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*THE HEBREW PROBLEM OF THE PERIOD.*

*OUR LORD'S SECOND TEMPTATION.*

II.

A TREATY with Hebraism would involve entangling compromises and accommodations, dangerous delays, ravelled issues. It is sure to be a sterile hybridity, an unavailing experiment. Miracles will galvanize life, but not awake it; they will only stimulate into a morbid expectancy the superficial ritualisms and political cupidities and cynical rationalisms which were undermining the life of the nation. An alliance in Jerusalem would provincialize the spiritual religion. It would be an interregnum, indefinitely postponing the kingdom of God, a regency which would supplant the Reign of God. It is disaster, and the disaster is painted by the historical picture of the Israelites in the wilderness, distrusting and experimenting, which invited the wrath and doom, "that they should not enter into My rest."<sup>1</sup> This is the clear conclusion before Him.

He sorrowfully consents to the tragic solution of the problem. He resolves, with the reluctance of love, upon the dissolution of the Hebrew fabric. This sorrow of tempted love anticipates those tears which later on He shed over Jerusalem. The Johannine memoir is mainly occupied with the Jerusalem ministry of Jesus, with Christ's efforts to save Jerusalem. From the fifth chapter onwards with regular recurrence we are told that the death of Christ is in the stifling air of the city. He became intolerable to the scrofulous society in its hectic debilities. Every time Christ appears in Jerusalem He feels that the thermal pressure indexes His death.<sup>2</sup> Spite of the hostility, the antique historic associations, the glories of Abraham,

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xcv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> See John v. 16; vii. 19, 25, 32; viii. 37; x. 31; xi. 50.

Moses, David, and Isaiah kept burning in Him an unquenched love, begun in the days of the temptation. There is a pathos in every word, the sadness of a love which wants to save underlining every sentence, in the elegy He utters. "He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."<sup>1</sup>

The resolution to keep the safe and straight path of the primary plan, unmodified, takes the historic drapery and dramatic form, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."<sup>2</sup> It expresses the high-water mark of purpose and decision, and a compendium of wide reviews and clear readings of the problem which has fascinated Him. The Remnant is there, the holy seed, the stock of Isaiah's felled terebinth and oak, even a minority within a minority, which He will call out and inspire with His Spirit. In Nathanael and Peter and John and Paul, Mary and Martha and Mary of Magdala, there remains the kernel of Hebraism, which will be vivified by His death. The glory of Abraham, Moses, and David will continue. But the case must go, the framework shattered to pieces, a total dissolution of the old fabric.

The equivalents to this temptation in human history

<sup>1</sup> Luke xix. 41-44.

<sup>2</sup> The scholar will notice the lucidity of the resolution in the prepositional prefix of *ἐκπειράσεις*: *Ὁὐκ ἐκπειράσεις Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου*, Thou shalt not out and out tempt the Lord thy God.

and individual experience will enforce the argument here adduced.

1. The problem before Christ is to extricate the spiritual from the material of the Hebrew Church, the essence of religion from its historic accidents, and to inform a new order of humanity, preserving the continuity of the past. He has said, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." If the Hebrew Church had handed to Him this reconstruction, and accepted His terms, there had been no destruction of Jerusalem, but the transformation of the Temple into the first Christian Cathedral. An impracticable conservatism, which had issued in malignant morbid conditions, had made this concession impossible. Christ's temptation was from the natural principle of conservation and continuity deep in Him, and the facilities which this conservatism and its compromises afforded for the inauguration of the new society.

These facilities form a class of temptations ever present with us, making conflicts and complications, demanding even dissolutions.

Thought requires a formula of words, but it outgrows the formula. Morality takes on the form of manners, and manners come to be regarded as the spirit of morals, and *mores* in Latin meant manners first. Kindness degenerates into politeness. Religion must have a habit, and ritualism overlays and smothers it. Worship has its sacraments, and sacraments may come to be regarded as magic. Progress implies that, after a few centuries, our attainments collect into essences which require new habiliments. Personal growth implies that, after a few years, we get at the kernels of things, find idealisms in the outward. Temptations waylay us here. One is from mental indolence; another is from moral indifference; another from a cynicism towards goodness; and another is from timidity. The mind is fatigued with originality, offended and frightened at it.

Change becomes a terror every way. If the forms and formulas have become institutions, vested interests have been created; they pay, and become more dangerous. Rotten institutions are the parents of revolutions which follow in the wake of the decay of ancient forms. Hebraism is a dead branch on the oak of humanity, and must be sawn off; it is festering into the living substance, but it pays, and may it not be utilized? An antiquated Hellenism invited Roman aggression; an expelled Latinism invited Gothic aggression; a papal senility demanded a Reformation; the decay of feudalism kindled the conflagrations of the French Revolution; the obsolete relation of landlord and tenant in Ireland has created the crime which has desolated that unhappy country. When will we learn that there is no finality for institutions, customs, liturgies, phrases, forms?—finality only for the unseen idealisms which underlie them. Antiquity is a temptation to fine minds.

“This will never do,” was the famous first sentence of the kindly and keen-eyed Jeffrey, in his review of Wordsworth’s *Excursion*.<sup>1</sup> The *Lyrical Ballads* “wavered prettily between silliness and pathos”<sup>2</sup> was the judgment of the same genial autocrat of criticism at the beginning of this century. He stopped the sale of the poems, and stopped the poet’s supplies, and the poet was very poor. Originality is not understood by the mere intellect; originality has its inspiration in love, as Wordsworth said in reference to this bitter criticism, “We have no thought (save thoughts of pain) but as far as we love and admire.”<sup>3</sup> And is it not one of our needs, that we find a mathematics which will have a love of the stars, and not mere measurements of miles, and a metaphysics which will have a love of the ideal, and not concepts of the

<sup>1</sup> *Contributions to the “Edinburgh Review,”* p. 534.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 585.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Lady Beaumont, 1807.

absolute? The rage and howl against the originality of Wordsworth is one of the most instructive mental phenomena of this century. Byron, Shelley, Jeffrey, *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, and almost every critic of the day expended a vocabulary of ridicule, contempt, and abuse upon the poetry of Wordsworth. £140 was all that the poet got in twenty-five years for his poems, which have created an epoch of thought for us. If Wordsworth had not a clear sense of his mission, he had succumbed to the temptation, looking on the literary and social world from the pinnacles of poetic ambition; he had yielded, and written things which had pleased men of consideration, and tempted commonplace and precipice. The sanctification of nature and of the elementary affections of human nature, which has been Wordsworth's contribution to our century, had been postponed for another century. He refused the temptation of the literary and reading world, and it came round to him. When Ruskin's *Modern Painters* appeared, the *Edinburgh Review* wrote, "Mischievous to art, mischievous to literature, but mischievous above all to those young and eager minds animated by the love of art and literature, who may mistake this declamatory trash for substantial and stimulating food." Had Ruskin conceded to this critic, the sanctification of art had been postponed indefinitely. Paul was the burning genius of ideas who directed the inevitable conflict between Judaism and Christianity which Christ foresaw in this temptation. He circumcised Titus as a concession to Jerusalem conservatism, and later on Timothy, in the hope of making him an acceptable missionary to the Hebrew world, from which Christianity had to begin. In these instances he probably failed in insight or decision, or more probably succeeded in charity, or still more probably impressed upon his coadjutors his indifference towards all externalism. But he soon saw the necessity to put his foot down, and to accept no compromise,

and to treat Mosaism as a beggarly rudiment. In the Epistle to the Galatians we have the dialectic of his resolution. Had Paul not braved the opposition of the Hebrew world, a bitterness which followed him even after death, had he sought its suffrages, had he wished to make his way easy as a missionary, Christianity had been near strangled in the folds of that rationalism and ritualism which always go together, and which lay as a death-pall over Jerusalem. He had tempted a failure and a disaster.

The temptation to men of genius to come down from the roof and meet the literary reviewers and ecclesiastical leaders and the people of consideration in church and society is very great, something which ordinary men, who have not their resources, can scarcely appreciate. Cowardice, compromise, applause, wealth urge their persuasive eloquence. The same temptation comes to all men to keep well with their fellows, to go with the multitude, to do as others are doing. Good men very properly follow Church traditions, cannot help expressing religious thought by well-worn phrases, worship according to the custom of their fathers, love the antiquity which has made them. When the form is gone, we are naturally afraid the spirit will go; when the creed is attacked, we think doctrine is attacked. But the time comes when new truths, fresh ideas, other readings of the Bible force us out of our routines; and we have then to be loyal to our attainments, and conquer cowardice and popularity. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," means, Be true to what you know; take the path of conviction; mind not your stomach, as the Israelites did at Meribah.

The perplexities of our day are the perplexities of a transition period, and the character of a transition period is that the past is drawing into its essences. The temptation at such a period is to keep to the forms; literalness is the trial of the period. We need men of insight at these times.

John was a seer of the age of Jesus, and by the force of his genius he obtained two extracts from the past, which are among the greatest achievements of the human mind. He condensed the essence of the vast, antique system of sacrifice, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." He found the ideal of centuries of thought and feeling which grew round the monarchy of Israel, and said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Comparable to these, no feats of insight and genius are to be found in our world, living thought cast into dead thinking, living truths cast into dying materialisms, living ferments into a putrid society.

The doctrine of the fall, the imputation of Adam's sin, federal headship, the covenant, atonement, substitution, justification by faith, plenary inspiration, everlasting punishment contain eternal truths. But the Church is uneasy with them, and the thinking world is indifferent to them, and it is a crisis. The fact is, that these great truths have distilled themselves into essences, which require other expressions, and the entrance among them of other truths requires another perspective, restatements and rearrangements; old truths are never lost. We wait for a genius like that of John, who will find new bottles for the new wine, who will unify past and present in one whole by the idealism which underlies them; a genius of distillation and unification. The exhaustion of the outwards and the expressions of religion is one of the great facts which we have to reckon with. Did not the Hebrew system become petrified by the sheer lapse of time? and was not the Hebrew language exhausted when Christian truth had to take its form from the subtle and flexible language of Euripedes and Plato? A twofold temptation emerges in these times. The temptation to nebulosity, in being or trying to be all spirit without a body or bottle, when the wine is sure to be spilt; and the temptation to literalness, in holding to the

form or formula, when the new wine will be spilt by bursting the old bottles. The spirit needs the letter, though the letter was killing religion in the days of Paul. A letter is a mark for a sound; a number of sounds make a word; the word is the voice of an idea. If the word is not there, the idea is a wandering spirit; the word may be there and the idea departed, and it is all sound. The temptation to nebulousness makes the doubter and the agnostic, and it made the Sadducees of old. The temptation to literalness makes the formalist, who likes a religion which does not inspire him to duty, and the moralist, who likes a morality which is not in him, and which he can put off and put on as he does his clothes. The man without ideas plays with words, and the man without words plays at ideas, and it is playtime for cynics and worldlings, with issues serious enough for everybody. The Church is responsible in these times for the laxness which lets indefiniteness alone, and lets antiquity putrify, and makes a holiday for sceptics and casuists, and markets for worldliness. For amorphousness, on the one hand, and the outwards of religion, on the other, produce also a worldliness. We tempt the Lord our God by the indolence which does not discern essences, and the timidity which does not give them expression; by that nebulousness which leaves the spirit of religion disembodied, and by that literalness which leaves it in worn-out phrases and customs, exhausted routines and rituals. Originality is one of the forces of religion. The idealist and the realist are both exposed to temptation.

2. In the conquest of this temptation Christ shows us the place and the work of the supernatural among spiritual forces. He worked miracles sparingly and on fitting occasions, and commonly in obscure places. He did not exhibit miracles, He did not advertise them. What we call miracles is the impact of mind on matter, and a personality like His could not be in this world without effluences of

the miraculous going out of Him. The supernatural is natural to mind, but in the morbid condition of the nation the miraculous had become magical. The craving for signs had become a diseased temper of the nation. At best, signs are no proper basis for religion; they are signals seen by the eye. The inspirations of religion are in the native love of God in us, and in the splendid pressure of the infinite upon our faculties. Perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon in the life of Christ is His abstinence from the miraculous, the restraint he put on His supernatural power, the supernatural abeyance of Himself. To pasture the soul on miracles is like getting drunk on champagne. It is the capture of the fancy at the expense of faith. A faith languishing in the damps of ruins will find the supernatural a stimulus; but even then they are the blessed who have not seen, and yet have believed.

The supernatural is in us. We do not need to see it outside of us. Are we not supernatural beings ourselves, who converse with the unseen God, and build temples, oppressed with a destiny elsewhere? Mind is an incursion into nature of the supernatural, and it becomes natural by the reconciliation it makes between the natural and the supernatural. Miracles are an expression of the difficulty which mind has with matter, and the difficulty has to be endured. My dog converses with me and with his food, and goes no farther, being lost in nature. We converse not only with the stars and photograph their spectrum, but we go farther into the stellar depths, and find God, and converse with Him. We are not lost in nature, but are above it. If we want other miracles than ourselves to evoke the Christliness that is in us, we are departing from our true selves, and going far away from the truth in us. The truth of Christ is in us, and it may be waked up by the sensuous in miracles when shreds of affinities are still there,

but it cannot be kept waking by the sensuous. It must be sustained by the spiritual, and not the sensuous. "Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after signs." A generation whose spirits have broken the wedlock with God, who are living in the adulteries of literalism and ritualism, pedantries, and sophistries, this generation seeketh after thaumaturgies.

A splendid opportunity later on was given to Christ to make a profound impression of His supernaturalness in Jerusalem, and it was this temptation repeated, and He refused it; perhaps the profoundest and sublimest instance of self-effacement on record. He was told, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross, and we will believe Thee." He stuck to the cross, and resisted the engaging witchery of the most bewitching proposal ever made. It would have done no good. The crucifixion is a force, the miraculous a stimulant. Death is a dynamics; descent from the cross a pyrotechnics. The miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus led on to the murder of the miracle worker.

The impression of a miracle is first upon the senses. The eye receives it, and carries the report to the more inward parts. Sensation becomes perception, and the percept the concept. If the dispositions entertain the conceptions, there is harmony within. If impressions remain in the border region, and perception and inclination be at feud, if unwillingness resists conceptions, there is a civil war. The senses will continue the report, they are bound to take up the impressions; they are not at liberty, they are mechanical. The will can refuse to receive the report and to act upon it; the will is free, and is not bound to accept the conviction of reason. This becomes a condition of unreason, which prolonged, becomes a species of insanity. It is this insaneness which accounts for the phenomenon

of the Hebrew rulers conspiring to kill Christ, because the resurrection of Lazarus was an unquestioned fact. It is the only account by which we understand the Pharisees excommunicating the man,—making him an outcast of Hebrew society,—because he had convinced them that he had been born blind, and that he now saw, and because he urged on them the invincible logic, that the Man who had given him his sight is a man who had a Divine commission in Jerusalem. “Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes. . . . Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this Man were not of God, He could do nothing. . . . They cast him out.”<sup>1</sup>

Miracles are a tyranny, carrying a relentless logic, which crushes freedom. The royalty of Christ is not to be a despotism. If Christ had become monarch in Jerusalem by the force of miracles, and had assumed the office of legislator of the Temple, His legislation had become obsolete as soon as His presence was removed, and the pressure of the supernatural withdrawn. In this temptation Christ refuses to be an intellectual tyrant, disbelieves in tyrannies, will not hurry conviction, will not apply force. The truth makes us free. Christ reigns by love.

This temptation finds us everywhere; it appeals to tendencies in our nature and tendencies in systems, which ever tend into morbidness and inflict serious structural and functional injuries to the moral constitution.

Literature tends to become sensational; politics panders to the applause of the day. The religious worker seeks brilliant effects, and if he comes to believe in them he is entangled in dangerous spells. They who are the subjects of work, men who are seeking religion, will mistake these excitements for true feelings. Ritualism touches the harp-

<sup>1</sup> John ix. 30-34.

strings of the beautiful in us, and a tune of art played on our faculties is taken for religion. In our day, one end of the earth looks upon the other. The cablegram flashes fame over oceans; the telegram over continents. Newspaper paragraphs like the personal element, and our names get there and please us, and are seen by everybody. Very exciting is oratory in the pulpit; very brilliant are learning and literature; very titillating the songs of the revivalist; very witching the art of the ritualist. Catching the performers in scenic plaudits, administering stimulants to audiences; and there is a deal of religion which has an alcoholic tyranny over us; a religion of the nerves which produces enervations, and demands stronger stimulants. These stimulants are among the indispensables of religion, as Christ found the advertisement of miracles necessary; but just as He saw the dangers in His miraculous power, we are to be alive to the insidious perils which lie hidden among the superlative adverbs and adjectives by which Christian work and workers are described, among the pleasing methods by which we try to rouse the religious faculty. Paul is a prodigy of imitation in the way he reflects the mind of Christ, in whom the contents of Christ's mind were assimilated and reproduced with a startling accuracy. He speaks of excitement in this strain: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing." The thing remarkable in this strain is the clear distinction he draws between the temporary and the permanent, the shewy and the substantial, the sea of love and the curling wave and coloured foam and brilliant phosphorescences on the surface.

Silence and obscurity are Christian forces, and they are

not trusted, and will be less in the coming age of electricity. Because good men do not see the missionary work of the Church in foreign lands making a stir of signs, they talk of it as a failure, they get impatient, they find fault with methods. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. It does not show itself by a parade of angels or a display of revolutions. When men say, "Lo, here, and Lo, there," look out for everything but the kingdom. The kingdom of God is within you. The unhistoric obscurity has chapters of greater consequence than those which historians delight to discourse about. The silent spaces are richer in the eternities. It is sure to startle us out of our proprieties, and it may even do us good, if one came from the dead and told us the secrets of the spiritual world; but it is better for us to have Moses and the prophets, and the silence of their utterances in our inner self and unpretending bookshelves, the leaven of the kingdom silently working in all lands, and even the Christ hidden in humanity—the *λόγος σπερματικός* of Origen—to lie unexpressed there till the day of His showing.

3. A temptation consists of assertions and counter-assertions. Christ in this temptation asserts His idea of the universality of the society He is founding. Jerusalem is refused as a metropolis, because it is a provincial town or parochial village in the imperialism of His idea. He is the spirit of all kinghood; the ideal of all priesthood; an unlocal power, the genius of all history. Christianity has its empire over all nations. Is not this conception still unrealized in the thinking of Christendom, and even discredited by it. Our ideas of doctrine, administration, life are provincial. We are even smaller than provincial; we are parochial.

We are located by our native affinities in one or other of the various systems of truth, forms of government, and modes of life which have grown out of the prolific Christian stock. And what do we do? We unchurch differences, or

at best tolerate or pity them, and we succumb to the local and parochial idea. Not toleration, but appreciation of these differences; not till we regard these variations as the beautiful fragments of a great whole, do we get above the temptation which Christ conquered. Every typical system of doctrine, government, and life belongs to the empire of Christ's idea. Variation is the law of vitality. Unity is not uniformity; unity is an unseen ideality. An empire is a federation of provinces; a federation of doctrine, government, life makes the Christian empire. Truth is infinite; life is infinite. We yield to the parochial temper when we think that if one Church constitution is true, another is, or must be, false; that if one type of life has a reason for its existence, every other stands in a perversity of reason. We get countrified by this temptation, when a system or type thinks that every other must be banished or reduced to one pattern before we are right. The temptation to provincialize the kingdom of Christ is ever present; it is the same in Jerusalem, in England, in Scotland, in Rome; to claim monopoly is always pleasing, and it is this false claim which makes the darkest pages of Christian history, this provincial idea which has deluged lands with the blood of persecutions. Christ is the Son of Man, universally human: not provincially Hebrew, Greek, or Latin; not Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or Wesleyan. No one theology, Church government, or Church life has the custody of Christ. Jerusalem is repudiated, among other reasons, for this reason, to teach us this catholic and œcumenical universality. Christ conquers the spirit of every age in its manifold forms, when He conquers this temptation. He bewilders the provincial orthodoxy, and horrifies the conventional society of Jerusalem and of all time—of London, Edinburgh, Rome. He shows the opulences of His kingdom, shows the many provinces and parishes and metropolises which belong to it.

4. The victory of this temptation is the victory of the Cross. Christ sees that the extraction of Hebrew acquisitions from the fatal embraces of new moons, sabbaths, and circumcision can be made only by His death, that the idealities of righteousness and holiness won by Hebraism will find their new vestures by the crucifixion: a singular prevision. Surely the two great factors of history are Anticipation of the higher, and Absorption of the lower into the higher. Is not the victory of a human life measured by these two factors, which gives a recurrent new birth of character?

The victory of the Cross is the victory of submission to a superior will, of patience, of getting included into the large scheme of things. Evil is good got in a hurry, and it is only the mimicry of good; wrong is happiness for the hour or the day, with blank and husky years before us. Eternity is the element with which creatures of our make have to reckon; we must get our hand on centuries. The sting of evil lies in our neglect or defiance of the future, often in our inability or indisposition to rise into the higher latitudes and far off ages. The Cross of Jesus has shown us the crucifixion which lies deep in the heart of the universe, in the course of human history, in the sublime structure of human nature, that the law of the Cross is the law of futurity. We got our feet planted firmly on the ages by accepting the law which requires the service of present suppression. Take away the friction of our will with a superior will, and you have drawn the sting out of temptation. Take away the impatience with the plan that limits us, and temptations have no mark to hit. Look at the Cross, and a serious purpose is obtained, and far looks. The victory over our assertive egoism is obtained by the patience of eternity. The acquisitions of time and inheritance are conserved by the sacrifice of the present to the future and the comfortable to the dutiful. Then Necessity, which pressed so heavily

on the Greek mind, becomes free will. Temptation is an opportunity to bring into clear shining what of eternity is in a man. In the ample folds of the words, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," lie hidden the past ages in their seeds, and the future in their buds.

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