

other things. But when our attention is directed to the medium itself, we begin to appreciate just how extraordinary it is—and how remarkable it is that we alone in the entire animal kingdom are blessed with it. To repeat Chomsky's words, quoted earlier, "The human faculty of language

seems to be a true 'species property', varying little among humans and without significant analogue elsewhere". When we consider how language is acquired, as we hope to do in our next article, the phenomenon becomes more remarkable still.

(To be continued)

Zacchaeus

"Sinner" or "son of Abraham"?*

Stanley Bayliss

THE OPENING VERSES of Luke 19 reveal two opposing opinions of Zacchaeus. As seen by his countrymen, the Jews, Zacchaeus was the publican, the extortioner, the collaborator with Rome and a "sinner". In the eyes of Jesus Christ, however, Zacchaeus was a true "son of Abraham". It is both interesting and profitable to examine the evidence leading to each viewpoint.

The publican

The name Zacchaeus would suggest a Hebrew national, since it means 'pure' or 'righteous'. The term 'publicans', although used frequently in the AV, is never a translation of the word *publicani*, but always of the word *telōnēs*. The term *publicani* only strictly applies to the direct farmers of taxes from the government, being taken from the inexact rendering of the Vulgate.¹ The publicans were the tax collectors of the Roman civil power. The taxes were farmed by the rich Roman citizens of the Equestrian Order, or sometimes by a joint-stock company at Rome, who had agents in the provinces to arrange the actual collection from the people.

These agents divided the country into districts, which were separately offered by public competition to be 'farmed' by the highest bidder. The buyer was usually required to pay the purchase money (either wholly or by instalments) in advance, but he was duly at liberty to recoup himself. He was usually a native of the country, and, well knowing its resources and the temper of its people, he used his knowledge and his power to extort as much as possible for his own profit. In this he was supported by the Equestrian Order at Rome, who carried out most oppressive decrees in the Senate against defaulters.

Such were the tax-gatherers (AV 'publicans'); universally despised, branded as plunderers and beasts of prey, and coupled with the vilest and most contemptible characters. Moreover, because much of the tax was an *ad valorem*² duty on property and produce, which the 'publican' gauged, there was ample opportunity for unjust exaction. The question, "Is it *lawful* for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?" (Lk. 20:22), was ever rife, and to the Jews such subordination was a peculiar sting, for they liked to pride themselves as being "Abraham's seed, and . . . never in bondage to any man" (Jno. 8:33).

It is no wonder, then, that the 'publicans' were regarded as traitors to their country and to their God; and even our Lord classed them with evil men, although his general denunciation of 'publicans' proves that a *general* denunciation of a *class* by him does not necessarily mean that *individuals* will be rejected. Zacchaeus was "rich", in the words of the inspired record (Lk. 19:2), whilst those mentioned at the end of the previous chapter (as having become followers of the Master) were poor men. Luke tells us, nevertheless, how anxious was Zacchaeus to see Jesus, and that, being short of stature, he climbed a sycamore tree for the purpose.

Let us summarise the obstacles in the way of Zacchaeus:

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1. The Vulgate is a Latin translation of the Bible, made in the fourth century, which became the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. It had a considerable influence upon the formation of the AV.—*T.B.*
2. This Latin expression means, according to *Collins English Dictionary*, "in proportion to the estimated value of the goods taxed".—*T.B.*

- 1 His riches; but he did not allow any natural tendency towards worldly pride, nor a preoccupation with wealth, to stand in his way;
- 2 The crowd, before which he ran;
- 3 His physical shortness of stature;
- 4 His profession in life, one which would discourage making 'an exhibition of oneself', and also which so easily lent itself to legalised robbery, for environment can easily enslave our ideals;
- 5 The whole combination of difficulties peculiar to his case.

And let us not suppose that, because our particular difficulties seem different in type from those of others, they may not be sent by God as well-chosen acts of grace on His part for our benefit—a role which they will more particularly play if we joyfully receive them as such.

Son of Abraham

We then we read how Jesus saw Zacchaeus, called him down and declared his intention of staying at his house. Possibly there was something in the look and tone of the Master which told Zacchaeus that he was now to be in reality that which his name expressed, and that he must make no delay in cleansing himself, for that day he was to have as his guest the Holy, the Separate, the Clean One of God.

Zacchaeus "*must*" (v. 5) have the master as his guest, not merely because Jesus wanted to display the faith and right disposition of Zacchaeus, but also because of the necessity of observing the Seventh Day of rest. This was just one of those occasions when "the Son of man [had] not where to lay his head" (9:58), and the 'great' of that world (the priests living in Jericho) allowed Jesus to pass, in their spiritual blindness, without offering hospitality. Jesus "*must*" therefore, self-invited, become the guest of a despised tax-gatherer; and doubtless then *they* would be the first to cry out that he "was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner" (19:7).

And have *we* not—if we have the eye of faith—that same wonderful and privileged opportunity of helping our Master in distress? For we have the promise that, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren" (Mt. 25:40), it will be reckoned to have been done to Jesus. It is often for those who may be termed "least" that we can do most, and, although the word "sinner" may not be actually used of us, yet we may be despised, reproached or suffer a little hardship for the sake of the Master. But let

us take heart, for the reproach exhibited by this world is of no meaning in God's sight.

Zacchaeus took his stand and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I [now propose to] give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Lk. 19:8). That little word "if" helps much in demonstrating what type of life Zacchaeus had led. Zacchaeus felt justified in suggesting that he had *not* taken anything from any man, as he could easily have done by making a false representation to the Senate or its representatives concerning a man's taxable goods. Jesus justified Zacchaeus' inferred integrity of purpose, for he described him as "a son of Abraham" (v. 9).

It is interesting to note that the RV gives the rendering, "and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man", and this immediately reminds us of John the Baptist's reply to the publicans as to their expected moral duties: "Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (3:13), that is, appointed as your right and due by the government. He did *not* say, "Cease from being publicans". Though the government was hated by the people, and though its officers and agents often abused their privileges, yet the *office* of publican was not dishonest in itself.

Jesus furthered declared, "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:9,10). Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham, since Paul tells us that Abraham is "the father of all them that believe . . . that righteousness might be imputed unto them also" (Rom. 4:11). Moreover, the faith of Zacchaeus entitled him to become a son of Abraham, for Paul says again, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). Like that patriarch, Zacchaeus manifested his faith by his good works; and, just as Abraham joyfully received the three messengers of God, so Zacchaeus joyfully received Jesus Christ.

In the attitude of Zacchaeus we can clearly discern the twin virtues of humility and love; and of all people, surely, Zacchaeus must have realised that Jesus had "first loved" him (1 Jno. 4:19). Let us therefore give due attention to the example of love as evinced by Zacchaeus and of which our Master approved, and to that love let us add humility and its kindred attendant virtues, that we may be accounted in due time along with Zacchaeus to be true "children of Abraham".