

the Apostle speaks of the first man as of the slime of the earth but the second Man as of heaven. We are meant to be like God, our Father in heaven, like to him *who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust* (Matth. 5, 45). It is at Christ's prompting, then, that we beg to be allowed to offer our prayers for the salvation of all men, that as God's will is done in *heaven*, i.e. in us, for faith brings something of heaven to us, so also it may be done on *earth*, i.e. amongst those who have not the faith. By their first birth they are of the earth, but, by being born again of water and the Holy Ghost, they may begin to be of heaven.

[To be concluded]



DAVID (II)

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DAVID fulfils the long-hoped-for ambition of all Israel in taking Jerusalem, and establishes himself there with the ark of God, the central, sacramental thing in the religion of the chosen people. He is unaware that his own kingly office is to become a no less venerated centre in the dynasty he founds. For to be king of Jerusalem entailed far-reaching consequences. To be the anointed of Israel gave him an office that could be set in rivalry beside the priesthood of the house of Aaron; and to the general populace of Israel (especially the tribes that had no love for Levi and what they deemed its pretensions) he, not the successor of Aaron, was the spiritual head of the nation. This was because the formed religious faith of Israel as seen in later works had but partially or weakly taken root in the nation as a whole, and the pagan tradition of a god-king was both the instinct of humanity in that culture, and the practice of all the neighbours of the Israelite tribes. But to these, the now submissive populace of Canaan, the king of Jerusalem had for at least a thousand years been such a god-king, and to them David's occupation of that office gave him a sacred supremacy, founded on the natural desire of men to see a divinity embodied as a person, in the highly specialised tradition of Jerusalem. This tradition, indeed, dated

from an earlier period of primitive monotheism, not totally obscured by the ever-increasing corruption of morality and worship which contrasted so sharply with the higher and purer cult of the Israelite invaders.

This cult included the notion of a sacerdotal kingship entrusted with moral even more than physical power, and charged with responsibilities as well as with authority. It is worth while, on this point, considering how David came to conceive of it in the last years of his life. To assume this role did not impair his faith in Jahweh, for had not Moses himself learnt from the cult of Jethro something of the true God? David's faith accepted all that came as from the hand of providence, even what might, from a narrow viewpoint, seem to be opposed to Jahweh. We might compare his assumption of this kingly office with the papal taking of the pagan title of *Pontifex Maximus* when the ascendancy of the Roman emperors passed to that of the Roman Bishop. Included in this kingship was the taking of many wives, seemingly a whole harem (perhaps the brides of the kings of subject peoples), in a manner that seems incompatible with Christian notions of a man of decently controlled appetites, still less of a saint. But the duty and the role of the increase of one's kind in Israel was so evident a law that while the most stringent purity was required it went along with a frankness about sex and a freedom in its exercise that emptied it of much of the danger that would now attend it, nor was there that association of reticence with reverence which the later Jews themselves have done more to propagate than any other nation. The emotion of love was so strong and the faith of Israel rested so fundamentally on the first command to Adam and Eve, that David could, and apparently did, pursue a mystical life under physical conditions that seem at first sight impossible.

Amidst these splendours, both worldly and spiritual, it was revealed to David through a prophet, Nathan, who was for him a successor of Samuel, that his race was to be established in Jerusalem for ever. Also he was told that from his line was to come the mysterious future king, the promised Great Prophet of Israel, in accordance with the rather indeterminate prophecy that¹ had been handed down for generations. He might indeed have been tempted to think of himself as this predicted king; it must be accounted to

1. cf. Deuteronomy 18, 15.

him for humility that he did not. He accepted the prophecy with a due sense of unworthiness (2 Sam. 7, 18); and henceforth he himself becomes, though not often in expressed words, a prophet, whose predictions of the Messiah is an advance upon the brief words of Jacob and Moses, though falling far short of the teachings of Isaiah and his successors. Such was the holiness of this future King that David, innocent as he was, learnt that he was not to build a temple to Jahweh because he was a man of war; as if his own personal devotion and even perfection were not enough for the holiness of God.

Meanwhile David was extending his rule over all Palestine, Syria and beyond Jordan, and the wars he now conducted, the prayers he uttered and the hymns he wrote, were not only for himself but for the whole people of God. His kingship, of necessity in such a culture, imparted a fatherly influence and met with a filial response from all his subjects; for the corporate spirit of tribal peoples is swayed by the institutional headship of society in respects where the individualised western seeks and finds his own personality. He represented all, and now began to exercise that character-moulding force on Israel which later generations made lasting by their record of his poetry and prayer which perpetuated it.

Among these peoples was Ammon, the most unpleasant, apparently, of Israel's neighbours. David performed a characteristic deed of generosity (for no feature of his character is more outstanding than magnanimity in every form) which, as is the practice with the degenerate and mean, the Ammonites presumed upon and treated with contumely. David was determined to take a vengeance on them, and besieged Rabbath Ammon. He was himself by then held to be too precious of person to go forth to war and stayed in Jerusalem. And perhaps in consequence there fell on him a temptation which he failed to resist. The story of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite is a tragedy in the strictest sense. One touch of pride, of elation, moved him, and he fell, and this on the very occasion that he was vindicating the nobility of moral idealism which gives him a unique place among the monarchs of his age. Still worse, the sin he committed was the very sin he had found Saul trying to commit against himself. The shadow of Saul's sinister soul had fallen on him and had left an unhealed wound. Unknown to himself, because unconscious, the will of that king,

a man whom he had feared and revered as the anointed of God, had impressed itself upon his own emotional life; and this habit of feeling, suddenly stirred, prompts him to perform an act of like nature under the guise of a desire to exercise a kingly privilege in obtaining a fair woman. One redeeming trait exculpates him from the blackest guilt: he did not directly slay Uriah, but left his death to chance which was in his conscience, leaving it to providence: an excuse Saul also could have claimed. But in this case the plot fell out according to the plotter's desires, and gave his intention the sinister character of a graver evil. Nathan brought home to him in penetrating terms the heinousness of his offence. David was a man of great passions and largehearted emotion. On his realising how he had sinned, he repented, and his penitence stands alone in the spiritual history of mankind. Even St Peter's tears after his denial are scarce as poignant, for this man had led a life of perfect virtue, and his sin was profound and ignominious. He fasted, wept and grovelled for seven days; and though he said to his servants that he was hoping and praying for the life of the child that was born of his sin, against the prediction of Nathan, it is probable that, while thus hoping, he was in the intimacy of his soul more fearful that the child would live and his sin not be forgiven, than that in its death he should receive confirmation of the prophet's word, punishment and the hope of pardon.

A moral collapse, so gross, to so low a level, in a man in whom virtue had so splendidly reigned, in whom innocence had gone hand in hand with achievement, is beyond the measure of imagination to conceive, almost beyond tears. It epitomises the fall of man itself. It needs no idealisation of David, the man after God's own heart, to see the chasm between what he had been and what he became, the hero and the common sinner. It was his one, his only, grave sin, but enough, alas, to spoil all that he had been. Hardly less than the fact of this fall was the suffering he endured in his own esteem. The noble-minded suffer acutely from moral failure, and where the objective motive of God's glory is from a lesser grace, as under the Mosaic dispensation, the human instigation to virtue is stronger and the shame and humiliation the more bitter. In his ignominy David found a humility he had never before either known or needed, for a selfless love of life, of men, of God is itself sufficient to take a man out of himself too much to leave him any pride. But the remedy for positive

pride is positive humility, and this he learnt in a repentance which, when he knew he was forgiven, he saw he still had to work out.

Nothing but this repentance could have wrung from the heart of any man the 50th psalm, which is outstanding even among David's. The whole gamut of sin, sorrow and repentance is there expressed as nowhere else in Scripture or in merely human history. What happened in that week of suffering, prayer and self-abasement can be in part only conjectured. He saw not only his sin, but his sinfulness, the fact that no man born is clean in God's sight, that all are prone to evil; the Fall, in short, became clear to him. But more happened, for David's soul melted and was recast, and he emerged a different man, the man who became the ideal of future Israel and the prophet of the Messiah in a fuller sense. He discovered the need of a redemption, and the promise of a deliverer; he found how greatly he needed the grace of God, and it was revealed to him through whom it should come. The Messiah that was to be born of his stock was to be more than an earthly deliverer. He was to achieve the priestly as well as kingly work of atoning for sin, as well as ruling justly, and for restoring to God that glory which David's unretractable sin had cast away. God's love was to grant to mankind that Saviour who because he was sinless was to bear all men's sin, and until David had himself known sin he could not have known salvation. All the good he had ever received he had had from the God whom he had offended; and now he was to receive from him pardon through one who was to come after him and would be preferred before him.

How David came to know Christ deserves consideration. To the elementary inchoate but not inaccurate metaphysic of Hebrew thought, the future Messiah would be a true man in the flesh, his heir, yet at the same time perfect and therefore in some way divine. He would be identical with what God expected of him, which was what David had now discovered was far from realised in himself. If to be perfect as man is to be divine, he knew the Messiah to be divine. That he ultimately came to see that he was divine even in the sense that he was Jahweh the Creator was the last light of David's life, the fruit of long meditation on the mystery he then learnt. He found in sin that the sacramental office of the God-king was not truly his, save in type, but would be the Messiah's in right and reality. Of this his own was but a participation, a gift

granted undeservedly, yet reposing in himself as far as he responded to the predestined exemplar of his own life as it had for ever been in God's knowledge.

Penance came to him at the hands of providence. His dearest son, his beloved Absalom, rebelled against him, and he was robbed alike of affection, of honour, of the hope of the future, even of the prospect of retaining his throne. He went through this furnace of affliction, submissive to the purging hand of God. He came to see new and deeper truths about his kingship as a priesthood, and his priesthood as one of suffering as well as reigning. He found that from humiliation comes greater good than if there were neither sin nor suffering; for what is this but the answer to the Fall? What but the consequence of freedom with all its glories and terrors? From this epoch come mysterious prophecies of the Messiah. This is not the place to discuss the Davidic authorship of these or any psalms, but there are strong objections to attributing many of them to any lesser man, on a purely human argument, once it is granted that grace is built on nature. The knowledge of a higher priesthood, exemplified in his own atoning office, and of a future spiritual kingship more exalted than his own, even a glimpse of the divine nature of Christ, can be discerned as factors in the revelation made to David, especially in the 21st and 109th psalms. These, with others, record an interior life richer, more ample, more gentle and pious in mood than those of his youth; and though he was restored fully to that old confidence he seemed for a time to have forfeited for ever, his note is now not

My soul is at peace with God . . .

I shall never be shaken (61, 2-3)

but a searching for the divine light that came fitfully amidst obscurities and lapses, as of

Make known to me the way I go

For to thee do I lift up my soul (142, 8).

In this spiritual heritage of prayer and exultation was moulded the devotion of all later Judaism, and the life of the Church has taken and used as the staple of its worship the intensely human piety of the son of Jesse, the sweet songster of Israel.