

*CHRIST AND THE SAMARITANS.*

HE who would trace out the footprints of the Lord during his earthly ministry has not to travel far to find them. They lie for the most part along the well-beaten paths of religion and of trade, or they circle around the chief centres of Judæa and Galilee. At first sight it appears strange that He, who was the promised "seed of Abraham," who was both the "Shiloh" and "Sceptre" of Israel, who was the central vision of Jewish prophecies and the antitype of the gorgeous Hebrew ritual, should in his life pay so little heed to Jewish prejudice and tradition. Hebron, with its honoured sepulchre, is not once visited, as far as the Gospel records shew. Bethlehem, the royal city, does not appear in the Gospel narrative after the Advent, and with the sad wail of Rachel, silence falls upon the "house of bread." Carmel—home of the rugged prophet and scene of a stupendous miracle—often rose up in the vision of the Christ as it kept its solitary watch by the sea, but no footprints of the Master can we discover on its slope. Perhaps the reason for this disregard of holy sites and shrines may be found in the self-appropriated title, "Son of Man." To Jesus, Judaism is nothing but a name, a shadow. Nationality has no place in the mind of Christ, it is all given up to humanity instead; and so, while again and again He styles Himself "Son of Man," He never once calls Himself "Son of Abraham." The whole ministry of Jesus may be divided into two sections, the Galilean and Judæan. Taking Capernaum as a centre, and describing a circle with a radius of ten

miles, we shall include nearly the whole of what we may call the Galilean Gospels; while taking the Temple as a centre, and describing another circle of equal radius, we shall include nearly all of the Judæan Gospels. Between these two points the life of Christ oscillated.

Separating the two provinces was a strip of country inhabited by a mongrel semi-alien race, the Samaritan. It is not to our purpose to account for the ever-widening breach that lay between Samaritan and Jew. It is sufficient to know that the rancour of national jealousy had been embittered by the addition of the *odium theologicum*, until between the neighbouring but rival races a wide chasm had been formed which completely severed both their religious and their commercial life. The Jew scorned the Samaritan, the Samaritan hated the Jew; and in the days of Christ the Hebrew Separatist would not even accept a kindness at the hands of the despised ἀλλογενής. Here then is a problem, How will Christ treat this long-standing feud? Coming to correct abuses, to restore society upon another and firmer basis, what will He do with the deep abyss of prejudice which runs athwart his path? Will He pass around it, and simply ignore the strange phenomenon? Will He by word and action widen the chasm already too deep and wide? Or will He exalt the valley and bring low the mountain, that He may join the twain in one? Let us see.

1. *When Christ speaks of the Samaritans it is in words of favour and of commendation.* In St. Luke (Chap. xvii. 11-20) we have the narrative of a remarkable healing, which the other Evangelists omit.

Coming to "a certain village," a strange cry greets the Master. Over in front, some distance off, ten lepers stand. Reaching out their scaly hands, they cry aloud (*ἤραν φωνήν*), "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Without waiting to come up to them—for the *ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς* must have a quick response—Jesus replies, "Go, shew yourselves unto the priests." Miraculously cleansed while passing hastily along the road, the nine stay not a moment to thank the wonderful Healer; but one returns to give glory to God, falling prostrate in his gratitude at the feet of his new-found Saviour. St. Luke tells us, laconically, "And he was a Samaritan." But Christ does more. He draws a comparison between the thankless nine and the grateful one, and turning round to his Jewish auditors, He speaks words of commendation that go resounding up into heaven, "There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." "This stranger." What a rebuke to their national pride! As if He said, "'Stranger,' you call him, but he was co-heir of suffering and woe with your nine countrymen; and, more noble than they, he has returned to give God thanks." The Son of Man finds humanity hidden in the guise of Samaritan speech and leprous scales, and He stoops to embrace it, to exalt it. In a Samaritan He finds the truest worship of Jehovah, offered not on Moriah, nor yet on Gerizim, but by the wayside.

Another occasion when Christ is led to speak favourably of the Samaritans, is in the exquisite parable (if it be a parable) of the good Samaritan. We need not repeat the details of the hapless journey

and misadventure of the "certain man" who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. We have again the same comparison drawn between the Samaritan and Jew, to the eternal honour of the one and the eternal shame of the other. In this case, however, the lines of comparison are made more sharp and vivid. The ten lepers occupied the same low level of physical suffering and social outlawry; but now the Samaritan is placed beside the very *élite* of Judaism, the Priest and Levite, and the Master uses their selfish inhumanity as a foil to throw out more clearly and brightly the noble generosity of the "stranger." And, by the way, how comes the Samaritan here, in the dangerous defile near the Jordan? True, the necessities of business might call him thither, but it almost seems a going out of the way—an *anatopism*, if we might call it so—to set down the Samaritan so far from the ordinary routes of Samaritan travel. But it serves the Master's purpose. He has answered the broad question, "Who is my neighbour?" and at the same time He has lifted out of the mire a name which for long centuries has been trodden under foot of prejudice and pride. Henceforth through the ages mankind awards its praise and lavishes its admiration, not upon the Priest- or Levite-Jew, the heartless hirelings of the Temple, but upon the anonymous "stranger," who sacrifices oil, and wine, and money, nay, even himself, to the need and misfortune of a beaten deserted foreigner.<sup>1</sup>

Nowhere else—except in one instance which we shall notice shortly—do we find amongst the words

<sup>1</sup> His nationality is implied in the narrative.

of Christ any mention of the Samaritans ; but among his unrecorded sayings there were doubtless many references to the outcast race. Indeed, in one place we find the Jews charging Him with being Himself a Samaritan (John viii. 48). True, the Rabbis tell us this expression was often used as a by-word of reproach and anger, but in this case it is something more than a taunt flung red-hot from the hasty lips of Passion. It assumes the nature of a deliberate charge. What was a mere whisper has passed into a common rumour ; and the rumour, rolled on from mouth to mouth, has grown, like a man of snow, into solidity and shape. It is no longer the hasty taunt, but the summing-up of what was common conversation among them. "*Say we not well* that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" And why should they speak thus? Surely not because they are in doubt as to his nationality, for it was well known that He came forth from Galilee, from Nazareth. But it might be—may we not say it *must* be?—because of his strong Samaritan leanings. He has visited them, has often spoken of them, has held them up to their gaze ; and that, not as the refuse of humanity, fit only for the Gehenna of perdition, but as models for their imitation. This is the vinegar which sets their teeth on such rough edge, and makes their lips speak in caustic rasping words. And, by the way, it is worth a passing note how Jesus replies to the double accusation. The second charge, "Thou hast a devil," He answers with a solemn οὐκ ἔχω : but to the former charge, "Thou art a Samaritan," He deigns no reply, He answers only by an eloquent silence.

2. *Christ seeks to remove the prejudice of his dis-*

*iples by personal contact with the despised race.* In the commission given to the Twelve we find one command that seems to run contrary to the whole drift of Christ's teaching and example. He tells them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Matt. x. 5). What means this exception to the general rule of Christ's words, and to the general tenour of his life? The reason lies not far off. The disciples are yet men of narrow views; the angles of their sharp prejudices have not yet been worn down by friction with the outer world. What right (to their mind) have the Gerizim idolaters to the privileges of this new kingdom when David's throne is rebuilt upon the ruins of a Cæsar's? How can the Galilean fishermen chaunt the Bethlehem refrain, "Good will toward men," when they are ready to call down upon those who slight them the swift avenging fire from heaven? Here, then, is the reason, and the only one. The disciples themselves are lacking in the essential qualifications for a Samaritan ministry. Their dreams of earthly aggrandizement must be laid aside; ambition must give place to love; their bigotries must be plucked up by the root and burned in the fire of Pentecost; their sympathies must be broadened and deepened; from the Son of Man they must learn the lesson of humanity, before they can thrust their sickles into the harvests that wave and whiten upon Samaritan fields. Till then the Saviour's command is but the language of Infinite Wisdom, where insight ripens into foresight.

And how does Jesus discipline his followers, and tone down their rough prejudices? By bringing

them into personal contact with the Samaritans. In St. John (Chap. iv. 4) we have a somewhat singular expression. They are about to make the journey from Jerusalem to Galilee, and the Evangelist inserts a brief sentence which is itself the key of the whole chapter: "And he must needs go through Samaria." Now why was this *ἐδει* — this needs-be? Was it because this was the only possible route? Nay, there were at least three roads leading from Jerusalem to Galilee: one veering to the west, and joining the main caravan-road along by the sea; another striking eastward, and passing Jericho up by the *ghior* of the Jordan; while the third led northward by Bethel and Sychar. Although the third route was most direct, the others were frequently taken. Indeed, the Jordan road was often chosen in preference by the Jews, just for the sake of evading intercourse with the hated Samaritans; and once at least the Lord led his disciples up to Jerusalem by way of Jericho (St. Luke xix). It was not therefore any topographical needs-be that now compelled the Saviour to take the northern route. It was rather the necessity of some hidden purpose lying deep in the mind of Christ, a purpose we may read in the expanded details of the journey. He leads his disciples through the heart of the alien country. By Jacob's well, by Joseph's sepulchre, by Gerizim with its blessings and by Ebal with its heavy curses, He reminds them of their common origin, how Samaritans and Jews are fellow-heirs of a glorious history. But more. He sends them to do business with the men of Sychar, to "buy meat." He brings them face to face, voice to voice, that they may recognize their common brother-

lood ; that in the exchange of commodities and coins there may be a softening of prejudice, with all the enlightenment of a nearer vision and closer intercourse. Yea, more ; He puts around his disciples the bonds of guesthood : for when the dream of the Messiah dawns upon the Samaritan mind, and they believe upon Christ, they cannot allow the new Sun which has appeared in their heavens to pass away with the daylight. They pressed around Christ, and "besought<sup>1</sup> him that he would tarry with them" (*Verse* 40); and we read, "He abode there two days." The narrative is silent as to what occurred during the two memorable days of the sojourn at Sychar. We are simply told that many more were led through his persuasive and convincing word to accept Him as *ὁ σωτήρ τοῦ κόσμου*, "the Saviour of the world," a higher title than the disciples even have as yet given the Lord.<sup>2</sup> Still we may easily fill up the picture drawn in outline to our hand. There would be, doubtless, a rivalry of proffered hospitality, and nowhere in the land would Christ and his disciples be more welcome guests than in this city. "Friend of publicans and sinners," did He find a home beneath the sin-stained roof of the nameless repentant one? From *this* desecrated temple did He drive forth the dark wings of lust and sin by the glorious light of his presence and his love, making it thus a fit abode for a new, a pure faith? We

<sup>1</sup> The *ἠρώτων* implies continued action ; "they kept on asking," as if they would take no denial.

<sup>2</sup> Only once before has the title *Σωτήρ* been applied to Christ, and that was in the angel-song at Bethlehem. The hills of Samaria thus give us the first echo of that song, and while the disciples yet look upon Christ as the Restorer of Israel, Samaria's faith outstrips them, and lays the "world" at the feet of Christ.



may only guess the answer. But where are the disciples? They are brought into close contact with the "strangers," they converse with them, they seal the contract of friendship by eating bread with them, they sleep on couches spread by Samaritan hands; and, lo! their sleep is just as sweet as if they lay within the shadow of the Temple walls, or as if they were lulled to rest by the soft-lapping waves of their own Gennesareth. The old prejudice is removed, the icy reserve is thawed out in the warmth and glow of friendly courtesies; and as they go out after the two days' sojourn, they carry with them a bright memory and a broadened charity.

3. *Christ offered to the Samaritans the privileges of his kingdom.* We need not repeat the familiar story, how Jesus sat wearied by the well; nor need we draw out the many lessons of the noontide conversation. How natural and cautious is his approach! How, little by little, He lets the light fall upon the eyes, and down into the shadowed heart of the Samaritan sinner! How He pursues the soul, and drives it from one refuge to another, until, like Noah's dove, it flies panting and weary to the Ark! With what calm majesty He replies to her light and flippant speech!<sup>1</sup> And how at last He breaks upon her ear the wonderful secret of his Messiahship!<sup>2</sup> To win the erring spirit to purity and to faith, He steps over the line of Jewish conventionality; He deigns to speak to, and to ask a favour from, a Samaritan woman. In her ears He speaks one of the sub-

<sup>1</sup> The *λαλιάν* of *Verse 42* is, perhaps, a key-word to her character. There is more speech than reason, more word than wit. It is the *φωνή* rather than the *λόγος*. See Alford *in loco*.

<sup>2</sup> It is the *ἐγώ εἰμι*, the I AM of the New Dispensation.

time discourses of his ministry; and now, hard by the mount where the Law's benedictions fell, there comes another blessing, the crowning one of all, the confession of his Messiahship. Nor does the work stop here, for many of the Samaritans find in Jesus the fulfilment of their long-deferred hopes, the "prophet like unto Moses." They recognize in Him the Shiloh of their "father Jacob," and they lay the homage of their hearts down at the feet of David's Son, the Saviour, the Christ!

And what is the result of all this? Why, the chasm is filled up; the estrangement of centuries is reconciled; Judæa and Samaria are joined in one by the double ties of nationality and humanity. And as we pass beyond the cross and the tomb, we hear the last charge falling from the lips of Christ: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, *and in Samaria*, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i. 8). "To the Jew first," as is befitting, the promises of the Gospel must come; but Samaria must occupy the second place. And so, after the first baptism of Pentecost, and the second baptism of blood, we read, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria,<sup>1</sup> and preached Christ unto them" (Acts viii. 5).

At length the prayer is answered, and into the fields "white unto harvest" the labourers come to reap and to rejoice, for "there was great joy in that city" (Acts viii. 8). And then we see Peter and John—the very John who would fain have called down fire upon them before—coming along the familiar road, where each hill and valley reminds them of Him who

<sup>1</sup> Probably Sychar. Comp. the εἰς πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας of St. John iv. 5

has vanished into heaven, to lay hands upon the Samaritan converts, and to build up the first Christian Church outside Jerusalem. Henceforth, to the Christian heart, the Samaritan is no more the "stranger," but a "fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God."

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THE HOLINESS OF JESUS CHRIST.

II. BUT would it therefore be true to say that, in realizing in this manner the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ, we break the link which binds Him to our humanity, and that this character, which raises Him to such a height in our eyes, is gained at the cost of another more precious still to our hearts; that so He would cease to be like us, our Brother, the Son of Man, in the full meaning of that expression?

By no means, for this holiness, however absolutely perfect, has, none the less, characteristics perfectly human, and which clearly distinguish it from the holiness of God.

1. The holiness of God is unchangeable, it cannot grow. Like God Himself, it *is*. That of Jesus rose step by step till it reached its final perfection. Is it not said of Him as a child, and again as a young man, that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"? This development was not merely in appearance; it was a profound moral reality, since it is said that this progress was accomplished not in the eyes of man only, but of God.

Perhaps you think that this idea of progress implies the fact of sin? Not so; it is possible to grow