

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 06826780 0

LD OF JESUS

⌘ HENRY SLOANE COFFIN ⌘

v. No subject

252

C

8880907

KEEP THIS BOOK CL
NOT TURN DOWN THE
be

252

C

Z12

M

Coffin

THE CREED OF JESUS AND
OTHER SERMONS

The Creed of Jesus
AND
Other Sermons

BY

06 X
HENRY SLOANE COFFIN

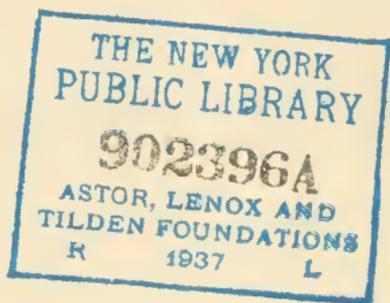
PASTOR OF THE MADISON AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
AND LECTURER IN THE UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
NEW YORK CITY

NEW YORK

Charles Scribner's Sons

MCMVII

1157



COPYRIGHT, 1907, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published October, 1907

NEW YORK
1907

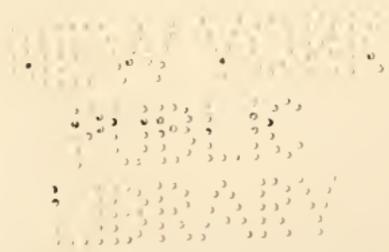


252

C

B880907

TO
 THE CONGREGATIONS
 OF THE
 BEDFORD PARK AND MADISON AVENUE
 PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES
 OF
 NEW YORK CITY
 IN GRATITUDE, HONOR AND LOVE



THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
 CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT
 419 5TH AVENUE
 NEW YORK, N. Y.

TRANSFER FROM C. JUN 18 1937

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE CREED, PROGRAMME, PRAYER AND EXPERIENCE OF JESUS . . .	I
II. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS	28
III. GOD'S SYMPATHY	45
IV. FAITH AND CHARACTER	66
V. FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE	93
VI. THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER	114
VII. OUR LIMITATIONS	139
VIII. HEAVEN'S DOOR THROUGH THE USUAL	164
IX. CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR	185
X. CRAMPED LIVES	208
XI. THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARDS NATURE	231
XII. THE UNWEARYING CHRIST	258

THE CREED OF JESUS AND OTHER SERMONS

I

THE CREED, PROGRAMME, PRAYER, AND EXPERIENCE OF JESUS *

Matt. 6 : 9-13. "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

THESE words might be called "Jesus' Confession of Faith." A creed underlies every prayer, for one must have some sort of conception of the God one addresses, and a sincere man's actual creed is best discovered when one hears him pray. And this is Jesus' own creed, the faith by which He lived and worked and died. Put its sentences into creedal form and this is at once

* A Baccalaureate Sermon to the graduating class of the Divinity School of Yale University, preached June 2d, 1907.

THE CREED OF JESUS

apparent. "I believe in God, our Father, Mine and all men's, whose name of love is alone to be revered supremely as the ideal; whose will for earth is the establishment of His social order of heavenly love; who has so arranged His world that all His children will be given daily bread, if we live to fulfil this, His purpose; who freely forgives us our debts in the measure in which we are able to receive His forgiveness, that is, as we have forgiven our brethren; who never leads any child of His into a situation where he may be tempted to evil without providing deliverance for him, if he follows His leading." Is not that a fairly complete statement of the convictions Jesus preached, lived in and died by?

This confession has only one article. It is from first to last about God—His fatherhood, His character of love, His purpose for earth and heaven, His care for the daily needs of His children, His forgiveness, His guidance and deliverance. There is

THE CREED OF JESUS

but one thing fundamental in a man's theology—his thought of God. What he thinks of Him determines his thought of the universe, of the present life and the future, of all men and himself, of God's relations to universe and self and humanity. If God be thought of as the Absolute, then all His relations with us will be philosophical relations; and we shall talk of His infinity, transcendence, immanence, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience; and religion will be primarily speculation. If with the historic Latin theology we speak of God as King, we can speak of His eternal decrees, His sovereignty, His rebellious subjects, the satisfaction of His justice and the like; and His relations with us will be official relations. If we go "through nature to God," we shall arrive at nature's God; His relations with us will be expressed in the scientific words of the day—the terms of biology or psychology or sociology; and we shall have natural or psychical or social law in

THE CREED OF JESUS

the spiritual world as the statement of our religious faith. If we go through Jesus to God and think of Him as Father, and the particular kind of father Jesus conceived Him, then every word in our theology must be a household, a home-like word, and all God's relations with us will be personal relations. Even if for convenience' sake we employ a word that does not belong to intimate family affairs, like the word "kingdom," we must be careful, as Jesus was, to give it a thoroughly personal interpretation. A creed needs but a single article. Given what God is like, one can easily conclude what such a Being will do with anybody, under any circumstances, anywhere, at any time.

But were we to offer this confession as a summary of faith to a body of evangelical Christians, we should at once be told that it had unpardonable omissions. Where is the divinity of Jesus? It is here. What is the religious value of the statement that in

THE CREED OF JESUS

Jesus dwelt “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” but this, that whenever we wish to think of God we think of Jesus of Nazareth? God is for us Christians eternally Jesus-like. He never wills anything for anybody that Jesus did not will for someone. The aim of the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus is not to assert something about Jesus, but to assert something about God. Jesus is the Way, but the way is of value only as it takes one to the end, the Father revealed through Jesus. If Jesus is divine, we know what to think of God; and whether we conceive Him as Lord of heaven and earth, or as the indwelling Spirit within ourselves, He is always a Jesus-like Lord and a Jesus-like Spirit. We shall never ask, “Does God do thus and so?—does He punish, does He elect, does He forgive, does He answer petitions?”—without framing our question, “Did Jesus punish, or elect, or forgive, or grant requests, and how did He do so?” The divinity of Jesus is our way of stating the character of

THE CREED OF JESUS

our God. And the God we get at through this creed is the duplicate of the Jesus who utters it. If one defines divinity by the God addressed in the Lord's Prayer, one is forced to call Him, in whom the identical character is embodied on earth, divine.

Or where is the doctrine of the atonement in this confession? Here, too, implicitly. For what is the religious value of that doctrine but its statement of the character of the God, who commends His own love to us sinners by all that He does to redeem us, and of the manner of men His reconciled children must be? And that surely is plainly here:—our Father, who givest, forgivest, deliverest; and we—do Thy will, forgive our brethren, seek Thy Kingdom. The particular steps in the history of God's redemptive work, with its fullest disclosure of His eternal suffering because of, and with, and for His children on Calvary, are not mentioned; but the God spoken to here is the kind of Father who spares not His own

THE CREED OF JESUS

Son, and freely gives His children all things needful to attain the measure of the stature of the fulness of His Firstborn. And is not our criticism of the historic doctrines of salvation their misrepresentation of the Christian God? Start with an orthodox conception of God, that is, the God of Jesus, Himself Jesus-like, and we shall not go far astray in our interpretations of the Cross, or of any other of His marvellous works for the children of men.

So one might go on with the list of doctrines and show how the essence of each is given in this simple confession of faith uttered by Jesus in prayer with His disciples. The point is that it gives a true conception of God. You and I as ministers of religion must have a theology to shape our preaching, our conduct of public worship, our practical leadership of the Church of Christ. Let us think rightly of God. We are to preach God, and to preach Him as though He were preaching Himself through

THE CREED OF JESUS

us. Let every sermon be a message about *this* God, and *this* God's message through us. Public worship is to be the conscious social fellowship of a congregation with *this* God. Let us offer no prayer and select no hymn which is untrue to this thought of Him, and that will require a strict care of the language we use in devotions, and a judicious exclusion of at least fifty per cent. of the current hymns. As pastors we are to bring men and women and little children into personal intimacy with *this* God, and to make the organization we lead correctly represent Him in every detail of its work—the way in which its support is raised, people are seated in His house, and its members treat one another socially. Let us see to it that the type of spirituality we personally stand for and propagate is consistent with this conception of God, our variety of spirituality—Jesus-likeness.

2. These words contain not merely a confession of faith, but a statement of purpose.

THE CREED OF JESUS

They are a *programme* as well as a creed. "Our Father, I will deal with Thee as a son in trust and obedience and love, and with every child of Thine as a brother; I will hallow Thy name of love by seeking so to represent it that Thou shalt be lovely in all eyes; I will make Thy purpose Mine, and seek to live in and further the Kingdom of justice, kindness and faithfulness in the earth; I will be confident that, seeking first Thy kingdom, I shall not fail of daily bread; I will not run into any temptation unled, but when led into a trying situation will rely absolutely on Thy deliverance as I obey Thy leading."

It is worth noticing that the same words contain Jesus' programme and His creed. His theology was really subordinate to His purpose, and He was interested in it only as it promoted His purpose. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," He announced in the synagogue, not to give men correct ideas as to God and themselves, but to bring in the

THE CREED OF JESUS

era of gladness and liberty and light and health in unison with the will of God. There is little that is strictly new and original in His theology. One can doubtless find every clause of the Lord's Prayer somewhere in a Jewish document. The originality of Jesus lies in His clear grasp of God's purpose for the sons of men, and in the fine discrimination, with which He took the materials at hand in the faith of His own people, and with them made His Father's purpose plain to His brethren. First a purpose, then a creed was His order. "Seek ye first His Kingdom," and correct ideas will be among the addenda sure to follow.

You and I have our theologies. They diverge more or less from those held by many of the best Christians with whom we are to do our work. Let us make clear to ourselves that our bond of fellowship is unity of aim, and not agreement in opinion. We shall often find in our own congregations

THE CREED OF JESUS

and in our communities our strongest allies in people, whose doctrinal positions are widely different from ours, but whose hearts cherish the same ambition to redeem men into full-grown sons of the Most High and to transform earth into a household of brethren dwelling together in peace and goodwill. The Church unity for which Jesus prayed was not oneness of organization, nor uniformity of worship, nor identity of creed; but community of purpose—"that they may all be one, even as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee."

In the statement of our creed we must see to it that every clause is convertible into a plank in a working platform. The commonest of heresies is a false emphasis. The Church has spent precious time in discussing details of its theology which had no direct bearing on the Christian purpose—the method and extent of the inspiration of Scripture, the doom of those dying out of Christ, the virgin birth of our Lord,

THE CREED OF JESUS

and so on—and has often separated itself from those who were thoroughly at one with it in aim, because they differed in certain opinions. Truth is precious, and its frank statement is usually a plain duty; but the accomplishment of those things for which Jesus toiled and shed His blood and ever liveth is more precious still. Whether we be radical or conservative in theology, we are bound not to emphasize either our dissents or our assents to the detriment of coöperation with those who are one with us in devotion to the programme of Jesus.

Theology is often slightly spoken of to-day, and a distinction made between doctrinal and practical preaching. If a man who had left home in infancy were to return in manhood, the most *practical* thing one could do for him would be to tell him his relationships to the people he found in the home. “This elderly man is your father, this woman your sister, this crippled

THE CREED OF JESUS

child your invalid brother who has never properly developed." A Christian theology points out our relatives in the universe. "This Being you instinctively turn to with reverence is your Father, whose name is love. These people you live with and trade with are your brethren, whom you are to dwell with in coöperation for the good things of life, never in competition; whom you are to work with for the joy of serving the family, never for the sake of what you personally make out of your work; and whom you are to consider as the owners of all you individually control, so that you think of them as much as of yourself in your employment of whatever you call yours. This unfortunate you are sending off to a jail is an invalid child of your Father's, whom you must treat as an invalid and do what you can to supply with health. This man, who belongs to a backward race here at hand or on the other side of the globe, and whom your civilization would like to be rid of because he

THE CREED OF JESUS

does not easily fit into it, is a brother for whom your Father's eldest Son died. This world in which you find yourself, so pleasant and yet so difficult to understand and be satisfied with at times, is your Father's house, or one of His houses, where He puts you to get your education, and which He wants you to make a household of love like the heaven you dream of." That is doctrinal preaching in the spirit of Jesus, and it is most practical.

Men sometimes ask, "Is it necessary to believe a creed in order to be saved?" It depends on what we mean by "saved." If we mean by it what Jesus did when He said to Zacchæus, "To-day is salvation come to this house," then a creed is absolutely essential to salvation, the creed that embodies the purpose of God. When Jesus visited Zacchæus' house He gave him that sort of a doctrinal sermon, and Zacchæus stood and said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully

THE CREED OF JESUS

exacted aught of any man I restore four-fold." The theology of Jesus showed Zacchæus his right relations and gave him his purpose. And when Zacchæus set himself to make Jesus' creed his personal programme, Jesus said, "To-day is salvation come to this house." We shall be the means of saving men by preaching that sort of theological sermon.

3. This is the Lord's *prayer* as well as His creed and His programme—words He uttered with His disciples, looking up and speaking to Another, and feeling Himself in communion with this Other. It makes all the difference in the world whether one thinks of the Christian purpose as something to be striven for by us mortals and won perhaps after numberless æons of struggle, or as the will of a God, of whom and through whom and unto whom are all things and who is as almighty as love can be, who associates Himself with us, makes His strength perfect in our weakness, His wis-

THE CREED OF JESUS

dom in our foolishness, His hope in our discouragement.

Here again we cannot emphasize too strongly that the same words, which form this prayer, form also a declaration of the purpose of those who utter it. Every one of Jesus' prayers is a programme for man as well as a petition to God. He bade His disciples, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers," and then the narrative continues, "These twelve Jesus sent forth." "Go ye" stands side by side with "Pray ye." When He said in Gethsemane, "Thy will be done," He was not uttering a passive submission like helpless old Eli's, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good," or a grim resignation to the inevitable like the Stoics; He rose from His knees, gave Himself into custody, walked to the cross. Even His last prayer made in complete exhaustion, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," He Himself carried out. He placed

THE CREED OF JESUS

His life in God's keeping, and left it there in calm assurance that it would be safely kept. We so often pray, "I commend," but instead of actually putting ourselves in God's hands, and leaving ourselves there, expect our Father to drag us from ourselves, while we continue self-conscious and self-willed. Then we wonder that we have not the consciousness of God's presence. Communion with the Christian God, the God of this prayer, can be obtained only by sharing His purpose. That is what communion with the Christian God means, companionship with Him in common interests. "Hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." A friend visited Bengel, the great New Testament scholar, one evening, and finding him so engrossed in his studies that he did not notice his presence, sat down in a corner of the room and waited for him to finish. By and by he saw Bengel close his books, straighten out the papers on his desk, and kneel down beside it; and he

THE CREED OF JESUS

overheard this prayer: "O God, you and I understand each other. Amen." Sharing God's purpose in his studies, he had a sense of companionship; the prayer was simply a bringing into clear consciousness of that which was an abiding fact. Non-Christian prayer is largely an asking of God to do something that man cannot or does not wish to do. Christian prayer is a conscious entering into the purpose of God for one's self and one's brethren, that God and we together, being of one will, may attain it.

Brothers in the ministry, the secret of power for us lies first in our grasping the purpose of God in Christ, and then in making that purpose a life-long prayer. Only he who devotes himself to it in the consciousness of fellowship with a Mightier and a Wiser and a Better than he, will have force to achieve his part in it. One of his contemporaries said of Robert Bruce, an eminent minister in Edinburgh, in the time of James the Sixth, "O! what a strange man is

THE CREED OF JESUS

this, for he knocks down the Spirit of God upon us all." His power is explained in the account of a Sabbath, when he was preaching at Larbert. A party of gentlemen who had heard him in the morning were waiting for the afternoon service, and, being eager to start on their home journey, sent the bellman to the vestry to find out whether the service could not begin at once. The bellman returned saying that he did not know when the minister would come out; he believed there was somebody with him, for he heard him many times say with the greatest seriousness, "That he would not—that he could not go, unless He came with him; and that he would not go alone;" adding, that he never heard the Other answer him a word. And the old narrator adds: "When he came out in a little, he was *singularly assisted*."

4. This brings us to a final point that these words are not only creed and programme and prayer, but the record of Jesus' *experience*. Where did this knowl-

THE CREED OF JESUS

edge of God come from? Was it a series of ideas Jesus brought to earth from heaven ready made? or were they communicated to Him in some miraculous way? If so, He was not made in all points like unto His brethren. He found out God, precisely as all the children of men must, by living with Him and experiencing what God is to us—our singular Assistance. He started life with an exalted view of God, taught Him by parents who inherited the best in Israel's religion; He lived with the God of His fathers, only as none other had ever lived, in unbroken accord with Him; and He made the greatest of all discoveries, the discovery of the God whose purpose is set forth in this prayer. He was

“the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.”

Other great souls from mountain-peaks, from their highest moments of inspiration, had seen dimly and from afar what Jesus

THE CREED OF JESUS

saw plainly. He was the pioneer into the complete knowledge of the purpose and character of God. Read the words again as the account of an experience, a chapter from Jesus' autobiography: "I have discovered God, My Father and all men's: I have found that His character compels supreme adoration; that His will is that earth shall contain a brotherhood of His children dwelling together, as they do in heaven, the sphere of His ideals; that He has cared for Me faithfully as I have striven to fulfil His will; that He forgives freely as we forgive, and so has been entirely at one with Me, who have always forgiven My brethren; that He has never led Me into any temptation without providing a way of escape, that I might in His strength meet and vanquish it." Are not the words of this prayer the record of the spiritual explorations of One who

" . . . lived with God in such untroubled love
And clear confiding, as a child on whom
The Father's face had never yet but smiled;

THE CREED OF JESUS

And with men even, in such harmony
Of brotherhood, that whatsoever spark
Of pure and true in any human heart
Flickered and lived, it burned itself towards Him ”?

And because it was an experience, He said to His brethren, “Follow Me.” To share His purpose and make it our prayer is to repeat His experience and join in His credo.

You and I are to be ministers of the God and Father of Jesus Christ. What do we really *know* of Him? It is a solemn moment for any conscientious man when he faces an individual or a congregation, knowing that he is expected to say what he knows of God. He is not to repeat what others have said in Scripture or out of it; he is to say what he is sure of, because he has experienced it and believes it as he believes himself. Men ask for this, and this only. One of Father Taylor’s sailors said to him in Boston: “When a man is a preachin’ at me, I want him to take somert hot out of his heart

THE CREED OF JESUS

and shove it into mine—that's what I call preachin'." We may feel that our ministry will be far too limited by this. How can we young men, strangers probably to life's deepest sorrows and darkest perplexities, minister out of our scanty personal knowledge of God to souls in far direr straits than we can even dream of? Listen to Paul: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (there is the starting-point always—the religious experience of the historic Jesus, giving us the God of Jesus), "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (where did that name come from? That was Paul's personal discovery in Macedonia when Titus met him with the heart-relieving news of the state of affairs at Corinth), "who comforteth us in all our affliction, that" . . . that we may be able to comfort them who are in a similar affliction? Not at all! "That we may be able to comfort them that are in *any* affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves

THE CREED OF JESUS

are comforted of God.” The individual religious experience has a universal application. Why? Because our experience, however limited, is a window through which we look out and see God. We can bring our brothers up to the window and say, “Look and see!” See *what* I see? No two pairs of eyes ever saw just the same landscape out of the same window. We see what we bring with us the eyes to see. “Look and see *Whom* I see!” And God adapts Himself to every child’s needs who seeks Him.

Perhaps we shrink from the seeming egotism of making our personal experience of God the basis of all we say and do as ministers. There are two kinds of guides who take travellers through Continental cathedrals. One is the garrulous talker, who stands you in front of a sacred painting and reels off for the thousandth time his description of its fine points, and the remarks noted art critics have made upon it; and

THE CREED OF JESUS

you come away with a confused recollection of the jumble of things he said, and of certain personal peculiarities of his own in manner, or voice, or appearance. The other is the man seemingly in harmony with the reverent quiet of the great church, who leads you silently up to some picture, draws the curtain, steps aside, leaving you face to face with the sacred scene; and you come away with an impression of Christ as He was interpreted there by the master-hand of the artist. We use the Lord's Prayer and are not conscious of the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. All its clauses are parts of His religious experience and come to us through Him, but He obliterates Himself that He may be the Way to the Father. There is a certain impersonality about all truth that forever makes it impossible for one to utter that which is supremely true to him in an egotistic fashion, as though it were his private property.

THE CREED OF JESUS

“How sure it is
That, if we say a true word, instantly
We feel 'tis God's, not ours, and pass it on
As bread at sacrament, we taste and pass
Nor handle for a moment, as indeed
We dared to set up any claim to such !”

My brothers, it is our personal participation in the religious experience of Jesus that gives us the basis for our ministry as preachers and pastors and leaders of His Church. But it is comforting and fortifying to recall that intensely personal as must be our knowledge of God, it is not a knowledge that we alone possess. To guard us from idiosyncrasies that would put us out of touch with our brethren in the household of faith; to certify us that our message rests on no mere subjective illusion; to solemnize us with a sense of responsibility to those, through whom, by a true apostolic succession of the Spirit, we have received our Gospel; we are to remember that we are ministers of the Church of Jesus Christ. Behind us in the Christian centuries, and

THE CREED OF JESUS

about us in every place throughout the world to-day, are ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, who have shared this creed, lived for this purpose, found fellowship with the Father through this prayer, to attest that they have entered into the experience of their Lord and ours; and who join with us in our appeal, "O taste and see that our God is good, as good as Jesus said He was, as good as was Jesus Himself. We have been loved, trusted, used, forgiven, cared for, guided, delivered by Him. We know Whom we have believed."

"Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
Is He sure to bless?
Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs,
Answer, Yes."

II

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Matt. 6 : 3. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

WHY not? Because both hands ought to be doing. Jesus is speaking of giving, and warning against doing alms to be seen of men. All true giving is self-giving. The giver's whole interest must be absorbed for the moment in the person he is giving to, with no unemployed thought left to notice whether the gift is seen or not. And then He goes further still and adds, "Be not even seen of thyself. Be not self-conscious. Let not thy left-hand know what thy right hand doeth."

Jesus came to make us *whole* men in whatever we do. That is a fair summary of His purpose. We are to be whole children with our Father. When we pray, our entire

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

selves are to be engrossed in fellowship with Him—all our attention fastened on Him, all our feelings clinging to Him, all our resolution determining to do His will. That is what Jesus meant by entering into one's closet and shutting the door to pray. There are to be no stray thoughts observing whether other people see that we are religious. That is hypocrisy, acting. There are to be no remainders of ourselves sitting off like an audience and admiring the rest of ourselves addressing God. That is self-consciousness, a subtler form of hypocrisy, acting before ourselves,

“Changing the pure emotion
Of our high devotion,
To a skin-deep sense
Of our own eloquence,
Strong to deceive, strong to enslave.”

Jesus described the Pharisee in His parable as standing and praying “with himself.” Part of him was praying and part was congregation to the praying part. The Scot-

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

tish Covenanter, Samuel Rutherford, writes in one of his letters, "Nay, when I am seeking Christ, and am out of myself, I have the third part of a squint eye upon that vain, vain thing myself and something of mine own." And Richard Hooker, the great Elizabethan divine, gives this direction for prayer, "Single thyself from thyself, if such sequestration may be attained." It is his way of saying, "Shut thy closet door on thyself too, the spying self; and let the whole of thee be inside the door, absorbed in conscious fellowship with thy Father and seeking His will for thee. Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

Jesus wanted us to be whole children of God at every moment of our lives. Why does He say so often, "Be not anxious," "Fear not"? Every worrying person is a split self. He does not throw his entire personality into what he is doing now, but allows detachments of his thoughts to wonder what may happen to him next. When Jesus said,

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

“Be not anxious for the morrow, for the morrow will be anxious for itself,” He was telling us to be our complete selves to-day, without detailing a section of ourselves to look out for a to-morrow which may never arrive. All anxiety and fear are forms of self-consciousness; a half self is thinking about the other half, instead of letting the total self live and work in a to-day divine enough to need all that in us is to fulfil it. The left hand knows what the right hand is doing.

And with each other Jesus wishes us to be whole men. Paul repeated the teaching of this text when he wrote to the Romans, “He that giveth, let him do it with singleness.” Our translation reads, “with liberality,” but the Greek is “with singleness.” That is the Bible idea of liberality—a man’s whole self going out to another in the single act of love. The only kind of giving God knows is Self-giving. When He gave His Son, men found God Himself in Christ.

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

When He gives us a spiritual Comrade and Guide and Strengtheners, we find God Himself personally with us in the Holy Spirit. We speak of the divinity of Jesus and the divinity of the Holy Spirit. It is our way of expressing our consciousness that we find our Father Himself in the life He gave us at Bethlehem and in the spiritual influences that inspire us to-day. "He that giveth let him do it with singleness." The help of the brother who needs us must be the sole purpose, which engrosses us, so that in what he gets from us he shall feel that he really gets ourselves. To do that one can leave no part of himself to sit aside on a grand-stand and cheer the giving self. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

But how very seldom we succeed in being our whole selves in anything! When we talk with people, instead of being absorbingly interested in them, there is apt to be a fraction of us hiding around the corner,

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

eavesdropping on the talking fraction and calculating the effect produced on the man we are talking to. It was said of a celebrated French woman, "Elle s'écoute, quand elle parle;" as Pope satirized a critic,

"With his own tongue still edifies his ears,
And always list'ning to himself appears."

When we meet a number of people we are not our complete natural selves, but are awkward and constrained, and our conversation becomes artificial. Our real selves do not go into what we say. We do not incarnate ourselves in our talk as God incarnated Himself in His Word. "The Word was God and the Word became flesh." He spoke Himself out in Jesus, who is "the frankness of God." When we shoulder some responsibility, a little morsel of us runs off and stares up, like a Liliputian at Gulliver, at the self carrying the burden; and people say of us, "He's self-important." When we are at our work and ought, as the apostle puts

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

it, to be working "in singleness of heart," we have a way of letting a section of heart stay out and act as a spectator, watching whether we work as well as the man next us, or whether our work gets the compensation it merits, or simply sitting off and clapping hands at the working self and whispering, "Self, what a huge success you are!" We are like the little girl in the German fairy tale with three eyes, *Dreiaügelein*. We seem to have an extra eye fixed on ourselves, a left hand which acts as recorder to the right hand. How often people say about some fine man, "If he'd only forget himself!" or, "So and so is very clever, but he knows it!" We're not units, we're fractions. When a whole man ought to be up in the pulpit preaching himself out in a message from God to his congregation, there is often eighty per cent. of a man speaking and twenty per cent. noticing whether what he is saying takes or not. When a complete soul ought to be facing the question of what he should

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

do in the world and saying, "I owe the world a life, and I'm going to pay one hundred cents on the dollar," there is a decimal soul willing to give himself to serve the world, while a remainder asks, "What sort of a living will the world give me?" We should have infinitely more useful careers if we could get the entire man on the left-hand side of the decimal point.

Once in a while we are delightfully surprised to find someone who does not seem to be fragmentary. We say, "How whole-souled he is!" Was not that the impression Jesus made? When Paul writes to the Philippians "He emptied Himself," is he not trying to tell us that this Man was utterly unself-conscious, and was wrapped up in the great purpose He saw to be His Father's will for Him?

But we are rarely self-emptied. With most of us the left hand is intensely interested in the right hand and does not go to work because it is so curious to see how the

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

right hand is faring. We apologize for ourselves occasionally by saying, "I'm not myself to-day." We almost never are. Something hurt our feelings. How did we discover that? Because all of us was not feeling, but part of our feelings were busy feeling how the rest of our feelings felt. We do not like our work. How did we find that out? All of us was not working. The left hand stopped and asked how the right hand enjoyed it. Do you remember the Bible phrase for insanity? "He is beside himself." Self-consciousness is a form of lunacy. We are "beside ourselves." And oddly enough that old Bible phrase is echoed in a bit of modern slang. We say of a person slightly deranged mentally, "He is not all there." That is precisely Jesus' definition of a sinner, a child of God not "all there" when he prays, when he lives to-day, when he serves his brothers.

Look at the two sinners He has sketched for us in one of His parables. The prodigal

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

was not himself, his whole self, in his home. He was "beside himself," half watching whether the other half was having a good time. A divided self is never sane: the prodigal plays the fool, goes off, wastes his patrimony and, far worse, wastes himself in useless and ruinous living. By and by "he came to himself." Instead of being self-conscious his whole mind and heart were filled with the figure of another. He said, "I will arise and go unto my father, and will say unto him, father I have sinned, I have been throwing myself away, and what remains is not enough to call thy son." But the father as he looks at him sees that he is himself, a battered, wrecked, scarred self, but still a whole self, whole in his penitence and in his wish to do better. "This my son was lost, part of him was lost to me long before he left home, now he is all found."

But self-consciousness seems to have been a family failing in that household. There was an acute case of it in the older

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

brother out in the field. When he hears that his brother has come home, one would suppose that he would think at once of him and of his father, and of what that home-coming meant for the family. But he thinks only of himself. He is "with himself" when the news is told him; his left hand knows all about the right hand and prevents it from reaching out to welcome the returned brother. Listen to this: "Lo, these many years do *I* serve thee, and *I* never transgressed a commandment of thine; and yet thou never gavest *me* a kid that *I* might make merry with *my* friends." He is a lost son to his father, as far away in heart as the other has been in miles, as truly a spiritual as the other has been a geographical prodigal. No sympathy comes from him. He is self-centred. He, too, needs to "come to himself," and be a whole son with his father.

And need we go to the Bible for self-conscious sinners? Why did we hurt so-and-so

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

the other day? We did not mean to. Where were our thoughts? Not all on him, but part on ourselves, and the fractional self that talked wounded a brother for whose sake Christ died. People do not interest us? Why not? They do not seem to take us out of ourselves. How can they, when both hands never go out to take theirs, but left hand watches how well right hand likes the hand it touches? We are not conscious of God's presence. There may be a God, but if there is, we never seem to find Him and be aware of companionship with Him. What is the matter? We are not flinging ourselves into doing His will. A bit of us is conscientious, but the rest has interests of its own and occasionally looks around to see whether the more conscientious bit gets the divine Companion it would like to have. "Ye shall seek and find Me" when? "When ye shall search for Me with *all* your heart." What makes so much of our work ineffective? Too much of us is

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

audience. Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, with so much of ourselves upon the spectators' benches, is it any wonder that the work of life is not accomplished or its battles vigorously fought? How the knowing left hand constrains the poor attempting right hand! What a cursed bondage self-consciousness is!

“God strengthen me to bear myself;
The heaviest weight of all to bear,
Inalienable weight of care.

“All others are outside myself;
I lock my door and bar them out,
The turmoil, tedium, gad-about.

“I lock my door upon myself,
And bar them out; but who shall wall
Self from myself, most loathed of all?

“If I could once lay down myself,
And start self-purged upon the race
That all must run!

“Myself, arch-traitor to myself;
My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog whatever road I go!

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

“Yet One there is can curb myself,
Can roll the strangling load from me,
Break off the yoke and set me free.”

Christ, the Saviour from self-consciousness—that is the message of this part of the Gospel. How does He do it? “Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. Thy Father seeth.” No need then for the left hand to do any seeing. “Thy Father seeth.”

Jesus tries to make us feel, as He feels so vividly, that there is a living God who fills a father's place in this world of ours, so that the only place left for us is a child's place. It is not a child's place to examine his actions and praise or blame them. That is a father's duty. God's seeing, if we really believe there is a God to see, renders all self-consciousness unnecessary. It is sin. The watching left hand is an infidel, an atheist. If it honestly believed that God was watching, it would go to work with right hand and leave all the watching to

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Him, who is abundantly able to take care of it. A bisected self—part living to-day, part anticipating to-morrow, part working, part worrying—is an unbeliever. How invariably Jesus accounted for His disciples' failures by their little faith! He knew that it takes a whole man to do anything worth while in this world, and that there never is a two-handed man at work until he is sure that a living Father is here to do everything that a father can do. Dirt has been defined as matter out of place. Sin is man out of place. The instant we begin to think about ourselves we are beside ourselves, part in our child's place and part in our Father's place, who is always beside us. When the young ruler said of the commandments, "All these have I kept from my youth up," Jesus saw that his left hand had watched his right hand, and He said to him, "Go sell all that thou hast and give." He was trying to rid him of self-consciousness by getting him interested in

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

the brotherhood. When Peter cried, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord," Jesus saw that Peter's left hand had been thinking of his right. "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." He was giving him men to think of instead of self, that he might feel

". . . the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away."

Once let a man believe with Jesus Christ in a living God who fills a father's place to every child on this footstool, he will stop being beside himself. Both hands will reach out and grasp the cup of life the Father gives him to drink to-day and the whole man will drain it. He will neither be conscious of how he is drinking, nor wondering what the cup will contain to-morrow, nor noticing whether it is sweet or bitter to-day. "The cup which my Father giveth Me, shall I not drink it?" And a whole Son of a whole Father planes boards

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

in Nazareth, talks to crowds on the hillside, sleeps soundly on stormy Galilee, speaks to an outcast woman at Jacob's well, devotes Himself to be Simon's friend, and gives Himself to do His Father's will in Gethsemane. When He lays down His life, an entire life is laid down. When He prays "Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit," an entire soul rests in the hands of God. There is a whole Father here to see, to hold, to love; and, fearless and careless, there is a whole Son here, the only one in the family not "beside himself," the one complete life in a world of fractions. He takes the task His Father assigns Him and does it with both his hands.

III

GOD'S SYMPATHY

Gen. 22 : 6. "And they went both of them together."

THERE are some silences that say more than speech. The prophetic narrator of this scene in Genesis does not tell us what was passing in the minds of father and son on that walk to Moriah. He merely shows us the two figures—"and they went both of them together"—leaving our imagination to fill in the rest. The account of the journey is written in the simplest style. Clause is joined to clause after the plain fashion of the Hebrew language merely by an "and." "And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, *and* laid it upon Isaac his son; *and* he took in his hand the fire and the knife; *and* they went both of them together . . . *and* they came to the

GOD'S SYMPATHY

place which God had told him of; *and* Abraham built the altar there, *and* laid the wood in order, *and* bound Isaac his son, *and* laid him on the altar, upon the wood, *and* Abraham stretched forth his hand, *and* took the knife to slay his son." How tragic the "ands" are! Each marks a step, it cost a frightful struggle to take, up the stairs of the altar of sacrifice. They sound like the tolling of a bell—and . . . and . . . and . . . ! Nothing is said about the sufferings they involved, but how eloquent with pathos the silence is! "And they went both of them together."

As Christians we call God our Father, but we never really appreciate what the word means until we look at human fatherhood at its highest, and reason with Jesus, "If ye then being evil" have such affection, "how much more shall your heavenly Father?" It is when we stand beside a David as he waits at the gate for tidings of the battle and hear his anxious inquiry,

GOD'S SYMPATHY

“Is it well with the young man, Absalom?” and watch the strong old warrior, when the news is told him, turning away, sobbing, to go up to his chamber over the gate, “and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” that we get an inkling of what the loss of a child means to God. So, from this walk of father and son, under a terrific strain, we gain an insight into the fatherhood of God, and see what occurs in His heart when His children are laid upon altars of sacrifice. This story gives us a point of view (1) for the study of God's feelings during the life of His first-born Son in His career as the Man of Sorrows, and (2) of His sympathy with ourselves as we share the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

1. We assert that to us Jesus is God manifest in the flesh and that, whoever sees Him, sees the Father, who is His eternal duplicate. But we sometimes forget that

GOD'S SYMPATHY

Jesus Himself had a God whom He trusted, loved and served as His Father; that He was a religious Man and sent aspirations upwards, and was conscious of a divine comradeship answering His craving: "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me. . . . I abide in His love." Through His entire career from the manger to the cross there is an unseen Companion beside Him. Like the patriarch and his boy on the walk to Moriah, the divine Father and His Well-Beloved, on the journey through our world that ends on Calvary, go "Both of Them together." The evangelists, like the writer in Genesis, say little about the feelings of the Son, and nothing of what is passing in the heart of the invisible God. They show us the Son's life moving through its successive scenes—born, *and* reared, *and* devoting Himself to fulfil all righteousness at the Jordan, *and* tempted, *and* preaching, *and* healing, *and* gathering followers, *and* . . . *and* . . . *and* at length the tragic climax!

GOD'S SYMPATHY

Above those three and thirty stainless years broods the silence of eternity. But to Jesus that silence is neither empty nor speechless. It is inhabited by Love; and at each step Jesus makes us feel the unseen Father's presence, and think of His infinite heart, throbbing in completest sympathy with the feelings of His Son. To appreciate what the silence about Him meant to Jesus, we need some such story as this, where Abraham and his only son go "both of them together."

For who suffered on the walk to Moriah—the man or the boy? Abraham knew from the beginning what he was to do. How vividly the narrative gives us his prevision when it tells us, "On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off!" He had been looking at it in thought for days, and now there it is! Isaac starts in happy ignorance, glad, like any boy, to be taken on a trip with his father.

One has seen parents at a hospital bring-

GOD'S SYMPATHY

ing a child to undergo a serious operation. The child is a bit mystified at the strange place and faces, but untroubled. They have told him, in a pleasant way, a little of what is to be done to him, and he is interested. He is sublimely unconscious of the risks and the pain involved. His parents may have been facing this ordeal for weeks. They have lain awake at night, forefancying the scene. Each time they looked at their little boy, playing about the house, they shuddered at the thought of the surgeon's knife and the possibly fatal outcome. And when the appointed day arrived and "they went—parents and child—together," the suffering was all on one side.

The first "ands" in that journey cost Isaac nothing. It was a gala expedition for him. But gradually his boyish mind becomes perplexed. "And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a

GOD'S SYMPATHY

burnt-offering?" But the time has not come yet when the boy needs to know. "And Abraham said, God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son: so they went, both of them together." Children often suspect more than they are given credit for. The looks of their elders are great tell-tales. Who knows what premonitions may have come into that boy's mind? By and by even he must know. But the narrative maintains its expressive silence. Did Abraham have to say anything to him, to explain that the altar was for him? Did Isaac say anything? Or was there a silence in which both father and son understood each other and dared not speak—a silence unbroken save by the creaking of the logs, as the boy's body is tied fast upon them, and perhaps a gasp, as his eyes caught sight of the uplifted knife? If it all occurred in silence, how much that silence said!

The Child's life at Bethlehem and Nazareth starts happy in the blissful unconscious-

GOD'S SYMPATHY

ness of infancy. But who knows what was passing in the unseen Father's mind, who walked beside the Boy to the synagogue school, and stood by Him as He served an apprenticeship in His father's shop, and was drawn to Him as to no other boy among all the children of men before? It was a proud day for the twelve-year-old Jesus when for the first time He went up with His parents to the Passover, but was not the Father thinking already of another going-up to Jerusalem? When the Boy finds His spiritual aspirations quickened in the Temple, and lets Mary and Joseph know that He is bound by a higher relationship, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" what echo did the words find in that Father's heart, who knew what His business for this Son was—for closer than ever now They are going Both of Them together?

As the young Carpenter, drawing towards thirty, becomes aware of a distinctive life-mission, were there hours when His ques-

GOD'S SYMPATHY

tioning voice said, "My Father," and He was conscious of an answering Presence, "Here am I, My Son;" and He asked, "Behold I see thus and so prepared for Me to do, but . . . but what will be the issue?" Then there came a day—perhaps when the difference between His ideals and those of everyone else He knew foreboded an inevitable collision; perhaps as the fate of the old prophets of His people or of His friend the Baptist came home to Him; perhaps as He entered into some more sombre prophecy and realized that the Messiah must suffer; perhaps as He discovered the law of the universe that all life is born of pain—harvests of grains of wheat which die alone, and man of woman in travail; perhaps as, back of Scripture and universe, He found suffering in the character of His Father, and thought "My Father suffereth hitherto and I" . . . and the question "Where is the lamb?" was answered for Him: He told His disciples plainly, dwelling on each step

GOD'S SYMPATHY

in the tragedy, "The Son of man must suffer many things, *and* be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests and the scribes, *and* be killed." We hear only a silence. There was no voice that came down from a rent sky to explain the cross to Jesus. But this Son understood the silence, and read the look on the face of the Father He accompanied with. And "He stedfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem." Again, think of two Figures on the scene, and of what is passing in two minds as "They went both of Them together." Both now lift up their eyes and see the place afar off One has seen for so long. We go up into the Upper Room. The Master has been talking some while, and the little company are about to go out to the Garden. Jesus says: "Behold the hour cometh, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me,"—"with Him," as Abraham was with Isaac

GOD'S SYMPATHY

at the altar, suffering with Him, and suffering far more than He suffered. And out over the brook Kidron They went both of Them together, and "They came unto a place which was named Gethsemane." Mark describes the Passion in the same simple style of Genesis, adding clause to clause with an "and" as the strain becomes more intense. "AND He began to be greatly amazed and sore troubled, *and* He saith, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death, *and* He went forward a little, *and* fell on the ground *and* prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass away from Him." Is that other Figure, we cannot see, without His agony? What do the successive "ands" mean to Him? Who suffers more—the Son who takes or the Father who gives the cup? The hush of midnight is over the Garden, but is it a silence that says nothing? Does not the sigh of the breeze through the olive grove speak to the ear of faith of the moaning of the sympathetic God?

GOD'S SYMPATHY

The narrative goes on, "and" after "and" filling up the cup of pain. At last we come to one tremendous "and." "AND they crucify Him."

"We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear."

But do we know what pains that Other bore, while darkness hung over all the earth? Does not the black silence seem to tremble with a great divine anguish? The physical Sufferer with pierced hands and feet and bleeding side rivets our attention. But do we suffer more with our bodies, than with our minds? Who would not exchange a heart-ache for any pain our flesh is heir to? Watch two different sorts of sufferers—the patient, wheeled off to the operating table, and the friend who must sit in suspense in the hospital waiting-room and count the slow minutes, wondering what is going on upon the table. "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree," but He

GOD'S SYMPATHY

did not hang there alone. "They went both of Them together." Who bore the more—the Father or the Son? Who made the greater sacrifice? Who died for us—Jesus of Nazareth or the Father Everlasting? If human love can speak of "dying a thousand deaths" in losing its beloved, how many deaths did the Father die, while His Well-Beloved was giving up the ghost on Calvary? What profound things the silence about the cross says to him who has ears to hear! It speaks of a Father who has been suffering from all eternity. The Lamb was slain in the thought of God before the foundation of the world. Every step in his history since time was has been like the fateful "ands" in the journey of the patriarch to Mt. Moriah. "When the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son," but the word "sent" may mislead us. "And They went Both of Them together." The apathy of people in general, the want of sympathy in closest friends, the hostility of

GOD'S SYMPATHY

the religious leaders, the injustice and unkindness and unfaithfulness of men—all the confederated forces of selfishness in the world, which combined to break the heart of the Saviour, and crush Him with a sense of His brothers' shame, were borne by Two.

When one interprets the silence about Gethsemane and Golgotha by the figures of Abraham and his son at the altar, one may catch the meaning of Paul's great saying, "God commendeth His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." There is not merely a disclosure of the divine character in the Man of Nazareth, who is God incarnate; but there is a revelation of the heart of the eternal Father through the completeness of His sympathy with the suffering Saviour, as along the Via Dolorosa and out through the city gate and up to the summit of Calvary "They went Both of Them together."

2. This story, read in the light of Jesus' experience, shows us the sympathetic com-

GOD'S SYMPATHY

radeship of God with every child of His, as through life's varied round we go both of us together. What is bitter to us is bitterer to God: for troubles surprise us, but not Him. Like the patriarch He has seen His child bound on an altar from the start of the journey. He has spared us the pain of forethought. "Why spoil the child's happiness? Let Him be untroubled by the heart-rending morrow as long as he may." He treads the wine-press of our grief in anticipation alone. The "ands" in life's journey often only tinkle for us, while they are tolling for Him. More profoundly than we realize, in all our affliction God is afflicted. Children cannot suffer as older minds: they forget so quickly, they foresee so little. Parents do all the worrying for them. "He careth for us." God's sympathy involves far more than that He feels what we feel. He feels in all its intensity as an adult what we feel but childishly. We grow up to suffering. The

GOD'S SYMPATHY

shadow of death does not cloud the children in a home for long. They come home from a funeral and are absorbed in play in a few minutes. Older hearts take longer healing.

And there is another law running all through existence, that the higher we go in the scale of being, the more ability to suffer we find.

“The mark of rank in nature is capacity for pain.”

An oyster suffers a little, it has but one nerve. A dog suffers more: she will hunt pitifully for several days for puppies taken from her. A woman will remember for years the anniversaries of little events in a baby's life that ended all too soon, and to the day of her death feel the pressure of tiny arms that were once about her neck. And go one step higher, and what is the capacity for suffering in Him who says, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, these may

GOD'S SYMPATHY

forget, yet will not I forget thee?" Who can tell what He bears, as through the sorrows and sins and wrongs of life He and every child of His "go both of them together?"

They go, like the patriarch and the voiceless Father of the Gospel narratives, for the most part in silence, and the silence in suffering is hard to bear. If God would only say something! If He would only tell us why we are bound! why laid upon the wood! why beneath an uplifted knife in the hands of those we love best! why the cup in Gethsemane and why the cross!

"For the drift of the Maker is dark, an Isis hid by a veil."

Men are appalled by the divine reticence. Pascal speaks with a shudder of "the eternal silence of the infinite spaces." The sensitive Amiel of Geneva enters in his diary, "O silence! thou art terrible!" The Hebrew psalmists plead "Keep not Thou si-

GOD'S SYMPATHY

lence, O God: hold not Thy peace, be not still, O God." "If Thou be silent unto me, I become like them that go down into the pit." "Hold not Thy peace at my tears." Our prayers often only intensify the stillness.

"I raised my eyes to heaven: my prayer went high
Into the luminous mystery of the blue;
My thought of God was purer than a flame,
And God it seemed a little nearer came,
Then passed; and greater still the silence grew
For all reply."

Christianity itself is a religion of reserve. It has its frank moments. "The Word was made flesh;" but about that incarnate Self-utterance of God, what a silence there is! It is a Word wrapped about with absolute stillness. How did divine messages come to Jesus? What voice sounded in reply to His prayers? What did He hear? How was He so sure and so clear? How did He know there was Another, unseen, with Him? Once at least He heard nothing. Once He felt the space about Him

GOD'S SYMPATHY

utterly empty. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Christian thought has instinctively taken that moment as the climax of His vicarious suffering, His woe endured for His brothers' sakes. He felt for a moment the silence untenanted, that we might know that it is never so.

"Yea, once Immanuel's orphaned cry His universe
hath shaken—

It went up single, echoless, 'My God, I am forsaken!'

It went up from the Holy's lips amid His lost creation,

That of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation."

For out of that stillness came something to His sinless soul that said as much as speech, and He knew "They were Both of Them together." "Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Since Calvary, we know who inhabits the eternal silence and can bear "without resentment the divine reserve."

For suppose Abraham had said nothing

to Isaac at Moriah, he knew now well enough what his father was undergoing, knew what he had undergone since that journey was first planned. There is a new bond between them. His son means more to Abraham, and his father more to Isaac, after that silent scene. The boy can appreciate now his father's covenant with his God, and can enter more fully into his father's great plans. We see a new sympathy and completer oneness between the two, as we follow them returning to the camp "both of them together." They are more really "together" now than before. Was not that the meaning for His own soul of our Lord's sufferings and death? He was "made perfect through suffering"—perfect, not in the sense of being purified from evil, for He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"; but perfect in that it brought Him into more entire sympathy with the Father, who from all eternity suffers with and for His sinning children; who had

GOD'S SYMPATHY

trodden the winepress hitherto alone and now has a worthy Comrade. It made Him a suffering Saviour like the Father, the eternal suffering Saviour. He can say more truly after Calvary, "I and the Father are one."

Is not that too the meaning for us of life's experiences in which we have a fellowship with Christ's sufferings, and through which God and we go both of us together? The Father is silent for the most part, and the son, if he has caught his elder Brother's spirit, is saying "Abba, Father, Thy will be done," interpreting the silence by love. And out of the mutual suffering they come, meaning more to each other—the son knowing better his Father's plans and hopes and love, and becoming like Him a saviour, as he fills up on his part that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his brethren's sake, the Father prizing as more indispensable this trustful and obedient son. And every step of life's way "they go both of them together."

IV

FAITH AND CHARACTER

Hebrews 11 : 31. "By faith Rahab the harlot."

WHAT a striking combination of words—"By faith . . . the harlot!" What an odd character to canonize in the roll of the saints of Hebrew history! How could this Christian thinker with his high ideals and fine perceptions, the author of this majestic epistle to the Hebrews and of its sublime eleventh chapter, put in this woman, whose part in the history of Israel was so inconspicuous and whose fame was, to say the least, so tarnished? One is shocked as one reads down the list of the great heroes of faith—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses—to find the next name to Moses, who "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" and remains to all time the greatest of Israel's

FAITH AND CHARACTER

great men, not Joshua, the leader in the conquest of Canaan, as one would certainly have expected, but Rahab, the harlot. Think of placing side by side Moses, the founder of Israel's national existence, and this depraved woman, whose sole assistance to Israel was her hiding the spies under the stalks of flax on her roof and telling lies for them! There must have been something marvellously interesting in her case to this profound Christian theologian, as there seems to have been to another New Testament writer, James, who puts Rahab side by side with Abraham as an illustration of a person whose faith was living. These early followers of Him who counted some that are first last and some last first, upsetting current standards of worth, and who said plainly to the leaders of Israel's religious life and the most active workers in its Church, "the publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you," have surely a reason for singling out

this outcast and placing her in such exalted company. Abraham, Moses and—Rahab the harlot!

And yet when we read the narrative that gives her story (and these men had no other source than we for their knowledge of her), we cannot get over our surprise at her selection. She has indeed one good quality—devotion to her family. “Now, therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by Jehovah, since I have dealt kindly with you, that ye will also deal kindly with my father’s house . . . and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren and my sisters.” How pathetic is the family affection of this woman, whose life has been the ruin of family life for herself and others! How tenderly this degraded creature, beyond the pale of home, a home-wrecker, names “my father, my mother, my brethren, my sisters!” But this pathetic faithfulness to the only ties of love left her ends her catalogue of virtues. She is a contemptible

FAITH AND CHARACTER

traitress to her city and king, when she harbors their enemies. She lies most brazenly. Although she wishes to save her own kindred, she conspires to have all her fellow-townsmen, every acquaintance she has, put to a frightful death. And if we examine the faith that led her into this despicable intrigue—just what was it? She had an insight, which made her feel that this invasion of a marauding horde of wilderness wanderers was not altogether like the countless similar attacks made on Jericho, from the south and east, by bands of desert tribesmen, greedy for the plunder of a prosperous city; but that somehow a Power mightier than man was behind it, and working through it His divine plans. But this insight of faith bore fruits hardly more creditable than loathsome. It was fear for the most part that made her ready to change her creed and nationality; and even if she wished for herself and hers a place among the people of Jehovah, she was willing to

buy it with treachery and deceit. Is this not a perilous sort of faith for a Christian teacher to hold up to praise? Traitress, liar and harlot—a heroine of faith!

What a package of strangely assorted elements human nature is! What streaks of saintliness crop out in the most degenerate, and what devilishness the saintliest occasionally show! One gets glimpses of the gentleman in the lowest criminal, and of the brute in the most polished Christian gentleman. There are wild, reckless, dare-devil proclivities in the demurest, strictest, godliest mother in Israel, and tenderest family affections and keenest insights into the purpose of God in the deceitfulest, drunkenest, dissolutest prostitute. Jacob, self-reliant, shrewd, tricky, unspeakably selfish, wrestles with Jacob, humble, believing, faithful, devoted to the covenant God of his fathers. James and John, ambitious to outstrip the ten and by favoritism secure chief places in the Kingdom, are James and John lovers of

FAITH AND CHARACTER

Jesus, wanting seats at His right and His left, and willing to share anything that is His—His cup and His baptism. One finds the rake in the Puritan and the Puritan in the rake, superstition in the rationalist and rationalism in the credulous, a coward in the brave and a hero in the craven. Take any one of us here apart morally, and what odd virtues and vices are bedfellows in the one heart; what arch-angels jostle arch-fiends in our thronging emotions; what Judases rub elbows with Johns in the press of thoughts that surge through our minds; what demons seem to play tag with angels in the rapid succession of motives which chase one another through our wills! Who dares say whether, as he looks within, he has more God or more devil in his make-up? Richard Baxter, after the closest contact with the severest Puritans of the Commonwealth, and the most licentious cavaliers of the Restoration, writes in his old age, "I see that good men are not so good

FAITH AND CHARACTER

as I once thought they were, and find that few men are as bad as their enemies imagine." And these most deep-seeing sketchers of human nature, the Bible writers, give us again and again their incomparable portraits of complex men and women. "By faith Rahab the harlot."

And, in particular, what glaring contrasts one sees in religion and morality, in devoutness and conduct, in spiritual insight and coarseness of life! "By faith . . . the harlot!" Fundamentally we feel sure that the most believing must be the best; the closest to God, the kindest to men; the most self-sacrificing for his brethren, the most devoted to his Father in heaven; the godliest, the manliest. But in fact, it is often not so. Those who believe the most sometimes do the least, and those who believe least do the most; the godly are the least humane, and the humane the least godly. Some of the most intensely religious natures in the world's history have been the worst of men,

FAITH AND CHARACTER

and some of the best have had no sense of God whatsoever. We often meet people who are the most delightful of companions, devoted to their families, of the finest sense of honor and justice in their business, public-spirited and generous to the point of self-sacrifice; but utterly lacking in religious faith. "Lo, God is not in all their thoughts." And, on the other hand, we all know people who are singularly devout, enthusiasts for God and His cause, to whom things unseen are marvellously real and comforting, who would go to the stake for their convictions; but whose consciences are of the dullest, whose word about many subjects cannot be trusted, whose sense of honor and justice is obtuse, and whose ways at home and in society and in their business relations are, to say the least, intensely disagreeable. Lo, brotherliness is not in all their acts.

"'Cause grace and virtue are within
Prohibited degrees of kin,
And therefore no true saint allows

FAITH AND CHARACTER

They should be suffered to espouse.
For saints can need no conscience
That with morality dispense."

"By faith . . . the harlot."

These discrepancies lead to mutual re-criminations. From the side of the unbelieving come constant jibes at the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of the saints. They insist that a man's faith guarantees nothing else about him. A believer's temper, and patience, and obligingness, and honesty, and truthfulness, and courtesy are not certain to be better than an unbeliever's. The fact that a manufacturer is a church-member is no assurance that his employees are justly paid, safe-guarded from accident by every precaution, and treated with consideration, as brothers and sisters in the family of God; nor are we certain that the factory hand who comes to the Lord's Table will on that account be more conscientious with his employers' tools and time, less unreasonable in his

FAITH AND CHARACTER

criticisms of the management, and more pleasant for fellow-employees to work with. The Christian who thoroughly enjoys a warm prayer-meeting, and enters heartily into the singing of hymns, is not necessarily an unselfish person at home, nor the easiest sort of individual to live with in peace and happiness. When the public know that a merchant is a pillar in an orthodox church, they do not flock to his store, confident that his prices will be absolutely fair, his goods not made in sweatshops, the articles sold over the counter exactly what they pretend to be, his salesmen and women given a living wage, and healthful, kindly treatment in his establishment. Domestic servants do not inquire whether their would-be employer believes in Jesus Christ, in the certainty that in her household they will be looked on as children of God, shown thoughtfulness, allowed opportunities to attend church, and cared for as though they had souls and minds

FAITH AND CHARACTER

to be fed, as well as bodies; nor does an employment agency state the fact, that an applicant holds the Christian faith, as a warrant that she will be an agreeable person to have in a home, obliging, industrious, faithful. When a railroad magnate is known to be active in Sunday-school work, the community does not rejoice, sure that the stock of the road he controls is unwatered, that its rates are made on principles of justice, and that it has no agents at the State Capitol to corrupt legislators. The unbelieving taunt the faithful that a sentence that begins with "by faith" may end equally, in anything good, bad or indifferent, with the sentence that begins with "by skepticism." And from the side of the believing come pitying or even contemptuous remarks about "the merely moral man"; "good principles, but no solid piety"; "pleasant people socially, but no deep convictions"; "a hard-working, well-meaning, conscientious fellow, but no grip on God and

FAITH AND CHARACTER

no divine inspiration"; "a good, reliable, kindly soul, but the root of the matter is not in him." And the saints, with all their glaring faults and frailties, cannot help commiserating the very noblest, and apparently happiest of mortals, who goes through the world alone, so far as the presence of a divine Companion is concerned. "By faith" almost any life seems preferable to his.

While, at bottom, religion and conduct, faith and goodness, are one, they all too frequently show themselves separated. And there is a reason for this: they answer different cravings of our human nature. We fly to God always for refuge, for Him to do for us something that we cannot do for ourselves. We find ourselves pitted against forces mightier than we: some power in the universe is crushing us—sickness laying us low, death wrenching our hearts, injustice in men grinding us down, the bewilderments of life obscuring our path in shadows, responsibilities overwhelming

FAITH AND CHARACTER

us with a sense of our inadequacy to meet them, discouragement filling us with a longing for Someone to put new heart into us, shame making it impossible for us to forgive ourselves and flinging us on a forgiving love that goes far out beyond our dreams, restless dissatisfaction with ourselves and the world as we know it driving us out and up to rest in One who satisfies. Religion brings rest, while morality always means struggle. If we want to control our temper, we must hold on to it—our tongue, we must seal our lips—our feelings, we must set our face like a flint. If we want to be just, we must give thought to it, and sacrifice for it, and battle our life-long with unjust conditions and men who are willing to put up with injustice. If we wish to be pitiful, we must be pitiless towards ourselves—to be generous, we must fight to keep our desires from clamoring more loudly than our brothers' need—to be faithful, we must fling off laziness, forcing ourselves to do a

FAITH AND CHARACTER

great many things and to keep doing them, against the protests of a large section of our nature, which pleads for ease. To be religious, one throws off responsibilities and burdens on Another—to be good, one takes them upon oneself. So people who are stronger in affection than in will, clearer in the insight that looks up than in the conscience that looks out, more trustful than forceful, like Rahab, are often mighty in faith but lamentably little in morals.

And the sins of believers are usually of two main kinds. Either, like this woman, they are believing and lax, or else believing and over-rigid. Rahabs with comforting or terrifying glimpses of the unseen, warmly affectionate towards those they love, and equally intense in their expressions of devotion to God, are often shockingly careless about the truth. They prefer to cling to a creed, which they confess they cannot explain and secretly suspect to be somewhat indefensible; and are bitter against those who

offer them further light, that forces them to part with long-held notions, and to think out for themselves a new position. They are also frequently somewhat loose with truth in much commoner subjects: Huxley said, "I never find in people imbued with piety the same notions of honor and straightforwardness that obtain among men of the world." The second type is represented by a man like John the Baptist, so godly as to be a little inhuman; so interested by faith in things unseen and eternal that he gets and gives little pleasure in things seen and no less divine; devout but narrow, hard, gloomy.

"By faith" it is fatally easy to be too lax or too rigid, and both laxness and rigidity are immoral. The man who walks humbly with God is both to do justly and to love kindness—the Rahabs omit the first, the Puritans the second. "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction"—that is where John in the

FAITH AND CHARACTER

desert is lacking—"and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"—there lies Rahab's failure. And faith, the very best thing about them, may in a sense help them to sin. Mr. Gladstone—orthodox High Churchman, unfailingly regular church-goer, and devout man of prayer, once wrote to the Duchess of Sutherland: "There is one proposition which the experience of life burns into my soul; it is this, that a man should beware of letting his religion spoil his morality. In a thousand ways, some great, some small, but all subtle, we are daily tempted to that great sin." "By faith," *what?*—that is the question to ask ourselves, as believers, constantly. "By faith," what in our home circles?—for there are those, as George Eliot reminds us, "whose celestial intimacies seem not to improve their domestic manners"; and another has said: "My mother was an angel; but angels are not always 'commodes à vivre.'" By faith, what as citizens?—for there are

Rahabs in the city of New York as false to their civic duties as she to Jericho; who, have given up their city residence and vote to avoid paying their just share of the taxes, putting a disproportionate burden on those less wealthy than they; or who regard a pleasant autumn in the country above the obligation of registering and voting here, where the brunt of the battle is; or who let the delight of a holiday out of town keep them from the polls. By faith, what in the financial world? By faith, what as a cook? a school teacher? a physician? a stenographer? a clerk? By faith, *what?*

And look what faith does for Rahab the harlot. What marvellous things such a tiny bit of it accomplishes! Her faith was an insight, ignorant enough, that a divine Being was behind this invading horde of desert tribes, whom she saw coming upon her city; and that faith saved her life and her family's, gave her a place among the Israelites in Canaan, and, later, a husband

FAITH AND CHARACTER

and a home: for the tradition, embodied in the first chapter of Matthew, makes her the wife of Salmon and the mother of Boaz, Ruth's husband, and an ancestress of King David and his far greater Son, Jesus Christ. Did ever so little faith go so far? No wonder that a New Testament writer, extolling the triumphs of those who believed, gives her a place in his list.

Fortunately, this Christian thinker begins his list with a definition of what he means by "faith." "Now faith is assurance of things hoped for." What did Rahab hope for? Was it not that to this poor, depraved creature, who had known the hardness and falseness and brutality of man in that wicked city of Jericho, there had come a desire for a state of society, in which it would be easier for a woman to keep her honor and find the home, with its sacred ties, she was meant to possess; and that these wanderers from the desert impressed her as truer to family obligations

FAITH AND CHARACTER

and stricter guardians of the home than her Canaanitish native people? The sacredness of the family was the subject of their fifth and seventh commandments. Was it not because she felt that the Israelites stood for higher ideals, the ideals she hoped for, that she felt confident that their God, Jehovah, would give them victory? And in this "assurance of things hoped for," she received their spies, saved her family, entered the life of the people of Jehovah, found among them an honorable husband, a career worthy of a woman who is a child of the Most High, a place far beyond any she could possibly have imagined in God's world-plans, and a name on the roll of the mighty through faith, which will be remembered as long as the world endures. "By faith Rahab the harlot!"

Do we wonder now that believers sometimes speak slightingly of "mere morality?" Suppose that sentence began "By trying hard to be good, Rahab the harlot"—what

FAITH AND CHARACTER

would it have ended in? She might by life-long battle have overcome the temptations of her depraved nature; she might have risen on stepping-stones of her slain passions to higher things; but she would not have found herself among a people animated by a higher ideal than any she had ever dreamed of in Jericho, and with all manner of new incentives to be a good woman from the lives about her. In the first place, where would she have found the inspiration to attempt the battle? and, in the second, to what would she have attained in the end?—certainly not to this rôle in the purposes of God.

Every great advance in the world's progress has come through man's discovery of some force outside of himself, in reliance upon which and working with which, he can accomplish the things he hopes for, but cannot compass alone. One can work hard and make a tallow dip or a wax candle, and with it light one's room; or one can by faith

FAITH AND CHARACTER

lay hold of electricity, that mysterious power which is all about us, and trusting it and working sympathetically with it, let it light our rooms with a brilliance no man-made candle can equal. One can seek to become good by trying, and perhaps reach a quite exalted degree of goodness, if one tries hard and long enough; or one can lay hold on the living God and, entering sympathetically into His purposes for our earth, forget all about one's own goodness, and be found by other people some day vastly patienter, and purer-motived, and sweeter-dispositioned, and stronger-willed, than one ever imagined one could be. But that comes not by trying to attain it, and being always self-conscious; but by faith, seeing the invisible God, and flinging one's self into His purpose of capturing Jericho for His Israel.

Now there are invading the Jericho of our modern life a host of spiritual forces with an ideal called the Kingdom of heaven, the city of God; and the advance guard, a

FAITH AND CHARACTER

preliminary bit of heaven, like these spies, has already got in. They are coming not from Mt. Sinai, with its ten commandments; but from the hill-sides of Galilee and Mount Calvary, with the spirit of brotherliness, of justice, mercy and faithfulness, of love. They are compassing the walls of our Jericho—the social system under which we live. Jericho has three fundamental principles. First, competition—get ahead of others, for life is a struggle, and the shrewdest and strongest and hardest-hearted succeed. Second, rewards—work for what you get, wages, profits, fees, fame, and measure everything by what it brings you. Third, possession—what you get is yours to do with as you please, provided you do not break Jericho's quite pliable laws: 'therefore feel no responsibility for the other Jerichoites, for they feel none for you; and do as you like with your own. And against these three, the trumpets of the investing host of the ideals of the Kingdom of heaven sound

three opposing principles. First, coöperation—never seek to outdo any brother, but to serve the brotherhood—the chiefest is the servant of all: therefore seek to do the most for the most brothers. Second, service—find your blessedness in giving, never in anything that you may receive for your toil; life is not a cup to be drained, but a measure to be filled, and happiness is not in draining but in filling. Third, stewardship—whatever you possess, brains, artistic sense, physical health, money, a home, abilities, are not yours but the brotherhood's: be a faithful trustee for the family, and use everything you have for the family's sake as for your own.

Jericho and the city of God cannot both stand. They are as incompatible as day and night, darkness and light. We live like Rahab in Jericho, for we have been born there; but the invaders are here, led by a greater than Joshua, Jesus of Nazareth, asking us to throw in our lot with

FAITH AND CHARACTER

them, to be allies of the city of God, members of the Kingdom of heaven within the gates of Jericho, that we may do our part in causing its walls to fall down flat and in rearing the city of God on its ruins.

What do we believe? What do we hope for? Should we like to see the Kingdom of God here? Is that a régime we are eager for? Is that the life in which our ideals for our homes and our families, our work and our friends, our country and our city of New York, can be fulfilled? Is that the life into which we should fit, as Rahab fitted into Israel's life, and found her home in it? Or, on the whole, are we fairly well-satisfied with Jericho? True, its competitive, gain-seeking, irresponsible life is hard on a great many—the weak, the ignorant, the victims of bad air, insufficient food, over-work, too little pleasure, unbeautiful surroundings; and almost all its citizens have poverty-stricken ideals, even when

FAITH AND CHARACTER

they dwell like Dives in palaces. But then the competition develops certain strong qualities, the rewards are enticing, and it is pleasant to enjoy one's own, shutting the door to the cry of the poor by an occasional charity, and closing one's eyes to the glaring contrasts between plenty and want—soul-plenty, mind-plenty, body-plenty, and their lack. Although we may not be near the top, still, personally, Jericho, just as it is, suits us pretty well; and this Kingdom of heaven—it might not work, and well . . . well, we don't know that we hope for it very eagerly. It might not be at all comfortable for us if it were here. It would be *hell* to the man who did not fit into it.

What do we hope for? The Kingdom of heaven here, or Jericho? Well, if it be the Kingdom of heaven, the city of God, are *we* going to build it—to reform things, and turn the world upside down until it stands love-side up? Is it for *us* to build?

FAITH AND CHARACTER

Yes and no. No! The heavenly city cometh down from God out of heaven. Where is our faith, our assurance of things hoped for, our conviction of things not seen? Behind this ideal of the heavenly social order, which is compassing our Jericho, is Jehovah of Hosts. By faith the Rahabs see that. And if we do see it, then, in the assurance that what we hope for is bound to be by the grace of Almighty God, like her let us throw in our lot with the cause of the Kingdom, covet for ourselves and ours a life in that Kingdom now, live as though we were really members of it; and, sure of its final triumph, take risks for it as she did; work for it and suffer for it, if need be, as Jesus did; and find some day (who knows?) that by our faith we have put ourselves in line with purposes of God which reach down through centuries to come, and out through mighty world-wide sweeps to innumerable children of God: for Rahab not only has her own place in the Kingdom,

FAITH AND CHARACTER

but is an ancestress after the flesh of the Christ of God, through whom that Kingdom makes its appeal to you and me most persuasively at this hour.

(This treatment of this text was suggested by a discourse of my teacher and friend, the Reverend Professor Alex. Martin, D.D., of Edinburgh, published in a volume entitled "Winning the Soul." It is needless to add that Professor Martin is not to be held responsible for the interpretations and applications of the story of Rahab made above.)

V

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

Psalms 107: 27, 28. "At their wits' end. Then . . . "

THEN what? The psalmist is giving us a terrified landsman's description of a storm at sea. The Israelites were no sailors. While the isles of the Ægean and the indented coastline of their mainland constantly tempted the Greeks out on the water, the harborless shore of Palestine kept the Hebrews on terra firma. The Mediterranean plays no part in Israel's history save as an impassable western barrier. The unbroken coast seemed to be forever at strife with the long line of waves breaking with an angry roar upon it. Land and deep had nothing to do with each other. It was a Jew who pictured heaven as a place where there shall be no more sea. And this psalm

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

is evidently a very much frightened landman's description of the perils of those who go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters.

They mount up to the heavens, they go down again
to the depths:

Their soul melteth away because of trouble.

They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken
man,

And are at their wits' end.

It is a wonderfully vivid bit of writing. We can almost hear the creaking and groaning of the timbers, as the clumsy craft is pitched and rolled by the waves. We can picture the distracted sailors, running hither and thither, to secure something that has broken loose, and at a loss what to do to keep the old tub under sufficient headway to be manageable. We can enter into the distress and terror of the unhappy Jewish trader, whose business has taken him out on an element where he is so little at home. We can share the sense of relief of all on

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

board as the wind subsides and the vessel rides the waves more steadily. "Then are they glad because they are quiet." But the point of this exquisite piece of literature, like all the rest of the Bible, is the connection this experience of a storm at sea has with God. "At their wits' end," these men had not reached the end of everything. There is something that reaches out past the end of wits—faith. At their wits' end

Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble,
And He bringeth them out of their distresses.
He maketh the storm a calm,
So that the waves thereof are still.

And even if the waves had been no stiller, the hearts that looked out at them were. The thought of Him, who holdeth the sea in the hollow of His hand, brought composure. "Then are they glad because they are quiet." "At their wits' end, then"—then God!

If wits did not have an end, there might

be no religion. If we knew everything and could do everything, we should feel no need of God. It is when wits end that faith begins. Much of people's unbelief is due to the fact, that they have never thought long enough and far enough and hard enough, to get to the limit of their minds; and, when one stops this side of his wits' end, he can get on without God. It is when the mind tugs and tugs and tugs to stretch out thought, until at last it gets to thought's farthest reach, that it feels that He must be, who is past finding out. Is there a God?

“Some . . . to themselves
 Who scarce so much as doubt it,
 Think there is none, when they are well,
 And do not think about it.

“But . . . almost everyone when age,
 Disease and sorrow strike him,
 Inclines to think there is a God,
 Or something very like Him.”

At their wits' end they cry unto the Lord.

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

And then what happens to their wits? Have they left them behind? Are faith and knowledge two entirely distinct things? Does belief move off into a region where reason cannot follow? Are some things matters of fact to be known, and others, beyond them, matters of faith to be taken on trust by whoso can; but quite unprovable, at least this side the grave? Is faith witless, unreasonable and unreasoning? Does our religion continue to lie somewhere beyond our wits' end? Not according to those who have been most truly religious. A man lies blinded in the dust on the road to Damascus, at his wits' end. But past the limit of his comprehension, he is very sure that, at that moment, he is in contact with a Something, or rather a Somebody, whose will he cannot help obeying. And thirty odd years later that man writes, "*I know Whom I have believed.*" Faith is a wits-lengthener, a knowledge-stretcher. Wits reach their end and halt, and then

B880907

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

faith moves on and the wits come trooping after; what we believed and ventured on in trust, we know.

“The steps of faith
Fall on the seeming void, and find
The rock beneath.”

Faith is the discoverer that goes out into the unknown, and reports Someone there. Wits are the settlers that become familiar with the new country, dwell in it, and map out the character of Him, whom faith first found. “I know Whom I have believed.” Wits no longer end where they did. Faith has annexed a new territory, added a new Friend. At our wits’ end—then God!

Take some of the instances in life when we find ourselves at our wits’ end, and see what there is for us *then*. Take the case of these Jewish travellers at sea, to begin with. We are placed in a world where there are physical forces in wind and wave, in

earthquake, and in the bacilli of disease which are beyond our brains wholly to understand and control. The inventive wits of clever men have wrought marvels. What a contrast the clumsy craft, with its long banks of oars and square sail, in which these poor Israelites tossed up and down on the rough Mediterranean, would present to the mammoth steamers of to-day ! Year by year the mysterious laws of the universe are becoming more plain, and the wits of a twentieth-century man, thanks to the pulling-out given them in past generations, are considerably longer than those of these ancient seafarers. But there are situations in which we are quite as helpless. At our wits' end before disaster or sickness or inevitable death, then what ?

The wind has sprung up suddenly on the sea of Galilee. Hardy fishermen who have spent their lives on that sheet of water are terrified. They are doing everything they can think of to keep their small boat afloat, yet

with all their resourcefulness they are in grave danger of going to the bottom. Jesus is fast asleep. When they rouse Him, He has no fault to find with their wits. He, a village carpenter, has nothing to suggest to these seamen. They are doing just what they should do in rowing, and skilfully handling the tiller, and baling out the boat. But He complains that at their wits' end, they look off into blank space with terror. "Why are ye fearful? Have ye not yet faith?" Shipwreck and death might come in that storm. What then?—God: "Peace, be still." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." If there was anything more that could be done to keep the boat from filling, Jesus was in the best mental condition to see it and do it. There was a great calm in His thoughts before the waves were still. His faith in God gave Him poise, balance, a clear head. Their wits ended in a sheer cliff, over the

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

verge of which they looked down dizzily. His stopped on a slope up; and beyond was God. Or, again, when death is on Him more certainly, and He is literally at His wits' end on the cross and about to lose consciousness, how self-controlled He is! There is absolutely nothing for Him to do. *But there is!* At His wits' end there is trust. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." He is not dragged over the precipice, but throws Himself over, assured that underneath are the everlasting arms. And in that act of trusting He lengthened His wits. A moment before He had cried "forsaken." Now His wits know better. There is a great calm.

Or take situations in which we are as much tossed about mentally, as were these voyaging Jews by the waves. There are times when our minds are all at sea. We face some perplexing decision: we have one responsibility here, another there, and the two appear to clash; with the sincer-

est desire to act conscientiously, we are bewildered. Or a friend is taking a course we cannot approve. Ought we to speak or keep silent? Speech may break friendship and hinder future usefulness, silence may give a false impression and seem to make us assent where conscience cannot. Or we are confronting the difficult subject of our life-work, and are torn between conflicting emotions—a longing to enter a high calling and a sense of personal unfitness; or are halting at the opening of two paths, each of which calls to us, as with the voice of God Himself, claiming our help for brothers who need what we could offer along either line of service. We face ourselves and the circumstances before us as squarely as we can, and try to detect what God wills for us. The necessity of deciding often robs our nights of sleep and harrows our days with disquiet. We mount up to the heavens and go down again to the depths. We reel to and fro, inclining now one way and now the other, and

are at our wits' end. We need relief to lift the tension from our thoughts. We cannot be relieved from thinking. We must use all the brains we have, and think until we are positive that we have touched our wits' end. But when we have reached the limit of our wisdom, and have come as conscientiously as we can to a decision, we are not to go on with the mental battledore and shuttlecock. We are to rest in the Lord, to assure ourselves, that, when we get to our wits' end and reach our best judgment, God takes the responsibility for our conclusion. "Then are they glad because they are quiet, so He bringeth them unto their desired haven"—not the haven we perhaps thought we were heading for, but one that satisfies our desires, we may be sure, beyond any our wits had anticipated.

Jesus passes through just such an experience in Gethsemane. "O My Father, if it be possible, if it be possible," and we follow His mind darting off down path after path

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

to find some way of escape from the cross, yet a way that carries out His Father's will. The prayer "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto *Thee*," shows that He is at His wits' end. He sees no possibility of evading it: He can only hope a wider-seeing Father may. But when He has reached His wits' end, and recognizes the cross as the Father's cup for Him, He never reopens the question. His mind is entirely at rest. From the Garden to the summit of Calvary, there is not the slightest suggestion of uncertainty. When once a question is thought out to the wits' end, the decision is trustworthy, as filled with the wisdom of Him, to whom the night shineth as the day.

Or, again, take the circumstances in which we have done all, that we can think of doing, for the cause we have most at heart, and in the face of apparent failure are at our wits' end. Fathers and mothers know what it is to be there with boys and girls; teachers with scholars; battlers for righteousness in

the presence of entrenched wrong; Christian workers with men and women and little children, for whom they would willingly lay down their lives.

Jesus comes to His wits' end with His work. He has proclaimed the Kingdom; and set it forth as persuasively, and with as exquisite beauty in His parables, as He possibly can. He has illustrated its spirit unfailingly in His dealings with people. He has used every device, He can think of, to commend His cause. He has tried to laugh the religious leaders out of their pettiness: "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? They are like unto children playing." He has cried over them: "O that thou hadst known, in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace!" Time and again He has apparently failed with particular individuals, and the movement, He has sought to start, as a whole amounts to very little. It is a mere eddy in the stream of the religious

life of that day. More than once Jesus looked at people—His fellow-townsmen at Nazareth, a group of high-minded scribes not unlike Gamaliel, the rich young ruler, His own brethren—and was at His wits' end. But how does He feel when He reaches that point? Watch Him riding into Jerusalem amid the Hosannas of the Galilean pilgrims, publicly courting death, and how calmly confident of success He seems! Is not that the characteristic about Him, which strikes us most forcibly as we follow Him into the last valley of shadows? "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." How dare He cry "It is finished," on the cross? At His wits' end, then . . . Almighty God, the Lord of heaven and earth. The cross is the last thing He can think of for the Kingdom's sake; and because it is the *last*, and brings Him absolutely to His wits' end, He is certain that it will be victorious.

Fellow-toilers for the Kingdom of God's

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

sake, be sure we go all love's way to the very wits' end. Stop short of that, and there is no assurance of success. Had Jesus left one possible means untried, had He halted anywhere this side of Calvary, He could never have been upheld by such a confidence. Our brains cannot stop planning, nor our hearts cease loving with the love that beareth, believeth, hopeth, endureth all things and never faileth; but when we reach the last point, and have done all that we can conceive of, then . . . "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Commit Thy way unto Him, trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass." No man ever yet came to his wits' end for love's sake, who was not destined, in some way, to see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. If there is nothing more that we can think of doing, as was true of Jesus on the cross, let us say "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit, not for my sake only but for their sakes." Throw the spiritual influence of lives, faith-

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

ful unto death, into the larger influence, with which God surrounds His children. The little stream of our affection, and will to redeem, may seem a mere trickle, which loses itself in the sand, as it seeks to flow about some barren, self-centered life and make it fruitful with love; but that life is already enswathed with the lapping ocean of God's love, and we can mingle the small current of our good will in His more abundant flow.

“I rest my weary soul in Thee,
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.”

We chafe often when we come to our wits' end. Why must our minds be forever tugging at a tether, while things, we are most curious to know, lie just outside their reach? And, worse yet, why must we be continually cudgelling our brains and exhausting our devices, and be brought to men-

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

tal bankruptcy, in trying to do the very tasks, we feel certain God most wants done? It is the lot of all those who attempt the highest things to be always at their wits' end. If a man is content with the world as he finds it, drops into some niche others have made for him, fills it as they expect it filled, and takes people as they are, without any desire to make the indifferent ones different, he need seldom be at the end of his resources in brains or tact or patience. But when one follows the Son of God, as He goes out to war against things as they are, to make them things as they ought to be; to turn the world upside down, until it stands God-side up, in justice and truth and faith; to put a Godlike self in an earth, that had no room for the first Son who fully shared His Father's thoughts and feelings and purposes; to make people different until they are like Christ; he is doomed to live on the very verge of existence, to find his lot the Ricardian acre, to be putting into

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

his work every day the last scrap of knowledge and trust and affection he has. His business takes him out on great waters, where it is a daily occurrence to be at one's wits' end. It required every particle of skill, heart and energy He possessed, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, to make even the slight impression He did on His day. A whole Christ had to give Himself, to start a dozen men living and working and speaking for love's sake. Jesus lived and died at His wits' end. Paul knew that to be of value to the Church at Rome he must be ready "as much as in me is" to preach the Gospel there. And there is no one here who has set himself to lead one little child into the Kingdom, who does not know that it cost him every bit of tact and perseverance and affection he was capable of. Since the days of the Man of Nazareth, it is clear that, to do anything to annex our brothers' lives to God's Kingdom, we must go to our wits' end;

and that they do not end, until we reach a cross.

And then, perhaps, we make a discovery. We had thought that religion was our search for God. At our wits' end, then we lift our hands and grope for Him. There is a verse in a psalm that begins, "My soul followeth hard after Thee": that is often our thought of what faith is. But the verse goes on, "Thy right hand upholdeth me." Underneath us, in all our straining to get at Him, is His hand lifting us to Himself. And when some day at our wits' end, we are reduced to calling on Him, we seem to hear Him answering: "My child, I lured thee out on great waters; I put into thy heart the ambition to do business, which took thee far beyond the selfish borders of thine own life; I have been coming to thee on the wings of the wind, and walking to thee over the crests of the waves, and in all this storm I have been whispering 'It is I; be not afraid'; and I made thy wits with their very

limitations, that through all these I might find thee, who seekest Me.”

Was there not something like that on the cross? “Forsaken!” We feel confident that the Father was never nearer. But the shame of His brothers’ unbrotherliness is clouding the Son of man in darkness, and the angry storm of their selfishness has brought Him to His wits’ end. He is so at one with them by love, that He feels Himself with them far away from God, implicated in all their failings. And yet the very impulse that sent Him to His brothers, to share the family life and bear the family disgrace, to do for them and to die for them—was not that of God? If He is praying “Father forgive them,” is not the Father Himself inspiring that prayer with a whisper, “Son forgive them”? In the angry taunt hurled at Him, “He saved others, Himself He cannot save,” is not a Father’s voice speaking, “It is I, My Son—saving Thy brothers, Thou canst not save Thyself. I, their Father, in saving

them must suffer.” And when the heart-broken “forsaken” sounds and the Son gropes at His wits’ end for God, whom He has always found there before, does He not feel abandoned for an instant, only that He may take fresh and firmer hold on the Father’s hands, and into them commend His spirit? If there are any of us here at our wits’ end,—in perplexity as to what course to take to do most for the brotherhood in our day, in uncertainty what to attempt to save some particular brother, in any pitch and toss of doubt, that makes God himself seem distant,—we may be very sure that the impulse, which has brought us out into the great waters, and the winds and the waves themselves, as well as our own limitations, are God’s ways of forcing us out of our self-sufficiency into fulness of life with Him. “At their wits’ end, then” . . . God!

“His greatness flows around our incompleteness,
And round our restlessness, His rest.”

VI

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

Mark 4 : 28. "The earth beareth fruit of herself."

AND strange fruit it is sometimes! Cain had no idea that the dumb soil would produce anything, when he reddened it with the murder of Abel, but "the earth beareth fruit of herself." "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground." He discovered, as many another since, that his

"secret then was one
That earth refused to keep:
Or land or sea, though it should be
Ten thousand fathoms deep."

The Sanhedrin and Pilate little knew the harvest they were sowing, when they sent Jesus of Nazareth to the cross, and spilled

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

“blood that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” They fancied they were silencing an objectionable preacher. The earth has ever since been a vast reverberator, echoing and re-echoing the Word incarnate in that life. There is no speech nor language where His voice is not heard. His line is gone out through all the earth, and His words to the end of the world. The cause of the Kingdom of love, embodied in the person of Jesus, is buried in Joseph’s sepulchre, and a huge stone is rolled against the door and sealed. Heart-broken women, coming to anoint their Master’s dead body, are wondering to themselves “Who shall roll us away the stone?” They had forgotten the earth, and quite naturally. What has this great indifferent globe to do with love? Have stones a heart, or the clay faith? Who said the earth was indifferent? “The earth beareth fruit of herself.” There were myriads of unseen and secret allies in league with the love in the hearts of those women;

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

in everlasting alliance with the cause of justice and kindness and faithfulness, represented by that dead body. All things work together for good unto them who do love's will. The hidden conspiracy was disclosed that Easter morning. "And looking up, they see that the stone is rolled back." And now, since Easter has come hundreds of times on the calendar, and millions of times in people's lives, surely we know that this universe of ours is not uncaring. The frame and order of things has in it potencies that respond to trust and love, and a buried Jesus cannot stay buried. The Kingdom, He proclaimed, is backed up by all power in heaven and earth, and His Spirit is the most living and most mighty force in existence to-day.

Jesus had always been certain of it. His predictions of His death never stopped with death. "The Son of man must suffer, and be killed, *and after three days rise again.*" Why was He so sure? His parables might

well be bound together in a little volume, and entitled "Leaves from My Autobiography." They let us look in at His personal convictions. They give us His own religion more accurately than we get it anywhere else. And in this short word-picture from the memorabilia of Peter, recorded only in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' fundamental faith is laid bare. The Kingdom of God—the family régime in the earth, in which men live, with each other and with their God, justly, trustfully, affectionately—is something to which the entire universe is responsive, as soil is to seed. Sow love anywhere, and the earth will guarantee a harvest. One cannot exactly foretell the look of the harvest-field. That depends upon the richness of the soil, the amount of moisture it receives, the number of sunny days and dark, frosts and storms. Jesus did not know just what form this social order of love would take in any generation, how it would appear in the second century, or the twentieth, or the

fifty-first, or the 1042d. "Thou sowest not the body that shall be, but . . . God giveth it a body as it pleased Him, and to each seed a body of its own." But if it be a body *of its own*, Jesus knew that there would be a likeness to the life, with its hopes and faiths and sympathies and purposes, which He was laying down. The main point was the certainty of a harvest. That which He thought and dreamed of, toiled and died for, was adapted to the hearts of men, and was in league with sun and moon and stars of light. If He were faithful to it unto death, the world would give Him a crown of life. If He laid down His life in the cause of brotherliness, a far more potent self would rise and be alive forevermore. "The earth beareth fruit of herself."

It was only another way of expressing His faith in the living, loving God as Lord of heaven and earth. We sometimes think that the central truth of Easter is the living Christ, proclaiming the personal immortality

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

of men, who, like Him, devote themselves to righteousness. That is a most precious message. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." The open grave on Easter morning will always be visited by a company, who go in tender memory to the graves of their own dear dead, and come away comforted with undying hope. But there is an Easter truth far more fundamental than this, which carries this with it and vastly more besides.

The first disciples did not need to be assured that so good a man as their Master would live again. Except for a few materialistic Sadducees, there was little doubt among the Jews about immortality. Martha expressed the common faith, when she said of her brother Lazarus, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." She doubtless had the same hope, when the news of Jesus' crucifixion reached her. But Easter meant far more to her and the rest

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

of His followers than a proof that their great Friend was still alive. This Man had claimed that God was a Father with a character duplicating His own, whose purpose for the world was a family-life, in which all His children should live without self-seeking, and the greatest be the servant of all. He had lived as though this God were supreme, Lord of dumb nature and human nature; and His ways had clashed with the ways of the world. There had been a frightful and bloody ending on Calvary; it looked as if He had been mistaken. What was needed, was not an assurance, that this well-meaning Man would have the reward of continued existence, in some sphere, governed by gentler principles than ours; but a demonstration, that His God was actually in control of this earth; that the purpose of brotherhood, represented by and embodied in this Son of man, could not be thwarted; that stars in their courses, and flinty rocks, and the hearts

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

of men were His confederates, and made certain His triumph; that the Kingdom, He gave His life for, really was God's will; and that the earth and the fulness thereof, being the same God's handiwork, harmonized with it, and promised it complete victory. The earth bore fruit of herself, and attested of this Kingdom of love:—

“Deep in the world-heart
Stand its foundations,
Tangled with all things,
Twin-made with all.”

Renan once wrote, “It has in fact never been established by observation, that a superior Being troubles himself for a moral or an immoral purpose with the things of nature, or the affairs of mankind.” Here is the crucial instance. Jesus embodies what Renan, and you and I, cannot but regard as the ideal. If there be a God like the Being Jesus believed in, He must be in closest fellowship with this Son, and bring

all omnipotence to fortify His purpose and hope. Was Jesus defeated, or was His defeat the prelude to a vaster victory? An earth bearing fruit of herself, not merely in the re-emergence of re-animated dust—the dead body of Jesus now revived; but in the re-embodiment of His spirit, in lives useful, forceful, beautiful with His faith and hope and self-sacrifice, proclaims that Jesus was not mistaken; but that the God and Father of His trust lives and rules Lord over all. The living, Jesus-like God is the great message of Easter.

How it broke like a sunrise over the world of the Roman Empire! Here is a brief, second-century letter, dug up a year or so ago at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, and now in the Yale University Library. “Eirene to Taon-nophris and Philon, good cheer! I was as much grieved and shed as many tears over Eumoiros, as I shed for Didymas, and I did everything that was fitting, and so did my whole family, Epaphrodeitos and Ther-

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

mouthion, and Philion, and Apollonios, and Plantas. But still there is nothing one can do in the face of such trouble. So I leave you to comfort yourselves. Good-bye."

Imagine some Christian, who really believes enough in his faith to talk about it, speaking to Eirene of Jesus the Nazarene, and of the heart of the most high and most near God revealed in Him. And now she not only thinks calmly of the dead, "If we being evil know how to do everything that is fitting for Eumoiros, whom we love, how much more shall his and our heavenly Father do!" But such sentences as "there is nothing one can do in the face of such trouble," and "I leave you to comfort yourselves," become "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"; "Blessed be God, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves

are comforted of God." A living God—and there is always something one *and He* can do.

And how much that Easter message means to these people besides hope and consolation in the valley of shadows! Eirene is troubled about some of the members of her family. Judging from the names, she had a lot of boys to rear, and that was no easy task in pagan surroundings, as it is still hard in our semi-pagan to-day. She had been a faithful mother, training them as carefully as she could, but often discouraged because all her efforts seemed to affect them so little. Now she has a new self in Christ Jesus with which to train them; new ideals of the sort of men she wants these young fellows to be; new methods of dealing with them trustfully, patiently, forgivingly. But, above all, she has a new hope. Perhaps she sees no striking change in them; perhaps they disappoint and pain her more than before, be-

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

cause her standards are higher; but she keeps whispering to her despondent heart, "The earth beareth fruit of herself." Over me and them is the living God who raised Jesus from the dead. I lay down myself in love for them, and am sure the laying down is not the end. Their characters will be love's harvest some day.

This couple, who had just lost their second boy, now get a very different letter from the same correspondent. "Eirene to Taonnophris and Philon, far better cheer, even the grace of God our Father! I write to say that the tears brought to my eyes by Eumoiros' death are wiped away by One, who has conquered death, and whom I know as my best Friend. He wishes me to tell you of Him, that He may comfort you too. His name is Jesus, a Jew, but now with God on the right hand of all power. And on this papyrus I send you some of His sayings, and an account of His dying and rising, as it was told me. This

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

Jesus is everything to me, and I know He will be so to you. Read and know Him; and may you come to the living God through Him and be satisfied! Good bye.”

Taonnophris reads and believes, but Philon cannot share his wife's faith. He wishes he could. He sees that she has something that he lacks, which helps her to bear their loss, and gives her calm and joy and strength. And, as he reads, he cannot help being drawn to this Jesus: He seems the best of men. But how absurd it is to think that a Being, exactly like this good man, is over the world in which he does his business; and over the great Roman government with its iron legions, holding the peoples in subjection by sheer force; and over the storms that wreck vessels on the Egyptian coast; and over Vesuvius that wiped out so many thousands in Pompeii; and over his own life, so embittered and darkened by the cruel taking of his two splendid boys, Didymas and Eu-

moiros! And yet how he wishes it were so! His wife tells him that this God is living, is here. How can she prove it? How can he prove it for himself? She tells him, in her simple fashion, to trust and obey Him, and live for the just and the right and the loving thing, as far as he sees it, and he will be convinced. "Surely it is worth trying," he thinks. "If that God were here, what difference would it make in my dealings in the market-place, in my treatment of my slaves, in the pleasure I take in the games of the arena?" People wonder what is coming over Philon. "Poor fellow, he has never been the same since his second boy's death. The first son's death nearly killed him, and this has been the last blow." But Philon has been making a discovery. "The earth beareth fruit of herself." Sow conscientiousness to the light you have, sow obedience to the truth you know, and above the ground comes the blade of faith in the living God of light and truth. Philon believes

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

now, and, what is more, as he lives on in faithfulness to the Christian God, his faith grows—"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself to him who lives believingly, obediently.

"Who comes to God an inch, through doubtings dim
In blazing light, God will advance a mile to him."

Epaphrodeitos, Eirene's eldest son, goes into business as a contractor in the city of Alexandria. The government is planning the repair of one of the splendid Roman roads, and he has a chance to get part of the contract. The evening before his final bid is handed in, an official comes to see him, and explains that the prefect is in the habit of receiving a percentage on contracts, and that the amount charged the State must be made that much larger. But Epaphrodeitos is a Christian. Eirene's God is a God of uprightness. He loses the contract. It happens several times. "How

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

ridiculous that man Epaphroditos is," business friends remark, "he stands so in his own way! They tell me that it is that Christian God of his who keeps him from success. He puts into him so many scruples no one else has." But Epaphroditos, through days of poverty, stays himself on words, which his mother has told him, helped her when she was discouraged with him—"the earth beareth fruit of herself." He is meeting a business crucifixion for principle's sake; but there will be an Easter. We sow integrity, and in our own characters and in the confidence men come to feel in us, there is a harvest produced from no other seed. Epaphroditos may have died comparatively poor, although wealthy in soul; or quite as likely he died in comfortable circumstances. Trustworthiness, faithful even to a Calvary, finds stones rolled away in a world, which with all its failings is inherently responsive to honesty.

Thermouthion had a vineyard, which

people thought he managed very oddly. He was always concerning himself with the personal affairs of his laborers. He knew where and how they lived. He troubled his conscience whether they received a just proportion of the profits. They were not to him so many hands, doing his work; but so many brothers, working with him. He trusted them, and considered them in his various arrangements; and people used to laugh at the out-of-the-way things he was said to have done for them. "He has a queer streak in him—that Thermouthion. It comes from his mother. She had unusual notions about the bringing up of her family, you know." Thermouthion used to be imposed on again and again by men who took advantage of his goodness of heart and abused his confidence. Older men often said to him, "Thermouthion, your ideas are very fine, but you can't change human nature." And he would ask, "Do you know what is really *human nature*?" And

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

when some individual exasperated him by stealing, or lying, or shirking, and he was tempted to give up his methods of trust and gentleness and thoughtfulness, he would fall back on, "The earth beareth fruit of herself. Human nature is at bottom God-made, and will surely respond to God's ways. A vineyard run on brotherliness will bear better grapes, than one managed in selfishness." Every Good Friday he would take his dealings with his men up to his Lord's cross, and look at them carefully there; and on Easter morning he would say to himself, "He who raised up Jesus from the grave lives and reigns. This is His world, and He is working in it still, and in the hearts of all His children. I, Thermouthion, vineyard-owner, in the spirit of my Elder Brother, grow grapes. And, as I sow His spirit, the earth beareth fruit of herself."

Plantas, the youngest boy, was one of those impossible persons, who are to be

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

found in every age and community, to whose capacious hearts lost causes flock as doves to their windows. He was a hopeless radical, or rather, what is far worse, an unconquerably hopeful radical. He did not believe in slavery, and talked in a wild way that was calculated not to keep anybody's slave in his place; but to give him all sorts of notions that would make him discontented, and might upset existing institutions, seriously disturb the labor market and unsettle business prosperity. Well-to-do, conservative people shook their heads at Plantas, and called him "dangerous." He did not believe in war; and actually thought that the day would come when the legions would be disbanded; no more taxes levied for triremes; and the army and navy would cease to use up the energy and strength of men in unproductive tasks, when they might be producers, adding to the world's sum total of good things. He had a lot of unpractical theories about the treat-

ment of criminals. He thought there should be no such thing as punishment to pay back the criminal for his crime, but only a discipline that would turn him from a wrong-doer into a right-doer. He wanted all the courts and laws and police regulations revised to fit the fundamental principle that, when a man is overtaken in a trespass, everything possible should be done to restore him to a useful member of society. If there was any movement on foot to turn things upside down in the city of Alexandria—to get building and health laws that would make it impossible to crowd people as they were herded in some quarters, to keep little children from work when they should be at school and at play—or when there was a contribution being raised to help out the famine sufferers in Syria, you would surely find Plantas actively aiding it. There was a little company of Christians in the city, and even among them he was somewhat of a nuisance. He was forever

stirring them up to take Jesus Christ more seriously, and to believe that the love which beareth, believeth, hopeth, endureth all things and never faileth, literally never would fail if only used. And when people asked his reason for thinking that the world's work would be done, if the pressure on some in slavery were taken off; and the world's peace would be kept, if armies and ships of war were abolished; and wrong-doers would become right-doers, if men tried hard enough to change them with the methods of this Jew of Nazareth; he would always say, "The earth beareth fruit of herself. Try the principles of good-will and patience and faith, and see. There was Jesus, who believed in just as impossible things a century ago, as I do now. He was crucified when He tried them, but what then? He ever liveth. Look at my mother, Eirene, and my brothers, Epaphroditos and Thermouthion, and my mother's old friends, Taonnophris and Philon. It is no longer they that live,

but Christ liveth in them. He who raised Jesus from the dead, and made Him to live with Him forever, is the living, ruling God, of whom and through whom and unto whom are all things, here and everywhere."

But there was one boy in Eirene's home, who turned out badly. People used to point to Apollonios and say, "There, you see, what so much home-religion and church-going in childhood do. A reaction is bound to come; and that kind of boy, when he once gets started the wrong way, goes straight to the dogs." Eirene had died heart-broken. "The earth beareth fruit of herself," but chances of any crop from Apollonios were decidedly poor. Thermouthion, who had done wonders with his workmen, could do nothing with him; and Plantas, who had tremendous faith in other people's brothers, found it taxed to the breaking-down point with his own. Apollonios had no faith in himself. He was

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

weak and he knew it. If there was anything he ought not to meet, it came his way; and circumstances, in which he ought not to be put, seemed to shape themselves inevitably around him. He seldom went now to the meetings of the Christians, for they did not appeal to him, and he felt out of place there. But one Easter morning he was thinking of Eirene, and for old association's sake he went to the service. Somebody was speaking on that verse his mother had leaned upon so firmly, "The earth beareth fruit of herself," and the speaker was pleading with his hearers to give themselves to Him, who is Himself the resurrection and the life, that their lives might become glorious in self-control and usefulness and hope. Apollonios remembered what the earth had produced in Eirene. He went his way; and every little spear of grass, in a city park just beginning to become green, seemed to say to him, "The living God, Apollonios, thy Father, He who

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER raised Jesus from the dead is able to raise thee through Him." And in the secret of His heart Apollonios prayed, "O God I give myself to do Thy will; crucify my selfish thoughts and feelings and wishes; loose the grave-clothes of habit that bind my weak will; and let me live with the life of Thy Son, the life of love, that was in my mother Eirene." And the stone is rolled away. Apollonios sees a light streaming in. That Easter day he rises; and Plantas and Thermouthion and Epaphrodeitos are heard saying not many weeks after, "Our brother, Apollonios, was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found. It could not but be. Why were we discouraged? The earth beareth fruit of herself, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

Very likely Eirene and Taonnophris and Philon and Epaphrodeitos and Thermouthion and Plantas, and even Apollonios, are here this morning. The living God who raised up Jesus is certainly here; and we,

THE FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE OF EASTER

who give ourselves to live with Him in the trust and obedience of Jesus Christ, will find perhaps a cross, and surely a victory that overcometh the world. It cannot be otherwise. "The earth beareth fruit of herself."

VII

OUR LIMITATIONS

Col. 4 : 18. "Remember my bonds."

PAUL is signing his name to this letter to the Colossians, which he has dictated to an amanuensis: "The salutation of me, Paul, with mine own hand." And as his stylus moves across the sheet of papyrus the manacle about his wrist gets in the way, making his signature look cramped and awkward, and, probably more as an excuse for the poor writing than for anything else, he inserts, "Remember my bonds."

But how suggestive that short apologetic postscript is! How often, as we do our work in the world, we feel like pleading "Remember my bonds"! We all have our limitations.

To begin with, there are the bonds of

OUR LIMITATIONS

health. Not to mention crippling maladies that bind their victims to life-long beds, and incurable diseases that rack sufferers with agonies for years, and chronic weaknesses that make existence a constant struggle, the most vigorous of us have nervous systems that now and again bring us up with a sharp turn, and by a sleepless night or an aching head say tyrannically, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther, and here shall thine ambitions be stayed."

There are family bonds. From the cradle to the grave almost every life is tied to others by bonds of kinship, and these bonds tie him down. Within the reach of the tether of one's obligations to one's own, life's work must be accomplished. Even the world's Redeemer on the cross has a mother to care for. And while there are obligations more sacred than those to kith and kin, these can never be entirely disregarded; "for if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath de-

OUR LIMITATIONS

nied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.”

There are the bonds of our occupations. The daily routine of our callings claims our undivided attention for a large part of our waking life, and leaves but a scanty leisure for anything outside. A business or a profession allows little surplus time or energy, and, however attractive and urgent are the appeals to render service elsewhere, we must resolutely respond, “Remember my bonds.” The attempt to be a Jack of even two trades usually lessens our mastery of one.

There are the limitations of our early training. No knowledge picked up in later life will ever compensate for the lack of education in the formative years. No subsequent polish will ever make the child of an uncultured home like one “to the manner born.” Our childhood sends us into the years with ways of looking at things, prejudices and biases, instinctive likes and

OUR LIMITATIONS

dislikes which we can never wholly cast off.

There are the bonds of ability. To one is given five talents, to another two and to another one, and obviously the one-talent man cannot embark on the enterprises that are open to his five-talent companion, nor the five-talent man be content with returns that seem ample to the one-talent investor. In boyhood we rear towering air-castles and feel an almost boundless capacity for any position.

“A boy’s will is the wind’s will
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

But we are not more than over the threshold of adult life before we appreciate how exceedingly scanty our outfit of cleverness is, and wish we might append our names to all our performances with Paul’s excusing, “Remember my bonds.”

There are the limitations of age—we are too young for some things, and too old for

OUR LIMITATIONS

others; of influence—we have too responsible a post to make it wise for us to risk ourselves on courses that might be misunderstood, or we are too inconspicuous to make the course we take of serious consequence and weighty example. Temperament forges its fetters. The radical cannot understand the conservative, nor the phlegmatic appreciate the impulsive. Men are attracted and repelled by unaccountable instincts. Some people make us feel the tug of the manacle of an incompatible disposition holding back our hand from reaching out to take theirs in entire cordiality; if, by God's grace, we get the hand out at all, it moves awkwardly as hampered by a fetter, and to keep ourselves charitable we have to murmur, "O my soul, remember thy bonds."

And, to speak of but one more, there are the bonds of experience. We may be never so eager to give one who needs it comfort or inspiration or guidance, but as we near his life it seems to be sailing off over seas

OUR LIMITATIONS

totally unknown to us. We never felt the force of those gales nor the shock of those huge waves. We never threaded our way into that harbor past the reefs and up the winding channel. Try as we may, we cannot appreciate the force of his temptations, or the overwhelming surge of his sorrows, or the intricacies of his position. Our experience sets a limit to our helpfulness. We must frequently stretch out our hands in silence, offering no spoken consolation or suggestion. We can only say, "I feel for you and I should like to feel with you (for sympathy means feeling *with*, not feeling for), but remember my bonds."

"Limits we did not set
Condition all we do."

These limitations present a constant problem. What is a Christian to do with them?

Let us be sure that they are real bonds. Many an iron fetter stretches like an india-rubber band when there is a sufficiently

OUR LIMITATIONS

resolute wrist inside. The world's history is full of the surprising achievements of those for whom others thought such achievements impossible. What amounts of work frail people with some system and pluck have managed to do without impairing their health! What positions in Church and state and benevolent organizations men and women have occupied, and still have been all they should as fathers and mothers, sons and daughters! What outside services men most faithful to their regular business and women most conscientious in their home duties have succeeded in rendering! What stations determined souls with the meagerest advantages in equipment have contrived to reach and fill! How old in wisdom young men have shown themselves, and how young in sympathy old men have proved! How thoroughly the barriers of temperament have been surmounted and persons most uncongenial to each other bound together

OUR LIMITATIONS

by the greatness of a common purpose! How completely the limitations of experience have been done away by the sensitive sympathy of such a love as made Jesus, of whom no illness is recorded, say, "For them that were sick, I was sick!" Very few of us are as limited as we think ourselves. The busiest can nearly always do more. It is a question of readjusting time and energy so that they accomplish most; and, if we try hard enough, extras contrive to get themselves squeezed somewhere into the most crowded days. The least clever when he puts his will to it can lengthen his mental tether. Mountains are effectual barriers, but there is, according to One who knew, something that can remove even them. They disappear from the road of the man who puts himself in line with God's purpose and co-operates with the will of his Father in heaven. Only after we have tried faith as a bond-stretcher dare we call apparent limitations bonds.

OUR LIMITATIONS

But then Paul's faith in God did not break the manacle from his wrist. There are real bonds, limits that cannot be over-passed—what is the follower of Jesus Christ to do with them? According to this prisoner three things:

1. We are to accept them cordially as bound about our hands by God. A physical weakness may be clearly traced to an ancestor's folly, or to our own past imprudence. A dependent relative may have nothing to blame for his poverty but his own spendthriftness. Our own limited brains to-day may be accounted for by our indolence at school, or the weakness of foolish parents who did not insist on our forming habits of systematic study. Our want of experience in Christian work may be due to selfishness that made us deaf to Christ's calls, and to carelessness of the responsibilities which rested on us to see that His Church fulfilled the whole task assigned it. So long as the chain is a real chain we

OUR LIMITATIONS

must take it as put around our wrists by the hand of God. Paul's manacles were due to Jewish prejudice and to the political expediency of a Roman official who wished to curry favor with the Jewish leaders. He always calls himself, "Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ," as though imprisonment were the lot given him by his Master. The blows inflicted on his body by fanatical Jews, or ignorant mobs of barbarians, or Roman lictors, were to him "marks of the Lord Jesus." However the fetters have been forged, we must accept them *now* as the divine limitations of our lives. God has, whether willingly or reluctantly, permitted them.

Not only are we resigned to them—as George Meredith says of one of his characters, "He was now in the luxury of passivity, where we throw our burdens on the powers above and do not love them";—but we rejoice in them. There are no whines from Paul's prison. He does not pity himself. He had made plans to get to Spain,

OUR LIMITATIONS

and they had to be abandoned at least for the time being; but there is not one syllable of regret in these prison-letters. No doubt he had often prayed like Jesus, "O my Father, if it be possible, if it be possible." We know that for the thorn in the flesh he had besought the Lord thrice. Perhaps he had learned by this time not to call his limitations "messengers of Satan," as he had when he wrote the Corinthians a few years before, but to say with Jesus "the cup which *My Father* giveth Me." We are not even to wish ourselves healthier, or richer, or abler, or more experienced than we are. If, after trying faith as a bond-stretcher—willing with all our will the thing we feel that the Father of Jesus Christ wills for us—the bond remains, we are to say as Paul said of his thorn in the flesh and his chains, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses. . . . I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses." In one of

OUR LIMITATIONS

George Macdonald's novels Euphra Cameron says to her maid, "I wish I were you, Margaret." "If I were you, my lady, I would rather be what God chose to make me, than the most glorious creature that I could think of. For to have been thought about—born in God's thoughts—and then made by God, is the dearest, grandest, most precious thing in all thinking."

God has made us "indescribably ourselves." The limits set us in our nerves, the invalid relative who ties us down, the exacting occupation that consumes so much time and strength, the want of equipment in education or culture or Christian experience that hinders us from being as useful as we imagine we might be, are things to take pleasure in. The most galling chains about our wrists are not there without the will of our Father, the Lord of heaven and earth; and His will is not only to be taken patiently as something we are to be resigned to, but to be acquiesced in gladly as some-

OUR LIMITATIONS

thing upon which we can surely congratulate ourselves. The Best of fathers would not have handed us the cup had it not been the best cup for us, nor forged the shackle had it not meant our widest and largest usefulness.

2. And this brings us to the second thing. If we are bound by God, prisoners of Christ, then these fetters are His leading-strings; and we are not to ask what am I limited from, but what am I limited *to*. Something, indeed, might well be said as to what we are limited *from*. Bonds are often God's answer to the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Our meagre supply of brains safeguards us from self-conceit. Our absorbing work keeps us out of no end of mischief, and puts us beyond the reach of countless enticements to self-indulgence that lead others astray.

"Ah, little reck's the laborer
How close his work is holding him to God—
The loving Laborer through space and time."

OUR LIMITATIONS

“Lead us not into temptation,” we ask, and God doubles our work, or halves our physical vitality, or curtails our income, or circumscribes our pleasures. And we often forget to thank Him for the bonds. He is tying us up from sinning.

But the main point is not what we are kept from, but what we are led to. Paul’s imprisonment has cut him off from visiting the churches and making missionary tours into regions yet untouched by the Gospel, but that is not uppermost in his thought. He never mentions what he is shut out of, but what he is shut up to—to working among the Prætorian guard and the occasional visitors who call on him; to getting hold of a runaway slave Onesimus—“my child whom I have begotten in my bonds”; to quiet prison thinking on “Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”; and to sending the results of his thought in letters to the churches. All limitations are like the railroad tracks that

OUR LIMITATIONS

lay down the route along which the train of life is to travel, or like guide-posts with a finger pointing unmistakably to one particular path of good works in which we should walk. Jesus' probable unfamiliarity with any language other than the peasant dialect of Syria, and His scanty education unfitting Him for the broad work among the Dispersion and Gentiles that Paul undertook, confined Him to His own people. He had His wider vision of "the Kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," He had a purpose that included every child of His Father, Gentile and Jew, but personally He was restricted; and He accepted it as an indication of the boundaries His Father had set to His mission. "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel"; and, limited to those lost sheep, how He concentrated all His heart and soul and mind and strength on seeking them! The engrossing character of a man's occupation, preventing him from participating in out-

OUR LIMITATIONS

side affairs, indicates that through it the main part of his Father's purpose for his life is to be accomplished. A mother's absorbing family points her to her home as the scene of her God-appointed ministry. The particular position we fill in society, while it binds us with a host of conventions that are sometimes irksome, gives us points of contact with certain of God's children whom we should never otherwise touch. Even our limited experience in the things of God, our crude thoughts of Him and our imperfect sympathies with His purposes, bring us close to many at the same undeveloped stage, and give them some hold of God through us, while profounder words from much riper saints might be far beyond their grasp.

It is a good thing to stop now and again and "remember our bonds," in the sense of taking them as our Father's leading, and to ask ourselves, "what am I bound to?" It is perilously easy to lose sight of

OUR LIMITATIONS

near duties in dreams of large things which we should like to do. Hogarth has pictured a man in the debtors' prison occupying himself with plans for the payment of the National Debt. While thinking of Spain and its possibilities as a mission field and the romantic prospect of seeing the Gospel carried as far west as the pillars of Hercules, it would have been easy for Paul to have overlooked the jailors who guarded him, that runaway slave of his friend Philemon, and the visitors who were within reach of his voice every day. There are some of us who can join in Romney Leigh's confession:

“Who thought to take the *world* upon my back
To carry it o'er a chasm of social ill,
And end by letting slip through impotence
A single soul, a child's weight in a soul,
Straight down the pit of hell.”

Napoleon, who said “Je sens en moi l'infini,” used often to say “Il faut se limiter.”

OUR LIMITATIONS

Thank God for His guidance through bonds! The invalid confined to the house is chained in a peculiar sense to those under the same roof, to the visitors who come to him, and to a desk from which letters can do their ministry perhaps more effectively than any spoken words. An exacting task which exhausts all that in us is, prevents us from scattering ourselves, a bit here and a bit somewhere else, and enables us to give our whole selves to the limited number whom we do serve. Whether or not it was in Paul's thought he was really giving these Colossians his best reason for writing them when he said, "Remember my bonds." God had limited him to thinking and to writing the deep thoughts he had reached on Christ. It was as though he said, "Take these thoughts as the message to which God, through bonds has led me, a message I should never have reached had I been busy with the details of missionary work and church organization."

OUR LIMITATIONS

3. And this brings us to the third thing a Christian should see in his bonds. They are not only the leading-strings by which God guides us to the work He desires us to do and keeps us from running off into some other paths, but they are also the *tools* He gives us for the tasks to which He leads us. Paul writes from this same prison to the Philippians, "Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me, have fallen out rather unto the progress of the Gospel." Then he goes on to say how he had not only got access to the Prætorian guard, but that the Christian leaders at Rome "being confident through my bonds are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear." And in that connection he adds "my bonds became manifest in Christ," an expression which suggests that when one puts anything in Christ, accepts any limitation in Christ's spirit of devotion to His Father, the bond goes through a trans-

OUR LIMITATIONS

forming process. "In Christ" is an alembic. The bond goes in a galling band of iron, it comes out a golden key to unlock the hearts of the soldiers to whom he is successively chained. And all this is far truer than Paul had any means of knowing. No sermons he could possibly have preached, no tours, however widely extended and successful, he could have made in countries unevangelized, no amount of personal attention he could have given the churches he so much longed to visit, could ever have had the far-reaching results of any one of the four letters that have come to us from this imprisonment—the epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and to Philemon. Through them the Gospel has been carried into lands that did not exist on Paul's map, and the Spirit of that Gospel is embodied in an authoritative expression for all succeeding centuries. Charles Darwin towards the close of his long career wrote a friend, "If I had not been so great

OUR LIMITATIONS

an invalid, I should not have done nearly so much work." What he was shut off from, confined him to what he was shut up to, and contributed vastly to his efficiency. Arthur Hallam's death set a sad limit to one of Tennyson's most precious friendships, but in reducing that friendship to a memory gave the world the inestimable stanzas of "In Memoriam." Our bonds are not only guides to what God requires of us, but often the best instruments He puts in our hands with which to do it. When Paul held up his fettered wrists before the brilliant assembly in the governor's palace at Cæsarea and said, "I would to God . . . that all that hear me this day might become such as I am, except these bonds," the sight of the chains added a touching pathos to his appeal. And when he appends this short postscript to his signature, "Remember my bonds," he is adding weight to every sentence the letter contains.

So a Christian's poor health with the con-

OUR LIMITATIONS

sequent circumscription of His life may be the very thing that makes his faith conspicuous in the eyes of his acquaintance, as it was surely Stevenson's long battle with consumption which gives the words in his letters about courage and hopefulness the power they possess with so many readers to-day. The chains which tie a man so fast to his business give emphasis to his presence in the house of God regularly on Sunday and to the part he takes in the Church's activity. Were he a man of leisure his work would not count for nearly as much. The little attentions a busy man manages to give people mean infinitely more from him than from one whose life is not so crowded. A person with a critical and skeptical temperament may bemoan it, and wish he had been born with the unquestioning nature that takes things for granted and slips easily into faith, but it is his natural unbelief that makes his convictions appeal with power when he attains them.

OUR LIMITATIONS

Unless a man has the disposition "to prove all things" one does not pay much attention to what he "holds fast" as "good." The phlegmatic envies his neighbor who is so often enthusiastic and so easily kindled to zeal, but when his own calmer nature does take fire it will burn longer and give out more heat, as coal is slower in lighting but does far more cooking and warming than a bundle of kindling wood. A Christian of limited experience, who has but a very few things of which he dares say "I know," only occasional glimpses of light and patches of blue sky, caught sight of now and again as he clammers up the ascent through the valley of shadows, will wish that he had advanced to the shining table-lands of perfect familiarity with God; but he is of far more value to fellow-strugglers in the gloomy gorges where he is groping, and can serve them better because he is still not far from them on the dark and winding road up. It is just our limitations that fit

OUR LIMITATIONS

us for service among the limited lives of which our limited world is exclusively made up.

And how differently bonds look when we think of them as tools! It may possibly be that Paul had reached that vision when he wrote, "Remember my bonds." He wished to send the letter with the seal of God's authority stamped on it. Here was the work of God in his own career, a chain binding him to a Roman soldier. He took it and used it as the divine seal to endorse his own signature on that leaf of papyrus. He is trying to wind up his letter with a climax. "The salutation of me, Paul, with mine own hand." Yes, but there is another signature that carries far more weight. Here it is: "Remember my bonds"; and through that sentence he leads his readers into the presence of God. Through chains God had led him to write, in chains God was giving him grace to endure them and use them, and the chains made the grace

OUR LIMITATIONS

of God appear infinitely more valuable. "Remember my bonds." "Grace," the grace which binds me and leads me and uses me more abundantly in bonds, that "grace be with you."

VIII

HEAVEN'S DOOR THROUGH THE USUAL

John 6 : 42. "And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how doth He now say, I am come down out of heaven?"

It never once occurred to these Jews that Joseph and Mary, ordinary every-day folk, whom they knew as a village carpenter and his wife in Nazareth, could be the door through which heaven opened into earth and God sent a life down to the children of men. If something came out of heaven it must come in an unusual way and through some mysterious and unfamiliar channel.

This reasoning of theirs rested on their fundamental thought of God's relation to the world of men. For them heaven and earth were not usually in communication. Occasionally in the past there had been points of contact and God had spoken to

HEAVEN'S DOOR THROUGH THE USUAL

His people through specially inspired law-givers and prophets, and had interfered in the affairs of nations for their benefit, as when Pharaoh and his host were overwhelmed in the Red Sea. But ordinarily heaven and earth stood quite apart, and God and men lived two distinct and different lives. A remarkable Individual had appeared and was creating a stir throughout Galilee. He had asserted, "I am the bread which came down out of heaven." And they at once said: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how doth He now say, I am come down out of heaven?" The familiar cannot be the heavenly, the human the divine, the ordinary the act of God.

Jesus believed that heaven and earth were in constant communication. The Father was always in touch with every child of His. Had men the eyes to see it heaven was opened and angels of God ascending

and descending upon every son of man. Jesus found bread of heaven at hand here in Galilee, or even in Samaria: "My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to accomplish His work." And every brother of His who set himself conscientiously to do God's will as far as he understood it would find himself nourished with the same manna. Let men but pray sincerely, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," they could add, "Give us this day our daily bread," and rest confident that it would be provided for body and mind and soul. Everything good in the world comes from God: so the portals of heaven are always opening, and God is continually coming into earth—through nature where He caters for ravens and clothes the grass of the fields; through events in men's experience where He hands the cup of suffering and makes the cup of joy to run over; through people in whose every just and true and

lovely thought He speaks, so that Peter's declaration of Jesus' Messiahship is not Peter's only, but God's through him—"Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven."

To say that they knew Joseph and Mary, and that Joseph and Mary were just ordinary people, was not to settle the question whether He had come down from heaven. *They* could be the gates from which God came forth in a human life to reveal Himself to men. Since the Father and His children were always in contact, heaven's doors might be seen opening through the usual and familiar—a plain Joseph and Mary. They must apply a different kind of test to determine whether He were heaven-born or not. "The bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven *and giveth life* unto the world." Did they find His words spirit and life? Did they get from Him inspiration to do justly and kindly and faithfully? Then they

could be sure that He came from the just and kind and faithful God. They could decide as to His divine origin, not by asking how He got into earth, for God was getting into earth all the while through the most commonplace and everyday occurrences; but by asking, however He got here, now that He was here did He accomplish God's purpose, vitalize men with God's life, feed them with God's bread of love and trust and hope?

Familiarity, if it does not breed contempt, at least does away with surprise, and we look for God in the startling. If we can account for a thing, we at once conclude that God had nothing to do with it. We keep Him as a last resort for events otherwise inexplicable. The result is that the wiser we grow and the more things we have an explanation for, the less we think of God and the further we banish Him from His own world. You remember Keats' complaint:

“Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven;
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.”

But is the rainbow any less divine now that we understand the principle of the prism and the separation of light into its various rays? Its father and mother we know, but is it any less of God? Are not all laws the ways in which God usually works? And because He is methodical and not capricious, is not the regular and law-abiding and customary occurrence the most godlike?

Many devout Christians have felt about the scientific study of the Bible in the last fifty years much as Keats felt about the scientific treatment of the rainbow. The Bible used to be regarded as a book apart from all other books which had come straight from God, and was to be held as literally without error, at least in its original manuscripts, scientifically and historically and

ethically. Everything in it from cover to cover was to be taken as exactly so. Then scholarly men applied to it the same tests they used with any other literature. They asked how its books were put together. They compared its historical statements with others from monuments or secular historians, and said the Bible is correct here and incorrect there. Clay tablets disclosed the fact that the early Hebrew stories of the Garden of Eden and the Flood were similar to those of their Babylonian ancestors. The Bible's science and morals belonged to the age in which its particular parts were written, and were no more authoritative for us to-day than those of other early peoples. And then men said, "Is not this just a human book whose father and mother we know? How can it be the word of God that came down out of heaven?" Exactly as its Lord came through Joseph and Mary. Because we make allowance for its science and history and morals as products of their

HEAVEN'S DOOR THROUGH THE USUAL

ages, is it any less true for us than for our forefathers that the Bible's words are spirit and life; that its stories set forth eternal truths; that its pages, read in the full light of the Word made flesh in Jesus, give us the disclosure of God Himself for our inspiration with His thoughts and love and will? Nothing is settled when one discovers how a thing got here, the final question always is what does it do now that it *is* here. And the indisputable answer of generations of the faithfulest, lovingest, usefulest of the sons of men is that in this Book God speaks to our consciences, and we know Him, and have life—life eternal. It is the bread of God coming to us through all these lowly doors, and proving its heavenly origin by giving life unto the world—the life of justice and self-sacrifice, of trust and unfaltering hope.

But it is in the practical and personal affairs of our own lives that we do God and ourselves most injury by looking for Him in

the extraordinary and inexplicable instead of in the usual. We believe as Christians that God personally guides the man who seeks for His leading. But where, as a matter of fact, shall we get God's guidance? Through our own most conscientious and wisest thinking? That seems too commonplace. Our thoughts—their father and mother we know, how can the hand of God reach down and direct us through them? The immediate disciples of Jesus are trying to select a successor to Judas Iscariot. They have thought the matter over and evidently are not fully agreed; and they have two candidates for the place—Joseph Bar-sabas and Matthias. But how shall they discover which is God's selection? Pray, and think carefully over their relative merits, and believe that through their best judgment divine wisdom will point out the man? No, their judgment, formed in however conscientious dependence on God, is still theirs and too human to be divine. So they draw

lots on the supposition that a lot, which is drawn by a blindfolded man in ignorance, is a surer indication of God's will than a decision arrived at with all the wits at their command. It is an instance of looking for the gate of heaven in the mysterious. But the Spirit of God evidently led them, (for we hear no more of such devices), and has certainly led us into clearer truth. What congregation would select a minister by the toss of a coin? What Christian would leave an important decision to chance? A larger faith leads us to use all the brains at our command, and, prayerfully seeking to put our judgment in line with God's purposes in Jesus Christ, to believe that, though the brains are *our* brains, God-sent directions reach us through them.

This is not to disparage the surprising and seemingly unaccountable leadings that come to us. Robert Louis Stevenson gives this description of what one might call his conversion: "I remember a time when I

was very idle. . . . I have no idea why I ceased to be so. . . . Of that great change of campaign which decided all this part of my life and turned me from one whose business was to shirk into one whose business was to strive and persevere, it seems to me as though all that had been done by some one else. . . . I was never conscious of a struggle, nor registered a vow, nor seemingly had anything personally to do with the matter. I came about like a well-handled ship. There stood at the wheel that unknown steersman whom we call God." How striking it is in looking back over a stretch of life to see the way in which we have been led, and to recall how little we were aware at the time of divine leading or of the end to which the way would take us. Who could have told from looking at Joseph and Mary what their Boy was to mean to the world? No more can one say by scanning his own best judgments what the final outcome of his decisions will be. That

which comes down out of heaven accomplishes incalculable divine results in the earth; but it comes *via* a Joseph and Mary. He in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily grew up in the carpenter's home like other village lads; and the plans and decisions in our careers, that will mean most for us and for others, are born and mature in the usual fashion of the conscientiously formed thoughts of human beings. By their fruits, not by their roots, ye shall know them. If our inspirations and leadings impel us to be more brotherly, more self-forgetting and long-tempered and love-using, they are certainly visions from heaven, however humble the gates—a book, a newspaper article, a friend's words, a stray thought—through which they come from God to us here in the earth.

Again, as Christians we believe in what the New Testament calls "power from on high": that God, our Father, who is as omnipotent as love can be, works through

the lives of His children; so that we can say with Paul, "I labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily." But a great many earnest Christians never think that they possess this heaven-descended force, because they are not aware of any magical endowment that enables them to do astonishing things. The members of the church at Corinth were vividly conscious that power from above had come upon and was working in them; but they saw its presence most clearly in the noisy and startling speaking with tongues. Some showy individual who attracted a great deal of public attention was admired as a wonderfully spiritual man. "He has the Spirit of God," his fellow-believers said. But some retiring workingman, who was quietly bringing up his family to be earnest Christians, and commending his faith by the kind of work he turned out for his employers, was never singled out as remarkably "spiritual," nor made to think that he had

a gift from heaven. "So and so is an exemplary father and husband, and a very conscientious and reliable workman; but such devotion to one's own boys and girls and business-fidelity we can understand, its father and mother we know, how can it have come down out of heaven?" Paul saw the difficulty and asked these Corinthians to think what sort of Being their God was, and what were the kind of things such a God would be likely to do, were He working in them. If God is love, then whatever is stamped with love's hall-mark comes direct from the skies, and whatever is not, however showy and miraculous, has nothing heavenly about it. It is of the earth earthy, and may be of the devil devilish. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal."

Our Father abiding in us waiteth to do His works through us. But at present we may be working very feebly because we do

not feel that the heavens have opened upon us and the omnipotence come forth. We are living on the wrong side of Pentecost. We should date our efforts A. S.—Anno Spiritus; and be confident that God Himself is in us, eager to accomplish the things most on His heart. We need not wait with upturned faces for some heaven-descending force. “Stir up the gift of God which *is* in thee.” Let us attempt the tasks of sons of the Most High, and believe that through what we try to do we swing wide the everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come forth into His own world.

And how shall we be sure that our efforts, whose father and mother we know, are actually the gates of the spiritual world that lift up their heads for the Lord of Hosts? Here is the infallible test—are they characterized by the love which suffers long and is kind, envies not, boasts not, has no self-conceit, acts not discourteously, seeks not its own ends, cannot be irritated, imputes

HEAVEN'S DOOR THROUGH THE USUAL

no evil, is not glad at iniquity but is glad at truth's triumphs, bears, believes, hopes, endures all and never fails? If that is the spirit of our work, we need never doubt but that the Holy Ghost has come upon us and the power of the Most High overshadows us, and that what is born of our thought and toil is holy, is a Godsend which cometh down out of heaven for the life of the world.

Again, as Christians you and I believe in divine companionship. "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son."

"I need not journey far this dearest Friend to see,
Companionship is always mine, He makes His
home with me.

"I envy not the twelve, nearer to me is He;
The life He once lived here on earth, He lives
again in me."

We sing of it in hymns, but how actual is it in our experiences? Does God's presence seem so vivid that loneliness is impossible

—He is company; low talk unthinkable—
He overhears; secret evil inconceivable—
“Thou God seest me?” Why is it that
something, which, according to all the gen-
erations of Christians before us, is ours, and
ought to be appreciated and enjoyed as a
comfort and a strength and a calm, is, as a
matter of fact, vague, easily forgotten, prac-
tically unused, and often scarcely believable?
Where do we look for our Companion?
How do we expect to hear His voice; to feel
the touch of His hand; to be conscious of
His look of approval, or of His smile at our
childishness, or of His glance of shame when
His friend disgraces Him? Do we not an-
ticipate that something unusual shall make
us aware of His presence—some overpow-
ering event that awes us, some exquisite
glimpse of beauty that uplifts us, some emo-
tional excitement that makes us feel caught
up into a third heaven, some tremendous
appeal to conscience that wrings from us
the cry, “Surely the Lord is in this place,

and I knew it not" ? But in the course of a common day when we meet the ordinary run of people and look at the familiar sights of our rooms and read the papers and talk about the usual topics of conversation, we have no sense of a Divine Presence—of a Somebody coming to us out of heaven and bringing with Him the fresh atmosphere of the everlasting hills. And yet why not expect the portals of heaven to be flung wide through a Joseph and Mary, a carpenter's shop, a Nazareth ?

What did Jesus Himself say of His personal comradeship with His disciples ? "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, . . . I will love him and will *manifest* Myself unto him." What is keeping His commandments ? It is being interested in things that interested Him and not interested in things that seemed to Him trivial; it is living for the things He lived and died for—the family-izing of men and the home-izing of earth. To strive to make it

HEAVEN'S DOOR THROUGH THE USUAL

impossible for nations to go to war, to lift from the burdened backs of earth's toilers the absurd and altogether unnecessary load of keeping thousands, who might be engaged in productive pursuits, at the useless occupation of learning how to kill their brothers most effectively; to throw oneself into attempts to get one's brethren healthily housed, justly employed, wholesomely amused, efficiently governed, spiritually quickened; to dedicate oneself to be a friend to somebody and to do for him what that Man did for twelve men to whom He said, "Ye are My friends"; to invest one's life in any Christly purpose and keep oneself from being frittered away in things not worth the while of a son of the Most High God; is to have the presence of that God Himself. When engrossed in such occupations one can safely pray:

"O Power, more near my life than life itself!
I fear not Thy withdrawal; more I fear,
Seeing, to know Thee not, hoodwinked with dreams

HEAVEN'S DOOR THROUGH THE USUAL

Of signs and wonders, while, unnoticed, Thou
Walking Thy garden still, commun'st with men,
Mixed in the commonplace of miracle."

Living for the purposes of God as they have been disclosed in Jesus of Nazareth, we may count on His companionship as a constant experience. "Go ye into all the world and make disciples, carry out My plans for the earth and for the particular spot in it where your life is set, and, *lo, I am with you.*" The promise does not read, "Lo, I am with you whatever you do"; nor "Go ye and, lo, you shall *feel* that I am with you"—feelings are so fluctuating and unreliable, varying with health and temperament and circumstances. But, "Go ye and, lo, I *am* with you. And you shall find Me if only you look for Me in the right place, not in the extraordinary and surprising, but in the human and familiar, the Josephs and Marys through whom I come out of heaven to you. Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, even these

least, ye did it unto Me." Through the men and women whom we serve, we serve God. And that is divine companionship. In the man's hand which we take in brotherhood we touch the hand of God; in the voices of people, however uninteresting, to whom we listen in sympathy we open our ears to the still small voice of His Spirit; in the Josephs and Marys with whom we live in the devotion of their Holy Child we have all heaven opened and enjoy the most intimate fellowship with the Father and the Son.

IX

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Mark 8 : 31. "The Son of man must suffer."

How came Jesus to be so confident? Was it that from childhood He had been aware of a clash between His ideals and those of everyone He met, making Him feel misunderstood at home, lonely among His companions, isolated in the midst of the group of men who came closest to Him, and out of sympathy with the hopes and plans of the most earnest in Israel; so that in all the thoughts and aspirations of His day He had not where to lay His head? Was it through His familiarity with the fate of God's messengers before Him—a destiny brought home to Him most keenly in the murder of His friend, John the Baptist? Certainly their martyrdoms were often in

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

His mind—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her!" Was it from His penetration into the profoundest principles of the universe, and His discovery that suffering enters into the divine law of the whole creation, where all life is born of pain and death—golden harvest fields of grains of wheat which die in lonely darkness, and man of woman in travail? Was it a deeper insight than that of His contemporaries into certain messages of the Hebrew Scriptures which convinced Him that God's Messiah must be a sufferer for His people "wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities?" The early Church believed that the Master had Himself led them to explain His death by such passages as the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. They report Him as saying "The Son of man goeth, *even as it is written of Him.*" Was it that back of nature, which He scrutinized with such clear-seeing eyes, and back of the messages

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

of the Scriptures, which He interpreted with such incomparable spiritual discernment, He found suffering involved in the character of God Himself; and realized that to share God's purpose meant to share His pain? It is striking that He, who usually emphasized the likeness of God and man, felt that the Cross disclosed their essential unlikeness. He heard in Peter's rebuke for His proposed programme of suffering and death man's point of view as opposed to God's: "Thou mindest not the things that be of God, but the things of men." He who said, "What things soever the Father doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner," knew that, when He came to seek and to save, He must repeat the experience of His Saviour Father, who was afflicted in all His people's affliction, and whose redeeming love and pity met with a stubborn self-will which grieved His holy spirit. Perhaps through one of these, or through all of them together, He became

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

certain that the Son of man to save must suffer.

And how? First, in sympathy. Jesus was Himself spared many of the ills and woes that pain His brethren. So far as the records go, He never knew a day of sickness. He touched the leper without the slightest fear of contagion. Matthew applies to Him the saying, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases," but He did so only in His compassion for the sufferers. Nor are we shown Him sorrowing in intense loneliness at the death of those He loved. If one evangelist pictures Him as shedding tears for His friend Lazarus, it is with the consciousness that in a very few minutes He can awake him from his sleep. He never laid wife or child of His own in a grave.

To be sure He had His personal griefs—unbelieving brothers, fierce temptations to be faced in solitary struggle, constant misunderstandings and misrepresentations from

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

those He was eager to do most for, faithless friends—one a traitor, a mother to be parted from in death, life itself to be given up in excruciating agony—life which meant more to Him than to any other human being because He could do so much more with it, “Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his *life*.” “A Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief!”

But as one reads the Gospels one is seldom aware of Jesus’ personal sadness. He had lost Himself too completely to let His own griefs cast any shadow on the scenes through which He moved. His Figure throws no shadow because it is itself so shaded by the shadows of others. “Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling!” we hear Him say; and we hardly know whether to take it as an expression of pity, “Alas for a poor world so full of pitfalls!” or of severity, “Woe unto a world which trips up so many of My tottering and unseeing brothers,”—

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

an utterance of "that fierceness, which from tenderness is never far."

And He felt with and for every stumbler. The evangelists tell us more than once, "He was moved with compassion." Origen records Him as saying, "For them that were sick, I was sick." The thought of the fate awaiting Jerusalem made Him shed tears, "O that thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things that belong unto peace!" His sensitive nature throbbed in response to every mute appeal of wretchedness. The poor and illiterate, upon whom the scribes looked down as of no account in things religious, He spoke of affectionately as "the little ones," and as babes who see things hidden from the wise and learned. The tedious infirmity of chronic sufferers, like that of the woman bent in body for eighteen years; the injustice endured by the victims of long-praying Pharisees who devoured widows' houses; the ostracism of publicans and

harlots by those who should have embodied the loving forgiveness of their God; touched His heart. He could not see a sparrow fall to the ground without pitying it, and so was sure that His Father took notice of the small bird's mishap. Through His parables He gives us bits of autobiography, and lets us see how He felt towards the unemployed who stood for weary hours in the market-place because no man hired them; towards debtors in the hands of merciless creditors; towards foolish boys who threw themselves away in far countries, and fathers who hoped against hope that some day their sons would come to themselves; towards Lazaruses laid at unfeeling rich men's doors; and even towards the religious leaders of His day, of whom He says with sarcasm, but pitying sarcasm, "they are like unto children playing." He pitied others until He had no pity left for Himself. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children!"

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Such an intensely sensitive soul was foredoomed in a world like ours to be a constant sufferer.

“For He who lives more lives than one,
More deaths than one must die.”

Jesus lived as many lives as He had brothers. He was ill in their sicknesses, slighted in their neglect, burdened in their oppression, disgraced in their wrong-doing and sad in their sorrows. “The Son of Man must suffer.”

2. He suffered as a martyr for a cause. His convictions of God and of the Kingdom God purposed for His children compelled Him to say and do many things that brought Him into conflict with the principles and prejudices of the best people of His day. He felt bound to associate in the most friendly fashion with publicans and disreputable women; and that scandalized the Jewish Church. He felt compelled to disregard the Sabbath-Law in the interests

of humanity, and to treat the distinction between things clean and unclean as of no value, because it took the emphasis off cleanness of motive. He felt it necessary to criticise and disagree with parts of their inspired Scriptures, such as Moses' Law of Divorce, because it did not do justice to the woman as a child of the Father in heaven, and with other Scripture sayings because they tended to obscure the love of God for everybody: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, but I say unto you."

Jesus was very careful not to antagonize needlessly. One can think of a host of questions He might have raised which he carefully avoided:—What value had circumcision? Was it necessary to keep the Passover? What profit is there for children of the Father in the Temple and its elaborate ritual? Did the synagogue services need revising? These and their like did not seem to Him to clash with His fun-

damental conviction about God, and the life men should live together as God's children; but wherever anything did, He set Himself lovingly, but firmly, against it.

To the respectable and devout who took Him seriously He seemed an anarchist, a socialist, a heretic, a revolutionary; and to others a fanatic and a visionary. In Galilee, where religious thought was freer, He had conflicts here and there with local scribes, and with committees from the more earnest men at the capital, who took the trouble to come down and see what He was doing. And when at length He felt called to go up to orthodox and conservative Jerusalem, and to enter it openly as the Messiah, amid the Hosannas of the crowds of provincial pilgrims attending the Passover, the leaders felt that some action must be taken. Then came the cleansing of the Temple—a direct attack in public upon the vested rights of the wealthy priestly families;—and His name was on every man's tongue. Re-

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

ligious Pharisees and indifferent Sadducees agreed that this Man was dangerous and must be got rid of.

One must be careful not to blacken the characters of the men who determined to crucify Jesus. "They were," says John Stuart Mill, "not worse than men commonly are, but rather the contrary; men who possessed in a full, or somewhat more than a full, measure the religious, moral and patriotic feelings of their people; the very kind of men who in all times, our own included, have every chance of passing through life blameless and unspotted." We can easily multiply from history and literature the names of men infinitely worse—a Caesar Borgia or an Iago, for instance. But between these men of average, or more than average, goodness, in what was probably the most morally religious land in the world of that day, and the character and purpose of God represented by Jesus there came an inevit-

able collision. "The Son of man must suffer."

3. He suffered as a sin-bearer. We are surprised at the way in which Jesus, usually so fearless, confronts death. He does not speak of it beforehand with the tone of triumph we should have expected. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." As the dreaded event comes nearer, He shrinks from it with abhorrence and loathing, as from a frightful tragedy. In the Garden we see Him restless and burdened, as though an awful strain were upon Him. "He began to be greatly amazed and sore troubled. And He saith unto 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." At length the horror of great darkness falls upon Him, and He feels Himself a castaway. "My

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

This is not the way in which brave men, and especially those who stand for a noble cause, face death. Paul under no less terrifying circumstances writes, "If I am poured out as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Many a pagan, with no clear hope of a future life, has gone to as excruciating tortures without flinching. Many a coarse hired trooper, for the sake of his honor as a soldier, has marched to the cannon's mouth without a tremor. Many an unremembered Christian martyr—a weak woman, or a convert of only a few weeks' standing—has endured as cruel torments and much more protracted pain, with a boldness and a victorious assurance, quite different from the dejection and dread and utter collapse of this Son of man. Are the disciples above the Master?

How shall we account for Jesus' attitude?

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

By the cause for which He stood, and by His sympathy both with His murderers and with His God.

On the one hand, He felt Himself so completely at one with God that every opposition to Himself, every stripe given His back, every thorn pressed upon His aching forehead, every nail driven into His quivering flesh was directed against His Father and gave Him pain—was sin against God. He might say of His crucifiers “they know not what they do”; but He knew, and because He knew, He shuddered. His opponents were setting themselves against the universe, of which His Father was Lord, and were dooming themselves to suffer. A Jerusalem that refused to receive Him would not have one stone left upon another. An Israel that would not recognize its Messiah would have the Kingdom taken from it. A generation that did not listen to the message of a Greater than any whom other generations had ever heard, would stand con-

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

demned at the judgment by all the centuries. He was overwhelmed by the awfulness of the tragedy of God's rejection, and the terrible consequences it involved.

And, on the other hand, He felt Himself one by ties of brotherhood with the very men who slew Him. He had a life in each of their lives, and in every wrong of which they were guilty He was implicated. The want of love that made them blind to Him and hostile to the purpose of God was a family disgrace, which He bore as well as they. As the conscientious member of a family feels the shame of a relative's crime, while the culprit himself may not be seriously disturbed, so Jesus was the conscience of His less conscientious brothers, and felt the burden of the shame which they should have felt in thwarting and paining their Father. "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me." He realized, as they did not, the enormity of what they were doing to Him. He felt, as they could not, the

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

load of their guilt. In the curse which they brought on themselves He was accursed. He numbered Himself among the transgressors; and no one ever appreciated how heavy was the load of transgression, until it was laid on the Son of man and well-nigh crushed Him beneath it.

One night, after talking privately with some medical students at a meeting, 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?" Sympathy with His brothers made Jesus sick with their sins, sympathy with God made Him feel the weight of sin upon His Father. In no fictitious sense, but really, in the wounds in His body, and in the weight of shame on His heart, Jesus bore His brothers' sins in His own body on the tree; He suffered, the Just for the unjust.

And yet there is another aspect of His

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

attitude towards the cross. He courted death. He went up of His own accord to Jerusalem. He laid down His life willingly. "I lay down My life. No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." He shrank from the cross as a loathsome tragedy; but He believed so surely in God, and in the power of love, that He was certain that His sufferings and death would, as truly as His teaching and works of mercy, draw men into God's kingdom of love. The stone rejected of the builders would be the corner-stone of a larger and fairer building. His life given up in devotion would be the means of freeing many. His blood would seal a new covenant of complete oneness of heart between the Father and His children. Pain and death undergone for love's sake meant not disaster but victory. The Son of man in suffering would save.

How? Jesus Himself is not explicit, and as for ourselves—we can never explain all the ins and outs of love. It passeth knowledge.

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

But this we know from the experience of many generations of Christians that the love of Christ—shown in His sympathy, in His devotion to love's cause unto death, in His faith in love's power—takes hold of us and becomes for us the mightiest force we know. "The love of Christ constraineth us," we say, feeling at once helpless before it and empowered by it to become more than conquerors, "constraineth us, that we should no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him, who for our sakes died."

And, when we are drawn to and made one with Christ, we feel that the tragedy of Calvary is not a mere thing of the past. We are ourselves members of the family which slew its Elder Brother; and, worse yet, we are ourselves moved daily by the same motives that governed Pharisee and Sadduccee, a Judas, a Herod, a Pontius Pilate. The crucifixion would be as certain now, as it was then. The Son of man must as inevitably suffer. In the social life of

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

to-day there is the same unbrotherliness, in ourselves the same selfishness. The cross is not an event in ancient history. It comes home to us as something personal and present. Conscience

“ . . . 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 is not merely that Christ, like other martyrs for righteousness' sake, advances the cause of love, and makes me His debtor as an inheritor of all that He gained by His splendid devotion—although that is unspeakably precious. But He is more—He is the embodiment of my conscience; and all that He feels, I ought to feel and, in a sense, I do feel. “I am crucified with Christ.” I die to unbrotherliness, to selfishness. They can no longer rule me. They are exposed in the blood of my best Friend, and their fascination for me is gone. “I am crucified

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." I am alive to all He lived for and died for, alive with His interests, His sympathy, His faith, His hopes, His purposes, His love. And that is to be saved.

And that means that I too, like the Son of man, must suffer. At one with Christ in heart, I cannot but feel for, and feel with, every ignorant and abused and wretched and unloved brother the world over. I, too, must espouse the cause for which Christ gave Himself, and spend and be spent to bring in the Kingdom of love. I, too, must bear the sins of my brothers—be pained with the pain which they cause the Father, and burdened with the evils which they bring on themselves, and not on themselves only, but on all the race, for we are members one of another. No man is saved—made alive with the life of God, the life that was in His Son—who has not a fellowship with Christ's sufferings, a share in

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

His struggle, a partnership with Him in bringing men by love into the new covenant of complete oneness of heart with God. "He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren:" only in so far as that "ought" takes hold of us, and makes us transform it into our own "I must," are we saved by Him, who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

And how is it that this Son of man seems the embodiment of our conscience? How can a Carpenter in a small Syrian village centuries ago (in a world that is ever evolving morally) incarnate the eternal right by which we live and judge ourselves to-day? Who is this Son of man? To us Christians He is God manifest in a human life. He is the highest we know, and by the highest we know, we interpret the Most High. His sufferings unveil for us something in the nature of Him of whom and through whom and unto whom are all things. Our God is always Jesus-like; and, as this Son suffered

CHRIST AS SUFFERING SAVIOUR

in sympathy, suffered by the opposition He met in men's want of love, suffered in pain and shame for their sin, so God, who is over all blessed forever, is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and moved with compassion for every ache and lack of the sons of men; is wounded and tortured by every injustice and unkindness and unfaithfulness; and bears His children's sins as the heaviest burden on His holy heart. The cross is not an isolated event. It is an instance in time of an eternal agony in the life of God, which continues so long as there is a sinning child anywhere. From the summit of the little hill outside the city gate of Jerusalem, where the Man of Nazareth hangs dying, we look into the depths of the nature of Him, whom that Man and we adore as God, our Father, Lord of heaven and earth. The love of that Son of man is identical with the Power which rules the universe. "God commendeth His own love"—and that is Himself—"toward us, in

that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

To be reconciled to God, to be saved to Him, to be in fellowship with Him as sons with a Father, to be partakers of the divine nature, alive with His life, animated by His spirit, conformed to His character, is to share His loving purpose for His children, and to give ourselves, as our Father gives Himself, to make them wholly His. By suffering with and for us He redeems us, that we by suffering with and for our brethren may redeem them. And every son of man, who would be a son of the Father, must come not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life for the emancipation of many.

X

CRAMPED LIVES

Isaiah 28 : 20. "For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it."

ISAIAH coins or quotes this homely proverb in a sermon he is preaching to the leading people in Jerusalem in an hour of great national danger. The irresistible armies of the Assyrian Empire are rolling westward, blotting out nation after nation, and it seems all too likely that they will sweep on to the gates of Jerusalem. The city is in a panic. Fear drives men of little real faith into superstition; and Judah, which in times of peace and prosperity saw most of its influential people religiously indifferent, now sees them rushing off to all sorts of credulities for assurance and comfort. "Fear," wrote the acute Richard Hooker," is a good

solicitor to devotion, howbeit . . . the un-
 aptest to admit any conference with reason.
 . . . Many there are who never think on
 God but when they are in extremity of fear;
 and then because what to think or what to
 do they are uncertain, perplexity not suf-
 fering them to be idle, they think and
 do as it were in a frenzy they know not
 what."

Educated men in Jerusalem were consult-
 ing "wizards that chirp and that mutter"—
 spiritualistic mediums like the Witch of
 Endor, who made the desperate King Saul
 think that he saw the aged prophet Samuel
 brought back from the realm of the dead.
 "We have made a covenant with death, and
 with the world of shades are we at agree-
 ment," Isaiah quotes them as saying.
 Superstition is next of kin to unbelief.

"Which of those who say they disbelieve,
 Your clever people, but has dreamed his dream,
 Caught his coincidence, stumbled on his fact
 He can't explain?"

Under such circumstances a man without a rational faith, that sees in the mysterious the living God, has an open door for some absurd infatuation. And along with their trust in the charlatans who professed to give them communications of hope from the spirit world, they were pinning their faith to a diplomatic intrigue, by which they were seeking to bring Judah under the protection of Egypt in its quarrels with Assyria.

Isaiah will have nothing to do with credulity or shifty political devices. "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." The broad principles of justice, followed in quiet trust in a God who loveth righteousness, are the only safe foundations for the nation's life to rest on. "I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plummet." And the pathetic thing in his eyes was that the short bed cramped the man, the childish superstition confined the nation to a dwarfed

and stunted moral life; the narrow bed-quilt left the people shivering in the cold of fearfulness, when they ought to have been warmly wrapped in the mantle of confidence in the living God of right and truth and love.

This striking saying applies to many situations. Take the modern instances of the type of men with whom Isaiah is dealing—those who do not accept the Christian view of God—and, when one hears an agnostic state his faith calmly and fully, is it not too short a bed on which to stretch a full human life? Mr. Herbert Spencer wrote at the close of his long career, “Old people must have many reflections in common. Doubtless one which I have now in mind is very familiar. For years past, when watching the unfolding buds in Spring, there has arisen the thought—Shall I ever again see the buds unfold? Shall I ever again be awakened at dawn by the song of the thrush? Now that the end is not likely to be long

postponed, there results an increasing tendency to meditate upon ultimate questions." Then he goes on to say how at death he supposes the elements of our individual consciousness will "lapse into the infinite and eternal Energy whence they were derived," and that, when he tries to fancy eternity, the one thing eternal seems to him to be Space. And the essay concludes with these sentences: "The thought of this blank form of existence which, explored in all directions as far as imagination can reach, has, beyond that, an unexplored region compared with which the part imagination has traversed is but infinitesimal—the thought of a Space compared with which our immeasurable sidereal system dwindles to a point, is a thought too overwhelming to be dwelt upon. Of late years the consciousness that without origin or cause infinite Space has ever existed and must ever exist, produces in me a feeling from which I shrink." The covering is narrower than

CRAMPED LIVES

that he can wrap himself in it, and he is cold in "the winds from unsunned spaces blown." If he could only have said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," and had in his old heart at eighty the feelings of a little child toward Him from whom and unto whom are all things, one feels that he could have stretched himself out in hope and joy and calm, and have wrapped himself up much more comfortably in the ample folds of confidence in Him, who knoweth and careth for and loveth His children.

Or take it at the other extreme when, flying from the bleak Arctic Circle of unbelief, men go to the tropics, where the plant of faith grows into rank overfaith; and, laying hold of the fatherhood and goodness of God, they assert that disease and pain and death do not exist, but are the illusions of our mortal mind. One would think that here the bed would be roomy, but is it not shorter than that a *man* can

stretch himself on it? A man must face life open-eyed, and suffering and death are indubitable facts. A man will take the cup of pain man-fashion, and not seek to let himself be persuaded, as little children sometimes are, that it will not "taste bad"; but, admitting frankly that bitter is bitter and pain pain, will still believe in the goodness of God, and say, "The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?"

In a world where people are in danger of believing either too little or too much, and finding both positions cramping beds and scanty quilts, one chief evidence for the truth of the faith of Jesus of Nazareth is its lucid sanity and sweet reasonableness. It is so manifestly a bed on which a *man* can stretch himself. We look at Jesus Himself in the completeness of His manhood; and the couch on which he lay at full length, and the covering that wrapped Him effectually—faith in a living Father the duplicate of

CRAMPED LIVES

Himself in character—comes to us with the strongest of testimonials.

Some of us are often very uncomfortable on the beds of our faith. We lie down to be rested and refreshed and invigorated, and then get up aching from head to foot with difficulties and doubts of one kind and another. Now doubts are often the growing pains of faith, and we must all have them, unless we are to remain dwarfs. But many of these aches come from our lying down, not on a bed where we can stretch out at full-length, but in a cradle. We are trying to take the religious ideas given us by the last generation. One generation provides its successor in its infancy with bassinets, but full-grown men and women must furnish themselves with beds. The religious ideas, taught us by the best and wisest of the generation ahead of us, are an excellent cradle, in which to sleep the untroubled sleep of our early years; but to see a man of thirty attempting to content him-

CRAMPED LIVES

self with the best creed of twenty-five years ago, is to see a six-footer trying to squeeze back into the crib in which he was so happy in childhood. Nor can we do more than start the next generation off on its religious life. We furnish boys and girls with the largest and broadest and strongest thoughts of God and duty we possess; but these are only cradles, which may serve them for a few years now, but which they must eventually outgrow, if they are to grow up. Each generation, and each period of life in a single generation, must be free to frame for itself its own conception of the Most High.

“Each age must worship its own thought of God,
More or less earthy, clarifying still
With subsidence continuous of the dregs;
Nor saint, nor sage could fix immutably
The fluent image of the unstable Best,
Still changing in their very hands that wrought.”

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and forever, and in Him every century sees the Father; but we construe Jesus

CRAMPED LIVES

Christ differently, as year by year His Spirit leads us into more extensive truth. For the men of any age to accept at second hand their predecessors' statement of what God is as revealed in Christ, and to be content to stop with it, is to have a bed so short that they will get up from it lame and aching, and to have a bed-quilt so scanty that they will be chilled by every blast of current unbelief that blows.

And what is true of our intellectual belief, is true of other parts of our lives as Christians. We are born again baby sons and daughters of the Father in heaven, and cribs do admirably for a while. A few simple petitions in prayer, a few verses of Scripture to direct and comfort and inspire us, a few small tasks undertaken for Christ's sake, a few aims of usefulness along this line and that, will suffice. But when we begin to grow up into Christ, that cradle will become a menace to health and limberness and development. Christians of

CRAMPED LIVES

five, twenty, fifty years standing, are we provided with beds and quilts that fit our growth? Have our prayers broadened out because they take in so many more and larger interests, and lengthened because they enter so much more fully into the purposes of the living God? Is our knowledge of the Bible ampler, so that we can draw from it vaster amounts of nourishment and guidance and power? Has our work for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ measurably increased, so that what we attempted ten years ago is small in comparison with what we are laying out for ourselves this year? Is there anything more pathetic than to see a Christian, who ought to be taking an adult's intelligent part as a friend in Christ's plans, content with a mere child's share—instead of stretching himself on a man-sized bed, tucking himself into a cradle?

The Church as a whole is growing and finds some of its beds and quilts altogethe

inadequate. The hymn-book is one. Run through any collection of hymns, reading the words over carefully, and see how large a number are little more than baby-blankets, when one tries to wrap up the Christian experience of to-day in them. Our forefathers found their sentiments a sufficient covering, but about half the hymns in any of the standard books are outgrown now. Often one ransacks the list for a hymn to express the mind of Jesus Christ, as we have entered into it, in its longing for justice for all His brothers; in its yearning for a family-life in the earth, where each esteems other better than himself, and spends and is spent for the brotherhood; in its joy over this present life with dear human beings to love, with beasts and flowers and sea and hills to rejoice in, with good work and even good suffering and good death—when toil and pain and dying help on the Father's purposes for His children—to take with thanksgiving; in its clear vision

of a Father as forgiving and confiding and patient and ready to sacrifice Himself for His children as Jesus is for His brethren; in its assured hope of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth a righteousness like His, who was the embodiment of justice and faithfulness and love. We need a present-day Watts or Wesley to give us hymns on which we can stretch out our full Christian length, as we can still on a couple of hundred of the best of the old hymns.

Or take the arrangement in our Protestant city churches, where a church in a well-to-do neighborhood regards itself as a sort of religious club for the families of a particular social grade in the district. Those who can afford to rent pews are welcomed to make it their regular Church home, poorer people and their children are provided for at a mission. But a Church with the brotherly mind of Jesus finds that bed far too short to stretch on. We want a House of the Father where all His

CRAMPED LIVES

children can enter and feel at home, and rich and poor meet together in the worship of One who is the Maker of us all. It may mean some different adjustment of the way in which we take our sittings, and a different method of raising the revenue which the Church requires to do its work. These are incidental; but the main thing is a definite policy before the eyes of minister, officers and members, to make the Church include all classes, instead of narrowing and shortening it to a particular set, who mix together easily and can be readily taxed for Church support.

But this old saying comes to mind oftenest when one looks at the interests that make up the entire life of a great many of one's fellow-mortals. Take those who are at the bottom of the social ladder, and to what an abbreviated bed poverty fastens a host of our brothers and sisters! What sort of character can be produced from a life cooped up in close, dark, damp, ill-

CRAMPED LIVES

smelling basement rooms for a home; with squalid surroundings to feed the starving imagination; chained to a treadmill of monotonous toil six days a week, and all too frequently for a large part of the seventh; with night often turned into day by the driving pace of a huge modern city, so that parents and children scarcely see each other, and family-life, worthy the name, is well-nigh abolished; and with no conceptions of recreation other than those of the social atmosphere of the saloon or of some coarse show? Think of the sum total of the interests of hundreds of thousands of lives in this city, the things which occupy their thought and heart and strength, and can a *man*—a man in the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Son of God—stretch himself on a bed like that?

Ah, but he will not stretch himself when he is given the chance! We complain that, when larger and better things are offered these constricted lives, they do not appreci-

ate them. Give them cleaner and better dwellings, and they turn them into filthy tenements like the old; place them in the country, and they grieve at its loneliness; offer more uplifting pleasures, and they are not enjoyed. A small black bear, which had been kept in a box eight feet long, was placed in a large den at the Bronx Zoo; selecting a strip just the length of his old box, he proceeded day after day to pace up and down that scanty space; and it took weeks to get the poor creature to realize the extent of his new cage. When from childhood a human being has been cribb'd, cabin'd and confin'd materially, mentally, æsthetically, religiously, is it any wonder that for a while, he does not know what to do with himself when his feet are placed in a large room?

But the social unrest of to-day is the ache and weariness caused by beds shorter than that men and women can stretch themselves on them; and you and I, as members of the

family of the living God, are partly responsible for those hard and cramping beds. There must be a change in our social house-keeping. Every child of the Father is owed in justice a life, in which it is possible for him to develop to the height and breadth of a man, as manhood has been revealed in *the Man*, Christ Jesus.

Or go up to the other end of the social ladder, and how tragic it is to look at the beds men and women make for themselves, or let society make for them! Think of the range of interests which constitute the whole life of some people of culture and means and wide-open doors of opportunity!—"they that call their tiny clan the world,

"Who con their ritual of Routine,
 With minds to one dead likeness blent,
 And never ev'n in dreams have seen
 The things that are more excellent.

"To dress, to call, to dine, to break
 No canon of the social code,

CRAMPED LIVES

The little laws that lacqueys make,
The futile decalogue of Mode,—
How many a soul for these things lives,
With pious passion, grave intent!"

We protest with a shudder against foot-binding in China, but what of soul-binding in our own land? What of parents who give their sons, and especially their daughters (for boys through the freedom of school and college and business life can escape by doors, that in most instances are not open to girls reared in well-to-do homes) ideals, which contract and compress them into selfish, self-conscious, unbrotherly and unsisterly, and therefore ungodly creatures! In how many homes where fathers and mothers are flattering themselves that they are doing everything possible for the happiness and success of their children, they are strapping them to beds shorter than that a Christian life can stretch out on them? And some day a poor, deformed, stunted, misshapen life stands before the world, and

we smile at its pettinesses, its self-pampering, its narrow conventionality. A son or daughter of the Most High God has been ruined; an immortal soul, that was meant to be broad in its interested, self-consecrating brotherhood, and tall in its believing, devoted divine childhood, has been distorted and twisted and malformed into an uncaring, self-centred, unbelieving parasite.

And there is unrest at the top as well as at the bottom of society—a seeking here and there for some new interest, some fresh excitement, some novelty that will take poor starved minds off themselves. The trouble is with the bed, the life-purpose. Collect these beds in a mental museum, and what a row of childish bassinets one has, and what a bundle of bed-quilts about the size of pocket handkerchiefs! How is it possible that men and women, brothers and sisters of Jesus, can rest on or be wrapped up in these!

There is always a peril that when one

speaks of the bottommost and topmost on the social scale, we who belong in between should complacently feel ourselves beyond criticism. What are the things that interest us, that take up our time, consume our strength, employ our thought and fill our hearts? Are they wide enough and solid enough and long enough to let children of God stretch out full-length on them? How many men and women and little children do we actually care about? Into how many different kinds of lives are we entering, trying to appreciate their circumstances and to make ourselves feel what they feel? What is the dominating purpose we go to sleep on at night and awake on the first thing in the morning? Are we sure, that in our interests and sympathies and aims, we have bed and blanket ample enough for a whole man, since the Son of God showed us how large a man should be?

“He has made his own bed, let him lie

on it," men say. The prodigal made his own bed, and God made it impossible for him to rest on it, and through his father gave him another. The Bible is full of God's saving people by getting them on to other beds. Salvation is often a process of bed-shifting and quilt-changing.

Mordecai congratulates himself that he has put his beautiful niece on a downy couch, when he secures for her the position of queen of the great Ahasuerus. But what more stultifying and deforming crib could be picked out for a woman, than that of a pampered court favorite with no responsibilities and no interests, other than those of her own whims and the petty intrigues of a palace! Then God puts her on a hard pallet. Her people's lives are in jeopardy; a great obligation is placed under her, and she stretches herself to the dimensions of a heroic, self-sacrificing woman. "I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

CRAMPED LIVES

Saul of Tarsus is stretching himself as far as he can on the bed of earnest Judaism, and wrapping himself in the covering of its highest ideals. He is taller by head and shoulders than any in Gamaliel's classroom. His enthusiasm and energy and conscientiousness and splendid powers are devoted to the cause of God, as the best Pharisees understood Him. But Saul is cramped and compressed into a monstrosity. The fault is not with the man, but with the bed. Read the seventh of Romans to feel his lameness, his paralysis as he tries to stretch himself out, and his coldness as he attempts to wrap himself in that narrow blanket. Then on the Damascus Road God gives him a new bed—the purpose of Jesus Christ, and a new quilt—the righteousness of Jesus Christ; and from then on Paul never knows what it is to touch head-board or foot-board, or to feel a bit of himself uncovered and shivering.

Are any of us stiff and unwarmed; stretch-

CRAMPED LIVES

ing ourselves on our plans and interests, and never feeling all stretched out; or wrapping ourselves in the amplest hopes and comforts and inspirations we have, and still not really wrapped up in them? The fault may be not with ourselves so much as with our beds and quilts. Take Jesus Christ's. Live for the things for which He lived; be interested in that which He considered worth while, letting other things go; care and care intensely for that which was on His heart—there is a *man's* bed! Wrap up in His trust in the Father, His sense of God's love and thoughtfulness and companionship; be wrapped up in those for whose sake He died—there is a *man's* blanket! Let us take Christ Himself, and allow Him to control our life-aims and to furnish us with the inspirations to fulfil them, and He will make both bed and covering man-sized, even God-sized, for us.

XI

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

Matt. 11: 25. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth."

THE most casual reader of the Gospels notices that He, who "knew what was in man," and is unquestionably our greatest expert in human nature, had also a most keen and interested eye for the ways of the dumb creation. His sayings abound in pictures of the scenes about Him, sketched in the briefest compass of words, but which, like the diminutive canvases of the old Dutch masters, give us a marvellously detailed view of the landscape. Although the accurate description of the scenery of Syria was never His conscious aim, His observation was so correct and His genius for reproducing what He saw in

word-paintings so perfect, that we, who are familiar with His sayings, know the sights of Palestine almost as well as we do those of our native land. We seem to have seen with our own eyes a typical Syrian field with its four kinds of soil, and to have watched the fate of seed sown on each; to have stood by while the two houses were built, one on rock and the other on sand foundations, and to have been present when the sweeping storm of wind and rain reduced the latter to a heap of débris; to have visited a vineyard with its hedge and tower and winepress and laborers bearing the burden and heat of the day; and to have been with a flock of sheep when it was called out of its fold by the well-known voice of its shepherd and led to pasture, or when shepherdless the sheep were lying scattered and torn on the rocky hill-sides, or when it was left in a place of security while the shepherd went off after the one sheep which had strayed away.

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

How many of the plants of the country are familiar to us from His allusions to them—the tiny mustard seed which grows into a shrub large enough for birds to lodge in its branches, fig-trees and thistles, wheat and tares, grape-vines and thorns, the marsh-reed swaying in the breeze, the wild flower in the meadow so incomparably beautiful and yet a mere weed to be cut down and used for fuel!

How many dumb creatures He refers to—foxes and wolves, oxen, sheep, goats, swine, the camel, the ass, the calf fatted for a festal occasion, the scavenger dogs that hang about the streets of an eastern village and the little pet dogs waiting under the table for scraps of the children's food; sparrows, doves, ravens, the cock crowing at daybreak, a hen gathering her brood under her protecting wings, eagles collecting hungrily about a carcass, birds hovering over a sower to pick up the seed, and birds

quietly going to sleep at evening in the branches of a tree!

He mentions animals in the most personal sayings which give us glimpses into His deepest feelings. One realizes that He must often have looked wistfully at the foxes creeping into their holes and the birds composing their feathers as they went to roost at night-fall, and contrasted their apparently home-like attitude to their surroundings with His own homelessness, in a world which treated His ideals as such utter strangers that the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. It is noteworthy that, when He wishes to express His tender yearning for His unresponsive people, the illustration which comes to His mind is not a heart-broken human mother, but a hen seeking to gather her chickens under her wings. And His own kindly consideration for dumb creatures is apparent in His cleansing of the Temple, when He overturns the tables of the money-

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

changers and drives out their proprietors with a scourge of small cords, but spares the piled-up cages of doves, and, instead of upsetting them, bids their vendors: "Take these hence."

We appreciate how much Jesus thought and talked of nature, when we turn over to the pages of His greatest interpreter. Paul's sentences teem with the metaphors of commerce, the law courts, pagan worship, military affairs and the arena. He refers but rarely to nature, and never in a way to indicate his familiarity with it. While Jesus is unfailingly accurate, in his letter to the Romans Paul compares the Gentiles to a wild olive branch grafted into the cultivated Israelitish tree—a comparison which betrays his ignorance of practical farming, for a wild branch is never grafted into a cultivated tree, but exactly the reverse. He almost never mentions animals, and when he does, it is with no kindly feeling. "Doth God care for

oxen?" he asks in scorn, when he finds the humane provision in Deuteronomy, that an ox employed to tread grain shall be left unmuzzled, so that he can eat as he works. It appears to him to be beneath the dignity of God's Law to provide for oxen, and he concludes that the verse has a hidden meaning and applies to ministers of the Gospel, who are entitled to support from those to whom they minister. Paul was born and bred in the commercial city of Tarsus, educated in Jerusalem, lived and did his work in the great centres of population and trade—Damascus, Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Rome. Jesus was reared in the village of Nazareth; His teaching is connected with lake- and hill-sides, and reflects the scenery of Galilee.

The beauty of nature cast its spell over Him. He said of the commonest wild flowers, "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." It was not

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

the startling and grand in scenery that caught His attention. He does not dwell on the mighty and magnificent aspects of nature, as do the Psalmists and Job and the prophets. There is no allusion in His sayings to such scenes of grandeur as

“Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy
waterfalls”;

or,

“Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do
change,
And though the mountains be shaken into the
heart of the seas;
Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,
Though the mountains tremble with the swelling
thereof.”

He does not speculate on the awesome mysteries of the universe, like the author of Job:—

“Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?
Or hast thou walked in the recesses of the
deep? . . .
Where is the way to the dwelling of light?

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

And as for darkness, where is the place thereof? . . .

Hath the rain a father?

Or who hath begotten the drops of dew?

Out of whose womb came the ice?

And the hoary frost of heaven, who hath generated it?"

Jesus' references to God's feeding the sparrows and clothing the grass of the field are in striking contrast to Amos' description of "Him that maketh Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth." It is nature in its quiet and usual moods, of which Jesus thinks and speaks.

"The meanest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies,
To Him were opening paradise."

He had never lost a child's "baptism of wonder," and it did not require the ex-

traordinary and the astonishing to call out His admiration. Amyas Leigh in "Westward Ho!" says to his brother, as they stand looking at the sights of a new continent: "'I'll tell you what, brother Frank, you are a great deal wiser than me, I know, but I can't abide to see you turn up your nose at God's good earth. See, now, God made all these things; and never a man perhaps set eyes on them till fifty years ago; and yet they were as pretty as they are now ever since the making of the world. And why do you think God could have put them here, then, but to please Himself, with the sight of them?'" and Amyas took off his hat. 'Now I say, brother Frank, what's good enough to please God is good enough to please you and me.'"

Because the world was His Father's Jesus lived in it with joy and thanksgiving. His reverence for it as God's made Him love it exactly as He found it, and accounts

for the absolute truth of every reference He makes to nature. In His parables nothing unnatural occurs. He never reads a lesson out of that which does not strictly teach it. He never makes animals or trees talk, as fable-writers do, nor imputes to them the thoughts and feelings of human beings. His "nature stories" are genuine nature stories. In His teaching there is nothing like the story of Balaam's ass, or even of the trees choosing a king, as in Jotham's speech to the men of Shechem. Apparently He never wished that any of nature's ways might be altered, as Comte, who said of the laws of the solar system that "we can easily conceive them improved in certain respects." He never gives the slightest hint that He considered the ground under a curse for man's sin, as one Old Testament writer thinks; or the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for the full development of an upward-struggling humanity, as Paul teaches.

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

To many minds earth has conveyed this impression. A great German thinker compared nature to a bride adorned in her wedding garments, whose bridegroom had died on the wedding day, leaving her in tears ever since. And in one of his best known novels Mr. Hardy gives this bit of conversation:

“‘Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?’

‘Yes.’

‘All like ours?’

‘I don’t know; but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubborn-tree—most of them splendid and sound, a few blighted.’

‘Which do we live on—a splendid or a blighted one?’

‘A blighted one.’”

But Jesus as He looked about Him seemed to share the feelings of Him who “saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.”

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

To Jesus the same God, His Father, was Lord of heaven and earth, and, because He was consistent, His ways in the one were like His ways in the other. It was not that He went "through nature to God," but that He came from God to nature, and saw the God, whom He knew through His own religious experience, in control of the world of beasts and stars and stones. God was to Him first, "Father," and second, "Lord of heaven and earth."

There were four facts in nature which He particularly noticed, and from which He illustrated certain of God's similar laws in the lives of men.

One was its *mystery*. The growth of a seed is inexplicable to the man who plants it. It springs and grows "he knoweth not how." He told Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, but thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth."

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

Many men are frightened by the strangeness of an earth, which they cannot understand. Its vast forces in gale and ocean, earthquake and fire, alarm them. Jesus was fearless. He slept while his hardy fishermen disciples were in terror on stormy Galilee. Their dread seemed to Him foolish. This was their Father's world, and winds and waves did His will. "Why are ye fearful? Have ye not yet faith?" In a terrific thunderstorm in the Highlands of Scotland the frightened children in a school-house collected around their teacher, and were surprised to see her face radiant. "I love to think it is my God who thunders," she told them. And precisely that thought gave Jesus a heart in which there was a great calm.

Others have their curiosity roused by the mystery of nature. They sally forth to discover its secrets; they pry into the relations of things and get at their laws;

and to them we owe our sciences. But Jesus had not the scientific temperament. His attitude resembled that which Charles Kingsley once recommended to a correspondent, whom he advised to "feed on nature and do not try to understand it. It will digest itself."

And to Jesus the mystery of nature was not without its lessons. "The earth beareth fruit of herself," although the sower of the seed knows not how; and because he can rely upon a harvest he can well afford to remain ignorant of the method by which the earth produces it. Nicodemus can hear the breeze rustling the leaves, feel it cooling his cheeks, and enjoy the benefit of its stirring in a fresher atmosphere, without knowing whence and whither it blows. So Jesus knew that He and His disciples could plant His purpose in men, and have no anxiety as to its future fulfilment, although He could not tell what that fulfilment would be like, and was ignorant of

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

the various means by which it would be achieved. Nicodemus could have life from above, and rejoice in new motives and fresh impulses of trust and hope and love, without being able to understand how that spiritual vitality came to him, nor what its final results would be. If we discover nature's ways sufficiently to work in harmony with them, to place the seed in the soil and to trim our sails to catch the wind, we can secure its assistance, whether we solve its further secrets or not. If we understand God well enough to coöperate with His purpose (and that is what Jesus came to proclaim—the Kingdom of heaven in the earth), we can be content to leave all other mysteries to be cleared up in due time.

A second fact that impressed Jesus was nature's *regularity*. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Trees are known by their fruits, for good fruit cannot be produced by a worthless tree,

nor poor fruit by a good one in a law-abiding world. And Jesus believed that characters were grown by equally fixed principles. If a man's life was not right, the trouble was with his heart; and if his heart was right, his life could certainly not be wrong.

Nature's reliability gave Him patience. All growing things require time to ripen. The Kingdom He set forth and for which He laid down His life, would grow "first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear." The seasons could not be rushed. He was prepared to wait for His disciples' characters to mature. He never lost His temper with them, nor despaired because of their slowness of heart. Occasionally even He felt their tardy development trying: "How long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?" But nothing could shake His confidence that human nature was as responsive to goodness as soil is to seed: "The earth

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

beareth fruit of herself." A late spring brings home to us nature's schooling in patience:—

“December days were brief and chill,
The winds of March were wild and drear,
And, nearing and receding still,
Spring never would, we thought, be here.
The leaves that burst, the suns that shine,
Had not the less their certain date:—
And thou, O human heart of mine,
Be still, refrain thyself and wait.”

With the same trustfulness with which He saw a farmer plant seed in the ground, Jesus laid down His life. The same un-failing laws of death and growth could be depended upon to operate in both cases. “Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit.”

A third characteristic of nature which Jesus noticed was its *impartiality*. The sun rises on the evil and the good, and rain falls on the just and the unjust. To many

this has seemed faith's heaviest cross. Why is a universe, over which a God who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity is supposed to reign, utterly indifferent to moral distinctions? Why do calamities destroy the righteous with the wicked, and favoring gales speed the pirate's ship as well as the honest merchantman? If there be a Judge of all the earth, does He do right?

Had Jesus gone through nature to God, He might have been burdened with the same difficulty. It is part of His uniqueness that, unlike many of His predecessors in Israel, He did not expect impersonal nature to disclose the conscience of God. He started with the Father, whom He knew in His own heart and in whom He saw all that He felt to be best in Himself or any man, then He looked at nature so careless of men's deserts, and asked Himself, "How is this?" And the answer He gave was: "It is my Father's goodness. There is

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

nothing vindictive or vengeful in Him. If His children sin, the sun will still shine and the rain fall on them, as though nothing had occurred. He cherishes no spite and bears no grudge. And we must be like Him in our forgiveness of our brothers. Therefore love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you.”

A fourth feature of the natural world that appealed to Him was its *peacefulness*. In contrast with the restless and anxious pushing and striving of men, He was attracted by the absence of self-consciousness in lilies and birds. “They toil not, neither do they spin.” “They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns.” Paul with his strenuous nature and ever-struggling soul read the opposite meaning out of nature. “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.” But Jesus, with a quiet trust in His heart, found nature calming. In the midst of days of pressure, He would go off by Himself to a

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

peaceful hill-top, or to a garden, and let "out-door sights sweep gradual gospels in." In the last week of intense strife, He did not spend the nights in the city. Each evening He got away from the noisy streets, and the courts of the Temple with their wranglers, to the slopes of Olivet, or to the quiet of the little village of Bethany. Nature gave Him rest from distressing thoughts. In the calmer period of His Galilean ministry He had taught that flowers and creatures showed their trust in God's care, a trust which was not misplaced. Now He let Himself be reminded that His Father's hand filled life's cup for Him, and that in drinking it He need be anxious for nothing.

Others have found nature an antidote to self-consciousness. Frederick Tennyson was awkward and shy in society, and when his brother Alfred took him anywhere, he used to whisper as they entered the room, "Think of Herschel's great star-clusters!"

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

Often when we are fuming and fretting the hills and meadows seem to ask us reproachfully, "Why so upset, poor little mortal? See how well we are looked after. God careth; why should you?"

But keen as was Jesus' appreciation of nature, and clearly as He saw God working in it, He always insisted that people were incomparably dearer to God's heart. "How much is a man of more value than a sheep?" "If God doth so clothe the grass, shall He not much more clothe you?" Francis of Assisi used to speak of "our brother the sun," "our sister the moon," and "our mother the earth." But Jesus drew the family line very sharply. He said of the sparrows, "*Your*," not their, "heavenly Father feedeth them." God is related to us; He is simply Lord of nature. So if we wish to find out about Him, we must look for His image not in the order of things, but in people; and the best Man will furnish us with the fullest portrait of God.

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

There are two common attitudes toward nature, which for lack of better names one may call the sentimental and the scientific. To some sensitive souls nature seems alive in every fibre of her being, has a heart with which they can sympathize, and a message which is distinctly uttered to him that hath ears to hear. Wordsworth occurs to us at once as the typical representative of this position in our literature.

“Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul,
Of all my moral being.”

To those, on the other hand, who look at nature with the calm, cold eyes of the scientific investigator, it has often worn an entirely different aspect. They have seen

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

bloodshed and ruthless cruelty everywhere. Life preys on life, and nature appears wantonly regardless of life, destroying myriads of creatures to no apparent purpose. A single lamp massacres hundreds of insects on a summer's evening, and a lighthouse plays frightful havoc among the birds who dash themselves against the glass panes and fall dead at the foot of the tower. Every crime for which men are imprisoned and executed is an everyday occurrence—the very law of their existence—with animals. How contrary to all our standards of honor and mercy and courtesy and regard for the weak are nature's ways! Men when their hearts are wrung with pity in some disaster are shocked and embittered by nature's "terrible composure." Matthew Arnold may serve us as a representative of the many who have found themselves in this attitude towards nature in the last fifty years.

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

“Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood. . . .

Nature is fickle, man hath need of rest,

Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;

Man would be mild, and with safe conscience
blest.

Man must begin, know this, where nature ends:

Nature and man can never be fast friends.”

Jesus took neither position. He never speaks sentimentally of the language of sunsets, or of the sighing of the breeze, or of the laughter of a running brook. Nor does He indict nature for its heartless crimes, and call it “red in tooth and claw.” Certain from within Himself of God, and familiar with God’s character from intimate fellowship with Him in a common purpose, He apparently had no difficulty in finding Him at work in everything that occurred in nature. It was not that the problems of the universe, which have puzzled and tortured others, did not present themselves to Him as personal questions. The mystery of pain came to Him: He suffered and was silent. But the mystery,

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

which was perhaps mysterious even to Him, did not alter His faith. Into the same hands from which He took the cup of suffering, He commended His spirit.

But He clearly saw His fatherly God everywhere. He never makes a distinction between natural and supernatural occurrences. One might say that Jesus did not believe in miracles, were it not much truer to say, that to Him everything was a miracle. The daily feeding of the ravens was in His eyes as immediate an act of God as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. To connect certain unusual and inexplicable events in a special way with God's activity seems to make Him less present and active in ordinary and common happenings, and that to Jesus would have appeared irreligious. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father. The food which we produce and prepare comes as truly from God, as the bread which was multiplied to satisfy the five thousand.

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD NATURE

What we call "the laws of nature" are merely our labels for the discoveries which we have made of the ways in which God usually works. But because His activities are methodical and not capricious, they are none the less His.

"Back of the loaf is the snowy flour;
And back of the flour the mill;
And back of the mill, is the wheat, and the shower,
And the sun,—and the Father's will."

Jesus lived in the world as in His Father's house and accepted all its arrangements joyfully, confident that they were the wisest and best possible for the children of God. What needed improvement was not the house, but its occupants. He devoted Himself to infusing a family spirit, which is the Spirit of God, in His brethren. Could they be induced to dwell together in love—in coöperation instead of in competition, in mutual consideration instead of in self-seeking—He felt sure that nature would

provide every child with "bread enough and to spare." And as He consecrated Himself to the establishment of this divine social order, He believed that every force in the universe was on His side, because He was on the side of Him who controls the universe. If men refused to welcome Him with Hosannas, the stones would immediately cry out. If He were killed, the earth would not bury Him, but grant Him a resurrection with power. In storm and in sunshine, in life and in death, His trustful and hopeful heart rose in one constant refrain: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth."

XII

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

John 14 : 9. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet—?"

How personal to ourselves seem the words of Jesus recorded in this Gospel of John! In the narratives of the other three evangelists we are conscious of the particular circumstances under which Jesus is speaking and the particular persons He is speaking with. But in the fourth gospel Nathanael and Nicodemus and Philip and Thomas ask their questions or venture a remark, and at once drop out of sight and are forgotten in the rest of the conversation. The author does not seem to be interested in *them*. He does not tell us much about them, and leaves us altogether uninformed whether they were satisfied by Jesus' answers, or what was the result of

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

the conversation for them. They are not so much actual people on his pages, as names for a phase of mind or a state of feeling, for a doubt or a question, and, as we read, their mood or perplexity ceases to be theirs and becomes our own. We find ourselves by turns Simon son of Jonas, saying, "Lord Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee," and the man born blind holding on grimly to "one thing I know," and Andrew facing the world's need and a meagre equipment to meet it with "what are these among so many?" We forget *them*; their words express what is passing through our own minds, and Christ's answers come home with a marvellous directness as though He were speaking with us individually.

The explanation of this personalness lies in the fact that this gospel is not so much a history of events and conversations that occurred in Judaea and Samaria and Galilee, by the shore of Tiberias and at the

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

Jordan and in the privacy of the upper room, as a record of experiences in the soul of the evangelist, where, for long years after he had ceased to see Jesus in the flesh, he had continued to abide in Him, carry on a dialogue with Him in thought and lie in love upon His breast. No doubt there is a historic tradition behind it, and we can supplement the accounts of the life of Jesus given by the first three evangelists with some details reported only here; but as the old disciple sets down what Christ means to him, in order that others may believe and have life through His name, he is too interested in what Christ means to him to-day, to try to set himself back in thought a half century or more, and leave out all that has come to him in his rich religious experience since the Ascension. He recalls that Simon said something like this, and Judas (not Iscariot) something like that, and that Jesus replied somewhat after this fashion. He remembers here and there

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

the actual sentence spoken, or the striking illustration used, or some unforgettable word. But what happened years ago is not his main interest. This question of Philip's is one that has occurred to himself again and again, this doubt of Thomas's has often come over himself, these objections of the Jews oppositions he has struggled with dozens of times in people whom he had sought to win to his Master, or perhaps in his own rebellious will. He has thought for years upon the meaning of Jesus Christ to himself and the world. He has taken his own needs and questions, doubts and sins to Him and seen how they were met and dealt with. The words he lets us hear from Jesus' lips are rather replies to his own requests and troubles and uncertainties, than to those to whom they were first addressed. No wonder that Nicodemus and Philip and Judas (not Iscariot) are little more than names labelling a mood, an inquiry, a mistake, an objec-

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

tion. Sychar, Siloam, Bethany, Aenon near to Salim are not geography but autobiography.

“ And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.”

Christians prize this gospel so dearly, not because it helps us vividly to picture Jesus as He moved among men—the other three do that far more graphically and accurately—but because it faces us most personally with Christ Himself, and all that it records of His dealings with men is reënacted in our own souls. We find ourselves in its localities, ourselves under the names of its characters, and ourselves spoken to directly by its central Figure. “Have I been so long time with *you*, and yet—?”

The particular remark which drew out this question was Philip's, “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” What appeared to distress Jesus most was that

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

Philip should have failed to see God's character when it was embodied in a life in daily contact with his own. "Have I been so long time with you and yet dost thou not know Me, Philip?" Many people become impatient, as Philip seems to have done, because they are not made more positive of God's existence and character. "If God wishes me to believe in Him and serve Him as His child, why does He not let me see Him plainly as my Father? Why am I left to face the facts of a world so perplexing that I never seem to be sure of Him at all? Some people are confident that God is, others that He is not, and the great mass of men probably admit that He is and hold various notions of Him, but do not seem to be so impressed with His actuality that He affects them much one way or another. Why should so important a matter be left in uncertainty? If He be, let Him show Himself and it sufficeth us." "Have I been so long time with you, and

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

yet do you talk of God's not having shown Himself? What do you mean when you say, 'God'? Are you sure that you would see Him, were He revealing Himself most plainly? Let Me tell you what God is to Me. He is a Being just like Myself, and wherever you see anything thought or said or felt or done in the world in My spirit, there you see Him."

We form our own ideas of God, then look for Him to appear in ways that would fit our notion of His character, and are bewildered because we do not see Him. An earthquake, or a disaster, or the everyday misery of millions of people puzzles us. How can we believe in a loving God with these ghastly facts staring us in the face? Hearts of men the world over go out in sympathy to the victims of a calamity and their families, human beings are moved to pity and to help, and a whole community is lifted by the catastrophe to a higher level of brotherliness. And we think to ourselves

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

“How much kinder men are than God! Why does He not show Himself?” “Have I been so long time with you and yet do you not know where to look for God? He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father. The Father abiding in Me and in people the least bit like Me doeth His works. God is disclosing Himself in that disaster, but not most clearly where you are looking for Him in the shaking earth or the out-pouring volcano, in the pitiless gale and the furious waves that dash the vessel against the shore, but in the sympathetic and helpful people. He could not disclose Himself through nature. How can earth and air unveil a personality? He showed Himself not in stars or ocean waves or streaking lightning, but in a loving Man. He reveals Himself still not in the earth beneath or the sky above, but in hearts beside us. Have I been so long time with you, and yet will you look for God anywhere but in Christ-like lives?”

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

Suppose we stop making our own conceptions of God—constructing an idol which is no less an idol because shaped and graven in our thoughts, and not in metal or stone—and take our conception of Him from the divinest life we know—Jesus.

“Correct the portrait by the living face,
Man’s God, by God’s God in the mind of man.”

We shall see the Father then showing Himself more and more through homes and friendships and books and people that affect us in Jesuslike ways and draw us into Jesuslike purposes. Perhaps we shall even get a glimpse of Him working through an earthquake that stirs a nation to kindness, and a frightful wreck that reproves human carelessness and brings out courage and tenderness. What amazing ideas even Christians cherish of God! What odd things churches offer as worship pleasing to Him! What sentiments we ascribe to Him in some of our hymns! What ways of do-

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

ing things we impute to Him in some of our doctrines! Is not Jesus saying to us, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not made your thought of the Father correspond to Me, and do you not see Him everywhere about you and in you working His works? Have I been so long time, and yet—?"

But the words come home to us also in other connections. As we look about us at our city and know the conditions under which its inhabitants are born, grow up, work, sin, suffer and die, are there not times without number when we hear Jesus' question, "so long time with you and yet?" For how many thousand people is night turned into day in order that machinery may never stop, and one instrument or oven or furnace or apparatus do the work for which two or three would have to be provided, if men and women, boys and girls, worked only in the day-time? What does night-work mean for family life

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

and the contact of parents with children? What is home under such a régime? We lament sometimes that so many hundreds of people never cross the threshold of our churches; but do we stop to think what becomes of Sunday when elevators must be run, ferries ply, transit lines carry more passengers than on any other day in the week, janitors be on duty, snow be shovelled from our streets, jobs on buildings be hurried through to meet a contract or get a bonus for speed in construction, and repairs on all kinds of machinery be made that work may start full-swing the first thing Monday morning? We will get Church-going and a quiet Sunday devoted to the inspiration of lives with the mind of Christ, just so soon as the community really wants them, and not before. When as a city we are interested in the things that interested Jesus Christ, employers will think of the home life and the Sunday rest of their work-people, housekeepers will plan for it for

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

their servants as many nominally Christian do not now, the public will have it in mind—that public of which you and I are parts—and then things will be different. But to-day are we deaf to a sigh, an expression as nearly impatient as Jesus can be, “So long time . . . and yet?” Is the era of brotherhood, when each considers every other, and all are dealt with in justice, kindness and faithfulness and given the lives of children of our Father in heaven, never coming? And to our cries of “How long, O Lord, how long?” comes His answer to us, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet?”

But the words sting us more sharply when we are not looking at anything or anybody outside ourselves. Temper has run away with us, and we have written a letter or said something that mortifies us beyond words. Or we have allowed ourselves to form an opinion and, worse yet, express it with the utmost decidedness

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

when in our sober senses we appreciate we were in no position to judge, and in our Christian senses realize that it was not for us to judge, but to have the love that thinketh no evil. Or our own disgusting selfishness has shown itself so plainly that even *we* see it and are amazed. "Can it be possible that I have been so inconsiderate, so unfeeling, so regardless of everyone but my miserable self!" And, lo, it certainly is possible. Or our patience suddenly reaches its limit, our longsuffering stops short, and we simply cannot stand a trying individual a moment longer. Or we refuse some earnest soul's plea for assistance, and offer a number of excuses at the back of which we know there is just plain laziness and an unwillingness to be bothered. Or in the midst of doing something half-way Christian we realize how despicably pleased with ourselves we are, and feel that our contemptible self-satisfaction is ruining whatever good

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

we might do. Or . . . or . . . but why should one go into details? The point is that, when drowsy conscience at last awakes and rubs its eyes and faces us with ourselves, this Voice adds the final bitterness, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet—?" So long time!—and we look back across the years, and there in childhood was the same unmanageable temper, the same harsh judgment of others, the same selfish disposition, the same little endurance, the same unbearable self-conceit. And there was this same pleading Saviour dealing with us through painstaking parents and conscientious teachers, through playmates and schoolmates so much finer than we that we were ashamed of ourselves in their company, through plain-speaking pulpits and the unfailing still small voice that pointed home every lesson with its inescapable "Thou, thou art the man." "I was with you then," says the Voice, "So long time, and yet?" And then we come

down the years a bit farther and see the humiliating experiences into which temper has brought us, and the sad, cruel mistakes into which hasty judgment has led us, and the moments of self-loathing our own selfishness has given us; and the Voice comments "Remember, I was with you then, appealing to you through every inspiration to lose yourself in doing that which claimed your whole soul, through every pang of shame for what you were, through every incentive to be what you were not in self-control and large-mindedness and self-sacrifice, through every man or book or incident that helped you to new enthusiasm or fresh hope or firmer faith in God, and most of all through the thought of Me, in whom you saw yourself as you wished you were, and saw God in all His willingness and power to love you into what you could not make yourself. Have I been so long time with you, and yet?" And to-day as we face ourselves and think what we are, what people see in us and

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

get from us, and what holds us back from attempting and accomplishing larger things for God's and our brothers' sakes, the Voice repeats to us again and again with the most touching sadness, "So long time and yet!" Here with us has been One able to make us new creatures, to transform us from glory to glory into His own likeness, if only we would do His will . . . and yet . . . and yet!

But there is one thing above all others which we feel Christ's eyes looking for in moments when we are conscious of His dealing with us, and that is the marks of the cross upon our lives. One cannot be honest with one's self as one reads the New Testament, or enter with any sincerity into our best hymns, or come in contact with men and women truly obedient to Jesus, without being reminded that the very essence of Christianity is sacrifice. "Hereby know we love [and that is God], because He laid down His life for us: and we

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Where is the laying down, the spending and being spent, the pouring one's self out as He poured Himself out for us in thought and work, in sympathy and patience, and finally in unspeakable agony on Calvary? Where are the marks of the Lord Jesus on our days and the way their hours are spent; on our brains and the objects that engross our thoughts; on our hearts and the things about which they feel intensely, and the people they feel for and feel with; on our abilities and the tasks we set them to; on our money, much or little, and the proportion of it that goes to keep self and that devoted to the definite bringing of the brotherhood under the sway of Christ; on our strength and what we use ourselves up for? "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Have we left that out altogether? Why is it that the world's evangelization halts; that so many

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

of the ablest workers, in institutions that are grappling with the ignorances and perversions which keep our world from being the household of the Father it was meant to be, must spend a great part of their time in the rôle of itinerant beggars; that out of the comparatively large congregation one finds in a Church at its principal service but a fraction do the real work of that Church and make it a factor for the things of God; that from a group of several hundred sitting at the Lord's Table and saying, "He is mine, and I am His, forever and forever," but a handful can be counted on to lift a finger to bring another's life into the friendship of that Christ whom they profess to hold as all-in-all to them? Is it not that we Christians have forgotten the cross, not Christ's cross only but our own crucifixion, and that means forgotten the point Christ made plainest and makes plainest to everyone who comes anywhere near Him? "Have I been so long time with you, and yet are

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

there no more signs of sacrificial living, sacrificial giving, sacrificial doing and sacrificial doing without among you?" So long time and yet! How the words come home to us who have the name of Christian and lack the character and force—the sacrificial love of Christians, "having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof"!

Perhaps there are some here who are saying to themselves that they are glad that they have not taken the name of Christ or sat at His Table. They feel relieved of a responsibility when such a heart-searching Voice as this is heard. The words were spoken to a disciple to begin with, and it was a disciple who heard them spoken again and again in his soul and put them down in his gospel. Yes, they are words that make us Christians hang our heads; but is there anybody here who can hear them read without feeling that they are said directly to him, "Have I been so long time with *you*,

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

and yet? You do not call yourself My disciple, but that is not because I have not been with you. Look back and remember who impressed you when you were a little child as the dearest Being you had ever heard of. Look back and remember that when you grew old enough to think out life's problems for yourself My explanation of things, with a fatherly God above and at hand to be led and loved by, with a race of struggling humans to be made into a family of His children, with a world to be taken as a schoolroom, and with a life to be devoted to working with an elder Brother who was in the Father's secrets, took hold of you as the most satisfactory explanation, the one you could not help wishing were true. Remember how some friends you looked up to told you that I was the best possession they had and begged you to take Me. You said, 'I cannot believe, this and that and the other thing puzzle me'; and they said, 'We do not understand everything, but we

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

do know one thing, or two things, or half a dozen things, and through them we are convinced that Christ is trustworthy; we are willing to wait to have the, as yet, mysterious cleared up, and in the meanwhile we live with Him and are satisfied. Come and you shall see. Obey Him in so far as you understand what His will is, and let him prove Himself to you'; and you almost made up your mind to try. Remember again how when you had made a complete failure or when sorrow came to you, there was something about Me that touched you, and for a while you thought you believed; but you did not commit yourself to Me, and so no tie was formed, and you drifted off again, *but I was with you*. And from time to time you felt there was a something wanting in your life that others had, and I whispered, 'One thing thou lackest. It is I.' I think you heard Me, although you did not turn and close with Me. And . . . and . . . well, here

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

you are to-day. You know this word of Mine strikes home and you cannot escape it, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet?' Oh, that is the sad thing,—*and yet* you are not Mine, and that means you are not God's true son, or your brothers' real kinsman, or *yourself*. So long time, and yet—?"

And yet what? We think there is a touch of impatience in the, "Have I been so long time with you?" Our conscience puts the impatience there, but that does not make it really there. There is weariness, keen regret, pathetic longing, heart-sickening hope deferred in it—"So long time, and yet?" But the love of Christ has a length quite as marvellous as its breadth and depth and height. So long time! And yet He went on and explained all over again the matter that had puzzled Philip, and He had kept on with this evangelist for the best part of a century and was as patient at the close as at the start. So long time with you and

THE UNWEARYING CHRIST

me, and yet! . . . and yet! We look at ourselves and repeat, "Yes, Lord, *and yet!*" And He answers, "And yet I will not leave thee, I am here still. End the long, long, long time of wearisome waiting and let us have no 'yet' between us more. I have been so long time with you, and thou and I are one for a far longer time to come, yea forever."

THE END

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT
87. AGNES BRANCH 434 AMSTERDAM AVE.