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STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

II.—THE NARRATIVES OF THE BIRTH AND INFANCY.

THE sun while setting in the west often throws upon the eastern heaven a burnished shadow, the reflection of the golden glory in which he dies. So, many an infancy has been transfigured by the light of a great manhood, beautified by the marvellous hues shed back upon it from a splendid character and career. The childhood of Moses was to later Hebrew tradition a childhood of wonder and miracle. Ancient Greece made her heroes sons of the gods, men dear to heaven, for whom the Olympians plotted and schemed, round whom they strenuously fought. The proud fancy of the Roman made Romulus the suckling of the she-wolf; the history of his "eternal city" a history of marvel and miracle, of deeds and events prophetic of universal empire. The fame of the life reflected on the infancy may thus become in a creative imagination the fruitful mother of myths, credible in an age of wonder and childlike faith, incredible in an age of critical and rational thought.

Now, are the stories of Christ's birth and infancy but the luminous and tinted shadows of his marvellous manhood, the creations of intense and exalted dreamers who, bidden by their own fancies, made the child the father of the man? So it has been thought and said. The narratives which describe the coming of Jesus

have been resolved into myths, no more historical than the stories which tell the adventures of the gods of ancient Greece. Yet on the surface one great difference lies, which may have no critical, but has some rational, worth. The Greek mythologies became incredible centuries since, faith in them died out and no man could revive it; but the story of Christ's birth and infancy still remains credible, need not offend the most cultured reason of the most cultured age. *They* were proved, by actual history too, creations of the childlike imagination, credible to the fanciful child, incredible to the rational man; but *it* has been proved, by long and extensive human experience too, to be as fit for belief by the man as by the child, to be capable of vindication before the calm and critical reason. In the presence of rational thought legends die, but truths live, and in their respective fates their respective characters are revealed.

The story of the birth and infancy is told in the First and Third Gospels with a simple grace that excels the most perfect art. Its theme, hardly to be handled without being depraved, is touched with the most exquisite delicacy. The veil where it ought to conceal does not reveal; where it can be lifted, it is lifted softly, and neither torn nor soiled. There is as little trace of a coarse or prurient, as of an inventive or amplifying, faculty. The reticence is much more remarkable than the speech. Indeed, the distinction between history and legend could not be better marked than by the reserve of the canonical and the vulgar tattle of the apocryphal Gospels. These latter are, so far as they concern the birth and infancy, full of grossness and indecency, of rude speech as to things that become

unholy by being handled. But our narratives are pure as the air that floats above the eternal hills; are full, too, of an idyllic sweetness like the breath of summer when it comes laden with the fragrance of garden and field. The lone, lovely, glad, yet care-burdened mother; the holy beautiful Child, bringing such unsearchable wealth of truth and peace to men; the meanness of his birthplace, the greatness of his mission; the heedless busy world unconscious of the new conscious life that has come to change and bless it; the shepherds under the silent stars, watching and watched; the angel-choir, whose song breaks the silence of earth with the music of heaven; the wretched and merciless Herod, growing in cruelty as he grows nearer death, a contrast to the gentle Infant who comes with "peace and good-will towards men;" the Magi, wanderers from the distant East in search of light and hope: and round and through all the presence in angel and dream, in event and word, of the Eternal God who loves the fallen, and begins in humanity a work of salvation and renewal—these, all together, make, when read in the letter but interpreted by the spirit, a matchless picture of earthly beauty and pathos illumined and sublimed by heavenly love. Whatever fate criticism may have in store for our narrative, it must ever remain a vehicle of holy thoughts to every mind that lies open to the spiritual and divine.

The narratives of the Birth and Infancy may be studied either on their critical and historical, or their ideal and intellectual, side. If on the first, the questions mainly concern their authenticity and trustworthiness; if on the second, the questions chiefly relate to their interpretation and significance. But while the two

classes of questions are distinct, they yet interpenetrate. If the critical and historical questions are answered in a way adverse to the authenticity and credibility of the narratives, then they must be regarded as legendary, and explained as creations of a more or less childlike imagination. If, on the other hand, the ideal and intellectual questions can be so answered as to satisfy the reason, the answer may have considerable critical worth. It ought to shew, at least, that the narratives need not be rejected *a priori* as contra-rational, that they speak of matters the intellect can conceive and believe. It ought to shew, too, that they are not explicable like ordinary legends, cannot be explained by the normal action of the mythical faculty, are due to other psychological factors than those that have produced the myths of the world's childhood. If so much can be shewn, the objections taken *in limine* to these narratives must lose much of their power. It is the purpose of this paper to deal with the phase of the subject last indicated, to endeavour to discover the psychological roots of the narratives, though within our limits but little can be done to determine at once their critical and intellectual worth.

The narratives of the Birth and Infancy are peculiar to our First and Third Gospels, and they stand in each with agreements and differences that are alike significant. In Matthew the Jewish, in Luke the Gentile, standpoint and purpose are apparent. Their influence is seen (1) in the genealogies. Matthew traces the descent of Jesus Christ, "the son of David, the son of Abraham;" but Luke ascends higher, makes Jesus "the son of Adam, who was the son of God." The difference is significant. Matthew the Hebrew, ad-

dressing Hebrews, presents Jesus as the Messiah, complying with the conditions necessary to the Messiahship that He may be qualified to fulfil the Messianic hopes. But Luke the Greek, addressing Greeks, presents Jesus in his common brotherhood to man and native sonship to God. In the one case He is incorporated with Israel, in the other with humanity. Both standpoints were universal, but with a difference. Matthew regarded Israel as a people existing for the world, their mission culminating in their Messiah, who, while of particular descent, was of universal significance; but Luke regarded the race that had grown from Adam as blossoming into Christ, who, while the flower of the old, was the seed of the new humanity. Matthew's genealogy is the vehicle of Prophetic, but Luke's of Pauline ideas. The first represents Christ as a redeemer of Abrahamic, a king of Davidic descent, appearing to fulfil the aspirations of the ancient people, and realize the theocratic ideal; but the second exhibits Him as through his descent from Adam the blood-relation, as it were, of every man, appearing that He may create in every man a no less real and intimate spiritual relation with God. And so while Jesus is to Matthew the Messiah, He is to Luke the Second Adam, the Creator and Head of the new humanity, sustaining universal relations and accomplishing an universal work.

(2) In their modes of conceiving and representing the Child Jesus. Both, indeed, know but the one cause of the Child's coming, the creative action of the Spirit of God. Matthew says, with significant modesty, Mary "was found with child by the Holy Ghost;" while Luke, with greater fulness but equal purity, says, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the

Highest shall overshadow thee." It is possible that theologians have here personalized too much. The phrase "Spirit of God" often in the Old Testament denotes the Divine creative energy, the might of God, active and exercised, whether in the making and maintaining of the world, or the forming and direction of man. And so our Evangelists agree in representing Christ as the child of the Divine creative energy, find the cause of his becoming and birth in the action of God. But the agreement here gives point to the differences elsewhere. Matthew, true to his Jewish standpoint and purpose, finds the birth to be the fulfilment of a prophecy, and not satisfied with explaining the name Jesus in the sense Israel loved, describes and denotes Him by the prophetic title Emmanuel. But Luke, while he invokes no prophet or prophecy, and supplies no special interpretation of the name, significantly denotes the Child Mary is to bear as "the Son of God." The former is here true to the spirit and thought of Israel, but the latter to the theology of Paul. Luke had learned to read the Christian facts in the light of his master's ideas. The Divine Sonship of Christ was the foundation of the Pauline theology, and is here made the starting-point of the evangelical history that represents and embodies it. To the pupil as to the teacher the Second Adam could accomplish this work only as He was "the Son of the Highest."

(3) In the narratives of the Infancy, Matthew never forgets the kinghood of his Messiah—the theocratic character of his mission. The Magi come from the East in search of Him "that is born king of the Jews;" their act is an act of fealty, of homage to rightful royalty. What Herod fears in the Child is a rival—a king of the

ancient stock with claims he and his could not withstand. But though it is said that Christ "shall reign over the house of Jacob, and of his kingdom there shall be no end," Luke in his narrative hardly finds a place for the theocratic idea. The Child is set at once in his universal relations, a Saviour "to all people," "a light to lighten the Gentiles," "the dayspring from on high" risen "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." The standpoint is throughout Pauline. The advent that is celebrated is the advent, not of a theocratic king, but of a Redeemer whose work is universal, who is essentially related, on the one hand to God as a Son, on the other to man as a Brother.

But while the Evangelists remain true to their respective standpoints and purposes, their narratives prove that they could transcend both. The one happily indicates the universalism of the ancient faith, the other the historical relations and reverence of the new. The Hebrew makes the heathen Magi the first to worship the newborn King; the Greek shows the beautiful love alike of parents and Child to the law, the temple, and the customs of the Fathers. In Matthew the Gentile comes from the East to claim his right to sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, and his right is as finely expressed as divinely recognized. In Luke the aged representative of the faith and hope of the past stands up in the temple to acknowledge the advent and proclaim the work of a Redeemer. And so each Evangelist in his own way approves the standpoint and ratifies the purpose of the other. Their differences are not disagreements, but means by which the varied phases of a history of universal and enduring import may be exhibited.

But now we must advance from what is formal to what is material in the narratives. What is cardinal to each is common to both—the Child that is born of Mary is the Son of God, the fruit of the overshadowing "of the Most High." Agreement on this point is not peculiar to our First and Third Gospels, but to the New Testament books as a whole. Though the detailed narratives are peculiar to the former, allusions to the real and ideal elements in the birth of Christ are common to the latter. Paul could speak of Him as "born of a woman," "of the seed of David according to the flesh." Even the Fourth Gospel is most explicit in its recognition of his natural birth. In it his mother asserted her maternity, and He, in the most solemn moment of his life, confesses his sonship. Philip says to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." The people of Capernaum are made to inquire, "Is not this the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" and in Mark we have the similar inquiry, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" But alongside this recognition of the real and material birth stands the common confession of a higher and diviner being. The birth, but not the parentage, is human. While born of Mary, He is the Son of God. The Fourth Evangelist conceives the coming of Christ as the becoming incarnate of the Divine and Eternal Word; while Paul in many a form expresses and emphasizes his belief in a Christ who, "being in the form of God, did not think equality with God a thing to be snatched at, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men." Now, as the ideal Gospel, as

well as the doctrinal Epistles, everywhere imply the human birth, and often refer to it, the narratives which describe this birth more than imply the theory of his higher nature and relations developed in that Gospel and these Epistles. What is intellectually presented in the latter is historically exhibited in the former, and what we have to explain is, how men with the passions and prejudices, with the inherited tendencies and beliefs of Jews, could come to believe in what can only be described as an incarnation of Deity. The problem is one of deep and varied interest. The first Christians were Hebrews, their leaders men of intensely Hebraic natures; yet their fundamental and most distinctive doctrine was one profoundly offensive to the Hebrew mind and faith. The problem is, How did they come to entertain it? which is but another form of our already indicated question as to the psychological roots of the belief embodied in the narratives of Christ's birth and infancy.

Can our narratives be explained through the Hindu mythologies? Can they be traced to similar psychical roots? Can they be resolved into creations of the mytho-poetic faculty? Hindu mythology is an enormous growth, extending over many thousand years, and so far too immense and complicated to be compared with our short and simple narratives. All that can be done is to compare them where they seem to embody similar ideas, and discover whether the psychological explanation possible in the one case is possible in the other. Well, then, the idea of the incarnation of Deity is familiar to Hindu mythology. Brahmanism knows it, and so, in a sense, does Buddhism. Divine appearances or manifestations are common in the former system: incarna-

tions of Buddha are frequent in the latter. But as Buddhism is nominally, though not really, atheistic, it wants one of the terms most essential for comparison, and so for our present purpose had better be dropped out of account.

The affinity of the Hindu and Christian ideas of incarnation has often been asserted, and the derivation, now of the Christian from the Hindu, and again of the Hindu from the Christian, has been confidently affirmed. Only a few years since a German scholar endeavoured to prove traces of Christian ideas both in the theology and ethics of the Bhagavad-gîtâ; and the influence of the Orient in the schools of the apostolic and post-apostolic age is a commonplace of historical inquiry. But these inquiries have been due to affinities that are only apparent, that mask, indeed, the most radical antitheses. (1) The idea of incarnation is essentially different. In the Hindu system incarnations are many and frequent, but in the Christian there is but one. In the former they are transitory and occasional; in the latter it is permanent and providential, necessary to produce the well-being of man and accomplish the ends of God. The Hindu incarnations are often monstrous forms, effected to perform with immoral violence works that can hardly be called moral; but the Christian incarnation is human, rational, the moral means of achieving the greatest possible moral work. Multiplicity is essential to the first, but unity to the second. Unity would be fatal to the ideas expressed by the former, but multitude to those represented by the latter. Were the Hindu incarnation conceived as happening but once it would lose its essential character; to conceive the Christian as happening oftener would be to abolish it. But (2) the

Hindu and Christian incarnations express and repose on essentially different ideas of God. In India the belief in incarnation is the logical and necessary result of the belief in God. To the Hindu God is no person, but the universal life, the inexhaustible energy that, unhasting, unresting, creates every change and exists in every mode and in all forms of being. As the particles that make up the water-drop may roll in the ocean, float in the vapour, sail in the cloud, fall in the rain, shine in the dew, circulate in the plant, and return into the ocean again, remaining in all their apparent changes essentially unchanged, so the universal energy or life that is termed God assumes the infinite variety of forms that constitutes the world of appearances. But the Hebrew did not so conceive God. His Deity was a conscious Mind, a voluntary Power, the living Maker and righteous Ruler of nature and man. He was never confounded with the world or its life; He stood infinitely above both, the cause of their changes, not their subject. The Hindu could not separate, the Hebrew could not identify, God and nature. Incarnation was the logical correlate of the Hindu, but the logical contradiction of the Hebrew, idea of God. The one reached it by the simple process of logical evolution, unconsciously performed; but the other could reach it only by a violent logical revolution. It was a native growth of the Hindu mind, especially as Brahmanism had made it; but it was utterly alien to the Hebrew mind, especially as it had been educated and possessed by Judaism. The law of natural mental development explains the rise of the belief in incarnations in India, but it cannot explain what so manifestly contradicts it as the rise of the belief in the Incarnation in Judæa.

Can our narratives be explained through the Greek mythology? Can the psychological laws exemplified by the latter be applied to the former? The Greek mythology, while it had started from the same point as the Hindu, had yet had a very different development. The ideas it ultimately embodied were almost as unlike the distinctive ideas of the Hindus as of the Hebrews. It knew, indeed, many gods and sons of the gods, but in these the idea of incarnation was in no proper sense expressed. Gods and men were to the Greek alike created beings. They were akin, of a kind, and stood so near each other that the god was but a magnified man, the man a reduced god. The god lived a sort of corporate existence, needed food and drink; was immortal, not in his own right, but by virtue of the peculiar qualities of the things he ate and drank; was, too, a husband and father, capable of sustaining the same relations as man, of feeling and indulging the same passions. We can say, then, in a sense, that every Greek deity was incarnate, none lived an unembodied spiritual life. But incarnation so universalized ceases to have any significance; it belongs to the idea of deity, not to his acts; is a necessary quality of his essence, not a state voluntarily assumed. Where God is so conceived, Divine Sonship becomes as natural and proper to Him as to man. Belief in it is a logical necessity. Men feel that without it their notion of deity would remain inconsistent and incomplete. And so the theogonic myths, so far from offending, pleased and satisfied the early Greek mind, seemed to it a native and integral element of the conception of God. But the Hebrew, who conceived God as spiritual, invisible, lifted above every creature, every-

thing creaturely, filling eternity, filling immensity, could not while his old idea stood conceive Him as becoming incarnate, or as sustaining the relation of a Father to a Divine yet human Son. Into the latter conception elements entered so abhorrent to the former that the one could live only by the death of the other. The conditions that allow the old and the new to be affiliated as parent and child are here absent.

The belief, then, embodied in our narratives was not a natural product of Judaism, and cannot be explained by any normal evolution of thought within it. Yet the men who made and first held it were Jews, and their two most creative personalities were men of intensely Hebraic natures. Paul was a strong type of the scholastic Jew, the man trained in the methods, skilled in the dialectic of the schools; Peter was a thorough representative of the unlettered class, stalwart, robust in mind, faithful to ideas and duties consecrated by ancient custom, not very open in eye and heart to new lights and loves. Paul was possessed by the prejudices of the school, Peter by the prejudices of the people; and in the various orders of prejudices these may claim to rank as the most invincible. And if anything could have heightened the native Jewish aversion to the ideas of Divine Sonship and Incarnation, it must have been the life and death of Christ. The men who had known Him, who had seen his poverty, who had watched his sufferings, who had witnessed the agony and impotence of his tragic end, must have had these so woven into their very idea of Him, that He and they could never be conceived as dissociated or apart. Yet this was the very person they were to conceive as the Son of their awful and eternal God, as the manifestation in the

flesh of their Almighty Maker and Lord of men. It is impossible that any imagination possessed by the Jewish conception of God, and filled by the recollection of the poverty, suffering, and crucifixion of Christ, could have ever placed that God and this Christ in the relations expressed by the terms Sonship and Incarnation.

The men, then, did not pass by an easy and natural transition from their old to their new belief. They were, we might almost say, driven to the new in spite of the old, and the forces that drove them were revolutionary. There occurred a great and creative change in their conception of God. The God of the Jews was eternal, almighty, august, yet He was the God of the Jews only, loved them, loved no other people. But the God the disciples came to know through Jesus Christ was the God of men, a Being of universal benevolence, of love that embraced the world and sought its good. He pitied like a Father, was a Father, and every man was his child. But this new conception seemed to involve two great consequences, the first as to the nature of God, the second as to his relations to man. As to the first, it was seen that He could not be essential and eternal love and be essentially or have been eternally solitary. Love is a social affection, and is impossible without society. Love of self is selfishness, and so it was necessary to conceive a God who is love and loves as having another than Himself who stood over against Himself, made society, received and reciprocated his affection. An object is as necessary to love as a subject, and so Divine love is possible only where there is Divine society; in other words, there can be no eternal Father unless there be an eternal Son, his mirror and reflection. But God so conceived ceases to be the

barren and abstract God of Judaism, becomes the living Father in heaven, in whom, through Jesus Christ, we believe, and to whom He taught us to pray. And so from the first a second consequence followed—the Divine relation to man was conceived in a grander and sweeter and more perfect way. Man was God's child, owed Him a child's obedience and love; was true to the Divine idea of his nature only as he gave to its Giver what was his due. His relation to God did not depend on his descent from a particular patriarch: everywhere and always he stood by obedience, fell by disobedience; but even after and from his fall he could be saved by the grace, which meant the love, of God. And as He loved all, He loved to see none perish, to see all saved. He could do nothing else and nothing less, his nature being love. But since it was so He could not refuse sympathy, could not deny sacrifice, when by these alone men could be reached and saved. And so out of the new thought of God which came by Jesus Christ there issued by natural and necessary growth the belief in the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, who had come forth to declare Him. The relations of God to his world were the copy and counterpart of relations immanent and essential to God Himself; and the love in God to God which we express by the terms Father and Son became at once the source and image of the love expressed to man by the facts of incarnation and sacrifice.

The change thus effected in the fundamental conception of the disciples made its presence felt everywhere. It set the person, the life, the death of Jesus in a new light—created as to Him an order of ideas that can be understood only when the prologue to the

Fourth Gospel is made to underlie the opening narratives of the First and Third. It set Him, too, in a new relation to man, made Him the centre and head of humanity, to whom the past centuries had pointed, from whom the coming centuries were to flow. His appearance was no accident, no Divine chance, the more miraculous the less designed; but the fulfilment of a gracious Divine purpose, or rather a sublime Divine necessity, which was yet but the means to highest Divine ends. And so the new faith was at once transforming and transfiguring, made the poverty of Christ the wealth of the world, the humiliation of the Son the condition of glorifying the Father, and his death the power of God unto our salvation.

A. M. FAIRBAIRN.

THE BOOK OF JOB.

IV.—THE SECOND COLLOQUY. (CHAPTERS XV.—XXI.)

3.—BILDAD TO JOB (CHAPTER XVIII.).

I HAVE already described Bildad[1] as a man of less originality and more "temper" than Eliphaz. "A much lesser man every way, with a much more contracted range of thought and sympathy, he deals in proverbs and citations, and takes a severer and more personal tone." That description of him is fully borne out, as indeed it was in part suggested by, the Speech he now delivers. Throughout it he does but copy and reproduce, in colours still more glowing and austere, the terrible and impressive picture of the wicked man and his doom which Eliphaz had drawn in Chapter xv.

[1] THE EXPOSITOR, vol. iv. p. 174.