

CHAPTER XL

MAN, THE CHILD OF GOD

1. The belief that God hears our prayers and pardons our sins rests upon the assumption of a mutual relation between man and God. This belief is insusceptible of proof, but rests entirely upon our religious feelings and is rooted purely in our emotional life. We apply to the relation between man and God the finest feelings known in human life, the devotion and love of parents for their children and the affection and trust the child entertains for its parents. Thus we are led to the conviction that earth-born man has a Helper enthroned in the heavens above, who hearkens when he implores Him for aid. In his innermost heart man feels that he has a special claim on the divine protection. In the words of Job,¹ he knows that his Redeemer liveth. He need not perish in misery. Unlike the brute creation and the hosts of stars, which know nothing of their Maker, man feels akin to the God who lives within him; he is His image, His child. He cannot be deprived of His paternal love and favor. This truly human emotion is nowhere expressed so clearly as in Judaism. "Ye are the children of the Lord your God."² "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?"³ "Like as a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion upon them that fear Him."⁴

2. Still, this simple idea of man's filial relation to God and God's paternal love for man did not begin in its beautiful final form. For a long time the Jew seems to have avoided the

¹ Job XIX, 25. The Hebrew *Goel* signifies kinsman as well as redeemer and avenger, implying blood-relationship. In Job it means vindicator.

² Deut. XIV, 1.

³ Mal. II, 10.

⁴ Ps. CIII, 13.

term "Father" for God, because it was used by the heathen for their deities as physical progenitors, and did not refer to the moral relation between the Deity and mankind. Thus worshipers of wooden idols would, according to Scripture, "say to a stock, Thou art my father."¹ Hosea was the first to call the people of Israel "children of the living God,"² if they would but improve their ways and enter into right relations with Him. Jeremiah also hopes for the time when Israel would invoke the Lord, saying, "Thou art my Father," and in return God would prove a true father to him.³ However, Scripture calls God a Father only in referring to the people as a whole.⁴ The "pious ones" established a closer relation between God and the individual by means of prayer, so that through them the epithets, "Father," "Our Father," and "Our Father in heaven" came into general use. Hence, the liturgy frequently uses the invocation, "Our Father, Our King!" We owe to Rabbi Akiba the significant saying, in opposition to the Paulinian dogma, "Blessed are ye, O Israelites! Before whom do you purify yourselves (from your sins)? And who is it that purifies you? Your Father in heaven."⁵ Previously Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanos dwelt on the moral degeneration of his age, which betokened the end of time, and exclaimed: "In whom, then, shall we find support? In our Father who is in heaven."⁶ The appellative "Father in heaven" was the stereotyped term used by the "pious ones" during the century preceding and the one following the rise of Christianity, as a glance at the literature of the period indicates.⁷

3. It is instructive to follow the history of this term. In Scripture God is represented as speaking to David, "I will be

¹ Jer. II, 27.

² Hosea II, 1.

³ See Jer. III, 4.

⁴ Jer. XXXI, 9; Deut. XXXII, 7; Isa. LXIII, 16; LXIV, 7; Mal. I, 4; I Chron. XXIX, 10.

⁵ Yoma VIII, 9.

⁶ Sota IX, 15.

⁷ See next paragraph, and the art. *Abba* in J. E.

to him for a father, and he shall be to Me for a son,"¹ or "He shall call unto Me: Thou art my Father, . . . I also will appoint him first-born."² So in the apocryphal writings God speaks both to Israel and to individual saints: "I shall be to them a Father, and they shall be My children."³ Elsewhere it is said of the righteous, "He calls God his Father," and "he shall be counted among the sons of God."⁴ We read concerning the Messiah: "When all wrongdoing will be removed from the midst of the people, he shall know that all are sons of God."⁵ Obviously only righteousness or personal merit entitles a man to be called a son of God. In fact, we are expressly told of Onias, the great Essene saint, that his intimate relation with God emboldened him to converse with the Master of the Universe as a son would speak with his father.⁶ According to the Mishnah the older generation of "pious ones" used to spend "an hour in silent devotion before offering their daily prayer, in order to concentrate heart and soul upon their communion with their Father in heaven."⁷ Thus it is said of congregational prayer that through it "Israel lifts his eyes to his Father in heaven."⁸ In this way prayer took the place of the altar, of which R. Johanan ben Zakkai said that it established peace between Israel and his Father in heaven.⁹ Afterwards the question was discussed by Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Jehuda whether even sin-laden Israel had a right to be called "children of God." Rabbi Meir pointed to Hosea as proof that the backsliders also remain "children of the living God."¹⁰

4. In the Hellenistic literature, with its dominating idea of universal monotheism, God is frequently invoked or spoken of as the Father of mankind. The implication is that each

¹ II Sam. VII, 14.

² Ps. LXXXIX, 27-28.

³ Jubilees I, 24.

⁴ Wisdom II, 16; V, 5.

⁵ Psalms of Solomon XVII, 27.

⁶ Taan. III, 8.

⁷ Ber. V, 1.

⁸ Midr. Teh. Ps. CXXI, 1.

⁹ Mek. Yithro 11.

¹⁰ Sifre Deut. 96; Hosea I, 10.

person who invokes God as Father enters into filial relation with Him. Thus what was first applied to Israel in particular was now broadened to include mankind in general, and consequently all men were considered "children of the living God." The words of God to Pharaoh, speaking of Israel as His "first-born son,"¹ were taken as proof that all the nations of the earth are sons of God and He the universal Father. Israel is the first-born among the sons of God, because his patriarchs, prophets, and psalmists first recognized Him as the universal Father and Ruler. From this point of view Judaism declared love for fellow-men and regard for the dignity of humanity to be fundamental principles of ethics. "As God is kind and merciful toward His creation, be thou also kind and merciful toward all fellow-creatures," is the oft-repeated teaching of the rabbis.² Likewise, "Whoever takes pity on his fellow-beings, on him God in heaven will also take pity."³ Love of humanity has so permeated the nature of the Jew that the rabbis assert: "He who has pity on his fellow-men has the blood of Abraham in his veins."⁴ This bold remark casts light upon the strange dictum: "Ye Israelites are called by the name of man, but the heathen are not."⁵ The Jewish teachers were so deeply impressed with man's inhumanity to man, so common among the heathen nations, and the immorality of the lives by which these desecrated God's image, that they insisted that the laws of humanity alone make for divine dignity in man.

5. Rabbi Akiba probably referred to the Paulinian dogma that Jesus, the crucified Messiah, is the only son of God, in his well-known saying: "Beloved is man, for he is created in God's image, and it was a special token of love that he became conscious of it. Beloved is Israel, for they are called the children of God, and it was a special token of love that they

¹ Ex. IV, 22.

² Sifre Deut. 49.

³ Sifre Deut. 96.

⁴ Beza 32 b.

⁵ Yeb. 61 a.

became conscious of it."¹ Here he claims the glory of being a son of God for Israel, but not for all men. Still, as soon as the likeness of man to God is taken in a spiritual sense, then it is implied that all men have the same capacity for being a son of God which is claimed for Israel. This is unquestionably the view of Judaism when it considers the Torah as entrusted to Israel to bring light and blessing to all the families of men. Rabbi Meir, the disciple of Rabbi Akiba, said: "The Scriptural words, 'The statutes and ordinances which *man* shall do and live thereby,' and similar expressions indicate that the final aim of Judaism is not attained by the Aaronide, nor the Levite, nor even the Israelite, but by mankind."² Such a saying expresses clearly and emphatically that God's fatherly love extends to all men as His children.

6. According to the religious consciousness of modern Israel man is made in God's image, and is thus a child of God. Consequently Jew and non-Jew, saint and sinner have the same claim upon God's paternal love and mercy. There is no distinction in favor of Israel except as he lives a higher and more god-like life. Even those who have fallen away from God and have committed crime and sin remain God's children. If they send up their penitent cry to the throne of God, "Pardon us, O Father, for we have sinned! Forgive us, O King, for we have done evil!"; their prayer is heard by the heavenly Father exactly like that of the pious son of Israel.

¹ Aboth III, 13, quoted above, Chap. XXXIV, par. 6.

² Sifra *Ahare* 13, p. 86.

CHAPTER XLI

PRAYER AND SACRIFICE

1. The gap between man and the sublime Master of the universe is vast, but not absolute. The thoughts of God are high above our thoughts, and the ways of God above our ways, baffling our reason when we endeavor to solve the vexatious problems of destiny, of merit and demerit, of retribution and atonement. Yet religion offers a wondrous medium to bring the heart of man into close communion with Him who is enthroned above the heavens, one that overleaps all distances, removes all barriers, and blends all dissonances into one great harmony, and that is — Prayer. As the child must relieve itself of its troubles and sorrows upon the bosom of its mother or father in order to turn its pain into gladness, so men at all times seek to approach the Deity, confiding to Him all their fears and longings in order to obtain peace of heart. Prayer, communion between the human soul and the Creator, is the glorious privilege enjoyed by man alone among all creatures, as he alone is the child of God. It voices the longing of the human heart for its Father in heaven. As the Psalmist has it, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."¹

2. However, both language, the means of intercourse between man and man, and prayer, the means of intercourse between man and God, show traces of a slow development lasting for thousands of years, until the loftiest thoughts and

¹ Ps. XLII, 3.