divine control of human action but even the possibility of its forecast. On the other hand, a physical conception of the Godhead began to seep more and more into Church circles, which tended to reduce the sphere of His voluntary activity and to carry back all that occurs to some necessity of His nature, ontological or ethical, rather than to the decision of his choice. From the one point of view it was sure ultimately to be thought an incongruity that the Incarnation of the Son of God, the very core of Christianity, should be contingent upon the accident of man's fall, as if the Christian religion ran an equal chance of never having been given to the world. From the other point of view, the act by which God fulfils Himself by the self-communication whether of His essence or of His love, was sure ultimately to be looked upon as the culmination of a necessary process, independent of all contingencies. The presence in the Church of these two lines of thought—the Pelagianizing and the Mystical, as they are technically called,—made it inevitable, that sooner or later there should some one arise who would no longer assent to the Scriptural representation which found the principle of the Incarnation in the provision of a remedy for human sin.

Nevertheless, it was not until the twelfth century that these new points of view produced this, their natural fruit. Rupert of Deutz (who died in 1135), appears to have been the first who, substituting an ontological for the soteriological motive of the Incarnation, taught explicitly that Christ would have come in the flesh even though man had not sinned. The idea, once broached, naturally found support in others of like Mystical and Pelagianizing tendency. Among the Scholastics, it was advocated by Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, Duns Scotus; among the

Mystics by John Wessel, Andrew Osiander, Michael Servetus; Picus of Mirandola, and Faustus Socinus alike adopted it: and in modern times, chiefly under the influence of the Mystical conceptions given such vogue by the teaching of Schleiermacher, it has gained a popularity heretofore unknown to it, and has received the powerful advocacy of men like Liebner and Dorner and Martensen, of Rothe and Lange and Ebrard, of Van Oosterzee and Westcott and the divines of our modern Andover. On the other hand, not only the Church at large, but the whole succession of theologians of the very highest rank have abided by the simple soteriological standpoint of the Scriptures, and have continued to teach that the Incarnation finds its proper place in the purpose of God as a link in the great remedial scheme by which sinners are recovered to God. This is the explicit attitude for example of such teachers of all ages as Athanasius and Augustine, the Victorine Mystics, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura, of Luther and Calvin as well as of the whole body alike of the typical Reformed and Lutheran theologians. These all with one voice, under the guidance of Scripture, refuse to seek the proximate account of the Incarnation either ontologically or ethically in God, or in the nature of the Logos as Revealer, or in the idea of creation, or yet in the character of the created product and especially man as made capable of receiving God and therefore not finding his true end until he is raised to union with Him: and affirm that it is to be found only in the needy condition of man as a sinner before the face of a holy and loving God.

It is not to be thought, of course, that there are no elements of truth embodied in the various representations which men have wrought out, during the course of now nearly a thousand years, in their effort to discover a deeper and more absolute necessity for the Incarnation than that which, as Calvin puts it, "arose from the heavenly decree on which the salvation of men depended." The Incarnation is so stupendous an event that it is big with consequences, and reaches out on every side to relations that may even seem at first glance to stand in opposition to its fundamental principle. It is certainly true that all that is, is the product of the hand of God, and has, as coming from Him, somewhat of God in it, and may well be looked upon as a vehicle of the Divine. And surely it is true that He has imprinted Himself upon the work of

His fingers; and that as the Author of all, He will not be content with the product of His power, until it has been made to shadow forth all His perfections: and it cannot be wrong to say that so far as we can see it is only in an Incarnation that He could manifest Himself perfectly to His creatures. Similarly the Logos as the Revealer must be supposed to desire to make known to the sentient creation all that God is, and preeminently the height and depth and length and breadth of that love of His which passes knowledge, and which assuredly lies at the base of the Incarnation and was its impulsive cause. And above all it cannot be doubted that it is only in the union with God which is the result of Christ's incarnated work, that man attains his true destiny—the destiny designed for him from the beginning of the world and without which in prospect as the goal set for His creatures by the Holy Love which God is, so far as we can see, man would never have been created at all. There is scarcely a mode in which the absolute necessity of the Incarnation has been asserted, indeed, which cannot be perceived to involve an element of truth which it would not be well to permit to slip from our cognizance.

Yet it is of the utmost importance to observe that these elements of truth, great and important as they are, do not penetrate to the basal facts as to the occasion and end of the Incarnation. Nor, indeed, can they be profitably contemplated atomistically, as if they were so many independent truths standing out of relation with one another and the real principle of the Incarnation. Rather, they form parts of one closely concatenated sphere of truth, the center of which lies in the soteriological Incarnation of the Bible; and it is only as each finds its proper place as a segment of the great sphere of truth formed about that constitutive fact, that it possesses any validity, or even indeed reaches to the height of its own idea. It is only, for example, because Christ Jesus came *to save sinners* that all that God is is manifested in Him, that Holy Love finds its complete expression in Him, that through Him man attains his ultimate perfection. Eliminate sin as the proximate occasion and redemption as the prime end of the Incarnation, and none of the other relations in which it stands, and none of the other effects which flow from it, will be fulfilled, at least in the measure of their rights. That each of them may attain the highest place possible to it in our contemplation of the ends subserved

by the Incarnation and the glorious results that flow from it, it is essential that they be conceived not apart from salvation from sin as if they were or might be considered its substitutes, but along with it as its complements. It is that which gives their true dignity and worth to them, not they which justify it as an insignificant incident arising in the actual course of things rather than the fundamental fact underlying the whole great transaction and constituting its very principle.

The partialness of the view of the world-plan and world-process taken by the advocates of the independence of the Incarnation of the sin of man, exhibits itself very clearly in the false antitheses it is ever raising. Rooted itself either in a Pantheising conception of the relation of God to His works, according to which God Himself seems incomplete until He is fully manifested in the world and man incomplete until he is endued with God; or else, perhaps even more commonly, in a Pelagianizing conception of the indifference of the human will, which leaves no room for certainty in the Divine plans in the sphere of human actions, and accordingly is impelled to separate the assured end contemplated by God from the contingent means by which it is attained; it continually operates with what it seems to fancy an irreducible "either—or." But no one doubts that God will assuredly "fulfil Himself", and work out all His will. No one doubts that the human race was at its creation indefectibly destined to arrive at creaturely perfection. No one doubts that the love of God has pressed on from the very beginning to accomplish all its impulses of self-communication. No one doubts that the Incarnation marks the crown and culmination of God's loving purpose for man, and was absolutely ordained as such from the very beginning. No one doubts that Christianity, the very center and core of which is the Incarnation, is the absolute religion and has from eternity been the constant purpose of God for man, and could not possibly fail to come into being under any contingency whatever. No one doubts that "the Gospel" is embodied in creation itself, and that, as the Scriptures teach, it was "in the Son of His love" that "all things were created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers," that "all things have been created through Him and unto Him" and that He is therefore

the goal to which all creation tends. But it does not in the least follow from these great facts that the Incarnation was not contingent upon the fall, and is not conditioned on sin, and is not fundamentally in order to the recovery of man from sin,—as the Scriptures reiteratingly and invariably teach.

Nor is it a “deeper view” of it but a hopelessly shallow view rather, which, in order to preserve its high place as the end of creation, and as absolutely predestined to take place, seeks to view it as independent of the fall and as standing in no essential relation to sin,—as if, forsooth, its connection with so uncertain an occurrence as an act of the human will would destroy all its own certainty. Any really deep view will assuredly shake itself free from this tissue of inconsistencies. God’s plan is, of course, one and all-embracing; within its ample scope is included everything that comes to pass. The fall, though as an event in time it was contingent, that is, dependent on the action of the human will, was no more uncertain of occurrence than the Incarnation itself, which also was an event in time and contingent on the other events with which it was connected. If man was not created without his high destiny already in view: so neither was he created without his dreadful fall as fully in view. God did not create him first, and then stand helplessly by to learn only through dire experience what he would do: and only then painfully adjust Himself to the altered and unexpected conditions. Before man was created every step was already in view, through which he should attain the high destiny in store for him: and the course of the actual occurrences only unrolls the scroll of the eternal purpose. That the fall is actually one step in the actual course of the history of man journeying on to that far off divine event, is the sufficient evidence that it was contemplated as such in the Divine mind from eternity. And it is entirely idle to seek to exclude it from our contemplation and to inquire what would have happened had it not occurred—that is, what would have happened had God been deceived in the course of events which He had anticipated and provided for. As a matter of fact, if it can be said—and it can be truly said—that the Incarnation was contemplated and provided for in creation itself and we may seek to discover and trace the provisions for it made in creation: it may with equal right be said that the fall was contemplated and provided for in creation

itself, and we may with equal right seek to discover and trace the prophecies of it made in the very fabric of creation.

In a word the parties to this debate are not in disagreement as to whether the "incarnation forms an element in the original creative purpose of God", as to whether it was absolutely determined upon from the beginning, as to whether Christianity, therefore, is the "absolute religion." They are in disagreement only as to what is technically called the "order of decrees", that is, as to the relations in which they understand the several elements of God's plan to stand with reference to one another,—unless indeed the difference be pushed so far as to question whether God has acted on a plan at all, and whether His plan, if He had one, is all-embracing. Surely the deeper view and the higher view and the only worthy view, is that which recognizes God as GOD, in all the fulness of the connotation of that word as expressive of the All-Wise and the All-Holy and the All-Powerful One; and which insists that He shall remain to our thoughts GOD, in the completeness of His purposeful personality and of His absolute control over the work of His hands: that which can take up into itself, in a word, the Saviour's declaration that not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him and that He has numbered the very hairs of our head. To such a God there belongs of necessity an all-inclusive plan for the government of the universe; and He contemplates this in all its parts from the depths of eternity: and in the unity and completeness of this plan the fall too will take its place, and the Incarnation as contingent upon it, but not therefore in any way uncertain of occurrence,—towards which therefore the whole creation may move.

It is to this more worthy conception of God in His relations to His creatures—a conception that magnifies Him supremely, no doubt, in His Being and in the whole complex of His divine Perfections, but which throws out into peculiar prominence His consummate attribute of Holy Love,—that the Scriptures point us, when they tell us with such consentient voice that the determining end of the Incarnation of the Son of God was redemption from sin,—that the saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance, that it was in order to save sinners that Christ Jesus came into the world. And if that be true,—simply true, broadly true, true just as it stands in these pointed words, and in all the reach of its

meaning,—why then from that fact alone we may learn anew what the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of God is. And surely we may say with Bonaventura, that even if some other opinion of the motive and end of Christ's coming into the world seemed to us more consonant with the rational judgment, it would nevertheless be this that would commend itself to the Christian heart,—“because it more ardently kindles the affection of faith.” In very fact not only does the unvarying voice of Scripture commend this doctrine of the principle of the Incarnation to us, but so do also the ineradicable demands of the Christian soul. Only so is the distance between God and man recognized with due poignancy. Only so is the “blood of Christ” given its proper place in the saving process and in the plan of God. Only so is the amazing love of God made to stand out in its full wonderfulness. And only so is the answering love of the saved sinner drawn out to its full height.

THE PUBLICANS IN JEWISH LITERATURE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

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There is a deep ground-swell of popular hatred toward the publicans, felt rather than expressed, in the pages of the New Testament. It is perhaps even more strongly indicated in Jewish literature at large, and it would be easy to gather examples, if that were needful. There is no question as to the fact, we ought however to ascertain if possible the exact nature and origin of this remarkable emotion. It is not a sufficient explanation to assert that tax collectors are always unpopular. Such is not the case, and further, the feeling indicated in the Gospels is not simply dislike, but a serious and deliberate grouping of the men known as publicans with harlots and other gross sinners.

In modern civilized states the national income gathered by taxation is closely associated in the popular mind with the abstract notion of the civil law, and carries with it the dignity that is inherent in that conception. Hence while it may be burdensome, it does not become the object of hatred. But our idea of civil government was practically unknown to the Asiatic peoples