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Joseph: A Sermon to Men.

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'But he had sent a man before them, even Joseph who was sold to be a bond-servant.
Whose feet they hurt in the stocks; the iron entered into his soul:[1]
Until the time that his cause was known: the word of the Lord tried him.'—Ps. cv. 17-19 (P.B.V.).

There are few narratives in the whole Bible more suggestive to men than the whole story of Joseph. The young man dreaming his dreams of future greatness; the apparent overthrow of all his hopes; the final triumph when the dreams are fulfilled to the letter; the overruling providence of God, so guiding the apparent failure that it becomes the means whereby, under the chastening discipline of the experience of life, the young boy is made worthy in character, as well as placed in a position in life in which it is right that his father and brethren should do obeisance to him: these form a striking picture of the way in which boyish ambitions are tempered and annealed into the noble performance of duty.

And surely never was story told with more dramatic force and appealing charm. The theme is a common one, common in folk-lore, common in the drama, common in history. The younger member of the family kept down by the envy of the elder members, and at last triumphing over them,—it is the theme that delighted us in our childhood in Cinderella; it is very similar to the theme that attracted Shakespeare in the full prime of his genius, when in *The Tempest* he sketches the wronged and exiled Prospero getting those who had wronged him at his mercy, testing them by fresh labours, and at last forgiving them. The narrative combines the elements which Aristotle regarded as essential to a good drama, περιπετεῖαι, ἀναγνώρισεις (xlv. 4. 27), ἀναγνωρισις ἐκ παραλογισμοῦ (xxxvii. 33, xliv. 12). No doubt the story was told again and again by Hebrew rhapsodists at the fireside of Hebrew homes, and a close critical examination of the text makes it probable that the writer of the Book of Genesis has worked together into one, two if not three different strands. In one the caravan is said to be a caravan of Ishmaelites, in the other of Midianites; in the one Reuben plays the prominent part as trying to save Joseph, in the other Judah; and the exact length of time mentioned differs in different places.[2] But in spite of such trivial discrepancies, how true the whole narrative is to life, how absolutely free from anything which would tempt us to regard it as legendary! The changes of Joseph's fortunes are quite natural in Oriental countries: nothing happens to him which might not happen to a clever young Jew or Armenian in Constantinople to-day. No fairy godmother presides at his christening; no *deus ex machina* unties any knots; no Ariel is at hand to do his bidding: all moves forward within the lines of what is human and natural to an issue that justifies the ways of God to man.

Indeed, it is quite extraordinary how Egyptology has shown the history to be consistent with the condition of Egyptian life. Although no mention of Joseph has been found, yet there is scarcely a detail which cannot be illustrated from the literature and monuments of Egypt. The position which Joseph occupies in Potiphar's house; the temptation by Potiphar's wife; the position of the butler and the baker; the rise of a foreign slave to high political power; the granting of an amnesty on Pharaoh's birthday; the importance attached to dreams and their interpretation; the years of famine; the granaries

[1] '*The iron entered into his soul.*'—This translation has enriched for ever the English language with a terse splendid phrase which has passed into a proverb, and which recalls many a memory of suffering cutting to the quick, of patient bearing, of heroic endurance; and yet the translation is a mistranslation. The words should be rendered, '*His soul, or life, entered into the iron,*' 'he was laid in iron' (A.V.) 'he was laid in chains of iron' (R.V.); and therefore it is probably little more than a repetition of the first half of the verse, describing the fact of suffering; though, possibly, it adds to the fact the thought of his voluntary acceptance of that suffering—'his soul entered whole and entire in its resolve to obey God into the cruel torture' (Kay).

[2] Cf. Hastings' *Dictionary*, ii. *s.v.* pp. 767-769.

in large cities; the golden collar put round Joseph's neck by Pharaoh, the new name given to him, the title 'father to Pharaoh,' the oath 'by the life of Pharaoh'; the concentration of landed property in the hands of the king and the priests: these all find their exact counterpart. In one monument of about the date of Joseph a rich man records on his own tomb, 'I collected corn as a friend of the harvest GOD. I was watchful at the time of sowing. And when a famine arose lasting many years I distributed corn to the city each year of famine.'[1]

But we shall see the trace of a divine inspiration far more truly in the way in which under its influence this common theme is made to illustrate the triumph of divine justice, and to be a vivid portraiture of the true development of human character.

It is so most markedly with regard to Joseph's own character. Let us recall it. The young boy with a conscience more sensitive than that of his elder brethren is shocked at some wrong-doing on their part, and reports it to his father. We are not told what was the subject of the evil report; very probably it was some dishonesty in the sale of their father's flocks; he is conscious that he is right and they are wrong, and his imagination dreams of a time when they will bow down to him and right will be righted; then, the victim of his brothers' envy, he is sold into Egypt: but he accepts the position, his soul enters into the iron; he faces his ill-fortune and masters it; he becomes a faithful and efficient servant; everything prospers under his hand; he is loyal to his master, loyal to his GOD under temptation, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against GOD?' This very virtue, again, leads to worse imprisonment; but again his soul enters into the iron, again he wins favour by his loyalty to the keeper of the prison: he wins the confidence of his master and of the prisoners alike; he has the courage to tell to them the meaning of their dreams, even to the one to whom the meaning was death, but again his loyalty and his insight bring him no reward, 'Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.' The victim of envy, of slander, of neglect, he never loses his faith in GOD. Then after two long years he is summoned to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Quiet, self-possessed, trusting in GOD, he interprets the dreams, he points out the true policy to be adopted, and at last his reward comes. He sits at Pharaoh's right hand, the wise and faithful viceroy, as unspoilt by good fortune as by bad. The memory of his past life is never forgotten. It is true that his eldest son's name, Manasseh, constantly reminded him that 'GOD hath made me to forget all my toil and all my father's house'; yet the very name is a revelation of the depth of the memory. And it all surges up again when at last he sees his brethren kneel in obeisance before him; he tests, retests, and tests them again, but his heart is going out the while to his father and to his younger brother, and GOD's goodness, though it has not enabled him to forget, has enabled him to forgive his brethren, and he provides not only for the father who had loved him, but for the brethren who had wronged him, and that even after their father's death.

So beautiful is the character that we feel at once how much of it is taken up into the life of our Lord Himself. I do not remember that any writers of the N.T. point out the parallel, but it might be drawn out in a striking way: for He too was the son in whom His Father was well pleased; His conscience too was shocked by the doings of His brothers; He too was the victim of envy and of slander; He too was sold to His enemies; He too was tempted and resisted temptation; He too bore His cross between two real malefactors, one of whom was, and one of whom was not, to be forgiven; His soul too entered into the iron, and as He accepted His sufferings they proved the method by which God was going to bless His brethren; He too was raised to sit at the King's right hand; He too provided food for the starving masses of mankind; He too forgave His brethren; He too might have used the very words of Joseph, 'Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither: for GOD did send me before you to preserve life. . . . So now it was not you that sent me hither but GOD.'[2]

A real story true to human life, so true that much of its essential features reappeared in the perfect human life of our Lord, that is what inspiration has made of the story of Joseph. And in this story four points stand out in clear prominence.

[1] Summarized from Hastings' *Dictionary*, ii. *s.v.* pp. 772–774.

[2] Cf. Gn 45^{8} with Ac $2^{23.\ 24}$.

1. The first is the strength which a man gains by purity. The story of Joseph's temptation is told primarily to explain his imprisonment and to prove his fidelity to his master; but it serves also to show his loyalty to GOD. It is a part of the training which makes him the stable, self-reliant, strong man that he becomes. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see GOD,' is the great law of the spiritual world, and it is Joseph's purity which makes him so clear-sighted to read GOD's will in the dreams of the butler and the baker and the king, and to see GOD's hand in the over-ruling of his own fortunes.

2. Not less striking is the importance of practical wisdom in the affairs of life as gained by the experience of life. 'There is none so discreet or wise as thou art' (φρονιμώτερος σου καὶ συνετώτερος, xli. 39).

We are apt to forget how large a part of the Bible is occupied with teaching this lesson. The Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus are devoted almost entirely to it, and the practical wisdom of the steward and of the wise virgins is a subject of our Lord's own praise. And this must mainly be learnt not from books but from the experience of life. It was the discipline of the pit, of slavery, of the prison house which trained Joseph: his soul entered into the iron; he accepted each experience as it came; he found the sphere of service in each and through each.

3. The beauty and true character of forgiveness. Joseph's forgiveness of his brethren is no weakness: it is not weakness in him; it produces no weakness in them, for it is not hastily and carelessly given. They are tested again and again before the forgiveness. He had known them cruel to a younger brother; he had known them cruel to their father; he had known them, perhaps, dishonest. Had he found them still the same, there would have been no forgiveness. But the sight of their father's grief, the remorse of their own conscience, had trained them too. Now, under the tests which he applies, they stand the test applied to their honesty; they show that they are willing to do everything in their power to spare their father, and that they are willing to go themselves into slavery, if only they may save their younger brother.

So the forgiveness comes forth, very generous, very trustful, very stimulating.

It would be a most interesting study to compare the character of Ulysses with that of Joseph, and to speculate what effect each hero may have had upon his nation's subsequent history. Each kept true by the tender memories of home-love; each God-fearing, each shrewd, resourceful, courageous, growing with the experience of life; but with Ulysses the shrewdness just passes the line and can scarcely be distinguished from guile and cunning, from which Joseph is quite free, Ulysses finding his subsequent counterpart in Themistocles, Joseph in Daniel. Most interesting, too, to compare the scene when Joseph's brethren stand cowering, conscious of their guilt, before the brother whom they have wronged and only receive the winged words of forgiveness, with that other scene where the suitors of Penelope huddle together at the end of the hall conscious of their guilt, when Ulysses is revealed, and receive the winged arrows of death; and to think that the young Greek as he grew up had always before him the story of triumphant justice, while the young Hebrew was nurtured in the nobler story of triumphant mercy.

4. The last truth which stands out clearly is this: GOD's faithfulness to those who are faithful to Him.

The Lord was with him; the Lord made all that he did to prosper ($39^{2.\ 3.\ 21-23}$), and that because the thought of GOD was ever before him. 'Can I sin against GOD?' 'Do not interpretations belong to GOD?' 'It is not in me: GOD shall give Pharaoh an answer.' 'What GOD is about to do, He showeth unto Pharaoh.' 'This do and live, for I fear GOD.' 'GOD did send me hither.' 'GOD hath made me Lord of all Egypt.' 'Fear not, for am I in the place of GOD?'

Try to conceive Joseph's feelings at the moment when he saw his brethren making obeisance to him for the first time. What a sense of GOD's overruling power must have been upon him! After the lapse of twenty years the first dream of the boy of seventeen had come true: verily, the dream had been of GOD, and the interpretation thereof; each step in his life, the selling into Egypt, the imprisonment, the dream of Pharaoh, his own elevation, the seven years of famine, each had been in the hand of GOD. Who, then, was he that he should stand in the place of GOD and take vengeance on his brethren? Vengeance was GOD's and He had repaid; for the guilty had had the sense of their guilt festering year after year

and ready to burst out at any calamity; they had been punished with hunger and with exile: punishment he could leave in GOD'S hands; all that was tender and human and forgiving it was safe for him to exercise.

This incomparable story was told again and again in Hebrew homes; and at a later date, probably in the time of the great Captivity, the author of Ps. cv. threw it into poetical form and wove it into a series of instances of GOD'S overruling care for His people and the certainty of His protection.

Such a story may well be before you at the opening of life. Dream your dreams: it is the privilege, it is the duty of the young to dream dreams; only, if you are a Christian, you will dream not so much of what you are to be as of what you are to do, and of the way in which you can serve your country and your Church. On the path toward their fulfilment you will find difficulties, disappointments, perplexities: face them; let your soul enter into the iron and transmute it into a blessing; learn practical wisdom; waste no time in wishing that your circumstances were other than they are, but use them for making yourself as efficient, as wise, as practical as may be: successes also may come, let them not turn your head or make you forgetful of the love of home.

Above all, let the fear of GOD be upon you as it was upon Joseph. Do not let yourself grow to speak or think lightly of that sin which Joseph knew to be a great wickedness: let the thought of GOD'S forgiving love keep you from hardness to others: be with GOD: make your rules with yourself of that which you can really do in the matter of daily prayer and of communion; then shall that epitaph with which St. Stephen summed up the life of Joseph be your epitaph as well—

GOD was with him.

Who was Judas Thomas?

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A REMARKABLE book has lately been published by Dr. Rendel Harris, entitled *The Dioscuri in Christian Literature*. It is founded on two lectures which he gave in Cambridge shortly before his departure for Armenia in March of this year. Dr. Harris shows that the cult of the heavenly twins, Castor and Pollux, did not cease with the introduction of Christianity, but that their ghosts returned, under other names, to claim the homage of the too superstitious among Christians, and so, in the commemoration of Florus and Laurus, which prevails in the Holy Orthodox Church of the East, and in that of Protasius and Gervasius, initiated by St. Ambrose at Milan in the Holy Catholic Church of the West, we have a distinct revival of paganism.

By far the most striking of the identifications which Dr. Rendel Harris has made, is that of the legendary Castor with Judas Thomas,[1] called in the apocryphal literature of the Syrian Church, 'Twin of the Christ,' and identified with Thomas, the doubting disciple. Now, we cannot for a moment, with the text of two inspired Gospels staring us in the face, allow that Judas Thomas, or any other mortal, had the smallest right to such a title. But the question arises, Is there any basis of fact which may have led the Syrians into bestowing it on him? For the word 'Tauma,' or 'Thomas,' in Aramaic, means 'a twin.' It is not a name, but a title; and, as Dr. Harris remarks, 'he must have been somebody's twin-brother.'

The following hypothesis is offered only as a possible clue to the unravelling of the mystery. I make no pretension to have succeeded in that difficult operation; and I offer it only because a conjecture, even when rash, has occasionally the effect of putting some more fortunate inquirer on the right track.

Is it not possible that Thomas, the doubting disciple, is identical with Jude, the youngest brother of our Lord; and that either he and James, or he and Joses, were twins? My own conviction is that implied by Tertullian, viz. that all the four men named in Mt 13^{55} and Mk 6^{3}, with their sisters, were the children of Joseph and

[1] So named also by Eusebius, *H.E.* i. 13.