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## Could Jesus Err?

BY THE REV. THOMAS WHITELOW, D.D., KILMARNOCK.

### II.

THE third example of imputed error—and that on which most stress is laid—is derived from Christ's interrogation of the Pharisees concerning the Davidic Sonship of the Messiah, as recorded in the first three evangelists (Matt. xxii. 41-45; Mark xii. 35, 36; Luke xx. 41-44): 'If David then calleth Him Lord, how is He his son?' Accepting the historicity of this question placed by the Synoptists in Christ's mouth, and repudiating the extraordinary notion of Strauss, Holtzmann, and others, that Christ purposed thereby to assail the popular belief that the Messiah should be David's son, Professor Schwartzkopff engages to convict Christ of error in respect of both the authorship and the sense of Psalm cx., on which the question is based. In the attempt to fulfil this contract, twenty-two pages of argumentation are expended,—which shows how hard the Professor finds it to make out his case,—but nothing really new is advanced. The Psalm, it is argued, could not have emanated from David, because 'of no single Psalm can the Davidic origin be now asserted with any degree of certainty'—the titles which ascribe them to the son of Jesse having been affixed at least 500 years after his decease . . . ; because 'the office of the priesthood could never have been assigned to a king as something special, at a time when sovereigns were accustomed to exercise, but only when they had ceased to perform, sacerdotal functions,' *i.e.* not in David's time but after the Exile; because 'no theocratic ruler (in Israel or Judah) could ever have looked upon a descendant of himself as his Lord, or upon himself as a servant of anyone but God, not even of Messiah'; and because 'no sufficient proof exists that David's poetical efforts ever partook of a specifically religious character.' Nor, if David did compose the Psalm in question, the Professor argues, could he have referred to Messiah, because no prophet's outlook, it is alleged, could have extended beyond his own immediate horizon, so that David must have had in contemplation some near (say, Solomon) rather than some distant successor (like Messiah); because 'David never had a conception of Messiah,' in which case it is clear

he could not have written about Him; because when the Hebrew prophets did allude to Messiah, they were accustomed to speak of David as 'the type (Vorbild), original (Urbild), and even model (Musterbild) of the Messiah,' but never of Messiah as either David's Son or David's Lord; and chiefly because 'in order to be able to foresee this future priest-king, David must have had before his eyes a more exalted picture than the greatest prophets of the most flourishing period of prophecy ever had,' which, of course, would have been 'a measureless anachronism,' utterly subversive of the sacred law of prophetic evolution. In either case, whether Christ accepted the Davidic authorship or the Messianic reference of the Psalm, in Professor Schwartzkopff's judgment He stands convicted of error. Nor need it be questioned that this conclusion is inevitable, and the defenders of Christ's inerrancy will be forced to throw up their brief if the above critical positions are impregnable. But, seriously speaking, can a fair-minded reasoner claim that even one of them has been placed beyond challenge?

With respect to the authorship of the Psalm, the following considerations may be pondered. Granting for the moment that the titles were affixed to the so-called Davidic Psalms 500 years after David,<sup>1</sup> does it not seem a large order to ask acceptance of the proposition, that all of these titles were wrong? That not so much as one of them rested on carefully sifted and authentic tradition? That the Hebrew rabbis in every instance erred in their reckoning, while German scholars, living 2000 years later, never miss

<sup>1</sup> Although the *final* redaction of the Books of Samuel may have taken place in the fourth century, it does not follow, as Schwartzkopff after Cornill imagines, that the titles to some of the Psalms may not have been affixed much earlier than this. David's history was known to the eighth century prophets, and, assuming the Psalms to have been in existence then, some at least of their superscriptions might have been then prepared. Besides, at the most, neither Cornill nor Driver professes to have established more than that the titles are not all reliable: neither has proved them to be all wrong. The subjective test—the correspondence of the titles of the Psalms with their contents—is one upon which equally competent critics may reasonably differ.

the mark in finding both a date and an author (when they want one) for the strayed songs or 'lost chords'? Had only the critics been less sweeping in their demands, they might have more readily obtained credence. Had they seen their way, for example, to entertain the suggestion that perhaps they themselves might not be infallible,—an extremely violent supposition, no doubt,—and that probably the Hebrew rabbis knew a little about their own religious books,—which, it must be granted, is preposterous!—ordinary persons might have been disposed to bow to the superior learning of modern scholars. As it is, these must not be surprised if the average intelligence should argue that the likelihood is that the rabbis were occasionally right in their conjectures, and most probably in this instance in which Christ confirms their judgment.<sup>1</sup> Then it puzzles untrained intellects to discover why it should have been impossible for David to conjure up before his imagination the picture of a priest-king like himself, but perfectly possible for an unknown psalmist 500 years afterwards to conceive such a lofty ideal, when king-priests no more existed? And just here, again, one not an expert might want to know how it came to pass on evolution principles that the king-priest conception of Israel's sovereignty, which, according to Schwartzkopff, was its 'ideal' conception, realised itself in David's time, and not in the post-Exilic era? Was not this pretty much like setting evolution at defiance, if not turning it upside down? As for the allegation that theocratic kings in Israel—like the Pharaohs of Egypt, the Sennacheribs of Assyria, and the Nebuchadnezzars of Babylon, or like the emperors (say) of Germany and China at the present day—found it a stiff mental exercise to imagine any successor who could be more distinguished than themselves, why should this have hindered David, under the Spirit's guidance, from representing Messiah as his superior? That he could have done this in exceptional circumstances it is doubtful if Professor Schwartzkopff would deny (see below); that he actually

<sup>1</sup> Here it is worth observing that Ewald agrees with Hengstenberg in acknowledging that if the title of this Psalm be accepted as correct, the conclusion drawn by Christ in the Gospels was valid, whereas, if the title was inaccurate, the conclusion was wrong. Schwartzkopff and Driver unite in saying that even if the title was inaccurate, the Saviour's argument was not affected thereby; but, of course, these scholars are too modest to expect everybody to recognise them as superior to their predecessors just named.

did this is what Christ asserts. To complain that David should not have called himself the servant of anyone but God, and therefore not of Messiah, is to assume that David could not have risen in a moment of supernatural inspiration to the idea of a divine or at least superhuman Messiah. It is arbitrary criticism with a vengeance to cite 'the only authentic song of David's handed down to us, the song of the bow, 2 Sam. i. 19-27,' as a proof that David never composed a 'specifically religious poem,' and that therefore Psalm cx. never proceeded from his pen.

As little satisfactory are the grounds upon which all reference to Messiah is excluded from the Psalm. That Old Testament prophets, 'in exceptional cases justified by special circumstances,' could look beyond their immediate environment, Professor Schwartzkopff allows (p. 24). That they often did so, Peter in his First Epistle distinctly affirms (i. 11, 12). Christ claimed the 110th Psalm as a specific illustration of this truth; while Driver admits that 'the Psalm is a Messianic one, and that the august language used in it of the Messiah is not compatible with the position of one who was a mere human son of David.' But if a post-Exilic writer could look beyond and above his environment to a superhuman Messiah, why could not David have done the same? Of course, if David never possessed a conception of Messiah, as Professor Schwartzkopff endeavours to demonstrate by an examination of Nathan's promise to David (2 Sam. v. 12-16), David's thanksgiving to Jehovah (2 Sam. vii. 18-29), and David's last words (2 Sam. xxiii. 2-7), it will follow that, even though written by David, this Psalm could not have had an outlook towards his Greater Son. But, while conceding that in all three places lay a primary reference to Solomon, it is enough to reply that many competent exegetes hold that the language, when fairly interpreted, cannot be restricted to one or even to all of David's royal descendants, but attains its full significance only when applied to Him who appeared in the fulness of times, and of whom it was spoken: 'And the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David.' Then, that David did not picture Messiah as 'another David,' but as his 'Lord,' simply shows that Jesse's son was not so egregiously vain as some moderns think he should have been, but was endowed with more modesty than these are disposed to give him credit for. Imagine the

conceit that Saul's successor must have exhibited had he been guilty of holding up himself as the type of Messiah! And conceive, if that be possible, the scorn with which his boundless egoism would have been reprobated by the critics! Like old Moses, for talking about a prophet like unto himself, young David for singing about a Messiah like unto himself would have been impaled upon the sharp stake of pitiless critical raillery! But because the sweet Psalmist avoided the venerable lawgiver's supposed indiscretion, he has incurred the hot displeasure of his friends. For friends of David not a few of his nineteenth century critics claim to be. In denying him the authorship of the 110th Psalm, and in contending that even though he wrote it he could not have dreamt of Messiah, do they not seek to wipe from his fair fame the scandal of subverting the sacred law of evolution? For this is what it comes to, they keep on assuring the unlearned, if once it is allowed that before David's eyes flitted a loftier conception of Messiah than was cherished by the great prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. It is idle to interpose that the facts of Old Testament Scripture do not establish the modern development theory of Israel's religion, unless by first cutting and carving the documents in accordance with the preconceived theory, or to suggest that it is reasoning in a circle first to demonstrate the evolution law of Israel's conception of Messiah

by denying that David could have written Psalm cx., and then to parade that law as evidence that David could neither have penned the Psalm nor thought about Messiah. Yet pretty much after this fashion does the German professor build up his accusation against Christ. David could not have produced the 110th Psalm, because then he must have foreseen Messiah as his Lord. No Hebrew prophet could have had such a vision of the distant future unless it had been specially revealed to him. Such special revelation is forbidden by the law of prophetic development which criticism has invented. Jesus affirmed that such special revelation had been vouchsafed to David by the Spirit; that David had foreseen Him, the Messiah, in the distant future, and that David had composed the Psalm in question. Therefore, is the Professor's unwritten but implied conclusion, since the critics are unquestionably right, Jesus was undoubtedly wrong. Those who are satisfied with this reasoning must be easily pleased.

In closing this section of his treatise, Professor Schwartzkopff assures his readers that the above instances of so-called error on the part of Jesus belong to the most important that come before one in the New Testament. The remark sets one wondering what the least important might be, and what form the evidence offered in proof of them might assume.

## Point and Illustration.

MESSRS. OLIPHANT ANDERSON & FERRIER have just published an attractive crown octavo volume by an accomplished American preacher. Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis is the preacher; *A Man's Value to Society* is the title of the book. The book is further described as 'Studies in Self-Culture and Character.' In short, it is a volume which the librarian must place in the most elastic of all his shelves, the shelf where the *Essays* stand. But it must not be left standing there. For it is a very able and original book. Do not dream, because the three anecdotes that follow are quoted from it, that it is a gathering of crumbs from the ordinary raconteur's table. The book was being read, and with quite uncommon pleasure, and the anecdotes came in the course of it.

### The Inner Motive and the Outer Fact.

When Coleridge the schoolboy was going along the street thinking of the story of Hero and Leander, and imagining himself to be swimming the Hellespont, he threw wide his arms as though breasting the waves. Unfortunately, his hand struck the pocket of a passer-by, and knocked out a purse. The outer deed was that of a pick-pocket, and could have sent the youth to jail. The inner motive was that of an imaginative youth deeply impressed by the story he was translating from the Greek, and that inner motive made the owner of the purse his friend, and sent young Coleridge to college. Thus, the motive made what was outwardly wrong to be inwardly right.

### Nothing Covered.

The story has been told recently of a burglar who accidentally discharged a magnesium light connected with a kodak on the shelf. The hour was midnight, and everyone