

The Servant of the Lord.

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III.

The Suffering Servant (Isa. lii. 13, liii.).

WE are now to study a passage which is perhaps dearer to believers than any other in the Old Testament. Some of the phrases which occur in it are peculiarly appropriate to Jesus Christ, and we love to apply them to Him. We speak of them as finding their fulfilment in Him. The fact of real importance is, that it is from Himself that we have learned to do this (Lk 22³⁷ 24²⁵). But for Him it is doubtful if we should have come to do so, seeing that no Jewish disciple of His would have dreamed of identifying the Messiah with the suffering servant of the Lord, until taught by Jesus to do so. The chief question, therefore, which we have to answer is: What do we mean when we say that this prophecy of II Isaiah was fulfilled in Jesus Christ?

The prophet himself, as we have seen, was not thinking of an individual at all when he spoke of the servant; and we shall accordingly have to draw a very careful distinction between the meaning of the prophet and the further meaning of the Holy Spirit who inspired him. This distinction has been illustrated by the difference between the understanding a workman has of the part he is doing in the construction of a great building, and the understanding of the same piece of work by the architect of the whole building. 'While the workman may have perfect comprehension of the piece of work he is engaged upon, and be full of enthusiasm in the execution of it, he may not be able to see the place it will hold in the completed fabric, or the great meaning which may accrue to it from the whole. This can be perceived only when the fabric is reared.'¹ In the same way, what the prophet meant can be fully determined by considering his words in the light of the events of his own day. 'The question as to what the Holy Spirit meant can be answered only from the point of view of a completed revelation.' As we see the prophecy unquestionably fulfilled, we are able to say how much more was in the mind of the Spirit than in the mind of the prophet.

¹ Riehm's *Messianic Prophecy*, p. xiii.

Let us begin, then, by interpreting as accurately as we can just what was in the mind of the prophet when he uttered this noble prophecy. Only when we have done that shall we be able to proceed intelligently to the fascinating and all-important question of how his words were fulfilled. The description of the servant before us is introduced in exactly the same way as the one we studied in chapter 49, that is to say, just after a great appeal to the people to come forth from Babylon. It would be altogether idle to question the identity of the servant in chapter 53 with the servant in chapters 49 and 50, unless some new feature appeared which should make it difficult to reconcile the two descriptions. No such difficulty presents itself; and, after our careful inquiry as to who the servant is, it would be mere waste of time to labour the point that he is not an individual, but the God-fearing heart of the nation. In chapter 50 the servant was depicted as a martyr—a martyr because of his determination to witness faithfully for God. In chapter 53 we are told the purpose of his sufferings, and are shown that they are in order to his people's salvation.

The subject of this passage is, then, the humiliation and the exaltation of the servant, and the reasons for them. The topic was briefly treated in chapter 49, where we read, 'Thus saith the Lord . . . to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers; kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall worship; because of the Lord that is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee.' This subject is now developed and explained. The passage we are to consider is divided in the Hebrew into five strophes, and these are represented in the R.V. by five paragraphs of three verses each. I shall give a somewhat modified translation as we proceed—a translation partly suggested by the marginal readings in the R.V. Some of the phrases in the ordinary rendering are far from plain, and I wish to bring out the meaning as clearly as possible.

1. In the first strophe (52¹³⁻¹⁵) we have the statement of the theme. The words are put into the mouth of the Lord, and they tell us that the servant shall succeed in his undertaking and be exalted; and that, when he is really known and understood, he shall be received with homage by kings.

'Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Like as many were astonished at thee (his visage was marred from that of man, his form from that of the sons of men), so shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths before him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.'

The verb in the first line is rendered "deal wisely" in the text, and "prosper" in the margin. It really means, deal wisely in such a way as to prosper. The sufferings of the servant are sure to succeed: they will not be thrown away. God has a purpose in them, God who holds his hand. Therefore in the long-run there will be a recognition of his work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, and he will be exalted.

Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future;
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above His own.

Keeping watch, and seeing to it that His servant's labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Many who look on at the time do not understand the mighty power of suffering for righteousness' sake. The conception is too high for them: they cannot attain unto it; but later on they, or their descendants, build the sepulchres of the prophets they slew, and so acknowledge the folly and the crime. The greatest instance in history is, of course, the death of Christ. Did those who slew Him really suppose that that stupid cross was going to prevent the setting up of a Kingdom not of this world? They actually hastened by mistake the coming of the Kingdom; and now it must stand and grow for ever till all the nations own Christ's sway.

Ever since the black deed on Calvary there have been those who have 'considered' that to which they had previously shut their eyes; and

their remorse has drawn from them the confession—

O the bitter shame and sorrow
That a time could ever be
When I let my Saviour's pity
Pass me by, and proudly answered,
All of self and none of Thee.

Or here is another illustration. When the Reformers of the sixteenth century rose as the servant of the Lord to purify His Church of scandalous abuses, many within the Church shook their heads and questioned the wisdom of the step, many opposed themselves; and the Council of Trent made matters no better, but merely asserted that Roman Catholicism would never be reconciled to Protestantism. Persecution and martyrdom followed for all heretics upon whom the Church could lay her hands, and many precious lives were, from one point of view, uselessly sacrificed. But mark the result in the long-run.

'Everywhere in Catholic countries as in Protestant, the practices have been abandoned which the laity rose then to protest against. The principles on which the laity insisted have become the rule of the modern world. Popes no longer depose princes, dispense with oaths, or absolve subjects from their allegiance. Appeals are not any more carried to Rome from the national tribunals, nor justice sold there to the highest bidder. The clergy have ceased to pass laws which bind the laity, and to enforce them with spiritual censures. Felonious priests suffer for their crimes like unconsecrated mortals. Too zealous prelates cannot call poor creatures before them *ex officio*, cross-question them on their beliefs, fine, imprison, or burn them at the stake. Excommunications are kept in bounds by the law of libel. Itinerant pardon-venders no longer hawk through Europe their unprofitable wares. . . . These scandals against which the laity cried so loudly are gone, and the devoutest Romanists would not wish to revive them.' So says Mr. Froude.

The whole world, Catholic as well as Protestant, has cause to thank God for the Reformation, and a man can deny that statement only by approving of the evils which the Reformation did away with. The Reformers were servants of the Lord, who dealt wisely and prospered in the thing whereto God sent them. Wherefore also God hath exalted them; and kings who are true kings are silent in the presence of these, who are greater than kings.

2. After the words of the Lord in chapter 52, chapter 53 appropriately begins with the confession of the conscience-stricken people. The Lord has spoken of the servant as one who shall startle many nations, and before whom many heathen kings shall shut their mouths. After this reference to the heathen, the prophet represents the people as saying penitently, 'But among us Jews, who hath believed what we have heard? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He hath no form or comeliness that we should look upon him; nor beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of pains and acquainted with sickness; and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not.' The beginning of the last clause might also be rendered, 'He hid as it were his face from us'; the reference in either case being clearly to one afflicted with leprosy. We are reminded of the regulation in Leviticus: 'The leper shall cover his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean' (13⁴⁵). The servant, then, is here described as a leper, hideous with a fearful disease, unsightly and despised. As we read three verses before, 'His visage was marred from that of man, and his form from that of the sons of men,'—he was only just recognizable as human.

3. And the people go on in the next strophe: 'Surely he hath borne our sicknesses, and carried our pains: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and degraded. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement that brought us peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep went astray: we turned every one to his own way; and the Lord made to light upon him the iniquity of us all.'

Here, then, we have the reason of His humiliation. At first the people thought that the servant was suffering for his own sins: among primitive men that is always the first conclusion. The more a man suffers, the worse he must be, the more abhorrent to God. But reflection shows that this is absolutely false to the facts of life. The people could not help seeing at length that the servant was not suffering for his own sins; and as they were forced to seek a moral reason for his sufferings, they had to ask themselves the question: Whose sins, then, is he suffering for? And con-

science gave the answer: *Theirs*. The sufferings of the servant were vicarious; they were redemptive, in order that his fellows might have peace with God.

4. In the next strophe it seems to be the prophet himself who speaks. He tells how the servant bore undeserved treatment with patience and endurance. None of his contemporaries understood the real nature of his sufferings, and even after his death they pursued him with ignominy, burying him with extortioners. 'He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth. By oppressive judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who among them considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living? For the transgression of my people was he stricken. And they made his grave with the wicked, and with extortioners after he was dead; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.' These verses tell us how he was judged to be a malefactor, owing to the usual judgment of those days upon the afflicted. We shall at once remember how the Book of Job combats this cruelty and lack of sympathy towards suffering.

5. In verse ¹⁰ the prophet passes from what the people thought of the servant to what God thought of him; and we are shown in the last strophe the great reward to the servant for all that he had to bear, as described in verse ⁶. 'Yet the Lord had purposed to bruise him; he laid sickness on him; if his life were to make an offering for sin, he should see a seed, he should prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands.' In the last two verses the Lord Himself speaks: 'Out of the travail of his soul he shall see, and shall be satisfied by his knowledge (*i.e.* knowledge of Jehovah). My righteous servant makes many righteous, and bears their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bare the sins of many, and interposed for the transgressors.'

Now let us try to get at the heart of this utterance, so stately, so full of pathos. We need not pause to speculate whether the prophet had a

particular sufferer in view when he spoke of the servant as a leper, and as treated as a felon. His words are too vague for that to be likely. Leprosy and perverted justice are mentioned because these are two of the worst and two of the commonest misfortunes in the East. Besides, the prophet speaks as if he were sometimes referring to the past, sometimes to the future; and the more we examine his words, the more we feel that he is not thinking so much of a definite event as of an ideal. As the spokesman of God, as one who tarries in the secret place of the Most High, whose ear the Lord wakeneth morning by morning, and to whom the Lord hath given the tongue of the learner, the prophet comes forth and declares in the name of God what must happen some day. Because God is love He will assuredly redeem His people, and save them from their sins; and this is a magnificent prophetic anticipation of the method of redemption. The prophet could not know that 550 years after his day God would become man, and suffer for the sins of men. It was not possible for him to make this truth known. What he actually did was a far grander thing—he proclaimed to his generation a permanent moral and spiritual truth. He did not know that God would ever suffer on earth for men, but he stated the highest that he knew: that God-fearing, God-like men would suffer, do suffer, for sins not their own; and he ventured to believe that their sufferings would be redemptive as well as vicarious. It is a permanent truth that righteous men suffer vicariously; but since the days of II Isaiah the prophet's words have had a greater fulfilment than he would have dared to anticipate, and we know that the sufferings which are redemptive are the sufferings of God.

And, now that we have tried to show that the prophet describes a moral situation rather than a historical event, the way is clear for us to see how his words apply to Jesus Christ. In a literal sense, some of them do not apply in the least. Christ was not a leper, nor have we any reason to believe that He was outwardly marred. Though virtue went out of Him when He bare men's sicknesses, He did not transfer them to Himself. And, of course, neither did He make His grave with the wicked or extortioners. It is not so much in outward circumstances as in the moral and spiritual sphere that we must look for the resemblance between Jesus Christ and the servant of the Lord;

for that is precisely what Jesus Himself did. 'As He read the Scriptures, He was always looking for the spiritual situation and its peculiarities. He thus interpreted His own surroundings and the situation in His own time by the light He obtained from Scripture. He argued from the unchangeableness of God and the constancy of His methods to the way in which God would act'¹ in similar circumstances in the future. And so, with unerring prophetic insight, He made the application to His own time, of permanent spiritual truth. As soon as He knew, after His baptism, of His mission as Messiah, He applied to Himself the Old Testament statements about deliverers of Israel, and thought out in anticipation what His destiny or fate would be. 'He searched the Old Testament to form a spiritual history of His own future.'¹ He chose parts out of psalms and prophets which otherwise would hardly be reckoned appropriate to Him, perceiving that the words found a spiritual fulfilment in Him. 'He was all unconscious of arbitrariness; for He felt Himself vindicated spiritually.'¹ In particular, with regard to the condition of the Jews, and their need to be redeemed from sin, He saw that the spiritual situation of the time of II Isaiah 'had repeated itself, and even more emphatically.' But most remarkable of all is the way in which He conceived the Messiah and the suffering servant as one and the same, and proceeded to regard His career as destined to fulfil the prophecies concerning both, at least as regards the spiritual aspects of what was written of them. The Messiah of Jewish expectation was a king on whom the sevenfold Spirit of the Lord should rest—a king who should judge with righteousness, and with the breath of his lips slay the wicked (Is 11). The Messiah was always conceived of as a victor, never as a victim. How abhorrent the idea of the Messiah suffering was to the Jew may be gathered from Peter's words, after he had acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, and Jesus spoke of His approaching sufferings. 'Peter began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee.' But Jesus, with matchless insight, had perceived that it was a greater thing for the Messiah to be a persecuted prophet than even a righteous and victorious king—greater to stoop and bear men's sins than to reign and exact their service. And so, to the spiritually lesser office

¹ Adamson's *Studies of the Mind in Christ*, 119-121, 123.

He added the spiritually greater, and chose to reign over men through their hearts, having first won their love by bearing their sin. 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me,' He said. The cross was to be His throne; and through it He has reigned ever since. 'Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name.' He who was called Jesus because he should save His people from their sins, bears in a unique sense the name of Redeemer of mankind. Yet such is His grace that He calls believers to be fellow-workers

with Him in the work of redemption. The apostle who most of all, perhaps, had the mind of Christ, ventures to speak of 'filling up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church' (Col 1²⁴). So though there has been only one who actually bore men's sins, only one who has made men righteous, yet it is a permanent truth that God-fearing men in all ages constitute a servant of the Lord, through whose sufferings mankind is brought to own and to love the sway of God.

Recent Biblical Archaeology.

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The City of Enoch.

IN THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for May 1899 I have shown that a close connexion exists between the antediluvian patriarchs of Genesis and the antediluvian kings of Babylonia—so close, indeed, as to make it clear that the biblical account is as much dependent on Babylonian traditions as is the story of the Flood. As has long been recognized, moreover, the genealogy of the Cainites is but a variant form of that of the Sethites, though the reason of the variation in the order of the names does not seem to have been explained. Whereas in the Sethite line the order is Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah, it is reversed in the Cainite line, where we have Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, and Methusael. The fact is that the source, or sources, from which the writer of Genesis derived his materials did not indicate the links of relationship between the several names, which must have followed one another without any explanation, as is sometimes the case in the First Book of Chronicles (*e.g.* 2⁴⁷ 4³). They were taken from lists similar to those with which the cuneiform tablets have made us familiar, in which groups of words or names are arranged one under the other without comment, and it is left to the reader to supply the links of relationship that exist between them. Where the names stand in genealogical order, it is open to him to regard them as denoting either father and son or son and

father. Hence Mahalaleel-Jared might mean either that Jared was the son of Mahalaleel, or that Mahalaleel was the son of Jared. The twofold view that is taken of the relationship in the Book of Genesis points to a cuneiform tablet with its vertical columns as the source from which the names are derived.

Why Enoch heads the list in the Cainite genealogy is clear. Cain, 'the smith,' represents the civilized inhabitant of the Babylonian city, and must therefore have been the builder of a city in the country east of Eden,—or Edin, the 'Plain' of Babylonia,—to which he had migrated. Here was a district which figured a good deal in early Babylonian history, and usually bore the name of Khana. The proper names contained in a contract from the land of Khana published by M. Thureau-Dangin, show that it was inhabited by a Hebraic or West Semitic population similar to that to which the Israelites belonged (see my note in the *Proceedings* of the Society of Biblical Archaeology, January 1899).

Now we learn from the inscriptions recently discovered by M. de Morgan at Susa, that in the early days of Babylonian history the Sumerian suffix KI, 'place,' was often pronounced by the Semites at the end of the geographical name to which it was attached, and which was consequently made to terminate in a guttural. Thus on the obelisk of Manistusu we have Zimana-k, Kharkhamuna-kki, Kazura-kki, Nana-kki, and in a text of