

*STUDIES IN THE "INNER LIFE" OF JESUS.*

VII.

THE SURRENDER OF HOME.

1. IN His Baptism Jesus had assumed and been confirmed in His Vocation. In His Temptation His fidelity to His own ideal, in conflict with the popular expectations of it, had been tested, and had stood the test. In His Early Self-Disclosure He had proved the readiness of a few men to help Him in its fulfilment. In His Surrender of His Home His devotion to it stood a severe and grievous trial. How was His Divine call to be related to, and affected by, His human duty in the relationships of the home? This question was answered in His response to His mother's request in Cana of Galilee (John ii. 4), His rebuke both of her and His brethren, when they came to take Him away from His ministry (Mark iii. 35), His recognition of the opposition of spirit and purpose between Himself and them, when they urged Him to go up to Jerusalem to manifest Himself to the world (John vii. 6), His committal of her to John on the Cross (John xix. 26). The meaning of these utterances themselves, however, cannot be fully understood, unless viewed in the light of all His teaching on the duties of the home, and of the demands He made on His disciples with respect to their family relationships.

2. The general principles which Jesus laid down have secured for the home a place of honour and a claim of devotion in Christian society, such as are not elsewhere accorded to it. In opposition to the lax practice of the age in regard to divorce, He insisted on the absolute inviolability of the marriage bond; and His boldest criticism and severest condemnation of the imperfection of the Mosaic code were uttered in defence of this fundamental social institution. To the same uncompromising defence of mar-

riage belongs His demand of perfect chastity of thought as well as deed. In His censure of the traditions of the scribes, which set at nought the law of God, He emphatically affirmed the claims of parents upon their children. He regarded any loosening of the family tie as an annulling and making void of the will of God. His tenderness and gentleness towards women and children may also be taken as an indication of the great value He assigned to the family relationships. His choice of the name *Father* for God proves that in human relations He recognized an image, however imperfect, of the Divine heart. This analogy between the human and the Divine affection He so confidently used in argument about God's dealings with men as to show that in the home He saw a revelation of God Himself.

3. There are some sayings, however, which seem to show a depreciation of family relationships. One of His sayings has not only bewildered, but even grieved loving hearts, for it seems to limit the relationship of marriage entirely to this earthly life, and thus appears to refuse to the most intense and intimate affection of which humanity is capable a place in the heavenly world. "In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven" (Matt. xxii. 30). As the Sadducees, to whom these words were spoken, conceived marriage merely in its physical aspect as the means of continuing the race, no so wide-reaching significance need be attached to them. Marriage as a physical provision will cease; the social institution which depends upon it will pass away; but the personal affection, which has its basis in nature, and protection from society, but has itself a spiritual value, will, we may confidently assume, have its legitimate function recognized even in the new order of the eternal life. Nevertheless this saying does undoubtedly show that there is a physical and social aspect in human relationships to which Jesus assigns but a temporary validity.

4. More important even for our present purpose are the sayings in which Jesus deals with the family relationships of His disciples. He forbids one who seeks to be a disciple to go and bury his father; and another to bid farewell to those who are at his home. Not only are father and mother to be loved less than He Himself is, but even in comparison with Him they are to be hated. Among the sacrifices He required of His disciples a foremost place is assigned to the surrender of home. As His teaching at other times shows that He did not assign little worth to the claims of kindred, we must conclude that it was only the incomparable value, and the absolute authority, which He ascribed to discipleship, that made Him depreciate in comparison the good of the family. It was also because He saw the danger which lurked in the duties of the home, that He was so insistent and uncompromising in His demand for its abandonment. Affection may narrow as well as widen the heart. The logical formula, that as the intension of a term increases its extension decreases, may be applied to human affection. Intensity and exclusiveness are often allied. The family instead of being the servant may prove the rival of the kingdom of God.

5. We may assume the principle that what Jesus taught others He had Himself learned in His own life. Did He so earnestly warn His disciples of the dangers of their family relationships as hindering their entire and constant devotion to His cause, because He Himself had faced the danger, and had discovered by how severe a struggle alone it could be escaped? Several incidents in His life seem fully to justify this conclusion. With some of these we may now deal. His saying to His mother at Cana has caused expositors not a little trouble. The attempts to represent the utterance as altogether courteous and gracious cannot be pronounced entirely successful. "Woman" may or may not be a title of respect, but it is not natural for a son so to address his

mother. The use of this mode of address, even apart from the words which follow, seems to show without doubt that it was necessary for Jesus to assert at this time in unequivocal language His isolation from and His independence of the interests and obligations of His former home in Nazareth, to make plain to His mother, however painful to her that knowledge might prove, that her authority could no longer be recognized by the son, who was now directly subject to God alone, and that her wishes could not be regarded by Him in the fulfilment of His vocation, and in the exercise of the powers which had been entrusted to Him by God for His work.

6. Most men are able to fulfil their vocation without the surrender of home, nay, even for most men, home has a necessary place to fill, and an essential part to play, in the doing of their work in the world. Most men do their duty to God and mankind by pursuing some trade and profession, by maintaining and protecting a family, by discharging the duties imposed by neighbourliness and citizenship. But some men are called to a wider sphere, and therefore a harder task. To fulfil their vocation, they must cast off the limitations of interest and effort which the home involves. To quote Jesus' own striking words, "there are eunuchs which made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." The more universal the scope of any man's vocation, the more absolute the demand which it makes upon him, the more absorbing its interest and exhausting its efforts, the more completely must he abandon home and kindred. Such an abandonment Jesus did demand from His followers. If their vocation as His disciples required this surrender of home, much more must His vocation have demanded from Him this complete sacrifice.

7. How great was the sacrifice involved we cannot measure, for our capacity of loving cannot fathom the depths of the affection of Jesus. It has already been shown

that the home in Nazareth was divinely prepared to be the nursery and the school of the soul of Jesus as He grew in wisdom and grace. He had been in no hurry to escape from its shelter and its burden. Even He was taught and trained for His wider task by its narrower duties. As the Son of Mary and the Carpenter of Nazareth He learned to bear Himself fitly and worthily as the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind. If, as is not at all unlikely, He owed to His mother not only the care and kindness of common motherhood, but even those first disclosures of the dignity of His person, and the glory of His destiny, which were for Him the occasion and the stimulus of His self-discovery, home would be to Him not only a shrine of human affection, but even a temple of divine communion. Nevertheless His words in the Temple, when He stood where "the brook and river meet," between boyhood and manhood, show that misunderstanding was possible even in that home. There were limits to His mother's insight and sympathy. Not improbably even before He left His home, He had begun to realize that His nearest and dearest could not share His wishes, aims, and hopes, and that in the fulfilment of His vocation He would be left alone with His Father. Although He enjoyed a closeness of fellowship with God which has been given to no other, yet, as His appeal to His disciples to watch with Him in Gethsemane shows, He longed for human companionship; and accordingly His mother's failure to understand and feel with Him must have been a very severe trial to Him. We cannot understand His words to His mother unless by a sympathetic imagination we realize for ourselves as clearly and fully as we can the psychological situation. His departure from home had been regarded with disapproval; His return to Cana had been welcomed as an opportunity for the recovery by His mother of the influence over Him which she had so long exercised, but which now seemed to be slipping from her grasp; His

mother's request appeared an attempt to reassert her authority over Him; His answer was intended to assert conclusively that the old relation was for Him once for all ended, that He had entered on a new life in which His mother could not continue to fill the same place, and wield the same power, as she had hitherto done.

8. The severity of the language in which this decision is expressed is inexplicable, unless it marked a crisis in Jesus' own experience. Just as the harshness of the words to Peter at Caesarea Philippi, "Get thee behind Me, Satan," can be accounted for only if He was feeling the strain and stress of temptation in Peter's appeal, even so the sternness of tone can be explained only if His mother's request appeared to Him to involve a moral peril for Himself. It is not easy to set aside habits of obedience; it is very hard to claim the rights of independence. The closer the relationship and the deeper the affection, the easier the obedience and the harder the independence. Our dearest relationships may bring us our most dangerous temptations. How many have sinned for love's sake who would not have done wrong from greed, or pride, or hate. Just because Jesus loved His mother so deeply, did He feel so keenly the greatness of the danger of her interference in His work. Had He cared less for her, He would have feared less that she might turn Him from the path of duty, and make Him in obedience to her disobedient to God.

9. It is true that He afterwards fulfilled His mother's request, and gave the help asked; but the moral quality of the same action is altogether changed by difference of motive. To use His supernatural power at His mother's bidding would have been altogether wrong, for it would have been a subordination of His universal vocation to His private relationships. To work a miracle at the prompting of the Spirit of His Father dwelling in Him to enlighten and guide Him was right, because the power was being

used in submission to the will by which it had been bestowed, and in obedience to which alone it could be legitimately exercised. At Cana Jesus felt the same struggle, if not quite as intensely as in the wilderness. He could not accept His mother's wishes as a guide to His action, because He could fulfil His vocation only as He minded not the things of men, but the things of God. How wise was His foresight, and how right His decision in thus asserting His independence of His mother in His obedience to God, subsequent events clearly showed.

10. It is most painful and surprising that Jesus' own in the narrowest sense of the word did not receive Him. But the Gospels make it plain that during His ministry He suffered, not only from the indifference, but even from the opposition of His mother and His brethren. Mark, with his frank and bold realism, informs us that "when His friends," by which, as the context shows, the Evangelist undoubtedly means His family, heard the report of His words and works, and the stir made by these, "they went out to lay hold on Him; for they said, He is beside Himself." So far had their misunderstanding gone, and so far were they prepared to carry their distrust of Him. Jesus absolutely denied their right to control His actions, and He did this even in language in which He renounced their claim to relationship. The only relation which He will recognize is spiritual affinity, and not physical connexion. "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." (With this may be compared His saying, when a woman called His mother blessed, "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.")

11. This renunciation of family was made, not from selfishness or lovelessness, but because on the one hand these relationships were hindering His fidelity to His vocation, and on the other in the doing of His duty He was forming other bonds of affection, which were more enduring

and satisfying. That the wider love of all who shared one common aim of submission to, and service of God might attain all the intimacy and intensity of family affection, the claims of the natural relation had to be resisted. It was for the sake of an expansive love that an exclusive love was denied, not its right as an affection, but its claim as a monopoly. Nevertheless we can be certain of this, that a heart so tender as Jesus' could not, without keen pain, curb and check the first affections of the home, even although thereby He might gain a larger liberty of love's communion among those who understood Him better, and, therefore, could in His work help Him more than those who were earliest kind, because nearest kin. Jesus had thus to solve for Himself what are the most serious and troublesome problems of the moral life, those arising, not from the conflict of sinful desire and simple duty, but from the opposition of duties, each of which has its own right, and the claims of which as against one another must be decided by an enlightened conscience in view of the great end and chief good of life. He decided that there are higher interests and greater obligations than those of the family, even those of personal communion in the kingdom of God.

12. It is not needful to dwell on the incident recorded in John vii. 1-9. His brethren's taunt and His rebuke show how great the estrangement had become. Ambition had in the brethren led affection astray. Duty in Him refused to be turned aside by affection. Instead of being willing that He should be the best that He knew He ought to be, they wanted Him to be as great as they believed He might be. Still more suggestive in regard to Jesus' family relationships, however, is the utterance from the Cross, "Woman, behold thy son" (John xix. 26). This is a saying the full significance of which is not commonly grasped. It does not mean simply that Jesus, who had hitherto been looking after His mother, when He knew Himself dying, passed on His task



to His beloved disciple. If no more is meant, why is the strange mode of address used? why did the failing breath not use the sacred name mother? why was the transference of the trust described as the annulling of the old in the forming of the new relation? These questions can be adequately answered only from the standpoint to which we have been led by our consideration of the previous incidents. His vocation as Saviour and Lord of all mankind necessarily involved the sacrifice of all other more private and particular human relationships. That He might offer Himself freely and fully to all men, no woman could claim the exclusive privilege of His filial affection. If we are not prepared to place Mary nearer the throne of the exalted Christ than any other, and thus fall into the superstition of Mariolatry, we should heartily welcome these words of Jesus as an intimation that this human relationship was once for all dissolved, that in the eternal life the temporal bond would no longer hold. There is no respect of persons with God. If Jew and Gentile are on an equality in the Kingdom of God, even although salvation was from the Jews, Mary is not exalted in heaven above other women, even although she was so highly favoured by God as to be on earth the mother of the Messiah. As Jesus in His progress Godward transcended His Jewish nationality, even so He transcended His family relationships. In His typical experience the law held, first the natural, then the spiritual. The natural relationship of mother and son must yield to another, even the spiritual of the Saviour and the saved. There was then no lack or loss of affection in the intimation on the Cross. He desired that His mother might be knit to Him in a spiritual union, closer than even the hallowed relationship of motherhood allowed. It was for a sacred ministry that He chose His beloved disciple. He entrusted His mother to one who understood and knew Him best, that by his converse and influence she might be brought to believe in

her Son as hitherto she had failed to believe, and that for the mother's fond affection there might be given to her the hallowed devotion of the believer. His bequest to His mother was a companionship, by which she might be led to the higher relationship of discipleship, with its greater blessedness.

13. As Jesus was richly endowed in heart as well as mind and will, and as the growth of His heart was for so long a time, as well as first of all, in the home, the surrender of home was no small part of the sacrifice of His life. It did mean sorrow to Him, that those from whom He might have looked for understanding and help had to be withstood as a danger and a hindrance. It did mean struggle for Him so to enlarge the bounds of His affection, that the disciple-circle became dear to Him even as His home had been. At great cost to Himself He has given us the supreme example of that ever-widening universal love, which rests not on any physical connexion, but on spiritual affinity, and the severest rebuke of that exclusive sentiment of family, which so often hinders a man's doing the work to which God has called him, and rendering the service to mankind for which he is fitted. As the narrowing affection is a temptation, so the widening affection is a task. Jesus withstood the temptation and discharged the task.

14. Jesus does not, however, destroy the home, as might at first sight appear. For (1) as has already been indicated the vocation of most men can be realized not only without the surrender, but even by means of home. It was only because Jesus realized the typical and universal humanity, that in Him the larger so entirely superseded the narrower affection. (2) In the home every man must, as Jesus did, learn the duties of the heart, which prepare him for the exercise of the love which embraces all mankind. (3) It is not inevitable that kindred and friends should be indifferent or hostile, as was the experience of Jesus; but happily

many a man finds in his home the comfort and encouragement which enable him to go on with his task, even in the face of an unfriendly world. Only as we estimate adequately the value of home, can we realize sufficiently how great was the sacrifice of Jesus in the Surrender of His Home.

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