

PART II. MAN

CHAPTER XXXIII

MAN'S PLACE IN CREATION

1. The doctrine concerning man is inseparably connected with that about God. Heathenism formed its deities after the image of man; they were merely human beings of a larger growth. Judaism, on the contrary, asserts that God is beyond comparison with mankind; He is a purely spiritual being without form or image, and therefore utterly unlike man. On the other hand, man has a divine nature, as he was made in the image of God, fashioned after His likeness. The highest and deepest in man, his mental, moral, and spiritual life, is the reflection of the divine nature implanted within him, a force capable of ever greater development toward perfection. This unique distinction among all creatures gives man the highest place in all creation.

2. The superiority of the human race is expressed differently in various passages in Scripture. According to the first chapter of Genesis the whole work of creation finds its culmination in man, whose making is introduced by a solemn appeal of God to the hosts of heaven: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."¹ This declaration proclaimed that man was the completion and the climax of the physical creation, as well as the beginning of a new order of creation,

¹ Gen. I, 26, and the commentaries.

a world of moral aims and purposes, of self-perfection and self-control. In the world of man all life is placed at the service of a higher ideal, after the divine pattern.

The second chapter of Genesis depicts man's creation differently. Here he appears as the first of created beings, leading a life of perfect innocence in the garden of divine bliss. Before him God brings all the newly created beings that he may give them a name and a purpose. But the Serpent enters Paradise as tempter, casting the seed of discord into the hearts of the man and the woman. As they prove too feeble to resist temptation, they can no longer remain in the heavenly garden in their former happy state. Only the memory of Paradise remains, a golden dream to cast hope over the life of struggle and labor into which they enter. The idea of the legend is that man's proper place is not among beings of the earth, but he can reach his lofty destiny only by arduous struggle with the world of the senses and a constant striving toward the divine. The same idea is expressed more directly in the eighth Psalm:

"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that Thou thinkest of him?
Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than the godly beings (Elohim)
And hast crowned him with glory and honor.
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet."

3. According to the Haggadists,¹ before the fall man excelled even the angels in appearance and wisdom, so that they were ready to prostrate themselves before him. Only when God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, they recognized his frailty and kinship with other beings of the earth. The idea expressed in this legend resembles the one implied in the legend of Paradise, viz. man has a twofold nature. With his heavenly spirit he can soar freely to the highest

¹ Gen. R. VIII, 9.

realm of thought, above the station of the angels; yet his earthly frame holds him ever near the dust. It is this very contrast that constitutes his greatness, for it makes him a citizen of two worlds, one perishable, the other eternal. He is the highest result of Creation, the pride of the Creator.¹ Thus he was appointed God's vice-regent on earth by the words spoken to the first man and woman: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth."² The rabbis add a striking comment upon the word *R'du*, which is used here for "have dominion" but which may also mean, "go down." They say: "The choice is left in man's own hand. If you maintain your heaven-born dignity, you will have dominion over all things; if not, you will descend to the level of the brute creation."³

4. An ancient Mishnah derives a significant lesson from the story of the creation of man⁴: "Both the vegetable and animal worlds were created in multitudes. Man alone was created as a single individual in order that he may realize that he constitutes a world in himself, and carries within him the true value of life. Hence each human being is entitled to say: 'The whole world was created for my sake.' He who saves a single human life is as one who saves a whole world, and he who destroys a single human life is as one who destroys a whole world."

5. While it is man's spiritual side which is the image of God, yet he derives all his powers and faculties from earthly life, just as a tree draws its strength from the soil in which it is rooted. Judaism does not consider the soul the exclusive

¹ Gen. R. XIV, 1.

² Gen. I, 28.

³ Gen. R. VIII, 12; P. d. R. El., XI.

⁴ Sanh. IV, 5, correctly preserved in the Yerushalmi, and the addition in the Babli, *Me Visrael*, ought not to have been inserted by Schechter, Ab. d. R. N., p. 90.

seat of the divine, as opposed to the body. In fact, Judaism admits no complete dualism of spirit and matter, however striking some aspects of their contrast may be. The whole human personality is divine, just so far as it asserts its freedom and molds its motives toward a divine end. In recognition of this fact Hillel claimed reverence for the human body as well as mind, comparing it to the homage rendered to the statue of a king, for man is made in the image of God, the King of all the world.¹ Thus the Greek idea that man is a *microcosm*, a world in miniature, reflecting the cosmos on a smaller scale, was expressed in the Tannaitic schools as well.² The stamp of divinity is borne by man in his entire heaven-aspiring nature, as he strives to elevate the very realm of the senses into the sphere of morality and holiness.

6. In this respect the Jewish view parts from that of Plato and the Hindu philosophers. These divide man into a pure celestial soul and an impure earthly body and hold that the physical life is tainted by sin, while the spirit is divine only in so far as it frees itself from its prison house of flesh. Judaism, on the other hand, emphasizes the unified character of man, by which he can bend all his faculties and functions to a godlike mastery over the material world. This appears first in his upright posture and heavenward glance, which proclaim him master over the whole animal world cowering before him in lowly dread. His whole bodily structure corresponds to this, with its constant growth, its wondrous symmetry, and the unique flexibility of the hands, with which he can perform ever new and greater achievements. Above all, we see the nobility of man in his high forehead and receding jaw, which contrast so strikingly with the structure of most animals and even with many of the lower races. Indeed, primitive man could scarcely imagine a nobler pattern by which to model his deity than the figure of a man.

¹ Lev. R. XXXIV, 3.

² Ab. d. R. N. XXXI.

7. In fact, the Biblical verse, "God created man after the image of the divine beings" (*elohim*), was originally taken literally, in the sense that angels posed as models for the creation of man.¹ The phrase was referred to the spiritual, god-like nature of man only when the difference between material and spiritual things became better understood, and man obtained a clearer knowledge of himself. Man grew to feel that his craving for the perfect, whether in the field of truth and right, or of beauty, is the force which lifts him, in spite of all his limitations, into the realm of the divine. His soaring imagination and ceaseless longing for perfection disclose before his eyes a partial vista of the infinite. The human spirit carries mortal man above the confines of time and space into those boundless realms where God resides in lonely majesty.²

Man did not emanate perfect from the hand of the Creator, but ready for an ever greater perfection. Being the last of all created beings, as the Midrash says, he can be put to shame by the smallest insect, which is prior to him. Yet before the beginning of creation a light shone upon his spirit that has illumined his achievements through untold generations.³

8. The resemblance of man to God is attributed also to his free will and self-consciousness, by which he claims moral dignity and mastery over all things.⁴ Still, all these superior qualities which we call human are not ready-made endowments, free gifts bestowed by God; they are simply poten-

¹ See Jubilees XV, 27; comp. Gen. R. VIII, 7-9; Ab. d. R. N., ed. Schechter, p. 153.

² See Jellinek: *Bezelem Elohim*; Philippon, l. c., II, 58-72; Dillmann, l. c., 325. The words of Plato (*State*, X, 613, and *Theatetos*, 176), "Man should strive for God-likeness through virtue, and be holy, righteous and wise like the Deity," may have influenced the ethical interpretation of the Biblical term.

³ Gen. R. VIII, 1.

⁴ See Gen. I, 26; Comm. of Rashi, Saadia, Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, and Ob. Sforno.

tialities which may be gradually developed. Man must strive to attain the place destined for him in the scheme of creation by the exertion of his own will and the unfolding of the powers that lie within him. The impulse toward self-perfection, which is constantly stimulated by the desire to overcome obstacles and to extend one's power, knowledge, and possessions, forms the kernel of the divine in man. This is the "spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty, that giveth them understanding."¹ Thus the teaching of modern science, of the gradual ascent of man through all the stages of animal life, does not impair the lofty position in creation which Judaism has assigned him. Plant and animal are what they have always been, children of the earth; man with his heaven-aspiring soul is the image of his Creator, a child of God. Giver of name and purpose to all things about him, he ranks above the angels; he "marches on while all the rest stand still."²

¹ Job XXXII, 8.

² Zach. III, 7; see comm.