

lypse often gives *completing* scenes in the great drama of God and creatures from creation to consummation. Thus in the Prologue of St John, our Lord as pre-existent is called *Logos*, in virtue of his cosmological rôle in the creation of all; this same *Logos* becomes flesh and is the subject of the whole Gospel. In the Apocalypse, our Lord is *Logos* because of his eschatological rôle as divine avenger and protagonist in the struggle against the enemies of the Kingdom. This is particularly clear in chap. 19, where the stage is set for universal history, and the subject is the totality of our Lord's triumphs, up to and including the Parousia. 'With the armies that are in heaven', he is the triumphant victor who makes an end of iniquity and of Satan the '*caput omnium malorum*'. Thus the Risen Word of God vindicates God's goodness and is agent for the restoration of the divine plan for the universe, as he had been for its first founding. At the term is a promise of a new creation, 'Behold I make all things new' (21, 5. Cf. 2 Cor. 5, 17). As in the Prologue, the background is creation, and the truth conveyed to our minds is that the Redemption has restored and more than bettered God's first plan for the happiness of mankind and the destiny of all creation.

Fittingly the last book of Scripture closes on a sublime note of restoration and universal cosmic reintegration, in part actualised, for the rest, yet to come. 'Come, Lord Jesus.'



DAVID

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DAVID was a man after God's own heart.¹ The saying is founded on certain qualities in the psalmist, prophet, king, conqueror, which mark him out as distinct from all the other saints and heroes of either Testament. Among these qualities was this: that he was, if not an 'ordinary' man, a norm among men. He was extraordinary only by not being in the striking mode of most holy men, extraordinary. He worked no miracles like Moses, suffered no crushing humiliation like Job, saw no vision like Isaias, had not to hope against hope like Abraham. He was, to ordinary men, an ordinary man, and his

¹ 1 Kings 13, 14. We omit other references from 1 Kings 16 to 3 Kings 1.

greatness lies therein. He had strong human desires and enjoyments, but did not permit anything human to interfere with his service to his God; and that he sometimes lapsed, and once lapsed gravely, adds to his normality and even, in the long run, to his sanctity. He was intensely alive and intensely human in his desires, his ambitions, and his affections, yet free from base self-love and the sophistication which corrupts the purity of a man's character. He accepted the moral standard of his age, yet neither in his career as a bandit leader who attained a throne, nor in his almost sensual affection for Jonathan, nor even perhaps in his cruelties against defeated Ammon, nor in his taking to himself the many wives that custom allowed, did he overstep the mark set by nature, by piety and by wholehearted submission to and fulfilment of the will of God, which is the way of life; save in the matter of Bath-Sheba.

Although Moses is the lawgiver of Israel, it is in David that we find most clearly portrayed in the Old Testament the image of the just man, a judgment that later ages made with so emphatic a voice that he was set up as the hero and model of virtue in Israel. It is even humanly natural, as well as providentially fitting, that David should have supplanted the figure of the unique and inimitable Moses as the ideal to which the people of God was invited to conform itself as it approached its destiny as the nation that brought forth the Messiah; and so completely did his spirit imbue the nation, through the psalms and the idealised history of the Paralipomena, that it is he whose character may be detected as the inspiration of the good Jew even today. This is due, among other reasons, to his having lived and flourished in an age when an ideal that can be called 'humanistic' was dawning amongst men, and his piety includes in its scope the fullness of human nature as well as the obligations man lies under before his Creator. It is, in history, the age of Homer and the discovery of Man.

The life of David exhibits, then, the growth of one humanly as well as spiritually great. There are two sources from which to gather a true picture of him: the accounts, partial and to some slight degree confused, in the books of 'Kings' (1 Kings 16-3 Kings 1) and the psalms.² Neither is a safe guide to the man without the other, and both must be correlated with the whole of Hebrew history and literature, that is, the whole of the Old Testament,

² That a sufficient majority of psalms are his, reconciles tradition and criticism.

with Hebrew thought and custom, and with the natural law which prescribes the rule by which both are to be understood, if his place in history is to be accurately estimated. Still more, the consummation, the divine Redeemer, the New Testament and the Church, hold the key to the final understanding of what he was and what he stood for. Relying on these sure sources, the life, and above all the interior life, of the king, prophet, poet and saint can be outlined with some security, and to some degree, at least tentatively, suggested as to detail.

David in his youth was a shepherd. He was the youngest of the sons³ of Jesse, head of a once princely clan in the tribe of Judah. His status, if not base, was certainly not exalted, even in a society free from sharp distinctions of rank.

David was devout. From the communion with nature which his daily life afforded he enriched his ancestral faith in God, the Creator and Preserver, by all that prayer and meditation could bring him. He grew in trust and courage, and built up a resolute character founded on God. For men resolute and courageous were plentiful enough in Israel, then on the point of claiming that ascendancy in Canaan which numbers and success were inviting it to seize. With this rising spirit, much spirituality that had survived or flourished in times of oppression had waned. Success had generated a sense of new power, and many men found and utilised opportunities of ambition, greed and pride which had not been open to the nomad tribes that had entered the land some three centuries before. It is a sign of the divine purposes throughout the story of Israel that the man who came to so singular a pre-eminence in his people should have been one of so pure a conscience and so noble a mould.

The first notable event in David's life was his slaying a lion which had set upon the flocks he tended. This story is from 1 Kings 17, 34-5. The feat gave the youth a firm sense of divine protection, in his defence of his life and in the pursuit of his aims. That Ps. 8 '*Domine, dominus noster*' is the fruit of this incident is a hypothesis that might be put forward without absurdity, though it is beyond possibility of proof or disproof. The mastery of a young man over the strongest of the beasts might well have led to a reflection on the whole realm of human power and the God who had given it him. The impression left on his mind lasts throughout his life, and

³ See 1 Kings 16, 10, and I Para. 2, 13, 14.

the image or metaphor of attack by a lion serves to describe any attack, physical or spiritual, in which he was tried, and his confidence confirmed;⁴ nor, from the commonness of such a circumstance in Israel, is it only in his own writings that this figure of speech appears. It becomes a piece of the poetic lore of Israel. The second event in his life of which we have knowledge was his success in battle against the Philistines. It is difficult to reconstruct the course of events from the tales told. Whether Saul discovered that his harpist was also a soldier, or that a young warrior who had shown prowess was also a harpist,⁵ he left his flocks for the primitive court of the newly chosen king and there showed skill in music. This is nothing remarkable when verse, of which the parallelistic form is but a simple effort of thought, was produced impromptu on any occasion that demanded it; that David became the creator of a form as well as the mover of a spirit in such composition, marks a stage in the development of both Hebrew spirituality and of literary sense, second only to the majestic epic prose style which was but one aspect of the inheritance Moses had bequeathed to Israel.

David thus achieves his introduction to all the glory and all the temptation of both military prowess and court life, without losing his innocence of soul or purity of intention. He is able to charm away the melancholia of Saul; he becomes his armour-bearer, then a captain, and in the course of a few years, one of his chief officers, and finally, his son-in-law. He is triumphantly successful as soldier and courtier, and naturally earns the hatred or dislike of several rivals, as well as the admiration of the many. He was prosperous, popular, capable, attractive, and above all God-fearing, and there is no doubt that this last quality was his greatest strength even in the eyes of the nation as a whole. Adolescence and such success brought spiritual maturity. In him is realised perfectly the dictum of St Thomas Aquinas, 'By the trust we now posit as a part of fortitude a man had confidence in himself, but all the same in subjection to God' (II-II, 128, 1 ad 2).

Among those who fell foul of David was Saul himself. Exaltation had elated the Benjamite. That one on whom the spirit of God had come as king over his people should be no better in his own eyes and no happier than this man his servant, twenty years

4 A textual difficulty of the O.T. The act of prowess was fused later with traditions.

5 Pss. 7, 3; 16, 12; 21, 14; 34, 17; 56, 5.

younger than himself, and raised at his own command, might well have tempted any man to jealousy. But beauty and innocence were added to his qualities, things for lack of which kingship is no consolation. The roots of human nature were bared in Saul's soul, and he saw in the contrast his own shortcomings. 'There is a daily beauty in his life which makes me ugly.' (*Othello* V, 1, 18.)—such is the best interpretation of his mind. His melancholy became more acute, and increased with the growth of an obsessive jealousy. It may be universally true that mental disorders are basically moral disorders. It is certainly unquestionably so in unsophisticated societies. Saul's obsession was due to bad conscience, and the sharp contrast of David's good conscience brought him to the verge of insanity. His own confidence had always been largely self-confidence, not the godly trust which was the atmosphere of Israel, even among the many whose vices may have been crude but were not against a fundamental 'rightness with God'. In Benjamin, perhaps, there was a tribal weakness making many prone to vice, as Judges chs. 19-21 suggests. All forms of perversion as of sin are basically self-love in place of an objective love, and Saul's virtue, his courage, his pride, even his humility were contaminated by introverted emotionalism, without frank self-knowledge and the simplicity and truth that might have saved him from jealousy of one better than himself. Such a character is by no means lacking in 'personality' (as many great men in the course of history demonstrate well enough), but such eminence is warped by a spiritual weakness, usually inculpable, but below the demands of moral leadership such as were implicit as an ideal in the corporate life of Israel. This mental malady, which David had come to charm away, resulted perhaps naturally in an attack on his life, motivated by that force as if it were a living thing. Saul tried to pin David to the wall with a javelin.

This was a crisis in David's life. Ordinary vice he could understand and resist, morally or physically, if need be. But so unsolicited an attack by a man he had no reason to fear, or to suspect of disliking him, was beyond his comprehension, and he learnt for the first time profound fear, an inward terror. For the supreme cause of fear is ignorance, and the mysterious workings of a disordered mind are beyond the reach of common understanding, even in the most just and perspicacious. Love going unrequited, or meeting with unreasoned hate, is a challenge to life and love as

these are found by a good man as the basis of all relationships, human and divine, and as they mature with experience into the full love of God and man. This challenge put David's faith to trial, and from it he learnt a greater fear and trust in God—for the gifts of the Holy Ghost do not operate mechanically, but by a co-ordinated increase, and greater fear of man elicits greater fear of God, while this in the virile soul is followed up at once by no less great a fortitude—and at the same time he learnt to know more of men.

But he never came to understand Saul's insane hate, and it left a lasting impress on his soul, which in modern language can be described as a complex left in his subconscious, a fixation in the phantasy which he was unable to unravel or explain, and was therefore the source of a lasting and indissoluble fear. For fear can with an effort be dispelled when its causes are found and its force counteracted by deliberate will. This David could not effect, as seems clear from the fact that when he sinned, he committed the very offence that Saul had striven to commit against himself: the procuring of death by putting his rival in a position of danger.

David fled the court. He dared not touch the anointed of Jahweh. He knew he was guiltless. He knew not whence another blow might come, nor when, nor how nor why. Perhaps the robust confidence with which he dealt with men was stretched to the limits of the permissible in what followed, for he became a popular leader little removed from a brigand chief, in the South of Judah, among his own clans. To see this in an unfavourable light is absurd, for in that nomadic world a moral standard prevailed which might indeed horrify men in the twentieth century, as much as our usury and tolerance of it would have horrified them.

To be forced to a leadership, in defence of his life, in circumstances that he could not but suspect would lead to a kingship, was a wide field for the high adventure of a God-fearing young man. He was at an age when, if life presents opportunities, it is instinctive to embrace them; and virtue in its widest sense so informs the soul that conscience observed from day to day leads on to fortune. He had already made or renewed his acquaintance with Samuel, and he formed an alliance with the Aaronite clan, and found a deserved favour with the guardians of all that was sacrosanct in Israel, the ancient priesthood who saw that it was not in God's plan that Saul should long remain.

On the other hand, his followers—men of dispossessed clans, victims of Philistine wars, younger sons seeking land, bravadoes out for adventure, refugees from vendettas, escaped slaves and servants, were at best a very mixed company, far from disciplined or pacific, and as their chief David learnt much more than he ever knew before of the weakness and wickedness of men. His own consciousness of virtue was enhanced by daily contrast with his followers, men over whom he exercised a power freely conceded; in them hero-worship was mingled with the reverential awe that lies deep in the most unruly, if they are not altogether bad, and comes to the fore when they meet with striking goodness coupled with attractive ability. From this era come, it is safe to hazard, the greater part of the psalms undoubtedly David's, for literary exuberance goes hand in hand with outward activity and popularity; and the tale of treacheries, disappointments, the outbursts of trust and triumph, which constitute a spiritual scale sounding every note of the inner feelings of the godly warrior come mostly from this period of experiences, objurgations, and disgust at the varying characters of men among whom his own seemed stable by reason of its God-centredness and resplendent with unassuming superiority.

Religious scruple kept David from the least attempt to supplant Saul, even when the latter set out against him in the field. If that was to come, it was to come at the hands of providence, the supreme guide of his life, the hand of God in events outside himself; and it must even then come so manifestly from God that he would not lift a hand against Saul even when opportunity presented itself of killing him unawares. No deed of his more endears him to mankind than this act of chivalry, nor more reveals the spiritual laws which were the light of his life.

With increasing success he became acknowledged king of Judah, and reigned in Hebron; the death of Saul opened the way for him to attain the kingship of Israel. The note of these two periods in his rise to power is still innocence, virtue consciously triumphant and a splendid exultation in battle and victory. Trial, when it comes, comes to one who knows no guilt; desolation and all the experience he had learnt in love's first failure to find response set upon his soul the seal of interior affliction, but he returns to his full confidence in prayer and patience time and time again.