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## The Sinless High Priest.

BY RENDEL HARRIS, LL.D., LITT.D., MANCHESTER.

SOME two years since (to be exact it was in the *Expositor* for July 1919), I wrote a short study entitled 'Jesus and the Exodus,'<sup>1</sup> with the object of elucidating the sequence of thought in the early chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews. I am referring to those passages where the writer argues successively on the themes of the Sabbath-keeping of the people of God, on the penetrating\* and incisive nature of the Living Word, on the High Priesthood of Christ, and so, by a not unnatural transition, to the Priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek. It was not easy, if we may judge from the work of extant interpreters, to put these themes into an orderly sequence. There appeared to be crevasses in the line of march of the writer's thought, and it was only by the use of a new instrument of criticism that we were able to make the road into a continuous track. This new instrument was the hypothetical *Book of Testimonies*, current in the early Church. It was shown that the writer, on three successive occasions, was using an allegorical interpretation, by which Jesus of the New Testament was identified with Joshua of the Old Testament. In the first instance, it was Joshua leading the children of Israel into the Land of Rest; in the second, it was the same Joshua practising a second circumcision with sharp flint knives<sup>2</sup> upon the people whom he had brought to the border of their inheritance; in the third case, the writer passed from Joshua the son of Nun to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest in the story which Zechariah tells of the restoration of the priesthood, after the return from exile. He calls him the *Great High Priest*, as the Testimony Book did, and all the early Fathers who use it. The sequence from Jesus the Leader to the Land of Rest to Jesus the Circumcisor with a New Circumcision, and to Jesus the High Priest with restored functions and glories, and an unchangeable priesthood in a new and celestial order, was sufficiently made out.

We are now going to show that further elucidation of the meaning of the writer to Hebrews is

possible, if we return and pick up the clue which was running through the separate and successive themes. Those who are familiar with the earliest strata of Patristic literature will not need to be reminded of the stress that is laid on the supposed parallel between Joshua the High Priest, of whom Zechariah writes, and the Great High Priest of our own Confession. It is certain that in the intercourse between the Church and the Synagogue in the beginning of the Gospel, the vision of Zechariah was often appealed to. The appeal commonly took the form of a pictorial demonstration of the primitive doctrine of the Two Advents, one in shame and dishonour, when the High Priest is seen clad in foul raiment and uncrowned; the other in glory, when his filthy robes are removed from him and a clean mitre is set upon his head. According to the Fathers, who expound the matter to us, the Jews have failed to understand this vision: they did not know (though Isaiah told them clearly enough) that the despising and rejecting of Messiah precedes His exaltation and triumph. The prophetic vision is a testimony against the Jews. To this day, says Tertullian, they deny that their Messiah has come, because He did not come sublime, and because they did not see that He was to come lowly.

Suppose, then, that we admit that the writer to the Hebrews has been engaged upon a series of extracts from the Old Testament, arranged so as to suggest and to prove certain Christian doctrines, let us see if, by the closer examination of the passages from which he is working, we can further elucidate his actual message.

Let us try and realize the situation which would be created if, instead of an epistle addressed to Hebrews, and interpreting from its very first pages the conventional Church Testimonies, we were to find ourselves confronted with a real live opponent, like Trypho the Rabbi in Justin's *Dialogue*. We could not recite the passage in Zechariah at length without provoking hostile comment. Justin says as much when he comes to the subject. He sees Trypho frowning in anticipation of the argument. For suppose we come to the sinister figure of the Adversary, who is countering the claims made on

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in *Testimonies II.* (Camb. Univ. Press, 1920), c. 6, pp. 51-57.

<sup>2</sup> *Testimonies II.*, *ut sup.* 54, for the Logos as flint knife.

behalf of the High Priest, and is reproved by the angel of the Lord, under the plea that Joshua is a brand plucked from the burning. Our opponent will ask, pertinently enough, whether our Jesus, whom we have assumed to be typified in Joshua the son of Josedech, is to be described in this way. The answer will not be easy. Then, as we read on, we come to the statement that the angel directs the removal from the high priest of his sordid array, and says to him, 'Behold! I have caused thine iniquity to pass away from thee, and will clothe thee in fair array.' The question now cannot be evaded as to whether the sordidness of the High Priest is a pollution of sin, and if our great High Priest is typified under these terms of sin and redemption.

Now these questions are not just imaginary, for we can see the answers which are made by various early Fathers to get rid of the suggestions which the prophetic text presents. Justin Martyr, for instance, escapes from the difficulty by saying that we ourselves are the sinful figure here typified, and that it is by the grace of Jesus and by the Will of the Father that we have cast off the raiment of our filthy deeds. And we are, also, the brand plucked from the burning, in that we have been rescued from our former sins by Jesus, who also saves us from the flame of persecution which the devil and his ministers raise against us (see Justin, *Dial.* 116). The explanation can hardly be called satisfactory, but at least it shows that the difficulty was recognized.

Now let us see how Tertullian will deal with the matter; for he also has a Testimony Book and a Testimony Doctrine similar to that in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in Justin. Tertullian makes it a case of the Two Advents, one in shame and dishonour, and the other in glory. The sordid raiment means the indignity of the Incarnation, which brings our Lord into passible and mortal flesh. And the opposition of the devil means two things: (i.) that he will enter into Judas and make him betray his master; (ii.) that he will tempt the Lord Himself after the baptism. This explains away the sordid raiment, but not the presence of sin in the person so clad.<sup>1</sup> The language of Zechariah suggests that the Adversary had not

<sup>1</sup> See Tertullian, *adv. Marc.* iii. 7.

played altogether a losing game in the Temptation of the Lord. I do not see that Tertullian quite meets the residual difficulty. When we turn to Cyprian's *Testimonies* and the closely related section in the *Institutes* of Lactantius, we shall see that Cyprian heads this section on the same lines as Tertullian, with the statement that the Lord was to be humble in His first Advent; when he describes his proofs of the Two Advents from Zechariah, he has the passage

auferte vestimenta sordida  
ab eo. et dixit ad eum:  
ecce abstuli iniquitates tuas;

and we notice that Lactantius has dropped the italicized words. These references will show the difficulty in which the early interpreters of the Testimony in Zechariah found themselves.

Now let us turn back to the Epistle to the Hebrews, and see whether the text is illuminated by the prophecy. We see at a glance the meaning of the statement that the High Priest was tempted in all points, like as we are. The Devil stands to oppose the High Priest: *Diabolus adversabatur ei*: but the writer to the Hebrews adds significantly the words

χωρίς ἁμαρτίας,

'without sin.' He is guarding against a wrong inference being drawn from the forgiveness of the sins of the High Priest in the Old Testament. He emphasizes elsewhere the point that the Jewish High Priest has to offer for his own sins as well as for those of the people: but the kind of High Priest that meets our need is 'holy, harmless, and undefiled.' Thus he escapes from the difficulty by refusing to complete the parallel. The sordid raiment is the result of the Incarnation, not of the Temptation.

Reviewing the whole matter, it appears that our analysis is justified by the added lucidity which our text has acquired. And we venture to repeat a sentence which we used upon a previous occasion: 'that the Christians cannot understand the Epistle to the Hebrews, nor the New Testament generally, unless they see the underlying document which all the writers employ. For everything in these matters depends on being in the line of sight.'