

THE HEIR (II)

BY

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OR hundreds of years, it would seem, God left the revelation as it was at the time of the great Patriarchs. Even in the time of Moses there is no explicit reference to the Messiah until we come to the most mysterious of all the scenes connected with prophecy: the oracles of Balaam (*Numbers* 24, 14-19). Balaam King of Moab, asked his local prophet to curse the Israelites who were threatening his borders. Instead of cursing, Balaam blessed them. The fourth blessing runs as follows:¹

'I see it (the people of the Israelites), but not as present. I contemplate it, but not as immediate. A star proceeds from Jacob, a sceptre rises out of Israel. It shatters the temples of Moab. It exterminates all the sons of tumult. Edom is its possession; Seir, its enemy, is its possession. Israel does exploits' (*Num.* 25, 17-8). This could be referred to David or to any conquering king of Israel. That was done; but generally, by Jews as well as Christians later, it was seen to refer truly and completely only to a spiritual Messiah.

Christ himself said that Moses spoke of him. The above might be one place. But more surely is the passage in Deuteronomy a direct reference to Christ; for, though in a general way the instructions of this 18th chapter apply to all the coming prophets, yet none but Christ could be called, or dared to call himself, 'like to Moses'.

'Yahweh, thy God, will raise up from thee, from among thy brethren a prophet like to me: you will listen to him . . . Yahweh said to me . . . I shall put my words into his mouth, and he will tell them all that I shall command him.' So Christ our Lord shall say, 'Search the Scriptures, for you think in them to have life everlasting; and the same are they that give testimony of me . . . think not that I accuse you to the Father. There is one that accuses you, Moses, in whom you trust. For if you did believe Moses, you would perhaps believe me also. *For he wrote of me.* But if you will not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?' (*John*, 5, 39 and 45-6).

It was promised to King David that 'his House and his reign are confirmed *for ever* before Yahweh' (*2 Kings*, 7, 16). These promises

¹ All this section is based on the article by l'Abbé J. Plassis entitled 'Le Messie annonce dans l'Ancien Testament' in the encyclopaedia called *Le Christ* (Bloud et Gay). •

to King David apply clearly enough in part to Solomon, but the vision extends beyond him, on to the end of time; so that 'He to whom belongs government, and whom the peoples will obey', it is now known, will be a 'son of David'. Thus the choice is narrowing. Out of all the descendants of Adam it is through the line of Sem, and of the Semites Abraham, and of the children of Abraham, Isaac; then Jacob; and from among his twelve children, Juda. He that is to come, it is now also known, will be a king. Then from the tribe of Juda, David and his house are chosen. Now the dramatic movement of history gathers speed; the warnings, the hints, the promises, the threats, grow in volume, are more frequent. We enter *the age of the Prophets*. First the psalms sing his praises (Ps. 2):

Thou art my Son this day have I begotten thee.
 Ask of me and I will give thee the nations as an inheritance
 and as a possession the ends of the earth.
 Thou shalt break them with a sceptre of iron,
 like a potter's vessel thou shalt break them in pieces.

How wonderfully has that psalm been fulfilled; what Jew dreamed that this could really come true? A son, as we all are of God, perhaps he was to be, only more perfect; but true Son, on equality with the Father, they scarce hoped, nor dreamed of. The Trinity was yet unrevealed. Even when Isaias called the Christ 'Emmanuel', 'God with us', the light did not penetrate. Nor perhaps could it. But we know now that God meant these prophetic words literally. Twice more in the psalms the divine nature of the Messianic king is hinted at; when King David cries out 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit thou at my right hand"' (Ps. 109, 1), the word Lord standing for God and:

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever
 The sceptre of thy kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness
 Thou hast loved justice and hated iniquity:
 Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee
 with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Ps. 44; 7-8).

The same psalm ends with the great promise:

Therefore shall people praise thee for ever, yea for ever and ever.

But the psalms did not describe only the glory and power of the Coming King; we know by the fulfilment that the psalm which describes the *Man of Sorrows* was meant as a description of the Messiah; and the Messiah in a new role, as the bearer of our sins, 'The Suffering Servant' who was to be yet more fully described in the book of Isaias. The twenty-first Psalm is the Dawn-light of the Passion. Christ himself was perhaps reciting it on the Cross, and cried out in his humanity when he came to the words 'O God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' It has become the last song

of many a martyr: St Thomas More, Blessed Richard Reynolds, Blessed Alban Roe.

But I am a worm and no man; the reproach of men and the outcast of the people.

All they that saw me have laughed me to scorn;

They have spoken with the lips and wagged the head (vv. 7-8).

And they that passed by, blasphemed him, wagging their heads

And they that were crucified with him reviled him (*Mark*, 15, 29).

He hoped in the Lord let him deliver him (Ps. 21, 9).

He trusted in God: let him now deliver him if he will have him: for he said: I am the Son of God (*Matt.* 27, 43).

They have dug my hands and feet. They have numbered all my bones.

And they have looked and stared upon me (Ps. 21, 17-18).

And the people stood beholding (*Luke* 23, 35).

They parted my garments among them and upon my vesture they cast lots (Ps. 21, 19).

But the reward for this suffering was promised in the self-same psalm:

The poor shall eat and shall be filled: and they shall praise the Lord that seek him: their hearts shall live for ever and ever.

All the ends of the earth shall remember and shall be converted to the Lord.

And all the kindreds of the Gentiles shall adore in his sight (Ps. 21, 27-8).

There is a third element in the psalms, equally with the previous ones—incomprehensible to the Jews except with faith and intelligible only when Christ manifested the way in his own life—the element of priesthood. Christ was to be a priest as well as king, as well as a man of Sorrows, as well as Son of God. '*Tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech*' (Ps. 109).

From the Prophets properly so called we have a multitude of facets upon the One who is to come and his reign. Amos and Osee begin and all the others take up the double refrain. The Children of Israel having deserted their God, God for a time will desert them; and then 'God will raise up again the ruined hut of David' (*Amos* 9, 11-5). This is the burden of all the prophets, they differ in the details each discloses: now the nature of the disaster, now the character of the Saviour, now the manner of his coming, now the way he will choose to put all right, now the nature of his kingdom.

THE NATURE OF THE DISASTER

For the children of Israel shall sit many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without altar, and without ephod, and without theraphim (*Osee* 3, 4).

No prophet speaks with a greater sense of the coming doom than

Isaias. In one place he describes the doom in the form of a parable, the very parable that our Lord is later to embellish and complete.

My beloved had a vineyard on a hill in a fruitful place. And he fenced it in, and picked the stones out of it, and planted it with choicest vines, and built a tower in the midst thereof, and set up a wine press therein and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

And now, O ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and ye men of Juda, judge between me and my vineyard. What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, and that I have not done to it? was it that I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes?

And now I will show what I will do with my vineyard.

I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted.

I will break down the wall thereof. and it shall be trodden down.

And I will make it desolate; it shall not be pruned,

and it shall not be digged; but briars and thorns shall come up;

And I will command the clouds to rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel:

And the man of Juda his pleasant plant:

And I looked that he should do no judgment, and behold iniquity: and do justice, and behold a cry. (*Isaias 5, 1-7, cf. Jeremias 2, 21*)

And Christ takes up the story at the end of his life when his own people had rejected not merely the prophets but himself.

There was a man, a householder who planted a vineyard and made a hedge round about it, and dug in it a press, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen: and went into a strange country. And when the time of the fruits drew nigh, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits thereof. And the husbandmen laying hands on his servants, beat one thereof and killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants more than the former and they did to them in like manner. And last of all he sent to them his son, saying: They will reverence my son. But the husbandmen seeing the son, said among themselves: 'This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and we shall have his inheritance'. And taking him they cast him forth out of the vineyard and killed him. . . . And when the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables they knew he spoke of them. (*Math. 21, 33-45.*)

Of the other prophets Jeremias and Malachy especially stress the coming doom. The latter's prophecy of the punishment of God on the formalism among the Jews in their worship is famous. But at this point we turn to the promise that God always made to his people whenever he chastised them—'A remnant would be saved'.

Isaias tells us, 'Behold the Virgin that is with child, she brings forth a son, and she gives him the name of Emmanuel (God with

us)' (Isaias 7, 14). Micheas gives us something of his family and birthplace.

And thou, Bethlehem, Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler of Israel: and his going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity. He (God) will deliver them (to their enemies) until the time when she who has to bring forth a child shall have done so. Then the rest of his brethren will return to the children of Israel. (Mich. 5, 2-3.)

THE CHARACTER OF THE SAVIOUR

We have an accumulation of wonderful titles designed to give the Jews some inkling of the Person who was to come. The commonest one was that of king, descendant of David, but there are many others more wonderful; and comment, except explanatory, would be useless; here, then, they are:

For a child is born unto us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the World to come, the Prince of Peace. (Isaias 9, 6.)

This is the same who was to be born of a Virgin, and 'his name shall be called Emmanuel' (id. 7, 14), God with us.

Isaias goes on to describe his character:

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him; the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness, and he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord. (id. 11, 2.)

These are the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and Christ had them as man. It would make an interesting study and profitable to examine how the gifts were manifested in Christ's earthly life.

Jeremias calls him 'God is our Justice':

Behold the days come—oracle of Jahve—when I shall raise up to David a just seed, a King who will reign with wisdom, and he will do right and justice in the country. In that day Juda and Israel will live in security, and see the name by which he will be called; 'God is our Justice'. (Jeremias 23, 5-6.)

Ezechiel uses a title dear to Christ himself: that of shepherd. The shepherds of old, the priests of the Old Covenant, had betrayed their trust. God speaks to them through his prophet:

Behold I myself will seek my sheep, and will visit them. As the shepherd visiteth his flock in the day when he shall be in the midst of his sheep that were scattered, so will I visit my sheep, and will deliver them out of the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.² And I will bring them out

² We can recognise the mingling of the immediate calamity and immediate saving with the ultimate and real calamity and saving; the first is the vehicle and symbol of the other.

from the peoples and will gather them out of the countries, and will bring them to their own land. . . . (*Ezekiel* 34, 11.)

This might seem to be merely a promise of saving from the Babylonian captivity; but then the horizon enlarges and embraces the deep design of Providence, the fall and the promise of salvation from sin.

And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God: and my servant David the prince in the midst of them. (*id.* 24.) Christ took up the description where *Ezekiel* left off. *Ezekiel* had said that God was to be their shepherd and that he would come and Christ Jesus our Lord said:

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me.

As the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father. (*John* 10, 14.) This reminds us of the description of the unity between Christ and God the Father, given in *St Luke* (10, 22):

All things are delivered to me by my Father, and no one knoweth who the Son is but the Father: and who the Father is but the Son. But Christ goes on explaining the quality and life of the good shepherd:

And I lay down my life for my sheep. And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd. (*John* 10, 15-6.)

It was a mighty claim, no wonder that those unwilling to believe called him mad and were preparing to throw stones at him, for he was equalling himself with God.

After that there is no new title other than the Suffering Servant and Son of Man, both of which I have discussed elsewhere. Let it be said here that between the coming of the kingdom and the announcement of the Saviour, is the passage through suffering, the trial by fire, the purging, the redemption, so vividly prophesied in the psalms and in *Isaias*, and so lovingly carried out by our Lord.

All things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man. For he shall be delivered to the Gentiles and shall be mocked and scourged and spit upon. . . . (*Luke* 18, 31-32.)

But this suffering was only a means to an end, namely the establishment of the Kingdom. How easy it was for the Jews to equate it with the worldly kingdoms that were oppressing them; yet it had only the terminology of such things and it had much besides; and it has only been properly fulfilled in the realm of the spirit through the Church of Christ. *Isaias* expresses it perfectly, showing that the rule is one of justice, not of power or money.

He shall judge the poor with justice and shall reprove with equity

the meek of the earth: and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. And justice shall be the girdle of his loins: and faith the girdle of his reins. . . . In that day the root of Jesse (i.e. Christ), who standeth as an ensign to the people, him the gentiles shall beseech, and his sepulchre shall be glorious. (*Isaias* 11, 4-10.)

When Jesus returned to Nazareth after inaugurating his public life he was invited to read the Bible. He was handed the book of *Isaias*, and there was expectancy in the air; the passage he read was as follows—as given in *St Luke*:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, wherefore he hath anointed me, to preach the Gospel to the poor he hath sent me, to heal the contrite of heart; to preach deliverance to the captives and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward. (4, 41.)

That was the kingdom, in which the triumphs and victories were in the heart, and in which the mighty would be brought low and the humble exalted; in which the rich would be sent empty away and the poor filled with good things. But that was not the only revolution. God was to make a new agreement with his people; the descendants of Abraham, God's people, were to come out from every race. 'All the kings of the earth will prostrate themselves before him, and all the nations will serve him', cries the Psalmist (*Ps.* 71).

This new nation of 'Sons of God' is born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of the will of God. Just as the descent from Abraham is etherealised, made dependent on faith, so is the Old Law transformed into the New engraved on our hearts—and the New Law ratified by a new sacrifice while the old was but a shadow and foretaste of what was to come. Nor was this passed over in silence by the Prophets. *Jeremias* says:

Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make a New Covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Juda. Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers; in the days when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, the covenant which they made void, and I had dominion over them, saith the Lord, but this shall be the covenant that I shall make with the house of Israel, after those days saith the Lord: I will give my laws in their bowels, and I will write it in their hearts: and I will be their God and they will be my people. (*Jeremias* 31, 31.)

And to prove that all this worldly imagery is symbolic he goes on, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more'. That is as clear as the first glimmer of hope at the gates of the Garden of Eden.

The New Covenant will have new priests from all the nations

of the earth, to offer the new sacrifice, for the Gentiles will hear the good news from the remnant of the Jews that were saved:

The time is come to assemble all the nations and all tongues. They will come and they will see my glory; And I will set a sign among them, and I will send of them that shall be saved, to the Gentiles in the sea, into Africa, and Lydia them that shall draw the bow: into Italy and Greece, to the islands afar off, to them that have not heard of me, and have not seen my glory.

And they shall declare my glory to the Gentiles.

And they shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations for a gift to the Lord. . . . and I shall take some even from among them for priests and levites, saith the Lord. (*Isaias* 66, 18.)

Thus we come to Malachy who saw the vision of sacrifice in every place:

For from the rising of the sun even to the going down my name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation. (*Malachy* 1, 11.)

This has always, from the day of the Didache to this, been taken as a prophecy of the sacrifice of the Mass.

So we may take leave of the Prophets as the exponents of the old law and its symbolic importance, of the old promise treasured by that strange little race, who seeing yet did not understand. Christ was the heir to all their history; for their history was one long vigil for Him who was to Come. Yet, it had been prophesied also that they would reject him.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as the bird doth her brood under her wings and thou wouldst not? (*Luke* 13, 34.)