SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE CROSS

HENRY SLOANE COFFIN

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE CROSS

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE CROSS

By

HENRY SLOANE COFFIN

Minister in the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church and Associate Professor of Homiletics in Union Theological Seminary, New York City

HODDER & STOUGHTON
NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

CONTENTS

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE CROSS

SIN

I

SIN

Isaiah 53 : 12 : "He was numbered with the transgressors."

Cf. Luke 22: 37: "For I say unto you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, and He was reckoned with transgressors."

JESUS was numbered with the transgressors by many of His contemporaries, and they were by no means the worst men among the inhabitants of Palestine. It is perhaps impossible for us at this distance to assign accurately the reasons which impelled them to enact the tragedy of Calvary. In the complicated network of their motives it is easy to distinguish misunderstanding, prejudice, bigotry, ambition, selfishness, fear, and much else that is base; but these are inextricably tangled with honest convictions, patriotism, loyalty to time-honoured opinions, devotion to revered institutions. Had we met the scribes of Galilee who began the agitation against Jesus, or the

members of the Sanhedrin who condemned Him, we should have found most of them courteous, kindly, upright, loved at home, respected by their friends, pleasant companions, with much in them to admire and love. Even Pilate and Judas were not monsters. But the fact remains that to them Jesus of Nazareth, for one reason or another, seemed an undesirable member of human society whom they combined to execute as a criminal.

"All we like sheep have gone astray," says the prophet, speaking of the strange mistake that numbered the sinless Servant with transgressors. Sheep seem unreasoning in their movements but extremely gregarious. Landor once made the significant remark that "we admire by tradition and criticise by caprice." Caprice — that is sheep-like unreason; tradition — that is sheep-like imitation. The death of Jesus startles us by its demonstration that both the traditions and caprices of people of average, or perhaps more than average, goodness are so far from right. It makes us question the labels we so readily attach to movements and opinions and persons. There is nothing unique in the attitude of a Caiaphas

or a Herod, of the rulers of the synagogues of Galilee who sent word up to Jerusalem of the suspected Innovator, or of the politician who was Roman procurator of Judæa. We know dozens of men and women who share substantially their point of view. We seem to see the face of a rigorous Pharisee or a lax Sadducee or a false Judas staring out at us from our own thoughts and impulses. The world about us and within us is made up of exactly the same sort of people as composed the world of Jesus' day, and He was numbered with the transgressors. How cautiously must we form our judgments, how searchingly try our motives, how hesitantly pass condemnations, how sternly check our whims and prejudices, how resolutely refuse to take traditional views merely because of their antiquity, or current opinions because of their universality! We live in a world where it is so easy to be tragically in the wrong, to mistake love for something else, to nail a Son of God to a cross, while we know not what we do.

Again, and this is more surprising, Jesus numbered Himself with the transgressors. There is not the slightest indication that He

felt Himself a sinner. The keenest conscience our world has known found nothing with which to charge itself. There is no expression of penitence and no plea for forgiveness among the personal prayers of Jesus. But this does not mean that He considered Himself without responsibility for the ignorance and folly and iniquity of the world in which He lived. While fully aware of His uniqueness, placing Himself apart from and over against all the rest of humanity, Jesus realized His oneness with men in all that they achieved or failed of, suffered or enjoyed. If there was a Zacchæus whose honesty and generosity had given way under the bad system of revenue collecting then in vogue, Jesus felt Himself implicated in his downfall. If there were sick folk, their diseases were to Him, in part at last, due to inherited weaknesses or wrong conditions of life which might frankly be termed devilish, and for which He felt Himself socially accountable. If the Church of His day was unable to reach large sections of the population, if it succeeded very imperfectly in making children of the Most High out of those whom it did reach, if it exaggerated ridiculous

trifles and under-emphasized such essentials as justice, mercy, and faithfulness, He, as a member of that Church, was chargeable with its failures. The young Mazzini at sixteen determined to dress always in black, feeling himself in mourning for his country; and Thomas Arnold, oppressed by the lack of moral principle in the policies of the British government of his day, writes a friend that he suffers from "A daily painfulness — a moral east wind, which makes me feel uncomfortable without any particular ailment." "Himself," comments our first evangelist, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases." "For them that were sick, I was sick." Sinless Himself, He felt socially involved in the iniquities and frailties of all His brethren. He was one in the transgressing family of God.

And because His conscience was so much more sensitive than theirs, and because He was bound to them by a sympathy we cannot hope to understand, He was burdened by their transgressions as they were not. One of the noblest of the

characters in the Greek drama, Phædra's nurse in Euripides's "Hippolytus," says:

> "Oh, pain were better than tending pain!
> For that were single, and this is twain,
> With grief of heart and labour of limb."

There was not only a doubleness, there was a multiplicity, in the life of Jesus. He could not see able-bodied and willing workmen standing idle in the market place because no man had hired them, without sharing their discouragement, nor prodigals making fools of themselves in far countries without thinking of their heart-broken fathers and feeling the shame the careless boys should themselves have felt, had their consciences functioned normally.

> "And he who lives more lives than one,
> More deaths than one must die."

When the dark shadow of His own murder falls upon Him, He shrinks from it, and falters, and seems overwhelmed. It is not lack of physical courage that accounts for the agony in Gethsemane; it is not His reluctance to part with a life with which He can accomplish so infinitely much; but it is His sympathy with the very men who were murdering Him,

which made Him feel their blindness, their perversity, their utter disharmony with the God they professed to honour, as a load of guilt that rested on Him. They were His brothers for whom He was responsible, and what they did was a household disgrace which involved Him. As the conscientious member of a family feels the shame of a kinsman's crime, while the culprit himself may not be seriously disturbed, so Jesus was the conscience of His less conscientious brothers, and felt what they should have felt. "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee, fell on Me." He realized, as they did not, the enormity of what they were doing. He was aware, as they were not, of the pain they were causing God. In the curse they brought on themselves, He was accursed. John Woolman, the Quaker, enters in his journal: "I felt the depth and extent of the misery of my fellow-creatures separated from the divine harmony, and it was greater than I could bear, and I was crushed down under it." "He began to be greatly amazed and sore troubled. And He saith to His disciples, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.'" The prayers He utters are cries from

a black abyss. "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me." He numbered Himself with the transgressors; and no one ever appreciated how heavy was the burden of their transgression, until the Son of God staggered under it — what this tangled network of mixed motives meant to a sensitive conscience implicated in it, until He recoiled from its deathly contact.

And, far more astounding still, Jesus was numbered by God with the transgressors. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." This is not to say that the Most High by some juggling of terms called a sinless man a sinner, nor that by some device of celestial book-keeping He transferred our debit column to Jesus and His credit column to us. But back of the sense of solidarity which made Jesus consider Himself answerable for every wrong done by His brethren, and behind the sympathy which made Him feel their guilt weighing on His heart, was the Father prompting, sending, inspiring Him. "God made Him," says Paul in one of those bold sentences that can easily sound repulsive unless we stop to understand them, "God made Him to be

sin for us, who knew no sin." God did not make Jesus a sinner, but that love which led Jesus to feel socially accountable for every injustice and oppression and falsity among the sons of men and to take to Himself what they should have felt and could not for their dulness of conscience, that was the divine, was God in Jesus, for that love is what God is. "Christ by an eternal spirit offered Himself." In His pouring out His soul unto death, He is not displaying some new spirit, but the eternal Spirit who is behind and in all history. The Father, abiding in Him, felt this responsibility and was burdened with this guilt. Jesus and the Father were one in this. God feels implicated in every wrong in the family life of His children and shamed by the guilt we ought to feel, and usually do not, for our wrong doing. "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In all that Jesus felt and endured we touch God, or rather God Himself touches us. In a true sense the holy God numbers Himself with the transgressors, feels accountable as our Father for what we do, and shamed as our Father in the disgrace we bring on Him as well as on ourselves.

But this is not all. There came a point in the sufferings of Jesus when He did not feel Himself at one with God. He numbered Himself with the transgressors over against the righteous Father. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It is common to explain the cry by saying that Jesus thought Himself in His extreme weakness and apparent defeat abandoned by God, while in reality the Father was never nearer. But surely we must hesitate to call Jesus mistaken, and mistaken in that touch with God where above all He excels us. Older theologians used to say that Jesus tasted the wrath of God. We shrink from their language, but were they so far wrong? Wrath is our name for love's instinct of self-preservation. If God be love, He must hate every thing that hampers and hinders His children from entering that fulness of life with one another and with Him which He purposes for us. "Your goodness," writes Emerson, "must have some edge to it — else it is none. The doctrine of hatred must be preached, as the counteraction of the doctrine of love, when that pules and whines." The love which is a purifying flame kindling us

to godlikeness cannot but be a consuming fire destroying every ungodlike element. There is a "fierceness which from tenderness is never far." One night after talking privately with a number of medical students who had unbosomed their own sins to him and spoken of others' iniquities, Henry Drummond was found by a friend leaning against a mantel, pale and tired, and when asked if he were sick, replied: "Oh, I am sick; sick with the sins of these men! How can God bear it?" How can God bear His children's sins? In one sense He does bear them with a patience and a sympathy past understanding. But His bearing is no easy tolerance of the intolerable. His love for us is hot with wrath for them. In that unwrathful recoil of love is our hope that He will not cease until all that is ungodlike in our own and the world's life is abolished. The sinless Sufferer on the cross, in His oneness with His brethren, felt their wrong doing His own, confessed in His forsakenness that God would have nothing to do with it save destroy it, felt that it separated between men and God, and that He was so at one with us that He was actually away from God. "That was hell," said a Scotch

theologian, "and He tasted it." By no fictitious process, but by the inevitable sequence that resulted from Jesus' social conscience and, sympathetic heart, "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bare the sin of many." There is a horror of deep darkness here. We may be sure that the forsaking cost the Father as much pain as it cost Jesus; but it had to be. "The mystery of the cross," writes a woman of rare insight, "did not, it is true, explain any one of the enigmas connected with our mortal existence and destiny, but it linked itself in my spirit with them all. It was itself an enigma flung down by God alongside the sorrowful problem of human life, the confession of Omnipotence itself to some stern reality of misery and wrong." "He was numbered with the transgressors."

"Follow Me," said Jesus to His disciples; and lest there should be any doubt how far they were to accompany Him, He specified: "If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me." The cross was a grim word connected only with the worst criminals. How can the servants be, as their

Lord, "numbered with the transgressors?" "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" Until the Kingdom of God has come, and all life is conformed to the divine will there must be an eccentricity in the children of light. We are doomed to be nonconformists. This is not to put a premium on peculiarities and measure a man's goodness by its oddity. It is to insist that we can take nothing for granted in the standards and principles and usages we discover. We must think for ourselves, and think with the mind of Christ. Our eccentricity will follow as a matter of course. To go with the crowd is like sheep to go astray. To follow our own inclinations is like sheep to turn every one to his own way. There is nothing for us as Christians, but a constant, thoughtful, deliberate loyalty to Jesus. There is but one type of disciple — that well pictured in Milton's Archangel Michael:

> "For this was all thy care
> To stand approv'd in sight of God, tho' worlds
> Judged thee perverse."

Here is an angel numbered with the transgressors.

But to run the gauntlet of men's adverse criticism and endure being misunderstood is, after all, but a small part of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. There is a sharing of His social conscience. If a life is being extinguished by a preventable disease, or by an accident due to heartless want of forethought, there is a trail of blood traceable to our door as really as though we had committed murder. If there is a prisoner behind bars who is innocent of his crime, or one whose birth amid degrading conditions foredoomed him to excessive temptation, or one whom prison life is turning into tenfold more a child of hell than when he entered, we are to blame for what he is. If our industries overtask and under-reward some; if there is greed and chicanery; if there is want of heart in the world of business; if public life is not just, honourable, pure; if there is corruption in government; if our country is not displaying a Christ-like spirit in its international relations; if among us man is pitted against man in racial antipathy and class hatred; if the Church of Christ is negligent; if there is waste through sectarian rivalry and failure through want of co-operation; if there are lives

at home or in the ends of the earth without the inspiration of the gospel of Christ, because the Church lacks the means or the will to serve them; if any human being is deprived of a just share in the race's comfort, pleasure, culture, faith — we are accountable. There is no needless suffering and no sin in all the world that does not in a very genuine sense come home to you and me as something for which we are personally blameworthy. We "sin by syndicate," by the industrial order which we help maintain, by the government which we place in power, by the Church into which we throw our personalities, by the whole corporation of humanity which is one vast multi-personality of which we are integral parts. "For none of us liveth unto himself, and none dieth to himself." Wherever there is a Zacchæus, a son of God is bound to say, "I must"; for Zacchæus's plight lays an obligation on him. Wherever there is a woman bound with some curable malady, followers of Christ say with Him, "Ought not this woman be loosed?" Wherever there is a wretched Magdalen selling her womanhood on city streets, her shame soils every clean man and

woman in the family of God. "He Himself," writes Martin Luther to a correspondent, "will teach thee how in receiving thee He makes thy sins His, and His righteousness thine. When thou believest this firmly, then bear patiently with erring brothers, making their sins thine."

To many this may seem far-fetched. Their consciences tax them with their own wrong doing, but the woe and injustice and sin which they are not aware of doing any thing to cause, never give them a twinge. But conscience, like a taste for music or the appreciation of poetry or the sense for God, is a developable instinct. It has to be expanded to function at long range. George Fox prayed "to be baptized into a sense of all conditions, that I might be able to know the needs and feel the sorrows of all." This is not a gratuitous prayer, a superfluous sympathy, which a follo er of Christ may omit if he will. Until all the wrong and needless pain of a whole world is felt by us as something for which we are responsible before God, responsible in our degree as He is responsible for it in His, we have not had formed in us the conscience of the

Son of man, who was numbered with the transgressors.

And, further, when we come to share Christ's intense love for men we shall also share "the wrath of the Lamb." We shall become good haters, and that means passionately earnest fighters and toilers for righteousness, ablaze with indignation at wrong, and with blood that runs as liquid flame at the sight of iniquity. A God, who is a consuming fire, demands that His children of light shall be children of as pure and purifying heat.

And, still further, as, like Christ, we appreciate God's iniquity-destroying wrath on the one hand and enter on the other into men's lives with a sympathy that makes all that is theirs ours, we shall share in some measure Christ's burden of a world's guilt. Paul speaks of his sense of the inseparable love of God in Christ, that holds him, and at once adds, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen accord-

ing to the flesh." A recent man of letters, himself a degenerate, but with a conscience rendered impressionable by his own consciousness of wrong, caught in "the gin that waits for sin," tells how in jail on the night when a murderer was to be executed that man's crime weighed on his fellow prisoners:

"He lay as one who lies and dreams
In a pleasant meadow land,
The watchers watched him as he slept,
And could not understand
How one could sleep so sweet a sleep
With a hangman close at hand.

"But there is no sleep when men must weep
Who never yet have wept:
So we — the fool, the fraud, the knave —
That endless vigil kept,
And through each brain on hands of pain
Another's terror crept.

"Alas! it is a fearful thing
To feel another's guilt!
For, right within, the sword of Sin
Pierced to its poisoned hilt,
And as molten lead were the tears we shed
For the blood we had not spilt."

"Do you know," says William Morris, "when I see a poor devil drunk and brutal, I always feel, quite apart from æsthetical perceptions, a sort of shame, as if I myself had some hand in it?" The social conscience

which makes us feel responsible for all transgression and failure, must bring with it a sense of guilty complicity which numbers us self-reproachingly with the transgressors.

But after all there remains this difference between Jesus and ourselves: we belong with the transgressors, and He does not. We have actually added to the sin of the world. Our thoughtlessness has left men to struggle vainly by themselves, while a word from us might have turned the day. Our cowardice has kept us from speaking out what others needed to hear to brace them for their battle. Our self-indulgence has crippled a good cause with lack of adequate support. Our negative attitude has weakened the influence of righteousness. Our compromise has befogged the issue of Christian and un-Christian. But He — the closer He comes to us in His amazing sympathy, the farther He seems from us in His utter unlikeness. "Holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," we say with that New Testament writer who most emphasized Jesus' complete sharing of our human expe-

riences. What did it mean to *Him* to be numbered with transgressors?

All sympathy in a world of imperfect beings involves pain. Schopenhauer compares men to porcupines, trying to huddle together for warmth and presently repelled again by the contact of their prickles. But what of the incomparably sensitive Jesus, as His sympathy drew Him toward men whose every thought and emotion must have hurt Him? Charlotte Brontë wrote frankly to G. H. Lewes, the philosopher and man of letters whose name is linked with the story of George Eliot; "You would often jar terribly on some feelings, with whose recoil and quiver you could not possibly sympathize." What was the "recoil and quiver" in the acute conscience of the Son of God when He shared our life with its home ties and friendships, its town gossip and national ambitions, its push for gain and fame, its business relations and church fellowship? It is His sinless conscience which is the unique factor. Paul speaks of filling up on his part the deficit in Christ's sufferings, but he asks, "Was Paul crucified for you?" It is not the crucifixion that matters, but the Crucified.

"He" — not His death — "is the propitiation for our sins." That He with His recoil and quiver should still have loved us so intensely that, when He felt the gulf fixed between God and sinners, He thought Himself on our side of the breach and numbered Himself with the transgressors — that is the marvel. It is that which puts the tone of unfailing wonder into our voices when we say, "The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

DUTY

II

DUTY

1 John 3: 16: "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

DUTY for the men of the New Testament is love. John would have agreed with Paul, when he wrote: "Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law." And love is a debt we must continue to owe. There are no moral bankruptcy proceedings through which we can pass and be discharged. So long as we exist, here or hereafter, we owe love.

But our best words suffer from usage. Language is liable to great wear and tear. People use the word "love" for their delight in a particular variety of china, their fondness for a kitten, their appreciation of flowers, as well as for their devotion to human beings. And even when the word is confined to the feelings of person for person, it may represent a vast

variety of emotions — the doting affection that spoils, the domineering attachment that bullies, the blind infatuation that undiscriminatingly adores, the passion that demoralizes, as well as the love described in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. Whether the Greek word for "love" which John employs be, as some scholars have held, "born within the bosom of revealed religion" and unused by heathen writers, or, as others more recently have sought to prove, a word in use in the vernacular adopted by the Christians, John is careful to give it a precise definition. "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us." The cross defined love for him. It was not liking, but devotion; not an emotion but a service, and a service regarded as an obligation, so that John can attach the word "ought" to it. "Because He . . . we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

You may already have noticed a slight difference between the translations of our text in the Authorized and Revised Versions. It used to read, "Hereby perceive we the love *of God;*" but the revisers felt that the words "of God," which are not in the Greek, did

not need to be added. Love is the same whether in God or in man. This needs to be insisted on. Love has often been represented as a duty in man, but as a mere favour on the part of God. We feel that we ought to love Him and one another, but we have hesitated to say that God ought to love us. But the Bible writers are exceeding bold. They know that God never asks His children to say "ought" in connection with anything with which He has not already felt an "ought." We are to be perfect *as*, not otherwise than, He is perfect. When God fathered us and brought us into being, He obliged Himself to love us, and to do for us all that love involves. A century ago it was the custom for children to address their parents as those to whom they were greatly indebted as the authors of their existence. To-day we regard parenthood as a responsibility, and emphasize far more the obligation which rests on them than on their children. The obligation, to be sure, is mutual; but it rests primarily on those who, without their children's will, bring them into being. God's fatherhood puts Him in debt to us. He owes us love. Duty is the same for God and

man; love is for both the fulfilling of the law; and "hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us." Calvary is the standard of duty, divine and human.

We never understand the meaning of the cross for God unless we recall what is implied in John's description of His character: "God is love." Then Calvary becomes inevitable from all eternity. From the moment when God gave another being life, His parental responsibility required Him to devote Himself to that other's perfecting. If His child sinned, He must suffer with and for him, and He cannot cease loving him, nor doing for him all that love endlessly suggests. The Lamb was slain in the conscience of God from the foundation of the world. From the moment there was a world for which God was accountable, He could not withhold His nearest and dearest, He could not spare Himself. He was a debtor to all on whom He had brought the miseries and exposed to the temptations of life, so as much as in Him lay He was ready to serve them. Calvary is the typical event in time through which we look in on God's eternal self-devotion to His children.

The cross, then, is part of God's justice; that which He feels He owes us. We speak of the grace of God sometimes as though all that God did for us sinners were a sheer gift on His part. No doubt all that He is to us and does for us is a gift in the sense that we do nothing to deserve it nor to pay Him for it. But grace is obligatory on Him. Forgiveness is not a gratuity which He feels He may bestow or refuse. A distinguished theological professor in Union Seminary a generation ago preached a sermon entitled "The Exercise of Mercy Optional with God," and Thomas Chalmers said that "forgiveness is a duty with man but a problem for God." It is no more optional with Him than with us, and it is a problem for us both. "He is faithful and just to forgive us," writes John, and were He unforgiving He would be neither. "God," said Socrates, "may forgive sin, but I do not see how He can." "God," says this writer, "must forgive sin, and can do no other without ceasing to be the God we know in Christ." Jesus did not consider His suffering and death an optional service which He was not bound to render to His brethren. "The Son of man

must suffer." "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things?" What claim had we on Him? The family claim — we are His brothers. Love is not a condescension on His part, but an obligation, and an obligation which is not met by possessing a benevolent disposition, a good nature that would harm nobody, but by a sacrificial service that pours out the soul unto death, that gives until here is literally nothing left ungiven. And this is not charity, but duty; not being kind merely, but being just.

Men have sometimes pictured God's mercy and His justice as conflicting characteristics. The Talmud in a striking passage says, "God prays, and His prayer is this: 'Be it My will that My mercy overpower My justice.'" But the Bible knows of no such strife. "He is a just God and a Saviour." His justice and His saving are connected by an "and" not a "but." He could not be just without saving. Mr. Huxley wrote to Charles Kingsley: "The absolute justice of the system of things is as clear to me as any scientific fact. The gravitation of sin to sorrow is as certain as that of the earth to the sun — and more so — for experimental proof of the fact is within reach of

all; nay is before us all in our own lives, if we had but the eyes to see it." Mr. Huxley would have refused to say that forgiving and redeeming love was clear to him in the facts of the universe, but in the same letter he says of his own family experience, "Love opened up to me a view of the sanctity of human nature, and impressed me with a deep sense of responsibility." If we read the facts of the universe with the insight of Jesus and are convinced that behind and in all is a God of love, that God must as surely be impressed with "a deep sense of responsibility," and the justice which inevitably connects sin with sorrow must as certainly link it with redemption. There is as reliable a gravitation of love to sin, as of sin to sorrow. The Son of man, who comes saying "I must" as He seeks and saves the lost, is not better than His God and Father but like Him. He has caught His "must" from Him. Love naturally regards redemption as duty. Love beareth, believeth, hopeth, endureth all things and never faileth. That is love's nature. It cannot do less and be love. So long as one child of God remains in sin, his Father must and will lay down His life for him.

Some may feel that to call love for us God's duty is to reduce it to a right that we can demand of Him, and to rob it of that amazingness which led the first Christians to exclaim, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" We need not fear if we look at the love of God through Christ's cross that it will ever cease to be a marvel. No thoughtful man can look at Calvary without calling the cross "wondrous" and such love "amazing." Perhaps the conscience of Him who feels that He is obliged to go as far as this for men, most of whom He has never seen, none of whom can wholly please Him, and many of whom pain Him unutterably, is the crowning marvel. The sense of obligation revealed at Calvary is its supreme surprise.

"And we *ought* . . . " If the cross of Jesus reveals a love that says "must," its effect is to redeem us to feeling a like obligation. Sin is irresponsibility, failure to recognize and meet the claims men have on us. Sin is any want of conformity unto the conscience of God shown in Christ. The man who fell among thieves on the road to Jericho may have

been extremely careless. He may have displayed his money in a way that positively invited robbery. But however much of a fool he may have been, there in his wretchedness he had a claim upon the humanity of every passer-by. Priest and Levite ought to have laid down their lives for their brother. Their sin was their lack of love's sense of obligation. The Good Samaritan (were we interpreting him in the light of present conditions) would not only have felt responsible for the half-dead man at the roadside, but for other possible victims who might meet the same mishap, and beside caring for the wounded sufferer, he would have seen to it that the government took effective measures to protect all future travellers on that road. Further, his love would think of the highwaymen and recognize that they too had a claim on him. He must spend and be spent for their reclamation. And none of this would be charity on his part, but duty; not something he might omit without blame, but something he must do.

Would that we could get the "ought" of love into our consciences! There is an exacting parable of our Lord's that most

Christians forget. It is that in which the master orders the slave who has just come in from work outside to serve him at table, and Jesus asks: "Has the slave any favour with his master because he did what he was told? Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you say, 'We are simply servants: we have done that which it was our duty to do.' " If love masters us, we must do all that it prompts without feeling that we are going beyond our duty. Our extreme of self-sacrifice deserves no praise from God or man. Millions may be exclaiming, "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain!" but we may be sure that Jesus does not consider that He has done anything meritorious. He has done His duty by us; that is all. How free from the desire for recognition and the consequent disheartenment when we are not appreciated would we be, if only His "ought" were our imperative! And how refreshing it is to find any one who surprises us by his generosity and self-sacrifice, and when we thank him, looks astonished and says, "You need not feel grateful. I've merely done what I should!" It is only they

who are dominated by love's "ought" within themselves, who are adult sons of God. All others are children, whose judgment cannot be trusted and who must be urged and coaxed into doing right. But the man with a conscience set by the cross keeps time with God and can be relied on to be correct in life's every relation.

"And we ought *to lay down our lives.*" A recent acute observer of social morals writes: "It is not an exaggeration to say that unselfishness makes no effect on the London streets. Decency does, respectability does, and in a certain degree courtesy does; but the great note of Christianity — selflessness — makes no sound in the symphony of the public streets." Does it in the Christian churches? How many of us give the impression of having laid down our lives in the sense that we have placed them unreservedly at the disposal of the Kingdom, and the only question in our minds when some additional appeal meets us is, "Have I time and strength for this? or is it of more moment than something else that has been claiming me?" When one thinks how many of us have to be roused by a harrowing

plea before we feel in the mood to give, and pled with by some zealous worker before we will devote part of our unoccupied time to Christian service, and coerced by the importunities of friends to accept a position of responsibility in some public organization, it can hardly be said that we give the appearance of lives laid down. We must rigorously test ourselves by the cross. To what extent do people feel that we are at their disposal, so that they can draw on us for sympathy, counsel, inspiration, assistance, as though we were a bank account standing in their name? As we scan our assets in education, means, influence, leisure, opportunity, acquaintance, personality, how completely are they invested for the Kingdom? "He poured out His soul unto death" — is there any business dealing or social intercourse into which we do not put our *souls*? Can any one say of us, "Yes, I met him in connection with a transaction, or I knew him socially, and found him able, or clever, or pleasant, or even obliging, but I never was aware that I was in touch with a soul?" "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry," writes a prophet — but a hungry man

wants bread. No, he wants bread *and us*. He has a right to find the loaf we give him an incarnation of ourselves, our brotherly regard for him.

"The gift without the giver is bare."

Some one has described the Christian life as "infinite love in ordinary intercourse." It must be in ordinary intercourse, so that a life laid down does not mean a life stripped of the comforts and enjoyments that come to us in connection with the positions in the world we fill. It is not a synonym for a life reduced to the barest necessities. It means, to be sure, a life freed from every cumbering luxury, from every self-indulgence that consumes thought or energy or time or means that could be better employed. But essentially it is the life which has the sense of being owned by men; and, as belonging to them, spontaneously answers their needs with the feeling that they are entitled to its all. Scott's old servant, Tom Purdie, once remarked, "Sir Walter always speaks to every man as if he were his born brother." To let our very speech and attitude convey the impression that we recognize men's claim of kinship on us, to let them feel that with as much as in us is, we are at

their service, to make them certain that our refusals are never due to lack of heart but to our obligation to other and superior claims, to convince them that we are without self-seeking and are concerned solely to be just — that is to let them find in us a life laid down, a conscience kin to that disclosed at Calvary.

"And we ought to lay down our lives *for the brethren.*" Scholars tell us that John was thinking only of fellow Christians, when he said brethren. One may wish that he had not restricted his vision. But limitations to the sphere of duty are not an unmixed evil. It is easy to talk glibly of serving humanity and to forget to pass the salt to the man who sits next us at table, to think of placing our lives at a world's disposal and neglect the small attentions which mean so much to those in our own homes. Hogarth never drew a more useful moral than in the cartoon which represents a man in the debtors' prison occupying himself with plans for the payment of the national debt. The father of the distinguished master of Balliol, Benjamin Jowett, Sr., let his own business go to pieces, and reduced his family to poverty, while he wrote letters

to Australia on the proper treatment of the aborigines and attempted a new metrical version of the psalter for the Church of England. When Paul spoke of working "that which is good toward all men," he added, lest such universal devotion should become a vague, general philanthropy, "especially toward them that are of the household of faith"; and when he enforces a man's duty to provide for his own, he insists, "specially they of his own household." Our duties surround us in a series of concentric circles. We have to exercise conscience to function accurately and thoroughly at short range first; then the circle can widen out into a more inclusive round of obligation. It is through fidelity to the family in childhood that we become fitted for friendship in youth; through patriotism that we develop into responsible citizens of the world; through faithfulness in a church home that we grow to share with all Christians the responsibility for the universal Kingdom of God. The danger is that the circle which marks off the narrower sphere for which we are specially answerable, and which should be just an imaginary line like the parallels of latitude and

longitude on our maps, convenient guides for our moral navigation, may become a high wall that shuts out every thing beyond. Jesus felt Himself definitely sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. With His limited time and opportunities He must confine Himself to them. But He had His vision of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and recognized that He had other sheep not of that fold whom He must also bring. They too had a claim on His love, and for them also He laid down His life. Paul was debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians. There was no man in God's earth that had not a right to the unsearchable riches that were his, and gladly he wore out his life to present every man perfect in Christ. Our offering to foreign missions is no gift. As truly as our own families have claims upon us, that we dare not repudiate, the world-wide family of God own whatever we possess, and are entitled to share our most prized wealth — Jesus Christ. Missions are not for us optional, but obligatory, not charity, but justice. When we say "brethren," we cannot exclude one child of God, however remote and backward in development.

"We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

A moment ago we were speaking of the Christian life as "infinite love in ordinary intercourse." But that is hardly correct. It is *extraordinary* intercourse that Christ strove to create, a sense of world-wide kinship and responsibility. His cross was to draw all men to Himself, and it is only when all have fellowship one with another that His blood cleanses from all sin. Until then there remain the sins of imperfect sympathy and prejudice, of misunderstanding and contracted conscience. Only when "brethren" means for us everybody, past, present, and to come, and only when everybody means enough to us to demand and gain from us a life laid down, have we come under the atoning power of Christ's death making us at one with God and all His children.

"Infinite love in extraordinary intercourse" — infinite in the sense that it exacts our all, and that nothing about us is not laid down! We must guard against belittling the heroism required of the lowliest Christian. Gethsemane is proof that even the Son of God had to battle

to bring Himself to lay down His life. The tendency of our tolerant age is to make the Kingdom as inclusive as possible and to reduce the demands made of Christians to a minimum. The result is a cheap Christianity. But a Christianity which costs little and comes easy cannot be Christian. There is nothing harder and more exacting than to follow Jesus. The cross is unavoidable; and who is able to say invariably, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt?" It is hopeless to face the Christian life as a duty, the discharge of our obligations to men. Such love is impossible for us. If this be required, then who can be saved?

But the Christian life never presents itself to us as a duty merely. There is no abrupt statement out of a clear sky. "You ought to lay down your lives for the brethren." It reads, "He laid down His life for us, and we . . ." The Christian life is not an achievement we must force ourselves to accomplish, but a spirit which lays hold of us at the foot of Christ's cross and compels us to embody it in a life laid down. "The love of Christ constraineth us." "There are some natures," writes George Eliot, "in which, if they love us,

we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become that worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust." Jesus' death was His supreme demonstration of His trust in us. "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they . . ." If He did all that love could for us, and let God through Him reveal Himself as doing His divine all, He was confident that our consciences would become sensitive to a like obligation, and that love would be a bounden duty we could not fail to fulfil to our nearest and remotest kinsmen in the Father's family, in life's ordinary and extraordinary intercourse — a bounden duty we were irresistibly inspired to discharge. Because He laid down His life for us, He knew there would be a compelling and empowering spirit within us, saying, "And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Was He mistaken?

MAN

III

MAN

Galatians 2:20: "Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

1 Corinthians 8:11: "The brother for whose sake Christ died."

ONE who stands on the shore of a lake on a moonlit evening sees a silvery band of light running across the water directly to his feet. He may reason with himself that the moon's reflected light is diffused with equal brilliancy over the surface of our globe for many hundred miles about the spot where he happens to be; but do what he will he cannot make that path of light seem broader, nor deflect it from coming straight toward him.

It is so when one looks at the cross of Christ. We may remind ourselves that Jesus died for all men; that the "many" of whom He was thinking when He called His life a ransom were primarily those of His own generation; and that in any case it is inconceivable that we

individually should have been present to His mind, as He hung in anguish on Calvary; but as our eyes cannot but see the moon-beam connecting the light from the sky specifically with us, our consciences cannot help bringing home the cross of Christ personally to ourselves.

We may explain this sense of a personal connection with that supreme tragedy in history in a variety of ways. The inevitable effect of the cross on thoughtful people is to awaken their consciences; and when, with sensitive and susceptive consciences, we think of the circumstances which caused the crucifixion of Jesus, we are aware that this is a family catastrophe, in which the actors are our kinsmen, and the blood of the Victim stains us as sharers of our brothers' crime. Further, as we scan the motives of Christ's murderers — Pharisee and Sadducee, Roman politician and false friend, bawling rabble and undiscriminating soldiery — they seem strangely familiar to us. They have all been, they are still, alive by turns in us. We have been and are Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod and Judas Iscariot. The harmless spark of electricity

that greets the touch of one's hand on a metal knob on a winter's day is one with the bolt of lightning that shatters a giant tree. The selfish impulse, the narrow prejudice, the ignorant suspicion, the callous indifference, which frequently dominate us and determine our decisions, are one with that cruel combination of motives which drove the nails in the hands and feet of the Son of man. Still further, the suffering of Jesus never seems to an acute conscience something that happened once but is over now. The Figure that hung and bled on the tree centuries ago until He cried in victorious relief, "It is finished," becomes indissolubly joined in our thought with every life to-day that is the victim of similar misunderstanding and neglect, injustice and brutality —with every life in pain or poverty or loneliness or iniquity; and, while our sense of social responsibility charges us with complicity in all the wrong and woe under the sun, that haunting Form on Calvary seems to hang before our eyes, and

> "Makes me feel it was my sin,
> As though no other sin there were,
> That was to Him who bears the world
> A load that He could scarcely bear."

It may be felt that much of this is imaginative exaggeration. After all *we* were not members of the Sanhedrin who condemned Jesus, nor the Roman procurator who ordered His execution, nor the scoffing soldiers who carried it out. But, although our explanation of it may be faulty, for our eyes the path of moonlight on the water is an inescapable fact. We cannot look without having it stare us in the face. That band of silvery glory makes for us an inseparable part of the scene. For our consciences the charge of participation in the murder of the Son of God is an equally inescapable moral fact. It forms an unforgetable element in our outlook upon obligation, giving our life its tragic seriousness. It forces upon us the conviction that it is all too possible for us to repeat the crime of Golgotha, and by doing or failing to do, directly or indirectly, for one of the least of Christ's brethren, to crucify Him afresh and put Him to an open shame. As real as is the beauty of the band of moonlight on the lake to us, so grimly real is our personal implication in the death of Jesus.

But it is not only this consciousness of our

accountability for the crucifixion that a look at Calvary brings home to us. The cross casts not a black streak of shadowing disgrace but a radiant gleam of glory toward us. "Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

We Christians must always puzzle outsiders by what seems to them our amazing conceit when we speak of God's personal interest in us. Such a saying as "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" sounds like preposterous self-importance. If there be a Deity, however beneficent, behind and in all the mysterious forces of this universe, Creator of continents and oceans and skies, Lord of all lives past, present, and to come, how can there be a direct and individual relationship between Him and each of the myriads of human beings? There is much in the look of history with its swarm-like movements of humanity, with its record of the slow evolution of man from lowly beginnings in savagery, with its apparent disregard of the individual in the interest of the race, to confirm this skepticism. There is more, perhaps, in the look of the facts of human life to-day with statistics of birth and death rates,

of the number of criminals and insane persons in every thousand of the population, of the ratio of paupers and suicides; with the bewildering effect crowds have on us, robbing us of all sense of the individuality of those who compose them; with the depressing impression given by the uninteresting character of the majority of faces; to render the Christian view absurd. Think of the line of faces opposite one in a street car! Jesus's own faith rested not on His observation of humanity, but on His personal experience of what God was to Him. That experience, in so far as we have shared it, must assure us that the image of a Father for whom we each have a special significance is the picture to which the facts most nearly correspond. No other explanation does justice to our individuality, nor to the personalness of our contacts with God, if we have had any genuine contact at all. And as for the cross, which is the point at which the divine makes its deepest impress on us and comes closest to us, we cannot help feeling a direct line of personal devotion running from Calvary toward us. Call it fanciful if you will. There are dependable laws of optics which make it inevitable that

a normal pair of human eyes must see a moonbeam coming toward them. There are as inexorable laws which insure that the normal human heart looking at Calvary shall feel love reaching out and laying personal hold of it. The one is as regular as the other. And if the result of this outreach of love be the formation of a life-long, an eternity-long intercourse, which only words of personal relationship like "the friendship of Christ" and "the fatherhood of God' adequately describe, are we not justified in saying, "Who loved *me*, and gave Himself up for *me?*"

And when we say this with conviction, what a light is flung by the cross on one's self!

> "The grand comment, which displays at full
> Our human height, scarce sever'd from divine,
> By heaven composed, was publish'd on the cross.
> Who looks at that, and sees not in himself
> An awful stranger, a terrestrial god?
> If a God bleeds, He bleeds not for a worm."

There are moods in which the worm conception of humanity as applied to ourselves seems pitifully apt. Most of us must frequently despise ourselves. We are aware of such contemptible smallness — low thoughts,

petty feelings, mean impulses, trifling purposes, scanty love. John Henry Newman's mother, when he was at college, was at one time alarmed by reports of his appearance, and wrote to inquire as to his health. In reply he said: "Take me when I am most foolish at home and extend mirth into childishness; stop me short and ask me then what I think of myself . . . I should seriously answer that 'I shuddered at myself.'" But it takes a considerable self to shudder at, and most of us are sickened by self-contempt. We count for nothing, accomplish nothing, are nothing. Or, worse yet, we count as negatives, adding to the retarding and demoralizing forces in society. Our thoughtlessness, our crass stupidity, our insincerity, our miserable self-seeking and self-absorption — these stand between ourselves and self-respect. The affection of others for us, their generous esteem, while it gives us huge satisfaction, at times must also torture us by rousing the sense of our undeservingness. Our own ideal condemns us. But there on the cross hangs our Ideal, the Conscience of our consciences. And lo, *He loves us!*

It is in the light of that personal attachment to us that we assume infinite significance in our own eyes. Dr. Channing wrote a friend, "I have seldom, perhaps never, met a human being who seemed to me conscious of what was in him." So pitifully few of us look at our possibilities by the personal devotion shown for us in the cross. We individually mean every thing to God. Each of us is worth the life of His Son. In every mood of depression and discouragement, in every moment of self-depreciation, look at the Crucified! The personalness of His love is unmistakable. He must have you and me. We cannot help feeling the direct appeal to ourselves. We each have a special place in God's purpose here and forever, and that devotion lays hold of us and lifts us into it. However despised in our own eyes, God cannot replace us, and having made us "indescribably ourselves," He deals with each of us as unique, and convinces us through the personal plea in the cross that He cannot do without us. The cross never impresses us as a wholesale method of drawing men *en masse* to God, but as a special and most intimate friendly approach to each of us,

which we cannot slight without completely breaking the Heart that so loves us.

> "As men from men
> Do, in the constitution of their souls,
> Differ, by mystery not to be explained;
> And as we fall by various ways, and sink
> One deeper than another, self-condemned,
> Through manifold degrees of guilt and shame;
> So manifold and various are the ways
> Of restoration, fashioned to the steps
> Of all infirmity, and tending all
> To the same point, attainable by all —
> Peace in ourselves, and union with our God."

Nor does this individual appeal of the cross, making each of us feel that had he been the only sinner Christ would have died for him, render us conceited. While the moonlight falls across the water in a direct line to us, the shimmering beauty of the beam itself, the height of the sky from which the glory descends, the vastness of space all about, sober and subdue us. The Crucified is so far above us in the height of His conscience, His special devotion to us is so astonishing, the eternal purpose of God with which it surrounds us is so illimitable, that both our greatness and our littleness, what we may be and what we are not, come over us in the same moment. We are aware of a sting of shame and a thrill

of immeasurable hope in the same experience, when we realize the personal meaning of the cross for us, and say, "Who loved *me*, and gave Himself up for *me*."

But while we stand on the lake shore in solitary admiration, a friend's voice may call us to join him, and look out over the water from his point of view; then we see that to him, too, the moonlight makes a shining path. Paul knew that the personal relation of the Crucified to him was equally true for every man. He reminded himself and others of it when they were dealing with some trying or small individual. When he writes the Corinthians about the weak brother, the man who is too muddle-headed to be able to draw entirely obvious distinctions, and so tottering in his Christian walk that anything against which he can stub his toe gives him a tumble, he calls him "the brother for whom Christ died." It is hard to be considerate of a man of this kind; hard not to say: "He's a mere nonentity; why should we be prevented from doing perfectly sensible things because he is too stupid to see their reasonableness? Suppose he does drop out of the church, we are not losing anything." Paul

answers, "You may not feel that you are losing anything; but look at the straight line of devotion between the cross on Calvary and that man of no account! He is the man Christ died for."

When we are speaking of persons with odd peculiarities we often add, "Well, it takes all kinds of people to make a world." That is a bit of cheap and shallow optimism. It takes only Christlike people to make a God's world; all others more or less unmake it. But there is this much of truth in the common remark, that it does take *all* people to make God's world. The most unchristlike cannot be left out. He must be kept, and changed, and included in the Kingdom, or that remains incomplete. And it is very difficult for us to appreciate that some persons are indispensable. These are not the deep-dyed villains. We may cordially hiss an Iago; but we cannot help acknowledging that he is enough of a man to be well worth saving. We may speak with abhorrence of a Judas, and shudderingly picture him as going "to his own place"; but he has sufficient distinction to make a place of his own. "Ah Sam!" said Carlyle once to Froude, *à propos*

of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, the typical worldly and somewhat unscrupulous ecclesiastic of that generation, "Ah Sam! he is a very clever fellow; I do not hate him near as much as I ought to do." A man with an individuality of his own, even when he is thoroughly bad, strikes us as possessing some interest for his Creator. But the weak brother, the person without a sensible idea in his head, or with touchy feelings which get hurt where there isn't anything hard or sharp enough to hurt him, who at his best is an entirely negligible factor, the chronic nobody-in-particular wherever you happen to find him, how would the world be the poorer for his omission? John puts into his Lord's mouth bold words when he hears Him say: "I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth." It is the insipid, the characterless, who are nauseating to God and man. But Paul pleads for the nonentity. He shared the conviction that

"No creature's made so mean
But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,
Its supreme worth: fulfils by ordinance of fate,
Its momentary task, gets glory all its own,

Tastes triumph in the world, preëminent, alone.
Where is the simple grain of sand, mid millions heaped
Confusedly on the beach, but, did we know,
Has leaped, would we wait, i' the century, some onoe,
To the very throne of things? — earth's brightest for the nonce,
When sunshine shall impinge on just that grain's facette
Which fronts him fullest. . . . Quick sense perceives the same
Self-vindicating flash illustrate every man
And woman of our mass, and prove, throughout the plan,
No detail, but, in place allotted it, was prime
And perfect.

The "vindicating flash" which "illustrates" the most insignificant nobody falls on him from the cross. He is the man for whom Christ died.

Mr. Chesterton has said of Browning's "The Ring and the Book": "It is the great epic of the age, because it is the expression of the belief, it might almost be said of the discovery, that no man ever lived upon this earth without possessing a point of view." It was, perhaps, Paul's discovery that no man lives without possessing a distinct point of view toward Christ's cross. He may be blind to his own outlook, and you may have to put yourself in his place and see it for him; but a glory path of particular love for him leads straight from Calvary to his heart.

We talk of "the dark mass of heathenism";

we lump together a crowd of lives under some general caption like "the unchurched," or "the submerged tenth"; we are confronted with statistics to show us the appalling need in this and that direction; but we never begin to feel the full measure of our obligation until a discriminating sympathy attempts to visualize the individuals in the throngs and connects each in thought with the personal love of Christ. Men often speak slightingly about "saving souls," and tell us that we are rather to "save society"; but Christ's interest in a saved society is only for the sake of the children of God whom it will safeguard and perfect. He does not dwell on groups or numbers, but on men — "one sinner that repenteth," "one of these little ones," "one of these least." It is only when we are convinced of Christ's individual concern in every one of the millions of China, or of the thousands on a congested city block that we are at one with Him. We then cease arguing about their worth, their improvability, their need of more justice or better religion. What each is to the heart of God in Christ, that and nothing less he is to us.

There is surely no aspect of the cross we more

need for practical use than this. The best-natured of us knows some who tax him severely; the most appreciative finds those in whom he can see nothing whatever; the broadest in sympathy discovers some one outside the pale of even his interest; and the great majority of us, who are not conspicuously good-natured, or appreciative, or sympathetic, who have a fairly cordial dislike for a few, are bored by some, see nothing attractive in many, and would feel none the poorer if most dropped out of existence to-morrow, must train ourselves to put every man on a line between us and Calvary, that we may catch sight of that love-beam which glitters through the world's indifferent darkness toward him. To adjust ourselves rightly with every man in life's complex relationships, to lengthen our patience, to soften our roughness, to control our irritability, to dissipate our prejudice, to sensitize our tact, to lift us out of ourselves into genuine sympathy with him so that we render unto every man his due and fulfil that hardest of injunctions, "Honour all men," each must be to us "the brother for whose sake Christ died."

GOD

IV

GOD

Romans 5 : 8: "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
1 Corinthians 1 : 23, 24. "Christ crucified . . . the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

MARTIN LUTHER, commenting on the First Commandment, asks, "What means it to have a God, or what is God?" and answers, "Whatever thy heart clings to, and relies upon, that is properly thy God," and "to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe in Him with all our hearts."

When we look at Jesus of Nazareth hanging on the cross, our hearts go out to Him and cling to Him and give Him their all in adoring devotion. He is the divinest we know or can conceive of. His conscience and His love bow us before Him. We cannot think of Calvary without becoming awed. Palgrave, in a diary of a trip to Paris in 1848,

records the wrecking of the Tuileries, and tells how the mob suddenly broke into the chapel and faced the picture of Christ over the altar. "Some one cried out that every one should bare his head. The crowd at once did so, and knelt down, whilst the picture was carried out through the utmost silence — 'you might have heard a fly buzz' — into a neighbouring church. Then the suspended wave of destruction rolled on." Instinctively we bare our heads and kneel before the cross. The Crucified commands all our reverence, all our affection, all our loyalty. We have no intenser admiration left for a better than He, no more prostrate homage for a loftier. He is for us the Most High. We have no good beyond Him. We agree with Isaac Watts:

> "Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all."

We offer Him every thing we have to offer God — trust, worship, consecration — and if, as Luther insists, "trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol," Jesus is for us God, or we are idolaters.

But by the word "God" we mean not only that Being who evokes our supreme reverence

as the best we can imagine and draws out our affectionate trust, but also the Lord of the universe and of history, whose are sun and moon and stars of light, and the successive generations of the children of men. Jesus on the cross is after all a defeated Man, who cherished a fair hope, gave Himself to its achievement with singular fidelity, cast a spell over a discerning few by the loveliness of His character and the idealism of His teaching, but seemed entirely out of harmony with the world in His own or in any succeeding age. What connection can we prove between this dying Man, whose sublime sense of obligation and heroic self-sacrifice compel our honour and fealty, and the mysterious Power we instinctively fancy as Creator and Controller of this and all worlds?

There are spots in the Highlands of Scotland where the stranger is confused by the various bodies of water, all of which are called "lochs." Some are fresh water lakes, but others of the same general shape and appearance, winding in and out about the feet of the great hills and making their way far inland, are long arms of the ocean. Dip in your finger

and taste the water and it is brine. The loch rises and falls with the tides of the sea, and is one with the vast Atlantic. To the men of the New Testament the devotion of Jesus on Calvary is one with the eternal devotion of God. The conscience that impels Him to lay down His life is timed by the conscience of Him that sitteth upon the throne of everlasting right. The love that spares not His own blood and pours out His soul unto death is the disclosure of the heart of Him, of whom and through and unto whom are all things, the Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus, and Jesus supremely in His death, is for them their definition of God. "God is love," and "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us."

And in viewing Jesus, particularly in His death, as the disclosure of God, they are not making an arbitrary selection of an event which has most impressed them, but following Jesus' own selection of the most clearly divine act in His career. He usually emphasized the likeness of God and man, in order to make plain God's humanness; but the cross was to Him the point at which God and man stood

farthest apart. It was when Peter indignantly protested against His letting Himself be crucified, that Jesus heard in him man's judgment clashing with God's "thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." To spare Himself was satanic, to sacrifice Himself divine. As Jesus looked forward to Calvary, it was there that He saw Himself most manifestly Godlike.

It has been commonly assumed that the correct way to ascertain what God is like is to study the facts of the world and infer the kind of Being who designed and directs it. The universe is vast, its God must be omnipotent; it is intricate and complicated, so He must be omniscient; men think they see signs of His control and activity in every part of it, therefore He must be omnipresent. Order and arrangement are everywhere, and they conclude that God has a mind like ours, only wiser. They find a conscience and ideals in themselves, and reason that God must be at least as good as the best of men. It is a system of guessing, and may perhaps come near the truth, but it can result only in a man-made notion of Deity. The Bible writers look at

the problem differently. They are men of vivid religious experience to whom God is an indubitable fact, and in their experience with Him, it is not so much they who are seeking to reach Him, as He who is trying to get at them. And when from Calvary they are mastered by a love which constrains them to answer with their all, when they see in the Crucified their Ideal, the Better than their Best, they are sure that God is laying hold of them and disclosing Himself to them. Jesus is for them God's own description of Himself. "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell." "God commendeth His own love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Instead of starting with the universe and guessing out God from it, the Christian feels that God comes to him through Jesus, and especially at the point where Jesus makes His divinest impression through the cross, and reveals Himself to us. Ours is a Jesus-like God. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," and through Jesus's reconciling love for us, we know God.

Let us stop and think what we are saying.

We are facing Christ crucified, and letting a voice tell us, "Be still and know that I am God." Through the cross we are peering into the very centre of things — through this conscientious Brother, who owes and pays His kinsmen a life, to a conscientious Father, who acknowledged Himself indebted to His children and obliged to spare no thought or pains for them; through this Man of sorrows to a God who feels the shock and shame of His children's sin; through the writhing body and burdened spirit of this broken Life to the quivering and laden Heart who bears the world; through the victorious love of the Crucified drawing all men unto Himself to the good-will of Him who is First and Last, Author and Perfecter of all. We live in a world where God has entirely hidden Himself. We neither see nor hear Him. Benjamin Jowett said of Greek literature, "Under the marble exterior was concealed a soul thrilling with spiritual emotion." At Calvary men discover, under the seeming indifference of the universe, a most sensitive conscience and a most tender devotion. "God is love."

But is it credible that the Crucified is the

clearest portrayal of the final Reality back of and dominant in all existence? How hard it is always to be sure of it! Think of the world we know with its grandeurs and terrors — skies, seas, mountains, sunshine, and storm — birth, growth, decay, pain, death — with its history, writ large on our race or small on every man, a strangely chequered tale of light and shade, infamy and glory. Think of our own experiences when we have breathed the words "O God!" — moments of rapture in some seventh heaven of happiness and moments of anguish in some nethermost pit of shame or in some tophet of torture; moments of eager desire when our whole hearts went out in passionate craving for a coveted joy and moments of abject failure when our sole wish was to be relieved altogether of the responsibility of living; moments of perplexity when we longed for some clear guidance in this bewildering maze of circumstance; and moments when we looked to the unresponsive heavens for some sign of understanding and sympathy. Can Calvary be the correct symbol of Him who controls this world's actual life?

Is it not, as a matter of fact, through the

cross that men wanting God most desperately have most certainly been satisfied? A recent novelist pictures her heroine in a supreme ordeal and tells us: "The only thought that seemed to soothe the torture of her imagination was the thought stamped on her brain tissue by the long inheritance of centuries — the thought of Christ on Calvary. . . . She did not pray in words, but her agony crept to the foot of what has become, through the action and interaction of two thousand years, the typical and representative agony of the world, and, clinging there, made wild appeal, like the generations before her, to a God in whose hand lie the creatures of His will." It is not an accident which has drawn the years to act and interact upon the recollection of the cross. What men sought a God for they have found through it. Comfort, sympathy, inspiration, a sense of oneness with their Ideal, forgiveness, consecration, guidance, indomitable hope — these and much more Calvary has actually given them. What they mean by the word "God" — redeeming, transforming, glorifying love — lays hold of, masters, moulds, vitalizes them through the Crucified. They cannot bear

truthful witness to their own experience save as they declare, "God commendeth *His own love* toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

But some may object to this definition of God by the cross. They grant that Calvary reveals one element in His character — love — but they insist that God must have other qualities than love to be really the God we want. Unlike that odd French ecclesiastic, Cardinal de Retz, who declared that "it requires much greater qualities to become the successful head of a party than to rule the universe," they feel that the problem of being God is so serious that mere character, however good, will not suffice. God must possess wisdom and power as well. But are these supplementary to love, or is love itself both wise and strong?

To many people there seems no necessary connection between love and wisdom. Generosity often appears divorced from judgment, and affection from cleverness. The devoted are not invariably the far-sighted. A God who is merely love may be fooled and frustrated: but this is not the conviction of the New Testament. Christ crucified is the wisdom of God. The

Palm Sunday venture of Jesus trusting Himself to a hostile city was an act of bravery, but it seemed foolhardy. Mary's impulsive breaking of her flask of precious ointment, which Jesus so prized as the expression of a spirit akin to His own, was touching, but apparently wasteful and useless. But time, which is the test of wisdom, has demonstrated that Jesus' dying was supremely wise; and Mary's ointment is still filling an ever larger world with its fragrance. Jesus' dying was as sane and sensible as all His living. To Him love was wisdom, and to choose the most loving course was inevitably to select the wisest.

And at this point most of His followers fail to share their Master's faith. When we discuss questions of policy — the decisions a business firm must make, the course a nation's statesmanship should adopt, the practical methods a church can most successfully employ — it does not occur to us to ask, "Which is the most Calvary-like of our alternatives?" and choose that, sure that we cannot be mistaken. In the complicated personal problems that confront us — family questions, our dealings with particularly difficult persons, our

relations with the disagreeable, the aggressive, the ne'er-do-weel, the degenerate, our decisions as to obligation — how infrequently we take them to the cross, and, seeking to settle them in accord with its spirit, feel confident that we are certainly correct! We do not really believe that Christ crucified is the wisdom of God, and that to be of His mind is to share the only omniscience within our reach, the only omniscience in existence if through that cross we see God's self-disclosure.

A few years ago a French engineer, M. Dibos, happened to be on board a Channel steamer which ran into a dense bank of fog. He noticed that about the mouth of one of the stoke-hold ventilators there was a considerable clear space. He immediately conceived the idea that the mechanical shock of the heated air destroyed the equilibrium of the particles of water and made them fall. He has, after a good many experiments, devised a simple apparatus which under test produces in a dense fog a clear space over two hundred yards long. As the shock of heat precipitates the obscuring fog, the warmth of consecration, the heat of a redemptive passion, dissipates the mists of

life which hinder us from seeing. A love like Jesus Christ's cuts a long stretch of clear outlook ahead and lets Him see. His fog-bound brethren may speak of His imprudence, His poor judgment, His unpracticalness, His folly; but that devotion by which He is guided is for Him the wisdom of God.

And, again, there seems to many to be no connection between love and force. To do the kindest thing is not necessarily to do the most effective. Affection often impresses us as impotent. Legislators planning the national defence do not consider good-will our most impregnable fortification. Workmen struggling for a juster distribution of the results of industry are unlikely to regard brotherliness as their strongest argument. Prisons and reformatories are not consciously moulded by Calvary as though the reembodiment of its principles in the institutions and men who must handle the hardest human beings gives the most satisfactory results. Even preachers and teachers hesitate to use the cross of Christ as their strongest appeal; less unselfish motives they think more readily accessible in their congregations and pupils. The cross has never

been widely accepted by Christians as sufficiently practical to be used. Its patient endurance of wrong, its lamb-like self-surrender, its sacrifice of rights, ambitions, happiness — of every thing except principle — its utterly disinterested love, have seemed ineffective in a world like ours. It is not to many the power of God.

Mr. Kipling in his last volume pictures a baron overhearing snatches of the song:

> "'*Gold is for the mistress, silver for the maid!*
> *Copper for the craftsman cunning at his trade!*'
> 'Good!' said the Baron, sitting in his hall,
> 'But Iron — Cold Iron — is master of them all!' "

And relying on his strength, he wages an unsuccessful rebellion against his King, and finds himself behind cold iron bars.

"Yet his King spake kindly (Ah, how kind a Lord!)
'What if I release thee now and give thee back thy sword?'
'Nay!' said the Baron, 'mock not at my fall,
For Iron — Cold Iron — is master of men all!'

"Yet his King made answer (few such Kings there be!)
'Here is Bread and here is Wine — sit and sup with me.'
He took the Wine and blessed it; He blessed and brake the Bread.
With His own hands He served them, and presently He said:
'Look! These Hands they pierced with nails outside My city wall
Show Iron — Cold Iron — to be master of men all!' "

" 'Wounds are for the desperate, blows are for the strong,
Balm and oil for weary hearts all cut and bruised with wrong.
I forgive thy treason — I redeem thy fall —
For Iron — Cold Iron — must be master of men all.'"

The old song rang on in the Baron's ears:

"'*Crowns are for the valiant — sceptres for the bold!*
Thrones and powers for mighty men who dare to take and hold.'
'Nay!' said the Baron, kneeling in his hall,
But Iron — Cold Iron — is master of men all!'"

Jesus consciously plans a royal entry into Jerusalem when He knows that He rides to His death. It is His way of proclaiming His faith that through self-sacrifice He will reign, through service be Lord of all. And the centuries since testify that the mightiest force of which they know comes from the summit of that hill where a defeated Man is done to an ignominious death.

We speak of the omnipotence of God; and, starting with the assumption that He can do every thing, are puzzled by that which He does not do, and at that which He allows. To be genuinely Christian we must not speak of the omnipotence but of the "amorpotence," the love power, of God. He does every thing that

love can, and allows nothing that love is able to prevent. Love has limitations, and so has God. "And when He drew nigh, He saw the city and wept over it . . . How often would I . . . and ye would not." Were not love powerless in the face of some circumstances, the tragedy of Golgotha would not have been enacted. "He was crucified through weakness." There is a weakness in God. He is at His children's mercy: and in that are involved all life's tragedies — the Judases God cannot keep from treachery, the Christs from whom it is not possible that the cup can pass. The spitting and scourging, the crown of thorns, the nails and spear, are vivid symbols of present methods of treating the Love that loves us. God cannot prevent us; He can only bear us. But "crucified through weakness" the patience that bears has a strength all its own. We look on Him whom we have pierced, and are mastered. "The weakness of God is stronger than men."

"What means it to have a God?" to repeat Luther's searching question. "To have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe in Him with all our hearts." Is the God who

defines Himself for us through Christ crucified the Being we adore, depend on, serve with our all, and confidently expect to see Lord of heaven and earth? Is His self-giving love that which we invariably employ as the wisest guide and the strongest force in the universe? In a genuine sense God is not yet manifestly God. His godship He has still to gain. His glory, which is His character, will not be revealed until all flesh see it together, and that cannot come to pass until Love is all in all. But is He God to us? Is the love commended by Calvary our wisdom and our power?

THE END

Date Due