

The Apostles' Creed
IN
Modern Worship

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
ONE WHO TAUGHT ME
TO BELIEVE

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The Creed

I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth :

And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord : Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary : Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried : He descended into hell ; The third day He rose again from the dead : He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty : From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost : The Holy Catholic Church ; The Communion of Saints : The Forgiveness of sins : The Resurrection of the body : and the Life everlasting. Amen.

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CHAPTER I

FAITH AND CONFESSION

"I believe"

THE Christian religion founded itself on faith. In the days of the apostles if some anxious inquirer asked what he must do to be saved, the answer was, "Believe."¹ In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read a long list of those who, having accomplished great things, are accounted worthiest of commemoration by God's people, and the writer's statement of the case is that "these all obtained a good report through faith."² Still another apostle assures us that "this is the victory which is overcoming the world, even our

¹ Acts 16:31.

² Heb. 11:39.

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faith.”³ While it is the Master Himself who says that one who had faith and doubted not could say to this mountain, “Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea,” and it should be done; and that “all things are possible to him that believeth.”⁴

In other words, a man who can believe can do anything, for he has already done the hardest thing. Faith itself, this transcending of sense, this assurance of the unseen, this access to the infinite, this ability to endure as seeing the invisible—faith is the highest achievement of humanity. All other things must seem easy by comparison to the man who has really succeeded in this; “all things are possible to him that believeth.” Always it is by some sort of faith, more or less articulate, that men have subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, and done and borne other

³ 1 John 5:4.

⁴ Matt. 21:21, Mark 9:23.

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things worthy to be remembered on the earth.

But as our religion thus greatly magnifies faith, so it also enforces the value of a confession of the faith. "Believing we therefore speak," ⁵ says the apostle, quoting from one of the ancient psalmists. Another psalmist at a time of spiritual depression had kept his doubts to himself, because, "If I say I will speak thus, I should offend against the generation of thy children." ⁶ The good man was unwilling to speak out thoughts which could only drive his neighbors toward cowardice and despair; a resolute reticence which has much of the heroic in it. But when a man had in his heart anything that made for hope and courage, he must by all means speak it out and give his neighbors the benefit of it. "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard," ⁷ cry the brave apostolic wit-

⁵ 2 Cor. 4:13, Ps. 116:10. ⁶ Ps. 73:15. ⁷ Acts 4:20.

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nesses. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness," says Paul, "and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."⁸ And the Master Himself insists with much urgency that the disciple whom He will honor shall be the disciple who confesses Him.⁹

The public worship of the church has always included a large element of testimony, or witness-bearing, or confession of faith. At first it was necessarily spontaneous and individual; as when the women running quickly from the sepulchre brought word to the disciples that the Lord was risen;¹⁰ or when the two returning from Emmaus related how "He was known to them in the breaking of bread";¹¹ or when years afterward Saul of Tarsus testified how the Lord had appeared to him also as he journeyed toward Damascus.¹² Testimonies as personal as

⁸ Rom. 10:10.

⁹ Matt. 10:32, 33.

¹⁰ Matt. 28:8.

¹¹ Luke 24:35.

¹² Acts 22:6 ff., 26:12 ff.

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those of a modern revival meeting, except that they were to objective fact rather than subjective experience. In a little while, however, the members of the churches would crave more general forms of confession in which the voices of many could join for their mutual encouragement. Even in the earliest days of persecution in Jerusalem, the fourth chapter of the Acts relates how, when the threatened apostles returned to their fellows, they all lifted up their voices with one accord, repeating the glorious sentences of the second Psalm—"Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things?"—and then continuing: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done,"¹³

¹³ Acts 4:24-30.

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words in which you cannot fail to hear the beginning of a formal confession of faith by the united voices of a congregation as part of their Christian worship.

So there had come into existence very early those "hymns and spiritual songs" by the singing of which the apostle charged the faithful "to teach and admonish one another,"¹⁴ which very thing we are still forward to do.

But the hymns that we sing serve other purposes besides the direct confessing of faith. They are quite as apt to be a confession of sin; or sometimes they will be an entreaty for God's favor; furthermore, even in a Christian congregation, not all the people know how to sing. If, as a congregation, we have some common faith, we crave some common form of words by which we may show it in our public worship of God. If only there might be some great hymn of the Church,

¹⁴ Col. 3:16.

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to be said, not sung—a hymn hallowed by age but still the vehicle of present and living conviction, through which we all, adding our voices to the countless hosts of those who have gone before, might speak forth our grateful confessions to the world.

But here we are confronted by the difficulty that with the passing of time many of the thoughts of men have so completely changed as to make any common expression seem impossible. Go back even four hundred years—not to speak of nineteen hundred—and you will find men living in a world of ideas so radically different from our own that we seem to have no point of intellectual contact with them.

There is a famous passage in the first chapter of Froude's "History of England" in which that great historian sets forth the revolutionary changes of the period which he was undertaking to describe. "Chivalry was dying," he says.

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"The abbey and the castle were soon together to crumble into ruin; and all the forms, desires, beliefs, and convictions of the Old World were passing away never to return. A new continent had risen up beyond the Western sea. The floor of heaven, inlaid with stars, had sunk back into an infinite abyss of immeasurable space. . . . Between us and the old English themselves is a gulf of mystery which the prose of the historian will never adequately bridge. They cannot come to us, and our imagination cannot fully penetrate to them. Only among the aisles of the cathedrals, only before the silent figures sleeping on the tombs, some faint conceptions float before us of what these men were when they were alive, and perhaps in the sound of church bells . . . which falls upon the ear like the echo of a vanished world."¹⁵

Yes, a vanished world; and the ques-

¹⁵ Froude's "History of England," I, p. 65,

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tion which has started up to perplex us is this: How could any form of words which had truly expressed the faith of those far-away believers in that vanished world serve also as a truthful confession of our faith to-day?

Our first impulse would be to declare the thing impossible; but before we settle upon that answer we must reckon with another phenomenon, namely, that just at this time many branches of the Church are giving larger place than they had given before to the recitation of a very ancient Creed, namely, that which commonly goes by the name of the Apostles.

Of the various Protestant communions, the Lutheran in all its branches has always used this Creed in the regular service of the Lord's day. The Church of England has so used it, and also at the administration of baptism. The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America, commonly called the Dutch Reformed

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Church, appoints that this Creed be recited at evening service and at the Communion. The Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church provides a place for it in the order of public worship for the Lord's day. The Liturgy of the French Protestant Church prescribes it at the evening service. The Order of Worship for the Reformed Church in the United States, commonly called the German Reformed Church, appoints that it be recited at the morning and evening service. The Euchologion, or Book of Common Order, prepared by the Church Service Society of Scotland, also provides that it be recited Sunday morning and evening.

With a view to the preparation of a book of forms of worship for the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, a series of questions was sent out a few years ago, the answers to which disclosed the fact that a very large number of churches of that communion had

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adopted the custom of repeating this Creed as a regular part of public worship. The book which has now been issued inserts the Creed in the order for morning service. It had always been printed with the standards of that church.

It appears then that this ancient confession meets a present hunger in the hearts of God's people. Just because of the intellectual ferment of the time, perhaps, when "change and decay in all around we see," we long the more for something that changeth not, some form of words hallowed by immemorial antiquity, in which we might all heartily and confidently unite.

This desire appears, too, at the very time when the more modern confessions are losing their hold on the regard of Christian people. Being the property of some limited section of the Church, these have stood for sectarian division rather than union, and we now grow weary of

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them. What we hunger for is some more universal hymn of faith which the whole Church of Christ from the beginning might repeat together. One of our most honored leaders has lately affirmed that "the deepest spiritual life of to-day retains the Catholic creeds," that is, those of the ancient Church, "with joy as expressions of devotion and as holy inheritances."¹⁶

That may be true of all the older creeds, but more emphatically is it true of the one which, for most of its articles, is the oldest of them all, going back as it does almost to the time of those who heard the voice of Jesus Christ. I propose in the following chapters to study this most venerable of all the Christian symbols.

The name by which the whole world now knows the symbol is "The Apostles' Creed." Just how that name originated

¹⁶ "The Universal Elements of the Christian Religion," by Charles Cuthbert Hall, p. 125. Dr. Hall adds that they are not retained "as tests of belief."

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it may not be possible to say. An old tradition which can be traced back to the fourth or fifth century of our era has it that the apostles themselves actually came together and composed this creed, each furnishing one sentence. An anonymous writer of a somewhat later date even undertook to specify just which sentence came from each apostle, as that Peter said, "I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth"; Andrew adding, "And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord"; and then James his sentence, and so on through the list.¹⁷ An idle fancy, of course, for we know that some of these sentences were not included in the Creed till a good while after the death of the apostles; yet it seems hardly a misnomer to name it from them, for almost every phrase is directly scriptural, and the Creed itself, as a creed, grew from beginnings that were almost or quite as

¹⁷ "The Apostles' Creed," by Arthur C. McGiffert, p. 29.

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early as the days of the apostles themselves.

It may be well first to indicate briefly what can be known concerning the origin of this great confession of faith. Within the last generation much new light has been thrown on the subject by the labors of the late Professor Caspari, of Norway, Professor Kattenbusch, of Tübingen,¹⁸ and Professor McGiffert, of New York City. Its present form can be traced back to a time five or six hundred years after Christ. The larger part of it, however, is known to be very much older than that, for we can trace most of the phrases through various earlier writers; for instance, through a Latin writer named Rufinus, of about the year 400 A. D., who lived in Aquileia and wrote a treatise on the form of the Creed in use in that place; and a Greek writer named Marcellus of Ancyra, of about 337; and so back to

¹⁸ McGiffert, pp. 46-86.

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Tertullian, the famous Church father who began to write before the close of the second century in North Africa, and Irenæus, his contemporary in Southern Gaul. Tertullian, in particular, writes in a way which leaves no doubt, not only that he was familiar with this "rule of faith," as he calls it, but also that he himself acknowledged its authority; which renders it reasonably certain that the substance of our Creed was in regular use throughout the churches as early as the year 175. In this simpler form it is commonly known as the Old Roman Symbol. From various passages in Tertullian and Irenæus, compared with these later writers, we learn that it read about as follows:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Christ Jesus His Son, who was born of Mary the Virgin, who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried, the third day rose from the dead, ascended into the heavens, sitteth on the right hand

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of the Father, whence He cometh to judge the living and the dead: and in the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of the flesh." ¹⁹ It

¹⁹ McGiffert, p. 7, cf. p. 42. It may be interesting to give one or two of Tertullian's references to this Creed as accepted in his time. "On the Veiling of Virgins," Chapter I. "The rule of faith, indeed [*regula quidem fidei*], is altogether one, alone, immovable and irreformable; the rule, to wit, of believing in one only God omnipotent, the Creator of the universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead, received in the heavens, sitting now at the right hand of the Father, destined to come to judge quick and dead through the resurrection also of the flesh."

"On Prescription against Heretics," Chapter XIII. "Now with regard to this rule of faith—that we may from this point acknowledge what it is that we defend—it is, you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, etc." So he continues, giving a somewhat fuller statement of belief than that quoted above.

It should be noted that Tertullian wrote in Latin, while there is sufficient evidence that the original, and therefore older, form of the Old Roman Symbol was in Greek. "For fully two centuries and a half Greek was the predominant language, if not of the city of Rome as a whole, yet of large sections of its inhabitants." Sanday, "Commentary on Romans," p. lii. Sanday goes on to say that "it is generally agreed that the Creed was in use at Rome by the middle of the second century. The main question at the present moment is whether it was also composed there, and if not, whence it came. Caspari would derive it from Asia Minor and the circle of St. John."

Kattenbusch and McGiffert, however, think that it originated in Rome.

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is a little shorter than the Creed as we know it, but otherwise they are almost identical.

A few obscure references have been found in still earlier writers, both of the West and of the East, which some scholars think imply their familiarity with this same symbol. But omitting these from our survey, we have traced the substance of the Creed which many of us love to repeat back to the time of men who knew the men who had known our Lord's apostles. For this Irenæus was a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna, who in his turn was a disciple of the Apostle John.

This Creed then in its older and simpler form, this Old Roman Symbol, antedates the Nicene, the next oldest of our great Christian symbols, by not less than a century and a half; and comes so nearly into contact with apostolic teaching as to give it some title to the apostolic name. In-

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deed, its true and original starting-point seems to be nothing else than the baptismal commission recorded in Matthew's Gospel: "Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." ²⁰ It appears that what we call the Apostles' Creed is a gradual amplification of that original declaration of the faith of a Christian.

It appears also that this process of amplification was going on in all parts of the Church, East and West; following everywhere the same general lines but with slight local differences in phraseol-

²⁰ Matt. 28: 19. Tertullian writes [Adv. Prax. 2]: "We believe this (Son of God) to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and born of her, Man and God, Son of Man and Son of God, and named Jesus Christ; this one to have suffered, died, been buried according to the Scriptures, and raised by the Father, and taken up into heaven, that He sits at the right hand of the Father, and that He shall come to judge the living and the dead; Who thence sent, according to His promise, from the Father, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, Sanctifier of the faith of those *who believe in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*" The closing paragraph seems to imply that the entire Creed, as here rehearsed, was recognized as only a fuller development of Matthew's formula.

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ogy. Rufinus, for instance, points out one particular in which the Creed as recited in his own church at Aquileia differed from that used at Rome, and also from those used in the East;²¹ yet all these various forms were so much alike that from places so far apart as North Africa, Southern France, Aquileia, near modern Venice, and Ancyra, two hundred miles east of Constantinople, come reports of a Creed hardly to be distinguished, except in brevity, from the one we still repeat. The precise form that was finally selected for perpetuation among the Western churches was probably that which approved itself to Christian sentiment as best of all these variations.

In the East the Nicene Creed, after its completion in the year 381, very soon supplanted all others, but it takes little study of that great confession to show that it also was only a more metaphysical devel-

²¹ McGiffert, p. 191. "Pearson on the Creed," p. 346.

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opment of some form of the same original rule of faith.

It should be remembered that this Apostles' Creed was devised as a baptismal confession, which still continues to be its most important use in the ancient Church of Rome. The new convert, presenting himself for initiation, though he knew that in going forward he faced the possibilities of literal martyrdom, even with that dread prospect before him would lift up his face toward heaven and solemnly proclaim, "I believe in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His Son."

Ah! if our great English historian heard in the sound of a church bell "the echo of a vanished world," what shall we say of the stately music of these sentences coming down from a far more distant past, in which those early confessors long ago breathed out their faith before they went to the lions, or to the fire, or to the cross, but which ten thousand lips are

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still repeating round the world every Lord's day? Here is the echo of a vanished world which at the same time sounds forth the living and loving conviction of a present world. We claim a place in a very goodly company when we open our lips to say "I believe."

We are now to study this ancient confession, sentence by sentence, to see whether we can understand why its ancient phrases should prove so grateful to modern lips.

CHAPTER II

THE FATHER AND THE SON

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth ; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord.”

So begins this declaration of faith for which, in the old days when Rome was still a heathen empire, brave men and women were willing to die. The question which is to face us in our study is whether this, or any form of words inherited from so distant a past, could serve as a vehicle for men's convictions in this living present. It has seemed unlikely ; yet we may answer “ Yes ” unhesitatingly and without need of argument, since the facts so evidently prove the truth of the assertion.

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The fact is, as stated in the last chapter, that, with singular unanimity, in many parts of the earth and many branches of the Church, Christian people are now raising their voices in the language of this oldest of all the creeds. No need of arguing that they ought to like it, when they so evidently do. My task is simply to account for this liking if I can.

“I believe.” Certainly the old creed begins well. No wonder the people like its opening phrase. What we were looking for was a declaration of faith; so that if a man had any faith at all—even a very little, like a grain of mustard-seed—he might speak it forth. Here then is the very form of words to suit him, “I believe.”

There have been creeds, or confessions of faith, so-called, which open very differently; perhaps with some abstract impersonal philosophic definition; or even with a damnatory clause, as in the Atha-

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nasian Creed, aimed at those who should refuse to recite. Whatever other purposes such documents might serve, this is evidently a far better beginning for purposes of worship, "I believe."

This is what every worshipper must wish to say if he can. For any man's faith, if he has one, is so incalculably precious. Even if he trembles in the telling of it, and though his temper is so nearly allied to doubt that he must cry with the poor father in the Gospel, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief"¹—even so let him do his best to range himself frankly with the believers rather than the doubters or deniers—"I believe."

But what do I believe? This creed does not offer me a "what," but rather a "whom." "I believe in God," it says.

But it is hardly worth while to try to explain that first article taken alone by

¹ Mark 9: 24.

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itself; for this Creed proposes to be Christian, setting forth the faith which one could not profess except as a Christian; but there had been men of all varieties of religious connection who might have declared a faith in God. There is nothing distinctly Christian in such an article; nor even if it should name him "Maker of heaven and earth," and in some sense "Father" to all that He has made.

"Father of all! in every age
In every clime adored,
By saint, by savage, and by sage,
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord;—"

every one knows the musical but rather colorless sentences of Pope's "Universal Prayer." But the worn-out confessions of those ancient savages and sages would not serve for the belief that demands utterance from our lips to-day.

No; for our present faith in God—if we have any—springs from quite another source, and one which is not indicated in

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that opening article taken by itself; so we must not delay to add the second.

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord.” There at last you have a Christian creed; and though it comes from the first or second century, it gives a wonderfully correct expression to the Christian faith of the twentieth century.

For what is our present Christian faith? Assuming that we have some sort of inclination to call ourselves Christians, what is it that we believe? Leave one side, if you please, all outgrown theory and speculation; insist upon the most accurate and most modern statement for the religious belief that is in you to-day—what is it and whence comes it? You, a man living and working in this modern world, in this particular year and day, what point of contact have you found between yourself and the world of the unseen and the

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eternal? Surely, if you like to call yourself in any sense a Christian, you will answer that the point of contact is nothing else than Christ Himself, that strange being who appeared on earth nineteen hundred years ago, and who still speaks to us from the pages of this Book—Jesus Christ. For the reason why our modern world has been able to retain some degree of faith in God the Father, is because it cannot help believing in Jesus Christ His Son.²

Here let me call attention to two peculiarities of the religious situation of our day; first, the increasing difficulty of believing in God's Fatherhood; and second, that it has become inevitable for us to believe in God's Fatherhood if we are to believe in God at all.

The increasing difficulty of believing in God's Fatherhood comes from the tenden-

²This statement will receive further consideration and confirmation in the concluding chapter.

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cies of modern scientific thought. Men were never so oppressed before as they are to-day by the apparent heartlessness of the universe. Darwin and his associates have given a new color to all our thinking. Even though we may not call ourselves Darwinians, the very phrases they have taught us, "natural selection," "the struggle for existence," "the survival of the fittest," have a hopeless, godless sound. Indeed, even before the scientists had formulated their theories, or invented their phrases, these apprehensions were already in the air. Two generations of readers now have been confessing with the poet Tennyson that 'Nature, careful of the type, seems careless of the single life'; and that 'red in tooth and claw with ravine, she shrieks against the creed' that the God who made such a world can pity or love.³ A

³ The "In Memoriam" was published in 1850, the "Origin of Species" not till 1859.

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thoughtful writer of our time has entitled his book, "Can I Believe in God the Father?"⁴ And it never seemed quite so hard as it seems to-day to answer, "Yes."

That, then, is one peculiarity of the present religious situation, the increasing difficulty of believing in God's Fatherhood. But the other peculiarity is that if we are to go on believing in God at all, it has become necessary to believe in His Fatherhood. For a being of infinite power merely, or of infinite wisdom, who lacked the moral qualities that would enable us to trust him as a father, would not seem to us now a God at all. It might do in other ages for men to believe in their Moloch or their Mars or their Thor; now he must be a father, else we will not own him God. So just at the time when it has grown most difficult, it has also grown inevitable that we should believe in a divine

⁴ "Can I Believe in God the Father?" by William Newton Clarke.

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Fatherhood, or else give up believing in God.

We have not given up believing. In spite of the difficulty, we do believe in the Fatherhood. But why? How can you explain so strange a phenomenon? I will tell you why. The explanation is historical. A great while ago a Child was born into this world the deepest and surest element of whose personal consciousness was that God was His Father. That is the explanation; that is why, against whatever difficulties, we still believe in our Father God. The whole world has read the story of that strange Child. We have heard those first recorded words from Him when he was twelve years old, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"⁵ We have seen Him afterward at the Jordan, grown to manhood, baptized to His public mission, and a voice from above

⁵ Luke 2: 49.

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saying, "This is my beloved Son."⁶ We have followed Him straightway into the wilderness, and there have found Him resisting a very different voice from below, which said, sneeringly, "If thou be the Son of God."⁷ We have heard Him teaching His disciples to pray "Our Father;"⁸ teaching them to trust, since "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of;"⁹ teaching them to aspire, "that ye may be the children of your Father;"¹⁰ teaching them to forgive, "else my Father will not forgive you."¹¹ We have followed Him into the deep shadow of the garden and heard Him in His agony crying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."¹² And when the cup was forced to His lips, and His lifelong trust had seemed to be set at naught, and His enemies had worked their cruel will upon

⁶ Matt. 3: 17. ⁷ Matt. 4: 3. ⁸ Matt. 6: 9. ⁹ Matt. 6: 8.

¹⁰ Matt. 5: 45. ¹¹ Matt. 18: 35. ¹² Matt. 26: 39.

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Him, with no hindrance from heaven, there, hanging on the cross, we have heard Him say: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;"¹³ "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."¹⁴ Always, Father, Father, Father.¹⁵

The one greatest event in the whole religious history of man—no, let me begin again—the one greatest event in the whole history of man has been the coming into the world of this one Child of our race in whom the deepest and surest element of personal consciousness was that God was His Father. Now it is because of what we have all been learning from Him that it has become impossible for our modern world to believe in God at all unless He is

¹³ Luke 23: 34.

¹⁴ Luke 23: 46.

¹⁵ "What was most distinctive of Him was His consciousness of God, the kind of God He was conscious of, and the relation He sustained to Him. God was His Father; He was God's Son. What God was to Him He desired Him to be to all men; what He was to God all men ought to be." Fairbairn, "The Place of Christ in Modern Theology," p. 48.

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worthy to be called, as Jesus called Him, "Father," but not impossible to believe that. More and more of the children of men are coming every day to believe in a God who is a Father. That is the most characteristic religious conviction of the twentieth century; and it is Jesus Christ who has made it so; and that is what we resolutely and joyfully confess as often as we recite the first two articles of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God the Father, and Jesus Christ His Son."

I am not curious to ask whether just these considerations in just this form were before the minds of the original framers of this creed; probably not, every age has its own troubles and problems. We may hardly guess at theirs, or suppose that they could guess at ours. The singular fact remains, however, that the words which they have bequeathed to us (in these first two articles, at least) adjust themselves so perfectly to our own

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present need that we might hardly hope to contrive for ourselves so perfect an expression of the deepest Christian loyalty of our time. Try it if you will; choose your own words, make us a creed that shall best speak forth the most thoughtful religious conviction of our day, and then place it by this, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His Son our Lord."

Very early in the development of the Creed it was made to say, "Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord." The meaning of that most significant addition, that word "only," must be left to be considered in another chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE HUMILIATION OF OUR LORD

"I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried."

THE last chapter left us facing the question how, when we are all children of the same Father, Christ could be called His only Son. Was it not his mission to bring us all back to our Father, teaching us to trust and pray to our Father? How then can He be called God's only Son? Well, at least the Bible affirmed it before the Creed; for that memorable sixteenth verse of the third chapter of John says that

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“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.”¹ Elsewhere in the Gospels, while we find Jesus teaching men about “their Father,” and speaking to them for “his Father,” yet we never find him so joining Himself with them as to unite with them in saying “our Father.” He declared that “no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”² The message that He sent to the disciples through Mary Magdalene, after His resurrection, was in harmony with what He had always said to them on this subject, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.”³

The Father is the same for Him and for them; but everywhere we are made to feel

¹ In the Creed the Greek original gives the same word, “only begotten.”

² Matt. 11: 27. Cf. Luke 10: 22.

³ John 20: 17.

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some vital difference in the sonship.⁴ So in His own parable of the vineyard, the householder sent many servants to the keepers of the vineyard, but only one Son, His well beloved; for he had no other son to send.⁵ So in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read how God who had spoken to the fathers by the prophets "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."⁶

This is the uniform impression of Scripture, that, while Christ is not ashamed to call us brethren, yet in some way He stood so alone in His filial relation to God that He should be called "God's only Son"; and so the Creed calls Him "His only Son."

From this statement the portion of the

⁴ "Nothing so marked Jesus as His feeling of kinship with men. . . . All the more on this account is His action significant when He detaches Himself from man and distinguishes Himself as in a preeminent sense the Son of God." Fairbairn, "The Place of Christ in Modern Theology," p. 360.

⁵ Mark 12: 6.

⁶ Heb. 1: 2.

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Creed which we study in the present chapter goes on, still in the language of Scripture, to specify at least one striking difference between our Lord Jesus and other human children of God, in that He was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

There are some conscientious persons who shrink from repeating this particular article of the Creed—or perhaps, because of this article, even shrink from repeating the Creed at all. I should be sorry to say anything that might increase their shrinking, or that might shut away from the comfort of this great hymn of the faith any who are entitled to it by following Jesus as their Lord.

It must be remembered that two of the four Gospels say nothing about the circumstances of our Lord's birth, but we cannot suppose that any Gospel would omit any truth the knowledge of which

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is really essential to salvation. So we could not well exclude from the privilege of confessing Christ with us one who accepts what he has been taught by Mark and John, even if he had not learned yet certain other things, which you and I had been taught by Matthew and Luke.

Furthermore, I am ready to admit that those opening chapters of Matthew and Luke do not read quite like common prosaic history—not quite like the later chapters of those same Gospels. Indeed, you feel that the narrator speaks under the constraint of a great reserve. Does not an instinct of delicacy force on us a similar reserve whenever any new life is born into the world? We always hush our voices in presence of that sacred mystery. Should we practise any less reverence at the birth of this child who shall be called the Son of God? There are times when the maturest reason would do well to yield

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to our native instincts and cultivate a reverent silence.⁷

But it would be hard to convince me that the interests of exact truth can ever demand the prohibition or contradiction, not of this old Creed only, but of our noblest Christian art and our sweetest Christmas songs. It is poetry, I grant you, that Bethlehem story—every child knows that it is the sweetest poetry in all the world—but there are regions where what we call poetry sees much deeper into the heart of things than what we call science.

⁷ Perhaps we ought to admit also that the foremost interest in the minds of the framers of the Creed was not so much the exceptional circumstances of our Lord's birth, but the reality of it; they were moved to insist that He was truly born of a woman. For already they were confronted by the beginnings of the Docetic heresy, that insidious denial of His genuine manhood, which led John to say [I John 4: 3]: "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

Surely all of us would now spring to our feet to affirm our sympathy at least with this part of the original intent of the article.

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The religious world of our day has been disturbed by controversy on this subject, and some have felt constrained to renounce this ancient faith of the Church. I think a more patient study may incline some of these doubters toward their earlier position. Those who accept the Incarnation as a historic fact are likely to find it easier to believe than not to believe that this article of the Creed is also historically true. After all, an extraordinary result demands an extraordinary cause; and here we are confronted by a most extraordinary result, the absolutely unprecedented fact of Jesus Christ Himself; a historical person; a true man, if there ever was one; and yet amazingly different from all other men. He is different from others, not only in his own character, but also and more especially in his conscious relation to God—so different that by comparison with him the others are as servants while He is the Son.

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Now how do you propose to account for this difference? If it were left to you, could you suggest any more rational explanation of it than is offered by the Evangelists? For of course the Creed must not be held responsible for this article on our Lord's nativity. The Creed only repeats in the most exact terms possible what we read in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke, "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."⁸ "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."⁹ So say the Gospels. And so the Creed says—and many

⁸ Matt. 1:20.

⁹ Luke 1:35. Surely it is not an unreasonable suggestion that this Evangelist Luke, who has confessed his zeal in "tracing the course of all things accurately from the first," might have found access directly or indirectly to the story of the one human witness who had the best right to testify concerning this sacred mystery; and of whom he himself has taken pains to tell us that "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

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of us find great comfort in saying with it, "I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." This dear faith of the Church about the birth of Jesus seems to me most rational as a statement of historic fact.

This then is given as one point of difference between our Lord Jesus Christ and all other children of men, one reason for calling Him God's only Son.

But there might be other reasons; indeed, as we meditate on this theme many questions force themselves on the mind, as, for instance, what Paul means by saying that Jesus "being in the form of God, made himself of no reputation,"¹⁰ or John in what he says of 'the Word which was in the beginning with God, and was God, and became flesh.'¹¹

The complaint has sometimes been made against the Apostles' Creed that it

¹⁰ Phil. 2: 6, 7.

¹¹ John 1: 1, 14.

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ignores some of the deeper questions which we greatly want to have raised and answered concerning the relation of this only Son to the Father.

But, after all, may not that be a merit rather than a defect in a Creed intended to serve as a hymn of faith for the whole Church of Christ? For those deeper questions, however alluring and inevitable, take us into a region where the human mind moves rather blindly; and where it has seemed impossible that all minds should follow the same course. Recall, for instance, the creed that comes nearest to this in antiquity and universality, that of Nicea. In its profound and admirable statement on this very point, that great confession used one phrase—saying that “the Son is of the same substance with the Father”—which, instead of binding those early confessors more closely together, only perpetuated their hopeless division into two almost equal and very

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hostile companies. Many who were inclined to the views of Arius are reported to have been willing to declare that Christ was "of *like* substance with the Father," "homoiousion"; but the followers of Athanasius at Nicea insisted on declaring him "homooousion," "of the *same* substance with the Father."¹²

The Church has generally been satisfied that the Athanasians had the better word, having seen more clearly into this depth of mystery. For the mystery of the Gospel and of Christian experience is that in Jesus Christ man, who had been alienated from God, is reconciled to Him. As Mr. Phillips Brooks said in his wonderful "Trinity Sunday Sermon": "In Jesus of Nazareth appeared the Mediator by whom was the Atonement. His was the life and nature which, standing between the Godhood and the manhood, was to bridge the

¹² Neander, "History of the Christian Religion," vol. ii, p. 378. Gibbon, "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," Chapter XXI.

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gulf and make the firm bright road over which blessing and prayer might pass and repass with confident golden feet forever. . . . Evidently, on both sides that bridge is bedded deep, and clings with a tenacity which shows how it belongs there. He is both human and divine." Yes, and He must be both to accomplish that work of reconciliation which our own hearts told us sorely needed to be done.

Now Athanasius and his followers, however confused their argument and faulty and violent their method, were earnestly endeavoring to show that the bridge is "bedded deep on both sides" of the chasm; that our Saviour, who has touched us as very man, is also very God.

The doctrine of Arius, on the other hand, was apt to make Him neither man nor God—a third something; no bridge, but an isolated pier, standing in the middle of the abyss, and inaccessible from

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either shore; totally unfitted therefore for the work of our salvation.

So the Church of God through the ages has generally been satisfied that in this old Nicene conflict the Athanasians had seen further into this depth of mystery. Yet it is a mystery whose deeper depths must forever baffle the human reason. Moreover, we have to confess that not clearness of discernment alone, or force of argument, determined the issue, but that the great Emperor Constantine, who called the council, had much to do with settling its conclusions.¹³

Now that old passions have had time to cool, a Christian man, recalling these things, finds it hard to reconcile himself to the thought that such a question should ever have been allowed to divide men who all loved the name of the one Lord Jesus Christ. Think of it, one little Greek let-

¹³ Schaff, "History of the Christian Church," vol. iii, pp. 622-33.

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ter—for in that language the two words differ by a single letter—that this small iota should have helped to split that ancient Church in two.¹⁴ We grow weary of so much contending over matters which no one can ever hope to understand; and so we may well conclude that it is no defect but a merit in our older symbol that it leaves those deep questions of religious philosophy unanswered and unasked.¹⁵ In plain scriptural terms, to which every child might shape his lips, we are content to confess our faith that this Son of Mary is the very Son of God.

¹⁴ Gibbon remarks cynically that "the profane of every age have derided the furious contests which the difference of a single diphthong excited between the Homooousians and the Homoiousians."

¹⁵ When the orthodox of those days spoke Greek they affirmed one divine "essence" (ousia) with three "substances" or "subsistences" (hypostases); when they spoke Latin they affirmed one divine "substance" with three "persons." Had they used the language of that modern philosophy which finds the ultimate being in the will, their critical term might have been not "consubstantial" but rather "convolential." "Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers." II Tim. 2: 14.

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“He suffered under Pontius Pilate,” that is the next article. “Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate,” and not a word for the thirty years of life that lie between! Why should the Creed go so abruptly from our Lord’s birth to his passion; why its strange silence concerning the years of His ministry, with all their gracious teachings and wonderful works?

I do not profess to know just what may have been the motive for that silence in the minds of the framers of the Creed, but I feel very sure that their silence was wiser than any words they could have spoken.

For, remember, this does not profess to be a history, a compendium of the Gospels, or a substitute for them. It is simply a personal confession of faith—our faith in Jesus Christ. Now the Creed says enough to identify that person clearly, so that all who hear may be sure who is

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meant when I declare, "I believe in Jesus Christ"; and when that is said, what more was it necessary to say? It is true that there are many chapters of the Gospel histories which set forth His example and teachings and commandments; am I not to believe in them also? Surely, yes. And am I not to show that I believe in them? Surely, yes. But how? By words?

I may have heard read, for instance, that great parable in the tenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, which tells of the Good Samaritan, the true neighbor; now shall I hold up my hand and solemnly affirm that I believe in Christ's doctrine of neighborliness? Oh, but there is a far better way than that to prove my faith in such a doctrine; and the lawyer was told it when Jesus said to him, "Go and do thou likewise." Not words, but deeds.

So it is with any other of our Lord's practical teachings—when He teaches the duty of forgiveness, or of love for ene-

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mies, or of sincerity in prayer, or of the greater blessedness of giving over receiving—what use of saying that you believe all those things? Do the thing, and that will show. “Why call ye me Lord, Lord,” He once cried, in a kind of noble impatience, “and do not the things which I say?”¹⁶

The Creed teaches us to call Him our Lord. It is right that our public worship should include this confession of his lordship. But the confession of his lordship, being thus begun, must complete itself, not in more words, but in deeds. James, the Lord’s brother, shall be my interpreter for this part of the Creed, when he says, “Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.”¹⁷

Oh, it seems to me there is nothing in the whole Creed more eloquent than its silence concerning those years between

¹⁶ Luke 6: 46.

¹⁷ James 2: 18.

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our Lord's birth and his passion. For through all those years He was setting us an example, and often speaking words of command. And we are to believe in those commandments, and in that example; and this faith must by all means be confessed; but the Creed will not allow us to attempt that kind of confession by anything so futile as mere words spoken on Sunday in a church. This confession—this part of our recitation of the Creed—is to go on silently right through the week, when those who have openly confessed Christ their Lord are proving it by doing the things that He says.

So much for the Creed's silence. Now we return to its speech. "Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried." Strange that a confession which had just passed over so much in total silence should now use so many words. It is often remarked that the Gospels give dis-

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proportionally large space to the days at the end of our Lord's earthly life, and to the events that gather about Gethsemane and Calvary. But if the Gospels give large space to this subject, the Creed gives all its space.

“He suffered under Pontius Pilate.” It actually names the Roman governor, as if to leave no doubt of the definite historic reality of what we confess; that this is not matter of vague metaphysical speculation, but a real passion, suffered at the hands of real men. There is no room for the name of Peter, but there is room for the name of Pilate. “Crucified,” “Dead,” “Buried;” the words fall upon the ear like the tolling of a bell; as if the whole universe were commanded to pause and listen till this momentous history has been finished to the last syllable.

It has sometimes been charged against the Apostles' Creed as a defect that it says nothing about the Atonement. Nothing

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about the Atonement? Certainly there is no attempt at any theory of the doctrine; but listen once more to this fourfold declaration of tragical fact—"suffered, was crucified, dead, buried." Why should there be such painful insistence on every sad detail unless to force the truth home upon us that this life was given as a ransom; that he died that we might live?

There is a great passage in Paul's letter to the Philippians which may well be compared with this portion of the Creed; for the two are strangely alike both in their sayings and in their silence; the first part of the passage covers these articles of the Creed which treat of our Lord's humiliation, and the last part covers those later articles of the Creed which will treat of our Lord's exaltation: "Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was

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made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”¹⁸

Paul is as silent as the Creed itself concerning the events of our Lord's earthly ministry, but he lays the same strong and reiterated emphasis on the circumstances of His passion. And Paul has left us in no doubt as to the reason for this emphasis; it is because “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”¹⁹ And I call you to witness that the same solemn truth is forced upon our hearts as often

¹⁸ Phil. 2: 5-11.

¹⁹ I Cor. 15: 3.

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as we repeat these solemn sentences of the Creed.

It is time now that we should consider what it is that the Creed has placed before us up to this point—a series of historic facts concerning a historic person, and related as simply as possible in the words of Scripture. Avoiding all doubtful speculation about Him, it holds our attention fast on Jesus Christ Himself, that strange person who was born of Mary and suffered under Pontius Pilate. And that is the secret of the unfailing vitality and unrivalled power of this oldest Creed. Let me quote from the scholarly treatise of Dr. McGiffert: “The great value of the creed above all other creeds which the Church possesses is its emphasis upon the historic figure Jesus Christ. We may well congratulate ourselves that the great heresy of the second century was the denial of the reality of Christ’s humanity, for we owe to it

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a distinct and unequivocal statement of Christ's real manhood in a creed which for simplicity and compactness has never been surpassed, and which has been handed down through the centuries and has been revered by half of Christendom as the creed of the Apostles themselves. Perhaps to it more than to anything else—more even than to the Gospels, which were not widely read in the middle ages—we owe the fact that Jesus Christ is and always has been the object of the Christian's faith, and that His figure has never been completely lost even when the true Gospel has been most overlaid with scholastic philosophy or with sacramentarianism and ecclesiasticism.”²⁰

Yes, this is the secret of the creed's un-failing vitality and power; and a creed coming down from those earliest days might be expected to show this characteristic. For the personal influence of Jesus

²⁰ “The Apostles' Creed,” Arthur C. McGiffert, p. 35.

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was the power which was converting the world in those days; therefore any creed of those days, if it was to serve its purpose, must bring the confessor face to face with Jesus Christ.

Mr. Gilder's "Heathen of Galilee" may be taken as truly representative of the whole heathen world of these earliest centuries—so far as that world was susceptible to the Christian message:

"If Jesus Christ is a man—
And only a man—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to him,
And to him will I cleave always.

"If Jesus Christ is a God—
And the only God—I swear
I will follow him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air."

That is the very spirit of this oldest confession of Christian faith.

But the world has now moved farther away from that matchless personality of Jesus of Nazareth. We learn of Him

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now, not directly from eye-witnesses of His majesty, but through these very ancient writings, written we may hardly know by whom, or when, or where. Is it possible then that we, who derive our knowledge of Jesus through these longer and obscurer channels, could ever gain the sort of personal confidence in Him that should entitle us to declare our faith by this same old personal creed?

How indeed should we be sure that the person whom these Gospels profess to describe is a historic character at all?

Some years ago an American writer undertook to answer that question, and answered it so well that ever since his time men have been content to repeat his answer after him.

"We have four different writers," says Dr. Bushnell, "widely distinguished in their style and mental habit—inferior persons, all, as regards their accomplishments, and none of them remarkable for

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gifts of genius—contributing their parts and coalescing thus in the representation of a character perfectly harmonious with itself, and withal, a character whose ideal no poet had been able to create, no philosopher, by the profoundest effort of thought, to conceive and set forth to the world. What is more, these four writers are, by the supposition, children all of credulity, retailing the absurd gossip and the fabulous stories of an age of marvels, and yet by some accident they are found to have conceived and sketched the only perfect character known to mankind. To believe this requires a more credulous age than those writers ever saw.

“We fall back, then, upon our conclusion and there we rest. Such was the real historic character of Jesus. Thus He lived, and the character is possible to be conceived, because it was actualized in a living example. The only solution is that which is given by Jesus Himself

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when he says 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world.' " ²¹

Yes, this is the only solution; and though the long centuries have now set themselves between Him and us, yet Jesus Christ Himself personally is still the foundation of a Christian's entire religious faith; and so the best creed for us, as well as for those early believers, is such an one as this, which enables us in the most personal way to declare our confidence in Him.

²¹ "Nature and the Supernatural," Chapter X. The title of the chapter is, "The Character of Jesus Forbids His Possible Classification with Men."

CHAPTER IV

“He descended into hell”

WE come now to a clause which stands as a kind of parenthesis between our Lord's earthly humiliation and His heavenly exaltation. More than any other clause in the Creed, probably, this has given trouble to sensitive consciences. For the benefit of such as might shrink from repeating it, the standards of the Presbyterian Church suggest an alternative: “He continued in the state of the dead, and under the power of death until the third day;” while the Book of Common Prayer suggests: “He went into the place of departed spirits.”

Some, however, would prefer to drop

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the clause altogether. Such permission is given in the Liturgy of the French Protestant Church; and it ought to be said that since this clause does not appear in the earliest forms of the Creed, it could be dropped without marring the original structure. The earliest reference to it as part of a baptismal confession is by Rufinus about the year 400, who says that it was then included in the creed of Aquileia, but not in the creed as recited at Rome and in the East.¹ Just when and how it found its way into the present text of the Apostles' Creed is not known.

We do know, however, that the whole Western Church has been repeating these words now, certainly, for more than twelve hundred years; and some of us

¹“Pearson on the Creed,” p. 346. McGiffert, p. 191.

The words of Rufinus are: “*Sciendum sane est, quod in ecclesiæ Romanæ Symbolo non habetur additum, ‘Descendit ad inferna’; sed neque in Orientis ecclesiis habetur hic sermo.*”

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would be loath to let them go, for we find them peculiarly dear and comforting.

“He descended into hell;” of course, it is the language of figure. We have no other way of expressing the great facts of the spirit except by figure. What would it mean literally to descend into hell, or to ascend into heaven? Perhaps men once supposed they knew what it meant, when they took the earth itself to be flat and immovable; but for us, who now feel ourselves creeping about this whirling sphere, which way is up, and which way is down? Where would you try to locate the heights of your heaven, and where the depths of your hell?

Even in the old days, I fancy, many sensible persons knew that they were using the language of figure, or symbol, when they said, “He descended into hell.” The word hell, as they then used it, meant the under world, the abode of the dead, according to the old Hebrew conception—

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and it might be the abode of all the dead, evil or good. Apparently this article was added to the Creed in order to show that our Lord Jesus, like other men, really and truly died. For many persons in those days were slow to believe that. There had been a very obstinate form of error to which reference was made in the last chapter, the Docetic heresy so-called (in Greek “docetic” means “seeming”), which taught that Christ only seemed to be born of woman, only seemed to suffer, and only seemed to die. According to a later form of this heresy, which has gone by the name of Apollinarius, only Christ’s body was nailed to the cross and buried in the sepulchre, for He had no true human soul. What took the place of a soul for Him, His vital principle, was the divine essence, the logos or Word; and this, they said, never came into contact with death at all. There is reason to think that the article was added in order to correct just

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this notion. Since men were saying such things, it must now be made evident, not only that Christ's body was buried in the tomb, but that His soul also went into the abode of the dead. In other words, body and soul, death meant for Him all that it can mean for any child of man.²

There is great comfort in that assurance. It is another way of affirming what we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that "in all points he was tempted like as we are"; that "he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities"; that "he is able to save to the uttermost"—yes, and to save from the uttermost—"all those that come unto God by him."³ It is the language of figure, but the figure means that however far sin may have carried men away from God, so far our Saviour is willing to go after them to bring them back.

² "Pearson on the Creed," p. 364. McGiffert, p. 194.

³ Heb. 4: 15; 7: 25.

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It does not say, or mean, that Christ descended into hell to suffer there the torments of the lost. Such a notion was suggested late in the Middle Ages and taught by some of the reformers, even Calvin teaching something that closely resembles it—but it never occurred to the early fathers.⁴ And it should be said that this doctrine of the descent had been held and taught by many of the fathers a good while before it found a place in the Creed; indeed, it was the almost universal belief among them. Those early leaders of the Church offered various theories as to the purpose of our Lord's descent into that dread lower world; but it never occurred to any of them that he went there to be punished with the wicked. Probably this misconception of the meaning of the article accounts for most of the present reluctance to repeat it.

⁴ Pearson, p. 354. McGiffert, p. 31. “Dogmatic Theology,” by William G. T. Shedd, II, 608. Calvin's “Institutes,” Book II, Chapter XVI, 10-12.

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Some of the fathers would teach with Irenæus that "the Lord descended into the regions beneath the earth, preaching His advent there also, and declaring the remission of sins received by those who believe in him; . . . the righteous men, the prophets, and the patriarchs." And again he says, "The Lord remembered his dead saints who slept formerly in the land of sepulture; and He descended to them to rescue and save them."⁵ Tertullian,⁶ Augustine,⁷ and others use similar language.

But the fathers do not always restrict the purpose of that descent to the prophets and patriarchs and other righteous persons. Some of them will quote the famous passage from Peter's Epistle⁸

⁵ Irenæus, "Against Heresies," IV, 27, 2; V, 31.

⁶ Tertullian, "De Anima," 55.

⁷ Augustine, "City of God," XX, 15.

⁸ I Peter 3: 19, 20. Clement of Alexandria, whose date is from 153 to 217 A.D., devotes to this subject the sixth chapter of his "Stromata," in which he says: "And, as I think, the Saviour also exerts His might because it is His

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to prove that Christ descended in order to “preach to the spirits in prison;” or they will quote a magnificent saying of Paul’s, from the Epistle to the Ephesians,⁹ to prove that before Christ “ascended into heaven” “he first descended into the lowest parts of the earth”—that is, into the abodes of the dead—“to lead captivity captive.”¹⁰

I do not know whether these early commentators were right in their interpretation of these words of Peter and of Paul. The passages are obscure. The Bible

work to save; which accordingly He also did by drawing to salvation those who became willing, by the preaching, to believe on Him, wherever they were. If, then, the Lord descended to Hades for no other end but to preach the Gospel, etc.”

Origen also, whose date is from 185 to 254 A.D., says in his work “Against Celsus,” Book II, Chapter, XLIII. “When He (Jesus) became a soul, without the covering of the body, He dwelt among those souls which were without bodily covering, converting such of them as were willing to Himself.”

⁹ Eph. 4: 8-10. Cf. Col. 2: 15.

¹⁰ Irenæus, “Against Heresies,” IV, 22; V, 31. These ancient writers also make much of Peter’s words as recorded in Acts 2: 24-27, which include a quotation from Ps. xvi, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, etc.”

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does not lift the veil far enough to satisfy all our curiosity or anxiety about the dark mysteries of the future. But I have wished to quote enough of them to show as clearly as may be what this article originally meant, and with what intent it was introduced into the Creed. And surely any heart must respond to the sense of comfort which some of those early saints seem to have found in the thought of the great Captain of our Salvation going down into the dark stronghold of death, triumphing there over the great enemy, delivering and bringing back with Him certain poor prisoners who had been held under his power; thus "leading captivity captive, and giving gifts to men."

Even then there were compassionate souls who longed to believe that

"Somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;
That nothing walks with aimless feet:
That not one life shall be destroyed,

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Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.”¹¹

Pearson, in his monumental treatise on the Creed, tells us that to think that “hell was wholly emptied, that every soul was presently released from all the pains which before it suffered” was counted heresy in the early Church; but that “to believe that many were delivered” was by many counted orthodox.¹² He quotes St. Augustine at length in proof of both these assertions; but it is evident that even this most orthodox of the fathers was not unconscious of the drawing of the larger hope; for in his letter to Euodius he writes, “If we say that all who were found there were then delivered without exception, who will not rejoice if we can prove this?” He goes on, it is true, to confess his inability to prove it.¹³

¹¹ “In Memoriam,” liii.

¹² “Pearson on the Creed,” p. 370. See, also, pp. 371, 376, 377, 383.

¹³ “Letters of St. Augustine,” Letter CLXIV. The entire letter is most interesting. With a reverent sympathy which reminds one of Dante’s feeling toward Virgil, his

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We must try to deal soberly with this whole question of the future destiny of man. The Scripture teaches plainly that "now is the accepted time;" it warns us that we must strive now to enter the door while it is open, holding out no hope to any one who should keep on refusing till the door is shut. The Church has always tried faithfully to repeat these solemn admonitions of God's Word, "Knowing the terror of the Lord, she has persuaded men." Her aim has been "to keep herself pure from the blood of all, not shunning to declare unto them all the counsel of God."¹⁴

And yet the early Church also added to her Creed this article, "He descended into hell." Spite of all the dogmatists,

guide to the borders of Paradise, he speaks of the sages and patriots of pagan antiquity; and says that their virtues "please us so much that we would desire those in whom they exist, either by special preference or along with the others, to be freed from the pains of hell, were not the verdict of human feeling different from that of the justice of the Creator."

¹⁴ II Cor. 6: 2. Luke 13: 23-30. II Cor. 5: 11. Acts 20: 26, 27.

“HE DESCENDED INTO HELL”

whether priest or presbyter, it has held its place through the ages, a standing protest against a too confident eschatology. The late Professor Dorner, of Berlin, an acknowledged leader among the thinkers of our time, declares this to be an article which modern theology “eagerly welcomes.”¹⁵ Dean Alford says that “it throws blessed light on one of the darkest enigmas of the divine justice.”¹⁶ It stands as a frank confession of the inability of man to set limits to the redeeming grace of God. For that reason it is dear and comforting to some of us; and surely in making this confession the article may claim some warrant from Scripture. The parable tells us that the father saw his penitent son “when he was yet a great way off”¹⁷—“a great way off”—who shall say how far? Paul says that “where sin abounded, grace did

¹⁵ “System of Christian Doctrine,” IV, 131, 132.

¹⁶ Alford’s Greek Testament, Comment on I Peter 3: 19.

¹⁷ Luke 15: 20.

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much more abound," and prays for us that, in our knowing of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, "we may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and height and depth"—yes, "the depth of that love."¹⁸ The Psalmist of old could sing: "Though I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there,"¹⁹ and surely a Christian may have equal confidence in his Saviour's far-reaching compassion.

When I read such daring declarations from Scripture itself, it seems to me that the Creed goes none too far; and that we may well retain its article; and may find great peace in affirming with those ancient saints that our Saviour "Suffered, was crucified, dead and buried"; yes, and "descended into hell"; for it shows that we do not presume to set limits to what He is willing to do for us men and our salvation.

¹⁸ Rom. 5: 20. Eph. 3: 18, 19.

¹⁹ Ps. 139: 8.

CHAPTER V

THE EXALTATION OF OUR LORD

“The third day He rose again from the dead ; He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty ; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

IN the Creed these articles on our Lord's exaltation follow without any break (unless that of the clause noted in the last chapter) those that had set forth His humiliation; which fact reminds us, as often as we recite the Creed, how inseparable the one of those great truths is from the other.

St. Paul taught the same lesson in that great passage in the Philippians which

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has been quoted in an earlier chapter, for these same two truths are there linked by a strong wherefore; 'He became obedient unto the death of the cross; wherefore God hath highly exalted him.'¹

Our Lord Himself had taught the same lesson, saying, that "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit"; and again, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me"; again, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." And once He affirmed it as a general principle, applying to Himself and all, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it."² It appears then that we could not hope to understand what is meant by the exaltation of Jesus Christ until we know something of the bitter taste of the cup of his humiliation.

¹ Phil. 2: 8, 9.

² John 12: 24, 32. John 10: 17. Matt. 16: 25.

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“The third day He rose again from the dead.” Any creed which professed to tell anything about the Christ whom the apostles preached could hardly omit this article, for the resurrection of Christ filled a very large place in all their preaching. Until they had learned of this, their real preaching could not begin; but after they had learned of it, their preaching could not well stop. “Jesus and the resurrection,” “Jesus and the resurrection;” far away in heathen Athens men would hear Paul repeating those two words so constantly that some of them took him for a setter-forth of two strange gods bearing those two names.³ In his Epistle to the Romans he offers this as the substance of a Christian creed, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead.”⁴ So also the earlier apostles in Jerusalem, on

³ Acts 17: 18.

⁴ Rom. 10: 9.

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the day of Pentecost and afterward, made it the great subject of their message to the people of that city that the Jesus "whom ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain, God hath raised up." ⁵ And so all four of the Gospel histories reach their proper conclusion and climax in the account of that third day—the first day of the week—when our Lord Jesus rose from the dead. To that event this first day of the week, our great Christian festival, still testifies throughout the world.

As we read the sacred history we never cease to wonder at the extraordinary change appearing in those disciples after that first day of the week. Unlearned and ignorant men, up to that time their ineffectiveness had been such as one might expect from their antecedents and from their very meagre attainments. Following Jesus with a kind of dumb fidelity,

⁵ Acts 2: 23, 24.

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they were helpless except in his presence; and when death had taken Him from them they were thrown into utter despair.

But from the time when they knew Him risen, these same men stand boldly before kings and councils, and begin to march through the world with the confident tread of conquerors. What a change it was! Read of the majestic power of the Roman Empire of those days, as Gibbon describes it, for instance, in the beginning of his history; and then consider that this little despised and persecuted sect of provincials from the East was going to compel that proud empire, within less than three centuries, to accept the cross, Rome's familiar instrument of most shameful execution, as the standard of the legions, because Jesus had glorified it by dying upon it! It gives you some conception of the marvellous power set loose in the world in the preaching of these Christian apostles. But that which set this power loose

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was their conviction that Jesus, their crucified Master, had risen from the grave and shown Himself alive to them. The victory that was overcoming the world was their faith in Him. That faith had begun as a personal confidence in Him while He and they walked and talked together through the years of His earthly ministry; but their faith never gained this extraordinary effectiveness until they had seen Him crucified, and then were sure that they had seen Him alive again. No fact in the past history of the world can be more certain than that the historic cause which changed those disciples from a demoralized company of hopeless fugitives to an army of world conquerors was their conviction that their dear Lord had shown Himself to them alive after His passion by many infallible proofs.

A great German historian, who might not accept many of the beliefs that you and I hold dear, has this to say about the

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occurrences of that first Easter: "Whatever may have happened at the grave, one thing is certain—this grave is the birth-place of the indestructible belief that death is vanquished. On the conviction that Jesus lives, we still base those hopes of citizenship in an Eternal City which make our earthly life worth living and tolerable." ⁶

That is one thing historically certain. There has been a tendency in our day among a good many scholars who strive for the most rigid historical exactness to ignore much of what Paul and others have to say concerning our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, basing their view of Christianity almost altogether on what the first three Gospels tells us of His life and teachings. The method is not without value when properly employed, but when carried to this length it is strangely unhistorical. For my own part I believe

⁶ Harnack, "What is Christianity?" p. 162.

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that both Paul's epistles and also the first three Gospels give us information that we may accept with entire confidence. But if we must make any choice between those two set of writings, every Biblical critic will tell you that of all the books in our New Testament those that come to us with most unquestionable authenticity are Paul's earlier epistles, especially the Galatians, the Romans, and the two to the Corinthians. Scholars who have questioned and doubted everything else are almost unanimous in affirming that those four letters have come down to us substantially as they were written or dictated by the Apostle to the Gentiles.⁷ Therefore, so far from ignoring those let-

⁷ See, for instance, the "Pauline Theology," by George B. Stevens, p. 79. Hasting's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii, pp. 716, 717. Also Commentaries of Ellicott and Sanday on the Epistle to the Romans, and Meyer on the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Corinthians. Meyer says, concerning the genuineness of one of them, that "Bruno Bauer alone, in his wanton fashion, has sought to dispute it."

A very few later Dutch and Swiss scholars have revived

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ters, any conscientious historical inquirer would make them the starting-point for his examination of the origins of Christianity. But those four letters have almost as little to say as our Creed itself concerning our Lord's earthly life and teaching. From the first verse to the last each of them is full of Christ, but it is Christ crucified and risen. So Galatians begins, "Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised him from the dead." And to the Romans he writes, "It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."⁸ And to the Corinthians, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."⁹

Bauer's theories, but the consent of the sober scholarship of the world has not been disturbed by their eccentricities. Sanday calls their whole criticism "subjective and arbitrary"; and speaks of their theories as "hardly worth repeating."

⁸ Rom. 8: 34.

⁹ I Cor. 2: 2.

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But that means crucified and risen again ; for you remember that fifteenth chapter of the same epistle where the Apostle most carefully sets forth first the historical proof and then the infinite significance of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. If Christ be not risen, he says, ' our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain, we are found false witnesses of God, ye are yet in your sins, then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.' ¹⁰

It has been well said by Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall in a recent series of lectures—and we may believe that the reflection came to him in part from his own experiences when commending Christianity to the educated natives of India : “ The admirable zeal manifested in the study of the life of Christ is in a measure offset by the tendency to separate the example and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth from

¹⁰ I Cor. 15: 14-18.

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the Christ crucified and risen, the Christ of the apostolic consciousness and of the consecutive Christian experience of the world. With such significant discrimination are we now being pointed to the historical Christ as distinguished from the metaphysical and theological Christ, that, for the time being, the historical method is in danger of becoming unhistorical, and the teacher who seeks to represent the Jesus of history may easily misrepresent and conceal the Redeemer of the world."¹¹

Yes, if we look to these four epistles, which are our most unquestionable historic testimony concerning the origin of our religion, they tell us that the resurrection of Jesus was then held to be the article of the standing or falling church. What a flat contradiction then of historic method to ignore this great event alto-

¹¹ "The Universal Elements of the Christian Religion," pp. 141, 142.

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gether, contenting ourselves with the Sermon on the Mount, merely, and certain parables recorded in the three Gospels, books written many years later than Paul's epistles.

The Christ whom Paul and those other early Christians believed in was truly the Christ who spoke that Sermon on the Mount and those parables; but it was their faith in Him crucified and risen from the grave which made these men invincible. That was the faith that was overcoming the world; by virtue of which they were able to say to mountains, "Be ye removed, and be ye cast into the sea," and it was done, and nothing was impossible to them.

And that is the faith which still speaks in tones of glad confidence from this most ancient Creed, "the third day he rose again from the dead."

You notice once more that the language of the Creed is very simple and script-

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ural. Many questions might be asked, and have been asked, as to how it was that Christ showed Himself alive, but this Creed does not undertake to answer them. Indeed, it does not concern itself with the manner of the resurrection—beyond naming the third day, as if to insist on the definite historic reality of the event, even as the name of Pontius Pilate had already given tangible definiteness to the reality of His suffering; beyond that the Creed does not concern itself with the manner of His resurrection, but only with the fact of it. These men were satisfied that their Lord, whom they had seen crucified, had now shown Himself “alive after His passion by many infallible proofs.”¹² So we read it in the Revelation, “I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore.”¹³ So Festus described to Agrippa the preaching of Paul, “It was about one Jesus, which was

¹² Acts 1: 3.

¹³ Rev. 1: 18.

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dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”¹⁴ There was not a shadow of doubt left in their minds that the very same Jesus whom they had been learning to love and trust while He lived at their side was now alive again and showing Himself to them; identifying Himself to them; it was He Himself.¹⁵ And that is what the Church of God has continued to believe throughout the ages, and still declares in this great hymn of our faith, saying, “The third day he rose again from the dead.” He who died for men was now alive forevermore.

“He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” As was remarked in a previous chapter the language is figurative, but it is simple and scriptural, and carries our thoughts back to the simple scriptural record, how for a period of some forty days after our Lord’s resurrection the

¹⁴ Acts 25: 19.

¹⁵ Luke 24: 39.

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disciples never knew when or where He might appear to them; and meanwhile, though they had been lifted out of their despair, in this nervous expectancy they could attempt no work, and showed none of the power of faith.

But then came one more appearance and disappearance which they felt to be final for the time. They felt that the period of transition was now ending, and that they were now about to receive power to do the work to which their Lord had called them. The Scripture describes it in these words: "While they were beholding, he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight."¹⁶ Whatever the actual event may have been which those words describe, that is what our Creed affirms in the phrase, "he ascended into heaven." But then it goes on, without any break in the thought, to say, "He sitteth at the right hand of God the Father

¹⁶ Acts 1: 9.

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Almighty"; and I suppose that shows us best what the article means. "The right hand of God," in the strong style of Hebrew poetry, means that our Lord is now on the throne of power. It is the fulfilment of His own Word as recorded at the end of Matthew's Gospel, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."¹⁷ And notice the Creed, as well as the Scripture, puts it in the present tense: "He sitteth—He is sitting at the right hand of God." This was the vision that cheered the soul of the martyr Stephen, Jesus, his Master, now "on the right hand of God."¹⁸ It took a prophet like Stephen to see that vision—one whose eyes were opened to look into the heavens; but the vision, whether men saw it or not, was true; and in the Creed we declare our faith in the truth of it; we believe that all power has been given to the crucified one; we believe that in spite of the apparent

¹⁷ Matt. 28: 18.

¹⁸ Acts 7: 55, 56.

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triumphs of ungodliness He who offered His life for the world is now sitting on the throne of the world. Oh! that is a wonderful faith if you can believe it, and truthfully declare it. A man who could believe that with all his heart could do anything, it seems to me; all other things would seem easy by comparison; to believe that all power is given to our Lord Jesus, that patient sufferer, that Lamb of God, and that He is sitting now on the throne of the world.

But we can better understand all this if we continue to the next clause, which is needed to complete the statement of what our Lord's resurrection means. "From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." You notice that while the last assertion was in the present tense, this stands in the future.¹⁹ Those early saints declared their faith that their Lord

¹⁹ So also in the Latin; in the Greek the verb is in the present tense, but with an evidently future signification, "he is coming."

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was already on the throne, but they believed that He should sometime come again to judge the world.

Undoubtedly many of those men expected to see that glorious second advent of Christ in their own time. The language of Paul himself in his earlier epistles implies such an expectation on his part—that he, as well as some of those to whom he wrote, would be alive and remaining to meet Christ in the air.²⁰

When Paul was writing his last letter to Timothy from the Roman dungeon, he had learned to think otherwise of this; he knew then that “the time of his own departure was at hand.”²¹ He was not to remain alive till the coming of the Lord. Thus it is that God’s revelations to His servants are interpreted by the later course of His providence. And the Church has now enjoyed more than eighteen hundred years of such interpretation

²⁰ I Thes. 4: 17.

²¹ II Tim. 4: 6.

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that had not been granted to Paul. Some things that were hidden from him ought to be plain to us. The times and seasons that are still before us, we cannot know; but many of the times and seasons which were then before him are now behind us, so that we can read them as history.

Paul was put to death a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, but we can see now that that dread event fulfilled some of the predictions of Christ's coming to judge the world. Paul died centuries before the fall of Rome; but we can now see in that also the fulfilment of much that the Scripture says about the coming judgment of the world. So again in the great contests of the sixteenth century, and in other of God's providential dealings with nations and with men. It was an illuminating utterance of Lord Bacon, recorded somewhere in his works, that "prophecy has a springing and germinant fulfilment." It is not fulfilled all at

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once and once for all. These words of prophetic truth are so vitally true that they go on fulfilling themselves over and over, ever more and more completely—"a springing and germinant fulfilment"; like the seed that springs up and grows and grows toward the full stature of the tree.

Both Testaments give us prophecies of a future divine judgment, all declaring that some day all things on earth will have to be brought to the test of the divine approval, with "a removing of those things that are shaken, that those things that cannot be shaken may remain."²² So the wise man of old declared that, "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."²³

Indeed, that such a testing must come sometime and somewhere has always been the conviction of all thoughtful men.

²² Heb. 12: 27.

²³ Eccl. 12: 14.

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The old pagans believed in their Nemesis, that divine principle of vengeance which would surely overtake men at the last.²⁴ So our great dramatist makes poor Macbeth cry that, "This even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips."²⁵ So our great President in his second inaugural stirred the heart of the nation with dread of those judgments of the Lord which "are true and righteous altogether." There is nothing peculiar to Christianity in this thought. It has been a universal human presentiment that somehow and somewhere all things and all men must stand before their judge. The Creed Christianizes that human presentiment when it names the judge; it is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the walls of the Sistine Chapel at Rome Michael Angelo painted his great picture of "The Last Judgment." It

²⁴ See Acts 28: 4.

²⁵ Macbeth, Act I, Scene vii.

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shows the earth and the sea giving up their dead; all the people of all the ages appearing before their judge for sentence, and the judge is Christ. It is among the greatest of pictures, and it is Christian in so far as it tries to put Christ on the throne; but I do not believe the picture is truly Christian either in the quality of the judgment or in the face of the judge. For looking at the hard expression on that countenance, I fail to find there any trace of Him who, when a certain wretched woman was brought before him, said to her accusers, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," and then stooped and wrote upon the ground; and when He lifted Himself, and saw that the accusers were all gone, none of them condemning her, He said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more."²⁶

The Sistine Chapel was built and

John 8: 1-11.

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adorned under orders from Pope Julius II, that ambitious and unscrupulous ruler who in full panoply used to ride at the head of his own armies, leading them into battle. Do you think that the servant of such a master, though endowed with all of Michael Angelo's genius, could have been expected to catch the expression on the face of our judge? That Jesus who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, descended into hell—He it is who shall come again to judge the world. We do not forget Paul's "wherefore," that strong link by which he binds the exaltation of Christ inseparably to his humiliation.

No, we are very glad to remember it. Amid the many mysteries of temptation and ruin that darken this present world, where the victim who suffers most is so often more sinned against than sinning, how comforting it is to reflect that He who was known of old as the friend of such

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sinner, and who gave His life for sinful men, that Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, is to be the judge of the world. Yes, it was a lamb as it had been slain who was seen in the midst of the throne.²⁷

But the most terrible phrase in all Scripture is "the wrath of the Lamb." Michael Angelo himself could not paint a scene that should make men tremble as does that which John has painted in the Revelation, where the people were heard crying to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb";²⁸ or that still more terrible scene which Christ Himself has painted in His great parable of the judgment, "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them, one from the other, and shall say

²⁷ Rev. 5: 6.

²⁸ Rev. 6: 15-17.

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unto them on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father'; and unto them on the left hand, 'Depart.' " ²⁹

Some years ago a discussion was conducted in the pages of an English magazine between two great English thinkers. Mr. Huxley, arguing against the Christian position, and attempting to quote this twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, said that according to the Christian Bible men would be condemned, 'because of mere errors of religious opinion, to depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' Mr. Gladstone, responding in the next number of the review, courteously corrected the misquotation, and showed that according to Scripture the Judge spoke that stern sentence against those on His left hand, not because of mere errors of opinion, but because they had given no meat to the hungry, no drink to the thirsty, no clothes to the

²⁹ Matt. 25: 31-46.

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naked, no comfort to the lonely. That was the ground of condemnation. You might be sure of it when you remember who this Judge is that sits upon the throne, that He is the Son of man, who came into the world, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many";³⁰ thereby establishing the great principle of judgment according to which sooner or later all things human will have to be decisively and finally judged. The principle is that of ministry, of ransoming, of giving the life, or living the life, for others. Whoever stubbornly rejects that principle, refusing to live his life for others, rather forcing others to live their lives for him, must expect to come under a condemnation against which there is no appeal.

For Christ's principle is going to prevail, so we believe; He is on the throne

³⁰ Matt. 20: 28.

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of power; He is sitting on the right hand of God. Do you see the terribly practical import of these doctrines of our Lord's heavenly session and second advent? If you rid your mind of extravagant millenarian curiosity, and ask what practical lesson he who readeth is intended to understand, the lesson is just this: that the final judgment of the world is not only to be made sure, as all thoughtful persons have expected, by an All-Seeing Eye and an Almighty Arm, but that it is to be conducted strictly according to the standards of rectitude established by Jesus Christ. That is what we confess when, with the Church of all ages, we affirm that this Jesus who died for the world is now on the throne of the world, and shall come to judge the world. We confess that all the institutions and possessions and acts and characters of men will have to appear before Him to be tested according to His standards.

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The slow process of history, with its fall of Jerusalem or of Rome, with its Protestant Reformation, its French Revolution, its American Civil War, is but the steady registering of the irreversible sentence of Jesus Christ concerning men and things.

He hath sounded forth the trumpet
That shall never call retreat:
He is sifting out the hearts of men
Before His judgment seat.

The judgment still goes on. Our own American nation—you yourself the reader of these pages, or I the writer of them; my property, and the methods by which I made it, and the title by which I hold it; your neighbor, and his reputation and social standing; the church to which either of us belongs, with its worship and all its various plans of work—they are all on trial, under investigation. The one thing we have to dread most for any of them is what the Bible calls “the wrath

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of the Lamb." For if ever that gentle and most compassionate nature should be stirred to fiery indignation—if 'the great day of his wrath should come, who would be able to stand?'

Michael Angelo's great Pope, had he lived to see his splendid chapel finished, with its great picture of "The Judgment," would have enjoyed the picture no doubt, for Julius was a liberal patron of the arts. But suppose that so-called vicar of Christ had caught sight of the look on the face of the real Jesus—the Jesus whom he himself was professing to represent to the world; the Jesus who gave His life for the world, and who is now sitting at the right hand of God—it may be that that ambitious and blood-stained pontiff, his eyes at last opened to that vision, would have cried to the roof of his own splendid chapel to fall about his head and hide him from the wrath of the Lamb.

But I do not know. God forgive us! it

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is not for us to judge one another any more. But it is for all reciters of this ancient Creed solemnly to remind one another, and for each to take to heart for himself, how much it means, when we say :
“I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord ; Who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried ; He descended into hell ; the third day He rose again from the dead : He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty : From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

CHAPTER VI

THE HOLY GHOST

"I believe in the Holy Ghost: The Holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints: The forgiveness of sins."

THE earlier part of the Creed has been holding our attention fast on Jesus Christ; the Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, who the third day rose again, and shall come to judge the quick and the dead. This Creed has been so framed as to declare our personal faith in Him.

We also observed that this Creed was first designed for use as a baptismal confession; but for that use it would need to be a confession of personal faith in Christ, for the earliest records of Chris-

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tian baptism tell us that the converts were baptized, every one of them, "in the name of Jesus Christ."¹ There is reason to suppose that at the very first, at Pentecost and for a little after, the only name spoken at the baptism, either by minister or convert, was the name of Jesus Christ.

We can well understand why it should be so. His personality was the one thing that had made religion real to these converts. It was when they saw His face that they began to believe in holiness and heaven and God. They had been as sheep going astray, wandering about the lonely wilderness of the world, but were now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. This Jesus Christ, the crucified, the risen—this was their confession of faith. They were baptized therefore into His name, and the creed that sprang from their lips was, "I believe in Him."

¹ Acts 2: 38.

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But if the simple name of Jesus was thus the earliest creed, and the earliest baptismal formula, we know that the formula was soon enlarged to what we find prescribed in the closing verses of Matthew's Gospel, and what we still use at baptism in our churches—that is, “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” This, however, should not be taken as a new formula or creed, but only the old enlarged, the meaning coming out more clearly as men meditated on it longer.

For who was this Jesus Christ but the Son of God? That had been always the deepest item of His own personal consciousness that God was His Father; and for men to know Him was necessarily to become aware of His sense of a filial relation to God. Therefore, to believe in Jesus was to begin to believe in the Father of whom He spoke; and so those who believed in Jesus might well be bap-

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tized into the twofold name of the Father and the Son.

But the complete formula of baptism, as we have it in Matthew, gives a threefold name, and its third title, the Holy Ghost, is what we come to now in our study of the Creed; but what I should like to make plain first of all is that for those early confessors this third title was also part of their personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

The name Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, taken by itself, would mean God revealing His presence spiritually in the heart of a man. Such a revelation had long been somewhat familiar, for all the ancient prophets testified to it. But now when these early Christians began to confess their faith in the Holy Ghost, they meant something more than that, something which the old prophets had not known, something which their Lord Jesus had lately bestowed upon them. And this

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was something that He had promised to them while He was still with them upon the earth. He had told them that it was expedient for them that He should go away; for if He went away He would send into their hearts such a spiritual presence and power as would make Him nearer and dearer to them than He had been before He went away. This Spirit coming into their hearts would enable them to understand His teachings as they never could while He was visibly with them. This Spirit coming into their hearts would enable them in His name to do greater works than He and they had ever done together.² More than that, this Spirit coming into their hearts would fulfil His own promises to them, "Lo, I am with you alway," and, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you."³ So He had said, and on the day of Pentecost they began to find

² John 14: 12, 16, 17, 26; 15: 26; 16: 7.

³ Matt. 28: 20. John 14: 18-23.

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the saying true; and this presence of their unseen Lord with them continued to be a blessed and unquestionable experience with them as long as they lived. That definite experience, beginning at Pentecost, and uniting them forever with their unseen Lord, was in the minds of those early confessors when they said, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." It was only putting into plainer words, therefore, a part of what they had in mind when they had said, "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"; for this was that new spiritual presence which their Lord Jesus had promised them, and now bestowed upon them, and in which He was manifesting His continued presence with them.

In the later development of Christian doctrine this term Holy Ghost has come to stand for various obscurer meanings. It has started mysterious questions as to the divine essence—the three persons, as we say, in one God. The attempt to an-

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swer those questions was probably inevitable, but it has not always been satisfactory. The earliest and noblest of these attempts was the Nicene Creed, partly formulated in the year 325, and completed in 381.

We have seen how that creed, by its article on the Second Person of the Trinity, was partly responsible for the cruel schism which split the Church into two almost equal parties under Athanasius and Arius;⁴ and now we have to admit that its article on the Third Person of the Trinity is partly responsible for another schism which still helps to hold apart the churches of the East and the West; for the entire Eastern Church when it repeats the Nicene Creed declares, "I believe in the Holy Ghost . . . who proceedeth from the Father"; while the Western Church when it repeats the Nicene Creed insists on declaring, "I believe in the

⁴ See the third chapter of this book.

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Holy Ghost who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." That phrase, "and the Son" ("filioque," as it is in Latin), for a thousand years and more has been largely responsible for this most cruel wound of the body of Christ. Oh! I like our older Creed, for the very reason that it is not so ambitious, but is willing to leave some of these disturbing questions alone. "I believe in the Holy Ghost," it says. Why say more?

Who is the Holy Ghost? Repeat to yourself the promises of your Lord; remember the day of Pentecost; nay, Christian, commune with your own heart and be still, and that article will interpret itself well enough to you. "I believe in the Holy Ghost." What further confession do we need?

But then the Apostles' Creed goes on to say, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church," and this is really a practical continuation of the article on the Holy Ghost.

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Omit this and there might be danger that some of us would not rightly understand the doctrine of the Holy Ghost. For we are discussing the Christian doctrine of the Holy Ghost, and that is not complete till you bring in the thought of the Church, the united company of believers. I say this is the Christian doctrine. In the olden times, before Christ came, good men had sometimes felt the power of the Spirit of God, but it was apt to be for them a very solitary experience. It is true, as Professor Irving F. Wood has said, that 'the Spirit was not given to the prophet for his individual behoof . . . but for the good of the people of Jehovah.' * Nevertheless the prophets were lonely characters, only one or two to a generation. Speak of the prophets and we think of Moses by the burning bush, or Elijah at Horeb listening to the still small voice, or John Baptist in the wilderness. If you

* "The Spirit of God in Biblical Literature," p. 11.

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wish to cover this entire spiritual experience of the ancient prophets by one form of verbal benediction, you might call it "the individualism of the Holy Ghost."

The Christian benediction is "the communion or fellowship of the Holy Ghost";⁵ and this new phrase only shows what a strange new thing Jesus Christ had brought to pass in the world. This Jesus, God's dear Son, who loved men enough to die for them, and who had told men that as He loved them so they must love one another, and that in this way they must be known as His disciples even by their love for one another—He had now brought it to pass for those disciples that the spiritual presence of God in their hearts, as realized on the day of Pentecost, should become a collective experience of the whole company, one which they shared with one another. It was so

⁵ II Cor. 13: 14.

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that He had promised it to them—collectively, not individually. “I am with you alway,”⁶ He said—“with you”; not with thee, and with thee, and with thee; but “with you alway.” “I will come to you.” “The Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth.”⁷ It was a promise of the fellowship of the Spirit, and it was made to this fellowship of disciples. And so it came to pass on Pentecost that they were all with one accord together in one place, when suddenly they were filled with the Holy Ghost, the fiery baptism resting upon each of that company; and then the disciples, being filled with that Spirit, continued in the Apostles’ fellowship, and even endeavored to have all things common; for they had received the fellowship of the Spirit, and it bound them together into this sacred unity.

And this is what the Creed teaches, when, after saying “I believe in the Holy

⁶ Matt. 28: 20.

⁷ John 16: 13.

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Ghost," it goes right on to say, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." The Church is nothing else than the united company of all those who are bound to each other by this common experience of the one Spirit of fellowship which Christ has bestowed upon them all.

The Creed declares this Church to be holy; and so it must be, if it is the habitation of the Holy Spirit of God. As Paul says, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you—the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."⁸ If God dwells in this temple, the temple must be holy; that term in the article needs little explanation.

But the next term may need more explanation, "the Holy Catholic Church." Some of us had fallen into a habit of speech by which that phrase "Catholic Church" would be used as a proper name

⁸ I Cor. 3: 16, 17.

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equivalent to "the Church of Rome." I wish our more frequent recitation of this ancient Creed might correct that misuse of language. Catholic is simply the Greek word for general or universal. The Westminster Confession of Faith defines it admirably when it says that "the visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children." The Te Deum, that ancient hymn, defining it, says, "The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee." Now in the Apostles' Creed we declare our faith in this world-wide catholicity or wholeness of the Church of Christ.

This term Catholic is a very important term, and for various reasons. For one thing it continually reminds us of our Lord's command to "go teach all na-

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tions.”⁹ This blessed fellowship of the Spirit into which we have now been welcomed is intended not for us alone but for all the people of the whole world, and must be offered to them all. So was the Spirit promised in that great saying of the risen Christ recorded in the first chapter of the Acts: “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Christ Himself joins the gift of the Holy Ghost to this world-wide catholicity of His Church. It is all one doctrine, as taught by the Master. And that is one point in which this term “Catholic” shows its great practical importance.

But then, for another thing, this large word “Catholic” keeps us ever mindful of Christ’s large promise to His disciples,

⁹ Matt. 28: 19. “Pearson on the Creed,” p. 528.

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that 'the Spirit of truth shall guide them into all truth.'¹⁰ A Catholic church must show catholicity of mind by holding herself ready to welcome all that the Lord has to teach her.

But again, and more especially, this word "Catholic" sounds its warning against any disciple of Christ who would be willing to divide the one body of His Church into little sects and parties. As often as I, who happen to be a Presbyterian, confess my faith in the Catholic Church, I solemnly declare that this small Presbyterian group of Christians is not the Church of Christ, but only a part of it; and not even a worthy part of it, unless we Presbyterians are doing what we can to maintain a vital fellowship and unity with all the other parts; so I believe in the Catholic Church.

We may well take example from the ancient Church of Rome in that she so

¹⁰ John 16: 13.

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loves and honors this great thought of catholicity; but it seems to some of us that that particular branch of the Church has not always succeeded perfectly in embodying the thought in her own practice; because she has sometimes endeavored to excommunicate or forcibly disfellowship many who confess the name of Christ and are evidently filled with His Spirit. But whoever in any branch of the Church is responsible for such exclusion of those whom Christ by the gift of His Spirit owns for His disciples—whether the exclusion be on the ground of certain orders of ministry, or certain forms of baptism, or certain peculiarities of doctrine, as if we Presbyterians should stubbornly insist on maintaining unchanged a particular confession of faith, even if it must shut out from our fellowship Methodist brethren, or Cumberland brethren, whom we admit to be quite as good Christians as ourselves — whoever is responsible for

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any such exclusion and division, offends against the catholicity of the Church. So it was long ago in Corinth: "Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" ¹¹ There was great danger that those jealous partisans and schismatics in the Church of Corinth, forfeiting the catholicity of the Church, would lose their share of this Christian blessing of the Holy Spirit.

It is a splendid phrase this "Catholic Church," if you can only keep in mind its true meaning. It appears, however, that these early confessors came to be afraid lest some might miss the true meaning of it, for they soon added to their creed a further explanation, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints." That added phrase shows what

¹¹ I Cor. 1: 12, 13.

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“Catholic” really means. The “saints” are the holy; it might be either holy things or holy people;¹² and “communion” is this same word fellowship, or, literally, partnership. The men who first brought this term into Christian use were Peter and Andrew and James and John, four men who used to be partners in their trade when they were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee.¹³ The word as those men introduced it must carry very practical meanings; and it was under their instruction that the early Christians learned to believe in what they called the communion of the Holy Spirit, and also the communion of saints, or partnership of the holy. It means that if any man desires his own share of the Holy, he must be willing to come into this partnership of the holy,

¹² In the original the word for holy may be either masculine or neuter; but we are not likely to surrender the magnificent phrase of our English version—the communion of saints. It is worth noting that in the New Testament the word saints is always used in the plural.

¹³ Luke 5: 7.

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and abide there. Any disciple, therefore, who should cut himself off from this partnership of believers would have no right to claim his share in the promised Holy Spirit of God.

We cannot assert this too emphatically. Any church, or any individual, standing wilfully aloof from the universal fellowship of Christ's people, has no right to claim Christ's promise of the Holy Ghost. For that promise was made to the disciples, not individually, but collectively, as a partnership.

Of all the New Testament teachers the one most distinguished for personal independence was the Apostle Paul. "The Gospel which was preached of me is not after man," he said, "for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." "When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me, I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to

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them which were apostles before me.”¹⁴ Peculiar circumstances compelled that man thus to insist upon his own apostolic standing as fully equal in dignity to that of the older apostles, and therefore to magnify the importance of the revelation which had come directly to him.

Yet even this Paul, though converted by a vision from heaven, when he asked the Lord what he should do, was sent into Damascus to the nearest Christian church to be told by old Ananias what he must do.¹⁵ And afterward when he was writing to the Corinthians concerning an important question which had perplexed them, after quoting the authority of one of Christ's own commandments which partly covered the case, he then went on to say, “To the rest speak I, not the Lord,” and so proceeds to give his own opinion at some length, closing with these remarkable words, “this is my judgment,

¹⁴ Gal. 1: 11, 12, 15-17.

¹⁵ Acts 9: 6, 17.

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and I think that I have the spirit of God."

"I think that I have."¹⁶

Contrast that very hesitating assertion with the confident words used at another time when this Paul and Peter and James and all the other apostles and elders in Jerusalem were gathered together, considering certain important questions; and after they had reached a happy agreement among themselves, they drew up a letter embodying their common view, and sent it out to all the churches, and it reads, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us."¹⁷

"I think I have the Spirit of God"—
"It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." What an extraordinary difference in tone between those two sayings! So long as a good man was considering such questions thoughtfully and prayer-

¹⁶ I Cor. 7: 40.

¹⁷ Acts 15: 28. See, also, Acts 13: 2. "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul," etc.

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fully, but by himself alone, even though he were an inspired apostle, the most that he ventured to say was, "This is my judgment: and I think I have the Spirit of God." But so soon as he and his brethren, thoughtfully and prayerfully considering such questions together, had been led to a common judgment about them—so soon as their fellowship with each other had been thus perfectly established—they could rest fearlessly on their Lord's promise, and feel sure that it was the Spirit of all Truth that was thus holding them together and leading them on.

Ever the fiery Pentecost
Girds with one flame the countless host.

Perhaps you have known people who put this great doctrine of the Holy Spirit to quite the opposite use, making it an encouragement to their private vanity and exclusiveness; the more their own extravagant opinions have separated them

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from all other Christians, and the smaller their own little coterie has become, so much the surer they seem to feel that they themselves are led of the Spirit, and that no one else is. It was very different among the apostles. With them the doctrine of the Holy Ghost was one which promoted fellowship and conciliation and personal humility. In those days the fact that any Christian differed from all his brethren would be strong presumptive evidence to them and to him that he had failed to hear the Spirit rightly. It was not till all the good brethren—even those so unlike as James and Paul—succeeded in coming together that they could say confidently, “This is what seems good to the Holy Ghost, and to us.”¹⁸

Oh! we shall never know how much is meant by that name, “the Holy Ghost,”

¹⁸ The Vatican Council in 1870 proclaimed its novel dogma of Papal Infallibility; but from ancient times the test had been, “quod semper, quod ubique, et quod ab omnibus.”

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or how much our Christianity itself means, until all these many little parties—of Paul and Apollos and Cephas; or nowadays of Rome and Moscow and Geneva and Edinburgh and Canterbury—have been drawn together into some common sense of their vital unity with one another. Yes, and more than that, till this Gospel has been preached also to all the nations of the earth; so that all the different sorts of people whom God has ever made, east and west and north and south, receiving through Christ their several shares of the Spirit, and contributing their several share of the testimony, at last the Church of Christ becoming truly “Catholic” shall be able to show forth the full glories of His redemption.

When Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall was lecturing in India three years ago on “Christian Belief as Interpreted by Christian Experience,” he closed the series with these notable words: “When

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I permit myself to contemplate the blessing that would come to the Western world if the great religious East were to become the teacher and interpreter of the religion of Jesus Christ, my heart burns within me. Again and again in the course of these lectures I have reiterated my conviction that the Christianity of the West has been, in many ways, an inadequate and imperfect illustration of the uncorrupted essence of the faith of Christ. . . . In the day when the vigor of the West and the insight of the East shall be joined by a true union of hearts for the interpretation and practice of the faith of Jesus Christ, then, and not till then, shall the unspeakable Gift of God be understood, appreciated, and expressed on earth." ¹⁹

More than twenty years ago Phillips Brooks wrote from that same country:

¹⁹ "Christian Belief as Interpreted by Christian Experience," pp. 246, 247.

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"I long to see Christianity come here, not merely for what it will do for India, but for what India will do for it. Here it must find again the lost oriental side of its brain and heart."

Yes, this article must be said through to the last syllable if one would be sure that he is not misunderstanding it: "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints."

And "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." But why should that be included in this short Creed, and included just at this point? What has the forgiveness of sins to do with our faith in the Holy Spirit, or in the Church? Well, you must remember once more that this Creed first came into use as a baptismal confession; the Creed is a putting into plainer words what is meant by baptizing men into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, even as that was only putting into plainer words what had been

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meant by baptizing men into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Take, for instance, a new convert, like that jailer at Philippi who had always been a heathen, but was now asking what he must do to be saved; and he heard the answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"; and it became evident that he did believe, he and all his house. In token of their new faith and allegiance, it says, "they were baptized straight-way."²⁰ Now this Apostles' Creed—of course the actual Creed had not been put into its present shape till a little later than those days—but in substance this Creed was what any such converted heathen, presenting himself for Christian baptism, would be moved to say.

Remembering this, do you wonder that the new confessor made sure to say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins?" Ah! he knew well that there were sins of his

²⁰ Acts 16: 33.

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own that needed confessing, and he came up for baptism because he believed in their forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

You remember how it was at the very first administration of Christian baptism on the day of Pentecost—though there the converts were Jews, not heathen—listening to Peter's sermon, they were pricked in their heart, and they cried out, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" And Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."²¹ And so they did; and about three thousand of them, repenting of their sins, and baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, were added to the Apostles' fellowship, and thenceforth continued in it.

No wonder then that every new confessor from that day to this, when presenting himself for reception into the fel-

²¹ Acts 2: 38.

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lowship of the Christian Church, should be expected to say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."²² And we may well say it, not only at our first admission into the Church, but as often as we come together on the Lord's day to worship Him; for we cannot be reminded too often that we have all come to Him with sins to confess, and in sore need of forgiveness. But then as often as we remember our need of God's forgiveness, we must also remember the word of Christ, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."²³ Thus the true Church of Christ is made up of people who are bound to Him, and bound to one another, by this common recollection of forgiven sin. We must never cease to believe in

²² In the Nicene Creed the corresponding article reads: "I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins."

²³ Matt. 6: 14, 15.

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forgiveness, therefore, as one of the fundamental articles of Christian faith, and to practise it as one of the primary Christian duties, else we shall be grieving the Holy Ghost. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."²⁴ "I believe in the Holy Ghost: the Holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints: The Forgiveness of sins."

So I have been trying to show that these four phrases which have engaged our study in this chapter all belong together under the third part of that blessed name into which we are baptized.

But neither are we to forget that this

²⁴ Eph. 4: 30-32.

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threefold name into which we are baptized only tells more fully what the earliest converts had confessed when they were baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. This Apostles' Creed throughout all its articles never ceases to be most intensely Christian; and you cannot be sure of understanding a single phrase in it except as you keep on thinking of Him. He is our Creed; for we believe in Him.

CHAPTER VII

ETERNAL LIFE

“I believe in the Resurrection of the body : And the Life everlasting. Amen.”

THE word “Amen” indicates that we have now come to the end of this ancient confession of faith. Indeed it might seem that the last chapter had brought us to the proper ending of it. For this Apostles’ Creed, being the baptismal confession of the early Church, was simply a fuller statement of that threefold name into which the early Christians were baptized, “the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” The third part of the Creed, therefore, must treat of the third part of that name, “the Holy Ghost.” This was the Spirit which Jesus

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had bestowed upon His disciples; a spirit of sacred fellowship binding them together into the one body of the Church. If any of us wish to claim our share of this fellowship, we must come with humble confession of our own sin. So we found this third part of the Creed reading, "I believe in the Holy Ghost: the Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints: the Forgiveness of sins." And that might seem to complete our confession of faith in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Yet evidently there is another word that ought to be added to that, for some one would be sure to ask, "What has this faith in a risen Christ to do with the fact of our own human mortality? You say that He died and rose again; that death has no more dominion over Him; but how is it for us who are also appointed to die—and for our friends?" That always has been, and still is, one of the great questions of the human soul; What

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are we mortal men to look for after death?

And the early Church believed that their faith in a risen Christ had given them a sure and triumphant answer to that question. For they were confident that their Lord's resurrection was not a mere solitary phenomenon of the past; but that He rose from the dead to become "the firstfruits of them that slept";¹ that He had gone up to His Father's house to prepare a place there for all the other children;² that the Father's house was spacious enough to furnish a mansion for every member of the household; "that he died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."³ That is what those early Christians believed, and therefore that is what they must confess; and so their confession of faith in Christ will not end until they have spoken these words which it remains for

¹ I Cor. 15: 20.

² John 14: 2.

³ I Thes. 5: 10.

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us to study in this concluding chapter, "I believe in the Resurrection of the body and the Life everlasting. Amen."

No Christian believer, indeed no one who believes in personal immortality, could well object to that second phrase, "the Life everlasting"; but some will shake their heads over the first phrase, "the Resurrection of the body." I should like to justify that phrase, also, if I can. Let me say first that one word in this article was changed by those who translated it into English, and I am glad of it. In the Greek, and also in the Latin, it read, "the resurrection of the flesh"; in some of the earlier forms of the creed it had read, "the resurrection of this flesh,"⁴ as if to affirm in the most positive way possible the complete material identity of this fleshly body which we now inhabit with the body which shall be ours after the resurrection. I am glad the

⁴ "Pearson on The Creed," p. 562.

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translators changed that word flesh. I do not see how such a phrase could be easily reconciled with what most of us now believe, or with what the Scriptures teach. The Apostle says that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God";⁵ and, explaining the resurrection, he says that when any man sows seed in the ground, he sows not that body that shall be, but bare grain, and "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him."⁶ The phrase "resurrection of the flesh," would seem unscriptural, and in danger of misleading; still worse, the phrase "resurrection of this flesh." But happily that fact need not disturb us, for our English translators in the days of Henry VIII, led by some spirit of wisdom, dropped the unscriptural term "flesh" and restored the truly scriptural term "body";⁷ so that

⁵ I Cor. 15: 50.

⁶ I Cor. 15: 37, 38.

⁷ McGiffert, p. 169. In the baptismal office the English Prayer-Book retains "flesh."

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our own present concern is with this "resurrection of the body." Does this honestly express our own faith?

But you may ask what real difference does it make which word you use, flesh or body, and that is the question which we must now try to answer. The word flesh has a materialistic content; it always makes one think of the particular material particles now belonging to me. But if I were asked whether this flesh, this identical material body, is to rise again from the grave, I must say, "Which flesh do you mean? Is it the fleshly body the man was born with, or the one he happened to die with? Is it the flesh I was using last year or that which I use now? or that which I shall use, if I live, a year hence?" For we all understand now that our bodies, in their material fleshly particles, never remain two days the same, nor two hours the same. So long as we live we have to change these fleshly bodies as cer-

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tainly as we change the clothes that cover them; and sometimes far more rapidly, for many a man will continue to wear some part of his wardrobe years longer than he wears any part of his material body. The particles of your body are like the drops of water in the current of a river. The river holds its course indefinitely, but the particular drops of water—they were in the clouds yesterday, and they will be in the ocean to-morrow. And so it is with these bits of matter which I am pleased to call my body. They are mine to use to-day; but I know not where they were yesterday, and I cannot guess where they will be to-morrow.

Yet in spite of this ever-flowing current of change, my body in an important sense stays the same body as long as I live; but we know now that it is the same not through any identity of material particles of flesh—it is rather an identity of form, of cause and effect, of habit, of power;

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or, to put it in a single phrase, of regulative vital principle. But what is that vital principle which regulates my body, and keeps it always one and the same as long as I live? Why, it is nothing else than the breath of life that is in me, my soul, my own innermost self. And if that principle has been strong enough to maintain my complete personal identity this side of the grave, I believe it can go on maintaining it the other side.

When we say, "I believe in the resurrection of the body," we are not raising any questions one way or the other about these material particles of flesh; hold what opinion you choose about that; but the Creed affirms—that is, the Bible affirms—that the same vital principle which has been maintaining my personal identity here will go on maintaining it there; yes, and furthermore that it will go on serving itself, and clothing or housing itself, as successfully over there

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through all that long future, as here through this brief past. For listen to the Apostle, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."⁸ What a magnificent declaration that is, and how it appeals to all the highest instincts of the human soul—"Not unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

That is Paul's own doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Are you prepared to repudiate it? If you do, what is the alternative? Read your Homer and Virgil, and the other poets of Greece and Rome, and see what the future meant to those poor old pagans—a dark world of miserable, shivering, disembodied shades, without power or joy, with no proper sphere of activity, the least miserable of them longing to change places even with

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the most miserable of living men; a barely conscious existence, it amounted to nothing more than a regretful memory of the old earthly life. That was the pagan's best thought of the future, and it is fairly paraphrased in the suggestion that death should "unclothe" men, leaving them forever naked and miserable. So Homer makes the shade of Achilles answer Ulysses's well-meant attempts at consolation: "Nay, speak not comfortably to me of death, O great Odysseus! Rather would I live on ground as the hireling of another, with a landless man who had no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead that be departed. . . . Ah, could I but come for an hour to my father's house as I then was!"

So Virgil, though his account is somewhat less depressing than Homer's, tells how Æneas, visiting the lower world, saw the shade of his father, Anchises:

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“Thrice with his arms he essayed the beloved one’s
neck to embrace,
Thrice clasped vainly; the phantom eluded his hands
in flight,
Thin as the idle breezes, and like some dream of the
night.”

Homer had given Ulysses the same poor success in his effort to embrace the shade of his mother: “Thrice I sprang toward her, and was minded to embrace her; thrice she flitted from my hands as a shadow or even as a dream, and grief waxed ever the sharper at my heart.”

According to the Greek poet, it appears that two worthies could hardly meet in that lower world without moans and tears. But his most pathetic confession of the dreary insubstantiality of all human hope beyond the grave is when he makes Ulysses meet Hercules (whom they took for more than human): “After him I descried the mighty Heracles, I mean, his phantom; but *as for himself he hath*

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*joy at the banquet among the deathless gods.”*⁹

That celestial banquet, rather than this dreary world of phantoms, would seem to offer some hint of the Christian hope of immortality; but that banquet was held to be for the gods, not for common mortals.

Paul, as a Christian, knew that we should not be thus “unclothed, but clothed upon.” What we have to look forward to is not a process of subtraction but of addition. All that this body has been meaning to me in this world—of sense, and growing knowledge and power, and manifested identity—all that and more my Christian faith promises me in the world beyond. For even if this natural body should wear out and be dissolved, my faith promises me something which it is fair to call, as the Apostle calls

⁹ Homer’s “Odyssey,” Book XI; Virgil’s “Æneid,” Book VI.

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it, "a spiritual body."¹⁰ My Lord's own victory over the grave has given this assurance to all His people, that there is for them in the spiritual life beyond something that shall mean to them all of advantage that this natural body has ever meant to us in the life here on earth; that death shall not condemn us to the shivering nakedness of pagan despair; that we shall not be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life.

At the same time I am well assured that all the rich and novel experiences of that unknown future shall never rob me of this personal identity to which I cling so fondly now—for myself and for my friends; for the very principle of this identity—which all through my life has been ordering all these changing particles of matter into one body for me—has been nothing else than the breath of life in me, my own

¹⁰ I Cor. 15: 44.

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living self. And I myself, blessed be God, am going to live on. That which always has been ordering this identity for me here shall live on and serve the same purpose there. It is a mystery, of course, for all life is. "Behold I show you a mystery," ¹¹ was what Paul said about it; and he does not claim to have shown it all. None of us would profess to know all that the words mean. But the mystery grows radiant through our Lord's great triumph over corruption and death. Remembering that triumph, I am lifted to a height where I am not afraid to continue the Creed through this article, "I believe in the resurrection of the body"; I believe that we shall not be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life.

"And the Life everlasting. Amen." Life, that is a good word to stand at the end of a Christian's creed.

¹ I Cor. 15: 51.

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"Tis life whereof our nerves are scant;
Oh life, not death, for which we pant,
More life and fuller that I want." ¹²

And our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly. We believe in this more abundant life that He has promised us, this life everlasting. Everlasting—it is to go on forever, and it is going on now, and then and now it is all one life. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." ¹³ "I am the resurrection and the life:" Christ said to Martha; "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." ¹⁴ As Christians we believe in that life everlasting. All one life it is; a life which the accidents of time can never interrupt, and over which death

¹² "The Two Voices," Tennyson.

¹³ John 17: 3.

¹⁴ John 11: 25, 26.

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has no power. That is what this old Book promises to all who put their trust in Jesus Christ; and that is what this old Creed enables us as Christians to profess our faith in—an eternal life; a life so closely united in faith and purpose and hope to Jesus Christ, our ever living Lord, that it already shares His victory over death, and nothing can ever separate it from Him.

If we believe in that kind of life, we ought to be living it. And every time we recite this Creed its closing words ought to mean a new and solemn declaration from us that such a life we do believe in, and such a life we are determined to live. Amen.

So this brings us really to the end of the Creed. But before ending the chapter, and closing up the book, I should like to recall some of the thoughts with which we started into this study. One thought was that faith is the highest achievement

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and also the most precious possession of man. For faith is the transcending of sense, the access to the infinite, the power to endure as seeing the invisible, the rising out of the brute and into the God; that is faith, and it is the highest and hardest human achievement. All other things would seem easy in comparison. As Christ says, "All things are possible to him that believeth."¹⁵

But as this faith is the highest achievement of man, and the secret of all other worthy achievements, so it is also his most precious possession. And therefore whoever has any of it, though it be but very little, must long to share it with his neighbor. True faith of every sort struggles to become articulate. If we are believers, we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard. And so our Christian religion, which from the first founded itself on faith, has also magnified always

¹⁵ Mark 9: 23.

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the duty of confession; and that has been from the first an important element in the public worship of the Christian Church, this element of witness-bearing, or testimony, or confessing of faith.

So we were led to wish that there might be some great hymn of the Church (to be said not sung, for not all can sing), a hymn hallowed by age, and still the vehicle of man's present and living convictions, through which we all, adding our voices to the countless hosts of those who have gone before, might gratefully speak out our confessions to the world.

But then the question arose whether it would be possible, or conceivable, that all the believers of all different lands and different ages ever should unite in any such common confession of faith; for the thoughts of men change with the passing of the years, and are completely revolutionized with the passing of the centuries. If there were any form of words that truly

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expressed the faith of those far-away believers in that "vanished world" a thousand years—yes, nearly two thousand years ago—at first it hardly seemed possible to us that the same form of words would serve as a truthful confession of our faith today.

But then we were confronted with the strange phenomenon that just at this time many branches of the Church are giving larger place than they had given before to this most ancient of all the Christian creeds. At the very time when some of our more modern confessions of faith have been losing their hold on the regard of Christian people, this most ancient confession is reëstablishing its hold. For these modern confessions, only three or four hundred years old, born of controversy and marking sectarian division, have been the property of some limited section of the Church, and we seem to outgrow them. But in this most ancient

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confession, which counts its age by millenniums, the ear catches a note of universality, and we cannot outgrow it.

At the time when men first began to recite this old creed—or most of it—the phrases were still fresh from the pens or lips of the apostles of our Lord. The words had not yet been wrenched by long controversy, or dried and hardened into dogma; they were like coins fresh from the mint, the image and superscription clear to every eye. Moreover, they come down to us from days when every Christian confessor knew that he faced the possibility of literal martyrdom. When men began to say “I believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ his Son,” some of them were just starting for the lions, or the fire, or the cross; it was long ago, but ten thousand lips will be gladly repeating the same brave words round the whole world next Sunday morning. The state-ly music of these sentences, which comes

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down to us as the echo of a vanished world, also sounds forth the living and loving conviction of a present world.

So we had to reverse our first hasty opinion and admit it as possible that there might be one and the same form of words which should serve as a confession of faith for Christians of the first, or second, or third century, and also for us Christians of the twentieth century. The fact is that this very form of words is so serving us now. I did not need to argue that the people of our time ought to like this old Creed; the evident fact is that an increasing number of us do like it, and love to repeat it together. It was only necessary for me to mention the fact, and then try to account for it, showing what it is in the ancient symbol that makes it so very likable to-day.

And so we have taken up the articles one by one, trying to show what they meant at first, and also how much they

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must mean now and always. There are two or three of them perhaps that have sometimes given trouble to conscientious believers. I think it is generally because the proper meaning of the words has not been understood; and therefore I have tried to remove the trouble by showing the meaning. Probably I have not always succeeded; indeed, none of us suppose that this venerable Creed, or anything else that man ever made, is perfect. We have been thankful that the English translators got rid of that unscriptural word "flesh" in the article on the resurrection; and there may be other words or phrases which some persons will wish they had got rid of also.

But at the worst I think our study must have shown that those defects are very small, and very few, in a whole which is wonderfully beautiful and precious. For the power of this old Creed is not so much in any set of words; it is in the spirit

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which breathes through it all of loyal confidence in that strange person Jesus Christ. The Creed comes down to us from a time when men had not yet forgotten Him, or their loving loyalty toward Him, in their speculations about Him. My effort has been to show that their faith in Christ was the foundation of all the religious faith those men had. If they believed in the goodness of the unseen God above, it was because Jesus Christ had called Him Father; if they believed in the Holy Ghost, it was because Jesus Christ had promised to bestow such a Spirit upon His disciples; if they believed in a Christian Church, it was because Jesus Christ had commanded His friends to love one another as He had loved them, and had prayed that they might all be bound together in such perfect unity and fellowship; if they believed in a life beyond the grave, it was because Jesus Christ, crucified, dead, buried, rising again, had won

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that eternal life for them all. Whatever faith they had, it all grew out of their immovable and loyal confidence in Jesus Christ Himself.

“Christ! I am Christ’s! And let the name suffice
you,

Aye, for me too He greatly hath sufficed;
Lo, with no winning words I would entice you,
Paul has no honor and no friend but Christ.”

And the faith of Paul was the faith of the earliest Christians; and this same loyal confidence in Jesus Christ is what still breathes through every syllable of this earliest Creed.

I have recurred to this thought again and again in the progress of this discussion because it leads up to what I chiefly wish to affirm now at the end of it, namely, that this peculiarity of the old Creed is the very thing that makes it appeal so strongly to our own latest generation. For in this respect we of this latest generation have been moving back toward the posi-

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tion of the earliest believers. For a good while past the motto of earnest Christian thought has been "back to Christ." It may be that the phrase has been used by many who do not rightly understand it, but there could not be a nobler phrase, "back to Christ." Many are turning back to Him with earnest desire, and some with a kind of desperation: "To whom else shall we go?"¹⁶ For an increasing number of the people of our time, both in the Church and out of it, are beginning to confess that all the religious faith we have, that is worth confessing, rests somehow on our personal confidence in Jesus Christ, His own character, and His interpretation of the problem of the world.

To support this assertion one could quote men most unlike each other, and some of them very remote from traditional Christianity. Listen, for instance, to Mozoomdar, the Hindoo: "Jesus from

¹⁶ John 6: 68.

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that day, to me became a reality whereon I might lean. It was an impulse then, a flood of light, love, and consolation. It is no longer an impulse now. It is a faith and principle; it is an experience verified by a thousand trials. . . . My aspiration has been not to speculate on Christ, but to be what Jesus tells us all to be; . . . and I shall be content if what I say in these pages at all tend to give completeness to any man's ideas of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. . . . In the midst of these crumbling systems of Hindoo error and superstition . . . to me Christ has been like the meat and drink of my soul." ¹⁷

That is from India, in the far south; now hear a voice from Russia, in the far north. Count Leo Tolstoi says in the Introduction to his "My Religion": "Five years ago faith came to me; I believed in the doctrine of Jesus, and my whole life

¹⁷ "The Oriental Christ," Mozoomdar, pp. 11, 12, 13.

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underwent a sudden transformation. . . . Like the thief on the cross, I believe in the doctrine of Jesus, and this belief has made me whole. My soul, once filled with despair of life and fear of death, is now full of happiness and peace."¹⁸

John Stuart Mill, the English utilitarian, hastens to offer his testimony that, "in the Golden Rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility."¹⁹ Yes, and the next socialist whom you encounter in the street, however he may rail at the churches, will probably claim Jesus as a leader in the brotherhood to which he professes to belong. Evidently there are multitudes of persons in our modern world outside of Christian churches who would indorse the oft-quoted remark of Charles Lamb, that "if Shakespeare was to come into this room we would all rise up to meet him,

¹⁸ "My Religion," Count Leo Tolstoi, pp. ix, xi.

¹⁹ "Utilitarianism," J. S. Mill, p. 24.

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but if that Person was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of His garment!"

Within the limits of the organized Church the same tendency "back to Christ" has been showing itself. Of the movements that are more distinctly and radically modern in the New World, no one is worthier of mention than that which was started a century ago by Dr. Channing, and one may recall his great sermons on "The Character of Christ" and "The Imitableness of Christ's Character." As to the Old World, it has been well said that "one of the most striking facts in the history of philosophy is the sudden downfall of the Hegelian system." The place of this system has been largely filled by the teaching of Ritschl, which takes its departure not from metaphysics but the Gospel, insists upon the objective historic reality of Christianity, and bases the Christian religion definitely on "the life

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of its author as Redeemer and founder of the Kingdom of God." ²⁰

But this same movement "back to Christ" appears quite as plainly in other sections of the Church which could never be charged with radicalism; witness the multiplied Lives of Christ published in our day. As a modern writer has said: "His teaching, work, career, and personality have been studied and appreciated as never before. The result, it is not too much to say, is that Jesus who lived in Palestine is better—that is, more distinctly and more critically—known to our age than He has been known to any age since His own." ²¹ The very children in the primary departments of our Sunday-schools have been studiously mastering "the fact of Christ." Principal Fairbairn says that "we feel His personal presence in all our thinking, more in the

²⁰ "The Essence of Christianity," William Adams Brown, pp. 223-41.

²¹ "The Fact of Christ," P. C. Simpson, pp. 47, 48.

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manner of the apostolic than of any other age."

There had been ages apparently when another temper prevailed; when men hoped to lift each other toward religious assurance by the power of argument, and were always ready to make the attempt. Now we have about given up such experiments. Those elaborate "Defences" and "Analogies" and "Systems," which meant so much to our fathers—the dust lies thick upon their covers today. Even the fine old Creed of Nicea seems to be proving too metaphysical for some modern confessors.

Today the whole religious question—for me as for the jailer of Philippi—has practically narrowed itself down to one searching inquiry, Can I believe in Jesus Christ—Yes or No? For one, I love this old Creed because it enables me to lift my face toward heaven and answer confidently, "Yes"; and my purpose in this book

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has been to show that this definite historic and personal quality of the old Creed is one thing that fits it so well for purposes of modern worship.

But I have hoped also to make it evident that the old Creed possesses another priceless advantage in the great antiquity of its chief articles. We love it not only because it is good, but also because it is old—old enough to bring the Church of all ages together. For this movement “back to Christ” has had to cross an immense interval of time. These asserted facts of His earthly life, His death, His resurrection, were very long ago. If our faith is to be securely fastened to them, we must become aware of a continuing vital unity lasting on from then till now in the body of believers. We need a communion of saints that should be truly catholic, extending itself not only over all the spaces of earth, but also over all the ages of time.

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So we are learning to love this old Creed whose very expressions were dear to Christ's confessors in the early days of martyrdom. Under the sound of its music the distant triumph song seems to be stealing on the ear, and hearts are brave again and arms are strong. "The glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of Martyrs"—we long to join hands with them all, and catch the contagion of their heroic confidence.

"Oh, may Thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
Fight as the Saints who nobly fought of old,
And win with them the victor's crown of gold.

Alleluia!"

And the sentences of this ancient confession, bringing us consciously into that fellowship, put heart into us to take up again the hard enterprise of life.

"Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and

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the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."

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