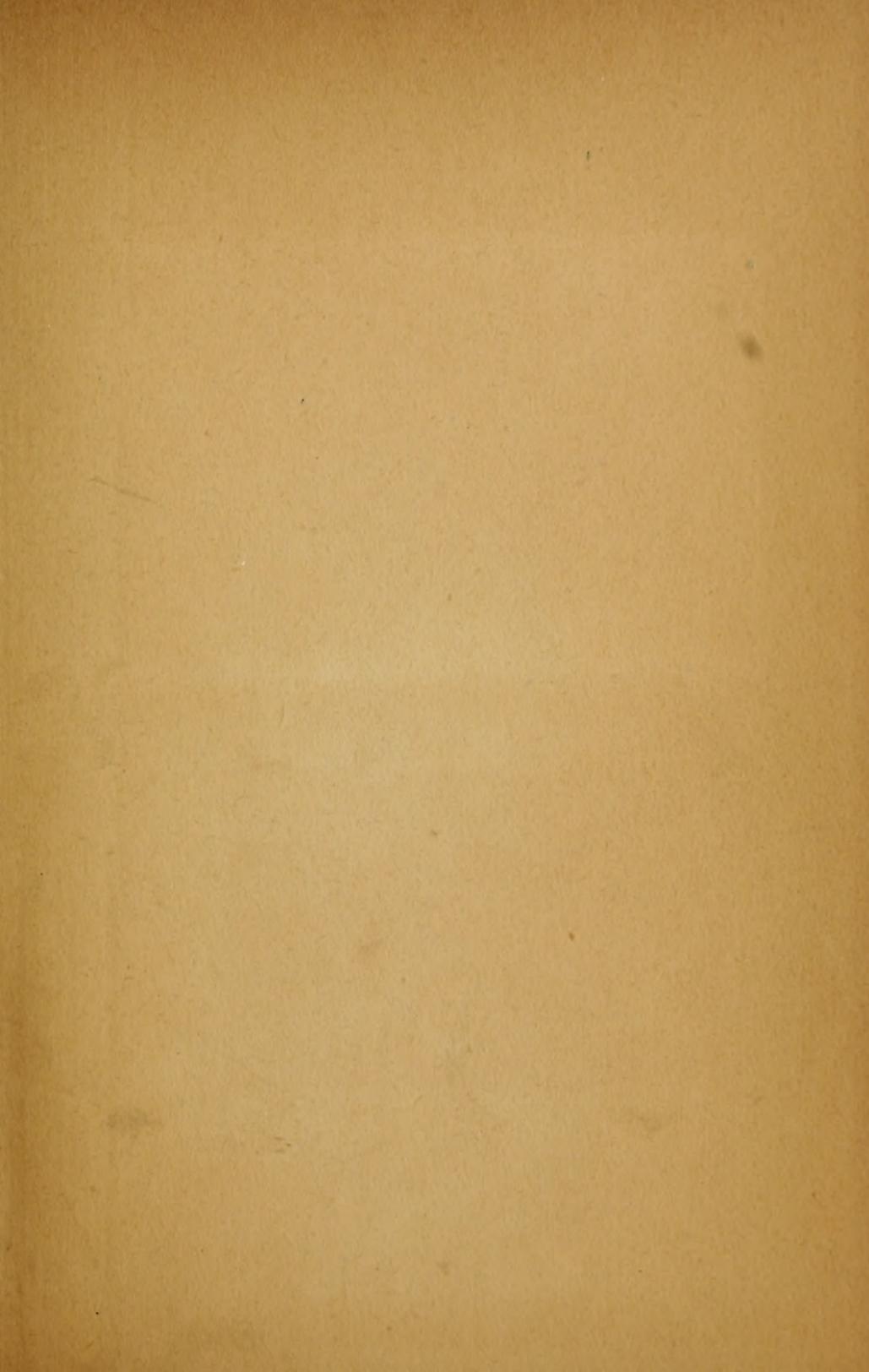


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GREAT IDEAS OF RELIGION

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GREAT IDEAS OF RELIGION

BY

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"CHRISTIAN IDEALS," "CHRISTUS CRUCIFIXUS,"
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PREFACE

THE six papers with which this volume opens were published under the title of "Great Ideas of Religion" in the *Treasury* magazine. Taken in connexion with the sermons that follow, they are an attempt to set forth the great truths and principles of the Christian Religion in the atmosphere of contemporary thought. This atmosphere is, of course, in a state of constant change and flux, and to this extent, no doubt, quite apart from the limitations of the author's own point of view, there is necessarily much in what is here said that is ephemeral and subject to revision. But this is no more than is true of all religious thinking in every age, and it is the presentation of truth in the changing lights and shadows of the moving years that is one of the chief functions of the preacher.

If it be asked what is especially characteristic of what Mr. Balfour might, perhaps, call the present psychological climate, we might sum

it up in the phrase Ideas in Action. On the one hand the mind of to-day fixes itself upon the same evolutionary process, the same stream of life and history, which fascinated the imagination of those who were first introduced to the Darwinian theory. On the other hand the impatience of ideas, which was a conspicuous feature of the philosophy of sensation, is passing away. It is coming to be recognised that a mere record of changes, however accurate the terms in which it is stated, is not a complete interpretation of experience, and that the inductive inquirer must take account of the *why* as well as of the *how* of History. Life may be manifested in an evolution which, it may even be, knows no gaps, without being the product of that evolution. In this way Consciousness, Purpose, Reason are reasserting themselves as facts of experience, and both Freedom and Necessity are accepted as factors in progress without either being regarded as the slave or vassal of the other. This is something very different from the absoluteness of what has hitherto been known as Idealism, which looked upon Time and Space as forms of thought and seemed at any rate to deprive the common experience of the ordinary man of all fundamental reality.

Personality and phenomena are alike real. But Personality makes itself in Action and Purpose perfects itself in History.

Such a habit of thought, as I have attempted to indicate, lends itself in a remarkable manner to the presentation of Christianity as God's Redemptive Action. Some of the phrases used in the following pages may be received with a certain amount of hesitation and misgiving. When, for example, it is said that "God has a history" or that "God has His difficulties," it will doubtless be urged that such expressions are inconsistent with the perfection of His attributes. To those who feel that they must still begin with some definitions of the Eternal, the Omniscient, and the Omnipotent, I would merely say that, even allowing full weight to such definitions as axiomatic, the view of the Changeless One, which they present, comes for all practical purposes rather at the end than at the beginning. Between God as He is thus proclaimed to be and God as He reveals Himself in action there still remains such an infinite and inscrutable distance that it is all one as if we were content to build up our knowledge of Him from such manifestations of His purpose and power as History affords. But, if we free

our minds of any preconceived notions of what God must necessarily be and do, and allow the Bible to make its own impression upon us, we seem to see ourselves confronted with a Divine Personality that builds itself up before us in Divine Action, a Work of Redemption that is itself God in History. A purpose of love pushes its way to accomplishment, encounters obstacles, makes fresh starts and new adventures, till at last it triumphs in the Death of Christ. We seem to be brought into contact with a Personality, like our own, both in respect of its permanence and self-identity on the one hand, and of its need of time for self-fulfilment on the other. God, like those whom He makes in His own image, exists in movement. Whatever may to some minds appear the metaphysical and moral necessities of a divinely perfect Being, we are in experience brought into contact with a God, Whose Love surmounts difficulty and Whose own heel is bruised as He crushes the serpent's head. If there be an Ultimate, for which effort is non-existent, it is too remote from our world to have any practical bearing upon human problems.

Several of the sermons which this volume

includes were preached either shortly after the Transport Strike of last year or during the Coal War and the strike in the Port of London of yet more recent memory. Those who for the past twenty years or more have been striving to press upon the Church the importance of escaping from the prejudices of an honest but unreflective conservatism, which prevented sincerely religious men from appreciating the causes of social change and industrial disturbance, cannot view without misgiving the emergence of a spirit, which seeks to attach the stigma of sickly sentimentalism and muddleheaded enthusiasm to those spiritual teachers who are inclined to look without disfavour upon the ideals and aspirations of the hand-workers. Last year, for example, the Dean of St. Paul's issued his brilliant and much-discussed "Topsy-turvy Papers,"* contrasting the Spirit of the Age with the Spirit of the Ages, and preaching an optimism so wide as to leave abundance of room for virtual pessimism and unsympathetic resistance to all changes that come within the scope of practical politics. And under the title of "Some Weak Points in Christian Socialism"

* *The Church and the Age*, by W. R. Inge, D.D.

one of the most venerated of Oxford teachers, Dr. William Sanday, has issued a defence of the middle classes, the tendency of which must surely be to put a weapon in the hands of those whose object is not to free the Church from politics, but to retain its services as a real, if unprofessed, ally of one political party.

The Dean is nothing if not paradoxical, and, when he ventures to speak of democracy as the divine right of kings standing on its head, doubtless no one is more fully aware of the limitations of his epigram than he is himself. His strictures are probably not all intended to be taken *au pied de la lettre*, and may thus be regarded as a wholesome corrective by high-flying progressives. When, however, we turn to Dr. Sanday's brochure on Christian Socialism, we are confronted by a type of criticism which is scrupulously anxious to avoid all pungent exaggeration and to say neither more nor less than the writer exactly means. His unintentional misrepresentations of the Christian Socialist are, therefore, all the more disconcerting.

Dr. Sanday believes that he can detect a tendency to *secularise* Christian teaching in those circles which emphasise what has been

called the social message of the Gospel. It is always true that when some forgotten aspect or consequence of Christianity reasserts itself among religious people there will always be found those to whom it becomes an absorbing interest, and that in consequence the proportion of faith is distorted. But can it seriously be asserted that those to whom we owe the social movement in the Church of the last quarter of a century are open to this charge? I do not think it can. On the contrary, those who were instrumental in establishing the Christian Social Union in the ancient universities of England were the very men to whom those who have now reached middle life would acknowledge that they owed a new and vivid apprehension of the fundamental articles of the Christian Faith. Not to speak of those who are still with us, the names of Westcott at Cambridge and Aubrey Moore at Oxford are sufficient guarantee of the truth of this statement. And the movement has spread far beyond the bounds of its first beginnings in those very circles where "Christ and Him Crucified" was, and is, the supreme interest of life. Evangelicals have extended their devotion to missionary endeavour to embrace

also an enthusiasm for social enterprise. The Presbyterians of Scotland, and more especially of late the United Free Church, have developed the same spirit. No subjects are more keenly discussed in the Student Christian Movement than those which involve the organisation of society. In fact, it would almost be true to say that it is just where interest in the fundamental questions of religion is most active that the tone and temper most favourable to the rise of Christian Socialism is to be found.

Once again, Dr. Sanday seems to be obsessed with the idea that those who are the object of his criticism are inclined to level ill-considered charges against the tyranny of capitalists, the selfishness of the rich, and the luxury of the wealthy. My recollection of the principles upon which the Christian Social Union was founded is very different. I remember a very pedestrian proposition, quoted from a German economist, which was taken as a basis of that study of social problems out of which this modern "Christian Socialism" has grown. "There is a social question"—so it was urged—"something wants doing." The evidence on which this statement was based had nothing whatever to do with the question

which Dr. Sanday discusses with the patient attention to detail for which he is distinguished, whether the capital of the country is really in the hands of millionaires or is not rather distributed among a large and moderately comfortable middle class. The facts of crowded dwellings, labour inadequately remunerated, uncertain employment, exhausting and uninspiring toil, inequality of opportunity—in short, all the conditions which constitute the social question, and the evidence of which is the sordid quarters of our cities—these facts remain, and they are the *raison d'être* of the Christian Socialist. What Dr. Sanday says of the estimable middle class only tends to justify the contention of those whom he attacks, when they repeatedly affirm that it is the impotence of a system and not the immorality of individuals with which they are concerned.

Dr. Sanday enforces the old Christian virtue of Contentment. I entirely agree. And I am sure that he is not one of those who would inculcate it in the spirit of “God bless the squire.” But surely there is a noble unselfishness in the “divine discontent” of the Christian Socialist. It is not for himself but for others that he is dissatisfied with things as they are,

And may not the parson be as faithful in teaching this necessary part of Christian ethics if he is less concerned to address the poor than the members of that middle class, to which he himself belongs, bidding them to be satisfied with food and raiment, and not to be turned aside from seeking the wealth of the whole community by the sacrifice of comfort and convenience which social reform on a wide scale may entail upon themselves?

If Dr. Sanday belonged to the epigrammatic school of critics, he would doubtless, as he surveyed the condition of the lower classes of the population, tell us that it is the pig that makes the sty. It is clear that in common with most of the critics of Christian Socialism he looks rather to the regeneration of the man for the improvement of his environment than to the improvement of his environment for the regeneration of the man. What would be resented by the Christian Socialist in this attitude is not the assertion that the ultimate source of human misery is the corruption of man's heart but the suggestion that those who are working for drastic social reform are substituting a material for a spiritual gospel. It is just about as true to charge the Christian Socialist with this folly

as it would be to accuse the Temperance Legislation League of endeavouring to make men sober by Act of Parliament or the advocates of a readjustment of tariffs, who also call themselves reformers, of regarding Protection as a panacea for all the ills that flesh is heir to. I venture to assert that among those clergy, whom Dr. Sanday would probably regard as most open to his criticisms, would be found some of the most devoted parish priests and evangelical workers in England. Their daily and hourly experience assures them that, while it is true that the pig does make the sty, the pig's pail is also responsible for a good deal of the mess.

There is something truly astonishing in the use that Dr. Sanday seems to make of the New Testament. The good lady who cites Christ's saying about the poor, whom His disciples have always with them, in stay of the efforts which wicked Radicals are making, clumsily enough it may be, to deal with the causes of poverty, may be heard with courteous indulgence. But what are we to say when the text "To him that hath shall be given" is apparently cited as a criticism of the Socialist's endeavour to reach equality of opportunity? These words are nothing more

than an assertion of the survival of the fittest, which, though it has been employed as an argument for the policy of *laissez faire*, it is nevertheless the constant effort of civilisation to mitigate. But even more amazing is the turn given to the words read by Christ in the synagogue of Nazareth from the roll of Isaiah—"He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted." "I have a feeling," says Dr. Sanday, "that 'to comfort the fallen and bind up the wounded' has at least a more evangelical sound than 'asserting rightful claims.'" This may, indeed, be granted so far as the mere phraseology is concerned. But what we have to get at is the thought which lies behind it. And I seem to remember that no less a personage than the Archbishop of Canterbury has sought to impress upon the Church the duty of grappling with social problems instead of merely providing ambulances. It is one thing to bind up the wounds of individuals, it is another and a better thing to heal the wounds of society. It is all the difference between prevention and cure. Surely it is criminal folly to be content with patching up the victims of alcoholic excess, while no attempt is made to diminish the temptations to this indulgence; to provide rescue

homes for fallen women, while no attempt is made to deal adequately with those who create the unfortunate class. And this is precisely what the Christian Socialist means when he warns the religious community to deal with the social question by investigating and seeking to remove the causes of failure rather than to provide palliatives for preventable wrongs. The Salvation and Church Armies, Dr. Barnardo's Homes, and the Waifs and Strays Society, these and kindred examples of philanthropic effort are merely engaged in picking up the wounded, and, however admirable their work may be, there is grave danger lest Christian people should excuse themselves from the more difficult task of understanding and removing evils at their root by supporting one or all of these and similar institutions.

When Dr. Sanday tells us that in the modern Christian Socialist he fails to see a close resemblance to the Servant of the Lord who neither strives nor cries, and who does not lift up his voice in the streets, has he forgotten the fierce and unmeasured terms in which He who fulfilled that prophetic portrait poured His denunciations upon the Scribes and Pharisees? When he claims for Jesus Christ an attitude of non-

intervention in regard to the social and political difficulties of His day, has he fully realised what a policy of non-intervention means in our own? We all know the clergyman who, when some hot-headed Radical curate has ventured on the expression of opinions not altogether satisfactory to a respectable congregation, emphatically declares that politics should be banished from the pulpit, and rushes off to attend a non-political meeting at which Lord Hugh Cecil, Mr. Bonar Law, and Sir Alfred Cripps make speeches in protest against Welsh Disestablishment, and indicate in no equivocal terms the methods by which the audience are to put the Church before party. There is surely something wrong when men who keenly feel the existence of what they regard as grave social wrongs, and many of whom, in a spirit not unlike that of the opening words of the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, devote time and opportunity and life itself to what they regard as the proclamation of liberty to the captive and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, can look upon the Church as positively identified in sentiment and practical action with those forces in the community which thwart their efforts and resist their schemes, and which

will not even do them the justice of understanding their aspirations and respecting the integrity of their aims. The real point is that non-intervention is precisely the attitude which cannot consistently be claimed for the Church, and that the name of Churchman is almost a guarantee for a practical distrust of democracy and opposition to popular sympathies. Whatever Dr. Sanday may say about Christ's refusal to intervene, it remains true that the common people heard Him gladly, that they felt a subtle sympathy between their point of view and His, while the Scribes were irreconcilably opposed. Would the same be true of the Church of England to-day?

There are many circumstances in the present situation which make for reaction, and it is indeed a sad thing if the larger minds among the clergy are to become influences in the same direction. The hand-workers are realising their political power. Methods, which it is scarcely possible for Christians to approve, have too often disfigured recent agitations. The mixture of motives, which is unfortunately present in all human affairs, too easily lends colour to the charges of "envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness" as the inspiring causes of

social unrest. Not only is this the case, but we have entered the zone of practical attempts to deal with the situation. This means the adoption of measures, each of which is exposed to a fire of criticism and all the consequences of which it is not possible to foresee. Men talk of remedies that are worse than the disease, of tyrannical interferences with liberty, of the creation of new difficulties, of the dangers of bureaucracy, and so forth. People are frightened into forgetting that the antithesis to progress is not rest but reaction. They need to be reminded that all movement in an imperfect world involves some steps that are tentative or even mistaken. Progress is curiously complex.* We all know, for example, the jibes that are levelled at education, because there has been much that is erroneous or even ridiculous in the blundering efforts of local authorities and government departments. And the social reformer is apt to be thrown off

* There is an interesting passage in the "Life of Sir Frank Lockwood" in which the English lawyer describes a visit which he once paid to the inventor Edison: "He (Edison) said that he did not try to do possible but impossible things. In one of his investigations he was always confronted by an imperfection, and at last overcame it by creating another."

his balance in similar fashion, and to lapse into censorious opposition. The instinct which in days past has always thrown him on the side of the minority assists the process. The same William Watson, whose verse has ever championed oppressed nationalities, now pleads the cause of the prosperous minority in Ulster!

The only optimism which is really Christian is that which sees God coming in the life of to-day. This optimism alone is available for action. To believe merely in a "far-off divine event" may be indistinguishable from pessimism. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" was the divine injunction in the Wilderness. We must keep our faces to the future. We must be among those who "ever went straight forward." My object in these sermons, so far as they touch the social problems of the day, is neither to recommend programmes nor to defend parties, but to preserve, if it may be, that clear-eyed perception of the fetters that still bind the common life and that generous, unselfish enthusiasm for the human race, which are the genuine product of the Gospel.

One of the most important subjects which this

volume touches is that of Marriage in its relation to Christianity. It requires no very keen faculty of observation to perceive that, for members of the Church of England at any rate, the pressure of a not too accurately informed public opinion on the action of the State is likely at no distant date to create a situation, the seriousness of which it is scarcely possible to exaggerate. The report of the Royal Commission on Divorce will probably be published before these pages are in print, and its recommendations, whatever they may be, are almost certain to form the basis of future legislation. We are sadly familiar with the troubles that have already arisen under the Divorce Act, and of the yet more recent difficulties created by the legalisation of marriage with a deceased wife's sister. These are premonitory of the collisions that are almost certain to arise if, as is not improbable, facilities for divorce are increased, and the grounds on which it may be obtained widened.

The issues of the problem are unfortunately confused, because two questions, which are essentially distinct, are in fact closely entangled with one another. These are (1) the claim of the Church to independence, (2) the rigidity

of the Church's own law. It is of the utmost importance that these questions should be kept entirely separate, if there is to be any useful discussion of this momentous subject. Many churchmen who are quite prepared to allow that it is at least open to discussion whether the ecclesiastical law, as it at present stands, is alone consistent with Christian principles, will refuse at all costs to admit that the Christian conscience must bow to the will of the civil legislature. At all costs the freedom of the Church must be asserted, whatever the consequences may be. This is why the recent decision in the case of *Banister v. Thompson* has changed the situation for the worse. Speaking for myself, though I should have been prepared, in the absence of this decision, to refer to my Bishop the question of admitting to communion persons who had contracted a marriage under the Deceased Wife's Sister Act, and though my own sentiment would incline me to believe that in many, if not in most instances, such persons should be so admitted, I have no doubt that, as things are, I should unhesitatingly refuse.

For what is it that has occurred? The Court of Arches has decided—the fact that the decision has been upheld by the civil courts is immaterial

—that a man who marries his deceased wife's sister cannot be repelled from communion on the ground that he is "a notorious evil liver." The phrase is one that no one need concern himself to justify. It belongs to an age when men did not trouble to consider the nice edges of moral conduct. What is wanted is, of course, a formula which shall no longer identify ecclesiastical incompetence with notorious immorality. But the point is that before the passage of the Act in question the decision would have been the other way. It is therefore impossible to avoid the conclusion that a civil Act, which it was generally supposed had been so framed as to protect the conscience of the clergy, has altered the terms upon which persons may be received to communion in the Church of England. I have tried to understand the special pleading by which the attempt has been made to show that the decision is not inconsistent with the inalienable right of a spiritual society to determine its own terms of communion, but the conclusion seems to be inevitable. If the State were to infringe upon any other of the prohibited degrees, it would be held to transfer yet other sets of persons from the one category to the other. And this is precisely what no self-

respecting religious society can allow the civil authority to force upon it. If a Church ought not to tolerate any union of a matrimonial character which the State refuses to recognise, freedom demands that it should not be debarred from refusing for its own purposes to recognise every union which the State may tolerate. Upon this claim of right we must insist, before we consent to discuss the question whether the existing law of the Church of England, or for that matter of any Christian community, is to be taken as a complete embodiment of Christian principles and therefore as an absolute rule.

The time has, surely, arrived when this, the second part of the problem, should be fully and frankly faced, and that without prejudice. Whether the appeal be made to Scripture or to the practice of the universal Church, it is obvious that summary methods are no longer possible. Not to speak of the differences of standard among the general body of sincere and honest Christians, the differences of opinion which have disclosed themselves among theologians, equally desirous of being wholly loyal to the Christian tradition, render a re-examination of the whole subject one of the first moral necessities of the day. Biblical and historical

science have made such strides in modern times that results based upon antiquated methods of interpretation no longer carry conviction. Nor must it be forgotten that the device of the Dispensing Power has in the past greatly modified the rigidity of Canon Law. May it not be that, so far as the Church of England is concerned, the time has arrived for an exhaustive inquiry, carefully and patiently undertaken by an authoritative Commission.

What above all things we should be anxious to avoid is a growing divergence between a national policy, guided by sloppy sentiment and ignorantly violating Christian principle, and a petrified ecclesiastical code, supported by a no less blind and unintelligent assumption that the law as it stands is the commandment of Christ. It is impossible to exaggerate the influence which might be exerted upon public opinion by a carefully chosen Ecclesiastical Commission on the Marriage Law, composed of clergy and laity, all anxious to adhere resolutely to Christian and Catholic principles, yet sincerely desirous not to lay upon men's shoulders unnecessary burdens. And if, as is not unlikely, resistance to tendencies embodying themselves in legislation were still necessary, the conclusions of such a

Commission, based as they would be on an impartial survey of the evidence and resting upon reasoning intelligible to the modern mind, would solidify the convictions of Churchmen and command the respect even of those who differed from them.

The object of the sermon *Christ and Marriage* is to suggest the principles upon which, in the view of the author, Christian thinking on this vital subject should be founded.

Most of the sermons contained in this volume were delivered in St. Paul's. But that entitled *Christ and Society* was preached in Westminster Abbey, while *The Great Adventurer* is the name of the sermon given in my old church of St. Paul, Dundee, on the occasion of the meeting of the British Association this year.

BRAEMAR, 1912.

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EXPERIENCE

I

EXPERIENCE

THE word Experience plays a prominent part in religious discussions at the present day. We meet it constantly, not only in books and reviews, which are read mainly by theological experts, but in manuals and magazines which circulate among the general body of intelligent people. It is, therefore, of great importance that we should endeavour to understand its meaning.

In doing so we had better not begin by way of definition. People are always asking us to define our terms, but, where mathematics or exact science is not concerned, the result is too often the exclusion of what is really essential to the idea, and, consequently, an argument that is unsound from the start. This is especially true in the region of theology, which is so closely connected with practical life that theoretical definitions are apt to mislead even more than they help. Take, for example, such

well-known terms as *creation, sin, grace, miracle*. Not one of these but is apt to lose itself in definition. And at least one recent book, dealing with the last of the four, might have been very different if the writer had not fallen into the trap of defining a miracle at an early stage in his exposition. In all these cases it is better to let the idea grow by description. We may almost take it as a safe rule in all arguments dealing with religion, "Never define." Your faith will be none the less definite, none the less accurate, none the less uncompromising, for compliance with this rule. The subject with which you are concerned is alike too large and too personal for the use of this method.

Good Catholics are apt to be alarmed at the mention of Experience, because it seems to them to be advanced in opposition to Authority, and sober Englishmen to distrust the idea because it seems to them a pietistic substitute for common sense.

I

First let us think of Authority. Now it ought to be obvious that we can never dispense with Authority. Even our physical perceptions we take upon trust. We acknowledge the authority of our five senses. And a great deal more than we know of what we think we see for ourselves is accepted on the authority of those who have

taught us to distinguish it. How much, for example, of our ideas of the Beautiful is really our own? How much do we not owe to the repeated assurances of those whom we trust when they instruct us what to admire? Our dependence is still more manifest in all matters of scientific investigation. Life is far too short and far too full to make it either desirable or even possible that every man should, for himself, go through all the processes by which results have been reached. Advance in any branch of knowledge is gained only on a basis of mutual trust.

And religion is no exception to the general rule. Our knowledge of God is, in the first instance, supplied by Authority. So wrapt in obscurity are the beginnings of religion that the old theory of a primitive revelation, though entirely without proof, is preferable to the opinion, which there are no facts to support, that God was first of all discovered. But it is better to keep within the limits of observation, and to realise that the knowledge, however originally gained, has been passed on from one generation to another. The Bible itself begins with the assumption that God is known, and there is no man who can truthfully deny that Job's case is also his own: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear." And, more particularly, the authority of the Christian Society, in

greater or less degree, is primary for all the disciples of Jesus.

Yet the fullest acknowledgment of the claims of Authority cannot absolve us from the duty, nay the necessity, of realising for ourselves, of criticising, and under some circumstances of correcting the teaching of Authority. To begin with, there can be no security, no lasting assurance, unless we can make plain to ourselves the ground upon which our authority is accepted. But genuine authority is never arbitrary. It is always rational. It claims to be always translating itself into an experience which is direct and personal. "I have heard of Thee," cried Job, "but now mine eye seeth Thee." "Now we believe," said the people of Sychar to the woman of Samaria, "not because of thy speaking; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour."

II

So much for Authority. The other objection comes from those who distrust Pietism. To many minds Experience suggests the testimony of a Methodist Class Meeting. Whatever suspicion may attach to Methodism in the eyes of those who are external to the system thus falls upon experimental religion. All the prejudices excited by Welsh or other revivals are aroused against the term. It is supposed to involve

an abnormal heightening of personality, the development of emotions and feelings which, if not actually neurotic, are yet peculiar to the devout evangelical temperament. Some sigh because they find it impossible to summon up these affections, this glow of spiritual fervour. The majority would rather demand that religion, if it is to make good its claim to universality, should rest upon a basis more broadly human, more amenable to the common sense of mankind. These are days in which a good deal is made of mysticism as almost a synonym for spiritual religion, and as most men no more expect to become mystics than they hope to develop into artists or musicians, they are apt to be repelled by language which seems to connect the proof of Christianity with some strange form of perception rather than with reason.

Now the truth is that the word Experience, when applied to the subject-matter of religion, is used in precisely the same way as when it is applied to any other department of human affairs. There is nothing to suggest that spiritual gifts are entirely different in kind from the ordinary powers of mind. Experience is use.

There is a striking sentence in Herrmann's "Communion with God" which admirably illustrates the place of Experience in religion: "The proof of the historical reality of Jesus

for a believer rests always on the significance which the story of Jesus has gained for his own life." This is ultimately the ground upon which we accept the reality of any fact. Of course there is a large number of facts which, so far as we can see, have little or no bearing upon ourselves, and these we are content to acknowledge on testimony which would be wholly inadequate if they had a vital relation to our practical activity. But what finally determines our judgment in all matters of genuine importance is the general consistency of what we are asked to admit into the circle of our beliefs with our whole scheme of life and thought, with our whole view of reality. This does not mean that, because we find a thing useful, it does not concern us whether it is true. What use have we for this fact? Does it make life more intelligible? Does it make existence work out for us? Along the line of such questions as these, we arrive at the practical conclusion that we are dealing, not with a phantom or an idea, not with an illusion or a dream, but with something that has a real place in the sum of external realities.

We have to grow into our faith in God through discovering that He is a necessity of our practical life. The method of the Church Catechism is not to present the dogma of the Trinity in all the nice adjustments of theo-

logical statement, but to endeavour to waken experience in the expanding personality of the child. It takes that least theological of all statements of Christian belief, the Apostles' Creed, and sums up in one compact and pregnant answer the whole of its meaning as an expression of the Christian revelation of God. "First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me and all the world. Secondly, in God the Son, who hath redeemed me and all mankind. Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me and all the elect people of God." What stands out clear is the threefold repetition of the first personal pronoun and the threefold repetition of the Name of God. "I need God"—that is the great thought, teeming with possibilities of a growing appropriation of the experience that has made life intelligent and purposeful for generations of believers, which the wise teacher will press home to the imagination, the reason, and the will. The daily existence of the baptized sets him in a threefold environment—the world of nature, the society of men, the community of believers. None of these will admit him to the secret which it holds unless each becomes the centre of a living experience of the presence and power of the Divine Personality. In the physical universe he must learn to recognise the Divine Fatherhood. Human relationships

must be covered by Divine Redemption through the Cross. The Christian community is indwelt by the Divine Spirit. The instruction of the Christian is not the conveyance to his intellect of a series of propositions concerning the being of God, but the education of his spirit in the art of detecting the presence of God in practical contact with the facts of life. It is the transmission of a key, and no man can be called a Christian indeed so long as he keeps it in his pocket. He must for himself fit it into the lock, and find that it opens the door. That is the significance of a key.

III

But there are three mistakes against which we must be constantly on guard, if we take Experience for our guide. First of all we must not suppose that Experience can exhaust the meaning of God. It is God who thus grasps us, not we who grasp God. What we do not apprehend is always infinitely larger than what we do. But, if religion be real, there must always be "the first-fruits of the Spirit" in the intelligence no less than in the moral life. Some precise theologians might be inclined to criticise the language of the Church Catechism on the ground that in the Godhead there is infinitely more than the creative Fatherhood, the Redemptive Work, and the Spiritual Power through

which the children of men are able to approach Him. Unquestionably this is so. "The Catholic Faith is this, that we worship One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity." God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Still, the Athanasian Creed, in its first division at any rate, is not a document for children. It is only through the living recognition of the Father *Who creates me*, of the Son *Who redeems me*, of the Spirit *Who makes me holy*, that I can hope to attain to the Song of the Angels.

Secondly, we are always in danger of imagining that what Experience has taught us to-day is all that Experience holds for us to-morrow. Time is essential to Experience. We cannot be the recipients of Experience except in Time. No man has ceased to be young until he has ceased to grow. The teacher who no longer brings forth out of his treasure things new as well as old, had much better retire. He is practically dead. All that we can rightly deny is a teaching that has proved itself to be smaller than what we believe, a closed system that is narrower than our present experience. If we have had reason to trust the doctrine of the Christian Church, so far as we have yet gone, there is no dishonesty in assenting to those portions of it which as yet find no living response in our own experience. There is plenty of unconscious heresy at various stages

in the spiritual development of most good men I remember an excellent student at Leeds Clergy School coming to me at the close of a lecture on the Eternal Sonship of Christ, and confessing that hitherto he had virtually supposed that Christ became the Son of God when He was born of the Virgin Mary. This case is probably not so exceptional as it appears.

And, thirdly, the experience of the society is always larger than the experience of the individual. If time is necessary for each believing Christian to complete his realisation of Christ, how much more is it necessary for the whole society to bring forth all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hid in Him! For the full experience of Christ is vaster than any one believer can hope to compass. Even the witness of the Christian centuries that lie behind our own day is at the best partial and imperfect. What may not the future have to contribute? Still, as compared with the private judgment of any one believer, the experience into which we have entered is the testimony of the whole Catholic Church. If it be true that in the last resort the experience of the believer must for himself be the standard of faith, and in this sense every man is the Pope of his own soul, there is always an appeal from the Pope ill-informed to the Pope better informed. Nor can the community ever consent to be nothing more

than an aggregate of private convictions. "If," as it has been said, "it is the privilege of the individual to be free, it is the duty of the society to be something." There is a common experience of the Church, as there is a private experience of the believer.

What, then, are creeds? They are the accumulated experience of the Christian Society, or, to speak more accurately, the form in which that experience is registered. For, when we are attempting to think exactly, we must carefully distinguish between words and things, between the language which has been used to prevent the disappearance of a living truth and the reality which it protects.

IV

Those who had the good fortune to attend the lectures which the late Dr. William Bright used to deliver in Oxford on the Arian controversy will recall with what inimitable force he used to draw out the real point at issue in that momentous struggle. There was no peculiar virtue in the Greek word which is represented by the English phrase "of one substance." It was not to be found in Scripture, nor had it any place in the formulas of belief which in the fourth century were traditional. But Athanasius saw, as most of his contemporaries did not, that, as men thought in that age, no other word

would prevent the disappearance of that attitude towards Jesus Christ which had been continuous from the time of the Apostles, and which led Christian men to accept Him as Saviour and worship Him as God. What really mattered was not the term which they agreed to use, but the experience which was their actual bond of union.

What was true then is true now. In these days, when thought has a much keener edge than in the period of the œcumenical councils and when even orthodox bishops lecture on the "reconstruction of belief," it is of the highest importance to get behind words to the facts for which they stand. We think, and we cannot help thinking, in a very different way from those who devised the terms of traditional theology—*substance, person, nature, incarnation*. Even the last of these terms, which means the assumption of flesh by the Son of God, is not fully descriptive of the vital reality. To use the phraseology of the Fourth Gospel, and to declare that "the Word became flesh," is a sufficient protection from the heresy of primitive times which treated Christ as a phantom or unreal appearance. But to the modern mind "flesh" conveys no idea of the human Personality of the Son of God.

Such of these terms as have been embodied in the Creeds must, of course, stay there. The

divisions of Christendom, to go no further, make revision impossible, save where it is merely a matter of re-translation from original languages. But it is important to realise that much of the language current in theology has been imposed upon us by history, and that a terminology more consistent with modern psychology would certainly be used if the work had to be done now. But it is more important still to understand what is meant by the appeal to Experience, and so to perceive that the real issues of faith are not primarily concerned with language, and may even be obscured by a too slavish dependence upon it. The Christian Church ought to be the master, and not the servant, of the forms in which its essential experience has been expressed.

CREATION

II

CREATION

IF we contemplate the efforts that have been made to harmonise the first chapter of Genesis with the results of modern science, we are struck, not so much with their futility, as with their irrelevance. For the problems which they raise do not touch the fringe of those questions with which alone religion is concerned. The considerations which have inspired these ingenious attempts have had no direct connexion with the interpretation of God and His dealings with mankind. But the Bible contains the record of salvation, and to impugn the accuracy of what seemed to be its statements in one particular was, as it appeared to many minds, to invalidate its authority altogether. If creation is a myth, can redemption be accepted as a fact? If God did not make the world in six days or periods or stages, how could we be certain that on the third day Jesus rose again? So men reasoned who would have had no diffi-

culty in distinguishing between the statements that Augustus became Emperor of Rome and that Romulus was suckled by a wolf. And great is the ingenuity which in consequence has been wasted upon the solution of a problem that has no bearing upon the spiritual life and that does not constitute a religious difficulty at all.

The origin of the universe is a matter of perennial interest to the human mind; but its investigation belongs, in the first instance, to physical science, and in the second to philosophy. So far as it is a matter of history it belongs to the former; so far as it carries us beyond history we must seek what aid we can from the latter. And, when all is said and done, these instruments of investigation will not carry us very far beyond the unaided observations of ordinary experience. What they give us is clearer ideas rather than fresh information. They show us how things are related to one another, and not what they are in themselves. But religion brings us into fellowship with God, and what concerns us as His children is simply the relationship of the rest of our environment to Him "in Whom we live, and move, and have our being."

We make a great mistake if we separate the first chapter of Genesis from all those other passages in which the Hebrew prophets and psalmists contemplate the heavens and the earth as the work of God's hands. Look, for example,

at the eighth Psalm. "When I consider Thy heavens," exclaims the poet, "the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" So also the prophet, in Isaiah xl., lifts up his eyes to the starry sky, in order that he may ask the question: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord and my judgment is passed away from my God?" The questions of both these writers are strictly religious. In the connexion between God and the universe they discover grounds of faith and hope. With Job it is fidelity to conscience, as the law of his being, which is the practical issue of contemplating Him Who "made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning," and Who to man has said, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." And for all these writers creation means something far more immediate than the construction of the world at some moment in the distant past by an almighty Architect. Those old Hebrews did not think in the highly unspiritual manner of the English Deists, who flourished in the eighteenth century, and whose mental habit we still find it difficult to escape. The God Whose presence they recognised in conscience, and Whose will they had learned to know in the moral law, was no less closely associated in their thoughts with that mighty

frame of things which encompassed them. Those who are most competent to form a judgment concerning the development of the Old Testament tell us that the knowledge of God as the strength and stay of the universe advanced along with the expansion of conscience, and that the language which has been just cited is the flower rather than the seed of the religion of the Hebrews. The doctrine of creation was not a tradition handed down from a remote antiquity concerning events of an immemorial past, but the growing realisation of a living, working, active God. The "one increasing purpose," which was daily bearing witness to itself within man, was the same which was daily working itself out in the changes of external events. All things are the opportunity of that victorious Will which "faints not, neither is weary." This, and this only, is the religious aspect of the universe.

That is what we mean when we declare that God made all things of nought. The Will of God is at the back of all things, and nothing is at the back of God's Will. And that is only another way of saying that all things shall be put under His feet, which is what matters for practical action. To try to make it mean a fact of history is to state a contradiction in terms. Something must exist before history becomes possible. Try to imagine any event, and there must always be an antecedent state of which it

is a modification. Thus the creation of light can only be conceived as a change from a pre-existent darkness. Formless chaos is the necessary condition of the growth of an ordered universe. The first chapter of Genesis can only be written on the assumption that something is already there, before what is conventionally called the story of creation begins. The production of something out of nothing is in the ordinary sense of the word impossible. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*—out of nothing nothing comes—is a very simple piece of philosophy. They may be quite wrong who say that there is nothing new under the sun, and that all the changes which occur through the motion of the universe or the operation of personal will are nothing but a shuffling of the cards, a transmutation of forces the sum of which is constant. The most recent thinkers, who hold that every exertion of conscious will is in the full sense of the word creative—that is, calls into being what previously had no existence—may be, and probably are, nearer the truth. But even so, bricks cannot be made without straw, and there must be something from which the new fact takes its beginning. To use a figure which this newer thought constantly employs, we cannot jump without springing off from somewhere. It is not therefore a refusal to believe, it is the sheer, inexorable necessities of thought which constrain us to

assert that the story of creation is not, and cannot be, a matter of historical fact. The doctrine which it conveys, and which receives fuller and complementary expression in all that the prophets have written about Him "Who made heaven and earth," goes deeper than any fact, and is more universal than any event. It is the postulate upon which the spiritual use of the material world rests, the religious axiom which governs all right action. "Of Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things," and "All things work together for good to them that love God."

And if the Old Testament doctrine of creation cannot be understood by taking one passage in isolation, more especially if it be interpreted upon an arbitrary theory of Biblical truth, much less can Christians afford to neglect all that the fuller experience of the New Testament has added to the enrichment of this great religious idea. Whatever may have been the conceptions of prophets and psalmists, for us the doctrine of creation springs directly out of our faith in Jesus Christ. It is implicit in the Gospel. It is explicitly stated in the Creed. We believe in God the Father Who made "all things visible and invisible" and in His Son, Jesus Christ, "through Whom all things were made."

The revelation of Jesus Christ cannot stand

alone in history, because it is the key to the character of God. "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father." On the one hand Christ justifies the inward witness of conscience, and is thus recognised as "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world." On the other, by His Death and Passion, He transformed the very facts, which hitherto had seemed to contradict the purpose of love in the world's development, into the means of redemption, and so was recognised from the first as the crown of the "one increasing purpose." In Him that purpose in all its stages was recognised as one. That is the meaning of those phrases in the New Testament for which at first it seems difficult to account, and on which rests the statement of the Nicene Creed, that through Him "all things were made." Thus St. Paul calls Christ "the firstborn of all creation," and declares that "in Him all things consist"; and the Fourth Gospel asserts that "the world was made through Him," and "without Him was not anything made that hath been made." And once again St. Paul says that it was the good pleasure of God "to sum up all things in Christ." Thus the Christian doctrine of creation is that Christ is the religious interpretation of the universe, and its practical issue is expressed in the words "To me to live is Christ." For the believer there is and can be no divorce between the course of this world and

the experience of his inner life. If Job could see parallel exhibitions of the one Wisdom in the decree by which the rain falls and the law by which man lives, for the Christian the two are blended for ever in the Person of Christ.

Religion is practical, and, in affirming the Gospel teaching, the Catholic doctrine, of creation we are dealing with a practical issue. This is God's world, because He has been able to work out a triumphant purpose of love by means of it. It presents no obstacle which He cannot surmount, no resistance which He cannot subdue. What oppresses the mind and paralyses the hand is the waste that is everywhere apparent, and that confronts each man in his daily experience. Is life after all nothing more than a treadmill, with its constant effort and its futile result? That is the sort of question that presses itself upon our attention, when the first ardour of a young enthusiasm begins to cool, and we require something more than the easy optimism of inexperience to hold us to our task. That God is the creator of heaven and earth is not the mere assertion that the world did not come about of itself, but was planned and executed by a master mind. This in itself would not be a faith of any great practical importance. It is not whence the universe came, but whither it is going, that matters to those whose faces must always be set towards

the future. The truth, of which I want to be assured, is that there is a thread of purpose—and that a good and loving purpose—running through the world's story; that work is worth while and labour does not go unrewarded because God is the final end of all things. When effort begins to slacken, when the spirit of disappointment broods over our activities, when we despair of making headway against the adverse stream of circumstance, then it is that we are losing faith in the words with which the Bible opens: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." If that be true, then the benediction of His presence sanctifies the very material of our daily life, the circumstances of our bodily condition.

"The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we need to ask,
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God."

This is the practical issue of the belief that God the Father made me and all the world. "In the beginning God created" is no more a historical statement than are the words with which St. John introduces the story of redemption—"In the beginning was the Word." The latter means that Christ is God; the former that the universe depends on God. The Son is in the bosom of the Father, and underneath the world

are the everlasting arms. It is a question of Divine relationship, not of historical fact. The conviction is practical power, not speculative knowledge. If we want to discover the recesses of the solar system, we must take the telescope and sweep the heavens. If we desire to explore the secrets of our physical being, we must take up our anatomical instruments and dissect the human frame; we must examine such records of its formation as the study of biology will yield. Religion unfolds to us none of those truths which we can search out by the ordinary methods of inquiry. The world is still the world, whether we acknowledge that God made it or not; nor does the quality of our eyesight depend on the intensity of our faith. We can stake out what department of knowledge we please, and, within the limits which our powers of intellectual abstraction have laid down, pursue our investigations, undistracted by any considerations that may prejudice the accuracy of our results. It is for the moral ends of life that we cannot do without the conviction that "the sea is His and He made it, and His hands prepared the dry land."

What the phrase "God made the world" means, if it be regarded as a philosophical proposition, is quite uncertain. The only form of creation of which we have any experience is the expression of ideas by the aid of materials of

which we are not the authors. But to believe, by way not of intellectual assent, but of practical response, that the Saviour of our souls is the Creator of the universe, invests life—the life that we now live in the flesh—with an abiding reality. These hives of industry, no less than the heavenly mansions, are chambers in the Father's house. Workrooms, as well as resting-places, are covered by one sheltering roof. Nothing, not even the devastating presence of sin, can deprive the earth of its character as God's world, for the Potter remakes the vessel which is marred in His hand. The new creation is for the body, no less than for the spirit; and, as we reach forward to the end, we look, not for a phantom realm of spiritual unreality, but for a renewal of creative activity, which shall transcend all former exercise of Divine power, even the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

SIN

III

S I N

NO one really disbelieves in the existence of sin so long as he is content to approach the practical problems of life from the point of view of daily experience. It is only when we are brought into contact with theological formulas, but partially understood, that prejudices are aroused which lead to explanations of fact infinitely more sophisticated than the theories rejected as gratuitous.

Let us remember that as Christians we are committed to no theories. A man may be perfectly aware that Christ has satisfied his need without being able to give any consistent account of how that need arose. The doctrine of sin, as distinct from that recognition of wrong within which is the testimony of conscience, arises out of the desire for systematic statement which is certain to assert itself in the reflective mind. But it is probable that the average Christian will never fully appreciate

this necessity, and will always feel a closer sympathy with the practical temper of St. James than with the logical intellect of St. Paul. But, while he asks the professional theologian not to be impatient with his inconsistencies, he ought not hastily to condemn language he has not been at the pains to understand. For the theologian, like himself, is concerned only to preserve the essential Christian experience, and will stand upon his statement only as it conduces to this end.

The main question is a very simple one. What am I bound to assume with regard to the actual condition of any human being to whom I offer Christ as the satisfaction of his spirit's deepest need? If I give men bread, it is because they are hungry. If I invite them to drink, it is because they are thirsty. If I say that these needs are universal, because all men inherit a common human nature, I am merely stating in a convenient, general form what is implied in the practical actions of daily life. It does not in the least matter whether the desires and longings to which I minister are transmitted from one human being to another or whether they arise spontaneously in each new instance with which I am confronted. It is of no consequence whether all the men and women in the world are descended from a common stock or whether their antecedents are as various as their per-

sonalities. I am concerned only with the necessity of providing food for this vast multitude. It would be foolish to waste time in discussing the terms in which a need admittedly universal is expressed, to raise the question what is meant by inheritance, or to ask what is implied by human nature, or whether the idea has any meaning at all apart from the individuals to which all will at once apply the epithet human. The fact is that, if we were confronted with any being resembling others in every respect but the need of bodily sustenance, we should at once rule him out as belonging to a category to which we should deny the attribute of humanity, and return without concern to the practical business of supplying the wants of the rest.

And that is precisely where we stand with regard to the need which Jesus Christ supplies. It is of no importance whatever, so far as the recognition of this need is concerned, what may be the condition of those members of the human race who are not, so far as our methods of reaching their personality are able to inform us, capable of a normal experience—infants of a span long, and hopeless lunatics. We may be quite right in treating them as proper objects of salvation. Charity demands it. That we are unable to detect the presence of responsible personality affords no assurance that it is

absent. Nor can we forget that it was of the former class that our Lord said, "Of such is the kingdom." Nevertheless, it remains true that, apart from the universal mission of Christianity, which it is too late in the day to ignore, the ultimate basis upon which the doctrine of sin rests is the conscious experience of those who have felt the power of Christ to judge and to deliver.

The value of the Epistles of the New Testament lies mainly in the fact that they are not theological treatises. That is to say, they do not endeavour to embody all the implications of Christian discipleship in a complete and orderly system of doctrine. They show us Christian thinkers endeavouring to express the meaning of their experiences, as occasion arose, in relation to the particular circumstances in the development of the Christian Society which they were called upon to meet. They do this in language imposed upon them by the current ideas, whether Jewish or Gentile, which made up the thought of the time, and without which it would have been impossible either to reach the minds of others or to interpret their own. This is, of course, a limitation with which we are beset no less than they. But human nature is essentially the same in every age, and it is not really difficult to penetrate to the facts which underlie the words. And the Apostolic

Christians possessed an advantage denied to those who, baptized as infants into the Christian community, are less able to separate the stages of experience. Their position corresponds to that of modern converts from heathenism, by whom the two conditions, represented severally by the Scriptural phrases "in Christ" and "without God in the world," are readily contrasted, standing as they do for two distinct environments, less easily distinguishable where conversion and baptism are not combined in one vivid, inseparable experience. Thus they enable us to disentangle what might otherwise be confused and indistinct in our own relationship to Christ.

These early Christians, then, realised with overwhelming force that the act of faith, consummated in baptism, was an act of surrender or capitulation to Jesus. Though all the New Testament writers were Jews, it is clear from their manner of addressing the Gentile converts that they could count upon them to ratify the statement that the Christian had been brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. What was more obviously apparent in the case of the Hebrew was that this surrender was also reconciliation. Further, a familiar phrase, in which St. Paul describes baptism into the believing community, is "union with Christ in His Death." If the disciple was brought into living relations

with Christ, it was only through the Death of Jesus that these relations had become possible. It was the vital experience of every Christian that he had only entered into what he now called life through the Cross. He had no standing apart from the benefits conferred on him through the Passion. But now, because he shared the Spirit of Christ, through dependence, not upon a common source, but upon the risen Jesus as Himself the source, his attitude towards the world and towards his former self was that which had brought death upon the Lord as its inevitable consequence.

The position was, therefore, this: it was the manifestation of that very spirit, into which he had now been made to drink and which had brought about the Death of Christ. Calvary was the final and emphatic condemnation by the world of all for which Jesus stood. He was thrust out of the circle of human society as an alien. No parley was possible between the world's ideals and His. If one was right, then the other was wrong. If one represented the true destiny of the human race, then the other was in opposition to it. If one was life, the other was death. The Crucifixion meant that no compromise was possible. Christ was crucified unto the world, and the world unto Him.

We must get this thought quite clear before we proceed further. The essential experience of

the Christian involved his contemplation of the aims, objects, and ideals of the world from the point of view of the Cross. If it was through the Lord's Death, and through this alone, that Christians were brought into sympathy with what the world had condemned, then before their conversion, before their baptism, they were "enemies of the Cross of Christ"; they were among those who crucified Him. No one can occupy a position of neutrality towards the Cross. All must either crucify or be crucified with Him.

Nothing comes out more clearly from the Gospel story than the plain issue which decided the judicial murder of Jesus. He met His doom at the hands of the Jewish authorities because He claimed to be, what in fact He is, the Son of God. They condemned Him because His existence was a condemnation of themselves. If Jesus were allowed to prove His claim, that would amount to an admission that their own view of life was wrong, that their ideals and purposes were at variance with the universal order, and that they needed reconciliation with God. It was not a question of an accusation of sin levelled against those who became His murderers by Jesus Christ. His existence was itself a conviction of sin. And what a man feels who recognises that he can only share Christ's attitude towards God by allowing him-

self to become dependent on the Death of Christ for His salvation, is that by this very admission he identifies himself with those who slew Him. By his act of surrender he brings to the test of deeds the conviction, aroused in all who contemplate the Personality of our Lord, that if any man is to come to the Father it can only be through Him. He assents to what was clearly the mind of Jesus Himself, that He could not draw men to His side by simply presenting to their imagination the Kingdom of God. That ideal offered to human nature a service which was too heroic, a sacrifice which was too high. Even a Peter, who professes himself ready to go to prison and to death for the Master's sake, abandons Him in the decisive hour, and involves himself in the guilt of the Crucifixion. If Christ is the Life and Character and Will of God expressed in the lineaments of a human personality, then there is active hostility between the mind of God and the minds of men. The Cross is the measure of all the lusts, the hatreds, the selfishness which disfigure human society. God has but to manifest Himself decisively, and the children of men join battle with Him.

The Christian is bound to recognise this truth, to accept this situation, if Christ is to profit him anything. His baptism means that he has given up the attempt to approach Christ in the spirit

of the Rich Young Ruler who called Him good, or of the Peter who drew the sword on His behalf. He is content to stand over against the Saviour as though he were one of the crowd that watched the Crucifixion, and assent to the overwhelming words, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, Whom thou persecutest." He confesses the bankruptcy of human nature, and realises that it stands condemned in Calvary. The Christian doctrine of sin is simply the attempt to express this part of the experience of a believer in a form which universalises it and fits it in to a general scheme. St. Paul puts the same thing in a more concrete and personal form when he declares that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It means that a conviction of guilt is part of the experience of all who have "put on Christ," and that it must prove itself true in the case of any man who shall hereafter believe on His Name. If the message of the Gospel is intended for "every creature," then each man to whom it is preached must be held capable of receiving it. It is the function of the preacher to quicken this conviction of guilt in all those to whom he delivers the glad tidings.

If we would only begin our study with Christ, we should have little difficulty in appreciating the facts which every theory of the nature and origin of sin ever constructed endeavours to

express. In recognising Christ as my Saviour, I know myself as a sinner. The two are correlative, and represent one fact regarded from opposite sides. No doubt the Old Testament, with which the New stands in historical sequence, and which anticipates, if imperfectly, the fuller revelation, supplies us with the language and forms in which to clothe the idea. But it is not really relevant to inquire whether at any given time in an obscure past there occurred an event which may be properly described as a Fall. Nor is the issue affected by scientific theories of the evolution of man from lower to higher stages of moral responsibility. There is nothing, for example, to hinder us from arguing, if ascertained facts point to such a conclusion, that actions now condemned by conscience were once necessary for the preservation of the race. Nor must we be in bondage to those apparent analogies of physical nature which have been pressed into the service when it has been deemed necessary not only to express, but also to explain, the unity of the race in this respect. Such, for instance, are the metaphors of disease and its transmission, and the Darwinian theory of heredity.

These figures have proved themselves useful, because they enable us to represent to ourselves the common need of all men. But they are also dangerous because they suggest that Christianity

is committed to a psychological theory. It may be worth while to bear in mind that these ideas, to which theologians have freely had recourse, belong to a different habit of thought from that which is characteristic of the New Testament. The background, against which our Lord and His Apostles viewed the facts of life, is spiritual. They saw two kingdoms, or spheres of influence, one of which was swayed by the Spirit of God, the other by "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." We should do well to go straight back to this habit of thought when we are contemplating the universality of sin. Physical analogies may suggest explanations of a universal tendency to evil, but they cannot help us to understand why all should be involved in common guilt. Exposure to the dominant influence of "the Evil One" would appear to be the account which the New Testament gives of the condition of those whom Christ sets free.

GRACE

IV

GRACE

IF we may judge from the tendencies of thought which are manifesting themselves to-day, we are at the beginning of a period in which a new value and importance will be given to personality. The marvellous development of physical science, characteristic of the nineteenth century, produced a habit of mind which viewed personal action in the light of its own fetish, the uniformity of Nature. Many will recollect the immense popularity of Professor Henry Drummond's book called "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," which swiftly passed through a multitude of editions and was eagerly read in every part of the English-speaking world. The argument was faulty from the point of view of theology, of philosophy, and of natural science itself. But it was the work of a man who united singular literary power with deep religious feeling, and, above all, it seemed to supply the felt want of the age.

Those were days in which it was scarcely possible to think in any other terms than those of evolution, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest. The lessons of biology were applied to every other department of human inquiry. We invoked the aid of Darwin to interpret history and direct politics. And Herbert Spencer, with his genius for generalisation, gathered together the various fields of knowledge in one imposing system, from which even moral conduct was not allowed to escape. *Data* is the technical term for the facts or phenomena on which any given science is based, and the world had almost substituted the "Data of Ethics" for such principles of moral conduct as are represented by the Ten Commandments. Thus people began to look for a reading of theology which should translate it into similar terms, for a reconciliation between religion and science in which the former should save itself by wearing the livery of the latter. The Reign of Law had come to mean, not merely the triumph of scientific method within the area to which it was strictly applicable, but the dominance of popular scientific theories as the absolute standard of truth. The Universe was regarded as a closed system of causes and effects. Its changes and revolutions were nothing more than the shaking of a kaleidoscope which, though it allowed for an apparently endless

transformation of patterns, admitted of no new factor in the general scheme. It was only ignorance that prevented us from forecasting the state of the world to-morrow from the causes operating to-day. What was overlooked in these calculations was the element in these changes and permutations that can only be compared to the free hand that turns the kaleidoscope.

Even when the soul naturally Christian refused to abandon religious ideas, as the prevailing agnosticism with greater consistency was prepared to do, the result was to confine these ideas within limits which deprived them of more than half their significance. Thus sin, for example, came to be expressed not as a burden of responsibility, but as a bad heredity. If religion be rightly described as the communion of the soul with God, then no account of sin can be adequate which does not begin with those personal relations and keep them steadily in view at every point. But just as the tendency of the epoch, from which we are now emerging, was to explain spiritual life as a thing in itself on the analogy of the life of the body, so it was content to represent sin and salvation in language that was almost physical. A popular way of explaining the first clause of the Athanasian Creed was to retranslate it by the phrase, "Whosoever wishes to be in a state of spiritual

health"—an idea which was not only, in all probability, absent from the thoughts of those who framed the document, but also far enough from satisfying the fulness of the meaning of salvation in the New Testament. "Whosoever wishes to stand in the presence of God" would approximate much more nearly to the original meaning of the term.

The great error of this type of thought is the substitution of things for persons. It explains human life and action by the order of existence which comes next below it. It endeavours to break up personal life, with its apparently spontaneous motions and active purposes, into the operation of laws and the sequence of causes. The exercise of Will it resolves into the mutual action of motives and impulses, themselves the result of impersonal forces outside and beyond the individual. We all know something about the law of averages, which is the basis of life insurance and kindred departments of finance. To go on thinking in this atmosphere is to deprive life of its freedom, its spontaneity, its power. We begin to imagine that Will, which is the fountain-head of an active purposeful career, is an illusion, and that large views of existence must deal, not with free personalities, but with impersonal forces.

On the other hand, this point of view has its strong side. It has created the modern concep-

tion of solidarity. In religion it has closely allied itself with the Oxford Movement to make the brotherhood of the Church a real power among the teeming populations of great centres—in East London, in Leeds, in Cardiff. The institutional side of Christianity has been emphasised, and has had a wide effect upon religious life within and beyond the Church of England. The Christian Social Union is, to a large extent, a tribute to the vital truths which the scientific habit of thought had to teach the men of the nineteenth century. To use the words of Tennyson, we must “be grateful for the sounding watchword, Evolution, here.” Our faith has been redeemed from a narrow individualism, and the principle of membership in one body, upon which St. Paul bases all Christian fraternity, and Butler all social duty, has been strongly reaffirmed amongst us.

But meanwhile a change has been coming over the spirit of the scientific inquirer's dream. The language which the biologist, for example, is using to-day is wholly different from that to which we became accustomed a quarter of a century ago. Natural Science has been penetrating further into the heart of its own problem, and is learning that its method of exact observation has served, not so much to explain, as to point out more precisely what is the ultimate fact that needs explanation. The investigator,

for example, observes at one moment a germ-cell and its environment. The next he observes that the mutual action between the cell and the environment has called forth on the part of the former an adaptive variation. Natural Selection does not really explain what has been going on. It is only a phrase expressing the fact that certain changes have taken place. The point of ultimate importance is the inward movement, the impulsive force, the creative action which sets the process going. Can it be that there is something in the living, moving world of things that corresponds to that personal power of voluntary action which every human being recognises in himself? If I have not arms and legs, I cannot correspond to my environment. If my limbs are tied together, and I am thrown into the river, only one result is possible. That is perfectly true. But the same result will follow if I make no attempt to strike out. The view of the world to which thought is returning recognises Consciousness as a power acting upon matter from above, and producing moment by moment upon what would otherwise remain a mute, inert, and meaningless mass those changes which realise purposes and make history. This is nothing short of a personal view of the universe.

Is there any corresponding change in theology? I think there is. And we shall, perhaps, best

describe it by saying that there is a manifest tendency to return to the Biblical interpretation of the word "Grace." Christian thinkers are again approaching the study of Jesus Christ through the gateway of Redemption. It has become customary for teachers of religion to look downward to the levels immediately below human life for their analogies, and to interpret Christianity as a system of means devised for the re-creation of character through the infusion of energies derived from the manifested Christ-life. Now they are returning to the language of the Epistles of St. Paul and emphasising reconciliation with God as the standard presentation of the Gospel. This is to look not down, but up; to forsake the method of looking for natural law in the spiritual world in favour of another, which follows the reverse path and interprets the lower in terms of the higher. It is to get back to the fundamental idea of religion, the communion of the soul with God, and thus to make the personal element supreme.

This method has been characteristic of all creative periods in the history of Christianity. With whom, next to St. Paul, do we connect the doctrine of Grace if it be not St. Augustine? And what is more characteristic of this Titan of the spiritual life than the passionate penetration with which he broke through all barriers—earth, sky, sea, the life of the senses, the logic of

philosophic thought—till he brought himself face to face with his God? What he experienced was the mighty Heart of God, the pure undeserved favour of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ reaching down to the wayward, wandering, unsatisfied soul. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless till it rests in Thee."

We may deplore the element of self-will in the reforming purpose of Martin Luther, which cut adrift the Evangelical Church in Germany from the moorings of historical continuity with the Past. But no criticism ought to blind us to the fact that the Reformation in Europe was a movement, and a necessary movement, towards a fresh and fuller realisation of personal relations with God as the birthright of every Christian soul. It is exceedingly difficult for us to imagine, brought up as many of us have been in a Protestantism which has too much obscured the social element in Christianity, how access to the Father had been choked rather than assisted by the channels through which it had been hoped that communion with God would be secured. Men had to learn afresh that Grace was not something that could be detached, as it were, from the personality of God, but, on the contrary, was an attitude of the Father's mind towards the sons and daughters whom, by His own free love, He had in Christ redeemed.

This is the teaching of St. Paul. When he says, "By grace ye are saved through faith," he is using personal terms. Grace is the free favour, the forgiving love of God, as He fixes His choice upon the objects of His merciful action. Faith is the response of the soul which trusts the love and accepts the mercy. The theology of the great missionary apostle can only be read in the light of what he tells us three times over—twice in the Acts and once in the Epistle to the Galatians—of his own crucial experience. Grace was what beamed in the eye and trembled in the voice of Jesus of Nazareth when the life of Saul the persecutor was changed on the road to Damascus. We may say with all reverence that the crisis in St. Paul's history was a personal interview with the exalted Son of Man, the crucified Son of God. This gives tone and colour to all those expressions which St. Paul uses to describe the Christian life, and which have passed into the theology of the Church Catholic. If the use of the word "Grace" be followed throughout the Pauline Epistles, it will be found that, however various the connexions in which it occurs, this fundamental experience is always implicitly present in the writer's thought. We may say with confidence that "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" is never an energy which, so to speak, He has launched into the world or stored up like a sort

of spiritual electricity, but a condition of His ever-present Personality, an attitude of His redemptive Will. God calls us through His grace (Gal. i. 15), and He is ever waiting to be gracious to such as again and again return to the embrace of His Fatherly Heart.

We have grown accustomed to the use of the phrase "Divine Immanence" as though it represented the first truth of religion. It is really the second, not the first. "The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters." Yes, but "in the beginning God created." We may easily become so intent on the immanence that we forget the divine. In the supposed interest of the sacramental in religion we may become careless of the personal. Christianity is none the less Catholic because it has an Evangelical basis. God transcends the world in which He is immanent. His grace resides not in things, but in Himself.

That is the meaning of the story of the woman with the issue of blood. She believes that if she may touch the border of Christ's garment she will be made whole. Nor is she disappointed. But our Lord is not content to leave her to suppose that there is healing power in the fringe of His robe, or to mistake the true meaning of the impulse which had brought her into contact with it. So He turns about, brings her face to face with Himself, and interprets

her eager yet trembling approach as an act of personal trust. "Thy faith hath made thee whole."

Redemption is the voluntary act of a creative, transcendent God.

THE CHRIST OF HISTORY

V

THE CHRIST OF HISTORY

THE recently published "Life of Robertson Smith" serves to remind us that it is scarcely forty years since English-speaking Christians began to awake to that historical method of studying the Holy Scriptures which has, contrary to expectation, immeasurably enhanced their authority for the modern world.

At the same time we have become indebted to this stimulating scholar for the application of a similar method of inquiry to the religious beliefs and practices of the whole human family in the important new science of Comparative Religion. This study has made it plain that the ideas of Reconciliation with God and the Real Presence of Deity, which are prominent features, the one of the evangelical, the other of the catholic, presentation of Christianity, are the monopoly of no one form of religion. Religion is natural. It belongs to the constitution of man.

The need of the human heart drives it to seek some means by which to enter into fellowship with the Presence that is behind the world. Conscience assures us that there are barriers which must either be surmounted or thrown down before this communion is established. The Bible, scientifically handled, brings us face to face with the Christ of history as the channel through which the spirit of man has found its rest in God.

For Christianity means that I clasp hands with God in Christ. It is a religion, in the scientific sense of the word, because it proposes to bring men into communion with the Eternal. To the Christian, so far as he thinks of it as a religion at all—when, that is, he begins to reflect upon his own position and to give a rationale of it—it is the only true religion, because he has proved in his own experience the truth of the Lord's own statement: "No man cometh to the Father but through Me." He sees that, whereas his faith agrees with other religions in recognising that there is a gulf which must be somehow bridged before a man can get to God, it differs from them all in one essential and vital feature. In other religions man builds the bridge, or attempts to build it, which he hopes will carry him into the Presence. But in Christianity God comes to him, lays hold of him, sets him in His own presence. Christ is the bridge provided

for him. God is "in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

Now mark. This means that Christ must become a fact of the man's own experience. He does not get to God unless he gets to Christ. We are not saved because we accept the teaching about God which Christ gave. It is not open to us to forget all about Christ Himself—to treat Jesus as we may, quite consistently, treat the Buddha, Mohammed, or Socrates, as though He had never existed. His message is not the revelation, for example, that *God is love*, which, once delivered, no matter who the original messenger may have been, can stand by itself as an article of faith, armed with which we may approach the battle of life in a spirit of optimism and confident hope. It is not the revelation of a way by which we may hope to work out our own salvation, albeit with fear and trembling. No; "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Herein is love, that God sent His Son to be the Saviour.

Nor can we even stop here. Our Christianity is not a teaching about something which God is believed to have done, but with which we are no more immediately and directly concerned than the Call of Abraham or the Battle of Waterloo. We must experience God in Christ coming to us and saving us, forgiving our sins, and making us His own sons and daughters. Nothing can

come between us and Christ. We must be brought face to face with Him and reach God through Him. That is why Christianity is neither acceptance of a creed nor assent to a doctrine. There are good reasons for teaching a child the Apostles' Creed, but I cannot agree with the view, which finds frequent expression among the friends of denominational education, that, if we are faced with the alternative, it is much better to teach Church formularies than to make the learner acquainted with the text of the Bible. A creed is a dead thing except as an index to experience. It is historically nothing else but a short form of indicating and recalling experience. So also with what are called doctrines—the doctrine of the Atonement, for example, or the doctrine of the Incarnation. You cannot have a doctrine in any intelligible sense until you have an experience which it attempts to express. And the doctrine will always be something less than the reality. Whoever it be that you get to draw up and express what a Church feels to be the rationale of its own attitude towards Christ, the resulting statement will inevitably contain the limitations of the individual either in realising or interpreting experience. The figures, the analogies, the images which he uses will only imperfectly convey what they are intended to express. And they will be understood with a

difference by those who listen to them. Then, as the language passes from mouth to mouth, there will be a constant tendency to depreciation, to transformation, to the gradual and almost imperceptible change of values.

All that we can really count upon is a general approximation first of experience, secondly of the language in which expression is given to it. The value of doctrinal statements, and for that matter of creeds also, is not under any circumstances to take the place of experience, nor yet to govern and control experience, but rather to guide the spirit of each new believer to those lines upon which the right experience becomes possible. There is, for example, a broad distinction between Christ as Saviour and Christ as example. All Christians are convinced that others must come to know Christ as a Saviour if they are to reach the secret of Jesus, and so to correspond, to come into sympathy, with the spiritual life of the Christian community, which is built upon redemption, not on imitation. The man who is simply taking Christ as a pattern, but has no knowledge of Him as the source of his life, may be, and is, an admirer of Jesus of Nazareth, but he has not been found of God and begotten of Him.

Until it becomes the expression of each man's fresh experience, doctrine, whether compressed into creeds or expanded into confessions, is

descriptive, illustrative of what Christ has been found to be by believers who have gone before. It is not an exact and precise definition of an experience too big for any formula.

I wish we could all grasp this essential truth, that just as life must always precede thought, so the experience of redemption must precede the confession that Jesus is God. We cannot begin by believing that Jesus is the Son of God as the necessary preliminary to the experience of redemption. It is in coming forth to redeem us that He convinces us that He is God. When I acknowledge that Jesus is no other than God Himself, I express my conviction that He has done for me what God alone can do, that my life is resting upon Him as upon the everlasting arms—not that He has made it possible for God to forgive me and receive me into His presence, but that in Him I am forgiven, in Him I am present with God.

This means that the only sort of Christianity which is of any value is that which introduces the believer directly to Jesus. Somehow or another the contact must be made, or faith is impossible. It may be very imperfect, as in the case of the woman who laid hold of the border of the robe, but it must be real. Christ may, for example, be conveyed to the believer in the life of His disciples. Or in the organised life of the Church, and more particularly in the ministration

of the sacraments, some rays of His presence may shine through. Or preaching may be so evangelical, so instinct with the manifested Christ, that He is made to appear before the eyes of the congregation, as when St. Paul was able to say to the Galatians that Christ had been "evidently set before them crucified."

But in the long run we come back to the Scriptures as the only record of the manifestation. It is only there that the soul can gaze directly on the historical Christ, apart from Whom a mystical Christ may stand for anything, and may have no relation whatever to concrete reality. Nor do we see the Christ merely as a portrait, caught, so to speak, in some characteristic attitude, at some particular moment in His developing life. We behold Christ as a moving, acting, working personality, a fact that enters into and becomes part of our world—not an ideal representation, but an actual living, real experience. There in all its actuality we see embodied the Will of the living God in terms of human obedience—I will not call it a picture, because that at once suggests a pattern, a representation, an ideal. But, as we look at Christ, we learn to say, "This is the Will of God." Then there comes the realisation of that great gulf fixed between us and Him, so that they who would pass from where we are to where He is cannot. It is just that gulf of pain and misery

and labour and bloody sweat through which the noblest and the best, as well as the fearful and conscience-stricken, have again and again sought to make their sad, toilsome, suffering way, as often as they have set their teeth, determined to endure anything, to wrestle with death itself, if only they may attain! Then comes the wonder of wonders. This Christ, unlike all other revelation of what we recognise as the inexorable law of the universe, does not condemn, repel, demand some means of reconciliation, which no man can offer, as the price of the soul's redemption. He is mighty to save. It is a love that will not let me go, which holds on to me even while it sets before me the "high that is too high, the heroic for earth too hard," and which plunges into the misery, the pain, the suffering, takes it to Himself instead of offering it to me, and lifts me up above it, sets me on the rock that is too high for me, so that I know that through Him I have attained.

Now this is no message about redemption. It is redemption. We need not quarrel about terms. Each will express it in the form most suitable to his own habit of thought. But there is no doubt about the fact. St. Paul was a Hebrew, so of course he uses the phraseology natural to one who could only express his experience in terms of the old covenant of Israel. But you cannot read him with any human sym-

pathy without recognising at once that he has had the standard experience. When he saw Jesus of Nazareth crucified, risen, exalted, he found himself where all his life long he had passionately desired to be. All the labour, all the suffering, all the tears by which he had been seeking, during long years of Pharisaic struggle, to ascend into the hill of the Lord were gone, like a bad dream—he was there when he saw Jesus!

All doctrines of the Atonement are the attempts to express this experience. When Jesus shows us His Hands and His Side we exclaim, "My Lord and My God." Because He redeems us, we know that He is divine. This differs by a whole heaven from the wonder, the admiration, the despair with which we hail the highest form of human excellence. The Being of God, which hitherto we have dimly discerned, comes to full recognition in Jesus Christ; the miseries of our mortal life, the meaning of which we have vaguely guessed, are interpreted as sin; and the need of our spirits finds its satisfaction in redemption.

Now we simply cannot get this without the Bible, and the more diligently we study it the more intimate will our tryst with the Redeeming God become. And this is more evidently true, the more fully we understand the historical method of studying those Scriptures which

modern scholarship has opened up for us. If the Bible is regarded simply as a non-human, infallible, verbally inspired text, then with the Church and the Sacraments, the Creeds and doctrines, the whole range of Christian institutions, it will sink down to that world of fetishes in which, as Comparative Religion teaches us, men are but fumbling after God in realms unrealised, in a dark underworld, where communion with the Unseen, and propitiation, and the real presence of the Divine belong to a superstitious and unsubstantial mysticism.

The modern method of studying the Bible restores it to that true function for which the process by which the canon was formed shows that it was originally intended. The Scriptures have been carefully distinguished from all other ecclesiastical writings because they give us, in its full length and breadth, the witness to the historic Christ. He is the Light of the World. Those who believe in Him, those who are brought into immediate personal contact with Him through these pages, no longer walk in darkness. They have the light of life. Those natural religious necessities—reconciliation with God and the realisation of God's presence—which lie behind all ritual, all worship, all theologies, all mystic initiations, find their satisfaction in Him Whom the Bible presents to our faith. The

whole circle of the Christian system is lifted out of the dark ways of paganism only because the historical yet ever-present Christ is its centre. I fear, as I fear nothing else, a Bible which nobody reads.

THE REAL PRESENCE

VI

THE REAL PRESENCE

THERE are few subjects upon which it is less easy to avoid becoming controversial than that of the Real Presence. In the history of Christendom it has become so entangled with bitter feuds and fierce oppositions that any one who should attempt to handle it must be prepared to incur suspicion because both of what he says and of what he omits to say. It will be well, therefore, to say at the outset that the object of these pages is entirely positive, and that what is said is not necessarily to be taken as the measure of what might be said. We are dealing, of course, with the idea of the Real Presence as it is specially connected with the celebration of the Eucharist, and not as it may be applied more generally to the relations of Christ with the Church. What are we to think about the conviction, which has taken firm root in the Christian community, that in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ the

Christian is brought into close and vital union with his Lord?

In the first place, it ought not to surprise us that Christian people have adopted very different methods of expressing their experience. For Christ, when He gave to His followers this simple and beautiful means of realising their fellowship with Himself, instituted what is primarily a matter of practice. We should naturally expect that time alone would reveal to those who participated in the oft-renewed ceremonial all the treasures of this Divine Mystery. To require of men, as a preliminary to its exercise, an exact and precise definition of its significance would have been to check, instead of to promote, their progressive realisation of its spiritual power. Christ did not institute the Eucharist until He had drawn from the Twelve an acknowledgment of His Messiahship, which marked them off from the rest of the world as His fellowship, as the Knights—if the figure may be allowed—of His Round Table. To this extent He made a demand upon them. But He left them to learn by experience what it was that He had given to them. And though it is natural and right that such general instruction as, for example, is contained in the Church Catechism, should be given to Christians of succeeding generations as they are admitted to the fulness of their privilege, it would be wrong

to require of them any declaration beyond the profession of faith which was the condition of their baptism. Convictions are far more likely to form themselves if the communicant is taught to understand what is involved in Christian discipleship than if he is presented with stereotyped definitions of the connection between Christ and the Sacrament. Nor ought we to wish to brand as uncatholic any baptized person if, sincerely believing in Him Who is the Master of the Feast, he cannot fully accept the language in which others express their experience in this matter.

If, however, we desire to get into sympathy with the stream of Christian sentiment towards the Eucharist, we shall do well to begin, not by repeating the phrases of text-books or the language of popular devotions, but by putting ourselves in the position of the primitive Christians and trying to realise the process by which they would arrive at the discovery of its true value and purpose.

It is perfectly clear that from the first the Apostles understood that their Master was instituting a rite which He intended to be celebrated by the whole community of His disciples, by those who should believe through the Apostles' word no less than by the Apostles themselves. The first Epistle to the Corinthians alone shows that it was the stated act of fellow-

ship in a Christian congregation from its earliest establishment. The prominence given to the account of the Last Supper in the three Synoptic Gospels, no less than the evidence which St. Paul gives, that the manner of the institution was a carefully transmitted tradition, shows plainly that no mistake was made when the regular observance of the Eucharist, as it has continued from age to age, was recognised as the intention of Christ. The form of the celebration itself, a common meal reduced to its simplest and most universal terms, would show all who took part in it that by it was realised the unity of Christians in all that made them the society of Jesus. No doubt its close association with the Love Feast, in which the circumstances of the Last Supper were reproduced, might at first obscure the essentially religious character of the rite. The Apostles, as we know, continued for a time to frequent the services of the Temple and the Synagogue, and these, rather than a meal eaten at home, would have for them the associations of religious worship. But we know how quickly the separation, first between the Synagogue and the Church, then between the Love Feast and the Eucharist, was accomplished. And the destruction of the Temple, within the lifetime of most of the Apostles, soon emphasised the fact that the ancient ritual had no longer any significance for Christians, and that they

must learn, in the spirit of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to transfer all that was essential in worship from the ancient system to such institutions as they themselves possessed.

That Christ was Himself present in power, though invisible save to the eye of faith, in the solemn meetings of His baptized followers, was from the beginning a strong conviction. He had Himself promised that where two or three were gathered together in His name, there would He be in their midst. This promise they had claimed. Wonderful spiritual experiences had attested the reality of its fulfilment. And the testimony of such Christians as St. Stephen and St. Paul, to whom individually in their hour of need the Saviour had been personally manifested, kept alive the simplicity of this faith, so that men continued to speak to their unseen Master as a never-absent Friend. No doubt this Presence was independent of the Eucharist, and I think that, if our belief in the living connection between Christ and the Sacrament is to be profoundly Christian, we must believe that the Lord is thus with us, before we can realise what it is that He gives us in His Body and Blood.

Now, it was this fundamental belief in the Presence of Christ which for the primitive disciples was the distinguishing mark of their Christianity. It underlay all their spiritual experience, and was the spring of all their

theology. They were dealing in the first instance not with past history or future hopes, but with present realities. The powers of "the world to come" were something that they were actually tasting. But this experience was not satisfied by the statement that Jesus Christ, who had died and who had risen, was still among them to strengthen, to comfort, and to bless. For communion with Christ was for them communion with God. The Presence that overshadowed them was the same that had ever been the sustaining Power of the world, that had talked with Moses and made Abraham His friend. This gave a new meaning to the facts of which the Apostles were the witnesses, and which culminated in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. In taking the Manhood into Himself, God had made the Cross part of His own eternal Life. Calvary was not a past incident in the earthly passage of Jesus to the Throne, but the "new and living way" through which everywhere and at all times the Christian has access to the Father. The historical accidents of the Crucifixion might belong to the historical past, but Jesus as God is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The Saviour who reigns for ever is even now "the Lamb slain." Unless this is apprehended, we have not got the key to the language of the New Testament. We cannot understand St. Paul when he speaks of the Christian as dead,

buried, crucified, risen with Christ, nor the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews when he exhorts his readers to go out to Christ without the camp, bearing His reproach. Gradually, though swiftly, the Church came to recognise that what had been expressed in the symbolism of the Mosaic ritual and sacrifice was actually accomplished in Christ. The Death of Jesus, though not in form, was nevertheless in fact an offering for sin, because through it men had access to God. All approach to God through Him thus became sacrificial.

This at once gave a peculiar significance to the Sacred Meal which was instituted by Jesus under the very shadow of the Cross. If the Last Supper was not actually Paschal in character, the associations were nevertheless those of "the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover." Westcott, in his commentary upon the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, asserts that the language attributed to our Lord in the fifty-eighth verse was sacrificial, and that the Jews stumbled at the idea of eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking His blood, because to them it implied, as it was meant to imply, the sacrificial Death of Christ. But even if it were not so, the close association of the Eucharist with the Cross must at once have suggested itself to the minds of those who were convinced by the Resurrection that their abiding relationship

with Jesus, their complete dependence upon Him as the author of eternal life, was bound up with the fact that He ever lived to make intercession for them, because His Soul, His Life, had been made an offering for sin. To use the language of the first Epistle of St. John, "He is the propitiation for our sins." Could there be, therefore, any question that when He took bread and said, "This is My Body, which is for you," and hallowed the cup, saying, "This is My Blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins," He meant that, whensoever His followers took part in this act of fellowship, the whole sacrificial action which was consummated on Calvary, and to which the Eucharist was indissolubly joined, would become a part of their living, present experience, and that they would realise their union with Christ in His Death?

There can be no question that this is the thought in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews when he declares: "We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." This is the same passage which, carrying on the analogy of the Old Testament, speaks of Christ consecrating, or setting apart for God's service, His people by His own blood when He suffered without the gate. Christians are to go out to Him without the camp, there in the wilderness to find

a table spread. All this imagery would be at once intelligible to Hebrew Christians, who were familiar from childhood with the Levitical ritual. Meeting week by week at the "Table of the Lord" (1 Cor. x. 21), they would perceive how the writer regarded the Communion feasts of the Mosaic covenant as finding their fulfilment in the Common Meal of the Christian Church (see Malachi i. 7). That does not mean that the Lord's Table was in its origin a ritual altar, any more than the Cross was a ritual sacrifice. But the reality was there, whether the form were present or not. No Christian would dream of denying that the Death of Christ was a sacrifice, because He was killed by Roman executioners, and not by Jewish priests. Nor should we hesitate to call the Eucharist the Christian altar because the environment of its beginning was the house rather than the Church.

The true inwardness of the Eucharist was still further realised by comparison and contrast with the social and religious customs of paganism. Such customs were as closely interwoven with the heathen society which surrounded the primitive communities as was the Eucharist with the Church. We need not be afraid to admit that St. Paul was enabled to draw out what was involved in the spiritual experience of Christians by viewing it against the background of those general customs of contemporary pagan society

with which the disciples of Christ found it difficult not to comply. Food offered in sacrifice to idols found its way to the tables at which a member of the Church might easily be an invited guest. How was he to act in regard to it? The theory of such consecrated food was, as all students of Comparative Religion now know, communion with the gods through sharing in offerings which had been dedicated to them. Whether St. Paul was right in believing that the heathen gods were real beings, and that those who shared their food were partakers with demons, does not affect his argument. The theory of the idol sacrifices remains the same. But at once the fact that Christians were partakers of a common sacred meal presented itself to his thought, and the inconsistency of complying with ordinary social customs and at the same time joining in the characteristic rite of the Divine Brotherhood became apparent. "Ye cannot," he says, "partake of the Table of the Lord and of the table of demons." Thus once again the spiritual experience of a real union and fellowship with Christ is seen to take the place of those ritual acts by which the hearts of men had sought to satisfy their deepest need.

These, if we examine the New Testament, would appear to be the lines along which the Apostolic Church was led to apprehend the true relation of the great rite, which became the

centre of Christian worship, to Him who is the fountainhead of Christian life. What is the Gospel but the proclamation of the Death of Christ as the act of God by which men have their sins forgiven and are brought into fellowship with Him? What is the Eucharist but the corporate act in which, rendering all praise to God for His redeeming mercy, they are enabled to express, realise, and focus that Divine Fellowship? The sovereign truth which lies behind both the Gospel and the Eucharist is the prevailing Presence of Christ in the midst of His worshipping people. When once this is lost sight of, we get, on the one hand a formal Gospel, on the other either a superstitious or a bare Eucharist. Men begin to talk of it now as a repetition, now as a mere representation of the Cross. The more Evangelical we are, the more real should the Sacrament become. The more strongly we believe in justification by faith, the more ready should we be to mark out the Holy Communion, which is the epitome of the Gospel, as the core of all our worshipful acts. Evangelicals ought to be the first to desire that its celebration should be accompanied with the use of vestments which, by contrast with those employed for the lesser and subordinate services, distinguish it as the characteristic rite of Christ's Gospel.

THE TRAVELLER

“Jacob went on.”—GENESIS xxxii. 1.

VII

THE TRAVELLER

JACOB is pre-eminently the traveller. He is always on the road. Nowhere has he a continuing city. He goes on pilgrimage. We meet him in the passes of the hills. We are not surprised to encounter him, dusty and footsore, leaning on his staff, where the maidens bring their pitchers to the well or lead out the thirsty flock. Very different is the figure that confronts us from the face and form of other passengers—the wanderer whom at “hour of deepest noon” the poet Wordsworth met outside the ruined hut—

“Amid the gloom
Spread by a brotherhood of lofty elms,”

and whose talk was of the beauty of the world the loves and the vicissitudes of men; or the Oxford scholar of Matthew Arnold’s graceful verse—

“Who, tired of knocking at preferment’s door,
One summer morn forsook
His friends, and went to learn the gipsy-lore,
And roam’d the world with that wild brotherhood.”

There is nothing shy or, at first sight, romantic about Jacob. The Bible calls him a plain man. Night by night his brother would return to the encampment with the smell of the field upon his garments and the trophies of the chase in his train. Jacob was the patient farmer, not the daring sportsman; the range of his occupations never took him far from the domestic tent. A practical man and an economist, he understood women and they understood him. Even in the matter of his marriage with Rachel, where the superficial reader sees nothing but a pastoral romance, it is exceedingly doubtful how much of this remains on a closer inspection of the narrative. If he did not marry for money, it must be owned that he went where money was. If we are told that the fourteen years of his unrewarded service seemed but a few days, there is not a successful merchant in the City of London who would deny that the long hours were well employed. So truthful are the ancient Scriptures that in the vivid picture of the meeting in the field it is not exactly a chivalrous youth, with the blush on his cheek, whom we see before us as he rolls the stone from the

well's mouth. For this is what is written, "It came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, that Jacob went near . . . and watered the flock." Not a generous schoolboy but turns with contempt from the story of the mean artifice that caused the sorrows of Rebekah's son. Nor did Samuel Johnson loathe the Scots more heartily than every free-handed Englishman detests Jacob the Jew.

What, then, was Jacob's secret? For that he had a secret, and a noble one, who that considers the wonderful history of the Hebrew race can for a moment doubt? We shall, perhaps, best understand it by following up the inevitable comparison at once suggested by the name of Esau. The Bible calls Esau "a profane person," and we resent the imputation as strongly as we rebel against the choice of Jacob. We fail to recognise that in the whole story of his career there is little positively placed to his credit save the one fraternal embrace of his later manhood, in which the memories of an ancient and irreparable wrong were for the moment thrown aside. But a mighty hunter must needs be a good fellow, free as the mountain air with which he fills his lungs. There is something that wins the heart even in the faults of an impulsive nature. The exhausted man who

must satisfy his hunger though he sell his birthright, the disappointed son whose tears cannot recall the lost blessing, is a subject for pity, but not for condemnation. How shall we brand him as "profane"? But the fact remains. Whatever romance our fancy may weave around the person of Esau, to him life is the merest prose. As he scales the heights the boulders that beset his path are nothing but limestone rocks, nor will he ever mistake them for the heavenly stairs. The unseen force that withstands his passage on the mountain path is nothing but the north wind. No traveller unknown wrestles with him till break of day, nor, as he goes on his way, do the angels of God meet him. If Luz be the place of his casual slumber, Luz it will still remain; for why should he call it Bethel? What Esau was we can read in the character of his descendants—the Bedouin, who still tramps the unproductive desert; the Edomite, who in the day of Jerusalem cried, "Down with it"; the Idumæan king, who, when the Lord of Glory came to crown the purpose of the ages, put on Him a purple robe and, with his soldiers, mocked Him. The "profane" person is the man who does not reverence time; for whom the past has no lessons, the future no possibilities; in whose life is no movement, in whose character no progress; who, for all his restlessness, would be the last to whom we

should apply those words which transform our estimate of Jacob and say that he "went on."

You can understand neither God nor man unless you take account of time. That is why the grace of patience occupies so prominent a place in the ethics of the New Testament. "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth, and hath long patience." If there is one thing that the scientific method of the modern age has taught us, surely it is this. If you trifle with time, you not only play with reality, but you deprive yourself of all knowledge of things as they really are. Not only will your life be frivolous, but your criticism will be worthless. Movement, which is only another name for history, enters into the very constitution of the universe. The man who lives only for the present is able neither to be nor to know. He is the fool who hath said in his heart there is no God. His is indeed a meaningless existence. For what is the present? It is no mere commonplace to say that it is the most fugitive, the most evanescent, the most shadowless of all things. Like a point, it has neither length nor breadth nor magnitude. There is no such thing as the present. You stay to grasp it, and you clutch the air. The snowflake on the river has more permanence. You can arrest neither its pleasures nor its pains. They issue from the womb of anticipa-

tion only to fall into the grave of memory. Time is ever on the wing. It is fleeing, fleeing, fleeing. What we vainly call the present is, in fact, a narrow section of the past. The world is travelling, and we must perforce travel with it. Nay, there is one alternative. Stand still we cannot. But if we do not go on our way we may wander. One or other it is bound to be—traveller or vagrant, Jacob or Esau, Israelite or Arab—treading the high road or scouring the sand. And if there is no movement in your character, no purpose in your career; if you decline reflection, and dissipate on the projects of an hour those powers which ought to be directed towards the destiny of a life, then, whatever be your qualities of head or heart, however amiable your personality, free though you are from social dishonour or degrading vice, kindly and tolerant though your attitude towards the world may be, one verdict, and one verdict alone, is possible. You are nothing but a piece of profanity in a sacred universe.

But "Jacob went on." The words occur, as you may remember, in the narrative of the patriarch's approach to Mahanaim, when he was returning from his long exile to the land of his fathers' sepulchres. It was thus that the traveller put himself in line with the creative activity of God as He renews the face of the earth. "Jacob went on," and he became a

different, a transformed, a new Jacob as he journeyed. That is the meaning of his changed name. No one is more alive to the change than the man himself. "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." It is not only the souls that he has gotten in Haran, not only the long caravan of flocks and camels, winding its slow, laborious way up the pass, that make the difference between the shepherd prince and the lad who, with bundle on shoulder, had crossed that mountain range long years before. In his dreams he has been with God. In the night he has wrestled with his Maker. With power he has at length prevailed. Therefore his name is called Israel.

Would that we could understand more fully than we do the meaning of this creative quality—that is, the power of gaining something new and, it may be, altogether unsuspected, in the character which is really moving forward! It would make us more gentle in our judgment of others, more hopeful and courageous in the struggle with ourselves. Our censorious criticisms, when we lay hold of some indication of character, afforded by a neighbour's actions, may be true enough to-day, while they would slanderously misrepresent him were they repeated to-morrow. No one is really what he may happen to be at any moment in his career.

Whenever there is movement in a man's personality, the very qualities which have issued in mean deeds or despicable actions may become the foundation of the nobler self. Jacob begins by overreaching man. He ends by prevailing with God. His patience, his pertinacity, his subordination of the nearer to the further good—the very qualities that have made the Hebrew feared and hated in the markets of Europe—are those that have best served the purposes of his splendid religious history. You do not know Jacob, you cannot understand the beauty of his character, you will not recognise the simplicity of his faith, till you have followed his moving tent through the vicissitudes of a long career. Those glimpses of the Divine presence which he has caught from time to time in the midway of his mortal life become the inward light of his closing hours. The God of Bethel is no casual visitant on the mountaintops of spiritual vision, but the real Presence in history Who, even when we know it not, is guiding us with His eye and gathering us into the continuity of His purpose. That is the strong conviction that breathes in the blessing of the sons of Joseph, which is the last confession of the traveller's faith. "The God before Whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God Which hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which hath redeemed me

from all evil, bless the lads." A majestic succession is here, a laying-on of hands, which binds together the generations of God's servants as they march to the Land of Promise. Yes, we must explain Jacob—and we may surely apply the name, as the Bible itself does, to the great race which sprang from the patriarch's loins and of which according to the flesh Christ came—not by the meanness of his origin, but by the splendour of his destiny. There were times when the Prophets bade their people to look unto the rock whence they were hewn, to the hole of the pit whence they were digged, to the Syrian ready to perish who was their father. But it was to read the wonder of God's creative purpose, not to resolve the apparent glories of their later history into the mean and beggarly elements of its undistinguished beginnings. "Jacob went on."

The age in which we live has been one of vast disclosures in the science and history of mankind. If Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents, the far-off progenitor of the human race was an ugly beast swinging in trees. "In the image of God" says the first chapter of Genesis. Why, it is the very lineaments of the devil that seem to grimace among the branches! That is the rock from which we were hewn, this the pit from which we were digged; a gibbering ape! Well, and what then? Why linger in the forest

primeval, watching the ungainly capers of our distant ancestor as it lumbers to the topmost boughs or grinds its idiotic teeth? Is that man? Has Time no contribution to make? Has the long evolutionary process nothing to add, no new creations to accomplish? Only when the far-off final transformation is accomplished shall the saying be wholly true, "In the image of God made He man."

If you want to know what man is you must travel with him on his adventurous career. You must see him as in obedient faith he rises up to go whither he knows not, to a land that is very far off. You must watch him as he puts out to usury the mysterious gift of speech and builds up a humanity nobler than the foundation on which it arises. Hear how the spirit within him is attuned to finer and yet finer melody, till at last it reproduces the song of the morning stars and vibrates to the music of the spheres. See him as he bends in lowliest yet aspiring worship and lifts his triumphant chant to wintry skies. Nor may you stop here. You have not yet seen the image of God. Look within at that strange, tremendous world of thought and purpose, of feeling and affection, which again and again is thwarted and denied expression by the stern necessity of the material world, the iron that enters into the soul. Look forward at the shining, shadowy figure tha

goes before you on the mountain track in the twilight of the dawn. That is man.

Man did I say? Nay, surely it is God. For He too is a traveller, and it is the pilgrims that see Him. How different from the revelation of the Bible is the conception of Divine manifestation that too often we form for ourselves. We imagine the withdrawal of a curtain which discloses a stationary figure clothed in a garment of transcendent attributes—omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient; infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness; throned upon time and pavilioned in space. But this is a God on paper, an abstract God. The God of Whom the Bible speaks is a living God, marching through the ages, travelling in history, taking the risks of development as He beats out a progressive purpose. It is we that are impatient. We would arrest the record of revelation as it unfolds the purpose of the ages. Is this God Who walks in a garden, Who regrets that He has made man, Who smells the fat of the smoking sacrifice? Is this God, Whose blessing is invoked on the treacherous Jael, Who commands the slaughter of the Amalekites, Who tempts David to number Israel? While men are disputing about the consistency of such activities as these with the character of a righteous and spiritual Being, God has passed on His way. Look yet again. There, rising above the plain,

is the Hill which by interpretation is the place of a skull. Against the sky is the Figure of One hanging on a tree. And as we gaze upon the Cross, whereon the angels ascend and descend, there steals into our spirits the great conviction which solves the problem of our changeful life and reads the riddle of the painful earth : " Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

GOD'S DIFFICULTIES

“For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might shew in thee My power.”—ROMANS ix. 17.

VIII

GOD'S DIFFICULTIES

THERE is nothing in the story of the Old Testament to suggest that any one was responsible for the experience of Israel in Egypt save God only. "Fear not to go down into Egypt" are the words which Jacob recognises as an intimation of the Divine Will. For him, as for his father Abraham, one step was enough. The famine was sore in the land. There is no indication that the desperate condition of affairs was in any degree traceable to the ignorance, carelessness, or self-will of the inhabitants. Their plight was due to what in the simple language of our forefathers was called the Hand of God. As in Egypt the Nile had withheld its wonted floods, so probably in Palestine it was failure in the supply of water that had parched the ground. All the circumstances pointed to such a migration as that to which the sons of Israel induced the aged patriarch to consent. For in Egypt there was

corn, gathered by the wise providence of his own brilliant son.

In those rough times the treachery of Judah and his brothers, wicked though it might be, was not altogether without excuse. Genius is often insufferable in its early stages, and virtue is not always recommended by precocity. Joseph would not have been exactly loved, if his lot had been cast in one of the public schools of modern England. But, whatever punishment their cruelty and deceit may have deserved, it was under Joseph's protection that the patriarchal family was at last comfortably settled in the Land of Goshen. What is prominent in the Book of Genesis is the Divine ordering of events, and this is recognised by Joseph himself. "God sent me before you," are the words which he addresses to his conscience-stricken brethren, "to preserve life." And the 105th Psalm ascribes the whole story of the descent into Egypt, not to the consequences of sin, but to the working of Divine Providence:—

"Moreover he called for a dearth upon the land :
And destroyed all the provision of bread,
But he had sent a man before them :
Even Joseph, who was sold to be a bond-servant."

From the point of view, therefore, of those by whom the trek was actually made, the event, which brought upon the race the sad and bitter

memory that precluded the dawn of their history as a nation, came as a happy release from hunger and penury. "A Syrian ready to perish was my father" is the form of words with which the sons of Israel were taught to commemorate the disaster that darkened the declining years of the old sheepmaster. Egypt was the asylum of his old age, not the iron furnace in which he was to expiate his sins. But the waters of Babylon, by which his more remote descendants wept when they remembered Zion, were no sadder sight for weary eyes than the river of Egypt, on the banks of which his nearer kindred groaned under their burdens. And between them there was this great difference. The Chaldean captivity was the punishment of sin; bondage in Egypt was a cruel and unmerited fate.

What, then, does Egypt stand for in the accomplishment of God's designs? Through no fault of their own, through no unfaithfulness to the mind and will of the heavenly Father concerning them, this race with its promise of a great future, its hope of a high destiny, is subjected to the grinding tyranny of a remorseless civilisation. The short experience of Joseph, when his feet were hurt in the stocks, was prophetic of a severity that went far to crush the spirit out of the race to which he belonged. Into their soul the iron entered, but no prince of

the people let them go free. Why, if the God of Israel be He who rules all things with His nod, did He not shield His prophets from harm? Why did He not attain His end by a road less rough, a way less painful for the feet of His saints than one which, like the old paths of the slave-raider in Central Africa, was strewn with dead bodies and bleaching bones?

Beware of suburban views of God! The last thing that we ought to think of revelation is that it will make the story of the world and the experience of life easy. People who argue that it should, and who decline religion because the God in Whom they are required to believe is something less perfect than their own notions of deity, are of all men the most unpractical. They will not look at things as they are, nor attend to the revelation of God, which the facts themselves contain. How vain, for example, and how unprofitable it is to stand and wonder why a human being should, as Thomas Carlyle put it, be shaped like a forked radish; why his comfort should be bound up with the necessity of imperfectly assimilating other portions of the physical universe in the form of food; why he should arrive only gradually at the full exercise of his powers, and not spring, like Athena, fully armed, from the brain of Zeus.

Few contemplative minds among us but are at times visited by these entirely useless reflec-

tions. Few critics of existence but at times are inclined to adopt the phrase put into their mouths by Bishop Butler, and think of the order of nature "as an awkward roundabout method of carrying things on." But, as that same great thinker has reminded us, it is easier to criticise than to construct. Make a world in imagination on the principle of perfect adjustment to your own conception of happiness, your own pattern of virtue. Will it command, I do not say the assent of all men, but your own approval? Whether the world in which we live is in its general outlines the best or the worst of all possible worlds is a problem that lies outside the region of proof. But a duller world than that which I have attempted to suggest it would be indeed difficult to imagine.

The times through which we are now passing are full of problems and perplexities, but we shall all agree that they are very interesting. Deplore as we may the outbreak of feminine violence, there are few among us that would take the tea-tables of Cranford in exchange for the broken windows of the Strand. Appalled as we may be at the possibilities of national disorganisation with which we have been menaced by the great industrial war, we would rather have to face the discontents of a living England than the swinish satisfaction of Sleepy Hollow or the dreaming ease of a land where it is always after-

noon. This is not the place nor is this the time to venture upon any expression of opinion with regard to the merits of controversies in which the issues will be determined as much by the adjustment of details as by the application of general principles. But there is a grave danger lest we should be blind to the lessons of history. Violence is no more a proof of injustice than miracles are a proof of truth. Nor is the welfare of a nation necessarily bound up with the mitigation of immediate suffering. Panic is short-sighted. Courage sees far, because it hopes much. And in moments of crisis we may learn a great deal from what the Bible has to tell us about the sorrows of Israel in Egypt. What in the history of God's people is the meaning of Pharaoh?

St. Paul, slightly paraphrasing the text of the Old Testament, gives the answer. The words he cites were addressed to Rameses II., the Pharaoh of the Exodus, whose cruel, hard, supercilious features look down upon us to-day from the walls of the British Museum. "For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might shew thee My power."

But, you will at once reply, how can this be? If you can only crush a serpent's head by allowing it to bruise your heel, surely this is something less than omnipotence.

Most of the difficulties that beset men's minds

with regard to God arise out of constructing Him in their own image before they will consent to seek Him in His actual working. The provincial freethinker constructs an enlarged portrait of himself, and has then no difficulty in proving that such a personality does not exist. Who knows better than he what a being like himself, raised to the power of infinity, might be expected to accomplish? And that is precisely what neither is, nor was; no, nor ever will be. Do you not think that, when the day comes that we shall know as we are known, we shall be amazed, every one of us, at our own views of God, at what seemed to us to be the meaning of omnipotence, at what we thought were the necessities of a boundless love?

We ought to bring the same frame of mind to the study of the ways of God as that in which we approach all other branches of knowledge. When we are engaged in the pursuit of positive science, it is not the essential nature of the facts that we examine. What they are in themselves is a mystery that eludes our method of inquiry. What we do wish to learn, what an exact observation and analysis of the objects of our study may be expected to disclose, is the best means of acting upon them. In other words, it is the destiny and not the origin of the universe which is the proper subject of human

investigation. If God be Life—conscious, purposeful, personal Life—how do I know what obstacles He may not have had to encounter in the earlier stages of His creative activity? How do I know that self-realisation in matter may not have encompassed Him with limitations not altogether unlike those which, as experience shows, have been imposed upon me? How do I know that a universe could have been summoned into existence in which conflict with evil was not the essential condition of the establishment of the Kingdom of God?

Of the answer to these questions I know nothing. They are problems which the candle of my intelligence cannot illuminate, the faculties of my human brain cannot penetrate. My thought only begins when the world is already in existence. What I see is reality springing out of mystery. For all minds alike clouds and darkness surround the origin of things. All alike must put out to sea and experience the tossing of the waves, for the wind is contrary. But faith sees God coming in the late night watches, walking upon the waters. Not in the annihilation of difficulty, but in the bending of difficulty to the accomplishment of His victorious Will do we see the salvation of God.

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform.
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.”

The Bible is the record of God's victorious working amid the actual conditions of the world's development. The universe is God's great opportunity, as it is yours and mine. In the *Te Deum* sung by the liberated captives on the farther shore of the Red Sea Jehovah is celebrated as a Man of War. And in the subsequent history of the people, when as of yore the ploughers ploughed upon their back and made long furrows, it was the remembrance of "the years of the right hand of the Most High" that sustained a drooping courage and confirmed a faltering faith. The Song of Moses commemorated a signal act of creative deliverance. "For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might shew in thee My power." Ask those emancipated Israelites whether they would be without one hour of that harsh captivity, one stroke of the oppressor's lash. Ask Miriam and her jubilant dancers whether they do not understand the place of Pharaoh in the purposes of God. Amid the clash of the timbrels the answer comes: "Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."

We can understand God's triumph in history, because it is a human victory. "In all their affliction He was afflicted," cried the great prophet of the Exile, "and the angel of His presence saved them." It is when, sharing our

risks and bearing our sorrows, He becomes our Redeemer, that we become aware of the mighty fact that God is our Father. At this moment God is my Creator, for underneath are the everlasting arms. He has never despaired. The breastplate of righteousness, He wears it. The shield of faith, with it God Himself quenches the fiery darts of the foe.

What is the spiritual significance of the Temptation of Jesus Christ but this? It clinches and brings to a supreme issue what has been suggested all down the pages of revelation. Our God is a human God. When Jesus is tempted to make stones bread, or perhaps to doubt His own prerogative of Deity, because He knows He cannot do it, we miss the whole force of the evil suggestion if we set in sharp contrast the Godhead and the Manhood of the Saviour. We think of God as one to Whom it would be quite natural to make stones bread, or to cast Himself unhurt from a pinnacle of the Temple. We think of the kingdoms of this world as belonging to the Almighty without any effort on His part to win them. So Christ's choice of the method of service appears but as part of that condescension whereby he voluntarily restrained the beams of Deity.

But surely there is something extraordinarily mechanical and unreal about the taking of the Manhood into God, if it is only thus that we

can represent it to ourselves. To separate the Godhead of Christ from His Manhood is a task as impossible as it is unnecessary. The earthly story which culminated in the Cross is the last and fullest exposition of the Humanity of God, which reveals itself in all His dealings with the children of men. If we are made in God's image—and that is the noblest faith about themselves that mortal men may entertain—then God is like us. Our conception of His power must never make us think of Him as some superior genie, who builds enchanted palaces or wafts us on fairy carpets to ambrosial bowers. God has His difficulties. That is how He is ever represented in the Bible, and no consideration of the mystery that surrounds His existence should rob us of the wondrous picture of a personal, living God. If "men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things," can we not understand how this process may correspond to something in the very heart of God? It is of the very essence of personal life to be lifted on the waves of difficulty to the accomplishment of its purposes. Difficulty is the means of salvation. It is by water that Noah is saved from perishing. "For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might shew in thee My power." That is the interpretation of those frowning providences behind which there smiles the face of a Father.

For you and me, as we encounter the storms of life, what gives us courage—a man's courage—with which to grapple the tempest is the Presence in the boat. "He entered into a boat and His disciples followed Him." When the furnace is hot, what opens our lips to sing praise in the fires is the great conviction that we bear the heat with God. "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? . . . I see four men loose . . . and the aspect of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

The difficulties of God are consummated on Calvary. Men have always found the Cross a cause of offence. That God should die, that the last great obstacle to the development of their own lives should reappear in the history of God, seems to them scandalous indeed. They imagine that somehow we should be able to accept the declaration that God is love, that He forgives iniquity and sin, though the declaration had no relation whatever to the fact of Golgotha. Tell us the parable of the Prodigal Son, and we want nothing further than that touching story to make us arise and go to our Father.

But there is no evidence whatever that this would be so. You cannot separate the story from Him who told it. Love has not proved itself to the uttermost till it has broken every barrier down. In the world as we know it (and we are concerned with no other) love cannot be,

unless it suffers. It must encounter dangers, it must wrestle with death, if it is to reach the fulness of its glorious perfection. We have no experience of a condition where to bask in the sunlight of a serene affection were paradise enow. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." That is the cry of the human heart when on Golgotha it beholds its God. O Cross, O bitter Cross, O Tree of suffering and of glory, this is the word which the Lord hath spoken of thee: "For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might shew in thee the power of My prevailing love."

THE GREAT ADVENTURER

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.”—1 JOHN iv. 10.

IX

THE GREAT ADVENTURER

CHRISTIANITY is the religion of Redemption. That is its distinguishing characteristic. It summons men to communion, not with a remote divinity who sleeps and must be awakened—or, which is practically the same, exists only for thought, and must be reconstructed by logical analysis—but with a concrete, forthcoming, creative Personality, who acts in history and is manifested in experience. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” This has ever been its proclamation, its message, its good news. The atmosphere in which it lives is that not of philosophy but of fact. Our thoughts are fixed on reality. It is not an interpretation of history, a theory of experience. It is itself an experience, itself a history. It has its own facts and its own action. Time, place, and circumstance all go to its making. At a particular moment and under given conditions God intervened in the life of mankind, pro-

foundly modifying its destiny, giving a new direction to its activities, and diverting its progressive development into lines harmonious with His own purpose. The Love of God, as it is represented in the New Testament, is not an ideal attribute of an unchanging and absolute Being, but a vital reality accomplishing itself in the stream of existence. Herein is love, that God sent His Son. This is Christianity.

The phrase—"the propitiation for our sins"—sums up the meaning, and gives the valuation, of that career of Jesus of Nazareth in which Christians have believed and maintained that they were able to discern the working of the living God Who is their loving Father. It is borrowed from the language of ritual custom and sacrifice, which no one can afford to neglect who wishes to understand the genius of religion. But it is not my immediate purpose either to justify or to criticise the terms in which the deep, spiritual thinker, to whom we owe the epistle, has attempted to convey to other minds the significance of what he had himself heard and seen. Suffice it to say that he is not alone in the terminology which he employs. Not one of those great representative writers, who in the books of the New Testament have given to the world the classic presentation of Christianity, but resorts to the same circle of ideas. The Epistle to the

Hebrews, which moves from beginning to end among the analogies of the Mosaic covenant, is, of course, built upon the theory that the Levitical sacrifices were types in a conventional and representative system of what was actually accomplished in the world of reality. But St. Paul and St. Peter, though their minds are not confined to these narrow grooves, are no less emphatic in the use of sacrificial language to describe the work of Christ.

The point to which I wish to draw your attention is not the adequacy or appropriateness of this language, nor yet the impossibility of expressing a true Christian experience in terms remote from priestly associations, but rather the fact to which it bears irrefragable testimony. It is the Cross of Jesus in which historical Christianity is centred. Nothing else but this could have suggested these analogies. Nothing else could have made the Son of Man, not the exponent of a religious system, but Himself the focus of religious worship, the new and living Way through which, as His disciples believed, they had access to God. However true it may be to say that Jesus left us an example that we should follow in His steps, however lofty the teaching of Him of whom it was declared that "never man spake like this man," the phenomenon, which for nineteen centuries has been called Christianity, rests upon the Death

of Jesus, conceived as a reconciling act through which the children of men are brought into fellowship with the Father. "What is Christianity?" we ask with Dr. Harnack of Berlin. And with him we answer that the primitive community called Jesus its Lord, recognising Him, that is, not primarily as a religious teacher but as the object of a religion, the channel through which they were actually brought into living fellowship with God, because He had sacrificed His life for it and was even then sitting at the right hand of the Father. No reading of the Gospel narrative can for a moment lay claim to historical continuity with the Christianity of all ages for which the Death of Christ is not the fact of crucial significance.

We have only to make this clear, and at once we cut athwart some of the most cherished misconceptions of religion which have too often obscured the view even of those who pass for thoughtful men. It is regarded, not as the active response of the spirit of men to a work wrought on their behalf by a God who reveals Himself in action, but as the recognition of a spiritual Being, existing in a condition of static and unchanging repose, from whose nature and attributes the veil has now been lifted. Revelation is the disclosure of the Divine portrait, and, if miracles were wrought by

Him in whom dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily, this was only to arrest attention and to convince the beholder that when he saw Jesus he was indeed gazing upon the Eternal God. And for those who, like ourselves, have inherited the habits of thought which result from the constant application of the scientific method, and who are impressed with the uniformities rather than with the eccentricities of the physical order, the tendency to interrogate the spirit of Jesus in order to discover the ideas of God for which He stands, rather than to invest with precise and objective values even the salient events of His career, increases rather than declines.

Now, if there is one thing that the experience of life ought to teach us, surely it is this. Revelation of character, like happiness, is a by-product of existence, and not its object, a reflex result of action, and not its conscious purpose. A spider taught Bruce perseverance, but it would have astonished the spider to be told that this was its proper function. If a man lays down his life for his friend, this is not to show how much he loves him, but to avert the danger which threatens him. And as the moving picture of the world passes before me, I may be filled with an immense curiosity to dis-

cover whether it has a meaning, and, if so, what that meaning is: whether there are any purposes except my own which are striving to fulfil themselves amid the cross-currents of restless energy, and whether all are knit up into the unity of one ultimate purpose which is striving towards its complete realisation. But I do not delude myself with the vain supposition that the sun rises, and the stars shine, and the earth brings forth, in order that I may know that the Lord omnipotent reigneth. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork." God does manifest Himself to the faithful and true heart in the facts of life. But they are the facts of life, not a cleverly constructed device for the conveyance of a special revelation. God does disclose Himself in the human conscience. But conscience is the judge and guide of men in the practical affairs of their daily conduct, not a private wire by which they receive intimations of the Eternal. Life is the chief concern of whatsoever lives, and thought is but that criticism of life by the aid of which they who are capable of its exercise are enabled to live more perfectly. If we would see God, we must watch Him as He works.

The first impression which the world conveys

to the mind of him who observes it is that it goes on. It never continueth in one stay. The second is, that in some sort this movement is a rational progress. As you stand over an ant-heap the seething mass of tiny creatures seems at first to be engaged in constant cross-passage and intersection, like the mazes of an intricate dance. As you continue to observe, you can detect here and there an insect with a burden on its back, threading its way somewhat more painfully, but at length it, too, is lost in the general movement. Then, perhaps, you are told something of the habits of the tribe: how work is really being done, ends are really being reached, purposes are really being achieved. That is the sort of way in which we come to realise the element of creative purpose in the great ant-heap on which our own destiny has been cast. Only here we begin by recognising that, however aimless our own lives may be, we are nevertheless engaged, moment by moment, in doing something, in using the material which surrounds us to give concrete reality to purposes that have their birth within the darkness of our own spirits. What are the habitations of men but matter mingled with thought, developments to which direction has been given by the exercise of conscious will? Then, little by little, a careful

analysis of natural processes suggests that the same factor is present even where it might be least expected. You have not, for example, explained the response of a germ-cell to its environment, the issue of which is an adaptive variation, by employing the familiar phraseology of evolutionary theory to express what has, in fact, taken place. Life, as we know it, is neither the arbitrary exercise of unimpeded will nor the stern, unbending operation of necessary causes that mock self-conscious personality under the guise of freedom. It is the construction of the future by the aid of a past progressively known and understood.

Such a view of the action of creative consciousness is not in the least invalidated by a full recognition of the stubborn resistance which the nature of the material affords. "Even the gods cannot change the past," said the old Greek poet. And this fact, hard as it may have been for human nature to learn the lesson, serves only to ennoble and enhance the value of persistent and persevering effort. When I was thinking over what I was to say this morning,* I was attracted by the labours of a tortoise, which had been placed for greater safety on the hearth. He had become dissatisfied, like all adventurers, with the bounds of his habitation. I watched him as he approached the rail that enclosed the

* See Preface, p. xxvii.

fireplace. He went to one end of the obstacle, then to the other. Then one foot was lifted to the rail, and then the other. The little snake-like head was twisted hither and thither over the top of the barrier, and the beady eyes gazed out upon the regions beyond. Then, as it appeared, with infinite strain the hard, heavy dome was elevated on the slender, leathery legs stretched to their utmost capacity. Then it was poised giddily on one only, while the other struck out in the hope of some leverage behind. The end seemed all but gained, when a clatter of the fireirons announced abortive efforts and disappointed hopes. But the optimism of some at least of God's creatures is invincible. I looked again, and behold the beast was balanced on the opposing edge, and, descending with a thud upon the side of its desire, was off to fresh fields and pastures new.

We have here an epitome of the struggle of the centuries. Creation, as we know it, is not the waving of magic wands or the rubbing of enchanted rings, but the age-long struggle with the painful earth, and the conversion of obstacles into means. What is that Science, the advancement of which is the object of the Association which is now gathered in your ancient City of Dundee, but the patient study of things as they are, that Nature may be conquered by obeying it. The mighty forces

of the world—the waters that devastate, the fires that consume, the angels stationed at the gates of Eden to keep the way of the Tree of Life—shall, indeed, become the observant ministers of human need; but they are not to be summoned with the clapping of hands. Dædalus will scale the heavens, but many an Icarus must fall headlong from the clouds with bleeding body and broken wing before the chariot of man's undismayed endeavour rides triumphant upon the wind. That is the story of creation from its first page until now. Have we any right so to define omnipotence as to leave no problems for God?

This, at any rate, is true: that Christianity proceeds on no such assumption. The record of Scripture is the story of how God has grappled with a great spiritual problem. Every man who knows anything of the plague of his own heart is aware that the most immediate, the most insistent, the most appalling problem that confronts the children of men is the problem of the human spirit. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" is a cry wrung from the lips of thousands to whom the story of Adam is as mythical as that of Hercules. Nor will it be appeased by soothing assurances of a merciful Providence, which the facts of experience too often seem to deny. "Do you suppose," is the grim question that Mr. Bernard Shaw puts into

the mouth of one of his characters, "heaven is like earth, where people persuade themselves that what is done can be undone by repentance ; that what is spoken can be unspoken by withdrawing it ; that what is true can be annihilated by a general agreement to give it the lie? No : heaven is the home of the masters of reality." That is only another way of stating what Butler said long ago in his plain, straightforward speech : "Things are and will be what they are and will be, and the consequences are and will be what they are and will be." It is no use criticising Christianity except by reference to the conditions which it is designed to meet. When I look at Jesus Christ I do not see in Him any answer to the great metaphysical and moral difficulties which underlie existence. I hail Him, not as my celestial philosopher, but as my Divine Redeemer. He is the response, not to my intellectual curiosity, but to my spiritual need. I see Love persistent until love prevails, winning its way to final triumph through failure, and opposition, and defeat, as the river cleaves its passage to the sea. I see obedience enslaving Death itself, that vanquisher of love, and turning it into the means and instrument of its victory.

"Over the mountains
And over the waves,
Under the fountains
And under the graves ;

Under floods that are deepest,
Which Neptune obey ;
Over rocks that are steepest
Love will find out the way.

“ You may train the eagle
To stoop to your fist ;
Or you may inveigle
The phoenix of the east ;
The lioness, ye may move her
To give o'er her prey ;
But you'll ne'er stop a lover :
He will find out his way.”

Yes. God is the Great Adventurer. Christ is the Pilgrim of Love. The quest was none of His seeking. The problem was none of His setting. But He fainted not, neither was discouraged, till He brought forth judgment unto victory. That, in briefest compass, is the faith of a Christian. Does it seem to some that such a religion moves in a narrower orbit than they would fain have assigned to it? Let us remember that the serviceableness of each instrument of human advancement is measured, not by the variety of the uses to which it may be put, but by the thoroughness with which it accomplishes its proper work. The days are not far past when men claimed for the methods of Science that they would enter all doors in heaven and earth. Now that experience restricts it to a less ambitious path the sovereignty of Science is

none the less secure. So is it with Religion. Christ is the Redeemer. He is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." In His reconciling work I have learned, as none else can teach me, "what love might be, hath been indeed, and is."

FORCE AND SPIRIT

“There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God.”—PSALM xlv. 4 (R. V.).

X

FORCE AND SPIRIT

A COMPANY of simple folk, singing at the top of their voices, in some obscure mission room, the words of the popular refrain "Shall we gather at the river?" would probably little suspect the long and splendid history of the metaphor under which they celebrate the joys of the blessed. Some of you may be familiar with one of those villages to be found in our English hill-country, where a beck fresh out of the cleft side of the mountain brawls and babbles with peaceful music down the central street. On either side the tall trees give to the white road they shelter from the sun the appearance of a shady boulevard, and the necessary touch of colour is imparted by the honeysuckle or red tropeolum which climbs over the porches of greystone cottages, and the banks of roses which rise above the low garden walls. Looking up the village in the direction from which the waters flow, you catch a glimpse, it may be,

of the church tower amid the green branches. And immediately there arise in the memory the words of St. John the Divine: "He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the midst of the street thereof."

But it is amid scenes very different from this that the great idea of the stream of living water, which has played a conspicuous part in the religious thought of Christendom, first finds its way into the prophetic intelligence of the Church.

This psalm at once recalls the inspiring story of the invasion of Sennacherib, when the taunts of the Great King's Rabshakeh under the battlements of Zion were as the blast of the terrible ones against the wall. The pitiless march of the Assyrian host had been compared by the prophet Isaiah to the waters of the Euphrates, strong and many. As when a great river in the season of rains rises inch by inch and foot by foot till it becomes first a turbid torrent and then a devouring sea, the waves roar and rage, and the very mountains shake with the swelling of it, so the march of the armies of Nineveh overwhelmed the lands which they traversed. That was the terror which now threatened with dire destruction the mountain city of Jerusalem. For its inhabitants a timely submission meant deportation to the cities of

the Medes, while stubborn resistance offered but the prospect of relentless and cruel torture. As for the existence of the city itself, that was scarcely worth a day's purchase. Its defences would be dismantled, its palaces razed, its temple burned. From the moment that Sennacherib's commissioner appeared at its gates, not to offer terms to Hezekiah and his ministers, but to corrupt the allegiance of the common people, all hope of national independence might well have seemed to disappear.

Rising out of the heart of the rock on which the Temple of Solomon stood was a little rivulet, a fountain of living water, a stream which is described in the book of Isaiah as "the waters of Shiloah that go softly." If the serried ranks of the terrible enemy, which like the waves of the sea were surging over Immanuel's land, represented those stern forces of the world, the fury of which was as inexorable as Fate, this river, which for many a long year had made glad the city of God, was to those who believed in the destiny of Israel the symbol of a Divine Presence that would never forsake the elect people. God had longed for Zion. This insignificant hill He had chosen to put His Name there. She would never be moved, so the prophets believed, not because her bulwarks were impregnable, but because God was in the midst of her. This was what inspired the

faith and courage of Isaiah in this desperate crisis of the national history. At that tremendous moment he is the one man who has a clear and absolute conviction which enables him to dictate to king and people alike a policy of masterly inactivity. Statesmen can do nothing but rend their garments. The king carries the insolent challenge of the foe into the unbroken silence of the sacred shrine, and spreads it before Jehovah. It is a confession of the extremity in which he finds himself. The situation was like that which is suddenly created in a crowded building when the cry of fire has been raised. The man of the moment will be he who can restrain the excited multitude with the peremptory order to sit still. In the hour of Jerusalem's trial, when the nerves of its citizens, from the king on his throne to the men sitting on the wall, were strained well-nigh to breaking, it is the voice of Isaiah that prevents the fatal panic. The hard metallic ring of the Assyrian's word becomes hollow to the ears of those who listen. The exhibition of resistless force becomes almost an illusion of the senses. The two self-evident things in the whole universe are the Israel of God and His Presence in the midst of them. No rabble of submissive slaves bearing earth and water issues from the fast-closed gates. A stillness as of the tomb reigns in the silent city.

There are times when men need to be reminded that the cause of God is imperilled, not by the forces which are arrayed against it, but only by the little faith of those to whom God entrusts His Presence. When the storm falls upon the lake, it matters not whether Christ is awake or asleep, but only whether He is in the boat. God can never become the sport of the universe which He inhabits. The quaking of the earth, the removal of the mountains, are part of that universal movement of the forces of nature which have their ebb no less than their flow, and which wax only to wane. Take but a large enough view of the sequence of events, and catastrophe itself is seen to be only one of the ways through which God works out His purpose. If there has been any real and living experience of the Presence of God—His Righteousness, His Love, His free Spirit—this is sufficient for the men of faith, whether in the clash of empires or amid the destruction of worlds. That is the secret of the heroism of martyrs and the patience of saints. It is the faith that overcomes the world.

What would have happened if Isaiah had failed to rally his countrymen to the policy of patient endurance? The people would have yielded to the blandishments of the Assyrian. Zion would have been destroyed. The inhabi-

tants of Judah would, like their neighbours in Samaria, have been dispersed among the towns and villages of a corner of the empire remote from their ancestral homes. Never again might they have been able to regain their identity as a people or to restore the desolation of former generations. Meanwhile the destinies of Nineveh would have reached their accomplishment. The expedition against the Pharaoh, the objective of that westward movement of the armies of Assyria, of which the reduction of Jerusalem was but an interlude, would have terminated in a disaster no less sudden than that which has become part of the world's history. Like Napoleon from Moscow, the proud Sennacherib would have returned from the borders of Egypt with the remnant of an army. The same impressive catastrophe, ascribed in the Hebrew chronicles to the breath of the destroying angel, in the traditions of Egypt to the work of the powers invisible symbolised by an attack of swarming mice, would have proved the ruin of his ambition. The same fatal retreat would have been succeeded by the startling event, the news of which reverberated like a shock from east to west of the vast dominion, when, like Lucifer fallen from heaven, the man, whose style had been the king of kings, went down

into Hades, stabbed by the impious hands of Adrammelech and Sharezer in the house of Nisroch his god. Then would have followed the inroad of the barbarous Scythians, the uprising of the Medes and Babylonians, and the crash which Nahum celebrates with a yell of bitter exultation, as with a realism worthy of Walt Whitman he describes the noise of the whip, and the noise of the rattling of wheels, and the multitude of slain and the great heap of carcasses, in the day which saw the fall of the great city and ended for ever the whoredoms of Nineveh.

The capitulation of Jerusalem at the summons of Rabshakeh would, so far as we can judge, have left the balance of general history entirely unaffected. The host of Assyria would have been decimated at Pelusium. Sennacherib would have died by the hands of his sons. The fatal hour of Nineveh would have struck. But what a tragedy if the city of God had failed to be true to its own experience at the very moment when the tide of outward events was upon the turn, when the fury of the storm was about to abate, when the night was even now departing! But Isaiah's sublime faith in the Presence of God, attested not by universal judgments but by the experience of His loving Spirit in the people's own life, enabled the prophet so to visualise the progress of events

as to anticipate the immediate future. If even the fine perception of the Greek could detect the presage of approaching woe in the insolence of overweening pride, there is little cause for surprise that under the tense pressure of a tremendous moment the greatest of the Hebrew seers should have foreshadowed the doom of the insolent Assyrian. "Behold, I will put a spirit in him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." It was enough that in the supreme hour, when the men of Jerusalem became the arbiters of their own destiny, the heart of the people remained true to its experience of the living God. Therefore with joy did they draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Nor were the men of Jerusalem alone in needing the calm voice that restored the quietness and confidence which was their only strength. The illusion of the great world-forces is upon us all. We, too, in the hour of trial, know the stress of being tempted to refuse the waters of Shiloah which go softly, and to ally ourselves with the giants whose tread shakes the earth. Look, for example, at that divine gift of Reason, which distinguishes man from the brute, and is the sure witness to the human spirit of the Presence of God. In moments of undisturbed reflection, when, like

Plato in the groves of Academe, or Emerson beneath the oaks of Concord, we meditate on the inner meaning of the universe, this crystal spring which rises like a fountain in the shrine of our personality commands our admiring reverence. We bathe in its waters. We drink of the river of its pleasures. Nor does it seem to us that there is any need to cry with our English poet:—

“Arise and fly
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.”

But the days come when the nerves are not so steady, the mind is not so calm, the problem of life is not so simple as it appears in the still hours of a summer holiday. It is not easy to sit still when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall, and the words of sobriety and truth are drowned amid the shouts of battle. How many among us are prepared to believe that the words of our Saviour are really meant as practical counsel: “Resist not him that is evil”? How many will resolutely refuse to acknowledge that the ultimate argument of human society is the appeal to force? When panic drives the multitude to feverish activity, do we retain that mastery of ourselves which Reason gives, and set our seal to the truth of

the old proverb: "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city"?

Or, once again, how is it with our fidelity to conscience under the attack of a competitive world that threatens to overwhelm us in its remorseless grip? Conscience is the fountain-head of the communion of the soul with God. By another figure it has been called "the candle of the Lord within us." No one that has felt himself the subject of its judgments but has had a direct and personal experience of the Presence of God. Where conscience has its seat and exercises its authority, there is Immanuel's land and the City of the Great King. But conscience flourishes in the cloister, not in the marketplace. What room is there for its tender scruples and its nice distinctions in London's central roar? You must conform to the ordinary customs, to the average morality, to the accepted maxims, or find yourself borne down by the rush of traffic and the hurry of business. Men cannot stand upon refinements of conduct or subtle points of commercial integrity when chances must be seized, bargains struck, situations accepted. To hesitate is to be lost. To stand and question the morality of the compliances, which necessity dictates, is like stopping to think in the middle of the road between the Bank and the Mansion House. "Thus saith the Way of the World: Make your

peace with me, and come out to me ; and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern." The stern struggle for daily bread, the wolf that is never very far from the threshold of multitudes, the forces of our complex civilisation that are a standing menace to thousands of toilers—these are the invaders that disturb our rest and threaten our life. Hard is it to be silent and steadfast. Hard is it to trust in the peace of God that flows as a river, and to believe that there is no abiding happiness apart from the testimony of a good conscience.

And, lastly, what of our faith in Christ? Time was, perhaps, when we rejoiced in the beautiful simplicity of the Gospel. We have memories of a time, before the weary city claimed us, when our lot was cast among scenes such as that which I attempted to describe at the outset of my sermon. When in the twilight of the summer evening we said our childhood's prayers to the accompaniment of the murmuring waters, or when on that first Sunday of our communicant life we received among the kneeling hamlet "the chalice of the grapes of God," it was not difficult to believe in the Father Who had reconciled us to Himself by the precious blood of His dear Son. The bleating of the flock upon the fell recalled the Lamb of God. When the storm gathered in the hills we thought how

the Good Shepherd had given His life for the sheep. These were days when no narrow logic had raised the ethical difficulties of believing in a Supreme Being, no cynical suggestion of the shambles had cast its shadow over the moral beauty of the sacrifice of Christ. The harmony of the soul, naturally Christian, was still undisturbed.

But then the spell of the simple, unsophisticated life was broken. You were plunged by the circumstances of your opening career into the problems and perplexities of modern thought. The world into which you have been driven has no apparent use for the motives and experiences of Christianity. The call is not for saints but for strong men. The men and women about you proclaim by their practical aims, if not by their avowed convictions, that your religion is altogether out of touch with its environment. "God on the Cross!" It is the inversion of that true moral order which is to give mankind the dominion! It is the morality of slaves, not of free men, that this paradox of sacrifice creates. We hear the brazen voice of the philosophic Rabshakeh crying aloud, "Let not the pale Galilean deceive you. Self-assertion and not sacrifice is the road by which we enter into life. Come out to me; I will give you vineyards and oliveyards. It is the strong that inherit the earth."

Ah! but it is the world-forces that are the great illusion. It is armies and empires that vanish like the visions of the night. They follow the law of physical nature. They ebb, they flow. They wax, they wane. They rise, they fall. Reason, Conscience, the Cross of Christ—these are the Word of the Lord that abideth for ever. Where is the interest of that stirring scene in a great tragedy, which was enacted beneath the walls of Jerusalem? Not in the prosperous Rabshakeh of the king of kings, for all his proud look and his high stomach. His principles are, indeed, still with us. They are called the noble art of self-defence, and are highly popular among the worshippers of a crude athleticism. But the thews and muscles of the Assyrian are profoundly unattractive. His big voice has no character. It is sounding brass and clanging cymbal. But when we turn our gaze to that afflicted and poor people on the wall of the beleaguered city the eye kindles. There stands Isaiah in all the majesty of spiritual power. "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee" is the cry of his exultant faith. No sword is unsheathed to make good that victorious challenge, but the legions of Nineveh thunder to their doom. A few nights ago I lay tossing uneasily on my bed, unable to sleep for the fierce heat of an almost

tropical September. Suddenly over the roofs of the city there stole a breath, and the breath became a wind, and the summer had fled. So in the grey dawn of a new day the Lord arose and His enemies were scattered: "*Afflavit Deus*—God blew with His wind." But the waters of Shiloah still flowed softly.

THE GOSPEL AND MYSTICISM

“The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit,
that we are children of God.”—ROMANS viii. 16.

XI

THE GOSPEL AND MYSTICISM

NOTHING distinguishes more clearly the religion of the Bible from those popular philosophies which claim to bring the soul of man into touch with the life of the universe than its teaching concerning the Spirit. There is all the difference in the world between getting in tune with the infinite and becoming children of God. It is the latter which, according to the New Testament, has the witness of the Spirit.

It is quite clear, in the first place, that the Christian experience, which this passage places on record, has nothing to do with theories which merge the human spirit in the divine. The phenomena of ecstasy are well known to all students of religion. There have always been people who have sought to identify divine influence with a vapour like the fumes which rose from the tripod at Delphi and overpowered the personality of the Sibyl. Some modern psychologists have, on the other hand, believed that they

could detect a substratum of personal life underlying those manifestations of thought and feeling and will with which we are familiar in our daily waking existence. And here, in the deep and dim recesses of the subconscious, is supposed to lie the point where the divine acts upon and sustains the human.

Few among us are altogether strangers to those weird stirrings of the soul, half-recovered memories, intimations of an unrealised world, which have inspired the song of poets or provoked the speculations of philosophers, now surging into an unwonted swell of rapturous exaltation, now beating beneath the surface like a continuous undercurrent of life. Who has not at some time asked himself the question whether that little personality which expresses itself in the clear-cut workings of the brain, in the well-defined sensations of the work-a-day world, in the reasoned inferences of daily life, be after all the true man, the genuine self? The average middle-class man, whose stated occupation is to follow the fluctuations of the market, and whose scarcely less serious amusement is golf, finds himself from time to time shedding a tear over some simple bit of artistic pathos, or fumbling with Adelaide Procter after an impossible lost chord. It is then that he begins to debate whether the tasks that make up the work of the ordinary day are not an interlude in an existence

of which the casual emotions, the unconsidered aspirations, the surplus activity of a busy life are the abiding reality. Most of us are aware that we have strange corners, darkened chambers, secret cabinets in a soul which never fully reveals its shy secrets even to ourselves. We are shrewd, practical, unromantic folk.

“ But often, in the world’s most crowded streets,
 But often, in the din of strife,
 There rises an unspeakable desire
 After the knowledge of our buried life ;
 A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
 In tracking out our true, original course ;
 A longing to inquire
 Into the mystery of this heart which beats
 So wild, so deep in us—to know
 Whence our lives come and where they go.”

Because there is something vague and indefinite about this yearning for the larger life, because those who claim such a vision of God seem to be incapable of describing the method by which it is attained, we shall be foolish indeed if we ignore it altogether as the product of devout imagination. Nor, as it seems to me, is the age upon which we have entered one that is unlikely to give the mystic his proper place in the history and development of religion. St. Paul himself speaks of groanings that cannot be uttered as an experience which the Christian may expect, the counterpart, as it

would seem, of the groaning and travailing earth. Nor can we forget how he claims for himself visions and revelations of the Lord, in which, as he expresses it, he was caught up into Paradise, and heard (again he uses practically the same adjective) "unspeakable words." There are many people who claim St. Paul as a mystic. It would be as true to represent him as a Calvinist. Large souls have many sides. The main current of his thought is neither one nor the other. He introduces the reference to these experiences with the sentence, "I must needs glory, though it is not expedient." Some Christians boasted of their gift of tongues, and the Apostle feels himself bound to say, "I thank God I speak with tongues more than you all." Others gloried in their descent from Abraham, and St. Paul is forced to proclaim himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He no more exalts his visions than he exalts his nationality or his miraculous gifts. These things have all their uses, but they are none of them essential to his Christian discipleship. Whatever he may have been in his personal life, in his public capacity as a preacher of the Gospel St. Paul was no mystic. He did not confound the by-ways of secret experience with the highway of evangelical truth. And the passage from the Epistle to the Romans, which we are now to consider, sets before us, not the ecstatic commerce with the

Divine enjoyed by the gifted and exceptional, but the plain, ordinary experience of the unromantic and normal Christian.

“The Spirit,” he says, “beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Notice, in the first place, that a clear distinction is drawn between the matter of fact and the witness borne to it. The fact, entirely independent of our realisation of it, is thus expressed: *We are the children of God.* Then there are the two sources of testimony, or rather the two personal witnesses, on whose evidence we are assured of the reality of the fact. They are sharply distinguished in St. Paul’s statement as the Spirit, and our spirit—*the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit.* These are independent witnesses, and their testimony agrees together.

Now look, first, at the fact. “We are children of God.” Here is no state of emotion or of feeling, no intuitive recognition of spiritual things. What a vast mistake people make about the change which Christ has wrought in our condition, when they imagine that nothing has been accomplished unless it can be recognised by some glow of spiritual satisfaction, some spark of mystical illumination. But the whole meaning of the Gospel is this: that you and I have been brought into relations with God by the work which He has Himself accomplished on our behalf. I say relations, for the word

which St. Paul uses in this very passage when he speaks of "the spirit of adoption" makes it clear that the fact involved is not the communication of a new nature, the infusion of a new life, nothing that might perchance be confused with an exaltation of feeling or nervous excitement, but a new status, a new attitude of God towards us. Here, for example, is a poor little lean and ragged waif from the purlieus of the Port of London who has attracted the notice of a kindly stranger. This friend adopts the boy, throws open to him the door of his home, takes him into his family, gives him a place at his table, affords him the kindly shelter of his roof-tree. As time goes on the dirty rags are replaced by clothing clean and warm, the flesh covers the bones, the bloom appears upon the cheek. But when the boy is first taken by the hand he remains the same shivering wastrel, the same starved and ill-clad child of the streets, that one short hour before was an unclaimed wanderer in the vast city. Add the fact that among the Romans adoption involved inalienable rights, and you have the human analogy which St. Paul would have us compare with what God has wrought for us in Christ.

Yet this is the great evangelical truth, which we, who call ourselves Christians, are perpetually liable to miss. People ask why we baptize

infants who, so far as we are able to judge, are incapable of spiritual experience. I remember a man who thought he had disproved the High Church notion of apostolical succession, because (said he) the new-made minister left the cathedral feeling just the same as when he entered it. Whether this opinion would be endorsed by all who have passed beneath the ordaining hands may well be doubted. But such arguments are wholly irrelevant. So are all theories which would confuse the free choice of God's fatherly love, resting upon the sinful sons of men, with the moods and phases of feeling that pass over their own spirits. Nay, there is a glorious independence in the activities of God, expressed in the glowing words of this same Epistle, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." God takes us—to borrow the phrase of the Prayer Book, which in turn rests upon the language of the Epistle—for His own children by adoption. The good news, preached by Apostles and attested by the pages of the written Word, is the declaration that, by an act of spontaneous favour, we have been made the children of God.

But if the fact of our redemption in Christ is not to be confounded with any sensible experience, if it is an external status rather than an inward state, we are not left to take it on trust, to accept it on mere authority. If this

were so it would be contrary to the ordinary method of divine working, and to the common experience of life. God never leaves Himself without witness, least of all has He done so here. So we are brought to the second declaration of our text: "The Spirit beareth witness." Mark, once again, the clear distinction which separates the work of this personal Agent from our own conscious personality, which is here spoken of as affording concurrent testimony. "The Spirit beareth witness together with our spirit." The Apostle is apparently carrying on the analogy of the legal process of adoption, and he summons, as it were, two separate witnesses to establish the mighty fact that the alien has been received into the family of God. The independence of their testimony is essential to the idea which he endeavours to express. And this becomes apparent when we remember what it is for which the Spirit stands in the thought of the Apostolic Church. To them the Holy Spirit was not simply the universal Life which breathes in all creation and stirs in the personalities of men. No doubt they would have assented to the words of the Book of Wisdom which declares that God's "deathless spirit is in all things." But as Christians—and this is the important point for us to remember—it was through Jesus Christ that they had been brought into contact with Him. The

Spirit of which St. Paul speaks is the Spirit of Jesus, Whose relationship with the Giver of Life was so intimate that the Apostle could even say, "The Lord is the Spirit." So interchangeable do the terms become that to speak of being filled with the Spirit and of being found in Christ are two different modes of expressing a single experience.

The Spirit, then, is the inward power, the living force the Personal Presence, manifested and brought into contact with the spirits of men through the life and work of Jesus. If you ask what it is that makes the essential difference between the Catholic Gospel and all mystical methods of approaching God, it is here that you will find it. The Spirit bears this witness to the Father in the great public universal fact of Christ. There is no aristocracy, intellectual or spiritual, in the Christian apprehension of the eternal world. Faith is the one condition, and faith is as democratic as conscience, as popular as Nature itself. The heavens declare God's glory. His Law converts the soul. And in Jesus of Nazareth the Word hath breath. He works with human hands, yet with the Divine Finger, casting out demons and establishing the Kingdom by the Spirit. Christ is the pledge that we are God's children. His Voice is the testimony of the Spirit. His mighty working, not alone in the history of

the past, but in the preaching of His messengers, the ministration of His Sacraments, the lives of His followers, the continuance of His society, is the assurance that God has not left Himself without witness. A world which includes Christ is no treeless Sahara. An environment which embraces Christ's Cross is no dry and sandy tract. A land where He builds His Church is a home for the lonely. The wilderness and the solitary place have become glad for us; the desert has rejoiced and blossoms as the rose.

And, lastly, there is the witness of our own hearts. "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit." We know that we are the children of God, because we have made our glad response to Christ. The Epistle to the Romans was addressed to those who were themselves Christians, not in name only, but in deed. Why is it that the writings of the New Testament seem to many people to have little correspondence with reality? The answer is that none but musicians know, or can know, the value of the language in which the harmonist expresses the experience of his own soul. I do not mean that religion is the possession of experts, the luxury of the few. But I do mean that to the superior Gallio, who has neither time nor inclination to listen to the message of the Gospel, the preaching even of a Paul is con-

temptuously dismissed as a matter of words and names. The repetition of creeds, the study of theology, the reading of the Bible will never of itself make men disciples. What Christians can do is to help each other out in the struggle to express, to interpret, and to increase an experience which the Spirit of the Lord Himself can alone convey.

But who is there that does not know in the daily intercourse of life the wondrous power of personality to call forth an answer in the souls of other men, to exercise an influence upon the spirits of those whom it touches, to wake responsive echoes in the hearts of millions? It is only in figures, in symbols, in metaphors that we can speak, when we attempt to express a fact that is yet clear as the noon-day sun. The very word "influence" means "flowing in." Yet we must never think of it in such a way as to suggest that one spirit is swamped by another—one personality merged in another. So far from the bounds of self being carried away, a man never feels more himself than when he surrenders to an influence that is pure and true. So is it when the Spirit of Jesus finds a response in the spirits of the sons of men, and deep calls unto deep. The faith of a Christian is not the assurance that in the far distant past something was wrought on our behalf by One Whom men believed to be the

Son of God. Nay, but it is the leaping up of the rejoicing soul to behold in the daylight of present experience Him Who is its shield and its exceeding great reward. To know Him in the power of His Crucified and Risen Christ is to record the great conviction that naught can separate from the love of God, and to receive the witness of our own spirit to the freedom of the Father's House.

THE BAPTIST AND SOCIETY

“And straightway the king sent forth a soldier of his guard, and commanded to bring his head; and he went and beheaded him in the prison.”—ST. MARK vi. 27.

XII

THE BAPTIST AND SOCIETY

AND so the voice was silenced, the lamp extinguished. On the western strand of the Isle of Man are the ruins of Peel Castle, from the battlements of which on a clear day in summer the eye beholds a shining prospect of sky and hill and water. To the north lies the Mull of Galloway, to the west rise the mountains of Mourne. It is a scene which fills the heart with that thankful sense of the width and freedom of the universe which is the peculiar treasure of them that remain in the broad sea. But in the depths of the castle, beneath the floor of the romantic choir of St. German's, where of old the island clergy offered to nature's God their Eucharist of the sea, is a gloomy, vaulted chamber. In that grim crypt, stinted both of light and air, poor prisoners once eked out a drab, monotonous captivity. A sadder contrast it is well-nigh impossible to conceive. But to those familiar

with the Gospel story it is the same painful impression that clings to the words of St. Mark which have been read in our ears this afternoon: "For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John and bound him in prison."

John was not like the ordinary occupants of the cells, accustomed from earliest youth to the crowded streets of a stifling city till the prison-van bore them off to the seclusion of our old Newgate. He was a son of the wilderness. The Bible has it that "he was in the desert till the day of his showing unto Israel." The whole portrait of him suggests comparison with the Quaker preachers who went up and down among the fells of Cumberland in the seventeenth century, or, save for their appeal to the sword, the "cloud of witnesses" who gave their testimony among the peat-bogs of Ayrshire. Men listened to his words as to the message of the stones and trees made vocal in human speech. His utterances were like the noise of the river as it rushed between the rocks. "I am a voice," so he had described both himself and his mission. Like our brothers the beasts, he had assumed the very hue and colour of the region in which he dwelt. His beard was unshorn, his clothing a shirt of camel's hair bound with a leathern thong. To such a being the story of his birth is entirely appropriate. You can picture that household

in the highland village—the austere old priest, remote from the ordinary interests of the rural community, the mother who had passed a childless prime, and the brooding boy, with his knowledge of the Bible and his distaste for the common pursuits, feeding his growing spirit amid the mountains where mists gather and storms break. There are some men whose destiny it is not to take their place in the web of history as part and parcel of the great fabric of human existence, but to break in upon the course of events, like a Greek chorus, with the voice of warning or approval, of blessing or judgment. Such was Melchisedek, of whom we read that he was without father, without mother, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. Such was Elijah, whose weird figure appears from among the mountains of Gilead, and at length, when his mission is accomplished, is lost to human sight in the whirlwind and the fire. It was the spirit and power of Elijah that seemed to rest upon the head of the lonely, passionate figure, whose life, whose speech, whose very dress recalled memories of him who dwelt in the imagination of his race as the type and embodiment of a voice from Heaven. But no dramatic close awaited John. No horses and chariot of fire were ready to bear him to the skies. The witness which provoked the hate of the adul-

terous Herodias was no less splendid than that which in the olden time had stirred the rage of the imperious Jezebel. But how different its sequel! The bold, uncompromising speech—"It is not lawful for thee to have her"—was the death-knell of him who uttered it. Henceforth nothing remained but the four walls of a dungeon; the weary days of waiting; the sordid story of the royal carousals; the Salome dance, and the debt of honour incurred by the tipsy tetrarch. "And straightway the king sent forth a soldier of his guard, and commanded to bring his head."

The Master said that among those who are born of women there was none greater than John the Baptist. The judgment of Jesus is its own certificate. If its subject were to us nought but a name, we should believe it to be nothing more than the truth. But, short as is the story of his life, there are few figures that stand out more impressively from the pages of Scripture than that of the great preacher who prepared the way of the Lord. I have said that he was a child of the wilderness, nourishing his spirit amid those witnesses of the eternal, which have neither speech nor language, though their voices are heard. He spoke to the earth, and the earth told him its secret; to the wind, and the spirit breathed upon him; to the universe, and the answer came straight from the loving

heart of God. Could a finer preparation have been designed for the delivery of a message which was to try the lives of men and the laws of society in the unerring scales of Him, to whom the false weights and the unjust balances of human selfishness are an abomination? It was always thus in the history of the Hebrews. When the Kingdom of God was about to come, when a new stage was reached in the development of the Eternal Purpose, it was always thus that the hearts of the disobedient were turned to the wisdom of the just. The prophets needed what our own great interpreter of Nature's message has called "fresh power to commune with the invisible world." The decadent town is no place for repentance. Abraham cannot become a great nation amid the civilisation of Hammurabi's Babylon. It is not the son of Pharaoh's daughter but the prophet who leads his flock to the back of the desert and sees God in the burning bush that delivers Israel. David is taken from following the ewes. It is in his long tramps over the hills that the herdsman of Tekoa learns to seek Him who turns the shadow of death into the morning. Only if he can arise and contend before the mountains will the men of Jerusalem attend to the Lord's controversy as set forth at the mouth of Micah. So, too, John the Baptist holds no missions in the crowded lanes of Jerusalem. Bricks and mortar

are no appropriate background for such a personality. Those who are tickled by incongruity would doubtless have provided crowded meetings for one whose object was not to declare eternal truth, but to fix attention on himself. Nor has society any objection to have its sins denounced, if only you will do it in Piccadilly or Belgravia. Let the circumstances be but sufficiently piquant, and they will as soon hear John preach as see Salome dance. But there is nothing dramatic in the asceticism of the Baptist. The power of his personality is its severe repression. Locusts and wild honey—these are the food which the desert supplies. Camel's hair—it is the clothing which blends naturally with the lights and shadows of the wilderness. There is no exaggeration, no excitement, no rhetoric on those lips which wine has never passed. He does no miracles. From the first he sees the waning of his own star. He will not be exploited as the coming man. His whole soul is absorbed in the visions he has seen, the voices he has heard, the realities amid which he dwells. He is a voice, rolling among the rocks and waking the echoes of the hills. In the market-place or the synagogue he is never seen. The town he never visits till he is dragged an unwilling captive by the gendarmerie of Herod to the fortress where he meets his fate. It is the sheer force of the great message which draws the

world after him. The carpenter leaves his bench, the shopkeeper closes his store, the tax-gatherer forsakes the place of toll, the soldier abandons the companionship of the mess. No class is unrepresented in the crowd which streams from the city gate. Even the haughty Pharisee and the superior Sadducee must mingle with the throng. "And there went out unto him all the country of Judæa and all they of Jerusalem; and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

John became the herald of Messiah because he had a true view of the Kingdom of God. He understood, as those who deemed themselves the pillars of the Hebrew community did not, that the past must be thrown into the crucible of the Eternal Purpose before that Kingdom can come. Masters in Israel are, as a rule, the last to apprehend the sovereign principle of New Birth. They are too much interested in the forms into which human society has crystallised to accept the truth that out of the stones God not only can, but does raise up children unto Abraham. We are always building the sepulchres of the prophets, because from the vantage ground of facts, which have long reached their accomplishment, the links that bind the generations seem clear to the meanest intelligence. We are always rejecting Messiahs because we put our trust in princes and in the children of

men. But nothing more surely hinders the vision of the future than confidence in the established order, in kings and priests, in the official administrators of Church and State. Evolution is the watchword of a decadent conservatism, and supplies a scientific reason for the slaughter of the prophets. We do not realise God's judgments in the past because Time, covering the ruins with its kindly mosses, has been gentle to the old wastes. But what tears, what agonies, what overthrows are concentrated, if our dull imaginations could but reconstruct the past, in those few pages of cold and unimpassioned print in which historical science summarises the struggles of centuries! The human story is the criticism of a loving God upon the selfish purposes of men. There is no passage in the whole of the Gospels which displays a more magnificent irony than that in which we read how "Jesus went out from the Temple, and was going on His way; and His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple." It is as though the Dean and Chapter of this Cathedral, essaying in their simplicity to act as guides to the Mighty God, were to stand beneath this dome and point with an admiring pride to the piers which support its fabric and resist its thrust. "Master, behold, what manner of stones and what manner of buildings." Who among us but has felt the cold

shiver with which we recall Macaulay's picture of the New Zealander who shall one day sit on the broken arches of London Bridge and contemplate the ruins of St. Paul's?

We who dwell in cities need to be shaken out of that complacency which, comparing the present with the past, is convinced that the conventions of our common life, the organisation of our social system, the ethical principles which find expression in our laws and customs, are one with the constitution of the universe and manifest the moral character of God. Details may need correction. Here and there we may fail to realise our own ideals. There may be room for the play of political parties, the Pharisees and Sadducees of our cherished civilisation, within the limits of a Christian community. But we are no less certain that we know what justice demands and what love requires than the official leaders of the Jewish nation who scorned John as a demoniac and crucified the Christ. It is the future which is always God's. It is the future which He summons us to meet. The old order changeth, giving place to a new community grounded upon a fuller realisation of the redeeming purpose, a larger apprehension of the Divine fatherhood than anything which the past has ever dreamed. And nothing but the humble and the contrite heart, nothing but a baptism

of repentance and the spirit of little children, will prepare us for the wonder of the New Age.

The fidelity of John to the unchanging principles of God's moral government of the world, which he learned in his secret and solitary communion with Nature, and which stand in emphatic contrast to the ethical maxims of the market-place and the pavement, provoked the bitter hostility of the governing classes, and at the last left him the victim of a woman's vengeance. Herod could well afford to respect the prejudices of his boon companions because he had nothing to fear from the leaders of Jewish thought. The Baptist was sacrificed as much to the malice of the Pharisees as to the resentment of the queen. The comfortable classes can afford to ignore the call to repentance as the vapouring of vulgar fanaticism, but for its practical issues. You may say what you like in a Methodist chapel or St. Peter's, London Docks, if you will only keep off a popular platform. But religion, if it is worth anything, will sooner or later reflect on politics and society. And so it was with this unseemly Baptist. If he had only said to the publican, "Extort no more than is appointed you," to the soldier, "Be content with your wages," he would have won the applause of every substantial burgher, the sympathy of every cultured gentleman. But these exhortations, which gave no

offence to the classes against which they were directed, of whom it is recorded that the common people heard him gladly, were but an interlude in the delivery of his message. It was the economic doctrine of the warning addressed to all alike that carried with it the scathing indictment of society, and stirred the malignant spirit of its leaders, whom the preacher feared not to denounce as a generation of vipers.

Think of it! There were symptoms of a wide unsettlement, the mutterings of a profound discontent in the heart of that ancient community, which is not without its parallel in modern times. It was no period of peace in which John preached. Prosperity is the fruitful parent of prophecy, and the Roman towns which had arisen in Syria, no less than the magnificence of Herod's temple at Jerusalem, witnessed the growing luxury of the age. But the prosperity of any community rests ultimately on the contentment of the working folk. What, then, of those robber bands which were as characteristic of the times as their increasing commerce? What of the four hundred disciples who listened to the wild schemes of Theudas? Of Judas the Galilean, whose alarming agitation was sternly repressed in the days of the Enrolment? Was this the moment for any who called himself a prophet to mingle with his summons to repentance inflammatory discourse

like that which was flung broadcast in the disorderly utterances of John? "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath food, let him do likewise." If those sentiments had been expressed to-day, cannot we imagine the sarcastic cartoons in the comic papers or the sententious severity of the *Times*! No one mistook the meaning of this advice. It was no invitation to the amiable performance of works of supererogation. These are the fruits of repentance, which are required of all alike. God is about to establish a new nation, a new race, a new kingdom, founded upon a higher, broader, purer expression in human life and intercourse of the righteousness and love of the eternal Father. Whether you will have the place in it which God designs for you will depend, not on your blind adherence to the ideals of the past, but upon your power to behold the ampler vision of the future. God will not cast off His people. He will rebuild the city, but it will be a city without walls. He will raise up children to Abraham, but it will be of the very stones.

There is nothing sadder than the fact, which history has often attested, that the official representatives of a social system, its cultured and professional classes, are the last to read the signs of its passing. They would stifle the voice that dares to dispute the conviction of all edu-

cated men that the brood of anarchism is the generation of vipers. Is it not significant that while the Apostles of the Lord included neither priest nor statesman, at least one member of that illustrious college, Simon the Cananæan, was chosen from the ranks of agitation? No one supposes that John the Baptist or his Divine Master had any sympathy with the methods of barbarism or condoned the offences of the robber bands that picketed the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Yet it was not these who were denounced as devouring widows' houses and neglecting the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. For those who, however blindly, are looking for the Messiah it is not impossible to enter this Kingdom by the needle's eye of the Divine forgiveness or to gain that humble and contrite heart to which the Crucified Redeemer can speak the reassuring word, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." It is the Pharisees and Sadducees whose polite ears are assailed by the messenger of God: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

We are told to-day in magazines and newspapers which circulate in our clubs and lie upon the table in our country houses, that private property is the foundation of civilised society. Are we sure of that? Are we sure that John

the Baptist was not proclaiming a deeper principle, and that a community shall not yet arise in which it will be taken as an axiom, as a fundamental article of its constitution, that he that hath two coats shall give to him that hath none? Is the ancient *lex talionis* ("an eye for an eye") the highest expression of the eternal Justice? Or did Christ admit us to a larger vision of God when He bade men to imitate the perfection of the Father Who makes His sun to shine on the evil and on the good? In the last resort can any civilisation claim the title of Christian which does not take as its guiding principle the amazing love of the Cross?

At this moment there are grave reasons, which will be present to the minds of most of us, why these questions should be anxiously pondered by all serious Christians. It is not three months since this Cathedral was the scene of a memorable service, in which our gracious King rendered thanks to Almighty God for the blessing of his coronation. On such an occasion it were almost pardonable if the problems of the future had seemed small in comparison with the glories of the past, and if men's thoughts had been busy with the splendour of our free constitution, the greatness of our national history, and the marvellous opportunities of our imperial sway. Since then we have been re-

minded by events, which none but the frivolous can dare to forget, that the old order is passing away. I speak not of the Parliament Act, which is too closely associated with the warfare of party politics to be usefully considered in this pulpit. The Labour War, which threatened the food of three kingdoms and disclosed new possibilities of national upheaval, leaves none of us exactly where we were before. Many questions of legislation and government, which but a few weeks ago loomed large upon the horizon, pale into insignificance before what none but the blind can fail to discern as the real and serious problems of the coming time. It is melancholy to think of the Great Council of the nation returning under stress of nothing more serious than the transient exigencies of party to the consideration of questions that fail to touch the fringe of national perplexities. With memories of Tonypany and Llanelly, looted shops and burning wagons, there is something almost intolerable in the thought of Parliament spending months, and it may be years, in debating the question of the disestablishment of the Church in Wales. If I were asked whether I supposed that in the new community of the future there will be an established Church, in the sense in which such an institution has been understood in the feudal England of the past, I should be bound to say, No. But

there is a social question, and to-day that is supreme.

And if we, Christian ministers, are asked to denounce social agitation, we must respectfully decline. Such was not John the Baptist's method, nor was it Christ's. Rather is it our part, when the sea and the waves are roaring, to take up the herald's burden—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That is the message of courage and faith and love. The question is not whether we can secure the permanence of the old order, but whether Christ is to reign in the new; whether in Him, Who, coming after us, is preferred before us, men shall recognise with a fulness which our fathers never knew "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

CHRIST AND SOCIETY

“My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.”—**JAMES ii. 1.**

“The cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”—**JAMES v. 4.**

XIII

CHRIST AND SOCIETY

IT is not difficult to understand why Luther should have called the Book of James an epistle of straw. He shook his head over its moral pages, as an early Methodist might have done over the ethical sermons of Butler or one of Mr. Moody's converts over the discourses of an undogmatic Dean. Those who have penetrated to the heart of the Christian country are impatient of those who are content to tarry on the marches, and to have beheld the glory of the highlands is too often to have little interest to spare for the inferior beauties of the debatable land.

But Christianity is a much bigger thing than many of our Bible-loving, evangelical fathers were tempted to suppose. Few of them would have gone so far as the paradoxical old Luther, who virtually decanonised St. James, but they would certainly have made as much of his specific Christianity, as little of his general

morality, as a belief in inspiration, coupled with a straightforward respect for the meaning of language, would have allowed them to do. If others watered down the Atonement, they watered down this epistle. They were thankful that its author believed in Prayer, and the Devil, and the Second Coming of Christ, and for the rest, well, it meant the ethical standards of Portman Chapel or the social ideals of the Octagon at Bath.

But to-day the preacher must address himself, not to those whose bodies have been buried in peace these fifty years, but to a congregation of modern men and women, who are probably more alive to Christianity as a diffusive influence than aware of its secret as the religion of the Cross. The faith of St. Paul is too articulate, the spirituality of St. John too profound for the average man. I do not mean that he repudiates the Apostles' Creed, or denies the right of the theologian to dot the "i's" and cross the "t's" of his own religious convictions. Of course, he believes that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. There are no negatives in his conviction. But he holds his Christianity, so to speak, in solution. He would call himself a practical man. To him the language in which St. Paul clothes a vivid spiritual experience is broadly rather than intensely true. To him Hospital Sunday will always have a more intelligible

appeal than Pentecost or the Feast of Trinity. His real point of attachment to Jesus Christ is that at which the Master seems to link Himself with his own better thoughts and purer ideals, to carry them just a little farther, to add just that little more to the world's best endeavours which redeems life from selfish aims and stamps righteousness as divine.

Now, my Christian brethren, it is worth while to remember that you, and such as you, were largely represented in the Apostolic Church. Those Hebrew Christians, over whom St. James appears to have presided in Jerusalem, and for whose benefit—they were dispersed far and wide over that ancient world—he wrote his epistle, were not for the most part men who had been able to clear up their convictions by the aid of that penetrating analysis which gave us the Epistle to the Romans and the theology of St. Paul. Many men, who would never have lapsed into those limited and negative positions, which were the result of primitive controversies, and which ended in a denial of the Divine Christ would yet have failed to respond to the sharp paradoxes of the Apostle of the Gentiles when he declared, "If ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing," "Ye who would be justified by the law are fallen away from grace." Why, it was just in relation to their own great past that they saw Christ. It was just their old

hopes, their old aspirations, their old endeavours after righteousness of which He was the fulfiller. It was because Christ had spoken to them in terms of their own Scriptures that they had been able to understand Him. Here, I say, was an attitude not at all unlike that of the ordinary man in every age, to whom clear-cut definition is always abhorrent, who lives among the concrete facts of daily experience, and who must always look at Jesus as He appears in the common environment.

But if St. James appeals to many of us, because he presents Christianity in its practical, ethical, familiar aspect, we must never allow ourselves to think either of him, or of the Master whom he represents, as a humdrum, conventional advocate of pedestrian morals. He is something very different indeed from a mere Hospital Sunday Christian. If we remember anything about Him at all, we are inclined to think of St. James as having said some good things about that unruly member—the tongue, or about faith without works being dead, and as having provided a useful text about widows and orphans for the opponents of drastic temperance reform. But St. James was not a man of good common sense. He was a prophet. Every line of his epistle beats with that fiery indignation against social wrong, that divine hatred of injustice which in every age has made the

prophet an exceedingly uncomfortable member of society. His language, his images, the structure of his sentences is that of an Amos, a Habakkuk, or an Isaiah. He was not a Machiavelli, but a Savonarola, a Mazzini rather than a Cavour. He is a witness to the fact, if one be needed, that Jesus Christ, if He takes up His work for mankind at the point where He touches the common life, the current aspirations, the ideals of the best men and women, nevertheless lays His axe to the root of the tree, and that the beginning of the Gospel of the Son of God is the mission of the inexorable Baptist. If Jesus was more than a prophet, He was a prophet still. The last thing that those among His contemporaries, who espoused His discipleship, would have allowed, the last thing that any one can allow who is content to read the New Testament in its historical setting, is this : that a Christian could quite happily adapt himself to the customs of any community not openly and flagrantly immoral, or adjust his religion to any social order, whatever the conditions of political or industrial life. The spirit of St. James is the spirit of the Hebrew prophets. His epistle is incontrovertible testimony that this spirit has passed over into the Christian Church. This is the background against which we must read it, if we in our turn are to be kindled by its fire.

I have fixed upon two passages which forcibly illustrate my meaning. The first is the famous passage about the man with the gold ring. What is to be thought of that Christian synagogue, where the well-dressed are shown into the front pews, and the poor people are taught to keep their proper stations? How modern it sounds! And yet how woefully we fall short of realising its import, if we accept the principles of that excellent society, the Free and Open Church Association, which cites these verses in justification of its appeal, as a sufficient recognition of their claim on the Christian conscience? It is all very pretty to think, let us say, of a Prime Minister rubbing shoulders with a shop assistant on the benches of this Abbey Church. But how far will this carry you? If you put the man with the gold ring in a back seat, the back seat will become a fashionable resort. Realise that the synagogue of those Hebrew congregations was the social world of the primitive Christian. Bear in mind that the spirit which this Christian writer had inherited, was the spirit in which Amos and Isaiah had looked out upon the social life of an earlier age. Then you will see that it is the puritanism of the prophets which has found a lodgment in the community of Jesus. It is not so much the deference paid to the gold ring, as the gold ring itself upon which the prophet looks with dubious

eyes. Read his words in the light of his fellow-elder Peter's injunction that the adorning of Christian women should be, not the plaiting of hair and the wearing of jewels, but the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. Remember his own axiom that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." Then you will begin to understand that discipleship demands some renunciation in the habits, not necessarily the immoral habits, of ordinary society.

But I would go farther. These words of St. James recall, and legitimise for purposes of Christian non-conformity, the stern words in which the old prophets spoke of the pleasures, the customs, the ways of society. There were social problems in Israel in the days of Amos and Isaiah, just as there were in Palestine when Christ announced the good news of the Kingdom, and as we have them with us here in England now. I remember, for example, how Amos speaks of the women of Samaria as cows of Bashan. For all we know the sensibility of these ladies was such that they would not have hurt a fly. Yet, to the eye of the herdsman of Tekoa, they were the real oppressors of the poor, because they said unto their lords, "Bring, and let us drink." Then the prophet goes on to describe the various engagements that made up the busy round of the social week. He speaks of the men and women who lie upon ivory sofas, and

stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall, that sing idle songs to the sound of the viol. Or listen to the long list of gauds that Isaiah thinks it worth while to recite. He is an observant bystander among the crowd on the pavement that watches the motors discharging their freight beneath the awning at the door of some brilliant mansion. In they go, one after another, the procession of invited guests. The prophet marks the bravery of their anklets, and the nets, and the crescents, the pendants, and the bracelets, and the mufflers; the head-tires, and the ankle-chains, and the sashes, and the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the rings and the nose jewels; the festival robes and the mantles, and the shawls, and the satchels; the hand mirrors, and the linen, and the turbans, and the veils. What a Walt Whitman is this ancient seer! It is the realistic impression that such a catalogue creates, which gets home.

We may say what we will about the exaggerations of those who tell us that there is a real connexion between the motor-car and social unrest, but—there must be something of the Piagnone, something of the Puritan, something of the Quaker in the temper of the Christian Society if it is to reflect the prophetic spirit of its Lord. Do not let us prate about the inartistic narrow-

ness of Evangelical religion, or the sourness of a Nonconformist conscience! We do not seek to banish the green, green grass or the lilies of the field. But our social life—and you and I had better not wait for others, but ourselves begin—must be baptized with the fiery spirit of Him in whom there is no beauty that we should desire Him, if the wilderness and the solitary place is to be glad for us; if the desert is to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

And so we come to the other passage. “The cries,” says St. James, “of them that reaped [your fields] have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” There is no mistaking the prophetic ring of that declaration. One after another the hot sayings of the Old Testament come crowding into the mind. “They have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes.” “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field.” “The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the chamber shall answer it.” There was a social question in those centuries before Christ. There was social unrest when the Lord was on earth. There are labour troubles to-day. And the attitude of our Epistle towards these sores of society is not that of the respectable modern newspaper, shocked at the lawlessness of an unthrifty and materialised proletariat, reckless of a nation’s prosperity, so only it can lay its hands

on the spoil. His utterance about wages is ugly to the ears of those for whom law and order rather than freedom are the last word of Christian civilisation.

One afternoon, as I took my walk in the neighbourhood of the Charterhouse, I saw a sight which aroused strange emotions. A convoy of wagons, laden with supplies of food, was escorted to market by a party of mounted police with pistols at their saddle-bow. Policemen lay stretched on the top of the cargo or hung on at the tail of the carts, while an idle crowd gaped at a pitiable procession which ought never to be seen in a country nominally Christian. Was it indignation at callous labourer or cruel agitator, who would, if they could, starve into servility a helpless population, that stirred within me? No, indeed. I thought of the dull imagination which could not place itself in the position of other people. I thought how, if the dock labourers had been brought up in the traditions of our public schools, and if those who had loaded and were driving those wagons had been sneaks that had outraged the fundamental code of school-boy honour, that caravan would have had small chance indeed of ever reaching Smithfield. But still more I thought how impossible such a scene would have been, if only the Church of Christ had been true to the prophetic spirit in which it set forth on its

evangelical mission of proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. I thought how He, who neither strove nor cried, who gave his own back to the smiter, and who said to His followers, "In your patience, ye shall win your souls," yet pronounced woes, the severity of which no prophet has equalled, not against the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with the sacrifices, but against the comfortable, law-abiding Pharisees who devoured widows' houses and for a pretence made long prayers.

Nothing is more idle than to insist that our Lord Jesus Christ found His way to Calvary, merely for the assertion of a remote spiritual claim, which the rulers of this world might well have been content to treat as a matter of words and names. Such a claim undoubtedly He did make, but it was so couched as to involve the creation of a kingdom of social righteousness, and this it was that slew Him. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, ye neglect justice, mercy, and faith!" It is a plain fact of history that it was not the leaders of popular movements, but the guardians of the established order, who were the enemies of Jesus. "Blessed are ye poor." "Woe unto you rich." No menace of violence, no prospect of social anarchy led Him for one moment to modify this sharp antithesis. Even when He refused their methods, He did not shrink from proclaiming

that the hopes, the aspirations, the claims of the common folk, far from being the sordid product of envious greed, belonged to that Kingdom which He came to bring.

Days of social unrest are no time for Christian men to make common cause with those who resist the methods because they hate the ideals of "this people which knoweth not the law." We ministers of the Gospel may be well content to incur the charge of truckling to democracy, if only we may avoid the doom which shall befall those clerks of the closet to the well-to-do of whom Micah speaks in the third chapter and the fifth verse. There are some things about which we are bound to speak plain. The real materialists, when Christ came, were the Scribes and Pharisees. We, like our Master, must proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. He, who is the Redeemer of the individual, is the Saviour also of Society. The Coming of the Lord, to which St. James bade the oppressed look forward, was no unsubstantial Kingdom where work and wages, poverty and wealth, labour and its just reward, have ceased to bear any meaning. Christianity does not ignore the reform of the social order, because it regenerates the heart. The New Testament contains the spiritual teaching of St. John; it contains also the prophetic wisdom of James the Just,

THE REDEEMER AND PROPERTY

“When they had brought their boats to land, they left all.”—ST. LUKE v. 12.

XIV

THE REDEEMER AND PROPERTY

DOES it not strike you as extraordinary conduct? Friendship with Jesus has opened up for Simon and his partners new trade possibilities. Here is one possessed of a secret which enables Him to detect the haunts and habits of fish. All the experience of the craft is superseded by what is equivalent to the discovery of a new method. If Jesus is in the boat, its owners will no longer be dependent upon the weary night fishing. But no sooner have they succeeded in bringing their nets to land, than one and all abandon the catch upon the beach, and follow Jesus as He leads them away from the familiar strand. Does not such conduct strike you as most extraordinary?

Unexpected success in business does not usually produce a sense of the vanity of human wishes. Not once nor twice in the history of the world have men become enamoured of holy

poverty. They have grown tired of their riches. The pleasures of possession have begun to pall. The flavour of wine has become insipid to the jaded palate. Ladies' smiles have ceased to fascinate. The counting-house has become a prison; the court a scene of monotonous etiquette. But here it is the same Voice which bids the disappointed to launch out into the deep and let down the nets, and which anon summons them to a quest that knows no earthly reward.

What these Galilean fishermen had received in the midst of their daily avocations was a tremendous revelation of the presence and purpose of God. That is the meaning of the strange confession in which the wonder of Simon Peter found expression when he fell down at Jesus' knees and cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." Is that an exclamation which romance could ever have conceived? Most of us can recall those wonderful stories with which the gorgeous East thrilled our childish imagination in the Arabian Nights' Entertainment. Ali Baba becomes possessed of the secret password, "Open Sesame," which admits him to the riches laid up in the recesses of the robbers' secret cave. Or a child of the people is suddenly introduced to the Slaves of the Lamp and of the Ring, who pour into his lap the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind, turning the

beggar into a prince and conferring upon him a state beyond the wildest dreams of avarice. How we longed for magic carpets and fairy palaces, and wondered what unimagined jewels the genies of fortune might have in store for ourselves! What a picture was presented by the magnificent Oriental fancy of the hidden powers of a world, still unexplored, which might one day open its treasures even to the prosaic children of the West!

That represents the attitude of the world towards those who can show them how to get wealth. "Depart from me" is the last request which we should willingly address to any one of them. On the contrary, we offer them money, saying, "Give me also this power." What is the price of your secret? For what sum may we buy our initiation into the mystery? A new process is discovered. A new industry is opened up. At once there is a rush for shares, and those who are first in the field burn incense to their luck. Again and again we rub the ring that the genie may appear. Again and again we pronounce our "Open Sesame," that the door of the cavern may fly open. We repeat the essay upon our kind fortune, because we did eat of the loaves and were filled. When riches increase men set their hearts upon them. And there is no prayer which we have more need to pray with bated

breath and whispering humbleness than the noble suffrage of our ancient Litany—"In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us."

There is, I submit, only one explanation of the strange and unexpected result of the miraculous draught of fishes. Peter was somehow made aware that in that sinking boat he stood in the presence of God. Nothing short of this could have filled him with the tremendous sense of his own sinfulness, which became the source and spring of a life of devotion and service. Nothing can so empty a man of the fatal egotism, which kills sacrifice, as the recognition of sin. And no man ever attains to that hard and humiliating conviction until he has seen God. That is what the golden-mouthed Isaiah has to tell: "Woe is me—I am a man of unclean lips—I have seen the King." Job, sitting in dust and ashes, has the same experience. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself." And now it is the turn of Simon Peter to cry in the anguish of his heart: "I am a sinful man."

In the anguish of his heart! Yes, there is no doubt about the ring of that exceeding bitter cry. But what was there in the circumstances of that successful fishing to suggest an infinite sorrow? We have all heard of the bitter cry of outcast London. We are not so familiar with the burden of Belgravia or the miseries of May-

fair. It is when earthly helpers fail and comforts flee that men are supposed to recognise their need of God, and to be peculiarly alive to the reality of His Presence. When the *Titanic* went down in mid-ocean, where millionaire and emigrant alike stood face to face with death, there was none of us but recognised the pathetic appropriateness of the situation, when we were told how the strains of "Nearer, my God, to Thee" floated across the hungry waters. But it is the very climax of the miraculous power of God to produce that same overmastering sense of personal unworthiness, when the omens are propitious, and the sun of prosperity begins to shine. And that is the situation which confronts us in this beautiful Gospel story that we are considering to-day. Peter's star is in the ascendant, and the man is aware of nothing but his moral bankruptcy.

Truly it is an amazing scene, the marvel of the miracle all forgotten in the still greater glory of the Personality which stands revealed to him in this act of power. It is the crowning wonder of Jesus Christ that, not alone in His ministry to suffering mortals, but in all His dealings towards the children of men, He can bring home to heart and conscience that it is the Living God Who is purifying lives and redeeming souls. I do not mean to say that Simon Peter, as he gazed upon this evidence of transcendent power, could

have used the language in which you and I have learned to worship the Eternal Son, as we repeat the clauses of the Nicene Creed. I will not affirm that there and then as he fell upon his knees in the laden boat he could have anticipated the exclamation which was drawn from his brother disciple when in the upper room he was bidden to thrust his finger into the pierced side of the Risen Master. Much had yet to happen before those who left all in Galilee could interpret in clearness of outline the meaning of those wondrous manifestations which compelled them to arise and follow the Prophet of Nazareth. But the man who at such a moment is constrained to use the words which Peter uttered has received that revelation which is the characteristic experience of all to whom Jesus discloses the secret of His inner life. What wakened the chords of his innermost being, and set them vibrating in response to the Master's touch, was the fact that he had been grasped by the hand of the living God and confronted with his Maker and his Judge.

And what a blessed experience it was! When such a crisis comes in a man's life, he passes the Rubicon. The moment becomes eternity, and the vision of an instant the inspiration of a life. Happy are they to whom Christ thus reveals Himself. Happiest of all are you, who, when riches have not yet taken to themselves wings,

when the hour of death has not yet struck, and men have not yet begun to ask where they shall dig your grave, have been brought down into what Bunyan calls "that empty and solitary place," the Valley of Humiliation. "'Hark,' said Mr. Greatheart, 'to what the shepherd's boy saith.' So they hearkened, and he said:—

" 'He that is down needs fear no fall ;
 He that is low no pride ;
 He that is humble, ever shall
 Have God to be his guide.

" 'I am content with what I have,
 Little be it, or much ;
 And, Lord, contentment still I crave
 Because Thou savest such.

" 'Fulness to such, a burden is,
 That go on pilgrimage ;
 Here little, and hereafter bliss ;
 Is best from age to age.' "

That is the spirit of the Christian, and by it all the values of life are changed. The disciple learns to forsake all, not because he has acquired the ascetic habit of monastic discipline, but because he sees life steadily and sees it whole. In the vision of existence we have no longer to allow for the personal equation of incurable egotism. As the man rises from his colloquy with the Redeemer, the voice of reassurance and hope rings in his ears: "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

“Men, not markets!” Wealth can only be interpreted in terms of human lives. The earth is not God’s farm, nor the sons of men but His herdsmen and His vine-dressers. It is not the beasts of the forest nor the cattle upon a thousand hills that are the object of His intervention in the world’s affairs. He has but one aim, one purpose, one end. God’s great enterprise is to catch men. All that is meant by property is precisely what has no meaning for God, Who for our sake became poor. It was God’s great longing for himself that St. Peter was brought to understand. The Master had neither silver nor gold, yet His was a power which gold and silver could not purchase. He had chosen to be more homeless than the foxes and the birds, yet His was an intimacy with the Father, without Whom not a sparrow falls to the ground. What a wonderful reading of the problem of the universe is disclosed to the eager hearts of men, when the world and all that is therein is seen no longer as property, out of which they may suck no small advantage, and wealth is nothing but unbounded opportunities of service! Thus to learn love from the redeeming love of God is to gain that devotion which is ready to make all sacrifices in order that we, too, may catch men.

This great passion for the lives of men is the leading principle of the social ethics of a

Christian. We are freely told that the foundations of civilisation are in peril of being cast down, and those who have almost a superstitious reverence for the rights of private property are calling upon the righteous to do something to bear up the pillars of the existing order of society. Pamphlets which profess to expose the monstrous immorality of Socialism are pressed upon the ministers of Christ's religion. Newspapers are asking whether these are times in which to curtail the privileges and property of churches, when it is necessary to summon all the forces of organised religion to resist (so the phrase runs) the disintegrating tendencies of modern movements. There is something ominously un-Christian in the temper with which the possessors of property are regarding all readjustments in the distribution of wealth. Two excellent laymen spoke with me at the door of a West End church a few Sundays ago, when a collection had been taken for the London hospitals and the vestry count revealed a fall in the amount subscribed. "How can you expect us," they said, "to provide medical aid for the masses when these fellows have their hands at our throats?" And they expected me to sympathise. It was not that they had less to give, but that they failed to recognise the claim of the suffering poor, so long as they were confronted with the menace of social change. They

trembled for the rights of property, as the heart of Eli trembled for the ark of God.

There are many questions which we might ask. Is there such a thing as a social order? Does not society, like all else under the sun, move in a perpetual flux? When we speak of the Ten Commandments, are we certain that we mean the changeless principles of the Divine Law and not the limitations with which it has been encumbered by the Scribes and Pharisees? I do not pretend to deny that the prospect is serious or to contemplate with a light heart the immediate future of my country. But how much depends upon the attitude towards a swiftly developing situation of those who by education and opportunity, though not of right, ought to be the leaders of the people? Will they be the blind critics of democracy? Or will they be content to be less wealthy, less powerful, less secluded, if only they can give more health, greater freedom, larger opportunity to the whole body of the people? We are told that we are heading towards revolution. Our destiny depends on the answer which is returned to these questions.

And for those who at least claim Christian discipleship the issue is graver still. The age in which we live has been one of unexampled commercial prosperity and vast accumulation of wealth. The net has indeed been cast upon the

right side of the ship. But has the operation brought with it the vision of God? Has there been any disposition on the part of those who own the name of Christ to fall down at Jesus' feet in the spirit of the fisherman of Galilee? If so, then we too have heard that Voice of victorious hope which calls us to share in the redeeming purpose and which bids us fear nothing, for henceforth we shall catch men. We have brought our boats to land. We have made the act of glad surrender on the shore. The wealth of the world is henceforth valuable only so far as it may be produced, distributed, and used for the salvation of the lives of men. Henceforth we recognise no rights but the right to redeem. We have left all to follow Jesus.

CHRIST AND MARRIAGE

“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the twain shall become one flesh.”—ST. MARK x. 7.

XV

CHRIST AND MARRIAGE

THEY are the words of Jesus, but they are cited from Genesis. "From the beginning it was not so" is the comment on the Hebrew custom of divorce which St. Matthew attributes to the Master. Just as St. Paul undercuts the Law of Moses by his appeal to the faith of Abraham, so the Lord refuses to discuss marriage on any other basis than the constitution and course of nature. As Christians we can do no more. As Christians we can be content with nothing less.

Periods of perplexity, when men canvass the first principles upon which social life rests, are always full of anxiety. But they are a call to faith and courage, not to panic and distress. The very last attitude that should be assumed by those who believe that the spiritual instinct of the Church conforms to the principles of purity and truth, is a refusal to sympathise with the doubts and difficulties of earnest men.

Levity should always be treated as it deserves. But blind insistence on authority will never satisfy reason, and to burke difficulties is to court disaster. If we are honest with ourselves, many among us will recognise that such mental struggles as are described, for example, by Mr. H. G. Wells in "The New Machiavelli," are precisely those which tormented their own early manhood, and which, it may be, the experience of the years has not wholly laid. We may deprecate, and that with some vehemence of protest, the employment of fiction as the method by which to deal with the problem of sex. For one writer, who with single mind and pure intention seeks to grapple with what has ever been to suffering mortals a source of pain and perplexity too deep for tears, there will be ten who are ready under the ægis of a great artist to make sordid gain out of the passions of their fellows, and to "set the maiden fancy wallowing in the abyss of Zolaism." Nay, more, the perfection of the art will too often conceal the seriousness of purpose and kindle undisciplined desire before it has satisfied the inquiring mind. But it is a cruel reticence which, because of the risk which discussion involves, is deaf to what is often the mute appeal of the growing intelligence. The whole conception of social duty may be impaired, a rational ground for the service of the race may never be achieved, unless we are

prepared to face the fundamental facts of our human brotherhood.

There are peculiar reasons, which have nothing to do with the perennial lawlessness of human nature, why the whole question of marriage should have been cast into the crucible of reflective thought. A claim is being made and pushed with an ever-growing persistence for a complete recognition of the full and independent personality of woman. This is due in part to a more perfect understanding of the psychology of human personality, in part to the industrial conditions of the age which are daily making increased demands upon the co-operation of women in the production and distribution of wealth. To the demand most men contribute, because it means dividends; to the claim many demur, because it involves rights. For my own part I cannot see that the one can logically be sustained without the other. But let that pass. Let us leave on one side all controverted questions with regard to the political status of women. The fact remains that the present generation has witnessed so swift a transformation in their general position and practical possibilities as has rarely, if ever, been witnessed in the history of society. What woman of to-day would not smile at the thought of her grandmother burying beneath the blankets the dangerous romances of Sir

Walter Scott, or of Jane Austen furtively drawing from the recesses of her work-box the unfinished manuscripts of her own inimitable novels.

In some of our modern cities—Dundee is an example—women constitute the major portion of the working population, and tenements occupied by young women of tender years but blameless life are as much a matter of course as homes which shelter families living under the protection of their parents. Our feminine fashions may in some respects resemble those of the Regency, but the gait, the carriage, the manners of our sisters would at once dispel the illusions of a society that frequented the Pump Room at Bath or the Pavilion at Brighton. At either end of the social scale the change is almost equally apparent. It is a change that is bound profoundly to modify existing values. Many among us, whose outlook is, perhaps, too much confined to those higher ranks in which they were born, sigh for the departing age of chivalry, with its beautiful reverence and splendid courtesy. They forget the limitations of womanhood, nay, the degradation of its commoner clay, which has been inseparable from the system they admire. But Christianity is larger than chivalry, and the faithful set their faces towards the east to greet the rising of a brighter, purer, ampler dawn.

How fares the marriage-ring amid the change? Would old Jeremy Taylor's eulogy of the wedded state fall to-day upon ears deaf to its magic music? I do not know. But there are some facts which we cannot ignore. Look, for example, at the normal conditions under which a marriage is celebrated to-day in an industrial parish. A man in his working clothes, or it may be even a young woman in clattering clogs, with a shawl pinned over her dusty locks, calls at the clergy-house, bringing the particulars of the proposed marriage and the customary fee. The banns are published. The hour arrives. The gates of the church are beset with a small crowd of neighbours, their hands full of confetti. From a cab, the driver of which has perhaps adorned his whip with a white ribbon, there steps a nervous-looking couple, the principals in the affair, and they are followed by a second couple, like themselves, who are the witnesses that the law demands. How often have I watched the second young man, the bridegroom's mate, as in response to what must to him seem an inexplicable demand, he makes a sheepish attempt to give the right hand of the woman to the minister! "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

Do you not see that the marriage service was framed, rightly because necessarily framed, upon conditions which have ceased to exist in

modern society? We shall not wring our hands because we are no longer dominated by that old conception of patriarchal authority, still in part recognised by the civil law, which respects the right of a stern parent "to keep his virgin daughter" even though she may have reached the mature age of fifty. As Christians we shall rather rejoice in the new reverence with which circumstances no less than sentiment have invested the personality of woman, according to her the same right of rational and voluntary espousal which has for centuries been the privilege of man. For it carries with it the possibility of a self-respect in wedlock as far beyond the honour of a Roman matron or even the queenly dignity of the feudal wife, as those surpass the sickly modesty of the submissive slave.

What, then, of the obedience which the wife owes to her husband? You will remind me that in giving her troth the bride promises not only to cherish but also to obey. Now it seems to me that in a relationship, so close, so intimate, so remote from the public gaze, as matrimony, where in the nature of the case no external arbitration is possible, there must exist in the last resort some court of appeal which in the sphere of conscience is an end of controversy. In matters which directly affect the union it must ultimately be the

duty of one of the partners to yield. And a marriage ceremony, which makes no provision for such a promise, fails just at the point where an accurate understanding is essential. But how easily it has lent itself to the sort of interpretation which the narrower order of society, from which we are emerging, has offered to the superior selfishness of the stronger sex. It may not be fair to speak of the wrongs which brutal husbands have inflicted upon the patience of their wives. But where men have claimed the right to prescribe the occupations, to limit the friendships, to confiscate the property, to regulate the personal life of the women who are economically dependent upon them, while retaining for themselves the right to practise their habits, to exercise their preferences, to choose their acquaintances, and even under cover of unequal laws to indulge their vices without let or hindrance from the household drudge upon whom they have been pleased to confer their name, there is surely no cause for wonder that even the primary principles of wedlock should not be exempted from the discussions which the larger ideas of feminine freedom have inevitably raised. And if we who have deep convictions are content to bolster up what is indefensible in the social system, when our earnest endeavours should be directed to the

task of distinguishing between what is essential and what is accidental, on us will lie the responsibility if the pillars of the house are undermined.

What, then, we have to ask, did our Saviour say on this momentous matter of morals and conscience? That He did speak, and that with no ordinary emphasis, no serious student of the New Testament can for an instant deny. That His words startle by the stern demand which they seem to make upon the weakness of our human nature few will fail to admit. To none was their weight more oppressive than to those in whose ears they were uttered. They fell like a thunderclap. "If the case of the man is so with his wife"—cry the astonished disciples—"it is not expedient to marry." And the well-known qualification which St. Matthew introduces into the saying about divorce may well have been due to the difficulty which the Hebrew Christians felt in adjusting the language of their Master to the preconceived opinions of their race. "Of course," they would argue, "such a limitation must necessarily be implied. He could never have meant that marriage was not dissolved at least by the adultery of the wife."

Now I do not think it can be fairly asserted that our Divine Lord ever intended to establish a positive marriage law in the Christian Church

Had He done so, it would not only have been contrary to His general method of informing the consciences of men, but it would have been inconsistent with what seem to be the great principles by which God discloses His will. To assert that He did so legislate serves only to darken counsel and to prevent that recognition of the mind of the Master which is essential to any true surrender to His authority. Men resent, and as I think rightly resent, any attempt to foreclose the rational solution of a moral problem by requiring obedience to a positive statute that has not convinced the enlightened conscience. You will recall the fact that the teaching with which we are dealing recurs in the Sermon on the Mount, and that fact alone should give us pause before we interpret it on any principles that would not equally apply to all the subjects which Christ illuminates in that divine discourse. But this consideration seems to me decisive. If Christ were imposing a canon upon the brotherhood of His disciples, no Church has ever yet approached the peremptory rigour of His demand, "For the twain," said He, "shall be one flesh." The keen insight of St. Paul perceives that this statement of the Old Testament is far too sweeping to be satisfied by a mere reference to lawful matrimony. None can claim to reach the standard which is here revealed who has

not from his youth up worn the white flower of a blameless life. And is there any community, be it Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, that would dare to frame a marriage law upon a basis so exacting as that?

But if Christ is not enacting a canon, still less is He proposing a Christian ideal. In the strict sense of the word there is no such thing as Christian marriage. In that kingdom, which flesh and blood cannot inherit, there is neither male nor female. The children of the resurrection neither marry nor are given in marriage. The same applies to all those relationships which are its natural sequel. "Who is My mother, and who are My brethren? He that doeth the will of My Father, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." No, the whole range of relationships which knit the families of the earth in one belong to that transitory discipline of time by which the spirits of all flesh are fashioned for eternity. They attend us to the gates of the celestial city, beyond which are the spirits of the just made perfect. The words of Jesus are more inexorable than canon law, more universal and primary than any ideal. He is lighting up the facts of that physical nature, which is the school for all mankind, with a ray of His divine insight. He penetrates to the very core of its constitution. He sweeps aside all partial and conventional assertions with the

assurance that "in the being it was not so." He bids us look once again at the primary facts in the light which His own absolute conviction sheds upon them. Do not search among the higher, and what perhaps seem to you the more spiritual, levels of human intercourse for the principles upon which to base your law of marriage. If you do, you will find yourselves in a fog of fantastic dreams, a maze of tangled and confusing sentiments, which are fatal to a sound morality. Do not lose yourselves in the wilderness of tender associations with which centuries of human affection have surrounded the names of "husband" and "wife." Do not even be misled by the dignity which attaches to the noble names of "man" and "woman." Be humble enough, be simple enough, be natural enough to believe that you can start only from the fundamental physical fact of sex. "I tell you that in the beginning God made them male and female."

You understand what this means. It means that, so long as our earthly house of this tabernacle is not dissolved, so long as the moral probation of our mortal state continues, the tie of blood, the bond of kindred, and not least that union out of which all spring, remains unbroken. For human beings, endowed with memory, hope, and personal identity, no device of man can annul the permanence of the physical bond.

The mother cannot forget her child. The son cannot disown his father. The husband may not act as though his wife were not. "In the beginning it was not so." "God made them male and female." The bar of circumstance men may break. Grasping the skirts of happy chance, the peasant may become a prince, the beggar may finance empires. But the bar of sex none may pass. It remains to control, to limit, to discipline the individual, and to remind him of the superior greatness of the race. Once let the real significance of Christ's words grip the consciences of men, and the idea of marriage as governed by the law of contract becomes at once impossible. It is a relationship that exists before the establishment of that social order out of which such covenants arise. Men cannot contract for marriage duty as they contract for labour or the use of capital. They cannot take a wife as they hire a house or engage a typist. With all respect to the Tenth Commandment, your neighbour's wife is something entirely different from his house or his maidservant. Marriage is a relationship. Whether you call it a sacrament depends upon your taste for the language of ecclesiastical tradition. In any case it makes no difference to the facts: it is immaterial to the issue. So also is the question of the superiority of one sex over the other. In this matter, at any rate, neither is before or

after the other, neither is greater or less than the other. The one thing that is important is that we refuse to acquiesce in any law of marriage which is not avowedly based upon the recognition of a natural and permanent relationship in the union of man and woman, and the object of which is not to honour and promote this principle in the social order for which we are in any measure responsible.

But further. Consider what is really involved in the statement, "the twain shall be one flesh." It is a question not merely of the relation of the husband to the wife or of the wife to the husband, but of both to the human race. It is not "one spirit," but "one flesh." What is first in importance is not the harmony of the partners, however nearly this may touch the happiness of the individual, but something far more prosaic—the fresh unit that has been created in the framework of human society. A man is to "leave his father and mother." This does not mean, nay it cannot mean, that the first place in his affections is to be transferred from the parents to the wife. By the parents that place may not have been held. It does not mean that a new friendship has been formed. Society, as such, has no concern with friendships. But it does mean that a new family has been constituted, in the maintenance of which the race itself is

vitaly interested. It does mean that men and women must be made to recognise that, while in the choice of a partner for life temperament, character, and spiritual outlook are matters of the gravest concern, these considerations are less than nothing if they be set against the paramount obligation which all those who are married owe to the permanent interests of the race. Do violence to nature and you sin against God.

It was once my misfortune to be present at a wedding when a dignitary of the Church, who ought to have known better, omitted the two former causes for which, according to the Prayer Book, matrimony was ordained and contented himself with proclaiming the third.

Much may, no doubt, be urged for the omission of all, as is permitted, for example, by the canons of our Church in Scotland. Nothing can be said for reciting the last to the exclusion of the rest. For what sort of happiness is to be expected of a union from which is excluded all reference to what nature itself teaches: that, before and beyond all else, marriage was ordained for calling into being a new family?

What havoc may not be wrought if once it be admitted that wedlock is primarily the concern of those who undertake it! What treachery to generations yet unborn may be perpetrated if once it be allowed that matrimony exists but

“for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other”! No one, who looks at life with the eyes of Jesus Christ, could thus exchange bread for ashes and pawn the welfare of a public institution for the prevention of personal pain. Alas! for the desolate homes and broken hearts, the tragedies of wedded lives, the wreck of departed happiness with which the winds of passion or the waves of adversity have strewn the shore of existence! For all that woe no heart beats with a more tender compassion than the heart of Jesus. But here, as ever, He, who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, refuses to represent the course of nature as other than stern, the discipline of life as aught but heroic. “He that will come after Me, let him take up his cross.” It is only by much tribulation that earth’s sons and daughters can enter into the kingdom.

Only one word more. Christian people can be satisfied with nothing less than the attitude of Christ Himself towards the institution of marriage. If the law of any State or country in which their lot is cast does not satisfy their conscience by promoting the principles which are unfolded by the Lord in His Gospel, what are they to do in a civil community like our own, the elements of which are not all even professedly Christian? It is wrong for the Church to tolerate any unions which are with-

out civil sanction. It is not, therefore, right that the Church should accept all unions that are tolerated by the State. No man who is both patriot and Christian will lightly embark on any course of action which tends to dissociate two societies which in ideal should be one, or to promote sectarian as distinguished from national aims. But there are conditions under which it is necessary to develop at whatever cost a non-conformist conscience. Whatever men may say, the Church is not the State in its religious aspect, nor is it High Churchmen who have fought most stoutly for the recognition of the independence of the Christian society in the history of these realms. Where loyalty to its Master is concerned, the Church must always be either persecuted or free.

Under modern conditions no civil community can do otherwise than reflect the opinion of the majority. The Christian community is bound at whatever cost to respond with an ever-growing fidelity to the conscience of its Lord.

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

“ God deviseth means that he that is banished be not
outcast from Him.”—2 SAMUEL xiv. 14.

XVI

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

THERE is far too much copybook morality in the world. Jesus says in the Gospel that, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven will not open to receive you. The little known but very striking incident in the history of King David, from which the words I have just read are taken, affords a remarkable illustration of the Saviour's meaning. The most strict moral principles are a man's righteousness at the best and at the worst nothing better than hypocrisy. If you are to get anywhere near God you must pitch your righteousness much higher. You must always be building bridges for your brothers and sisters, paving the highway of human progress with forgiveness, devising means whereby the banished may return. The Pharisee is always blind to the glory that excelleth, always pleading the highest principles

instead of God's purpose of redemption. Now that was exactly David's case in the story before us. He was prepared to do violence to his own fatherhood, to strangle the love of his heart, to hazard the divine destinies of his house and people in vindication of his own stern sense of truth and honour. The young man Absalom had been guilty of a crime which was condemned even by the wild justice of those early times. Three years had elapsed since the lawless prince had fled the kingdom, and day by day the old king was eating his heart out in the deserted palace at Jerusalem. No doubt he played the moral parent till the life at Court became a burden to all his ministers. He longs for his son with passionate eagerness, as everyone with half an eye can see, yet there he is fuming and blustering, and forbidding his servants even to mention the offender's name. We all know such people. The heavy father of conventional fiction who cuts the scapegrace off with a shilling; the innocent parties in divorce suits, whose guilty spouses have felt the mailed fist of outraged justice, but not the waving of the hands that bless. Are there none such in St. Paul's this afternoon? We shall all do well to remind ourselves that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes.

But there were those in David's house who were not thus blinded by the limitations of their

own morality. Joab is by no means a character worthy of our imitation, but this does not prevent us from recognising that on this question at least he had a juster estimate of the true issues than his more religious master. He avails himself of the simple custom of the times to bring into the royal presence a woman of Tekoah, one of those old wives whose mother-wit has often helped to the solution of seemingly insoluble problems. She tells how her son has incurred the penalty of blood revenge, and how, unless the king himself intervenes to protect the offender from the operation of this rough justice, the lower equities will be satisfied at the expense of the higher; a lesser wrong will be expiated by the commission of a greater. The slain man's kin will avenge themselves upon the slayer. "Thus shall they quench my coal which is left and shall leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the face of the earth." That is the way in which she leads the king back to those great fundamental principles of the universe, in the light of which all the greater issues of life must be faced.

That pedagogic morality which, in a later age, Jesus described as the righteousness of the Pharisees, and which keeps the Ten Commandments at its finger-ends as the measure of human conduct, solves no problem either in heaven or in earth. Copybook morality,

for all its fair appearance, as though it were the chief end of man, has no power to achieve his destiny. The citizens of London may gaze with complacent pride at my lord judge and my Lord Mayor taking their places on the Bench "to keep the simple folk by their right, and to punish the wrongdoer," but at best the Court of Justice is but a half-way house in the establishment of righteousness. To classify transgressors under the several heads of their offending is only a preliminary. What the world needs is not a law but a gospel. The real problem, the moral problem of life, is not to impose the ban, but to remove it. The power to accomplish this is the measure of the eternal righteousness, and God devises means that the banished be no longer outcast.

Quite so. God's task only begins with judgment; it must be consummated in mercy or He is not God. There is nothing triumphant, no bringing forth of judgment unto victory, in the mere separation of the just from the unjust, the righteous from the wicked. That is what we little moralists, we proper men, we earthly Pharisees, too often fail to see. There is but a poor satisfaction in shaking your head over the wickedness of the human race. We cannot long escape from becoming canting hypocrites if the one theme on which we can address our brethren is that sentence in Gala-

tians where St. Paul declares that as a man sows so shall he reap. We may as well go back to the cynical statement of the old preacher, "as the tree falls, so will it lie." Why, the world is a failure indeed if this petty vindication of righteousness is all that God has to show for the groaning and travelling of the centuries. It mocks that higher righteousness whose demand is nothing less than a new creation. The true morality is not embodied in a code of rules and regulations which avenge themselves upon those who violate them; it is the living, active principle of love which overcomes all obstacles to the realisation of its saving purpose, like the river which cleaves the very mountains that it may force its way to the sea.

People imagine that there is no alternative to the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees but the iniquity of the publicans and harlots. Christ declares that there is also the righteousness that exceeds, and that it is this and this only that penetrates to the Kingdom of Heaven. The difficulties which the sins of men present are the starting-point of the great human problem. Can the world be really saved? The world in which we live is not a moral world at all unless an affirmative answer can be found to this question. If we begin by condemning we thereby declare our inability

to save. The ferryman of the Styx does not care whether men are slain in a street brawl or despatched by the hands of the public hangman so long as there are passengers for his boat. There is laughter in hell when virtue declares its sentence of banishment against the transgressor and justifies itself by refusing a place of repentance to the guilty. That is why the Lord puts so high a value upon the quality of forgiveness. If you forgive not men their trespasses, if you do not look upon the spiritual failures of your fellows as just your chance of facing the facts and triumphing over them, you have no gospel for the world, no faith in the ultimate triumph of righteousness. God saves us from the faint-hearted impatience which washes its hands of all complicity with the unthankful and evil, and which trembles to be kind lest it should seem to condone. God give us rather the venturesome spirit of that divine charity which beareth all things and which never ceases to hope. Is there not a grave danger lest those who call themselves the disciples of Jesus should, like David in the matter of Absalom, be tempted to wrap themselves in the mantle of their own righteousness, as they contemplate the problem urgently presented by social disturbance and disquiet to all who desire the progress and uplifting of the world? "The foundations shall

be cast down and what hath the righteous done?"

The motives which are astir in the breast of the great multitude are debated on every hand by those who would fain constitute themselves the guardians of our national ideals and the high priests of a virtuous and self-respecting patriotism. We are told, and who shall say that the charges are incapable of being properly sustained, that suspicion of the wealthier class has been sown in the heart of the hand-worker, that the bond of mutual trust which binds employer and employed has been weakened or even destroyed, that the agitator is plying his sinister and selfish trade, that class is set against class, that the lust of loot is abroad. The brute mob, we are constantly reminded, fears God as little as it regards man. The Socialist Sunday-school, the worst fault of which—if we may judge from their catechism—is a sad want of humour and a pathetic dulness, is said to be destroying the Eighth Commandment. The Socialist philosopher is represented as undermining public reverence for the Seventh. For my own part I should be inclined to ask whether the system which seeks to identify the advocates of a distasteful theory of society with doctrines which are immoral and unjust is altogether straightforward and ingenuous. Are they all Socialists who throng the courts of Sir Samuel Evans and

Mr. Justice Bargrave Deane? Is contempt for marriage unknown in Jermyn Street or Berkeley Square? Ask the booksellers who it is that read the novels that may be described as "hot from the cinders"; they will tell you it is the well-dressed ladies. Are there no thieves but Syndicalists; no robbers but the followers of Karl Marx? Is all acquisition righteous that the law allows? An upright man of business with whom I was conversing a few days ago described the National Insurance Act as infamous. The same epithet, if applied to our present industrial system, would brand the critic in commercial circles as a dangerous depredator. Is this just? But let us admit that all the enormities which I have attempted to describe are principally found among the votaries of social change. Are we therefore impaled upon the horns of a dilemma? Are we confronted with a fatal choice—with resistance on the one hand and an immoral tolerance on the other? There is something highly fascinating to many minds in looking upon the forces of the future as raging revolutionary fires. Men are prepared to nail the old flag to the mast and to go down shouting for the Ten Commandments and for the Established Church. It is indeed magnificent but surely it is not war; for it is a blank refusal to face the very problem which the circumstances of the time present.

I wonder whether David, as he sat gloomily in his palace refusing to devise means for the outcast to return, remembered the old Adullam days "when everyone that was in distress and everyone that was in debt and everyone that was discontented gathered themselves unto him and he became their captain." How this may have been we do not know, but this we know, that the wise woman of Tekoah was able to show before him with convincing power the sovereign truth that God is above all else the Captain of our salvation. His is no narrow Pharisaic righteousness entrenching itself in the fortress of its own ordinances amidst the jeering laughter of the lords of hell. For God there is no dilemma; there is always the third alternative. Love finds out the way; it devises means that he that is banished be not for ever outcast. To the devil it matters not whether God appears on the side of licence or of law. In the one case He surrenders, in the other He acknowledges defeat. In either case the cry of the demons is *Væ victis*. But God brings forth the Gospel and His triumph is complete. The Cross is the third alternative. That is why it checkmates the hosts of wickedness. God vindicates righteousness in the very act by which He saves. Nowhere in the whole Bible is the power of the Gospel more trenchantly stated than in the words of the Epistle to the Romans, used to

express the purpose of the death of Christ, "that He might Himself be just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Here is an exhibition of Divine Righteousness beside which the storm and tempest of celestial wrath shrinks to a puny exercise of power. It is the eternal justice on fire with forgiving mercy; it is the hard rock become a standing water, the flint stone turned into a springing well. It is the reconciliation between the lower righteousness revealed in ordinances and the higher righteousness which cannot suffer the defeat of love. Oh, it is the most wonderful truth in Him who is the Fountain-head of all truth, the truth that God redeems. "Thou, O God, art our Father; our Redeemer from everlasting is Thy Name." This is the meaning of that majestic impartiality which Jesus recognises in the Sermon on the Mount, and which times without number has caused the soul of the disappointed Pharisee to deny the very existence of God. "Love your enemies," says Christ to His disciples. Imitate your heavenly Father. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." We think we should like to see a clockwork deity dealing out rewards and punishments from day to day, crowning what seems to us good, damning what seems to us evil. But what sort of a being would God appear if He were to make this earth

of ours nothing but a scrap-heap of ruined purposes, of derelict lives? I say He would be the devil's own God. Should we not declare that He had begun to build but was not able to finish, that He had gone to war but was not able to meet the foe? God cannot be righteous unless He redeems. God cannot do justly unless He forgives. In His patience He is kind to the unthankful and evil, not because He thinks lightly of human transgression but because in His own Passion He Himself comes forth to bear our iniquities. God's mercy in Christ draws a distinction clear and sharp between a living and a dead morality, the letter that kills and the spirit that quickens. The Pharisee, the moralist, lifts no loads from the shoulder; nay, he binds heavy burdens and grievous to be borne; but the disciple of Jesus has learned in the school of his Master's sufferings the power of redemptive righteousness. In bearing one another's burdens we fulfil the law of Christ. We make the most of men because we dare to think the best of them, for we have found a liberality in the heart of God which establishes truth in forgiving, a kindness in His justice which brings the out-cast home.

THE BURNING BUSH

“I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why
the bush is not burnt.”—EXODUS iii. 3.

XVII

THE BURNING BUSH

THE Burning Bush is one of the most striking incidents in the story of the Bible. It held, as we know, a prominent place in the thought and study of the Hebrew people. The passage in which the episode is recorded was commonly cited as "the Bush." It occupies a leading position in the development of the interrupted speech which forms the defence of Stephen before the Sanhedrin. And the celebrated argument, by which our Lord unexpectedly silenced the Sadducees in the controversy concerning resurrection, was drawn from this experience of Moses, the great law-giver. Had they never read "in the Bush" how Moses speaks of the God of his fathers? Abraham was, indeed, departed, but dead he could not be, for God "is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

Nor is it wonderful that the incident should have impressed the imagination of succeeding

ages. It is the critical, personal experience in the life of a great leader, which, as happens again and again with the world's men of action, was to find its interpretation in the sphere of public history. The refined and cultured personality, within which smouldered the fire of a generous enthusiasm; the rolling uplands of the lonely Sinaitic desert for which he had exchanged the pavements and palaces of the crowded city; the black mountain of Horeb against which the clump of windswept acacia glowed with a steady flame; the revelation of the nature and name of the Eternal which became the impulse at the back of those wonders in Egypt that brought the house of Jacob from among a strange people—these have all combined to make the Burning Bush one of the most inspiring symbols with which the history of religion has enriched the race.

A great many things are said about the religious influences of the countryside which can only be accepted with considerable reserve. You will not find God among the mountains unless in a very real sense you bring Him with you. Many men who climb the passes of Switzerland or Tyrol are quite content if, as they approach the summit, they can descry a hut with a flagstaff where they may obtain refreshments. What a week on the seashore means for thousands of men and women we are only too

painfully aware. Nor are the angels the only unseen influences to which the simple are exposed in the farms and villages of rural England. No, a beautiful environment, even if it rise to the sublime, does not make men prophets. A Wordsworthian love of nature is nothing without a Calvinistic consciousness of God.

Moses was not a shepherd. A fugitive in the wilderness, he had returned under stress of necessity to the ancestral occupations of his race. But he was "the son of Pharaoh's daughter," educated in a civilised court, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was a man of affairs and a philosopher, and more than this. If, like St. Paul in later times, he was "a citizen of no mean city," like him also he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. His contact with the court had not dulled his patriotism into cosmopolitan indifference. His heart was with his own folk, and their God was his God. His presence at the mount of God was due to the fact that he, the future law-giver, had put himself outside the law in defence of his people.

Who, then, was better fitted than Moses to mediate between the old and the new, to be the recipient of that higher revelation of the Eternal Will which should make him the human instrument of a fresh advance in the development of the creative purpose? There are periods in the

world's history when progress is no longer possible on the old levels, when fetters must be broken and boundaries overstepped, when the law of liberty has become inconsistent with the order of society, when nothing but a new revelation of the mind and purpose of the Eternal will achieve the freedom of the people of God. What was at one time a shelter becomes a prison. "Behold now the place where we dwell before thee is too strait for us."

Was it not the case some four centuries ago in Europe? The time had arrived when a straight and orderly advance, along the lines of that imperfect apprehension of Christ which had crystallised in the ecclesiastical institutions of the Middle Ages, was no longer possible. The world was a system much less simple, an organism infinitely more delicate and complex, than when the northern nations had yielded their allegiance to the Cross and been baptized into the catholic community. Once again, as of yore, Jerusalem was in bondage with her children. Those, whose forefathers converted from paganism had found in the Church a joyful mother, groaned under a burden of dead rites, a bondage of unspiritual ceremonies. Religion had to be vitalised by being lifted out of the ruts of a routine organised upon a view of human nature and of Christ's relation to it, which the mind of the nations had outgrown.

Whatever criticisms you may be inclined to pass upon Martin Luther, it yet remains true that but for the struggle with his own soul and with the words of the New Testament in the solitude of his cell at Erfurt, which resulted in the proclamation of personal relations with God as the central message of the Gospel, Christ would never have been able to interpret the new age or claim for Himself the expansion of Europe and the revival of learning. Once receive that faith of which Luther was the masterful exponent, once clasp it to your heart, once take it into your life ; and to go back upon it, to return to the clumsy, mechanical beliefs of a former age, is like retiring from the presence chamber of the King to sit with lacqueys in the outer courts. Reversion is the one thing that is impossible. It is to exchange the living Christ of our broader experience for the antiquarian relics of a buried past.

When we look out upon the world to-day, does it not seem as though we had reached another similar stage in the evolution of the Eternal Will? We have come to a point when the world is moving very rapidly to a complete transformation in the face of human society. New facts—industrial, social, political—have come tumbling into our field of vision. The problems that perplex us to-day are the chrysalis stage of those developments upon which will

rest the social order of to-morrow. May we not fatally misread the signs of the times if our only answer to popular disturbances, to the turbulence of excluded classes, to the industrial unrest, is the appeal to law and order, the criticism of democracy, the identification of religious forces with the vanishing past? What the time seems to demand of us is, not a re-interpretation of theology in the light of historical criticism and physical science, but rather new visions of Christ in the light of the changes which are swiftly accomplishing themselves among the nations of the world. New theology is inferior thought. Enlarged human sympathies will bring new visions of God.

I shall be told that these are the views of the socialistic curate. I am not a curate, and, so far as I am aware, I am not a Socialist. But I stand here for the socialistic curates. I speak out of an experience of the younger clergy wider than that of most. The socialistic curate is never the conventional Levite. He is always among the most thoughtful, the most living, the most human members of his order. He is not truckling to the democracy, for no one knows better than he that it is not to the hand-workers that he must look, if his path in life is to be made smooth and easy. What he does show is appreciation of facts, trust in the future, and faith in a living, liberating, and self-interpreting

God. He is the man who is emerging from the habits of the class in which he was born, and is beginning to think. It is not those dignitaries in Church or State, who in times of upheaval would inculcate respect for law and order as the last word of a nation's spiritual guides, to whom the Holy One will reveal His presence in the bush that burns. Was it not the official representative of law and order, the mouthpiece doubtless of the public opinion of Egypt, who said of those "wretched individuals," the children of Israel, "Ye are idle, ye are idle," and whose only answer to the tribunes of an oppressed class was this: "Ye do let the people from their work"? It was Moses, the emancipator, inspired by a fresh revelation of the Creator's Will in the Arabian desert, who dared to make himself the mouthpiece of the God of freedom, and to cry "Let My people go, that they may serve Me."

There are, then, crises in the history of the world, when, as it would seem, God embarks upon a new line in the development of His purpose. Evolution must never be conceived as proceeding upon one unbroken straight line. It is as though the purpose began to develop anew, under fresh conditions. The old limits are broken through. The living impulse fashions a new environment. If Israel is to come forth from Egypt and to enter upon its career as a nation, it must receive a new

revelation of God, adequate to the work which it has to do. The development of a nation is a very different matter from the migration of a family. The problem of the emigrant is a comparatively simple one. He seeks a country, a virgin soil, as yet unfurrowed by the plough of a complicated civilisation. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will shew thee." For a plain issue such as this, a rude, rough, imperfect faith, so only it be strong, will suffice. Men must be aware of a guiding Hand, a predestinating Will, an overshadowing Purpose. But what will uphold the Pilgrim Fathers in the *Mayflower* will not prove itself sufficient for those who are making a nation in New England. What has in it a note of the sublime, as the Dutch farmers strike upward with their bullock-wagons into the heart of the veldt, is pathetically unequal to the more delicate task of governing a South African Republic. Emigration is a patriarchal remedy for social ills. More sublime than the discovery of continents is the spirit which cries:

"Come, I will make this continent indissoluble ;
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever yet
shone upon !"

That, too, was the position of Israel in Egypt, when, already a people in being, the time came

that they must either escape from the midst of an alien civilisation and develop their own national genius and destiny or sink under their burdens. The religion which had sufficed to separate Abraham from Hammurabi's Babylon and to sustain the patriarchs in the days of their pilgrimage was not strong enough to impart the necessary impulse, when movement must now take new forms, and the evolution of a nation's complex and manifold life replace the migrations of a pastoral household. The God of Abraham must reveal Himself under a new name. So the destined leader becomes first the new prophet. The Eternal is no longer a voice that calls, a hand that points, an eye that guides. Or rather He is all this, but He is more, very much more. He is the living, burning Presence that destroys not but sustains. He is a consuming fire, but He does not consume. He knows the sorrows of His people because He shares them. In all their afflictions He is afflicted, and the angel of His Presence saves them. Now I do not say that, until Moses turned aside to see the Burning Bush, there was no knowledge of this wonderful immanence in history. No man can be brought into relation with the Living One without gaining some knowledge of His nearness. But it is one thing to have confidence that God will meet you in the way; it is another to awaken to the great conviction

that He is the force at the back of your life. It is one thing to wrestle as with a man until the breaking of the day; it is another to stand upon holy ground and listen to the proclamation from out the fire of the ineffable name. It is one thing to arise and follow God; it is another to find God even in your present perplexities.

Compare the needs of the man of the Victorian era with those of the man who stands to-day at the opening of the twentieth century and you will understand. Sixty years ago it was an easier matter to agree with the Psalmist, who declared: "I have been young, and now am old, and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." Life was a struggle then, as it is now. But science, full of hope, was entering upon its career of invention and discovery. Obstacles were being removed from the pathway of commerce. Trade was opening vistas of prosperity to enterprising energy and fertile resource. The Manchester School was busy with its schemes of political enfranchisement. War was about to die because it was unreasonable, and the dark places of the world to be enlightened with the lamp of universal education. "The Christ that was to be" when Tennyson wrote his "In Memoriam" is a prospect to which our modern mind finds it no longer possible to look forward.

For evolution, that watchword of a former generation, turns out to be a business much more complicated than its most ardent apostles dreamed. There are no ends that stand out clear, certain, and defined as the goal of the universal movement. The motion of the world is in circles rather than in straight lines. Everywhere there are crossroads, blind alleys, backward tendencies. You have only to translate your cherished schemes of social reform into acts of Parliament and at once there springs into being a crop of new problems, the possibility of which, it may be, you had not even suspected. You lift the load from men's shoulders, only, as it would seem, to impose new burdens. The courage which men need to-day is a deeper, larger, grander quality than the optimism which sustained their sires. We have to put the thought of our brains, the passion of our hearts, the energy of our wills, into causes and purposes, which, we require no cynic to inform us, are not a panacea for the ills of the common life. For this we need a vision of the Eternal, which shall justify that constant conflict of hope with experience, which is the history of man's strenuous striving with the painful earth. Like Moses, we must turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush burns and is not consumed.

Have we such a revelation? Look! The

Bible is the record of God's age-long attempt to manifest Himself amid all the conditions of man's earthly habitation. The Eternal Will which day by day renews the face of nature, and not without strain is continually bringing forth higher and higher forms of life, seeks to establish personal relations with the children of men, and to draw them into a sublime copartnery of creation. What faith more simple, what hope more trustful, what love more child-like, than to call God Father! But what infinite toil, what a mighty exercise of personal, spiritual power did the Lord put forth, before He could justify our right to be called the sons of God by making Himself our Father and giving us the Spirit of His Son. For there is suffering that racks our writhing frame, and sorrow that stains our cheek with tears, and death that holds us in the night of fear. Pain, grief, death—that is a bond of triple brass, which God must break if we are to escape from the shadows of the prison-house into the light of His countenance. And there is yet another and a heavier failure. There is the mind conscious of wrong, the will aware of its disobedience, the conscience stricken with its load of guilt. We set our Lord God a supreme task when we demand that He shall prove His Fatherhood by Himself bearing the weight of these. But at last His love prevails. At last

appears the greatest Birth of Time, and the Cross stands on the hillside of Calvary. Thither my steps hasten. I will turn aside and see this great sight. I will learn its secret. I will read its message. These are the words written over it in letters that burn:

“Before Abraham was, I am.”

THE CROSS-BEARER

“ He that doth not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.”—ST. MATTHEW x. 39.

XVIII

THE CROSS-BEARER

WHEN people speak about their crosses, they usually mean what would be more appropriately expressed by the figure of a fly in the ointment. In the lot of every man there is an element which is apt to make him fidget. This was expressed in the reply of the newly-married wife who had stepped into a comfortable home and a steady income, but who had found the partner of her life less congenial than she had hoped. "But there—there is always a something!" It is this something to which people are apt to refer when they speak about "my cross." This word spreads an atmosphere of Christian resignation around a circumstance which would otherwise appear rather sordid and commonplace, and perhaps not altogether creditable to the person concerned. St. Paul was a little more outspoken, and certainly not wider of the mark, when he described his infirmity as a messenger of the devil. And a

famous Oxford scholar, who, alas! dipped his reminiscent pen in gall, spoke of a personality peculiarly offensive to himself in terms which were at least honest when he called him, not "my cross," but "my Satan."

Jesus Christ never intended to provide those whose tempers were more cruciform than their trials with convenient phrases under which to cloak their failure to sustain the ordinary discipline to which all flesh is heir. That was a task more congenial to the Pharisees than to their relentless Critic. And this warning about cross-bearing was, as we are well aware, one of the hard sayings which even His most attached disciples found it difficult to hear. It set before His followers a standard which looked like a Quixotic squandering of great opportunities when He applied it to His own case. He told His disciples that He was about to make good the principle in His own Person, and that immediately. "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man is delivered to be crucified." Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him. He loved his Master too well not to talk to Him for His own good, to deal faithfully with Him, as we should say. So accustomed are we to connect the thought of salvation with the Cross, that we fail to realise the situation. That the Son of Man must be crucified seemed to His best friends a proposition wholly inconsistent with

that rôle of the world's Redeemer which they had just acknowledged as His proper part. Their zeal in Jesus' behalf was proportioned to the fulness of their belief in His Messiahship. It was because they had committed themselves to the great confession that He was the Son of the living God, that the little band of devoted disciples, who followed Him from Galilee, were eager to save Him from the strange madness that seemed suddenly to have taken possession of Him. Had something snapped in His brain? Had the tension suddenly become too great for His fine mental and spiritual equipoise? Crucifixion for the Son of Man was inconceivable, impossible, absurd. They wanted to save Him from a course which meant nothing short of a stultification of His whole career, a surrender of His whole claim, a complete and utter denial of Himself. At all costs the catastrophe must be averted. Where all seemed to be at stake, remonstrance even with such a Master as Jesus was peremptorily demanded. "This be far from Thee, Lord."

The reply was startling as it was strong. It was a staggering blow to that latent satisfaction which underlies all interference, however distasteful, which men deem to be demanded by the greatness of the issues. Jesus does not even say that He appreciates the kindness, the loyalty, the love which has prompted a suggestion to

which, nevertheless, He must turn a deaf ear. Simon's rebuke is met by another so instant and overwhelming that, if it does not silence his doubts, it at least crushes his opposition. "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumbling-block unto Me." Then the Lord reiterates the great principle of cross-bearing, of which His own approaching sacrifice is to be the supreme example. "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself."

Let him deny himself! Here is another instance in which the coinage has been debased, and the meaning which words originally bore has been degraded in ordinary usage. The professional diner-out will give as his reason for refusing an attractive course that he finds it necessary to deny himself. He means only that his doctor has warned him to abstain from certain articles of diet if he does not wish to shatter his already enfeebled constitution. We often take credit to ourselves for what we call self-denial because we curtail our amusements by an occasional hour in order that we may pay some of the debt of service which we owe to others. If we are High Church, again we deny ourselves. It may even be that the mild abstinence which is covered by this phrase is as æsthetically pleasing to our refined sensibility as a violet frontal or Allegri's Miserere. But we may mount much higher on the ladder of self-

denial and still remain much nearer self-indulgence than what the Saviour calls the denial of self. When Garibaldi offered the Italian patriots hunger and hardship, wounds and death as the price of their country's freedom, he appealed to a well-understood instinct of our glorious human nature. When he thus summoned his followers he knew well that he was making a demand to which hundreds and thousands of brave men, yes, and of women also, have in every age been ready to respond. When Latimer called on Ridley to play the man, his soul glowed with an intense passion of self-realisation, for, though his body was consumed in the flame, he knew that such a candle would be lighted in England as should never be put out. You and I may not be martyrs, but we are convinced that no great cause will ever appeal for them in vain. A Patteson will face the fury of the South Sea Islanders, certain that though the outward man perish, the spirit that inspires his devotion will be the seed of a Melanesian Church. A Hannington will not flinch before the spears of the Baganda, knowing that, when his body lies mouldering in the grave, his soul will go marching along. "I go gladly on this mission," cried the brave James Telford, "and shall rejoice if I may but give my body as one of the stones to pave the road into interior Africa, and my blood to cement

the stones together, so that others may pass into Congoland."

It is words like these which, as they rebuke our easy lives, make the good tears start. But they who say such things would be the first to urge that it was something very different even from heroic self-surrender that Jesus meant when He said, "Whosoever doth not take his cross is not worthy of Me." Look again at Christ as He meets the remonstrances of Simon Peter. It is not alone the risks which attend the assertion of an unpopular claim that He is willing to undertake. It is not alone the reluctance of the flesh, the love of life, the applause of the world, that He is willing to trample underfoot. It is not the resistance of the lower nature that He flings to the ground. Give the words their full meaning. *He denies Himself*. It is clear from the form of the disciple's urgent representations that Jesus is embarking upon a course that seems to crush and annihilate the very claim that He is making. He is the Saviour, and to the eye of those who love Him best He is flinging away His very power to save. The world needs Him and He forsakes the world. God's Messiah has become a fool. He denies Himself.

It is difficult not to use language which would seem to imply that when Jesus went up to Jerusalem to die He became, what the Son of

God could never be, untrue to Himself! Yet we must hazard misunderstanding if we are to attempt to convey what self-denial really means as it is interpreted by the sacrifice of Christ. It is the entire abandonment of everything that is rightly called life. "He emptied Himself." So St. Paul, looking back upon the self-abnegation of the Eternal Son, expressed the sacrifice which redeemed the world. And it was only when, as it were, He was already cut off out of the land of the living, that the Saviour took up the Cross.

This fact should at once check all cheap and familiar expositions of this marvellous phrase. No one can bear the cross in any sense which approaches that in which Jesus bore it, until he has passed upon himself that sentence of outlawry which Jesus means by self-denial. He must have placed himself in regard to all the world in just that position in which Peter placed his Master with regard to himself at the moment when the cock crew. It is difficult for us to understand the consternation with which the Twelve listened to this startling figure, because for us, with centuries of Christian experience behind us, the Cross is the sign of triumph at which Satan's hosts do flee. It is a symbol beaten in gold and set with jewels. But all this we must blot out of the horizon before we listen to the words of Jesus. "Yes, of course," you

reply, "it is the penal cross, and it means a public execution." Well, but when you contemplate the Cross in this connexion what is the picture that rises before your imagination? You have seen, perhaps, Mr. Martin Harvey in "The Only Way." Or you have read the story on which that drama is based in the "Tale of Two Cities." And you think of a noble figure, every inch a gentleman, mounting the guillotine amid the sordid scenes of the French Revolution. Many of you think how willingly you would have stood at the hero's side, and I doubt not that some of you are right.

But who among us would have stood beneath the Cross of Jesus? The disciples forsook Him and fled. Peter denied Him in the judgment hall. They were braver than most men. But three short years before they had forsaken all to follow Him. They had stood by their Master in more than one dangerous encounter. Some of them at least had dared to declare themselves ready to drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism. And one of them had even drawn the sword on His behalf. But they understood only too well what bearing the cross meant. It meant neither honourable wounds nor glorious risks. What they had to look upon was Jesus going forth beyond the camp bearing His reproach. No one carried the cross who was not beyond the pale of human society, a slave who

was already no better than living carrion, who had no character to lose, and who only awaited the shameful process of extinction. Suppose that one had told those followers of Jesus that in the ages to come these words would trip from the tongue as a synonym for petty troubles and trivial trials. They would have been less able to understand his meaning than we should be if one were to predict to us that a pretty metaphor was to be culled from the gallows. When those disciples continued to follow Jesus they must have hoped against hope that His words were after all some wild paradox, the limitations of which time would at length disclose.

Now, if you have been able to follow me so far, you will, I think, understand the point to which I have been trying to lead you. No one can reach that height of discipleship at which it becomes possible to take up the Cross and bear it after Jesus. None knew better than the Master Himself that He must go forward alone to tread the wine-press of the wrath of God. Ah! my brothers and sisters, we must be humble enough to let the Saviour bear the Cross for us. We have not yet begun to be disciples until we have learnt the humiliating lesson of our entire dependence upon the grace of Christ. The Cross becomes our glory when it spells for us, not punishment, but pardon. When St. Paul declares out of the fulness of a

rich experience that he has been crucified with Christ, he means that he belongs wholly to Jesus, Whose sorrows are the joy, Whose Death is the life of everyone that believeth. He is the freedman of Him Who became a slave, the child of His redeeming love, and the offspring of His pains. He suffers, but it is a light affliction. The burden which he bears is an exceeding weight of glory. Nothing can be clearer to any one, who will have the patience to follow his impassioned argument in the Epistle to the Galatians, than the true cause of the triumphant song into which he breaks in the sixth chapter: "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross."

Look at the context and you will see at once that it is not his sufferings for Christ, but Christ's sufferings for him, that the apostle here salutes in the wondrous Cross. It is the experience of a simple faith that bursts into language all too feeble to express his entire submission to Jesus crucified. This was the surrender which for years his pride had refused to make. This was the pestilent heresy that he had himself persecuted from city to city. The strong, stubborn Pharisee did not shrink from suffering. He would have faced the headsman's sword as readily for the Jews' religion as for the faith of a Christian. It is one thing to die for your traditions. It is quite another to suffer perse-

ention for the Cross of Christ. And it is the folly of the proclamation, not the risks which it involves, from which flesh and blood shrinks. Horatius who kept the bridge, Nelson who fell at Trafalgar, Gordon who perished at Khar-toum, these are the immortals. But the paradox of Christianity, attested by the faith and experience of generations of redeemed men, is this—I owe my soul to Him Who was hanged upon a tree.

To take up the Cross daily, while it does not exclude suffering and persecution, yea and death itself, has for the Christian a transformed meaning. "How might any pain be more than to see Him that is all my life and all my bliss suffer?" So said Julian of Norwich. To take up the Cross means that, but it means infinitely more. It means to glory in the Cross, as St. Paul gloried. Noble was the venture which led the sons of Zebedee to make the declaration that they were able to drink of the cup, to be baptized with the baptism, that awaited their Master and Lord. But how wide the chasm which separated the expectation in which the pledge was given from the experience in which it was fulfilled! Pride mingled with the loyalty that evoked it. Penitence and faith were the sole conditions upon which Christ Himself redeemed it. His was the baptism of pain, theirs the baptism of power. His was the cup

of sacrificial suffering, theirs the cup of eucharistic praise.

Yes, indeed. It is a changed cross which is offered to the Christian, a yoke which is easy, a burden which is light. Hast Thou said, O my Saviour, that if I take not up the cross, I am not worthy of Thee? What, shall I carry Thy Cross, who am not worthy even to bear Thy shoes? Nay, Master mine, but I come to Thee. Stoop down from the Cross which carries Thee. Embrace me with the arms of Thy mercy. Whisper the word of pardon. Breathe on me with the spirit of power. I am not worthy, but worthy art Thou. The feast is prepared; Thou hast sanctified the guests and called them to the sacrifice. We have an altar, on which they have no right to eat who deem that here in this camping-ground of weary mortals, with its daily tasks and customary routine, they have found an abiding city. We who seek the eternal city must needs be pilgrims. Without the gate Christ suffered. Thither we go forth to Him, bearing the reproach of believing in His Name. Beneath the Cross is opened the fountain for sin. Beneath the Cross the Table of the Lord is spread. Through Him let us draw near, in full assurance of faith. Through Him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.

THE RESPONSE TO
THE REDEEMING PURPOSE

“ I have found David My servant : with My holy oil
have I anointed him.”—PSALM lxxxix. 21.

XIX

THE RESPONSE TO THE REDEEMING PURPOSE

DAVID belongs to the world. The form which Michael Angelo has lovingly portrayed in his heroic marble expressed the judgment of mankind. What Alfred is to the English, that in still larger measure is David to the Hebrews. But the darling of his own nation has become the beloved of the human race. Not one of Homer's immortal kings has attained the full dignity of the shepherd of the peoples like him whom the Bible calls "the man after God's own heart." Criticism has been very busy with the Psalms, and is loth to leave us in possession of the pleasing sentiment that even one of those Divine meditations was conceived in the heart of the sweet singer of Israel. Yet what English Churchman, who after the sorrows of the Passion Song listens to the soothing chant of *Dominus regit me*, the Lord is my Shepherd—what Scottish herd,

following the bleating sheep on the hillside, as he cons the rugged music of the metrical version :—

“The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want,
 He makes me down to lie
 In pastures green ; He leadeth me
 The quiet waters by”—

what Christian man, who recalls the familiar metaphor that expresses the tender care of the heavenly Father, does not think of David?

Now, why is it that the story of this old Hebrew monarch has more power not only to enlist the affections but to move the wills of men than all the praises of virtue that have been ever sung? Plato draws a picture of the philosopher king, and the most cultured among us are bound to confess that after all he is an unconscionable prig. The high-souled man, of whom Aristotle writes, walking circumspectly between excess and defect along the middle way of perfect conduct, would be a very dull person to meet. His sense of humour would be so different from our own. And those descriptions of the virtues—justice, temperance, fortitude—which have been the commonplaces of moral philosophy, have no power to inspire the reader with the desire of attainment. No doubt they have their place in the training of character. St. Paul has sufficient sympathy

with the Greek mind to bid us Christians to the contemplation of the nobler qualities of the human soul. "If there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things."

But the general impression which an abstract discussion of the virtues is apt to leave upon the mind is surely one of unreality. We have met persons who act justly and love tenderly. But love and justice, and the whole range of human qualities of which men speak, are not furniture of the soul, like the bed and the table, the stool and the candlestick of Elisha's chamber. They have no concrete existence like the bumps of the skull by which the phrenologist professes to read off a man's character, or the lines in the hand from which the palmist pretends to forecast his actions. Habits are formed by actions, and no wise man can afford, apart altogether from conscience and duty, to neglect the links out of which his chains are forged. But virtues, almost as much as happiness, are only achieved on condition that they are not sought. The man who deliberately spends his time in their cultivation mars the spontaneity of goodness by a suspicion of professionalism, and would seem to suggest nothing more forcibly than Fielding's well-known portraiture of the philosopher Square.

But if a story like that of David holds us with a spell that no descriptions of virtue,

however enthusiastic, are able to cast, its effect is something very different from the appeal to our imagination which is made by the great creations of literature, whether in the play or in the novel. What reader of Dickens does not remember the sort of anticipation with which he turned the page, after wandering in other regions of the narrative, and discovered that some favourite character, who for the nonce had been waiting behind the scenes, was about to reappear upon the stage? In the dialogue which ensues there is nothing unexpected. The famous actor is sure to be exactly like himself. Uriah Heap is still humble. Micawber is still waiting for something to turn up. And if it be urged that the obvious criticism of the illustrious author of the "Pickwick Papers" is that his characters have no development, no life-history—that they do not struggle into being, and are unlike the men and women of experience who partly are and wholly hope to be—it yet remains true that in all personalities which are the product of imagination there is always the element of caricature. Charterhouse never knew a brother who was quite like Thomas Newcome. There never was an egoist like Sir Willoughby Patterne. Even Cordelia is too self-conscious to have found a footing on the earth more substantial than the boards of Sadler's Wells. For,

if all the world be a stage, it is not wholly true to describe all its men and women as merely players.

There are some who go through life under conviction of an important mission which they have been sent into the world to fulfil. But even they have not so subordinated every action to the accomplishment of one masterful purpose as to transform their lives into an artistic unity. Who among us is really aware of the part that he is playing in the theatre of existence? Who among us, if he were confronted with the pages of his own biography, would not again and again be moved either to laughter or tears by the extraordinary estimates of his activities with which he would be there presented. "What does he know," cried a public man, when he read the account which a critic had given of the secret of his influence—"what does he know about my 'intellectual vivacity'?" The real world in which we find ourselves is composed, not of types of character which it is the object of their actions to illustrate and express, but of personal beings with beliefs, hopes, fears, desires that are seeking to satisfy themselves moment by moment in what are often the fitful volitions of their daily life. What do they believe? What do they hope, or fear? What are the objects upon which their desires fasten? These are the things that awaken our interest, inspire

our enthusiasm, and stimulate our wills, when we contemplate our fellow-men, whether they be centres of mighty movements or the familiar companions of the common life. It is in the pursuit of kindred purposes and not in mutual admiration that genuine friendships move and live.

Here, then, is the true secret of the influence which the men and women of the Bible exercise not only over our imagination, but upon our lives also. We are not dealing with plaster saints, with the offspring of the devout imagination. We are not offered for our instruction conceptions of what the holy ought to be, with just enough of human sin and infirmity deftly introduced into the picture to give verisimilitude to what our intelligence might otherwise regard as an artificial and improbable tale. These stories are as much the record of what men have been and done, as the Psalms are the expression of what they have thought and felt. The failures and achievements of the one, like the depressions and aspirations of the other, belong to beings who reveal that same "piebald miscellany" which each one of us recognises in the experience of his own personality. Our respect for the scientific criticism, which is patiently seeking to appraise the historical value of the reports which together form the Bible narrative, does not in the least deter us from

recognising the fact that its people are real people, whose crown of rejoicing is not the surpassing excellence of the virtues they achieved, but the supreme glory of the Object they pursued. "Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed." David was following the ewes, and God took him.

Look at the life of David and you will find much in it that none would desire either to approve or to emulate. I do not speak of his great sin : that stands reprovèd on the forefront of Scripture itself. I think rather of many details of his career, revealing his moral standard or his human passions, which have not only been allowed to pass without censure by the prophetic historian, but the incongruity of which he may well have been unable to detect. We admire the fearless courage with which David defends his flock against the lion and the bear, the quiet confidence with which he meets the champion of the Philistines, his magnanimity towards Saul, his tender friendship for Jonathan. We are infinitely touched by his laments for the Lord's Anointed, for Abner, for Absalom. His family affection, his chivalry, his lofty conception of the kingly office, his readiness to bear the consequences of his own mistakes, the loyalty which he shows towards his servants, his friends, his people—all these at once constitute a claim upon the reverent regard of mankind.

But there are other incidents in his life and other features in his character. These appear inconsistent with such nobility only so long as we persist in supposing that the spirit of man is a collection of virtues and vices which rub up against one another within each human being, natures that come into play successively like the stops of an organ, rival personalities that neutralise each other's activity like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's famous romance. There is, for example, the lawlessness of the freebooter, the revengeful vows, the wars of extermination, the sensual indulgence of the Oriental monarch, the treacherous recommendation of pardoned enemies to the posthumous vengeance of a successor. David belongs not to the region of romance, where characters are constructed by literary art, but to the realm of reality in which men struggle onward amid the tangle of circumstances and in the twilight of moral imperfection towards a goal which they themselves only dimly discern.

I have said that what practically interests us in the lives of real men is not the graces of character they exemplify, but the principles by which they live, the objects in which their belief centres. The loyalty, for example, which bound Dr. Liddon to his master Pusey meant not an exact imitation of his character, which would have been singularly unsuccessful, but a scrupu-

lous adherence to his Church principles. The hero-worship which surrounded Mr. Gladstone was fruitful not in the cultivation of his characteristics, which would have been infinitely trying, but in fidelity to his political ideals. A man's secret is always something which is beyond himself.

And so it is with David. The God in whom he trusts, the Lord who is his Shepherd, is the legacy which the shepherd King of Israel has left to succeeding generations. It is the oil of the heavenly anointing that consecrates his life and transforms his career into a service. "I have found David My servant." Nothing that he himself possesses does he bequeath to the world. It is the fact that he was himself possessed, gripped by the mighty Hand, grasped by the Eternal Purpose, which awakens in every faithful and true heart the spirit of obedience and trust. It is neither his prudence nor his fidelity, nor his courage, but his religion which from him passes over as a motive power to other lives.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the story of his great sin. Men have their stronger side and their weaker. One may be as honest as the day in his commercial dealings, but dishonourable in his domestic relations. Another may be the soul of purity in his personal life, but shifty in his public action. And those who

are considerate of the reputation of others will magnify their virtues and speak tenderly of their faults. We are all too much aware of the glass houses in which we ourselves live to throw stones at the weak points in our neighbours' mansions. But David's fall had nothing to do with the relative proportions of strength and weakness in what is at best an imperfect character. It was a collapse of everything in which it might be supposed that a man could put his trust. The soul was beaten out of its very fortress. Disaster overtook him on his strong side. That loyal spirit of friendship, which had again and again manifested itself in noble and chivalrous action, was replaced by mean and murderous treachery. We invent ingenious reasons to account for those sudden crimes, those fatal lapses from moral rectitude, which from time to time come like a thunderbolt from the blue to ruin blameless reputations and wreck brilliant careers. We ascribe them to something abnormal in the moral constitution, to some unsuspected lack of mental balance, to anything but what the Bible plainly shows to have been the cause of David's sudden degradation. He forgot God.

No man that really knows his own heart can for a moment trust to reserves of moral force, stored up as it were within his personality, that shall render him impervious to assaults upon

the strong points of his character. The settled habits of years are as nought when once the guiding principle is lost. Do we know so little of the delicate poise of our spiritual being as not to perceive that, preserved as by the grace of God we may have been from calamitous failure, our honour, our purity, our faithfulness hang upon a thread? We have felt the fatal miasma rising about us, we have heard the voluptuous music with which the air has begun to vibrate, and we have trembled for the ark of God within us. Then the moment of recollection has come, and once again the danger has passed. Thank God that He has not allowed us to forget Him! "When I said my foot had slipped, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."

"I forgot God." They are the simple words once used by a poor sinner to describe a lapse that before its occurrence might have seemed impossible. Does the phrase seem conventional? Year after year have I gazed from the windows of the express upon one of the fairest scenes in England, as after toiling upward under the shoulder of Ingleborough to Ribbleshead and the high ground above Dent, the train sped swiftly down the green slopes of the limestone hills, with here and there a grey farm, or solitary sheep-pen or mountain church in its little clump of wind-swept trees, to Kirkby Stephen and the beautiful vale of the Eden. A more peaceful

upland could not be imagined, as it lies outspread in the soft moonlight, or the gathering shades of evening, or the shimmer of the mid-day sun. And then, you will remember it well, one dark morning last winter we opened the daily paper, and from that moment there is associated with that quiet country the ghastly memories of lurid fires and burning coaches and the charred flesh of men. Alas! one of the steadiest signalmen on the Midland Railway, who for many a long day had passed the traveller in peace and comfort down the windings of that lonely pass, had forgotten a light engine on the Carlisle road. It is a picture of the ruin that is wrought when, in one fatal moment, a poor soul has forgotten God.

That is why I say that the Bible is never more true to human experience than when it represents the fall of David as the result of a sad oblivion which in the hour of a great temptation obscured the guiding principle of his life. That is why David reveals to us, not less in the accusing presence of Nathan than amid the praises of Zion, the secret of spiritual manhood. It rests not upon the acquisition of settled habit, but upon the vision of a victorious and redeeming God. Oh yes—a redeeming God! That is the power which these men and women of the Bible are able to hand on to us, a power which no system of ethics, no eulogies of virtue,

no, nor yet the sublime contemplation of the beauty of holiness, can ever bestow. Have you never felt, when a sin has been committed, as though self-respect were a treasure that you could never regain? The sun is darkened in your heavens. The past, with all its virtues, all the self-control which it has exhibited, all the moral victories which it has witnessed, seems to have passed away like the baseless fabric of a dream. There is nought anywhere upon which the tired eye can gaze except the despair of leaden skies and sodden fields. It is no sentimental hypocrisy, but a real and present experience, which describes your righteousness as filthy rags, when the example of good men appears a mockery of your broken life, and the appeal to your best self seems to be made to a being in the existence of which you scarcely dare to believe.

Courage, thou fainting soul. Thy best self is thy God. He is thy glory and He is thy righteousness. Return unto Him and He will return unto thee. Cry aloud with the stricken king, "I have sinned against the Lord." Listen to the word of Him Whose mercies are new every morning: "The Lord also hath put away thy sin."

"O Love, that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul on Thee,

I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be."

This is the thirst for God, like the desire of the hart for the waterbrooks, which is the first and last secret of a true life. The saints that are in the earth are not those who have succeeded, but those who have never ceased to try; not those who have been satiated with holiness, but whose heart and whose flesh cry out for the living God. The man after Christ's own heart is the man whose heart is with Christ, as Christ's heart is with him, and who in the heat of the conflict longs and prays, "Oh! that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem."

THE BANQUET

“He brought me to the banqueting-house.”—SONG OF
SONGS ii. 4.

XX

THE BANQUET

NO apology is needed—and I make none—for giving a religious interpretation to the language of the Song of Songs. That it is originally a love poem no one who considers the luxuriance, often the extravagance, of its figures and flowers of speech can doubt. The very rhythm, which it almost naturally assumes in the English translation, is suggestive of other essays in this form of literature. This description of jealousy is unconscious verse, even as it stands in the Revised Version:—

“The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,
A very flame of the Lord.”

And with little transposition or change of phrase the passionate appeal of the fifth chapter, which begins with the words, “I am come into my garden,” at once reveals a close

parallelism in thought and lilt with Tennyson's "Maud":—

"Open to me, my sister, my love,
My dove, my pure and true:
For my locks are wet with the drops of the night,
And my head is filled with the dew."

But those who remember the splendid passage in "Sesame and Lilies," where Ruskin, using the language of Canticles, weaves into a matchless web of delicate and inspiring prose the figure of the English poet's lady, and the experience of her, not a Maud but a Madeline, who in the early dawn was met by One supposed to be the gardener, will not for a moment dispute the right of the prophetic nation to read in this ancient melody the record of the tryst in which God meets to bless His people. So I take it, and so by the help of God I will endeavour to apply the words I have just read: "He brought me to the banqueting-house."

What I desire to speak about to-day is the experience of the living Christ, the strength and refreshment of the soul, which in all ages has been to the believer the ground of his faith. First of all, I shall try to show that it is through the Jesus of history, not through any mystic or sentimental abstraction from actual fact, that the Christian holds communion with his God and Father. Next I will ask you to consider the

Cross as the specific determination of the work of Christ, through which, as by the gateway of forgiveness and reconciliation, we enter into that divine fellowship. And, lastly, I shall propose to you the Holy Communion as the provision made in the economy of the Christian household for its realisation in an expressive act of devotion. Here are three cords of Christian experience which become the true proof, to such as possess them, of the historical reality of the story of Redemption.

I

The first Epistle of St. Peter sums up the whole of Christianity in a single sentence: "Through Him," he says, "you are believers in God." The passage is one in which the writer is speaking about the glories of the Lamb, and he gets to the heart of the whole matter when he asserts that it is in Jesus Christ that our faith looks up to God. Religion is communion with God. Christianity is communion with God through Christ. That puts the whole case in a nutshell, showing at once the point wherein it agrees with all other creeds, and the point wherein it differs from them. Any system that puts forth a claim to the name of religion purports to establish relations between man and his Maker. The experience of every Christian

is that such relations have actually been achieved through Jesus.

I say Jesus rather than Christ, because I want to make it quite clear that the one Mediator between God and man is the Christ of the Gospels. People nowadays make the vain attempt to differentiate between Jesus of Nazareth and the Living One Whom, in the jargon of modern religious discussion, they call the Christ of experience. St. Bernard sings the praises of Him, the glimpses of Whose presence are "than honey sweeter far." The author of a modern hymn celebrates the grace and glory of the Beloved, who "brings a poor vile sinner into His house of wine." And many would describe the language in which these holy souls endeavour to depict the banquet of the soul as the creation of piety. This heavenly bridegroom, who haunts the inward consciousness of the mystic, has no real place in the procession of external facts. Others would go further still. They would say that the language of Christian devotion is but one of many forms of expression which have been given to an experience as universal as idealistic philosophy, as cosmopolitan as religion itself. You Christians, they would say, have nothing to show which is not equally the lot of the followers of Gautama, which may not be paralleled among the disciples of Plato.

Now, in the first place you and I are as much strangers to the experience of the Buddhist of Burma or the Platonist of Alexandria as to that of the North American Indian. We know, indeed, the principles of the Buddha and the mind of Plato, so far as these are made known to us in their writings. This is no more than to say that we know what Buddhism is and what Platonism is. But if the record of the experience, which is the basis of their several systems, is to be our guide, then all we can say is that the atmosphere of either is entirely distinct from the atmosphere of Christianity. Is there a single intelligent Christian who would recognise no difference between the scene in which Socrates takes leave of his friends and the death-bed of the believer? Who among us would exchange one hour under the Dome of St. Paul's for a century with Gautama beneath the Bo-Tree?

When Christians bear testimony to their intimacy with the personal Christ, it is the figure of the historical Jesus that is immediately present to their mind. Much is often made of St. Paul's refusal to know Christ after the flesh, of his apparent indifference to the earthly life of Jesus. But what a strange perversion of the true facts of the case is this fashionable method of representing St. Paul's religious experience. It was because the apostle

understood his own experience far too deeply to suppose that the Christ in Whom he believed was nothing more than an ensample of godly life that he appears careless of the earthly story of the Saviour. He who was persuaded that in Christ he was a new creature, did not concern himself to analyse the speeches or dissect the activities of the Master in order to ascertain His inner consciousness. But that he was indifferent to Him Whom we call the Jesus of the Gospels is contradicted by the story of that great event out of which every scrap of his theology springs. It was the historical Christ who appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He had started on his mission from Jerusalem to that northern town with a definite object. It was to harry the followers of the crucified Nazarene. It was to stamp out a pestilent heresy which was elevating a dead malefactor into an object of blasphemous worship. And the Voice which changed his previous purpose, and gave to the Christian community of all ages that classic exposition of salvation which lives in the epistles of St. Paul, was a mighty word identifying for ever the Man of Galilee with the ever-present Saviour: "I am Jesus of Nazareth, Whom thou persecutest."

No formula has more accurately expressed the value—or shall we call it the significance?—of

the Saviour for the whole community of Christians, and for every believing member of that community, than the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, yea, and for ever." It is not what He taught, but what He is; not what He thought, but what He does. Jesus is present, Jesus is active in the life and environment of the whole household of faith. Where He is there shall also His servant be. When we think of Him as "Shepherd, Husband, Friend," it is no ideal figure conjured up from the phrases in which mystics have tried to symbolise their ineffable, inarticulate experiences, that takes possession of the kindled imagination. We see Jesus as He draws His disciples round Him, or sojourns in the home at Bethany, or raises the widow's son at Nain. That is the wonder of Christianity, which it shares with no other religion in the world—a manifestation in history, a present power, a great expectation. "This same Jesus shall so come." Meanwhile, He is "with you always, even unto the end of the days."

We cannot realise this better than by reflecting how every incident of the Gospel story affects us in a manner wholly different from incidents narrated in the biographies of other great men of thought and action. Each episode appeals to us as typical of a mode of action by which the central figure affects the lives of men

in every age. Take, for example, the Storm on the Lake. The oarsmen are toiling in rowing, and in the stern of the boat is the Master asleep on a pillow. That picture, which thrills by its beauty and awes by its majesty, is no fragment of a distant past. Optimism revives, hope returns, faith is again triumphant, as it touches the fainting spirit with the energy of its victorious truth—God's in the boat, all's right with the world. Or the worker for God is oppressed with the crushing weight of the world's need and the hopeless disproportion between his own slender provision and the growing hunger of the multitude. Then once again he listens to the Voice of transcendent power in the Gospel appointed for Mid-Lent: "Make the men sit down." Or we harken as to a stern and accusing conscience, when Christ pronounces His curse upon the barren fig-tree: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever." These are but instances of an effect which all Christian students of the New Testament will immediately recognise. It is the historical Christ, and none other, Who is ever by our side to warn and to encourage, to condemn and to bless. He is with us still in all the richness of His Personality, yet under the form in which He is presented in the Gospels. The ancient page is universalised. The universal is concentrated upon the ancient page. This, and not the compulsion of historical

evidence, is the ground of our confidence that what is written concerning the Son of Man is true. We hear the Master's Voice. We taste the Living Bread. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, yea, and for ever."

II

But, secondly, the reason why we find so little of the earthly life of Jesus in the preaching of His disciples and in the theology of the epistles, is not that St. Paul or St. John sat loosely to the historical narrative, but that the story of Jesus only becomes a Gospel for human needs when it is concentrated in the Cross. For the apostle, for the experience of the believing community as it is summarised in the creed, no less than for the preacher and the missionary in every age, all is gathered up in the words, "He was crucified." This is the fact which challenges us, as nothing else does in the whole record. It is decisive, and it calls for decision. Will you pass it by as an offence to the daylight in a bright, warm world? Or will you let its shadow fall upon you? It is no mere play upon words to declare that the fact of the Cross is crucial. It represents that standard experience of the Christian to which for us English folk Bunyan has given classic expression in the "Pilgrim's Progress." If God has taken sorrow and suffering, yea, death itself, into the fulness of His

own wonderful history, then is He Love indeed. For what is Love in a world such as that of which we are aware but an infinite power of sacrifice on the part of a Personality which itself has no sense of need? So we become assured that God, and God only, can give Himself for the sins of men, because none but He, in the phrase of the Epistle to the Hebrews, has "somewhat to offer." He can forgive because He can satisfy; He can uplift because He can forgive.

These are no abstract propositions about God, but a living experience of His power which emerges from the spectacle of His triumphant suffering. The apostles themselves do not reach it till they behold Him risen. Something of the universality of Christ's Person, that is, of His power to touch and to affect all men, they had learned already, before they went down into the valley of the Passion. But there they forsook Him. It was only when they saw Death itself swallowed up in the victory of a divine and glorious Life that the Cross became to them the seal and stamp of Godhead, and they could publish through faith in Jesus' Name the Gospel of Forgiveness. But that message, once received, becomes a power, illuminating the mind, renovating the will, changing the life. It would be a sorry outlook for the world if the simple folk must either learn to

appreciate the niceties of historical criticism or become the victims of a possible illusion. That is an alternative absurd upon the face of it, a dilemma which we need not contemplate. For the perennial power of the Cross to awaken conscience, to certify forgiveness, and to kindle the spiritual life is itself beyond all comparison the greatest evidence of the reality which it proclaims. Christ died, because Christ lives. Jesus rose, because Jesus reigns.

The man who has experienced the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who has found joy and peace in believing, who knows that the life which he now lives he lives by the faith of the Son of God, will not be at the mercy of alleged discoveries in Palestine, or depend upon the ebb and flow of historical criticism, which at the highest cannot prove, at the lowest cannot annul, the testimony of the Christian conscience. It is the life of the redeemed which is the assurance of redemption. "O taste and see how gracious the Lord is: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."

III

So I am carried forward by an almost imperceptible progression of thought to my last point, which is, that fellowship with Christ through the Cross is concentrated and expressed in that

simple and sublime act of the Christian fraternity, the most comfortable sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. How much more fully we should grasp the essential principles of the Christianity which we profess, if only we could see that those outward rites which bind together the disciples of Jesus in a visible communion and fellowship were intended not only by the circumstances of their institution but by the terms of their celebration to be a pledge and guarantee of the living unity of the Spirit. The Holy Communion is the focus, the epitome, the realisation of our fellowship with the Father through the sacrifice of the Death of Christ. Here, if ever, we should know that we have been redeemed, not with silver and gold, but with the Precious Blood. Here, if ever, we should hear the voice of Jesus as He declares, "I am the Bread of Life." Here, if ever, we should be able to testify, "He brought me to the banqueting-house." Surely we should be able to make our own the language of that wonderful Eucharistic hymn, which has the crowning merit of applying the language of the simplest evangelical piety to the most catholic of all services :

"Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face ;
Here faith would touch and handle things unseen ;
Here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace,
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

“ Mine is the sin, but Thine the righteousness :
Mine is the guilt, but Thine the cleansing blood ;
Here is my robe, my refuge, and my peace—
Thy blood, Thy righteousness, O Lord, my God.”

What pathos and power belong to that sublime but simple service, in which we eat of Christ's Bread and drink of the Cup which He has mingled. It consummates our faith and crowns our discipleship. It is not the formulas, with which our stammering lips and crude intelligence have tried imperfectly, and sometimes even superstitiously, to represent the gift of the Father, the presence of the Son, the power of the Spirit, that has greeted them in this sacred tryst—it is the experience itself which in every age has assured the faithful communicant that Christ has died, yea, rather, has risen again, and is even now at the right hand of God.

Two outstanding memorials remain of the work of that illustrious Chapter in this Cathedral, of whom, perhaps, the most widely known was Liddon, to which, under the good hand of God, we owe the modern development of the spiritual energies of St. Paul's. One is the sculptured picture of the Crucifixion, above which is the legend, “So God loved the world.” The other is the daily celebration of the Holy Communion, which now for thirty-five years has been a solace to the weary and a strength to the

worker. What experiences this silent dome has known the Day alone will show. But great is the multitude of those who have sought the peace of these sheltering walls, whom in the secret of His tabernacle the Lord has hidden from the strife of tongues, and whose joy may find expression in those wonderful words: "He brought me to the banqueting-house, and His banner over me was"—the Cross.

PROCESSIONAL

“He made a show.”—COLOSSIANS ii. 15.

XXI

PROCESSIONAL

BEAT drums and bugles blow! It is the beginning of the Holy Week, when once again the great procession of the Cross comes sounding through the town.

The Gospel of the Passion may easily be changed for a sickly sentiment if the note of triumph be absent from our thoughts during the coming days. Year after year I have listened to the Passion Music rendered by some of the finest choirs in England. But even the sweet voices of the West Riding have never left me wholly content with the pathos and the sorrow which the famous composer has sought to express. The chorales are magnificent. They represent the strongest side of German religion. But there is something not fully and profoundly Christian—at least so it seems to me—in contemplating the world's Tragedy, only to bid a tender farewell to the sleeping Saviour. I stand beneath the Cross, like Christian in the

“Pilgrim’s Progress,” to feel the burden slip from my shoulders into the sepulchre, and to go on my way rejoicing.

Have you ever watched a Highland funeral, and heard the sound of the pipes as the familiar strain of the “Flowers of the Forest” wailed through the kirkyard and echoed in the hills? Have you ever heard those same pipes, wedded to the statelier music of the beating drum, as the band with flying streamers comes swinging down the glen? To turn from one to the other is like passing from the dim religiousness of wistful Westminster to the glorious certainties of St. Paul’s. There is nothing like the roll of the drums before the great Crucifix in this cathedral. The sound seems to answer to something in the spirit of the Apostle whose name it bears. Not the pain but the joy, not the shame but the glory, not the tragedy but the victory, is always the dominant thought. The soul of St. Paul is too large not to be aware of all that Calvary embraces in its mighty grasp. But his evangelical faith is always resting on the victory. Christ “blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us; and He hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the Cross; having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

Go through the experience of the Passion hour by hour, step by step, stage by stage. Behold and see if there is any sorrow like unto His, who wears the Crown of Thorns. But beware of a too theatrical observance of Holy Week. Never fling away the palms that are placed in your hands to-day. For the followers of the Crucified give thanks for a Finished Work. They joy before Him "with the joy of harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." Redemption is not a Passion Play.

I

Why is the procession of the Cross a triumph? Why is the Via Dolorosa the Via Sacra? Why is Calvary without the Walls the Capitol of the Celestial City? The answer is simple. The Cross is a complete and final vindication of God.

Do you ever consider how small was the apparatus necessary for the staging of God's transcendent act? Two beams, a long and a short, laid one across the other, a handful of nails with a hammer; and a naked body. That is all. There is no background, no tableau. They are not needed. "So God loved the world."

When Jesus was in the way going up to Jerusalem on that last eventful journey, there came one running to Him with the eager ques-

tion, "What good thing shall I do?" If that young man had been with us to-day we should not have found him hanging about a West End club and finding fault with the waiters. The ardent youth would have despised the petulant epicure as much as we all do. If he was well dressed he was only observing the decencies of his class. He was a man who understood to the full the responsibilities of wealth, position, and opportunity. He would have been one of the first to respond to the Bishop of London's appeal for willing workers. We can imagine him the enthusiastic director of a polytechnic or the soul of a workmen's club in Bethnal Green. He was thirsting for eternal life; for the highest, the best, the self-denying life. And Jesus loved him. Why should such a man have been subjected to so cruel, so unnecessary a test as Christ proposed? Why should he have become the type of a soul that has made the great refusal? Why do we see him, as in Watts's picture, limp, miserable, averted? What is it that he cannot face? What is it on which he turns his back? Not the simple life nor the strenuous life, nor the life of service. He is a good soldier. It is these that have been drawing him to that tremendous interview with the Master. The sight on which he cannot look is Calvary. He could not serve God, because he refused to know God. He would make a

splendid use of his opportunities, but he would not be so futile as to surrender them. He was an earnest millionaire. He would willingly have financed the Galilean ministry. He would not fall in behind the Saviour and follow Him to the Cross.

We cannot know God until we cease to think of Him as a millionaire. He is not the universal Purveyor, but our Father. The method by which He seeks us is that not of providence but of personality. This method He vindicates victoriously on the Cross. What a splendid lesson does the Crucifixion afford of the value and meaning of personality! Reliance upon the sheer force of personal attraction is divine. No adventitious circumstances are needed to draw the world to Him who hangs on the tree. The multitude had sought Him because they did eat of the loaves. And even Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him when He turned His back on Galilee. If He had neither silver nor gold, He had evinced powers of becoming the Benefactor of the human race, which the possessor of all the wealth of the Roman Empire might have envied. Would you and I have been wiser than the twelve disciples and not attempted to turn Him from a course that must bring to a sudden and abrupt close a career the influence of which was already unparalleled? Powers so wonderful are too precious to waste. It would

indeed be a crime against society, if the Son of Man were suffered to give Himself over to spitting, to scourging, and to death. Martyrdom is always attractive. If Jesus Christ had been exposed to the risk of public execution in the normal course of witnessing for truth or freedom or righteousness, the nobler spirits among His followers would not have sought to withhold the crown. What they were unable to trust was the mighty power of His personality. What they failed to foresee was that a rich activity was a hindrance to a mission that was universal. The shameful situation of a servile criminal, the parting of the clothes, the nailing of the hands and feet, the renunciation of every avenue of influence that men call opportunity, were the condition of that power to touch and to fascinate all ages with the matchless glory of His naked personality which the Saviour of the World felt within Himself when He cried, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself."

II

Once again the Cross vindicates God, because in it we see the triumph of the method of poverty. "For our sakes He became poor." In the eyes of the world that is a paradox, because the only way of salvation which it understands is the employment of wealth for the good of

others. This is what is popularly called the stewardship of riches. And yet in the deepest sense of the word there is no real gift, if I share with another the material resources of our common mother earth, which I, and not he, happen to command. But if his fulness means my want, and if I go hungry that he may be satisfied, then it is myself I give. It still remains true that nothing moves the gratitude of men but the endurance on their behalf of labour and sorrow, of toil and tears. The Londoner, who has accepted with due courtesy from a City company an invitation to dine, does not experience a warm sense of thankfulness to the members of the court and livery for the privilege of inspecting their plate and tasting their dainties. And when a man of princely fortune, who might, if he so willed, dissipate the hard-won produce of the soil on follies and favourites, chooses rather to endow universities, or furnish libraries, or assist on his own terms in the provision of organs, he must not complain if we raise the question whether it is really good for the development of society that one man should be allowed to act as the providence of millions. Still the world persists in believing that it is no use having large ideas unless, to borrow the language of Cecil Rhodes, you have the cash to carry them out. I say nothing of the politics of that great Imperialist, but his

philosophy, I am sure, was wrong. It was an afflicted and poor people that God chose to be His ministers of grace. "Behold and see, if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow," are the words which the Bible uses of Jerusalem. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" God is no more in the pocket of the large fortunes than He is on the side of the big battalions. And if God has still a work to do for the nations through the land which our hearts love, who knows but it may be accomplished out of the dust?

For the crown which God Himself wears is woven of thorns. It is through His poverty that He makes many rich. Calvary is God's Hill. It is impossible to mistake the method whereby He wins salvation. For if in the beginning of the world His joyful work was welcomed by the singing of the morning stars, it is the lifting up of His own pierced hands which, as the shadows of its history deepen, become God's evening sacrifice. And still there is joy in the presence of the angels.

III

But the fullest and final vindication of God, given in the Cross, is the crowning mercy, of which it is the pledge. God has identified Himself, not only with our sufferings, but with our sins. It is the triumph of the method of Pardon.

There is a hopelessness about sin which is wholly incomparable with the effect of any other disability to which flesh is heir. Results may be mitigated by sympathy and co-operation, but the burden of responsibility cannot be shared. What a man has done by his own spontaneous act, that he has done, and there is an end of the matter. For when every allowance has been made for extenuating circumstances, for ignorance, for carelessness, for infirmity, the balance of guilt, whatever it may be, lies heavy upon the conscience, nor will the surrender of my dearest treasure cancel the account which from hour to hour is accumulated by the sin of my soul. And the central significance of the Cross, as its saving power has been proclaimed by generations of believing men, is this. God takes up sin and makes it His own from the very moment that the dread possibility has been translated into a damning fact. That is what St. Paul means when he expresses his own experience in the tremendous words: "Him who knew no sin, He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." This is what St. Peter means when he declares that Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness." This is the force of St. John's language, as he contemplates "the broken vow, the frequent fall" which hide the light of God's

countenance even from them who would fain serve Him best. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation." There is no mistaking this language or the experience which it expresses. God not only becomes poor, but He takes the place of the sinner. What we call the guilty conscience, that He can make His own, so that those who through fear of death have all their life long been subject to bondage, have no more conscience of sin. With a marvellous reiteration the writers of the New Testament, each from the standpoint of his own personality, confirm this essential Christian experience. This is what the Cross meant to them. This is the place which Calvary held in their own lives.

Blot out the Crucifixion from the history of the world and there is no escape from what the author of the 38th Psalm calls "a sore burden too heavy for me to bear." When he talks of his wickednesses he does not mean the anomalies of a vitiated nature. That is a conception which may never have occurred to his mind. His meaning is the same as that which finds expression in the language of another Hebrew poet: "Thou hast set our misdeeds before Thee; our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." This is the truth which that wonderful people could interpret with a clearness and accuracy

that no other race has ever approached. They knew the essential bitterness of the human heart, and, knowing it, they never ceased to wait patiently for the Lord. A God merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity and sin, but who would by no means clear the guilty, was a splendid paradox to which they clung with a pertinacity of hope that the future could not disappoint. "Wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities," so the old prophet described, in words that burn, the spotless Lamb, the Man of Sorrows, the faithful Servant of His redeeming purpose on whom God would lay the sins of His people. And when a Paul or a John or a Peter came to interpret Him, in whom he had believed, to the men of his own age and through them to each succeeding generation; when he remembered that it was Jesus who had buried his Past and illuminated his Future; when he recalled the assurance of pardon, the peace of reconciliation, the inspiration of the Spirit, that had flowed into his ransomed life from Jesus, and from Jesus only; what could he do but gaze upon that thorn-crowned Head and cry, "By His stripes we are healed"?

Therefore beat drums and bugles blow! God is marching to Calvary.

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