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MRS. HUTCHINSON AND HER TEACHING

by ELIZABETH BRAUND

MISS BRAUND has in recent years made a name for herself as an authority on Puritan history. The following article is an abridgement of a paper read at a conference on Puritan theology.

IN 1817 a volume was published containing two works written nearly 150 years earlier by Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson, who has become widely known through the *Memoirs* of her husband, Colonel John Hutchinson, the Parliamentary Governor of Nottingham Castle during the Civil Wars. Though written by Mrs. Hutchinson after her husband's death, the *Memoirs* did not appear in print until 1806; but their immediate success then was undoubtedly the chief reason for the editor, himself a descendant of the Hutchinson family, subsequently publishing her remaining works which will be considered here, after a brief sketch of the life of this remarkable woman.

I

Lucy Hutchinson, or Lucy Apsley as she was till she married, was born during the reign of James I, in 1620. Her birthplace and childhood home was the Tower of London, where her father, Sir Allen Apsley, was Lieutenant of the Tower until his death five years after Charles I came to the throne. Instructed by her mother, a godly puritan woman of noble family, Lucy came to a knowledge of the Truth as a young girl though, on looking back from old age, she could lament her continued preoccupation after that with a too-intensive study of classical writers which she was, however, later to put to good use.

Lucy's intellectual studies did not prevent her falling in love with John Hutchinson, the eldest son of Sir Thomas Hutchinson who sat in Parliament for Nottinghamshire. They were married in 1638, and the *Memoirs* which Mrs. Hutchinson later wrote provide a chronicle of the events of their life together, besides reveal-

ing her as a woman who, while drawing a tender portrait of a husband to whom she was devoted, could at the same time write detailed military history and set it clearly against the wider background of contemporary events and of the history of the gospel in Britain.

On Civil War breaking out John Hutchinson declared for Parliament, and not many months later was appointed Governor of Nottingham Castle and Town, which he held for Parliament throughout the first Civil War. Mrs. Hutchinson shared his hazards, living with him at the Castle which was often attacked, and on at least one occasion herself acting as surgeon to the wounded while also caring for the sick among the prisoners. Nor was her moral courage less evident than her physical bravery, and amidst the jealousies and feuds which were continually breaking out among Parliamentary supporters, she and her husband steadfastly pursued what they believed the Lord had called them to do. They also obeyed their conscience in matters of faith, although this led to them being spoken against by Presbyterians as supporting Separatists.

In 1646 Colonel Hutchinson was returned to Parliament in place of his father, who had died. He favoured the Independents, and his wife took a keen interest with him in events as they moved to their climax. When, finally, the King was brought to trial, Colonel Hutchinson was one of the judges who signed the death warrant. During the Commonwealth he was a member of the first Councils of State, but after the expulsion of the Long Parliament by Cromwell he and his wife retired to the country and he took no further part in public life, since they both strongly disagreed with the power seized by the army, and what they regarded as Cromwell's overwhelming personal ambition.

In the chaotic times following Cromwell's death, however, Colonel Hutchinson returned to Parliament, though shortly after the Restoration he was expelled as having been a regicide. Owing to his wife's strenuous efforts to save him, he was granted a pardon and allowed to retire to the country again, but in 1663 was arrested on a vague, and almost certainly false, charge of being implicated in a plot and was committed to the Tower of London. Though never brought to trial, after a few months the Colonel was transferred to Sandown Castle, a melancholy decaying place on the Kent coast. Having pleaded in vain to be imprisoned with him there, Mrs. Hutchinson took lodgings in Deal from where she walked over every day to care for her husband. After a while,

however, she had to go home for a few weeks, and while she was away the Colonel caught a chill which proved fatal. Mrs. Hutchinson never saw her husband again, but he left her a message: "Let her", he said, "as she is above other women, show herself in this occasion, a good Christian, and above the pitch of ordinary women".

With her husband's death, Mrs. Hutchinson's life retreats into the shadows, but it was undoubtedly during the Restoration period, when she was faced with many financial and family problems, that she wrote her two books called *On the Principles of the Christian Religion* and *Of Theology*, which are to be considered here.

II

The first of these was written specially for her daughter, and for a most practical purpose. Seeing her subject to many worldly temptations and living in an age of terror and confusion, Mrs. Hutchinson believed the most important thing of all was that she should be well grounded in fundamental truths of the Christian faith for, as she writes: "Let but the judgment be fixed in the foundation truths, and the practice will not be so mutable and various as we see it in many professors". She maintained, too, that women should take particular care lest they be led away into errors.

Mrs. Hutchinson wrote her book, rather than simply recommending others to her daughter, because she wanted it to stand as a personal witness of all she regarded as of vital importance if her daughter was to lay a foundation of "sound knowledge for the building of a holy practice". Since the book, therefore, sprang from immediate and personal concern to promote her daughter's growth in the Christian life, it may be interesting to notice the way in which Mrs. Hutchinson felt she could best do this. At once we see that she does not merely try to explain away her daughter's difficulties. Neither does she put her feelings in the first place, nor make happiness the primary reason for Christian living. Instead, her great concern is to present objectively those doctrines and principles she considers to be vital "foundation truths", giving positive expositions (of what I believe to be orthodox puritan teaching) at the same time as issuing exhortations and warnings. By so doing, however, she in no way divorces the objective from the subjective, nor decries experience. Rather she believes spiritual meditation on objective truths to be a great means of leading to deeper experience of those truths and of promoting Christian living.

Mrs. Hutchinson's expositions bear the impress of her own

spiritual meditation. Her judgment, too, is to be seen in her selection and presentation of those doctrines she considers vital for her daughter to be instructed in; and in this connection it is striking to observe how large a part of the book is devoted to truths concerning God Himself, His Being, the Trinity, His attributes, His eternal and immutable decree, predestination, and His works in creation and providence. As regards the doctrine of election, Mrs. Hutchinson holds it to be "a great fundamental in our faith", and declares it should keep us humble before God; it should stir up our thankfulness to Him; it should stay our souls in temptation; and exhort us to sanctity of life.

While ever seeking to direct her daughter's gaze upward to dwell on the majesty of God and the glory of Christ, Mrs. Hutchinson is equally concerned that she shall always do this through Scripture, the authority of which is unequivocally stated, and the book contains a solemn warning that "Christ is, in the gospel, held forth to men to be received as their life and salvation, and they that seek a Christ anywhere but where God exhibits Him, that is, His own authorized Word, may find Christ of their own inventions, but shall never find the Christ of God, the alone Saviour of men".

Mrs. Hutchinson examines at length the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our salvation and sanctification. Only in the light of these truths does she expound what are called "privileges to believers purchased by Christ", such as peace and joy and liberty—and her very expression declares the way in which these are viewed.

The book includes a number of warnings, and among these are admonitions against people who would reject the Old Testament as of no use to believers, or who would preach that anyone once justified can fall into an unjustified state. In the controversy over the order of justification and sanctification, we are told neither can be without the other though "justification is perfect and complete, being by faith received and given us in Christ; but sanctification, being derived from Christ to us, and wrought in our souls, is perfected in the body by degrees, and admits of growth and remissions and intentions". Mrs. Hutchinson disputes with ministers who deny the preparatory work of convincing men they are sinners and who preach only the love of Christ, the grounds of her objection being that Scripture shows "that Christ and His apostles used the other method". Consideration of the Biblical meaning of faith also leads to a further warning that "he that receives Christ by a true saving faith, receives whole Christ in all

His offices, and as well submits to Him as a King, as embraces Him as a Saviour”.

Love is the last vital truth which the book presents, and it is declared that none truly love God but those who love God only ; and constantly ; and for Himself more than for His blessings. He that loves God loves all things that are His, all those that love Him, and all His ordinances and His word. But although this consideration of love concludes the “foundation truths” of the book, Mrs. Hutchinson goes on at once to enumerate what she regards as the most essential principles for Christian living since, as she reminds her daughter, “to know all the truths and mysteries of godliness, without living in and according to that knowledge, will be less excusable than ignorance”.

These principles are not concerned with externals, but with the believer’s attitude of heart and mind to God ; and we may perhaps see here a connection between the emphasis in the first part of the book on the doctrines of God, and the primary importance attached to the soul’s inward worship of Him as the basis of all Christian living in the second. The great principles laid down are that true inward worship of God, without which everything else is vain, must include a cleaving to Him, by which is meant in faith resting upon Him and all His promises, and longing and striving after communion with Him ; and secondly, that there must be adoration of God, in which there are two essentials: self-abasement or self-denial ; and exaltation of God.

It is shown that Scripture clearly teaches self-denial to be requisite to all true worship, and Mrs. Hutchinson maintains that the great way to stir ourselves up to this is to meditate upon what Christ has done for us. By exaltation or adoration of God is meant having high and reverent thoughts of Him which make us approach Him with a deep sense of His majesty and our own vileness. It is maintained, too, that where there is a true fear of God, which to a child of God does not mean slavish terror, there will be constant prayer and seeking after Him, and there follows an exhortation not to be content with vague wishes after Him. There can be no true adoration of God without inward obedience, exercised in the understanding and will, and also submission to God in all circumstances ; while the last essential of all worship is said to be thankfulness, and Mrs. Hutchinson does not hesitate to assert that, of all sins, unthankfulness is the greatest.

III

It is obvious throughout the book that Mrs. Hutchinson herself

delighted to meditate on the great objective truths of her faith and, thinking of them as she wrote, was constantly moved to praise. But as in her later life she thus came to dwell more and more upon these truths, she saw with increasing clarity the false webs of philosophy in which, when younger, she had been so nearly enmeshed; and I believe this to have been the chief reason for her embarking on her other book which is called *Of Theology*. In it she surveys the position of man in sin and, making extensive use of her own knowledge of classical writers, attempts to expose the ultimate barrenness of philosophy and the impossibility of man attaining to a true knowledge of God by any effort of his own or by human reasoning. It is important to all Mrs. Hutchinson's thought, however, that she never means to decry man's faculty of reason as such, but only as it is set up in opposition to God or exalted above Him.

In spite of the involved form in which the book is written, with a mesh of close reasoning which often takes on a philosophical manner, its underlying argument proceeds logically from stage to stage as Mrs. Hutchinson develops her theme.

The book's first major argument is that by its very nature theology, by which is meant the study and knowledge of God and His revealed truths, cannot be reduced to purely human systems of intellectual study. Argument is drawn from the second chapter of 1 Corinthians, from which it is concluded that "theology is a mysterious and divine wisdom which is neither circumscribed by those bounds, nor taught by those rudiments that all other arts and sciences admit"; also that "whoever would receive or understand the wisdom in the hidden mystery, it is necessary he should be instructed . . . by the Holy Ghost".

From this there follows an enquiry into the nature of the "divine wisdom", or theology, which includes both the knowledge God gives of Himself, and the way in which men are enabled to receive this knowledge. As regards the doctrine of God—that is, the knowledge He gives of Himself—the basic propositions laid down are that God alone knows Himself perfectly, and our immediate mirror is not God Himself but His Word or Gospel "in which with open face, by Christ, we behold the Glory of God". Theology, therefore, is divine truth itself, as it is revealed by God. Further, all knowledge of God comes only by His own revelation; and here Mrs. Hutchinson adds the rider that all the Word of God is committed to writing.

Proceeding to the way in which man in his first creation and

entire nature was enabled to have this knowledge of God and to enjoy communion with Him, which is termed natural theology as distinct from the successive revealed Word of God, the book teaches that man in his first creation had a twofold dependence upon God. First, he was dependent upon Him as his Creator. Secondly, man, as a rational being and distinct from all other creatures, also had a moral dependence upon God with moral obedience required of him, and was endued with that innate wisdom or light or law—the terms are varied—which enabled him to know what God required and to obey Him. Adam's theology is thus concluded to have been that "being constituted in a state of moral dependence upon God, and subjected to the government of his Creator, and thereby capable of eternal blessedness in the enjoyment of his Maker, he had an implanted law of those operations which were requisite to the attainment of that end, created together with him; and was moreover endued with wisdom enabling him to render the prescribed obedience according to the will and mind of God shining in the law".

This principle of a twofold law of nature and moral law implanted within man, provides the basis for the rest of the book in which it is argued that though, by the Fall and sin, these laws within Adam were utterly corrupted and his communion with God broken, nevertheless relics of that first theology do in fact still remain in all men, though "corrupt and groaning". It is contended that all men have a sense of God, that He is to be worshipped and that He is judge of good and evil (Rom. 1: 19 is quoted in particular), and that they also have within them a law giving them a moral consciousness; and these are maintained to be the corrupt traces of Adam's true theology before the Fall. Conscience is cited as proving the existence of these principles within men, while universal experience is also held to confirm it—and the power of conscience.

The argument then proceeds from the internal sense of God within men to the ways in which He reveals Himself externally to all men through His works of creation and providence, and in a long digression the question is taken up as to whether this knowledge of God can bring men to salvation. Mrs. Hutchinson sees the whole controversy as hinging round two basic issues regarding God's will in giving the revelation of Himself in His works of creation and providence, and whether the means of these revelations are sufficient to save anyone. As regards the latter, the book's main conclusions are that though the works of God

in creation and providence may bring men to knowledge of Him as their Creator and that He is to be worshipped and obeyed, this can only lead them back to a sense of law and to a covenant of works which men in sin cannot fulfil; and, while they show the goodness and patience of God towards mankind, this is not saving grace, and they reveal no placability towards men in sin. Moreover, and this is the truth everywhere emphasized, the works of creation and providence do not reveal the gospel of Christ, and therefore cannot of themselves bring men to salvation; nor can the blindness and prejudice of men's minds be removed except by the work of the Holy Spirit within them. The works of God do, however, render all men inexcusable before God since, "in the state wherein they might have known God, they have been wickedly ignorant of Him, notwithstanding His revelation of Himself in His Works". But in her arguments concerning the will of God in giving these revelations of Himself, Mrs. Hutchinson would seem to tend towards reducing His intentions to a form of rational argument, and to making His absolute sovereignty into an excuse for a lack of missionary enterprise.

Having in these ways established that neither the external nor the internal knowledge of God given to all men can save them apart from Christ, the rest of the book works out Mrs. Hutchinson's view of how men's efforts to arrive at a true knowledge of God apart from Christ have, in fact, not only failed but led them further from the truth. She argues that philosophy had its roots in those implanted laws within fallen men which are themselves the lingering traces of Adam's true theology, and that the first philosophers were those who, urged on by the sense of God within them and the revelation of Himself in Creation, tried to feel after Him and by the exercise of their minds to arrive at Him. The study of ethics is said to have sprung from man's moral consciousness, while that of metaphysics was derived from man's sense of God. But though the philosophers, and particularly the Greeks, scaled great heights they could not live up to their thoughts, nor could they arrive at true knowledge of God since their very minds, twisted by sin, led them away into endless contentions and speculations.

But there were other ways, too, in which relics of Truth retained by men were further corrupted. Mrs. Hutchinson claims that many early traditions had in them "particles of divine truth", but that instead of men benefiting from these to improve their knowledge they further corrupted them. She accuses the Greek poets

in particular of mingling traditions with their own fables, and vestiges of truth concerning God with the worship of false gods, until it was impossible for men with blinded minds to pick out one from another, and they were led into all sorts of pernicious error and abominations, and to worship a multitude of gods.

Those concerned with law and government are also said to have been guilty of further corrupting the Gentiles' false religions by incorporating fables about gods and idolatrous worship into their laws for political ends. The wisest philosophers rejected this "political theology", but for all their efforts could not disentangle truth from fable, and as superstitions and idolatries increased many of the philosophers came to pour contempt on the whole multitude of gods. By these means, therefore, Mrs. Hutchinson maintains that all men's efforts to arrive at true knowledge of God not only proved hopeless, but led them to catastrophe. But, she declares at last, "God from the foundation of the world, determined that, in His appointed time, a light should break forth to the Gentiles that sat in darkness . . ."

In order to emphasize the power of the false religions and superstitions and philosophies which the light of the gospel was to pierce, Mrs. Hutchinson takes the fifteen points by which Cardinal Bellarmine had asserted the true Church might be discerned and shows that, in the sense in which they were used by the Roman Church, they might equally well be applied to the old gentile religions. While doing this with the explicit purpose of showing how strong was the hold of gentile religion to be overcome by the gospel, she is at the same time, however, surely implicitly contending that natural philosophy and religious superstition are to be found developing within the Roman Church, as they did among the gentiles, and that both spring from the same root: namely, those corrupt relics of truth retained by man in sin which cannot bring him to true knowledge of God and salvation.

The main propositions round which Mrs. Hutchinson builds her book, therefore, are the twofold law of nature and moral law which she claims as man's first theology before the Fall; the fact that relics of this, though corrupted by the Fall and unable to bring men to a true and saving knowledge of God, can still be traced in men by their sense of God and moral consciousness; and lastly, the contention that these principles within men were the main spring of gentile philosophy and religion. In this book her arguments concerning God's absolute sovereign will would seem to become too rational. But though we see here the weakness of

her judgment with regard to this doctrine, we see its strength in her other book where it is shown to be a great cause of promoting holy living. Undoubtedly, too, it was Mrs. Hutchinson's deep sense of the majesty and holiness of God that led her in life to walk in that fear of the Lord of which she has left us her own description: "This reverential fear", she says, "begets a holy care and watch in the soul, suspecting and crying out to God to keep His citadel there. . . . 'Tis a holy frame of spirit that keeps us always in a reverent awe and dread of the great majesty of God, and in an humble posture of soul before Him, yet cuts not off, but aggravates our delight in Him, our joy and our singing before Him . . ."

London.