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I. LITERARY.

MOSES.

No man among the sages
Enrolled on history's pages
To challenge all the ages
To reverence or condemn,
Can hold compare with Moses ;
No other name discloses,
No other life exposes
Such grandeur as reposes
In that God-crowned king of men.

No page in human history—
Sacred or profane,
No myth of heathen mystery,
No saga of the Dane,
No vague or weird tradition,
From all the hoary past,
Of man, or woman's mission
In labors great and vast
Suggest such scenes of splendor,
Of wonder and amaze,
To thrill the heart and render
One mortal's life ablaze,
As track the Hebrew Prophet,
In paths of lurid light,
From burning bush of Midian
To Pisgah's lonely height.

As Prophet and Preacher
And humanity's teacher,
The Koran's inspirer
Before the Hegira

SONSHIP IN THE FAMILY OF GOD.

A SERMON BY THE REV. JAMES F. LATIMER, D. D.

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power [*Margin*: the right or privilege] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”—John i:12, 13.

There is a sense in which all men are the children of God; and this is a truth which may be discovered independently of revelation. When Paul addressed that throng of doubting philosophers on Mars Hill, he could appeal to certain of the Greek poets who had declared that they were the offspring of God.

Every human being is a son of God, in this sense of the term, because he owes to God the origin of his life and the preservation of his existence, “for in him we live, and move, and have our being.” Again, he is a son of God because he has been endowed by his Maker with certain attributes which constitute the ineffaceable image of the Deity. Like God, he is an intelligent being capable of knowing the truth; he possesses a will and the power of choice; he is able to discern good and evil, and feels the obligation to do right and abstain from wrong. However men differ from one another in other things, they are all alike in these respects; and however wide the gulf between them and God, in other regards, they bear his image in these, and may, on that account, be called his sons.

But that is a sense far higher than this in which the sacred writer employs the word in our text. It includes, in fact, much more than could be affirmed of our first parent even, before the fall, although, in addition to being endowed with the faculties already mentioned, he was made capable of spiritual knowledge, and had the law of God written upon his heart. Notwithstanding the fact that he was possessed of righteousness and true holiness after the likeness of God, he was not a son, in the highest sense, but only placed in position to become one. By creation he was holy, but only a holy *servant*. He had, and could have while he continued in that original estate, no rights beyond the moment. He could not justly have been made a sufferer while he obeyed, but he had no vested

claims for the future. In this estate, his Sovereign creator would not leave him. He would lift him to a place nearer to himself—he would confer upon him, together with all his posterity, the rights of an heir in the family of a Divine Father.

You are familiar with God's gracious scheme for the accomplishment of this beneficent purpose, whereby through the faithfulness of our Federal Head he would transfer the entire human race from the sphere of perpetual probation to that of everlasting security and blessedness. You are no less familiar with the story of our first parent's unfaithfulness, and his far-reaching sin which brought with it ruin for himself and for all those who through him were to become the sons of God.

Now, my friends, it was this same task of introducing us into the family of God that Jesus of Nazareth undertook, but that task complicated with a difficulty most appalling in its character. Those who were to be elevated to sonship stood no longer in the place of servants, but of condemned criminals. No steps towards the accomplishment of the divine purpose could be taken before the curse should be removed, for that curse meant separation, of every soul upon whom it rested, from God. Therefore Jesus abolished that curse, for as many as receive him, namely, for those who are to become the sons of God.

But it must be evident to you that the removal of guilt is not all that is necessary; for when that has been done, if nothing else is done, we stand just where Adam stood. We are not condemned, but we have nothing to offer on the basis of which rights may be conferred. Jesus Christ, our Federal Head, does not leave us there. By the provisions of the covenant under which he stands for us, his holy obedience is ours, and as for his sufferings we are pardoned, so for his obedience are we accepted. He who receives Jesus—that is, exercises faith in him—becomes righteous in him. This you recognize as the doctrine of justification by faith.

At that same moment, being accepted of God, the believer is recognized as one entitled to the rights and privileges of a son of God. This is *adoption*, a transaction inseparable from justification and one which is grounded upon the same great facts. It is of this that the apostle speaks in our text: "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." The

first truth, then, presented to us here, is that *believers acquire, through Jesus Christ, legal status as veritable members of God's family, and become possessed, by an indefeasible title, of all the rights of sons.*

You observe that, thus far, we have been dealing with legal relations, and with these alone. Now, we all know that it is very important that we should sustain correct legal relations with our fellow-men. When God is a party, it is of supreme importance that they should be right. These legal relations which we have been considering lie at the basis of all those hopes that reach beyond this present life.

But, for all that, they, like all other mere legal relations, are external in their character, and, like all external relations, take on their highest significance only when there is that within which answers to that which is without.

Nowhere is this correspondence more important than in the case of the family. That family is one in name, but not in reality, of which it cannot be said that the outward bond is significant of a tie which binds heart to heart. That son is not one, in the truest sense, between whom and his father there is not the closest sympathy and fellowship. But this implies a harmony which cannot exist without likeness between the two.

Now, in the family of God there is no name without the reality. There is no outward, legal relation of sonship without the answering sympathy and fellowship. Sonship in the family of God, then, involves *God-likeness*. The Holy Spirit forms in every one upon whom is conferred the right to become a son of God "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Thus is realized the second element involved in sonship of which the text speaks, when it declares that the sons of God are "*born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" There is *birth from above*; birth which establishes true kinship with God; the implantation of a nature which brings the soul into sympathy with God as a father, and makes it a joy to serve him and hold fellowship with him.

It need scarcely be mentioned that both these transactions of which I have been speaking—that by which the rights of sonship are conferred, as well as that by which the new nature

is implanted—are *acts* of God, completed at once. He who is made a son is, in the first moment of his sonship, as fully entitled to all the rights which ever shall attach to that estate as he ever will be. Again, he acquires instantaneously, by the almighty operation of the Spirit, that life which characterizes the new creature.

But just here, we must note a difference. The new creature, though instantly brought into existence, is infantile. Its powers are instinct with vitality, but it is the vitality of the newborn babe. There must be growth and development through many stages till the vigor and perfection of manhood is attained.

A moment's consideration must convince you that it is necessary there should be outward favoring conditions in order to this growth. Such outward conditions are necessary to the expansion of any and all forms of life. So it is here. When the appropriate conditions for the growth of the child of God are realized, he advances constantly toward perfect likeness to his Father and finally develops every grace which belonged to Jesus Christ who as "Son of Man" realized the ideal which is the destined goal of every son of God.

Now, one of these conditions of growth is the constant favor of God; and this becomes possible only because the outward legal relations which belong to sonship exist, only because the right to become a son of God has been conferred.

This is true because it is only by becoming possessed of the rights of sonship through union with Jesus Christ that the sinners' *guilt* is removed and the way is opened for his acceptance by God. There can be no favor of God toward him upon whom guilt rests. But it is the right of the son to have no guilt, and to be accepted of God as worthy; just as worthy as Jesus Christ. More than that, it is the right of the son to be secure against the possibility of ever contracting guilt again, or of ever losing, for one moment, the favor of God.

You will not, I am sure, misunderstand me. You will not suppose that I mean to assert that those who have been adopted into the family of God never commit sin, nor ever fall under the displeasure of God. Of no man living can it be truthfully said that he never breaks the law of God. "If we say we have no sin," says John, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The ripest saint, as well as the most immature christian,

has occasion to lament his shortcomings and positive transgressions, every day. But to say this is very different from saying that he has forfeited his sonship and is no longer accepted by God as his child, which must be the result if he become guilty, that is fall again under the curse. How is it with one of you who is a father when your son disobeys you? You are displeased. You may chastise your child. It is your duty to correct him by discipline, and you do that. But does it ever enter your head to cut him off and repudiate him as your son? Such a thought could be entertained only by one unworthy of the name of father; and surely God is not less truly a father than an earthly parent.

I am not sure that the interpretation ordinarily given of the parable of the prodigal son brings out the point the divine teacher intended to illustrate. The usual application of that parable to the natural man, made to see his guilt, for the first time, and driven by his wretchedness to seek peace with God, disregards utterly the context. You recollect the occasion of our Saviour's speaking this parable together with two which precede it. When the publicans and sinners drew near to him to hear him, the scribes and pharisees murmured because he received these Jews who had disregarded the traditions of the fathers and had ceased to observe the customs of the chosen people. His answer is, in effect, that these persons, being of the seed of Abraham, are still properly regarded as members of the commonwealth of Israel. They belonged to the chosen people, and that God who still claimed this people as, in an especial sense, his own, would not repudiate those of them who had acted unworthily. The fact that they had wandered only made it the more imperative that he should care for them. He was to Israel according to the flesh still a father, and as a father he would not forget his erring children.

Now, brethren, as Israel chosen of God to be his people, in their outward relation to him, was the type of the body made up of those who are his children by the inward call of the Spirit, so the Israelite who wandered away and acted unworthily of the hopes of his people was the type of the true son of God backslidden into sin. As the extreme degradation of the publicans and sinners did not cause God to repudiate them as Israelites while Israel was his son, so the sins of the true child of God do not bring with them forfeiture of his place among those accepted as members of his family.

Do you say that the picture of the prodigal's wanderings is too dark to admit of its being applied to the case of any true child of God who has fallen into sin? Did you ever read the story of Jerry McAuley, the sainted evangelist of the Water Street Mission of New York? No man ever gave more certain evidences of being a child of God than did he after his conversion in Sing Sing prison, and yet when he came out from the society of criminals into the cold Christian world, and found no sympathy or help, he wandered away and fell into his old ways of sin. Read the story of the man once more a river-thief, a drunkard, a debauchee, carrying with him always however, unrest and longing for his Father's house, and tell me if he is not the counterpart of the prodigal. Tell me if one spent all in more riotous living than the other. No! There are those who have known a Heavenly Father's love, and yet have gone as far astray as did the prodigal; and our Saviour has drawn that picture that none such should ever despair.

Have you sinned, my brother? Have you offended grievously against that Father who sought you in your ruin and redeemed you with the precious blood of his Son, and gave you right to call him "Father"? O deplore it with bitter tears, but do not wound him further by doubting His love! Do not forget that when the forlorn, ragged, limping beggar, who had spent all in riotous living, came in sight of his home, it was the father who first espied him. Do not forget that when the son began to stammer out his request to be consigned to the place of a hired servant, the father would not hear him, but fell upon his neck and kissed him, and had him clothed in a manner befitting his sonship: "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. * * * For this *my son* was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Ah, that father represents the Heavenly Father, when we, having wandered away, return with our legal spirit and want to do something to merit our being taken into favor again. He desires nothing but evidence that we are truly repentant, for our rights as sons can never be forfeited. Whatever estrangement exists is upon our part, not upon God's. Once accepted in Christ, accepted forever: nothing less than that is involved in sonship.

In order that the Christian may be assured of this at all times, the Father provides for constant witness within the

bosom : "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore, thou art no more a servant but a son ; and if a son then an heir of God through Christ." It is the duty of every child to hear that voice *at all times*, for that witness never ceases ; and it never ceases, because the assurance of God's favor and love is essential to the growth of the new creature in filial confidence and every grace. You remember the exhortation : "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."—Eph. iv:30. Are you accustomed to regard that as addressed to unconverted persons, who resist the wooing of the Spirit ? It is addressed to "the *saints* which are at Ephesus." Read the entire verse : "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, *whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*" This latter clause limits the application to the Christian. How may he more flagrantly grieve the Spirit than by refusing to hear his testimony ? In the hear the is ever crying, with a still, small voice though it be, "Thou art a child of God." Will you say no ; I have sinned and he has cast me out and will have me for his son no longer ? O why thus despise your privilege ! Grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby thou art sealed unto the day of redemption, no more.

The endearing relation which exists between God and those who receive the right to become his sons is most appropriately indicated by a word used by the apostle in the text. It is the term used in the Greek language for a little child. It is the form a father would use in addressing his children gathered around his knees at the family hearth-stone. He would employ it as he pressed to his bosom his little boy running to him to be shielded from danger, or sobbing with the grief of some childish sorrow.

What a picture does it call up before some of us of days long since past and gone ! O the halcyon days of our childhood, when we knew the tender care of a father whose voice has now long been silent ! As we think of it, we can almost feel the gentle touch upon our heads of that hand long since palsied in death. O the confidence with which we trusted him for the supply of all our wants, for protection from every danger ! O the delicious sense of freedom from care of those happy days now gone forever ! Gone forever ? No, *not* gone forever. Our Heavenly Father is far gentler than any earthly parent ; more able to care for us and protect us

than any father according to the flesh ; more faithful to discipline us and bring us back from our wanderings to his bosom. We are his little children and can rest in him with a confidence such as was never justified by our relation to those in whom we trusted in the days of our childhood. His eye never slumbers ; his hand is never empty ; his arm is never shortened that it cannot save ; he never forgets to love ; he never leaves one real want unsupplied.

Again, this word contains in it a prophecy ; for to be a little child means that, in the future, there is the maturity of manhood ; that is, if the development of what is in the child be not arrested. Alas, no earthly parent can avert the causes which often cut short that progress. But our Heavenly Father can and will ward off every danger which threatens to arrest the growth of his child to maturity. This is one of the rights which belong to all his children that they shall grow to the stature of perfect men in Jesus Christ. " Now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that, when he shall appear, *we shall be like him* ; for we shall see him as he is. "

Brethren, what a family is this which we have been contemplating, this evening !

It numbers, among its members, all the truly great and noble of all the ages. Abel, the first sinner saved by grace, belongs to this family ; and Enoch, who walked with God, and was translated that he should not see death ; and Abraham, the friend of God ; and Moses, the man of God ; and David, the man after God's own heart ; and Elijah, with the prophets who lifted their flaming beacons all along through the darkness of the old dispensation. Upon the records of this family are written the names of the apostles, and of the holy company of martyrs, and of those in the times which followed who did not count their lives dear unto themselves so that they might serve the Lord Christ. And this family shall grow until all the elite of earth shall be gathered into it. What patent of nobility can compare with being invested with the rights of a son of God ?

Again, it is a family which shall never be broken up. How many families are there represented here, this evening, which have never suffered the rupture of any tie ? Is there one person here who has never followed to the grave a loved one who

has left a vacant place in his home? But here is a family whose ties shall outlast every catastrophe. The Elder Brother of that family is united with the Father in indissoluble unity, and every other member of it is united to the Elder Brother by a tie which the Holy Spirit has created and conserves. It can never be severed. Who does not, in this world of instability and dissolution, long for something which is not subject to change? The family of God shall last as long as the throne of God, and, once a member of it, you are a member of it forever.

Once more, let me say concerning this family of God that none is excluded from it who does not exclude himself by failure to receive Jesus Christ and believe on his name. "*As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*" There it stands, and it is the word of God. Ample provision has been made for your becoming a son of God, if you are not already one. There needs nothing but your consent to your investiture with the rights which belong to that estate. The invitation has gone forth, and has been borne on the winds of heaven for these milleniums since the Word was made flesh. Have you never recognized it as an invitation sent to you, as an individual? It was meant for you as truly as if you had been the only sinner on the face of the earth. I come as the ambassador of Jesus Christ, to-night, to persuade you to receive him. I beseech you, in his stead, be reconciled to God, and allow your name to be inscribed upon the roll of the sons of God. Will you turn away and say, "I will not be a son of God"?