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GOSPEL

OF

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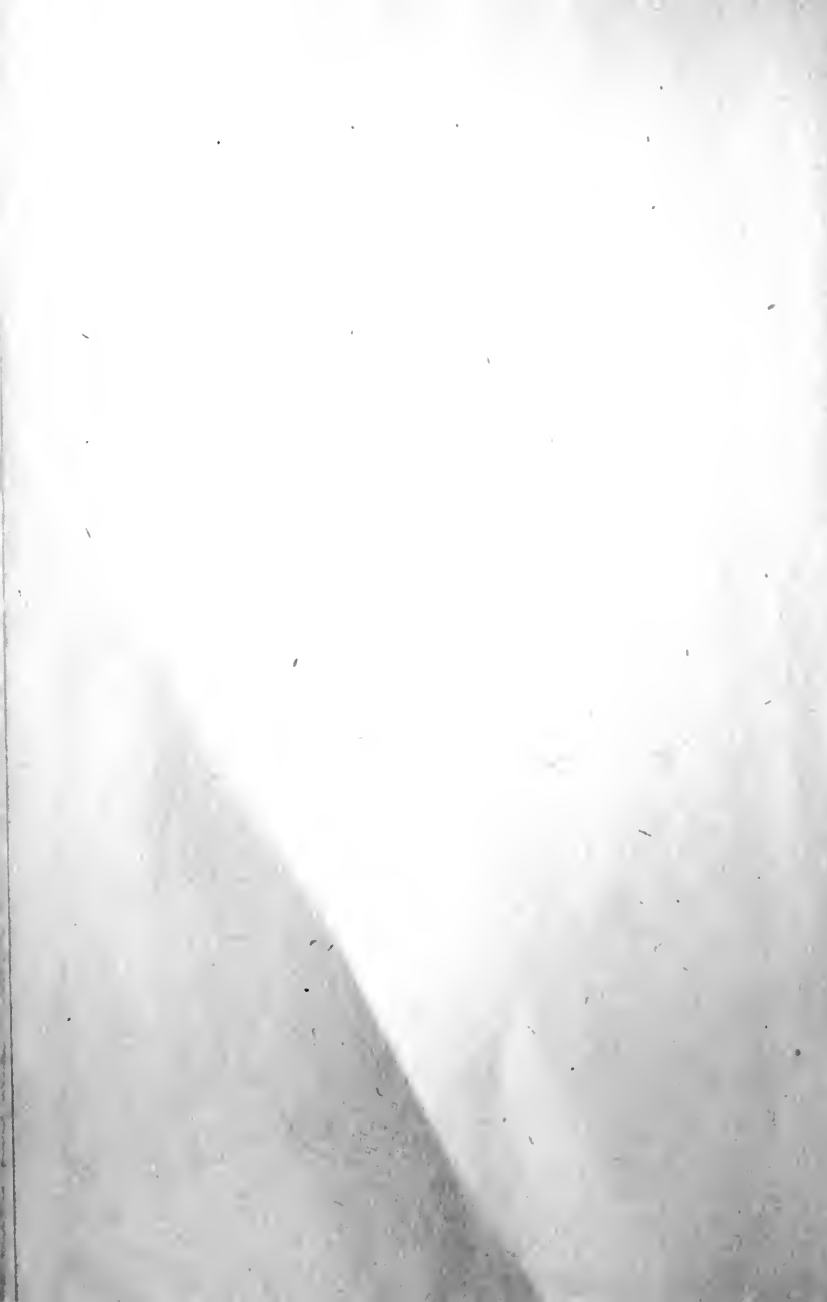
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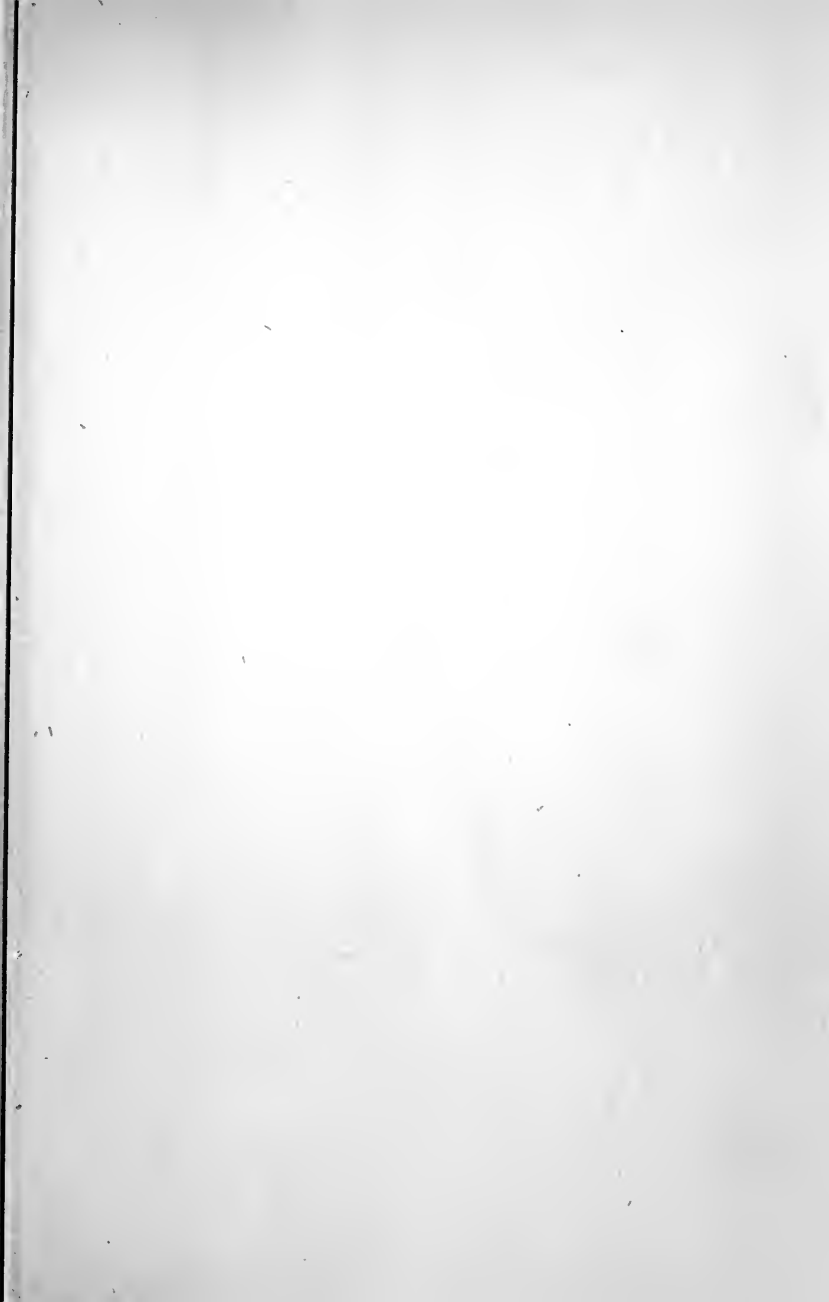
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**THE  
GOSPEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**





# THE GOSPEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY

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## FOREWORD

THIS book is addressed in the first place to those whose business it is to teach the New Testament to young people in Sunday schools. Any teacher who takes his task seriously is aware that it is not enough to "get up" a lesson for the occasion. He needs to grasp his subject as a whole, and to find a point of view from which it can be clearly conceived and presented. This is at least as true of the New Testament as of any other subject. It is a collection of religious literature which, though small in bulk, is remarkably varied in manner and outlook, and many-sided in its impact on human life and thought. Much of its value is obscured if it is read without due appreciation of this variety. At the same time, it has a definite unity, derived from the spiritual impulse which created it and still works through it.

This book is an attempt to set forth, as concisely as may be, the main religious purport of the New Testament, and to indicate the various ways in which it is stated and developed by the several writers. The approach is historical and critical, though par-

ticular critical questions are left to other volumes in the series. The intention is to help those who may be studying any portion of the New Testament to place it in its context, and so to get the perspective which is necessary to a right understanding. To this end an attempt has been made both to relate part to whole within the unity of the New Testament itself, and to suggest the wider context by reference to some other forms of belief in the period to which the New Testament belongs.

All through, the reader is reminded that everything turns upon specific religious convictions, derived from Jesus Christ, verified in experience by the classical exponents of the faith, and directly applicable to urgent needs and problems of our own.

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# THE GOSPEL

IN THE

## NEW TESTAMENT

### PROLOGUE

**M**AX BEERBOHM has depicted the man of our time in a caricature which he calls "The Twentieth Century looks at the Future." The future is a mere bank of black cloud, relieved only by a mark of interrogation. Before it stands a youth in black, gloomy, anæmic, terrified—the very picture of helpless incompetence and despair. It would, of course, be possible to present our contemporary in a more debonair mood, but there is enough truth in the picture for us to feel that we know that young man, as well as we know ourselves! His trouble is not so much that the time in which his lot is cast is out of joint, but that he is himself unequal to his situation. He has no sense of being in touch with what the world he lives in really means. He does not trust his fellow-men, for he suspects they are somehow against him. He does not trust himself, for he is at odds with his

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own soul—a mass of conflicting instincts, impulses, desires, ideas, with no central harmony. He badly needs to be reconciled with himself, with his world—which means both the other people with whom he must live, and the odd things that happen to him and them—and finally with some inclusive purpose by which he and his world must be ruled if there is any meaning in things at all. Until he finds some such reconciliation he will not know what it is to live, in the full sense of the term. While the soul is divided against itself it cannot be other than impotent to act. While a man feels an alien in his world, misunderstanding and misunderstood, his energies are consumed in friction. If any one could tell him convincingly how to get reconciled within and without, it would be good news—it would be Gospel; to use the old-fashioned term, a Gospel of salvation.

Now very many people have believed for quite a long time that the New Testament contains such good news. That collection of writings, indeed, contains various matter—philosophy, poetry, history, ethical teaching. But at its centre is what one of its writers, speaking for them all, describes as a “word of reconciliation.” Of course, the forms of human life and thought change, and the problem of the first century was not in all respects identical with the problem of the twentieth. Yet human nature itself changes little, and, if the fault is not in our stars but in ourselves, it may well be that there is at least something here which touches us as closely as it touched the men to whom it first came. We, like

them, know "fightings without and fears within." We, like them, need to be saved from things and from ourselves.

The world, indeed, into which Christianity came was painfully aware of the need for salvation. Before the first Christian missionaries started out, zealous preachers of other faiths were abroad in the Roman Empire, offering their various remedies to the sick soul. Some of these remedies bore a curious family likeness to some of the most modern ways of salvation, and a brief survey of them will not lead us too far afield. The thoughts of men, in spite of all changes, tend to run in a comparatively small variety of channels; and after all, we are, in a broad view of the limitless sweep of history, not so very far removed even in time from these first-century seekers of truth.

### 1. The Way of the Mysteries.

The religions of the ancient world had been tribal, national, or state religions, and they long survived to sanctify public institutions and acts of state. But they had not kept pace with the growth of the mind, and in the first century it is evident that they had ceased to satisfy the deeper spiritual needs of countless men and women. New cults sprang up, usually adapted from some ancient local or national religion, sometimes apparently starting from individual initiative. They united persons of various nationality and status by special rites of initiation and sacraments

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through which they felt themselves in communion with the deity of their choice.

We know little about most of them—the secret of their “mysteries” seems to have been well kept—but we have some fragments of their liturgies and a few accounts by initiates of their experiences. There is no reason to doubt that many persons found in them an emotional satisfaction, a sense of being lifted above the drift of things and given a place in a supernatural order, and some assurance of life beyond the grave. Of any direct ethical value it is more difficult to speak. Mithraism, indeed, seems to have encouraged the martial virtues, and at a later date it became a popular faith among the soldiery; but it seems certain that many of the lesser cults permitted or even stimulated grave moral licence.

With much that was good in them, the Mysteries, by their indulgence of the craving for exciting ritual, by their wild fantasies, and by their proneness to magic, led the soul into perilous paths which could bring no real harmony or reconciliation of the self, but rather threatened to disintegrate personality. They never really aimed at dealing seriously with sin. They offered rather redemption from this transitory world, from death and from the inexorable fate of the stars. And, at best, it was a purely individual salvation they offered. They had no hope and no message for society. It is a common weakness of men in ancient and in modern times to seek in external ritual an emotional thrill which is a substitute for the sterner reality of a searching religious experience. Not that

way is lasting freedom or peace to be found, nor in any other way which fixes the attention of the individual upon the bliss he desires for himself here or hereafter, and makes him content to wash his hands of social responsibility.

## 2. The Way of Illumination.

There were finer spirits in the ancient world to whom the crudities and extravagances of the mystery-cults made no appeal, while they, too, longed for a more warm and personal sense of divine things than the state religions could offer. They sought salvation in gnosis or "knowledge," and came to be called Gnostics. By "knowledge" they did not mean science or philosophy, though most of them would have professed themselves followers of the philosophical school which claimed Plato as its founder. Neo-Platonism did indeed supply them with some intellectual expression of their faith, but the "knowledge" they prized was chiefly that which came through mystic contemplation, or even through trance and ecstasy. Like modern theosophists, they treasured the occult revelations given to adepts and handed down from them to members of an inner circle. Though they dispensed with the initiation rites practised by the cruder mystery-cults, they, too, had their initiations, consisting in the communication of secret lore, hidden from the vulgar.

We know them best through the scriptures of certain sects of this kind known as the Hermetic

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Corpus.<sup>1</sup> Though these writings are themselves probably not earlier than the second and third centuries, there is good reason for believing that the type of religion they represent had its adherents before the coming of Christ. In many ways it is a pure and lofty type of faith. There is no mistaking the note of genuine religious experience in some of the surviving writings. But the kind of salvation such faiths offer has inevitable limitations. It is an individual satisfaction, not the least element in which is the comfortable sense of superiority to the vulgar. It is so entirely remote from the active life that it can never bring any real reconciliation with the environment of men in a world of activity. Its concentration on the mystic and the occult tends to paralyse the sane and peaceable operations of the normal intelligence as well as the plain discipline of moral effort. Certainly a gospel of esoteric knowledge can never be a way of salvation for ordinary men.

### 3. The Way of the Stoics.

The strongest, sanest moral force in the pagan world of the first century was beyond doubt the Stoic philosophy, with its lofty ethical code. The Stoics had their speculative doctrines, and they readily combined their tenets, at will, with those of the newer Platonism. But in the early days of the Roman Empire Stoicism

<sup>1</sup> The *Hermetica* are just now coming out in a critical edition, with commentary and translation, by the late Walter Scott; published by the Oxford University Press.

took on an emphatically practical and ethical cast.

It was not a religion to comfort the sick soul. The Stoics could promise no immortality but that of absorption into the Ether, and though they used current religious language, their God was in sober truth nothing more than the rational principle within man. Their philosophy was a "serious call" to men to be in earnest with life, to hearken to the voice of duty, to sink selfish desires in devotion to the "City of God" (that is, the commonwealth of the universe, "cosmopolis"). In its clear, bracing atmosphere choice spirits like "the halting slave" Epictetus and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius attained an elevation of character that commands our admiration.

Christianity was, in fact, able to incorporate into its own ethics much of what the Stoics taught, and their great teachers are a power with us still. Yet Stoicism, like all merely ethical systems, fails to give men what they most need. An authority on ancient philosophy calls attention to the "chronic depression" of the Stoic Emperor Marcus, and his haunting fears of moral failure. "If Stoicism as a system is responsible for those fears, it is, I think, because the doctrine offers only a 'god within' and no 'God without' to whom one can look for grace against temptation."<sup>1</sup> Though some individual Stoics seem to have combined with their philosophy some kind of personal faith in God, yet in the main it is true that the

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Taylor, reviewing Arnold's *Roman Stoicism* in *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. ii. part ii. p. 233.

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call to effort, without any promise of "grace to help in time of need," was too impoverished a creed for weak and sinful men. Moreover, a philosophy which ruled emotion out of the ideal life could never give that unity of all elements of personality which is a necessary part of salvation; and in the long run a life lived without any hope for the world except a recurrent conflagration misses true reconciliation with the environment. The Stoic is always on a forlorn hope in a universe ultimately indifferent to him.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. The Way of the Jews.

Judaism, which already before the beginnings of Christianity was a force in the Gentile world, combined an ethical code as high as that of Stoicism, and in some respects higher, with a powerful religious impulse that Stoicism lacked. The old religion of Israel had been re-shaped by the great prophets into an ethical monotheism unique in the ancient world. At its centre was faith in a "living God" whose "mighty acts" the experience of men could attest. To Him the world belonged, and at long last His Sovereignty would be manifested in an actual reign of righteousness over all mankind. In spite of dark days and of limited or even perverted ideas of the divine will, this faith in a living and reigning God of righteousness kept the Jews from ever wholly falling into a despairing individualism. There was always something to live

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bertrand Russell's essay, *A Free Man's Worship*, is very stoical in its spirit.



for beyond the individual life—the great hope of the Day of the Lord. When personal immortality became an article of belief, it was never a purely individual privilege such as the Mysteries promised; it was thought of rather as the opportunity to share in the Lord's triumph over evil, and to enter into the everlasting life of the people of God. Meanwhile God was not dead. Here and now He watched over His people and helped them. In His commandments He had given them the way of life—"In keeping of them there is great reward." At its best the keeping of the Law could be a true act of communion with God and a way of serving a universal purpose.

Judaism, however, was at a loss for a real Gospel to the world. In the first place, its ethical import was seriously obscured by an unspiritual attitude to the observances of the Law. Further, the intense and rancorous nationalism which had got the upper hand in first-century Judaism made a true reconciliation with the environment impossible. If "Love thy neighbour" was balanced by "Hate thine enemy," as it certainly was in much of the predominant teaching and practice, then the more devoted a man was to his religion, the less could he be reconciled to his fellows. Again, the hope of "the Day of the Lord" had developed an unfortunate mode of expression in weird "apocalypses" which emulated the most extravagant of pagan myths, and surrounded the mind with a hectic atmosphere of fantasy. Their influence in Judaism declined after the first century, but the generations of which we speak were haunted

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by this "fantasy-thinking." It was most dangerous when it gave rein in imagination to national rancour, which in existing conditions must needs be repressed. The Roman might be excused for seeing in the Jews only "hostile hatred towards the human race."

Quiet, pious Jews were still testifying to the saving power of God for all men, but Judaism as a system was bound hand and foot, and needed to be emancipated itself before it could liberate and save the spirit of man. No national religion can ever become in the full sense "the power of God unto salvation." Nevertheless, it was in Judaism, and not in Stoicism or in the "higher thought" of the Gnostics or in the Mysteries, that the germ of the Gospel lay.

**PART I**  
**JESUS AND HIS GOSPEL**



## INTRODUCTION

NONE of our Gospels gives a thoroughly systematic or complete account of the teaching of Jesus, nor can any of them be regarded as first-hand reporting. They represent attempts made in the latter half of the first century to compile more or less scattered and fragmentary traditions which had been handed down from the first witnesses.

Our earliest Gospel is Mark, which may be dated in the years round about 65 A.D. According to an entirely credible tradition, much of the information in this Gospel came from Peter's preaching as remembered after the Apostle's death by his "interpreter." But it is clear that the evangelist has eked out his material from other sources. His interest in the teaching as distinct from the story of the life of his Master is limited, and what he gives is for the most part grouped about two or three main subjects—the distinction between the Christian way and the old Law, the significance of the death of Jesus, the necessity for His followers to share His Cross, and the glorious hope of the future that lay beyond these sufferings. These are, in fact, just the topics which the evangelist might well think most immediately germane to the

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situation of his first readers in the Roman Church reeling under the shock of the Neronian persecution.

It is probable, indeed, that in this Gospel the overwrought mood of the moment has led to a certain exaggeration of what is called the "eschatological" element—that is, matters connected with the "end of the age" and the Second Advent of Christ. Chapter xiii., for example, contains a highly coloured picture of catastrophic happenings in the near future. Many scholars hold that it is not a plain record of what Jesus said, but owes much to the imagination of the early Church. We must, therefore, bear in mind that in some respects Mark's account of the teaching is one-sided in its emphasis. The Roman Church no doubt already possessed a tradition, whether written or only oral, of the more directly ethical teaching of its Master—in fact, we might fairly infer as much from the letter which Paul had addressed to it nearly a decade earlier—and so the evangelist might assume some knowledge of this teaching in his readers. But nowhere else shall we find more convincingly presented the heroic and revolutionary aspect of the Gospel of Jesus.

The Gospels according to Matthew and Luke came from fifteen to twenty years later. They both employed Mark as one of their main authorities, more particularly for the narrative of the Life. But for the Teaching they both used a second source, now lost, which they regarded as of at least equal importance. It was apparently a collection of sayings of Jesus, more or less arranged under topics. Exactly how much it contained we shall probably never know, but

it seems impossible seriously to doubt that certain groups of sayings at least were found by both evangelists in this early document. Such groups are the nucleus of the "Sermon on the Mount," which is common to both Gospels, the discourse which appears in Luke as the charge to the Seventy and in Matthew as the charge to the Twelve, the sayings about John the Baptist in Matthew xii. and Luke vii., and the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven. <sup>also</sup> Lord's Pra

The date of the collection of sayings can hardly be later than that of Mark, and it is probably earlier. It does a great deal to supplement Mark on the side of directly ethical guidance for daily life, while it is comparatively less interested in the themes of suffering and sacrifice, and of the eschatological hope, which Mark treats most fully. This collection of sayings is frequently cited by scholars under the symbol "Q," which implies nothing about it but what we can gather from an analysis of the Gospels themselves. Mark and Q are the foundation stones of our knowledge of the teaching of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Of the remaining portions of Matthew and Luke we know nothing certainly, but that about 80 A.D. they passed for credible tradition of what Jesus did and said. Doubtless much of the material came from very early sources, whether written or oral. But we must take into account the longer time that had elapsed during which the tradition was exposed to influences that might affect and remould it to some extent.

In Matthew we can discern a Jewish-Christian in-

<sup>1</sup> See *Q, the Earliest Gospel*, by Albert Peel (6d.).

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fluence, which has led to the emphasizing of certain aspects of the tradition. It emphasizes, for example, everything that could be interpreted in favour of the more conservative tendency in the controversies of the Early Church; and even more than Mark, it gives prominence to the eschatological hope.

Luke, on the other hand, betrays his sympathy with the more universal outlook which we associate with Paul, though very little trace of Pauline theology can be found; and in some respects he is so remarkably un-Pauline that we must wonder that his report has been so little influenced by the thought of his particular environment. The peculiarly Lucan matter is, on the whole, so well supported by Mark and Q that we may feel considerable confidence that in the main we are here in touch with good early tradition, even though the dress in which it comes is provided by a Gentile mind of the late first century.

The Gospel according to John, published probably not far from 100 A.D., we may leave aside for the moment. It is not only farther removed than the other Gospels from the living tradition of what Jesus did and said, but it sets out with an aim different from theirs. It certainly contains embedded in its discourses many original sayings of Jesus, some recorded in the other Gospels, and others which have reached us by no other channel. But, in the main, the discourses are the product of long meditation upon some aspects of Christ in the light of Christian experience, presented through the medium of certain theological and philosophical conceptions.



## CHAPTER I

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“ **A**FTER John’s arrest, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God in the words—‘ The time is ripe : the Kingdom of God has come near : change your minds and believe in the Good News.’ ” This is Mark’s summary of the early ministry of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that it represents our Lord as appearing not primarily to teach morals but to proclaim good news. The good news is in brief the nearness of God’s Kingdom.

We have seen that the religion of the Jews had at its centre belief in a “ living God ” whose purpose was being fulfilled through the course of history, and who would in the end mightily manifest Himself in a new and better order of things. In bad times they still believed in face of all dark facts that “ the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.” But they looked forward with intense eagerness to a day when this should not be a matter of faith but actual experience. In the Jewish Prayer Book to-day there is a very ancient service called the Kaddish. Its opening sentence runs as follows :

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 14, 15.

“Magnified and sanctified be His great Name in the world which He hath created according to His will. May He establish His Kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time ; and say ye, Amen.”

There is good reason to believe that this prayer was repeated by Jews of the time of Christ, and He gave sanction to its main thought when He taught His own disciples to pray, “Hallowed be Thy Name : Thy Kingdom come.”

We may take the phrase, “Kingdom of God,” then, first as an expression for the “Good Time Coming” to which our hope and desire are rightly directed. But we cannot go on to claim the sanction of Jesus for any sort of scheme of the Good Time Coming that may happen to appeal to our own imagination. To very many Jews of Christ’s time the hope of the Kingdom of God meant, above everything, the restoration of political independence and sovereignty to the Jewish people—“the people of the saints of the Most High” as they liked to think themselves. A prayer which was probably used in the first century contains the petitions :

“Bring back our judges as aforetime and our councillors as at the beginning ; let trouble and sighing pass away, and be Thou King over us, Thou alone, O Lord, in favour and mercy, in grace and righteousness.”

That Jesus would not lend Himself to the practical

fulfilment of that hope was one of the gravest matters of offence that His contemporaries found in Him:

Many of His fellow-countrymen again had come to think of the Kingdom of God in terms of those extravagant visions of future judgment and future bliss which we find in the apocalypses. They looked for signs in the heaven above and wonders in the earth beneath. Even if Jesus used at times some of the imagery of the apocalyptists, and even though He shared some of their underlying ideas, yet He never identified the Kingdom of God with any of these dreams. In our own day such Jewish fancies are things of the past. Attempts to revive them leave most of us cold. But we, too, form our pictures of the Good Time Coming after our fancies and desires. Our modern Utopias may serve, as these earlier visions served in their day, for passing symbols of the hope of the ages, but the Kingdom of God is something more than Utopia.

The Kingdom of God means God reigning, reigning in the hearts of men, and reigning in the whole sphere of their outward life as well, individual and corporate. Its coming would mean the end of social evils that arouse our indignation to-day, but also beyond doubt the end of much that to-day we do not feel as evil, perhaps of things we prize. It is certain that, as we come to know more of God in all His dealings, our notions of what His reigning would mean must greatly change and grow.

One thing is certain : we cannot conceive too nobly what the world and human life would be if God's

rule were fully manifested in it all. The stories Jesus told about the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price illustrate the rapture with which the vision of God's reign among men can move the heart. There is surely something in us all that responds. We are capable of being moved to a self-forgetful ardour of delight in hopes that are impersonal, in the sense that they touch us not privately, but because we are men and they are for humanity. It is to men so moved that Jesus says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God," and it is they who will pray with conviction, "Thy Kingdom come." Philosophers speak of the "Highest Good" as the true object of desire and effort. Jesus presents the Kingdom of God as the Highest Good—good in itself and for all men—good for you and me if we can forget ourselves and stand in with all our fellows in a common desire and hope.

## CHAPTER II

### RECEIVING THE KINGDOM

**T**O have found something outside oneself to live for is already to have one's feet on the way of salvation. But a call to seek this high and wonderful thing is not yet a gospel. There have been, and there are, men who have laboured unhopefully for an unattainable ideal with a stoical endurance that leaves the soul still lonely and malcontent in an unfriendly world. When Jesus called men to seek first the Kingdom of God, He added, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."<sup>1</sup> The Highest Good is God's gift to man, and the world in which man lives is in the last resort friendly to his aspirations. That is the faith of both Testaments; it is the faith in which Jesus lived, and in which He died under such conditions that He if any man might have been tempted to despair of the good cause.

Clearly, however, this gift is not one which falls into the lap from a bountiful heaven while we sit at ease. There are conditions to be fulfilled on our side. What are these conditions? The question was asked in the time when Jesus lived, and received definite but

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 31, 32.

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conflicting answers. The Zealots, hot-headed patriots as they were, called for a holy war on Rome. "Draw the sword in God's name," said they, "and He will surely help those who valiantly help themselves." The Pharisees repudiated such violence. "Keep every jot and tittle of the sacred Law," was their programme; "and wait quietly till God sends the sign from heaven." Neither party found an ally in Jesus. We cannot confidently assume that we could claim Him as an ally to-day in all our various ways of seeking the social ideal—whether we rely upon victory in war or party conflict, or think that the Millennium would surely dawn if every one in this country kept the Sabbath and went regularly to Communion.

The answer that Jesus gave to the question before us was plain, but very searching. "No one," He said, "who does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child can possibly enter into it."<sup>1</sup> To enter into the Kingdom of God is to enjoy the longed-for consummation of human hopes: to receive His Kingdom like a child is the condition. To receive the Kingdom of God means, quite simply, to take God for King. It was in that sense that Jewish teachers of the first century spoke of "taking upon oneself the Kingdom of Heaven." They sought to make God King by accepting "the yoke of the commandments," in the minute study of which they expected to find the truth whereby alone men can live. This was the way of "the wise," as they are commonly called in Jewish writings. Jesus, on the contrary, thanked God that the truth is

<sup>1</sup> Mark x. 15.

hidden from "the wise" and revealed to "babes."<sup>1</sup> Not that He was glad that any one should miss the truth. He rejoiced that the way of receiving the rule of God was simple and accessible. That does not mean that it is easy. "How hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God!" He once cried sadly.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult for most of us to become as simple, as honest, and as real as one needs to be in order truly to make God King in one's own soul. Simplicity, honesty, and reality are the qualities of the child-mind which Jesus calls for, and most of us are so tangled in our pretentious self-fantasies and sophistications that it is indeed necessary to "humble oneself" to become like a child.<sup>3</sup> For the "humility" demanded is the quality the grown man must show if he is to grow childlike, rather than itself a quality of the child.

To make God your King, then, in simple honesty, is a difficult thing, but there is no one for whom it is impossible. To become "wise and prudent" is perhaps for some only; to be like a child is to be yourself, and that is what God requires. To be utterly yourself in taking Him for your King is the way to enter the Kingdom of God.

Let us here set down some plain consequences of this teaching. We have seen that to have found something to hope for and to live for outside oneself is a step on the way of salvation. It is, however, not unattended with peril. It is a great thing to be an

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 25 (=Luke x. 21).

<sup>2</sup> Mark x. 24; R.V. margin gives the true reading.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xviii. 4.

idealist ; but the idealist may cherish a too impatient ambition to remould this sorry scheme of things nearer to his own heart's desire. He feels himself a superior spirit striving to make his mark on a very inferior universe. Proud and rebellious, he frets that the ignorance and wilfulness of other men, or the sheer perversity of things, should thwart his enlightened efforts, and dreams of being so wise and so strong as to take the Kingdom of Heaven by force. Such an one will hardly be saved. He is too sure of his own importance to the good cause. In that lies a self-deceit which is fatal to any real reconciliation with God or with his fellows.

There is a parable in the Gospels which idealists of such a stamp find a hard saying. It says that the Kingdom of God is as though a man should sow seed in his field, and go away and sleep and wake night and day, while the seed grows, he knows not how, for of its own accord the earth brings forth fruit—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.<sup>1</sup> Doubtless, in speaking so, Jesus risked misunderstanding by the lazy and careless, but this sense of one's own insignificance in the divine process, with the quiet confidence it brings, is a necessary part of receiving the Kingdom of God like a child. To accept the way that Jesus offers is an experience that purges the soul of pride and illusion and frees it from fretful anxiety. By it a man becomes truly himself in a world where God rules. There is no finer expression of this attitude than Milton's Sonnet on his Blindness :

<sup>1</sup> Mark iv. 26-29.



“ God doth not need

Either man's work or His own gifts; who best  
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best; His state  
Is kingly; thousands at His bidding speed,  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait.”

## CHAPTER III

### OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

IT is high time to attempt to make our thought of the Kingdom of God a little less vague, by giving to the mere form of a glorious hope a content that has some meaning for our experience. We shall best do this by keeping in mind that the Kingdom of God means, first of all, God as King. Its character, therefore, is given by that which we find in God Himself, under the guidance of Jesus.

We may start from the name that Jesus gave to God by preference—"Father." Not, indeed, that He was the first so to do. In fact, it is few religions that have not included the worship of a "Father-God," and certainly the Jews of Christ's time were accustomed to speak of "Our Father in Heaven." But with Jesus the name is thoroughly characteristic, and it clearly seemed to Him the least inadequate description of the Supreme Being.

We must not, indeed, forget that Jesus adored God as "Lord of Heaven and Earth,"<sup>1</sup> and called on men to "fear" Him<sup>2</sup> (not, of course, with a craven

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 25 (=Luke x. 21).

<sup>2</sup> Matt. x. 28 (=Luke xii. 5).

fear, but with the awe that we must feel in the presence of the great Mystery). The prophetic vision of the majesty and holiness of God had gone deep into the consciousness of the Jewish people, and Jesus did not need to lay emphasis upon it. But we miss the wonder of His teaching about God if we do not set it upon the background of that vision.

“ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD,  
Sitting upon a throne  
High and lifted up.  
And His train filled the Temple.  
Above Him stood the Seraphim,  
And one cried to another—  
HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD OF SABAOth :  
THE WHOLE EARTH IS FULL OF HIS GLORY ! ” <sup>1</sup>

The song of the Seraphim was not stilled when Jesus bade us say, “ Our Father ! ” It is that God of overpowering majesty who counts the very hairs of our head.

We shall not find out the meaning of the Fatherhood of God by analysing the idea of fatherhood as such, or by asking what kind of father Jesus had in mind—whether the oriental father, who is absolute ruler of his family, or the easy-going “ modern parent,” who only wishes that his children would treat him as one of themselves. All that is beside the point. Jesus showed men God as their Father by setting them to look at the world and human life and recognize God at work in them.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. vi. 1-3.

In nature, the sun shines on evil and good ; the rain falls on just and unjust.<sup>1</sup> The birds have their wonderful instinct, and the flowers are beautiful beyond Solomon in all his glory.<sup>2</sup> Among men we may see the devotion with which a shepherd will care for his lost sheep,<sup>3</sup> and the unwearied love a good father will give to an unworthy child.<sup>4</sup> It is in things like this that we are to find God ; and, having shown us the picture, Jesus trusts our instinct to see God in it, and trusts it often in a very challenging way. It is a thing monstrous in most men's eyes that an employer should give the same day's wage for an hour's work and for twelve. Yet Jesus told a story of a man who did so, in which we are compelled to see the truth that God gives upon no measure that human standards of justice will warrant.<sup>5</sup> In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the ordinary sense of fairness is with the Elder Son, and yet no one can fail to see that there is something essentially divine about the action of the Father. Jesus never told us to identify the Father in the parable with God—yet every one does it.

There is an extraordinary and radical simplicity about this method of revealing God, and we must say that it could hardly have been carried through if Jesus had not Himself been living out manifestly the character which He depicted as that of the Father in heaven. In brief, it comes to this : God is perfectly benevolent and beneficent towards every one of His

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vi. 26, 28 (=Luke xii. 24, 27).

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xviii. 12-14 ; Luke xv. 4-7.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xv. 11-32.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xx. 1-16.

creatures individually, small and great. His will for them is always a good and kind will. Whether they are evil or good makes no difference to God's attitude to them. His kindness is beyond the justice that reckons desert.

He has, indeed, placed man in a world where wrongdoing is disastrous and goodness is in the end the only thing that stands the fiery test of reality. This stern picture of the moral universe, which is the setting of human life, is painted in impressive colours in several parables.<sup>1</sup> They always let us see how the issue here and in eternity is bound up with the moral choices of man's freewill. Only in such a universe, indeed, could man's moral personality develop so as to make him fit to live with God. But over against this stern process stands God the Father, whose will it is that no single "little one" of all His family should perish, and who rejoices over one sinner turning to Him as a poor woman rejoices when she finds again one of her scanty store of shillings.<sup>2</sup> Like a magnanimous creditor who remits a large debt as generously as a petty one out of pity for his debtors' families,<sup>3</sup> God forgives with a royal disregard for the measure of the sin. That in itself is a great thing, but more is true of God. Not only is He like a magnanimous creditor; not only is He like a father who receives with joy a returning prodigal: He is like a shepherd who cares for his silly strayed sheep, and

<sup>1</sup> See Matt. xxiv. 42-51, xxv. 1-30; Mark xiii. 33-37; Luke xix. 11-27.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xviii. 10-24; Luke xv. 8-10.

<sup>3</sup> Luke vii. 41-43.

*goes after it* until he find it. Forgiveness is too slight a word to describe the fatherliness of God. He is far too good to wait till we turn and show our worthiness by a sincere repentance; He refuses to be alienated by our alienation from Him; His infinite kindness is an energy bringing us to repentance. That, indeed, is what Jesus meant by the "goodness" of God and by the divine "perfection" we are to imitate. "Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you"—that is how to be sons of the Father in heaven, for that is how the Father deals with us.<sup>1</sup> We might have cavilled at that, but Jesus lived it out, and there is no more to be said.

"There is none good but one, that is God."<sup>2</sup> This is almost the only general theological proposition that Jesus enunciated. But there is one other: "With God all things are possible."<sup>3</sup> That statement we find difficult in face of many of the facts of life. But the facts were not easy for Jesus. Twice He uttered the maxim, once when a man He loved had refused what looked like his only chance of salvation, and once when He Himself faced in darkness the collapse of His hopes and the menace of the Cross. It is not a despairing appeal to some irrational intervention of superior force, but a declaration of faith in a love to whose resources we can set no limit. The ultimate metaphysical issue between the finality of human freedom and the omnipotence of love Jesus does not settle for us, but He leaves us with the conviction that God

<sup>1</sup> Luke vi. 27-36 (=Matt. v. 43-48).

<sup>2</sup> Mark x. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Mark x. 27, xiv. 36.

is not, as some feel driven to think, a benevolent but comparatively feeble ally of man against a hostile world, but in the end "Lord of heaven and earth," with power enough in the unsearchable riches of His love to bring to pass His good will concerning us.

That, at least, is the Christian Gospel. God remains, indeed, the great Mystery. His counsels are unsearchable and His ways past finding out. But within that sense of mystery we can make an act of faith. Jesus has shown us a goodness beyond all mere justice, and in the power of that we will let ourselves rest. Thus we become reconciled to God.

There are many for whom God is still no more than a personification of the moral law which we have infringed, or of iron "laws of nature" that we are often inclined to resent. But at the point to which Jesus brings us, all thought of law and its impersonal compulsions falls away, and we are in the presence of a divine goodness which is generosity, kindness, loyalty, and all the things we needs must love, and by its very nature strives always to impart itself to us weak and sinful men. It is an energy towards life in increasing fullness and beauty, hostile only to that which is hostile to life, and potent to create life at its best where the human will adheres to it. It is such an energy not vaguely diffused through an unconscious world, but living in a Person who loves us and cares for us as individuals, giving to us a worth of our own by His thought of us, and calling us into life that we may share it with Him. At this point we may let go our doubts, fears, and rebellions, and in

accepting God, accept life and ourselves from His hand.

Here the vision of the Kingdom of God rises before us anew. It means the rule of such a God as Jesus has showed us. It means a state of heart, and a state of the world of men, in which all the goodness of God "gets through" to all men in all circumstances and conditions of their being. A kindness beyond justice, directed to individuals as possessed of a worth of their own, and making always for fullness of life in each and all—that is the note of the Kingdom of God. Such goodness is something of which our experience of man and of nature gives us hints at least, and which comes home to us in a way that passes understanding in religious experience, when we give ourselves to God.

When this is so, the Kingdom of God ceases to be a vague idea and becomes an intensely desirable way of life for us and for all men, and we can hope for it and seek it intelligently and with purpose.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD HERE AND NOW

WE may now return to the "good news" which Jesus brought into Galilee: "The Kingdom of God has drawn near." No doubt many who heard that proclamation understood that the long-cherished hope of a manifest reign of God in human affairs was shortly to be fulfilled. It is fairly certain that even our reporters of His sayings combined what He said with their own preconceived notions of the future. It is not easy for us to disentangle it, or to define how far and in what sense He may have looked for some epoch-making event in the near future. What is certain is that He laid no stress upon the precise time, whether short or long, that might elapse: He frankly confessed that He did not know when the critical event might happen by which the great fulfilment should come about.<sup>1</sup>

It is the less necessary for our present purpose that we should attempt to decide these difficult questions, because the predominant and essential meaning of His "good news" had nothing to do with the future. Not only did He say, "The Kingdom of God has drawn

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiii. 32.

near," but He also said, "The Kingdom of God has come upon you."<sup>1</sup> Clearly this means a good deal more than that some ill-defined event is to happen in the future—however near that future may be. Something *has* happened which makes a real difference to human life and to the world. If we look at the reported sayings of Jesus, we shall find that alongside sayings which point to the future consummation there are sayings, at least equally plain and striking, which speak of the epoch-making significance of the present: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see: for I tell you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and never saw it." "Something more than Solomon (the wise king) is here. . . . Something more than Jonah (the great prophet) is here."<sup>2</sup> Among the ancient symbols for the Good Time Coming were the natural and homely figures of Harvest and of a Feast of good things. Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, only the labourers are few," and He told a story of a great feast, with its climax in the words—"Come, for everything is now ready." The Kingdom of God, then, has come; even while we pray for it, it is here. That is good news going beyond any mere prediction. We must ask, In what sense was God's Kingdom present in the distressful world of first-century Palestine? For that matter, in what sense can it be present in post-war England?

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii. 28 (=Luke xi. 20).

<sup>2</sup> Luke x. 23, 24, xi. 31, 32 (=Matt. xiii. 16, 17, xii. 41, 42).

## 1. The Kingdom among Men.

Let us turn to the simplest of the statements we have cited: "The Kingdom of God has come upon you." To that saying is prefixed a condition: "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you."<sup>1</sup> This coming of the Kingdom, then, is not something purely inward or "mystical," for which we have only the evidence of "religious experience," convincing for the person who has it, but inaccessible to others. The evidence of it in this case is the restoration of sanity to a mind diseased. On another occasion Jesus bade John the Baptist remark how "the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news told them," and left him to draw his own conclusions.<sup>2</sup> Once again, when He sent His disciples out to carry His own work farther afield, His instructions were, "Heal the sick, and say, 'The Kingdom of God has drawn near to you.'"<sup>3</sup> The implication is that in the healing of the ills of men is the evidence that God is reigning.

Without raising here the difficult questions connected with the gospel "miracles," it is enough to say that no reasonable critic to-day, in spite of the objections he might take to details of the narratives, would think of denying the statements of the evangelists that men and women were actually better, in mind and body;

<sup>1</sup> Luke xi. 20 (=Matt. xii. 28).

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 2-6 (=Luke vii. 18-23).

<sup>3</sup> Luke x. 9 (cp. Matt. x. 7, 8).

that life for them was definitely enriched and the world made a happier place, because of what Jesus did for them; and that this took place on a large scale and in surprising ways. Nor must we forget the clause, "The poor have good news told them"; and we must interpret it in the light of what Jesus did as Friend of publicans and sinners—how He made life a new thing for just those people whom the religion of His time, lofty as it was, could not help.

Here, then, are the facts, on one side at least, which Jesus had in mind when He proclaimed the nearness of God's Kingdom. There were new and wonderful powers at work for the enrichment of human life and its possibilities, both "spiritually," as we say, and also in the way of a healthy body and a sane and happy mind. These powers were not a magic in His touch or a spell in His word, though some people thought so. To the patients who were healed He was accustomed to say with emphasis, "It is your faith that cured you." The power that He possessed was a power to awaken faith in God, faith of a new kind because the view of God He gave people was of a new kind. He could proclaim the Kingdom of God near because He was able to bring God so near to men.

With the coming of Jesus, then, there came such a new conception of God and such a new attitude to Him that the possibilities of human life were definitely enriched. Historically nothing catastrophic happened—except, indeed, that a new society was born which in time turned the world upside down—but new powers were abroad because men got right with God.

## 2. The Kingdom within.

It was then no mere inward feeling, nothing, as we say, purely "spiritual," that Jesus meant when He spoke of the nearness of the Kingdom of God, nor did He feel the healing of the sick or the feeding of the hungry irrelevant to His own main purpose. Not irrelevant—yet only incidental. We are to pray for the Kingdom first, and then for our daily bread; we are to seek the Kingdom first, and these things will be added to us. Always the reign of God is something greater than its particular results, and there is an inner life upon which all the outward depends. "The Kingdom of God is within you," Jesus is recorded to have said, in answer to those who asked *when* the Kingdom of God would come.<sup>1</sup>

This means that God reigns within, but it means not barely that. It means surely that those values and powers which enrich human life where they are realized, and will yet make the perfect order of things in the Good Time Coming, are a matter of present experience to him who has accepted the rule of God like a child—even in this present imperfect state. Thus, if God rules within, a man looks out on the world of nature and sees there the effectual reign of God: he considers the lilies how they grow; he considers the fowls of the air, and knows that not one is forgotten of the Father; he sees the falling of the rain, the growth of seed, the red sky at night that portends a

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvii. 21; the rendering of A.V. and R.V. is linguistically to be preferred to R.V. margin and Moffatt.

sunny day—in all things he sees God, and feels himself at home in His world. In like manner he looks out upon his fellow-men and finds in them no longer his rivals, or his critics, but “mother and sisters and brothers.” They are children of his Father, and, though they may often err, he has a strange care for them and a strange delight in their ways—as Jesus saw with interest and delight the sower at his work, the shepherd among his sheep, the traveller, the merchant, the children at play, and all the varied figures of the human scene, and found in them all some hints of God their Father. The world of nature and of man is no longer without God for him who has God’s Kingdom within. It is already for him a world transformed into a Kingdom of God.

### 3. The Growing Kingdom.

This does not mean that we must try to persuade ourselves that all is well with the world as we know it, and that no fuller manifestation of God’s rule is to be expected or desired. On the contrary, Jesus said that in His day (and it is still true of our own) the Kingdom of God was present in the world only in germ—like a mustard seed in the garden or a morsel of yeast in dough.<sup>1</sup> But it grows, as all things living grow. The mustard seed produces a tree which in time can shelter the birds, and at last the whole mass of dough is leavened. The Kingdom of God in the hearts of men—even in the hearts of a very few—is the germ from

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiii. 31-33; Mark iv. 30-32; Luke xiii. 18-21.

which the better order of the Good Time Coming must grow.

This is very characteristic of the teaching of Jesus, and it is a point in which He differed strikingly from His contemporaries. Generally speaking, they could not conceive of the Good Time beginning apart from some wholly unprecedented and supernatural intervention of God, breaking up the normal course of nature. For Jesus the coming of the Kingdom is just as emphatically the work of God—just as “supernatural” in that sense—but it comes along the course of His normal working, and in that sense is as “natural” as seedtime and harvest. There is a direct and organic connection between the presence of God’s rule in a sincere and childlike heart and the final triumph of His cause in all the world.

## CHAPTER V

### ETERNAL LIFE

FROM what has been said it will appear that when we speak of the Kingdom of God we are not far from speaking of life itself, the highest good we know. For God is the Lord and Giver of life; the evidence of His rule among men is the enrichment of human life, and the process of its growth is a progressive enhancement of the meaning of life for all men. It is all the more striking to find that Jesus sometimes used the term "eternal life" as a virtual alternative to the term "Kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> By eternal life we shall understand life at its fullest and highest, life in a form worthy to endure though heaven and earth should pass away. Indeed, whenever the consummation of the Kingdom is in view, the thought of the Gospels always takes a leap beyond our bounds of space and time, and sets us in the sphere of eternity.

This "otherworldliness" of the Gospels is by no means of the sort that carries with it a contempt for the really good things of this present order—health and vigour of body and mind, the beauty of the earth, family life, enterprise, and the conquest of nature. Yet

<sup>1</sup> Compare, *e.g.*, Mark ix. 43 with 47, and Mark x. 17 with 24.



however this life may be enhanced, there is something in man which will still be unsatisfied. Whether man will indeed build his ideal society on this earth before its span is over is something we cannot know. Even if he does, something of his hope will still await fulfilment. Nor can he be content that the generations of the dead who have lived and toiled in hope, shall be left out of the consummation. *Our* inclination to-day is to picture the moment of earthly fulfilment, leaving in hazy uncertainty the larger hope. The thought of Jesus passes from the growth of the Kingdom on earth direct to its perfection in the eternal world. He shows us those who enter the Kingdom of God feasting with the blessed dead in happy fellowship, in a world where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God.<sup>1</sup> On His last night on earth He let the cup at supper pass Him by because He was to drink it in a new kind in the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

The words and the act, at that tragic moment, reveal not only a quiet certainty of triumphant life beyond death, but a mysterious persuasion of the perfect continuity of experience between this life and that, which challenges imagination rather than theological definition. If salvation means reconciliation with the whole of our environment, it is hardly complete until death itself has ceased to be an enemy, and that mysterious realm that haunts us with surmises or forebodings becomes in truth a home to our spirits. Our share in that home is given

<sup>1</sup> Matt. viii. 11 (cp. Luke xiii. 28) ; Mark xii. 25.    <sup>2</sup> Mark xiv. 25.

to us in God's gift of His Kingdom to those who seek it.

We shall, therefore, be in no wise untrue to the mind of Jesus if, when we think of the Kingdom of God, we think of life itself in all its fullness. "Reverence for life," in all its manifestations, has been declared to be the most fundamental ethical principle of all;<sup>1</sup> and when Jesus bade us seek the Kingdom of God He was certainly bidding us pay reverence to life, God's supreme gift. In the grass of the field ("which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the furnace") and the birds of the air, there is a life which the Father in heaven gives and cherishes. Man, of more value than many sparrows, has a "soul" (*psyché*) of his own, which is the bearer of a specifically human form of life.

We must not give to that term "soul" any such narrow meaning as it has often held in theological language. As a term of Hebrew psychology (which, of course, underlies the use of it in the Gospels) it stands for that in any creature which is alive—for that in man which is humanly alive. To be anxious what food you shall eat is in this sense to "be anxious about your soul," though the soul is more than food, as the body is more than clothes.<sup>2</sup> The rich farmer in the story said to his "soul," "Eat, drink, and be merry!" and God said, "You fool, to-night your soul will be demanded from you"—*i.e.* you will cease to live.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is the teaching of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, philosopher, musician, and medical missionary, in his *Philosophy of Civilization*.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vi. 25 (=Luke xii. 22, 23); our versions render *psyché* as "life."

<sup>3</sup> Luke xii. 16-21; "soul" translates *psyché*.

Thus the word "life," which is used in our versions of the Bible as an alternative translation, is not far from the true meaning, though more accurately, perhaps, the "soul" is the seat of life. If we think of man's personality, or self, as the seat of his human life, we may find in the term "self" a word which best conveys the idea we want. Now Jesus said that a man's self is of quite extraordinary value, just because it not only possesses the life that the Rich Fool prized, but is capable of "eternal life" or life at its highest and fullest. If a man could gain the whole world at the cost of his self, it would not be worth his while.

Now there is a law which, so far as we can see, applies in one way or another to all life—the law that life is increased and enhanced by the laying down of life. In man this law acquires a deep spiritual and ethical meaning. Jesus formulated it in memorable words :<sup>1</sup>

"Whoever tries to secure his 'soul' (or self) will lose it; but whoever loses it will save it alive."

The only way, in fact, in which the self can come alive in the fullest sense is by being disowned or denied. In the last resort we die to live.

At first sight this stern law seems to introduce an extraneous condition into the simplicity of Jesus' gospel of the Kingdom of God. Is it, indeed, true that heroic self-sacrifice is, after all, the only way to life?

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvii. 33, and in slightly differing forms Matt. x. 39, xvi. 25; Mark viii. 35; Luke ix. 24; John xii. 25. No word of Jesus has been more frequently reported by our evangelists.

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And if so, is this a gospel? Certainly we must remember that Jesus called His twelve disciples to go to the gallows—for that, and nothing less, is the meaning of His solemn challenge, “Whoever wants to follow Me must disown himself and take up his cross.”<sup>1</sup> And we have before us the example of His own utter self-sacrifice.

We may here consider what Jesus had to say about His own death. He said little. In the first place, He made it clear that He regarded it as the great instance of the law of “dying to live.” Loving life as He did, He yet welcomed death before His youth was spent, in the conviction that He would rise through death to a more glorious life. He also made it clear that the life He would win through death was not for Himself alone. His dying was vicarious. He gave His life a ransom for many.<sup>2</sup>

Those words are not easy to understand, but we may perhaps come to their meaning if we think of what happened to those twelve men whom Jesus called to follow Him. He challenged them to “disown themselves” for the sake of Him and His gospel. Up to a point they responded. With splendid self-forgetfulness they went with Him to Jerusalem, knowing little of what awaited them, but surmising the worst.

Yet when the last days came they were not fit for the crucial test; and Jesus knew it. He had asked them to “drink of His cup,” and they shrank from it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark viii. 34; the saying was also in Q, as witnessed by Matt. x. 38; Luke xiv. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Mark x. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Mark x. 38.

Alone He must meet the tragic destiny, and must pay, on their behalf, as well as on behalf of the multitude of men whose attitude to life was still more immature, the utmost cost of living. So He gathered them about Him, and recalling those words about the "cup" that must be drunk, He passed them a cup of wine, and said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many."<sup>1</sup> Half understanding what He meant, they drank. The company went out, and soon the agents of the government came to arrest Him.

He no longer asked His followers to go to the cross with Him. He gave Himself up, and while He was taken, they escaped. Yet they had drunk the cup He had given them, and mysteriously they came to feel that they had a share in what He had done. They were bound up in the fellowship of His sufferings. In Him *they* had died to live. Unequal as they had been to the crisis, they had not fallen away from their acceptance of the way of Jesus; and after He had died for them, these weak and foolish men grew into the likeness of His sacrifice.

As time after time through the years that followed they "showed forth His death" in the broken bread and the wine poured out, each in his own way learned to bear the Cross. They did not win their salvation by heroic self-sacrifice. They found life in Him who died for them, and that life carried within it the principle of self-denial. Their self-denial was real, though limited, from the first, and through communion with their Lord in the growing experience of later days

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 24.

it fulfilled itself in sacrifice for His sake, and made them masters of the secret of life.

In the sequel we shall have to consider what some of the early disciples came to think about it all. But for the present let us keep close to what Jesus said, and what the Gospels relate of the facts of His death. We shall find no suggestion that Jesus ever supposed Himself to be dying as a means of propitiating an angry God, as some theologians have imagined. Such a theology we reject as not worthy of Him. But His own saying that life comes through the laying down of life is something we cannot reject. We know it to be the true law of life. But let us consider very carefully what follows from this position.

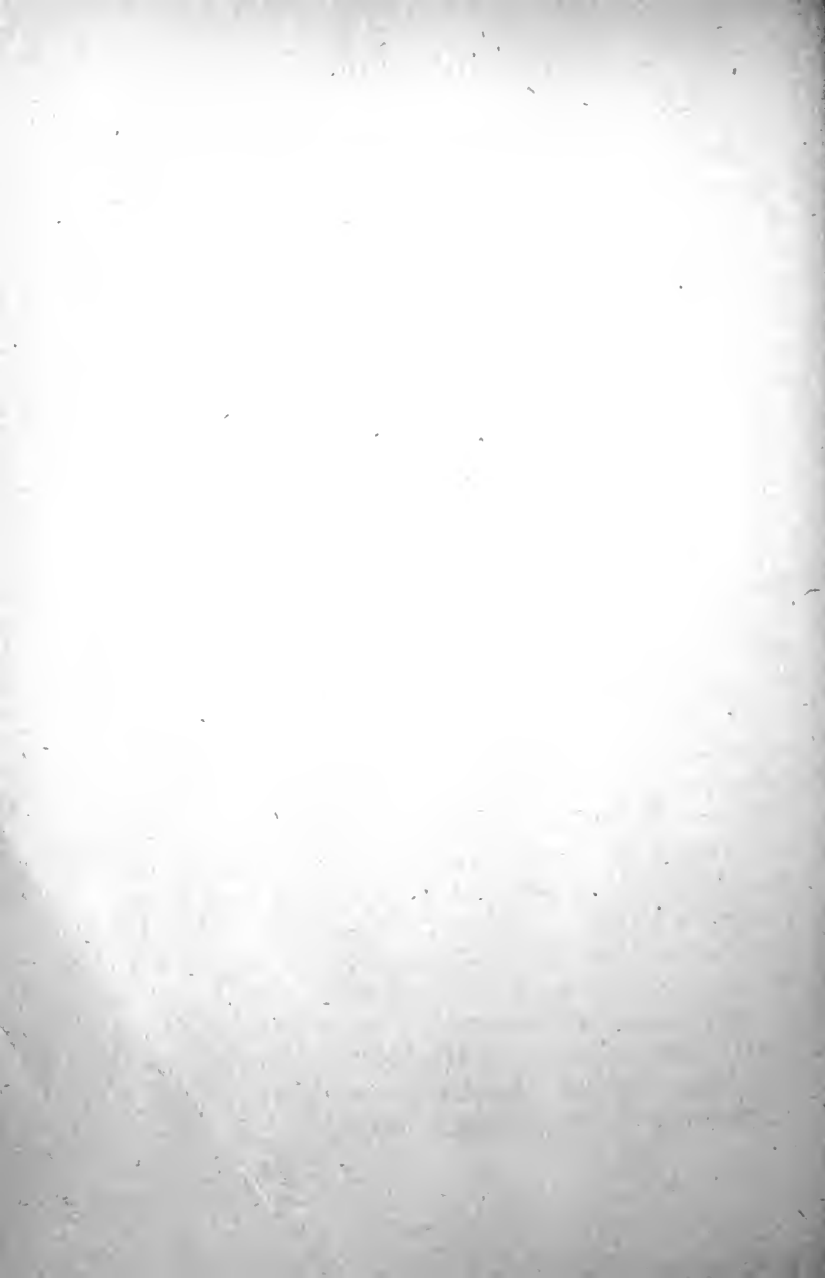
To-day we are often told that Christ did not die in our stead ; He died to show us how to live ; and if we can but be like Him, we shall be saved men. True enough ; but if the Twelve were not equal to that high call, still less are most of us. To hold up the example of Jesus and bid poor sinners imitate the heroism of His life and death is to overwhelm rather than to inspire. Take us for what we are, there is something unreal in the suggestion that such small "self-denials" as we can make are comparable with the Cross of Christ or can count as "dying to live." At least, if "the word of the Cross" is to be a gospel, it must reckon with people who by nature and habit are very little capable of that self-sacrifice which is the fine flower of human character.

We had better be true and humble about it, and confess that, if we are to be saved, we do need to

have something done for us. Jesus was aware that He was dying very definitely for those twelve men who were so little worthy of Him ; and not only for them, but for the " many " who stood outside that inner circle. He died as Son of Man ; and that enigmatic phrase, whatever else it may mean, bears in it the thought of a representative humanity. He died as representative of all men who are willing to accept what He did as being for them. Whoever gives hearty assent and consent to what Jesus meant, has his part in what Jesus did.

In Him *we* died to live, for He died on our behalf. That does not mean that He died to give us an easy escape from the law of " dying to live." It means that He who sounded all the tragic depths of life is willing to impart to us, who have as yet scarcely dipped below the surface, the fellowship of His sacrifice as we are able to bear it.

The beginning of everything is still the childlike acceptance of God's rule, God's purpose. In that acceptance we receive into ourselves the principle of life, and any sacrifice we may be called to make is not the price of life so much as a part of what life in its fullness is and means. Having received the gift, we work out its full meaning in experience under the guidance of Him who first brought us to the point of acceptance. For us, as for the first disciples, there is a special means of keeping us in the fellowship of His death—the sacrament of His body and blood. What can scarcely be put into words without paradox is known to us in the Breaking of Bread.



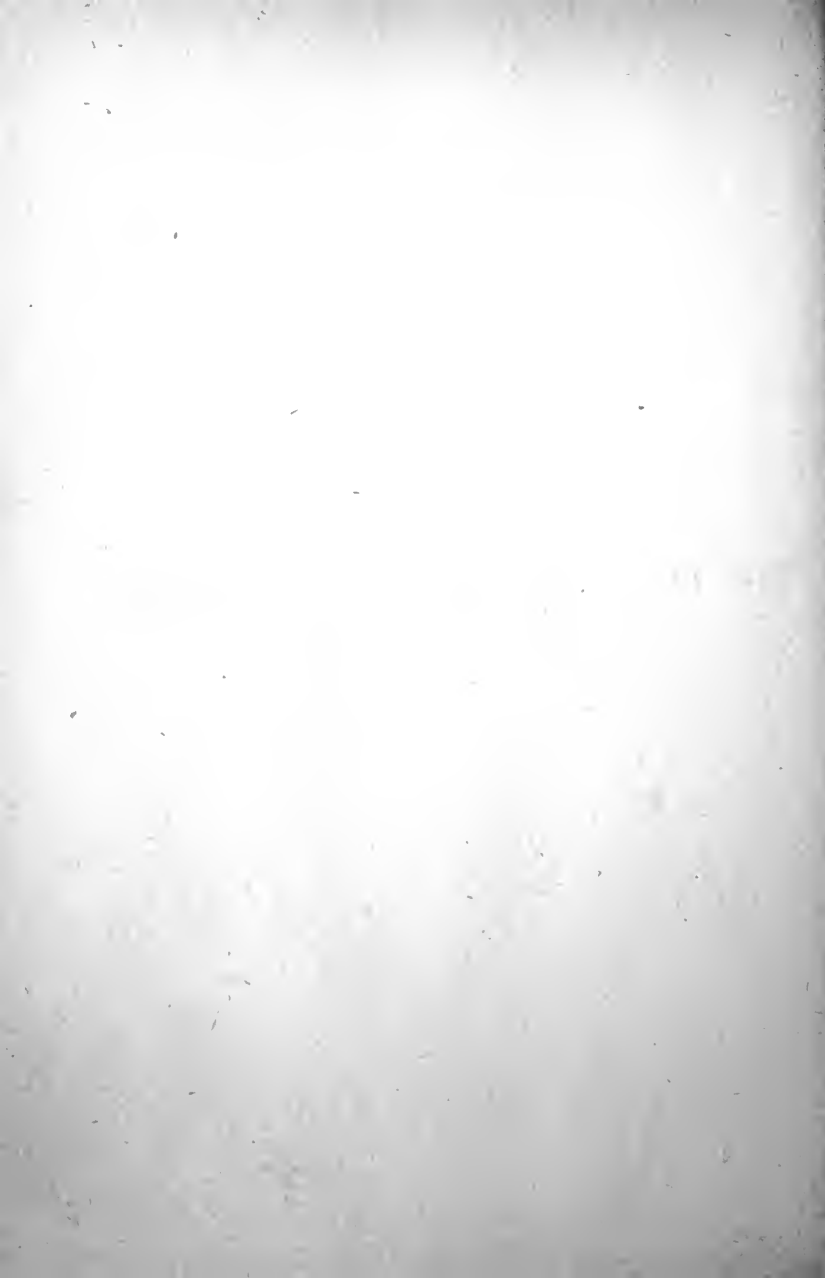




**PART II**

**THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL**

**A. THE SIMPLE GOSPEL**



## INTRODUCTION

OUR New Testament contains no writings which come to us directly from the very earliest days, before the influence of Paul began to work upon the life and thought of the Church. Yet we are not wholly without knowledge of the primitive Christian Gospel. In the first place, it is now credibly held that the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles are based upon documents, some of them in the Aramaic language of the Church's childhood, which are very early indeed. In the second place, there are certain writings, such as 1 Peter and the Revelation, which, though later in date, preserve in large measure the mental outlook of the first age. Finally, the Synoptic Gospels are almost entirely based on tradition which belongs to the first formative period of Christianity, and so they reflect the outlook and the interests of the early disciples.

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST PREACHING

**I**N the early days in Jerusalem there was no need to tell much of the story of Jesus. It was notorious. In the great world the execution of a Jewish agitator made no stir, but in the little world of Jewry the meteoric career of the Prophet of Nazareth with its tragic close was a "sensation." Everybody knew in a general way the kind of person Jesus had been, and the kind of thing He had taught, however little He or His message might be really understood. But His sudden and calamitous downfall set friends and foes thinking. To most religious persons so disgraceful a death put an end to any claims He might have had as a teacher or a leader. "Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree," said the Scripture, and that was surely enough. To those who had "trusted that it was He who should redeem Israel," it was a bitter problem. That is why the early preachers had so much to say about the death of Jesus and its sequel.

What they had to say comes to something like this: "The Crucifixion of Jesus was the result of a tragic misunderstanding, itself the outcome of a course of wrong thinking and wrong living on the part of those

responsible for it. That, however, is all over and done with, for Jesus was far too essentially a *living* person to be really dead. And, as a matter of fact, He is gloriously alive.”<sup>1</sup>

Such was their assertion. For proof of it they offered chiefly their own unshakable conviction, and with it the undeniable effects of that conviction in their own lives and actions. Certainly some momentous change had taken place in them, and they knew it was Jesus who had sent His Spirit to them. Because they had that Spirit they did the kind of things Jesus had done; they continued His work of bringing light and life to needy men. And because of it they discovered in their communal life a happy and practical fellowship which made all life and the world new for those who shared it, and stood out as a plain expression of the new Spirit to all beholders. The life of the community the Gospel had created was, in fact, a great part of the early preaching of the Gospel. This was surely the work of God, and at the same time those who knew it from within were persuaded that at every point Jesus Himself was the author of their experience.

And now, looking back, they could discern, as it seemed to them, the hand of God in all those tragic happenings. Even a shameful death which was the prelude of such wonderful things must have been part of the Divine plan.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, had not God through

<sup>1</sup> This is intended as a summary of the gist of such passages as Acts ii. 22-24, iii. 13-19, v. 30-32.

<sup>2</sup> Acts ii. 23, iii. 18.

His prophet in old time said that such must be the fate of His "Righteous Servant"?<sup>1</sup> In such simple ways did the early disciples put to rest the perplexities that had troubled them at first. They made no theologies of the Atonement, but their acceptance of the Cross as part of the Divine will set them free to give their minds to all that the living Christ meant to them for the present and the future.

The future—for their experience of what Christ was doing for them here and now made them very sure that their future, too, was in His hand. They expressed their convictions in terms of the belief of their time, giving to their Lord the place which the apocalypses gave to the transcendent figure of the Son of Man who should descend from heaven at the last.<sup>2</sup> Where they differed from other Jews was not in the expectation of a future "restoration of all things," but chiefly in that all their expectations received character from what they knew of Christ, and that whatever bliss the future might hold meant for them the full fruition of what they now enjoyed in the fellowship of His people. They had the Kingdom of God within them, as Jesus would have said, and in the whole life of the community and its influence on others we can watch, even through the medium of our meagre records, the growing of the seed and the working of the leaven. A most signal proof of the reality of this growing life is the way in which the early Church was driven, even against its will, and certainly in opposition to all the inherited prejudices and pre-

<sup>1</sup> Acts viii. 32-35; Isaiah liii.

<sup>2</sup> Acts iii. 20, 21.

possessions of its members, to break away from old national and tribal limitations and go out to save the world.

It must be confessed that but little of the rich content of Jesus' gospel of the Kingdom of God finds effective expression in the earliest preaching. Very much of the significance of His person and work still lay in solution, as it were, working half-consciously in the minds and hearts of those who had known Him intimately, and waiting for further experience to bring it to full consciousness. Yet already the Church had a real gospel.

First, it was able to set before men the assurance of forgiveness and a new life. It was no small thing for the friends of Jesus, within a few weeks of the loss which had plunged them in resentful despair, to face the people whose fickleness had brought about the tragedy and speak to them with calm friendliness: "Now I know, brothers, that you did it in ignorance. Change your minds, then, and turn over a new leaf, that your sins may be blotted out." They had no theology of forgiveness. They did not yet connect it with the Cross. It was Jesus Himself, living and powerful, who gave the new life: "God exalted Him with His own right hand to be Leader and Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness to Israel." In saying that, the Church had got hold firmly of one thing at least that Jesus stood for; God does not wait for man to repent; He Himself makes repentance possible, and with it forgiveness. That is essential Gospel.

The next thing that the Church had to offer was its own wonderful fellowship, with the rich life of the Spirit that pervaded it. Much, indeed, that these simple Christians attributed to the Holy Spirit—the “speaking with tongues” and such-like “signs and wonders”—were very external and unimportant. But behind them lay something real—a “communion of the Holy Spirit,” which made the actual human relations of the disciples of Christ a piece of the Kingdom of God. “All the believers unitedly held all their property in common. They would sell their estates and possessions and distribute them to the whole body in accordance with individual needs. Daily they stayed with one consent in the Temple, or broke bread at home, and so they took their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and enjoying the favour of the whole people.”<sup>1</sup> That common life, centred in the common sacramental meal, afforded an actual experience of reconciliation among men which gave a sharp edge to the preaching of the Gospel of reconciliation.

It is, perhaps, less necessary to-day than it would have been some years ago to emphasize the importance of this aspect of the Gospel. Certain kinds of “evangelical” preaching have seemed to be confined to the appeal to “get right with God” and the offer of such inward satisfactions as a conscience at peace and an assurance of personal bliss beyond the grave. The early Church certainly made this appeal and this offer. But it was no less surely preaching the Gospel

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 44-47.



when it invited men into a community within which they could find there and then harmonious relations with their fellow-men and a truly social use and enjoyment of their talents and their property. No one should wish to copy to-day the crude Jerusalem experiment in communism, which failed as much from inward weakness as from outward pressure. But it is certainly true that a full gospel for our day must offer satisfaction to the craving for right social relations. The sense that we are not right with our fellow-men is deep and widespread among our generation. It is as important an element in the need for salvation as that individual "sense of sin" with which some have thought the Gospel should be exclusively concerned.

The third element which we may recognize in the gospel of the early Church is its offer of hope for the future. It clothed its hope in fantastic forms derived from Jewish Apocalyptic. These forms served to give imaginative vividness to the faith that this world is a world in which the "mighty acts" of God are revealed and will yet be revealed; so that those who love and fear Him may rest securely on His word and feel that the issue of things is in His hand. Of the value of this forward look something has already been said. No gospel for men who live in a world like this can be without it. We may add here that when the future is held in touch with the present by a robust corporate experience of the power of God, as it was in the early Church, the value of hope is at its highest. The early disciples, indeed, found their

present life so vivid a foretaste of the glories to come that the waiting-time hardly counted. A sad disillusion was in store for them before they learned a more valid and satisfying kind of hope.

In learning and teaching this lesson, Paul was a pioneer. His thought in its mature development gives us a firmer foundation upon which to build a restatement of the gospel of hope than the naive ideas of the primitive Church. They leave us with a sense of unreality, for they are too intimately bound up with a view of the universe which no reasonable man could hold to-day. Certainly those who would artificially stimulate crude hopes and fears of the imminent "end of the world" in our time are doing an ill service to religion, even though in form they may seem to take us back to the fresh sources of Christian life and faith.

## CHAPTER II

### THE REVELATION OF JOHN

THERE is a book in the New Testament which shows more clearly than any other what the eschatological hope became when it was allowed to dominate the whole outlook of Christians. That book is the Apocalypse or Revelation of John. Some of the writings on which it is based may have been produced quite early, but it was actually composed at a much later time than that which we have been considering. The first glow of things has faded. The joyful sense of infinite possibilities just ahead has ceased to be a natural state of mind. The world seems going from bad to worse; the Coming of the Lord is delayed; persecution has set in; the faith of some is growing cold.

Those in the Church who had followed the leading of Paul had found a larger, richer faith which did not depend on the expectation of an immediate "Day of the Lord." Those who had remained at the old level of thought in changed conditions were driven to re-affirm their hope with something of the stridency of despair. For, in truth, what John of Patmos has to say is sombre and often bitter. His book is full of

woes and horrors and "vials of wrath." He sees the world given over to be the prey of evil powers. Most of humanity is wicked past hope of redemption. The Christian community itself is tainted with disloyalty. Times are bad indeed, and worse is yet to come. So far it would be irony to speak of a "gospel." But there is something more to be said. Beyond the worst that is to come lies the best conceivable. God stands within the shadows, working out His own plan. The successive calamities of the present are but ticks of the clock, telling out the brief minutes till the Hour strikes, and all the powers of good make their final and victorious assault.

The divine Agent in the final victory is strangely depicted under the image of a Horned Lamb which is like a lion in the fight.<sup>1</sup> The image, however, was not so strange to the readers of Jewish apocalypses, in which God's people often figured as a flock of sheep, and its divinely chosen leaders as horned lambs, or young wethers, the natural leaders of the flock.<sup>2</sup> But for the Christian writer the lamb suggested something more. It was the victim offered in sacrifice; and the Messiah, the Leader of God's people, had died for them, and "loosed them from their sins by

<sup>1</sup> Rev. v. 6, vi. 16, 17, xiv. 1, xvii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Enoch xc. describes the coming of Judas Maccabæus: "I saw in the vision how the ravens flew upon those lambs and took one of those lambs and dashed the sheep in pieces and devoured them. And I saw till horns grew on those lambs; and the ravens cast down their horns; and I saw till there spouted a great horn of one of those sheep . . . and those ravens fought and battled with it and sought to lay low its horn, but they had no power over it."

His blood.”<sup>1</sup> Through His suffering He became “worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.”<sup>2</sup> Those who, amid the prosperous wickedness of their time, turned to Him and entered into His fellowship should share both His sufferings and His ultimate triumph, provided they endured in constancy the manifold trials through which they must pass.<sup>3</sup> This valiant band of the redeemed made up a community firmly knit together, resolute in hostility to all the world-powers, and stern to suppress any breach of discipline within their ranks—an army of the living God, taking their orders from the Lord who was dead and is alive for evermore, guided by His Spirit and upheld by His power from the unseen world. Thus when the fated hour should strike, Christ would ride to triumph as Lord of lords and King of kings. All evil powers would pass away into impotence and oblivion.<sup>4</sup> There would be new heavens and a new earth, and for the martyred followers of the Lamb eternal joy in His presence.<sup>5</sup>

Such faith is magnificent, but it is dearly purchased. All tenderness towards man as man, all belief in the struggling virtues of human institutions, all charity and forgiveness towards the erring have been sacrificed to the stern demand for judgment and the vindication of

<sup>1</sup> Rev. v. 6, i. 5 R.V., better than A.V. or R.V. marg., vii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. v. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. ii.—iii. ; each of the seven letters contains a promise “to him who overcomes.”

<sup>4</sup> Rev. xix. 11–21, xx. 1–10.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. xxi.—xxii.

right. The splendid pæan over the fall of Rome<sup>1</sup> is simply a "hymn of hate," and the vision of the warriors of the King of kings wading in blood to their horses' bridles is all too realistic. These things are in the background of the bright visions of the ransomed in their white robes, walking the golden streets and fed with the fruit of the Tree of Life. It is true that even the background is not all unrelieved darkness. The gates of the City are ever open, and the leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations. The book even rises at its close to the great invitation—"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." But these hints of the authentic Christian Gospel are sadly overweighted by the force of passionate feeling behind the visions of judgment, vengeance, and destruction.

The gospel of the Revelation, in a word, is a one-sided gospel. It testifies to a tremendous faith in the power of God in dark times, and nerves the courage of the Christian soul to stand against fearful odds with an assurance of ultimate victory. But to feed the mind upon sombre visions of the perdition of most of one's fellow-creatures is not to be reconciled to humanity, and, therefore, it is not truly to be reconciled to God, as Jesus clearly showed. Nor, indeed, is the man who strives to love his neighbour as himself, and yet finds God's glory in the calamities of mankind truly at one with himself. He is a fanatic, and the fanatic shall hardly be saved.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xviii. One school of interpreters, however, would deny the reference to the historical Rome, and take "Babylon" purely as symbolic of the power of evil.

The primitive disciples gloried in the fellowship of the faithful, and they looked for the Day of the Lord. If they had been pressed to think out their position to its logical conclusion, doubtless it would have come to some such world-despairing view as that of the Revelation. Fortunately they were too much occupied in trying to help and win their neighbours to feel themselves a close community; and they were too blithely conscious of the present grace of the Lord in common life to sigh with too fierce impatience for His coming to judgment. The author of the Revelation has brooded too much, and his vision is out of focus. Joy in the fellowship of the faithful has developed into the exclusiveness of the "minority mind," and the hope of the future, instead of enhancing the present, empties it of value. His gospel emerges in spite of his grim philosophy in the "whosoever will . . ." of that closing invitation, and in some paragraphs of his more intimate messages to the churches he loved, with their moving climax, so little consistent with the storm and fury of what follows—"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will hear My voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with Me."

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

**T**HE First Epistle of Peter belongs to the period of persecution, though probably to an earlier stage of it than that which is represented in the Revelation. It is later than the Pauline Epistles, and undoubtedly owes something to the influence of Paul. That influence, however, does not go deep. Of the subtleties of Pauline theology there is small trace. Whether or not the Epistle can be regarded as the actual work of the Apostle Peter, it may fairly be taken as representing a type of Christian piety Petrine rather than Pauline in its inspiration. It is in the direct succession of primitive Christianity.

The Epistle is, indeed, the fine flower of the simple Christianity of early days. It holds the hope of a glorious Advent without fanaticism, and pride in the Church's privileges without morose exclusiveness. It is as quiet and joyful as the Revelation is sombre and violent. The absence of any resentment of persecution, in spite of all the immediate suffering to which it testifies, is truly remarkable. The writer has a fundamental respect for his fellow-men. If they attack the faith, you should treat them as reason-



able beings and "give a reason for the hope that is in you," and that not with the harsh defiance of a bigot, but "with gentleness and reverence." There is a general decency in the world: "Who is he that will harm you," he asks, "if you be followers of that which is good?"<sup>1</sup> Respect the conscience of your opponents; give no scandal to their feelings; and they in the end will come to recognize goodness when they see it and "glorify God."<sup>2</sup> That there is gross moral evil in the world, he knows, and that calls for judgment; but he prefers to remind his readers that "judgment begins with the household of God"—*i.e.* with themselves.<sup>3</sup> For the rest—even the wicked "spirits in prison" had the gospel preached to them, and the dead received a larger hope.<sup>4</sup>

There is here abundant evidence that the author of this Epistle has attained a truly reconciled attitude to the world. And, indeed, the quiet serenity of spirit which makes his work one of the most attractive writings in the New Testament is evidence enough that he is in the fullest sense a "saved" man. The hard things that life may bring have been taken up into experience, and he is content. "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator . . . casting all your anxiety on Him, for He careth for you. . . . And the God of all grace shall Himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you."<sup>5</sup>

There is more in this than mere resignation to the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 13-16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 12.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 17.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20, iv. 6.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 19, v. 6-10.

inevitable. To the man who is right with God suffering itself is a means of grace. "He that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."<sup>1</sup> That is a doctrine with which the mind of our day shows itself ill at ease. But men of true religion have always known that it is so. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I observe Thy word."<sup>2</sup> That is far removed from an ascetic pursuit of pain for its own sake; it is equally removed from that fretful resentment of suffering which has devised so many theologies for itself. It is reconciliation to God and to life.

The gospel that the Epistle has to preach is in substance a confession of the way by which this happy condition came about. We may single out three principal factors. First, there is the vivid thought of Christ Himself as a real person who lived, suffered, and died, and "whom having not seen ye love, and rejoice with joy unspeakable."<sup>3</sup> In the preaching of the primitive disciples, the recent memory of all that Jesus had been was, as we saw, an unexpressed but a controlling factor. In this Epistle a few graphic touches betray the clear picture that lived in the writer's mind as a constant inspiration. "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps, who . . . when He suffered did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously."<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, the life of Jesus was not only an example and an inspiration. It achieved definite results in

<sup>1</sup> I Pet. iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> I Pet. i. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. cxix. 67.

<sup>4</sup> I Pet. ii. 21-23.

history, whose effects abide. "Christ suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God."<sup>1</sup> How this came about, the author does not speculate. He knows it happened. Bear in mind that he knew from experience that suffering may have positive results as a means of grace. If we ask how *another's* suffering can have such worth, he refers us to the classical expression of the principle of vicarious suffering in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed."<sup>2</sup>

The outcome of Christ's conflict is that we have been "emancipated from a futile tradition of living."<sup>3</sup> The change amounts to a new birth—out of the old heredity, we may say, into a new divine heredity. Indeed, our author thinks of the privileges of the Christian life both now and in its future perfection as an "inheritance" to which we have been born anew.<sup>4</sup> In a word, that which God did for us through Christ amounts to a new start for us in a world made new. That sense of futility in the way of life to which we seem committed by heredity and environment is by no means strange to our own time—certainly if we may judge from much popular literature of the day. If Christ's historic achievement has made it possible to break away from it and live by energies and inspirations springing from another world, that is Gospel for us as for the first century.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. i. 18.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 24.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Pet. i. 3-5, 23.

Thirdly, this new life finds its appropriate environment in a society created by the same divine energies. As the primitive Church offered its fellowship as a gospel to men, so the First Epistle of Peter proclaims the stirring news that those who were in time past no people are now the people of God. In other words, those who had failed to find any real fellowship of corporate life fit to nurture and to express the highest spiritual impulses, have now found it in a social life which "shows forth the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."<sup>1</sup> There is the note of experience and of conviction in the praises of the Christian society, and when the writer turns to the hope of the future, it is the life of the Kingdom of God as it is now lived in the fellowship of the faithful that inspires his vision. He needs none of the garish or lurid colouring of apocalypse. If the believer's part in this life is in one aspect a consequence of his redemption, in another aspect he is redeemed by the fellowship. Brought to God by what he sees in Christ, and given a spiritual home in the society which the work of Christ created, he faces life with strong serenity—a saved man.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 4-10.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EVANGELISTS

IT was in the atmosphere of the First Epistle of Peter that our earliest account of the life of Jesus was composed. A credible tradition informs us that Mark was Peter's interpreter, and set down what he remembered of Peter's discourses concerning the life of the Lord. We need make no difficulty about accepting Mark's picture of Jesus as substantially that which lay in the mind of the writer of the Epistle—in the mind of Peter as its inspirer if not its actual author. The words of the Epistle, "the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow," might well be given to Mark's book as a motto, and its effect on the reader is surely this—"whom having not seen, ye love." It was not for nothing that Mark chose to call his book a "Gospel." That word had hitherto been used for the preaching of the Christian message of salvation. The First Epistle of Peter lets us see how important for that preaching is the thought of Jesus Himself as He lived and died. When Mark set out to make that thought vivid by his lifelike narrative, he felt that he was all the time preaching the Gospel.

The evangelists who followed Mark likewise put

on paper the thoughts about Christ with which the early preachers of the Gospel gave substance to their message and force to their appeal. Luke, preserving the tragic and heroic in the Marcan picture, is more than Mark preoccupied with the grace of Christ as Friend and Saviour of men. In the great poems of salvation with which his book opens—the Benedictus, the Magnificat, the Nunc Dimittis, and the Gloria in Excelsis—we catch the authentic tones of the early days in Jerusalem, and detect the emotion that must have quickened the preaching whose bald outlines we read in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. And the evangelist who thus introduces his theme goes on to tell stories of the Saviour which no other writer has preserved—the sinful woman forgiven, the publican Zacchæus restored, the penitent robber consoled—and he alone gives us that immortal tale which has always been recognized as the supremely “evangelical parable,” the Prodigal Son.

In Matthew the tone is, on the whole, less warm. Christ is teacher, lawgiver, king. We shall perhaps best appreciate the significance of the book if we start from the thought of the Christian community offering its own fellowship, its own principles and way of life, to men as part of its Gospel. Matthew sets forth soberly and searchingly the laws which must govern the fellowship if it is to embody the mind and spirit of the Lord. Perhaps the enunciation of a law seems something less than a gospel; yet it opens with beatitudes, and the spirit in which it is to be received is set forth in the words—“Take My yoke upon you

and learn of Me . . . and you shall find rest to your souls." And certainly Matthew never leaves his readers to think that they are left with a task to be performed by themselves unaided. He alone of the evangelists gives the saying, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them," and his closing words are those of the great promise, "I am with you alway, even unto the consummation of the age." The Lord Himself is the living centre of the fellowship, and makes of it a very Kingdom of God.

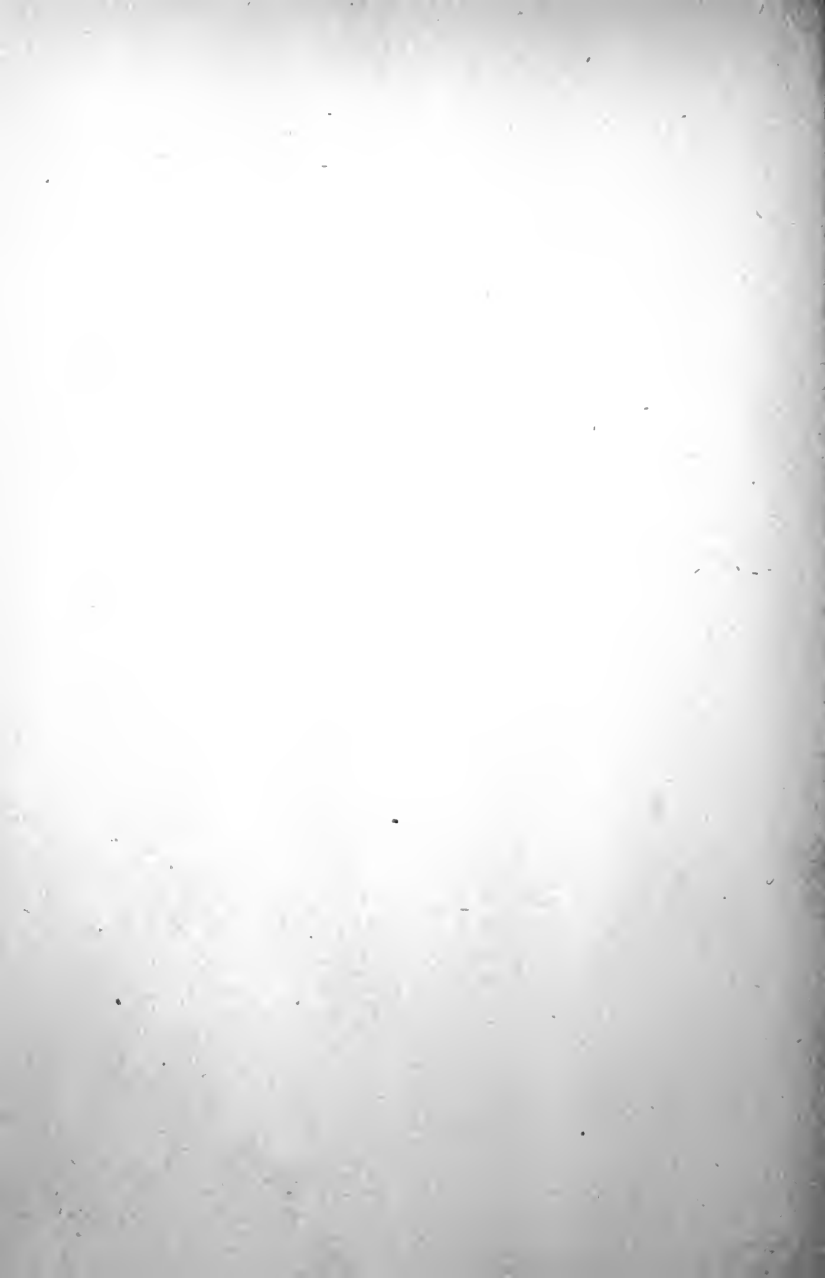




PART II (*Continued*)

**THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL**

**B. THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE GOSPEL**



## INTRODUCTION

SO far we have been dealing with presentations of the Gospel of a comparatively simple and unreflective type. There is little or no theology of a speculative kind. Memories of Jesus as He had lived, the hope of His Coming, and the present experience of a fellowship of which He is the centre, are the stuff of the message. But within the New Testament we have also the work of the first great Christian theologians, who give us a more profound interpretation of Jesus and His Gospel—more profound both in the sense that the type of experience it represents is more deeply mystical and in the sense that it is more fully thought out. The first of these thinkers is Paul. The second is the anonymous author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The third is the great Christian mystic to whom we owe the Fourth Gospel. He, too, is anonymous, and in spite of all that tradition has to say, we must confess that we do not know who he was. These three men laid the foundation of Christian theology.

## CHAPTER I

### THE FAITH OF PAUL

PAUL was a man of strong individuality and of unusual intellectual power. Before he became a Christian he had thought deeply and formed decided opinions on religion. His conversion was an experience of a kind outside the range of the plain man, and probably strange to most of his Christian contemporaries. All these facts give a special stamp to his presentation of the Gospel. Yet it would be a mistake to think of Paul as a pure innovator. He came into the Church probably not more than four years from its foundation, while the memory of Jesus was still fresh, and before the forms of Christian life or belief had been in any degree stereotyped. The general *data* of Christianity lay before him, not only in his personal experience, but in what he could observe of the corporate life, and in the common consciousness, whose witness, though confused and unreflective, was full of meaning for a penetrating mind. Paul perceived implications that had eluded wits less sharpened than his own, and it is probable that in some essential respects he appreciated the central message of Jesus better than the immediate followers

of the Lord. Certainly his prolonged missionary work among pagan populations forced him to select and develop those aspects of the Gospel of Christ which most clearly mark it as a universal reply to common human needs.

In his extant letters the exigencies of passing controversies—not sought by Paul, but forced upon him—have sometimes made it appear that he laid undue emphasis on scholastic arguments which many people to-day find barren. We shall certainly be doing as he would have wished us to do if we seek to bring into the foreground those strong, clear affirmations which constituted his gospel—the gospel he was prepared to defend not only, as occasion called, with all the learning and subtlety of the schools, but in the end with his life.

We may start with Paul's declaration that he had found "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> Before Christ "laid hold upon him"<sup>2</sup> (as he put it), he had known a great deal about God. He knew that God was one, that He was holy and righteous altogether, that His law was the only way of life, and that He was a "living God," mighty to overrule all things to the ultimate triumph of right. What further "openings" and intimate experiences of divine things had come to him, we cannot say; it is likely that he was a mystic before he became a Christian; but there is mysticism and mysticism. What we do know is that the time came when all that he knew of God did not save him

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. iii. 12.

from despair and self-disgust. Then he saw God afresh in Jesus Christ. What he saw was chiefly this—"God commendeth His love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us."<sup>1</sup> The italics, it is fair to say, are his own; for that is the emphasis to which the whole argument leads up.

It is in no way surprising that this should be the effect that Christ had upon Paul's view of God. It was the heart of all He had to say and the meaning of all He did. He made friends of the publicans while they were yet sinners, and thereby brought them to God, and so He made credible His own parable of the Shepherd, who goes out after the sheep that is lost. Such is the fatherly love of God, and there the Gospel begins.

To understand the special significance that this new conception of God had for Paul, we must take into account what he says of the moral experience that preceded his conversion. In some degree it was an abnormally intense experience, because of the way in which he had been brought up. But it is only its intensity that is abnormal. At bottom he is speaking of things familiar to most of us.

Religion begins in the instinctive awe that men feel in the presence of ineffable Mystery, which both overwhelms and fascinates them. As religion becomes more moral and more rational, that tribute of awe is paid to the sublime mysteries of goodness, truth, and beauty. In particular, to the elevated mind, the moral law, so mysterious in its inward compulsions,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 8.

so sublime in its austere ideals, becomes the supreme object of reverence, as the most adequate expression of that divine Essence which passes understanding. Thus in the higher religions, worship involves reverence for the moral law, and the effort to conform to it, as a way of communion with the Divine.

It is the glory of Judaism that it made this ethical implication of religion most clear and compelling. That is where Paul's religious life began. A devoted worshipper of the God of his fathers, he tried very hard to keep His law. The harder he tried, the more he became conscious of the gulf that lay between the ideal and his own attainment. He looked within, and traced the failure to the impotence of his will. "The good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do." Further analysis showed him that this impotence arose from a division within himself: "With my mind I serve the law of God, but with my flesh the law of sin."<sup>1</sup>

Thus alienation from God, as represented by the moral law, is the counterpart of discord within. Clearly both must be dealt with if the man is to be saved. But where begin? The whole tendency of Paul's training would lead him to try to deal directly with the inward discord, and by rigorous self-discipline and meritorious works eventually to bring all his "members" into subjection to the law of God. That seems reasonable enough. Only Paul found that it did not happen so. The discord increased. Nor was he peculiar in this. It seemed to him that in men, as he

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vii. 14-25.

knew them, there was something very deeply rooted which fought so implacably against the law of God that real, secure, radical righteousness was unattainable. This something Paul called "sin in the flesh"—not in my flesh or yours, but in one side of that common humanity which we all share.

No man, in fact, starts his moral adventure with a clean sheet. For good or ill he is partaker in the general life of the race, and down to his inmost depths he is affected by what men before him have done and suffered, and by the social atmosphere into which he was born. This is the purport of what Paul has to say about Adam's sin and its transmission to his posterity.<sup>1</sup> "Adam" is but a symbol for that common human stock from which we draw all our natural endowment. Now when a man suspects that the resistance to good of which he is conscious in himself can, in large measure, be put to the account of "heredity" and "environment"—as indeed may well be the case—he may comfort himself with the reflection, "It is not my fault." But, if he is a morally serious person, he will feel that in the presence of these vast and mysterious forces his individual problem is greatly aggravated, and a sense of horrible helplessness may come. That is how Paul took it. "O wretched man that I am! who will deliver me?" God, it appeared, had done all that God could be expected to do. He had made man with a natural capacity for knowing Him, and with His law written on the heart.<sup>2</sup> To His own people He had in His ineffable mercy given a

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 19, 20, ii. 14, 15.



very explicit revelation of His will, with the promise of glorious life to those who should obey.<sup>1</sup> Man had rejected the way of life : what more could God do ?

Now we can understand how Paul felt when it came into his mind that God *had* done something more. He had passed all barriers that the sin of men set up, and brought them into touch with Himself.<sup>2</sup> For any one who believes in God, that is enough—that he should be in touch with God. For this is the problem : the love, the power, the grace of God are there, but how shall a man who is sinful and unclean be helped by them ? To him is not God the vindicator of an affronted moral law ? Until I become a better man, how can I hope to have God for my friend ? The answer is that Christ was the Friend of sinners, and God is like that.

This does not mean, of course, that God is indifferent to goodness and badness in men. On the contrary, no one can face Christ without seeing very clearly what it means to be really good. No code of precepts could give us anything like so clear a picture. Indeed, any set of rules of conduct must be misleading more or less, for it misses out, and cannot but miss out, all that matters most in actual living—the web of human relations, and the intricate play of affections and feelings, that make every moral act a unique thing. “ The righteousness of God in Christ Jesus ” is goodness itself made alive and personal, an ideal that disturbs the conscience, but does not repel, or

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 20, iii. 1, 2, x. 5 ; Gal. iii. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. v. 6-11, viii. 3, 4.

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crush, or dishearten. It comes with infinite friendliness and promise. It awakens not despair, but hope and confidence—a confidence not in oneself but in God, so friendly and so strong to save as we see Him in Christ. This confidence Paul calls faith.

## CHAPTER II

### PAUL'S GOSPEL OF REDEMPTION AND RECONCILIATION

TO do full justice to Paul's position we must be clear that he did not regard the life and death of Jesus Christ as a mere *portrayal* of the loving righteousness of God, but as a real *act* of God in history. It was a victory on the field,<sup>1</sup> a verdict in the law-court,<sup>2</sup> a sacrifice upon the altar.<sup>3</sup> These and other metaphors are used to impress upon the imagination the stark actuality of what Christ did.

To pursue the intricate arguments which these metaphors serve would lead us far. Perhaps we can most simply arrive at the facts Paul had in mind through an historical analogy which, though he hardly formulates it explicitly, was certainly present to his thought. As a patriotic Jew he looked back with pride to the event which opened the history of his people—the deliverance from Egypt, commemorated yearly in the ritual of the Passover. At that remote

<sup>1</sup> Col. ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 3, etc. The word "justify" is a term of the law-court, meaning properly "acquit."

<sup>3</sup> Rom. iii. 25.

date the Hebrew clans, till then serfs in Egypt, had taken a decisive step which made them a free people, and started them on their way to the full dignity of a united and powerful nation. No religious mind could doubt that there was a divine providence in so significant an historical movement. And, in fact, "the redemption of Israel" was for the Jews, with their historical sense, the palmary instance of the "mighty acts" of the "living God."

Paul saw in what Christ had done a new "redemption." Once more a free community had been created by an historic act of God. The forces that make history are personal, spiritual, and moral forces. Such forces were set working in the world by the life and death of Christ, and the manifest result was a society actively conscious of having passed out of bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and living joyfully by new spiritual powers made available through Christ.

To bring these powers into play had cost Him dear. In a world like this, no new life is born without travail. Jesus brought the loving righteousness of God into a world of men "sold under sin," and He had to fight for it at every step with the only weapons such righteousness could use. He overcame evil with good—but at the cost of His life. As the blood of all heroes and martyrs passes into the very souls of the communities that inherit from them, so the life of the Christian society springs from the blood of Christ. The high tragedy of the Cross is the crisis of the historic emancipation of the people of God. We

have spoken of the forces of "heredity" and "environment" which so greatly complicate the moral problem. Using similar terms, we may say that in the Christian society created by the Cross there is a new spiritual environment, full of moral energy, and a spiritual heritage of life too rich and strong to be overcome by sin and death.

When Paul speaks of faith, then, he is thinking of a confidence in God evoked by Christ, and securely based on what God has actually done through Christ for the redemption or emancipation of men. Through such faith, he says, a man is "justified." That is, in fact, his answer to the old dilemma; no man can be saved unless he is in communion with God; yet, if God is righteous, how can a sinful man ever begin to have communion with Him? On the level on which Paul's thought had habitually moved, the only answer, given in legal or forensic terms, is that, in view of all the guilt that lies on a man's soul, God graciously acquits him, attributing to him a righteousness which is not yet his, but will be his through the divine grace. Thus God is not only just, but the Justifier of men, and His righteousness is shown to be of a larger kind than the justice of mere reciprocity.<sup>1</sup> The attempt to put it in legal language results in a paradox, and that serves to show that the legal way of thinking is inadequate to the facts of the religious life. "Through the law I died to the law," Paul said;<sup>2</sup> and his thought, by going as far as it could go in legal forms, broke the tyranny of the forms.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iii. 21-26, iv. 3-5, v. 18, 19; Gal. ii. 15, 16.      <sup>2</sup> Gal. ii. 19.

For something much more fundamental than a legal fiction of acquittal is in view. The goodness of God is a creative goodness, aiming only at the perfection of the life He gave to men. Where that life is impaired by sin, He draws near, not to redress an abstract legal balance by making the punishment fit the crime, but to give more life and so to overcome evil with good.

As this is a larger view of the character of God, so it involves a new view of what goodness means in men. Real goodness is not that into which a man nurses himself by self-conscious effort, but that which is given him almost at unawares when he ceases to think about himself and puts his trust in God. The moralist says, "Try hard to be good, and you will have the peace that comes from an approving conscience." To those who have tried and failed, the Gospel says, "Forget awhile all about your own goodness and badness; God is good: be honestly willing that He should make of you what He wills."<sup>1</sup> The great comfort of it to any one really troubled about his moral failure is that it speaks of a fresh start to be made here and now, in the actual situation, accepted just as it really is. For the wrong already done, God takes responsibility,<sup>2</sup> and He imparts to us power to deal with the whole situation issuing from it, according to His will, and so in the best possible way.<sup>3</sup>

Thus alienation from God is overcome from the

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 4-6, v. 18-21; Eph. ii. 8-10.

<sup>2</sup> Col. ii. 14; 1 Cor. vi. 9-11.

<sup>3</sup> Col. i. 11-13; Phil. ii. 12, 13, etc.

divine side. This is the Gospel of reconciliation or atonement (the two words are only variant translations of one word in Paul's original Greek). It is a monstrous misconception to think that God needs to be appeased or reconciled to us; in Paul's writings it is always God who is the reconciler and we the reconciled.<sup>1</sup> And peace with God brings harmony within the self. It is certainly true that concern about the correctness of our behaviour and the approval of our conscience is dangerous to real inward harmony. A wholesome forgetfulness of self and a quiet, sincere acceptance of the goodness of God brings a deeper peace than self-approval can ever bring.

Out of that death of self there is a resurrection. For there enters into us a power which is the effluence of the goodness of God Himself; "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us";<sup>2</sup> and in loving another the whole personality lives at its fullest, delighting in doing good as God delights in it, and because of that delight finding power to go further. Thus right conduct is not so much an achievement as the spontaneous "fruit" of a spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Such love or charity creates by its nature right relations among men. "Faith working through love"<sup>4</sup> makes a fellowship where each can lose his life

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 10, 11; 2 Cor. v. 18-20; Eph. ii. 11-22; Col. i. 21, 22

<sup>2</sup> Rom. v. 5; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15; Eph. iii. 14-21.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. v. 22-26; Rom. xii. 9-13; 1 Cor. xii. 31-xiii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. v. 6.

in service of the rest, and so find it again. It is a part of the Gospel that "we are one Body in Christ, and severally members one of another."<sup>1</sup> That is why Paul gave so much thought and pains to the building up of a wholesome corporate life in the Christian communities he founded and to the promotion of substantial unity between them and other sections of the Christian Church.

Two solemn rites consecrated the fellowship. Baptism set forth in moving symbolism death to self and resurrection into the larger life of the people of God.<sup>2</sup> The Lord's Supper was a common meal in which the one loaf and the one cup were symbols of the new life that all partaking shared, while they also recalled mystically the sacrifice of Christ by which the new life was given.<sup>3</sup> These two sacraments stand as perpetual testimony that to be right with God means being right with your brother also.

In the new life we have Christ for our closest companion and ally. For He who died for us lives, and "if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled shall we be saved by His life." He lives in the unseen, "at the right hand of God"; but He is not therefore remote from us, for the true centre of our own life is in that unseen world; "your life is hid with Christ in God."<sup>4</sup> The incidents of mortality do not touch it, and when the death of the body comes,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xii. 5-8; 1 Cor. xii. 12-31; Eph. iv. 1-16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 13; Rom. vi. 1-11.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. x. 16, 17, xi. 20-26.

<sup>4</sup> Col. iii. 1-4.



it is "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."<sup>1</sup> It brings the fulfilment of a communion which is real here and now.

Indeed, in some sort the Spirit which God gives to those who trust Him is Christ Himself living in us.<sup>2</sup> The purposes that arise in us, the values by which we judge, the motives that impel us to action, are the reproduction in us of His attitude to life, and by His love to us our love to other men is kept and fed. And since He suffered for us, we shall accept suffering that may be our lot as part of the life of Christ in us.<sup>3</sup> If it is caused by others who do us wrong, we shall react to it as Christ reacted, not with resentment, but with the desire that our endurance of the wrong may ultimately bring them good.<sup>4</sup> For in all things we shall share Christ's purpose to set men free from all that hampers life.

That all living beings can be saved is part of Paul's gospel. In his early days as a Christian he embodied his conviction that Christ would finally triumph in the forms of current eschatology, and spoke of coming terrors of judgment when Christ should return in glory.<sup>5</sup> But beyond that he looked through a lengthening vista to some mysterious consummation when, after death itself and all other powers hostile to life had been subdued, all men should be saved, and Christ as sole Lord of the race should yield the

<sup>1</sup> Phil. i. 21-23 ; 2 Cor. v. 6-8.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. ii. 19, 20 ; Rom. viii. 9-11 ; 1 Cor. ii. 12-16 ; 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Col. i. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. xii. 14-21.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Thess. v. 2, 3 ; 2 Thess. i. 3-12, ii. 7-12.

sovereignty to God.<sup>1</sup> For his maturer thought it is enough that Christ has "reconciled all beings in heaven and earth";<sup>2</sup> and his mind is full of the wonder of the growing unity of God's people, in which he sees a pledge that the reconciliation is real and will in the end be complete. God has purposed in "the fullness of the times to sum up all things in Christ."<sup>3</sup>

It is a striking proof of the reconciling effect of faith in Christ to observe how Paul himself not only grows more balanced and harmonious in his own soul, more kindly and tolerant, more appreciative of other men and of human institutions, but also grows into a sense of unity with the creation in its vicissitudes and its destiny. At first it was "Christ against the world, conquering and to conquer"; but in the end it was "the world in Christ, reconciled to God."

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 23-28; Rom. xi. 25-36.

<sup>2</sup> Col. i. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. i. 10; Phil. ii. 9-11.

## CHAPTER III

### THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

“WHO wrote the Epistle, God knows.” It is sixteen centuries and a half since Origen made that confession. We are no nearer a solution of the problem of authorship. So let that rest. The theory that Paul wrote the letter was a mere blunder. Its outlook on religion is quite distinct from his.

The writer has not Paul's dominating concern with the moral problem. God is for him the supremely Real, even more than the supremely Righteous, while man walketh in a vain show, among shadows and illusions. He is aware that somewhere there is an unseen, eternal world of absolute reality, but he is shut out of it, and longs to “enter in.” The very recurrence of that expression throughout the Epistle gives a certain pathos to the whole—“to enter into rest,” “to enter within the veil,” “to enter into the Holy Place.”<sup>1</sup> The spirit of man is homeless in the world. He has here “no continuing city.”<sup>2</sup> Ignorance and error lead him astray; full of “infirmities” and surrounded by “temptations,”<sup>3</sup> he falls into

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iii. 11, 19, iv. 1-11, vi. 19, ix. 24, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xiii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. v. 2, ii. 18, iv. 15.

sin, and sin is an effectual barrier between him and God. The ever-present fact of death keeps him in mind of the impermanence and unreality that shuts him in; he is "through fear of death all his lifetime subject to bondage."<sup>1</sup>

In religion man has sought a way through the veil. The author was a devoted student of the religious institutions and literature of his race. The sublime ritual of the ancient sanctuary moved him profoundly. Above all, the solemn yearly entrance of the High Priest into the Holy of holies<sup>2</sup> stirred his imagination—we can well understand why. The ancient poet who sang the praises of Simon the High Priest<sup>3</sup> must have found in him a sympathetic reader:

“ How glorious was he when the people gathered  
 round him  
 At his coming forth out of the sanctuary !  
 As the morning star in the midst of a cloud,  
 As the moon at the full ;  
 As the sun shining forth upon the temple of the  
 Most High  
 And as the rainbow giving light in clouds of  
 glory ! . . .  
 When he took up the robe of glory,  
 And put on the perfection of exultation,  
 In the ascent of the holy altar,  
 He made glorious the precinct of the sanct-  
 uary. . . .  
 Then all the people together hasted,  
 And fell down upon the earth on their faces,  
 To worship their Lord, the Almighty, God  
 Most High.”

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ii, 15.<sup>2</sup> Heb. ix, 1-10.<sup>3</sup> Ecclus. i, 1-21.

To his mind the liturgy was far from being a meaningless form. He had learned of that great Jewish thinker, Philo of Alexandria, who in the last age of the ancient Temple worship had offered to his people a philosophy of their religion. Philo was a Platonist. Following his master, he held that the "visible world" is a copy of the "intelligible world" of ideas or essential forms. Plato had said that the perfect and eternal forms of things were laid up "in some heavenly place," and Philo, finding in the Scriptures that Moses had made the tabernacle "after the pattern shown him in the Mount," interpreted the whole ritual of religion through an elaborate scheme of symbolism in which the sanctuary, the vestments, the victims, and all the details of the liturgy represented eternal realities in the unseen world.

In this the writer to the Hebrews followed him. But he was not satisfied. It may be that the destruction of the Temple, which Philo had not lived to see, had sharpened in him the sense of the impermanence of the whole ritual. Year by year the rite must be repeated. Priest followed priest to the grave. There was nothing final about it, and so nothing real in the absolute sense. The entrance of the priest into the sanctuary might *represent* the entrance of the soul into the realm of reality, but it was not real. The sacrifice of bulls and goats *represented* the cleansing of the conscience, but it did not really cleanse.<sup>1</sup>

Human history and experience, then, move in the realm of shadows, and the practice of religion, so

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 1-4, vii. 23, 24.

far as this is bound up with ritual, does not deliver or satisfy the craving for reality from that realm. But there is one episode in history in which full reality can be discerned. In the whole life and death of Jesus Christ an "eternal spirit" was at work.<sup>1</sup> He carried the effulgence of the glory of God and the express image of His person<sup>2</sup> into human life, brought it through untarnished, and ultimately entered by death into no shadowy holy place, but into "heaven itself,"<sup>3</sup> or that eternal unseen world which is the true tabernacle of God. He was the true priest—perfectly united in sympathy, as a priest should be, with the worshippers for whom He acts. He lived our life completely—He was tempted in all points as we are; He prayed, as we are driven to pray, with strong crying and tears; He learned, as we all must learn, obedience through what He suffered; and through that suffering He was fitted, as nothing else could have fitted Him, to become the Saviour of men.<sup>4</sup>

His was no merely official priesthood, but a priesthood of nature and character. The sacrifice He offered was at bottom the sacrifice of His own perfect obedience to God. An ancient psalm proclaimed, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not. . . . Lo, I am come to do Thy will, O God." On this the author comments—"He abolishes the first (namely, sacrifice and offering) that He may establish the second (namely, obedience)."<sup>5</sup> The sacrifice of Christ was finally

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ix. 14, x. 11-14.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. i. 1-4.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. ix. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. iv. 14-v. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. x. 5-10.

consummated by His painful death in ignominy, but that which was operative in it was His perfectly obedient will. This was the offering He made to God; and unlike all ritual sacrifices, it was absolutely and completely real. By it He "consecrated a new and living way through the veil" that hides from us the unseen.<sup>1</sup>

For so fully human was His life on earth, so complete His solidarity with men, His "brothers," that what He achieved stands as a permanent gain for the race.<sup>2</sup> He is our "Forerunner," and we already belong of right to that eternal order into which He has gone. The spirit of man is now like a ship riding at anchor in a mist that hides the land, but feeling the tug of her cable where the anchor grips firm ground within the veil of mist.<sup>3</sup> Nor does His active concern for His brothers end with the consummation of His sacrifice. Within the veil "He lives for ever to intercede for us."<sup>4</sup> At the heart of that eternal world from which man felt himself shut out, his own highest desires and aspirations are finding utterance before the central Throne of the universe.

The sacrifice of Christ, the Epistle teaches, frees the conscience from the guilt of sin.<sup>5</sup> This author's treatment of sin, however, lacks the precision and realism of Paul. He thinks of sin not so much as a plain moral fact, capable of psychological analysis,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 19-22.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ii. 10-18.

<sup>3</sup> This slightly bizarre but striking metaphor is found in Heb. vi. 19, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. vii. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. ix. 11-14.

and to be dealt with by a fully personal process in which the reason, the will, and the affections are concerned. For him sin is a mysterious defilement repugnant to the holiness of God, only to be removed by a process which is essentially just as mysterious. For he is still governed by the ancient idea of sacrifice as something beyond the reach of man's reason, acting by laws unrelated to ordinary moral or spiritual experience.<sup>1</sup> And though the sacrifice of Christ is utterly different from the offerings of bulls and goats, it is still not fully brought out of the realm of the mysterious into the light of reason and moral experience.

Yet the writer makes it clear that, in virtue of the solidarity of mankind, the obedience of Christ has a universal value in breaking the power of sin,<sup>2</sup> and he shows true ethical and even psychological insight in pointing out that the repeated sacrifices of the old "covenant" brought a perpetual "remembrance of sin,"<sup>3</sup> whereas what man needs, as Jeremiah saw long ago, is a forgetfulness of sin, and this the new "covenant," or the new relation to God established by Christ, makes possible.<sup>4</sup>

But the treatment here is defective, because the author has not fully assimilated the central teaching of Jesus about the fatherly love of God. That God is our Father and loves us, he, of course, believes; but his working conception of God is still governed by the thought of "God the Judge of all"; and he

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ix. 18-23.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ii. 6-11, iii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. x. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. x. 15-18, viii. 6-13.



betrays his dominant feeling when he exclaims, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," and "Our God is a consuming fire."<sup>1</sup>

The writer to the Hebrews, then, would take his stand on what Christ has actually achieved as the representative of our race, and in order that the benefits of it may come home to us individually he would have us "look to Jesus." No writer of the New Testament dwells with more fervour of imagination on all those features of the human life of our Lord which bring Him close to us. We are to "consider Him" in His conflicts and sufferings, in His perfect obedience to God and His perfect loyalty to His brothers, brought to a climax in a sacrifice which was not surrender to death, but victory over it.<sup>2</sup> When we thus see Jesus, He becomes the "author of faith" in us.

Faith is "the substantiation of things not seen,"<sup>3</sup> and when we have it, the whole aspect of life is altered. The tyranny of material things is overcome, the fear of death abolished, and the sufferings of this present life are no longer something we resent and rebel against, but the price of true wisdom. And when temptation assails, we "endure as seeing Him who is invisible," and we can lay aside the sin that so closely besets us by "the powers of the world to come," accessible to us here and now.<sup>4</sup> We are made citizens of "a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."<sup>5</sup> Within the walls of that

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 30, 31, xii. 5-10, 23, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 2, 3, v. 7-10.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. xi. 1, and the whole chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. vi. 4, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. xi. 10, 16, xii. 22-24.

city the souls of all men of good will find a home. The generations of the past who lived by the best they knew, but never attained their ideal, are waiting for us there because they without us cannot be made perfect. In the midst is Jesus, the mediator of this new covenant. And here we are in view of the very throne of God, for being of Christ's company "we have boldness to enter into the Holy Place," and worship in utter reality the supremely Real.<sup>1</sup>

This is the author's vision of reconciliation. It is, perhaps, less close to the experience of most men than Paul's, as it is less vitally related to the moral problem which, for most men, sharpens the need of a Gospel. Yet there is something here, too, that speaks to a universal need. We mostly content ourselves very well with the solid things that we can see and handle every day :

" Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
From the hid battlements of Eternity,"

and we are all astray. Very often it is the near presence of death, or some personal or public disaster, that shatters the regular course of things ; or it may be a strain of music or a sudden glimpse of unsuspected beauty. Something breaks in, and the things we thought so solid and certain take on a curious unreality. There is, we feel, after all, a supernatural order, and we are strangers in it, a prey to

" blank misgivings of a creature  
Moving about in worlds unrealized."

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<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 19-22.

Perhaps more than we know of the *malaise* of our times is at bottom a failure to adjust the common life to a world of unseen realities that always lies about us, though we pretend it is not there. If Christ will enable us to face the reality that our all too superficial way of living hides from us, and give us "boldness to enter in," then truly He is a Saviour. For few men can go right through life without finding how unreal are the material things in which we trust, and when a man finds that, either he says, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," or his soul advances from the unreal to the real—*ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

THE Fourth Gospel, as we have seen, cannot be placed on precisely the same level as the other Gospels for the purposes of historical inquiry. Whatever use it has made of historical material, its aim is to set forth the abiding truth which the events signify. The writer was probably himself not of the first Christian generation, but in the communal life of the Church at Ephesus, to which he belonged, he stood in the centre of a living tradition going back to very early days, and very likely preserving much authentic reminiscence of the first witnesses of Christ. With his mind full of such memories, he has thought out afresh the significance of that earthly life in which the spirit of man had found all eternity opening upon its sight. He has gone back to the beginnings of Christianity with the insight derived from long Christian experience—not individual experience alone, though his own experience was exceptionally deep and real. He wrote his book that we might understand more inwardly the story of Jesus than others had told, and that, believing, we might have life in His name.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 31.

We have seen that in the teaching of Jesus Christ the thought of the Kingdom of God comes very near to the thought of life itself at its highest and purest, so that in the Gospel according to Mark the two expressions, "the Kingdom of God" and "eternal life," are used interchangeably. For the writer of the Fourth Gospel it is this aspect of Christianity that is paramount. He speaks little of the Kingdom of God, and when he does speak of it, he clearly means exactly the same thing as he means when he uses the alternative expression. When he says "eternal life" he is not thinking of life beyond the grave; he is thinking first of life of a certain kind and quality which a man may live here and now—of such a kind and quality that it is worthy to endure for ever.

It can be defined very simply: eternal life is to know God.<sup>1</sup> At first sight that seems a coldly intellectual way of conceiving the highest kind of life. But it is obvious that John is using the term "know" in a sense different from that which we are accustomed to attach to it. He means, for example, something quite other than Tennyson meant when he said:

"We have but faith; we cannot know,  
For knowledge is of things we see."

John would have said—and here all the mystics and all the idealists would be with him—that the things we see are precisely the things of which we cannot have knowledge in the true sense; they are far too variable and evanescent. To know, we must go

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 3.

deeper, and apprehend what is more real and more lasting than the mere appearances of which our senses are aware :

“ A deep below the deep,  
 And a height beyond the height !  
 Our hearing is not hearing,  
 And our seeing is not sight.”

The fullest kind of knowledge that we can possess is the mutual knowledge of two persons who are very intimate with one another. It is an inward understanding in which spiritual sympathies play a larger part than seeing or hearing. Knowledge of God must be of that kind, but deeper, more inward, and more spiritual. And as no two persons can ever know one another unless they have some affinity of nature, so to know God we must in some measure partake of His nature. “ Like is known by like,” wrote a non-Christian mystic of the third century ; “ rise above all time and become eternal ; then you will apprehend God.”<sup>1</sup>

But God is Spirit and we are flesh ; and “ that which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”<sup>2</sup> This sense of the “ complete otherness ” of God, His “ transcendence,” as the philosophers say, has always haunted the religious mind. It is, indeed, in some sort implied in the very act of worship. Yet the religious consciousness also demands some bridge across the gulf.

The rich ferment of religious thought which was in

<sup>1</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum*, Libellus xi. (ii.), 20b. In quoting from the *Hermetica* I use Scott's translation.

<sup>2</sup> John iii. 6.

process during the period preceding and accompanying the rise of Christianity had produced one idea which to men of that time seemed full of significance for this central problem of religion. It was the idea of the Logos. Into its remoter philosophical antecedents we need not here inquire. The man who "made it current coin" for the religious world was Philo of Alexandria.

The word itself had a fortunate ambiguity. It meant both "reason" and "word"; or rather it meant reasonable and ordered thought, uttered or not. The Stoics had taught that there is in the world an immanent reason which makes it an orderly and intelligible universe instead of a chaos. This they called the Logos. Philo accepted from them both the term and what it stood for, but with a difference. He believed, as the Stoics did not, in a God beyond the world; and he held that the universe is reasonable because it was designed by God. Thus the Logos or immanent reason of the world is also the uttered thought of God; it is, in fact, that "word of the Lord" through which, as the Jewish Scriptures told, the world was made. The doctrine of the Logos, therefore, became in the hands of Philo a way of thinking philosophically of a transcendent God as being yet in some sort immanent in the world.

But for religion it was something more. The "word of the Lord," the Scriptures said, came to the prophets. The very uttered thought of God is imparted to men who are capable of receiving it, and gives them both knowledge of God and the life which is life indeed.

We now come back to the problem : granted that God is transcendent, " completely other " than ourselves, as the act of worship implies, how are we to come into that communion with Him by which alone we can truly live ? The answer of Philo is that, while the transcendent God remains Himself beyond our reach, He gives us His Logos, as closely related to Him as thought to the mind that thinks.

It is with this conception of the Logos, the Word or uttered Thought of God, that the Fourth Gospel opens : " In the beginning the Logos existed ; and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was Divine. . . . All things were made through It. . . . In It was Life, and the Life was the Light of men." This creative Word " came to " men, and gave them knowledge of the unknowable God : " No man has ever seen God ; the Only Son, who is in the Father's bosom, has declared Him." <sup>1</sup> Such language would carry its meaning at once to religious and thinking people at the time the Gospel was published. A pagan mystic not many years later wrote in similar terms of the supreme Being—" Mind, the Father of all, who is Life and Light"—and His " Word " (*Logos*). He tells how he saw in a vision a Light, and " from the Light came forth a holy Word . . . and methought this Word was the voice of the Light." The God Poimandres interpreted the vision to him : " The Word which came forth from the Light is Son of God. . . . Learn my meaning from looking at what you yourself have in you ; for in you, too, the word is son,

<sup>1</sup> John i. 1, 4, 18.



and the mind is the father of the word. They are not separate one from the other ; for life is the union of word and mind." <sup>1</sup> Another writer of the same school wrote of the Logos : " The nature of His intellectual Word is generative. You may call Him what you will, provided that you understand this, that He is perfect and issues from One that is perfect, and that He works perfect goods and makes and vivifies all things." <sup>2</sup> And again : " The world has over it as ruler the creative Word of the Master of all. That Word is, next after Him, the supreme Power, a Power ungenerated, boundless, that has stooped forth from Him ; and the Word presides over and governs the things that have been made through Him." <sup>3</sup>

Now, since the Logos is Son of God, and is itself generative, one easily passes to the idea that men who receive the Word of God become sons of God ; and this conclusion the Fourth Gospel draws : " To all who received the Logos, He gave the right to become sons of God . . . and they were born, not by the will of flesh, nor by the will of a human father, but from God." <sup>4</sup> The receiving of the Logos, in fact, amounts to a second birth, by which a man passes from the sphere of flesh to that of Spirit : " Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God " (*i.e.* cannot have eternal life).<sup>5</sup> We may once again compare what is said in a dialogue by a third-century

<sup>1</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum*, Libellus I. (Poimandres), 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Hermetica* (ed. Scott), fragment 29.

<sup>3</sup> Fragment 28.

<sup>4</sup> John i. 12, 13.

<sup>5</sup> John iii. 3.

writer setting forth non-Christian mystical teaching.<sup>1</sup> The speakers are the mythical Hermes Trismegistus and his son Tat :

TAT: I know not, thrice greatest one, from what womb a man can be born again, nor from what seed.

HERM. : My son, the womb is wisdom, conceiving in silence ; and the seed is the true Good.

TAT: And who is it, Father, that begets? I am wholly at a loss.

HERM. : The will of God, my son, is the begetter. . . .

TAT: And what manner of man is he that is brought into being by the Rebirth?

HERM. : He that is born by that birth is another ; he is a god and son of God.

This pagan writer lived late enough to have read the Fourth Gospel. It is possible that he had read it. But, in any case, he found this idea of a second birth by no means alien from his general mystical outlook.

We have seen, however, that this lofty mysticism necessarily fell short of providing a Gospel for men living a full, active life in the real world. In what does the Christian writer go beyond the others, that his book should be called a Gospel? Let us hear a man who had come through the one faith into the other. Augustine tells in his *Confessions* how he had found the literature of which we have been speaking a stage on the way to Christianity : <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum*, Libellus XIII. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions*, vii. 9, 18, 21.

“(I found) some books of the Platonists translated from Greek into Latin; and there I read the statement, not indeed put in these identical words, but demonstrated by many various arguments, that, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . .’ But that ‘The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,’ I did not read there. . . . I was seeking a way to achieve strength sufficient to enjoy Thee. I did not find it, until I embraced the Mediator of God and man, the man Christ Jesus . . . who calls and says, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.’ . . . And it is one thing to behold the Land of Peace from a wooded height and fail to find the way to it . . . and another thing to tread the road that leads there, made by the care of the heavenly Emperor.”

This is the thing that John has to say: that the Logos, the uttered Thought of God which is the final meaning of all life, is to be found not in some rarefied abstraction, but in Jesus Christ,<sup>1</sup> a real Person who lived, loved, suffered, and died, and who is now alive in the unseen world and very near to all who seek to know God. “Show us the Father,” cries one of the characters in his story; and Christ replies, “He who has seen *Me* has seen the Father.”<sup>2</sup> The book is written in order that we may see Jesus, and so know what God is like.

And that which God is seen to be, when He is seen in and through Jesus, is put briefly in the words, “God is love.”<sup>3</sup> To be born anew into the life of

<sup>1</sup> John i. 14.

<sup>2</sup> John xiv. 8, 9.

<sup>3</sup> The actual phrase is not in the Gospel, but in the closely allied First Epistle of John iv. 8, 16; it is implied in the Gospel.

God is to be born into a life of love. Christ not only *shows* us this; He *gives* the new life. We have not to strain to the limits of human faculties to make ourselves like God; we have to put ourselves into the hands of Christ, the Giver of life and light—the Christ who in the drama of the Fourth Gospel gives strength to the impotent man, sight to the man blind from his birth, and life to dead Lazarus. John would have us see ourselves in these needy persons saved by Christ.

There is here something deeper than at first appears. If Christ gives life and light, it is that He gives Himself, the Light of the world, the Life of men. We live by sharing His life. In the world of our daily experience the mystery of life lies hid in familiar processes. A seed perishes in producing a new plant. The vine puts forth its clusters, and the grapes swell and ripen by drawing sap from the parent stem. Man takes the fruits of the earth for his use; the bread is broken that he may live, and our bodies are of one substance with grass and soil. The same mystery is present in the spiritual world. Life grows by life laid down. Christ came that men might "have life and have it to the full";<sup>1</sup> and that this might be so, He gave Himself not only for them, but to them. His life is the seed cast into the furrows of the world. He is the real Vine, the real Bread of the soul.<sup>2</sup>

There lies here something mystical, which cannot be fully understood in a logical way. Yet the divine life which Christ communicates is the Love of God; and every one knows something of the sharing of

<sup>1</sup> John x. 10.

<sup>2</sup> John vi. 48, xii. 24, xv. 1.

life which love and friendship make possible. The closing chapters of the Gospel give a picture of Christ and His people as a band of friends. "No one," says Christ on the eve of His Passion, "can love more than this—to lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I bid you. I do not call you slaves any longer"—current Christian usage was to speak of the "Master" and His "slaves"—"because a slave does not know what his master is about. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I heard from My Father. You did not choose Me: I chose you. . . . This is what I bid you do: love one another." <sup>1</sup>

Those words strike the note of a whole long passage describing the intercourse of Jesus and His disciples in the Upper Room on the last evening.<sup>2</sup> It begins with the touching episode in which Jesus rises from supper and washes the feet of His friends. There follows a conversation on the most profound themes, conducted in a tone of quiet, frank affection, passing into a prayer in which the simple intimacies of friendship are carried up into mystical heights of unity with God: "That they may all be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee—that they too may be in Us." <sup>3</sup>

The prayer betrays the true character of it all, for this is no transcript of a particular conversation; it is spiritual drama, and the Christian mind has always instinctively read it as such. It tells in terms of human affections of that mystical impartation of life by which

<sup>1</sup> John xv. 13-17.

<sup>2</sup> John xiii.-xvii.

<sup>3</sup> John xvii. 21.

we become like God, who is Love, and, knowing Him, live the life of eternity in the midst of time. For the first readers of the Gospel, as for us, the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and Jerusalem was a memory of the past, and the evangelist is concerned to tell them what he himself has discovered—that, having lived His life on earth, Jesus had passed by death not into oblivion and impotence, but into a mode of being more real and powerful, and immeasurably nearer to us.<sup>1</sup> The Good Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep, still lives to lead His flock by green pastures and living waters. He knows His sheep and they know Him, and in the liberty of that mutual knowledge they go in and out and find pasture.<sup>2</sup>

Here hope is almost swallowed up in experience. The Kingdom within has almost taken the place of the Kingdom for whose coming we pray. Yet not wholly so. The full Christian experience will not be realized until Christ has gathered His "other sheep," and "brought into one all the children of God who are scattered abroad."<sup>3</sup> Intensely individual as the thought of the Gospel is on one side, yet it rises to its height in the thought of a community more perfectly one than any earthly society—with the unity of branches in the vine. This is a vision of the ultimate reconciliation, and for this we may still pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

Meanwhile, the "twice-born" followers of Christ find the world in which they live a new place. Strangely

<sup>1</sup> John xvi. 6, 7, 19-24, xii. 32.

<sup>2</sup> John x. 1-15.

<sup>3</sup> John x. 16, xi. 52.

enough, though they belong to eternity and not to time, they have no sense of being in exile, as is the wont of the mystics. For this world is full of sacramental symbols of the realities by which they live. All things are but the vesture of the eternal—water, wind, and light, the vine in the garden, the sheep at pasture, the fields white unto harvest, bread and wine at the social board. Most of all, these last—for the evangelist lived in a community in which for two generations already the simple yet solemn feast of fellowship had been the centre of the richest religious experience. His deeper meditation upon life and death made the familiar symbols fuller than ever of inward meaning. Christ in dying had not only done something for us ; He had given Himself to us ; and in eating the bread and drinking the cup, His Church fed upon the flesh and blood of the Son of Man. Thus through the visible, fresh life from the invisible world flows into the soul that has believed in Christ. The gulf between seen and unseen, temporal and eternal, flesh and spirit, man and God, has been bridged, and all is reconciled. Christ has given His peace (not as the world gives), and before us lies the promise of a growing knowledge and growing unity with God—which is life eternal. This is the Christian Gospel in its maturity.

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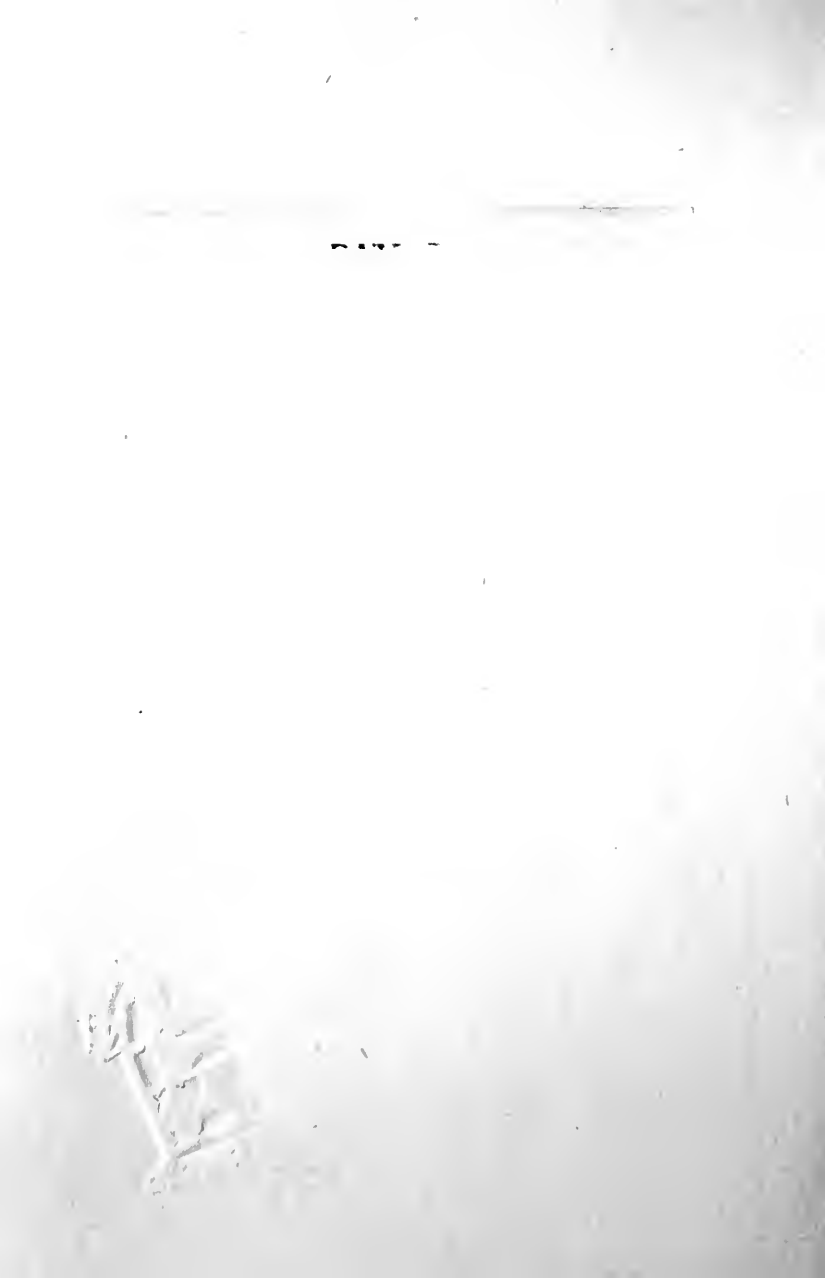
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