

A Perfect Standard.—The weights and measures of Great Britain and her dependencies are regulated by certain lengths of bronze and masses of platinum in charge of the office of Standards of the Board of Trade. These, of course, might by time or accident become altered. It is therefore desirable to have certain standards which, so far as human ingenuity can ensure them, are protected against change. These have been provided by Act of Parliament, and are preserved and immured in the wall of the House. Every twenty years the standard yard and weight used by the Board of Trade are brought to Parliament, and carefully compared with the absolute standards therein preserved.—W. L. WATKINSON, *The Education of the Heart*, 63.

The Inward Judge.

The soul itself its awful witness is.
Say not in evil doing, 'No one sees,'
And so offend the conscious One within,
Whose ear can hear the silences of sin
Ere they find voice, whose eyes unsleeping see
The secret motions of iniquity.
Nor in thy folly say, 'I am alone.'

For, seated in thy heart, as on a throne,
The ancient Judge and Witness liveth still,
To note thy act and thought; and as thy ill
Or good goes from thee, far beyond thy reach,
The solemn Doomsman's seal is set on each.

WHITTIER.

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The Dawn of the Messianic Consciousness.

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II.

CAN we now, with some help from conjecture, frame any explanation to ourselves what this Messianic consciousness may have meant to Jesus? We must begin with the words of the voice from heaven, or rather with the O. T. sayings which these words call up. The passages in question occur at Ps 2⁷ and at Is 42¹; in the Transfiguration narrative, as many have pointed out, we seem to hear the same passages once more, along with Dt 18¹⁵ or Ex 23²¹. The Messianic theology of the age took pleasure in combining many different sections of the O. T., and arranging them in fresh mosaic patterns,—the spirit of the age imposes itself, to a certain extent, even upon the interpretation of a voice from heaven. Some may feel tempted to confine the reference in our present passage to Is 42¹, excluding Ps 2⁷. Is 42¹ stands at the head of the 'Servant' passages in Deutero-Isaiah; if we could take 'servant' as 'Son'—an ambiguity which would be possible in a Greek text—then Is 42¹ would yield the three great elements of the message from heaven: (1) consciousness of Sonship; (2) revelation of the Divine complacency;

(3) communication of the Spirit ('I have put My Spirit upon Him'). Probably this reference of the whole message to that single O. T. text might discredit the historicity of our narrative as a real contribution to the inner biography of Jesus Christ. Anything founded on the Greek text must probably be of late origin; the Aramaic, presumably, would not admit the ambiguity between 'son' and 'servant.' However, we have good historical grounds for insisting on the inclusion of Ps 2⁷ along with Is 42¹ in the materials (so to speak) of the heavenly message; it is the Psalm passage which gives us 'Thou art My Son.' Reassured as to the historical credibility of the gospel narrative, and interpreting it in the light not merely of one but of two O. T. sayings, we still find as its contents the three points which we noted a few sentences above. These three points then may be regarded as making up, at its origin, the Messianic consciousness of Jesus. Of course we have to meet the objection that 'son' in the narratives of the baptism is but a stereotyped official title, emptied of all connotation. Wellhausen takes that objection, and, on the strength of it, dismisses the sentence

forthwith from further consideration. This may be fair enough, if we regard the Baptism narrative as composed by early Jewish disciples of Christ; if later Gentile disciples composed it, the probabilities would again change. But our own reading of it rests upon the belief that, whether as a simple record, or as an interpretation, Jesus Himself has given us the narrative. If that be true, are we not entitled, yea bound, to emphasize the word? It cannot be for nothing that He who habitually calls God 'Father' feels Himself summoned to His own life-task by the name of 'Son.' Even those who hesitate upon that point will probably admit that the citation of Is 42¹ is significant of the Christian temper—as we would contend, of that temper manifested in Christ Himself. The Servant of Jehovah is the highest conception reached by the O.T.; while not originally Messianic, it ennobles Messianism when associated with Israel's hope and made its interpreter. Does not that happen precisely here?

With hesitation, and with the caution already given, we take a further step, suggesting that the Messianic consciousness is twofold: positively, the consciousness of sonship to God as the correlative of God's Fatherhood, and, negatively, sinlessness—'In Thee I am well pleased.'

The first saying on record as having been spoken by Jesus occurs in the narrative of His loss in the temple as a boy: 'Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?' It would be a mistake to claim absolute certainty for an interesting anecdote of this kind, recorded as it is by only one of our authorities. Still, we must work with such materials as we have; and, without laying undue stress upon it, we may look at what it suggests. In the first place, the word rises to the boy's lips as if by instinct, 'My Father.' In the second place, we have the assertion of an abiding Divine necessity and high calling: 'I must be in My Father's house.' The meaning is not perfectly clear, but we might possibly explain it by a reference to Ps 27⁴: 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell all my days in the house of the Lord.' In the Psalm, indeed, what is spoken of seems to be a privilege, and, in the Gospel passage, an obligation; but that difference may perhaps be set aside. The third point we note is the necessity by which this wonderful child thrusts away the visions that have come upon Him, and, in spite of His own 'I must,' returns to Nazareth

and to earthly obedience. One need not labour the point that such obedience was, for the time, the truest fulfilment of the heavenly calling, and the best preparation for its more direct service in after days. Nevertheless, the closing down of life upon an ardent spirit, almost launched on a career of public service, must mean grave trial; that too is taught us, if we regard the narrative as historical. Some such experience might explain Christ's lingering till the age of thirty—if He had heard the call before, and if He had encountered another necessity, not less Divine than the call itself, which pushed back indefinitely the act of outward obedience to the call.

In this interval of eighteen years we can hardly err in supposing that the youthful Jesus led an isolated and lonely life. In after days we find Him peculiarly sensitive to female friendship—very peculiarly dependent on it, we may affirm, if measured by the standards of Judea and of eighteen centuries ago. Without sentimentality, therefore, one may allow oneself to conclude that the mother of our Lord was a great resource to Him in mitigation of this solitude. In her we may assume that He found sympathy, partial indeed and inadequate, yet less inadequate than elsewhere—that, till His hour came, she stood as far as she might between Him and the world, deadening its shocks—that, like others of this earth's great men, Jesus was conscious of peculiar sympathies with her who bore Him. In a different direction—in the mutual love of youth and maiden—we know that Jesus never allowed Himself to feel the charm of womanhood. We know this, not only from postulates or deductions of ours, but from the words of one of His own pointed sayings: 'There be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.' It is possible to exaggerate the universality of marriage among the Jewish race. Marriage had been forbidden to Jeremiah; it remains very doubtful whether Saul of Tarsus had ever married; there was John the Baptist; there was Jesus Himself. Yet marriage was so much the normal fulfilment not of inclination merely but of duty in Israel—and in all the ancient world—that Jesus might well convey to His disciples as new truth the conception of a moral vocation which, under certain circumstances, made celibacy the higher law. His own life and the Baptist's, among so many differences, agreed in this. 'There be eunuchs which have made

themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.'

There is another passage whose light one is tempted to throw backwards into these silent years—the passage which records how the mother and brethren of Jesus once desired to lay hold on Him, saying, 'He is beside Himself.' Family criticism is the most merciless thing in the world, and sometimes the most unjust. Such criticism must have passed from mouth to mouth in the home at Nazareth, unchecked by religious or dogmatic reverence; it could hardly leap at once to the height of its effrontery; it must have made beginnings in earlier days. We know what 'He is beside Himself' means:—worldliness is criticising perfect unworldliness. One does not for a moment grant that Jesus was unpractical, or that the sneer was anything but empty calumny; still, there is a certain plebeian knowingness which is sure to be absent from a nature compacted of genius and goodness—which in its knowing way is eager to point out the supposed defects of genius and limitations of goodness. One might smile indeed at the critics—these men of the world, whose culture was gained in—Nazareth! But even so the angels may smile at those who boast of their psychological insight into the usages of London or Vienna. Certainly, as we study His career, we see that this dreamer of heavenly dreams was rich in practical wisdom, and a born leader of men. Yes, we see this; but we may be sure that whatever *they* saw, whatever *they* admitted, in this direction, came as a great surprise to the brothers and sisters of Jesus' early days. Have we not confirmation of what has been said in the fact that Nazareth stands alone in the Gospel records as a place where the preaching of Jesus met even outwardly with immediate and unqualified failure?

But the deeper source of Jesus' loneliness must have lain in His profoundest moral and religious experiences. According to St. Luke's Gospel, He no sooner began to speak out His thoughts than He called God Father. According to all the Gospels, that was the name He habitually used—brushing aside by instinct previous revelations, to make room for the supreme revelation which lived in Him. With this attitude of spirit He would find partial sympathy wherever He found real piety. The O.T. was not ignorant of the name or of the thought. But nowhere would He touch upon an experience which fully echoed or mirrored His

own; His insight made Him lonely. And then, there was the further element—the problem of sin. Attempts have been made lately in certain quarters to elucidate the religious life of the soul of Jesus by claiming Him for the religion of healthy-mindedness. Whether that is fair or not, at least we may allow that Jesus could not belong to those—headed as they are by His greatest interpreter, St. Paul—whose whole religious life moves between two opposite consciousnesses, sin and grace. However we conceive of Jesus, we cannot think of Him, in any ordinary sense of the word, as a penitent. Here, then, was indeed an element of estrangement and loneliness—sin, in the lives around Him, and confession of sin in those Scriptures which He never faltered in hailing as divine. Here was something to throw Him back upon Himself—to keep Him silent—almost, to embarrass Him. Most plainly must this seem true to those who believe in the absolute sinlessness of Jesus. It may doubtless be urged by some friends of our Christian faith that what we suggest is incredible, and that Jesus must very early have arrived at clear knowledge of His sinlessness, and therefore of His distinctness from all other men. But, as we have seen, the records imply that the baptism was the occasion of a great inner revelation to our Lord. Might this revelation not include, as one element, full consciousness of personal sinlessness in contrast to others? Is there really, in such a supposition, the attribution to our Lord of undue or improbable *naïveté*? This is what we seem pointed to: a nature of slow development—the greater any nature is, the slower is likely to be its ripening; a nature possibly a little thrown back, as by a spring morning of frost, after the scene in the temple, when He had to leave the Father's house, which called Him, for the carpenter's workshop at Nazareth; a modest nature; a meek and lowly heart; one who had no temptation and no inclination to pass sentence of inferiority upon others, or to insist on claims of His own; one who did not need to resolve that, or any other intellectual difficulty, for the sake of His personal religious life, which ran clear and strong from first to last, in the untroubled consciousness of God's Fatherhood.

There may be one admission called for at this point. Perhaps our conjectures are indeed incompatible with the literal historical truth of the Birth narratives, and of the revelations said to have accompanied the birth of Jesus. But does this

incompatibility with these early chapters of the Gospels attach only to our speculations? Does it not also attach to the Gospel narratives of the Baptism and the Temptation?¹ Could one who had been introduced to human life thirty years before as the destined Messiah receive the Messianic title as a new revelation? But that is affirmed in the narrative of the Baptism. Could He be overwhelmed by the idea and driven into solitude, there to shape or reshape His life? But that is affirmed in the narrative of the Temptation. And we may surely say still more than this. It may appear, on full and reverent thought, that foreknowledge of His lot would have been a disqualification rather than a help for the youthful days of the Saviour of mankind. The heir to a kingdom, born in the purple, receives a special training, in order that, if possible, he may have a royal mind worthy of his royal rank. What was the special training, chosen by the providence of God, for the youthful years of Jesus? Was it not given in the carpenter's home? The one thing whose development must not be lacking to Jesus was character. To maintain the purity of His relationship with God till the definite and Divine summons to public duty should arrive—that was Jesus' task. In discharging it He gained in His own person what His life and teaching were henceforth to communicate to the world. The fuel was all piled in order; it needed only the spark from heaven to kindle it. Calculations or plans for public duty, before the hour for such duty had arrived, could only have served to distract Jesus from that inner private life which was the secret of His strength during the enormous tasks of the Messianic ministry. His ignorance of His future, with all its glories and all its agonies, was a protective shell, within which His nature might grow undisturbed, until the boy Jesus had become the man Christ.

But again we have to pause and face the renewed objection. Are we not imputing strange *naïveté* to Jesus? Is such a quality really conceivable in Him? It may help us if we are able to name any psychological or historical cause tending in that direction. A recent writer—O. Holtzmann—has described Jesus before His baptism as speculating on the arising of *someone else* than Himself to fill the office of the Christ. Frankly,

¹ Unless we could suppose that the earlier revelation had died out save for the memory of the mother of our Lord, and that she maintained silence on the point through long years.

we must regard that as incredible, so long as we think of Jesus as looking to other young men in Galilee or Judea as possible candidates for the Messianic honour. Modesty is very well, but not even modesty ought to make the supremely qualified person hang back, and await the action of others. But the case may appear differently if we can suppose that Jesus looked for the literal appearing of a 'Son of Man,' in heavenly power and glory. If that belief existed in our Lord's mind, it would keep Him from ever putting to Himself the question, Can I be the destined man? There is no competition between a working lad, however sure of God's love, and a towering archangel. This, even if scientifically a mistaken reading of Scripture, would give strength to that protective shield, of ignorance regarding the future, behind which, as we have said, human nature and character might grow to their maturity. And it may be well to recall here once again the saying about eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. That saying ought to save us from exaggerating either the *naïveté* or the self-introversion of the youthful Jesus. He had His thoughts—clear, strong, reasonable thoughts—about the future. Long before He could be a man of thirty, nature must have bidden Him ask, Are love and marriage, those tender gifts of God which make others glad—are they to be mine, or are they not? We know how the question was answered. Standing—and in this Jesus was neither ignorant nor mistaken, but full of prophetic not to say Divine insight—standing on the threshold of the greatest events in history, Jesus did not dare entangle Himself even in the most gracious bonds. Long before He began to preach—long before John His forerunner had broken silence—He knew that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and, in His own Oriental phrase, He had made Himself a eunuch for its sake; ready to spring unhindered to His post when the great commander summoned Him, but apparently not dreaming yet that the commander's own post was to be His.

Under such circumstances, how deeply must Jesus, of all men, be moved when He heard of the work of John! First, because the hoped-for kingdom was now publicly proclaimed. But also, because John's was a ministry of sin and repentance, emphasizing precisely that part of the religious life of the O.T. to which, as a personal matter, Jesus could make no response. What was He to

do? Could He be thus baptized? Dared He absent Himself? Whether or not the colloquy given in a single Gospel passed between Jesus and John (Mt 3^{14, 15}), some similar dialogue must have passed in the soul of Jesus before He went to the Jordan. And it must have met with a similar answer; even if we hesitate over the first half, we clearly see the psychological necessity of the second half: 'Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' The last *word*, indeed, may belong to the evangelist's own mint. It seems characteristic of the author who put in shape Mt 6¹ and the closing passage of the Gospel, Mt 28^{19, 20}. But the thought behind the words is significantly simple. Jesus says merely, I think it is *my duty* to be baptized; do you do *yours*. Nothing is said regarding what—one must concede—a Christian, looking at things in the light of history, can hardly keep from reading in the event: dedication of the sinless Jesus to the rescue of the sinful nation. Nothing is said beyond what Jesus at that hour might very well feel and say—so far as we may dare estimate probabilities in such a sacred region. Jesus, as we know from His words, judged the baptism of John to be 'from heaven,' not 'of men' (Mk 11³⁰; parallels). That carried with it the obligation that all men, even Jesus Himself, should be baptized with John's baptism. There was no necessity to understand the situation fully; conceivably, it offered some dark riddles to this most wonderful of candidates. But He had to do His duty in the situation appointed for Him; duty was clear.

And then, as He went forward—it may be, perplexed, possibly, even perturbed, but at anyrate resolute—then there burst upon Him the amazing, the overwhelming consciousness, that the meaning of all these human hopes and Divine purposes centred in Him. Still waters run deep; even the man of thirty had never fully known Himself; He had been but a placid mirror of the heaven above Him, reflecting the image of God. The excitement of John's call, and perhaps too the renewed occupation of mind with the mystery of sin and of the non-consciousness of personal sin, troubled the waters a little. But only on the surface; the deeper parts of His nature remained, as ever, resting in God. But now as He drew near to Israel's God, steadfastly accepting an almost unwelcome duty, He was revealed to Himself. The beam of Divine light searched Him—searched every part of His nature—and all was

pure. He was God's beloved Son, in whom God was well-pleased. What had seemed to separate Him from others was His true qualification for their service. The keystone of the arch was now in its place; the mystery of all the past was mystery no longer. His endowment lay in that twofold uniqueness of spirit, negatively, sinlessness, positively, the filial mind; twofold, yet one. But, if either has the priority, it is the filial mind. He did not earn His place; as the Fourth Gospel has it, He kept the Father's commandments and abode in His love. And this twofold truth about Christ is also the twofold truth about Christianity—as morality and as religion. And in the same order. We do not come through sinlessness to the filial mind, but through the filial mind to sinlessness.

In saying all this, one takes for granted that *Thou art My beloved Son* refers to what Christ essentially was, not to what He was suddenly transformed into by the descent of the Spirit upon Him. One view gives us a complex of intelligible moral ideas; the other gives us—one knows not what. But it is possible to see how a situation which we interpret as moderns in the light of psychological development, could also be interpreted realistically by the ancients as not development but sudden change—Jesus becoming Christ, or even, according to some of them, Jesus becoming the well-beloved son. The narrative tells us that Jesus did more than discover what He was: He discovered what He was called to be; the Spirit descended on Him. The Christ, conscious of His Messiahship, cannot possibly any longer await a signal from without. He is Christ; it is for Him, under God, to give signal to others. This is capable of being expressed—the ancients inclined so to express it—He has suddenly become Christ through a great descent of the Spirit upon Him. Nothing could be more opposed to a certain school of interpretation, which will have it that Jesus lived and died as one perhaps destined to Christhood, but never actually Christ. According to the passages we are studying, the Christ consciousness flies at once to the centre of His being and takes command of His life. Henceforward He is no longer—except for irrelevant sentimentality—'Jesus, the Carpenter of Nazareth.' That is in a sense His private affair, with which we have nothing to do. We have to do with Him as He now is—as Christ; and as He is henceforth to act—in Christly functions.