A DIALOGUE WITH GOD
AND
OTHER SERMONS AND ADDRESSES

By the late

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FOREWORD

Before Dr. Oman died he expressed the hope that, whatever requests might be made by publishers or personal friends, his papers would be left undisturbed. He had said what he wanted to say and was content to leave it without addition or qualification.

This was the answer consistently given by members of the family when from time to time suggestions were made about volumes of essays and lectures. Then, however, when the subject was again revived someone rather casually remarked: 'Of course, there are the sermons!' The manuscripts thus referred to were not easily forgotten for they stood, neatly arranged in loose cases, where Dr. Oman had put them. Very occasionally they were taken down, and glanced at. Some were written in his own not easily decipherable handwriting. Others were typed and much more manageable. The first impression was of their remoteness. Most of them were delivered long ago in Alnwick, where Dr. Oman was minister from 1889 to 1907. But the more the manuscripts were read the more clearly their relevance to this present age appeared. References to contemporary events were few and unimportant. Most of the sermons were prepared before the world was shaken by devastating wars, but they were preached by one who in his thinking was far ahead of his times, and whose chief concern was with the fundamental questions that face each generation. They were not prepared for publication. Many of them must have been written rapidly in the course of a busy ministry. Had they been intended for a wider public there would doubtless have been careful revision, as for example in the adaptation of the Joseph story on page 55. But there was always the possibility that there might be a special value in this particular style. It was at least simple and direct, and might therefore be of service to readers who found the later books involved and difficult.

The more the matter was pondered the more convinced members of the family became that Dr. Oman would not have objected. There remained, however, the problems of selection, alteration and classification. The first of these was handed to the publishers' Reader, who brought to the task unusual equipment and insight. We have also been greatly helped by Dr. R. H. Strachan, formerly Professor of New Testament Language and Literature in Westminster College,
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Cambridge, to whom we are heavily indebted. We have further been assisted by Dr. H. H. Farmer, one of Dr. Oman's old students and his successor as Professor of Systematic Theology in the same college. Their assistance and commendation have encouraged us more than we can say and have finally removed any lingering doubts about the wisdom of publishing.

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Hampstead Garden Suburb 1950

I

GOD'S VICTORY AND OURS

He will beautify the meek with salvation.
Ps. cxlix, 4

Among many other devices for salving its conscience, the world has a habit of misrepresenting and depreciating the thing it ought to admire. Among the things admirable, the things to be thought on and laboured for, nothing has undergone more perversion than meekness. It is regarded as a virtue of India rubber, a virtue of the jelly-fish, a sort of feeble surrender to the slightest pressure, an effacing of our own individuality, a standing apology for having had the misfortune to exist. Someone declares that you never saw such a meek creature. You at once call up before your imagination everything that is feeble: a shaky willowy figure, a watery smile like sunshine between showers, a perpetual, "Oh, no thank you, kindly," upon his lips, a being for all the rough tasks of life, the fighting, the struggling, the resolute patience, the dogged persistence, utterly useless.

The worst of this perverted picture of the meek man is the excuse it offers for the opposite extreme of ungentle, inconsiderate, self-confident obstinacy, which in its ignorance and blindness calls itself resolution. This spirit, in believing itself to be the embodiment of strength, is only self-deceived, as the sapless tree which will not bend to the wind might think itself strong. The true spirit of meekness is like the fresh green tree which bends because of the power in it. Its surrender is both an element of strength and a proof of strength. Meekness in like manner springs from strength and makes strong. The Lord will beautify the meek with salvation. It is a beauty like the grace of the swaying tree, all full of life and power.

The conception of salvation has also been much perverted, as if it were a kind of compensation granted by God for feebleness, almost a reward for being useless for every other purpose. Other spiritual blessings you do find spoken of as the free gift of God. He gives pardon, He gives grace. Ultimately all is of grace, just as ultimately it is because of God's endowment and that only that we have any power or capacity. But salvation is never spoken of in the Bible as a freely
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granted gift apart from human toil and suffering. We must through
much tribulation enter the kingdom, the apostles taught, we must
work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we must be faithful
unto death, we must finish the course.

The word used here for salvation means also victory. Salvation and
victory are the same. Salvation is victory over the world, the devil and
the flesh. Experience, apart from the Bible, teaches that little is done
in that warfare except by hard-earned, usually terribly hard-earned,
victory. The New Testament—not merely the Old—uses one figure of
conflict after another. The victory requires fighting, running, wrest-
ling, enduring hardship. Salvation has a helmet and is equipped with
sword and shield. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but
spiritual, but the soldier who wields them right, does not find them
easier, lighter, less dangerous weapons, and his campaigns are not
less trying to flesh and spirit.

The word used in our text is the same as is used by the people in
defending Jonathan when his father meant even at the expense of his
brave son to carry out his unwise command. Jonathan, not knowing
his father had commanded the people to fast, had eaten honey. When
it was discovered, the king passed sentence. But the whole victory that
day had followed Jonathan’s daring assault upon the Philistine
stronghold and the people felt that it was absurd to end a great vic-
tory by sacrificing the hero of the day. Therefore they would not hear
of such a decision and cried out: “Shall Jonathan die, who hath
wrought this great salvation [or this great victory] in Israel? God for-
bid: as the Lord liveth there shall not one hair of his head fall to the
ground, for he hath wrought with God this day.”

Was not Jonathan beautified by victory that day in the eyes of the
people? On his face there was a beauty which no material grace of
form or feature could confer. It was a halo, a spiritual radiance. That
is the grace with which God beautifies the meek. The glory of victory
over a more terrible foe than the Philistine rests upon him and he also
has wrought with God. He is not a carpet knight, his is no journey to
heaven by the primrose path but he alone has looked in the face of the
foe and he alone has watched with open eyes throughout the dark
and lonely night, and he alone arrives at length, no conflict shunned,
but all his battles won.

Jonathan on that day of his victory was no unfitting picture of the
meek man. He told his armour bearer they would show themselves
to the enemy. The meek man does not desire to have peace by hiding
himself from his foes, but goes in confidence against the enemies God
has sent him. He further decided that if the enemy asked him to go
up, he would accept the invitation and by thus entering at the door of

opportunity, he gained a great victory. Meekness accepts God’s call
and opportunity such as it is and does his utmost with it, not com-
plaining because a better has not been appointed him. His victory
won, he found he was not praised but blamed. Without boasting of
the deliverance he had wrought, he quietly accepted his father’s
decision. Never was he grander, stronger than at that moment. He
was poor in spirit but how far was he from being poor spirited. And
that is the distinction in this matter which must ever be remembered.
The Christian should be poor in spirit, should have the sense of need,
should ever be meek with a heart full of acceptance of the divine will,
but he should not be poor spirited, not afraid of duty, afraid of re-
ponsibility, afraid of man.

But the supreme example of meekness must ever be the Master
himself. He claims to be our Lord not because of His divine power
but simply because He is meek and lowly in heart. What is the essence
of that meekness? How is it qualified to give rest to our souls? Why
does He not say, “I am strong and can help, I am wise and can guide,
I am rich and can bestow?” Because rest is not to be received but to be
re-conquered, because it is found only on the heights. Being Himself
meek and lowly He has the secret of rest. What then is the essence of
this spirit? Nothing less than the spirit of submission. No shade of a
rebellious thought ever passed across His spirit. Meekness shows itself
in many ways and we might say much of its operation both towards
God and man, but though it may bear varied blossom and fruit, the
root of the matter is just acceptance of the divine will. Jesus and the
Father were one. The life appointed Him to live, the task to do, the
cup of suffering to drink, were ever accepted, not as He would, but
as the Father would.

No dark cloud of fatalism for a moment hung over His soul.
Fatalism and meekness are as opposite as light and darkness.
Fatalism is the crushing sense that nothing can be altered. All is the
divine decree, appointed from eternity, operating undisturbed by
puny man and probably inconsiderate of puny man, to eternity.
Meekness is the glad sense of a wiser, more loving power over and
around our life and all lives, wiser and greater than any foresight
of man can measure, of a power to which therefore we should joyfully
submit, accepting the duties it enjoins, bearing the trials it appoints,
and thus march steadily onwards, our faces even in the darkest night
facing the dawn. In this consciousness that the ultimate explanation
of all existence is a Father’s wise and loving will, the meek can not
only bear without murmuring matter manifestly of God’s appoint-
ment, but can also endure many things from man, ever recalling two
things, that he also is our brother with the same Father’s love around
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him, and he too has his own life to live under the same divine guidance with which we may not interfere, and that if he do err and his deeds hurt our feelings or our interests, behind us both, behind our sins and errors as well as our fidelity and truth, the will of God still operates. Not ascribing finality to anything but God's will, the meek can afford to have quietness of spirit and patience. Yet nothing of all this can be called weakness. It was certainly not weakness in our Lord. Personal injuries He pardoned. None was more patient with the erring. Yet Who ever went his own way through this world as He did, Who was ever less under the control of circumstances, Who ever measured less his actions by the opinions of his fellowmen, Who ever faced opposition and pain more like the victor over all opposition, spiritual and temporal alike? Meekness is not weakness but the very essence of victory, the invincible consciousness that to be on God's side is to be beyond the reach of harm, to be sure at least of the final victory which overcometh the world.

Fatalism is weakness. The heart faints, the arm is paralysed. It is decreed, who can alter it? It is part of the infinite scheme, and we, too, are no more than another part. What avails effort? Opposition is only folly. That is fatalism. The weight of destiny lies upon the soul, like a mountain upon the dead. The meek have an outlook from the mountain top, seeing all life, one's own amid the rest, as appointed and directed by infinite wisdom and love. And first of all appointments for us is the divine decree that salvation shall not be ours except as another name for victory. For us God has appointed a conflict with the world, the devil and the flesh, a conflict amid duty and responsibility, trial and temptation. The reason we may only dimly know, but the very first thought of the meek is that we in our limitations can have no perfect knowledge. Wherefore the first work of meekness is to set us to the task our Father has appointed, in the assurance that He has a loving purpose behind it and that He also will bear us up in it. A deep sense of ignorance and weakness ever belongs to the spirit of meekness, but it is a sense of our own deficiency which does not drive a man to rely on his neighbour but on his God. Out of this reliance a new sufficiency arises. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves. Yet we must account of ourselves. Tasks face us which demand self-reliance. What is the man who cannot face his duty by himself, who cannot exercise his own judgment of what is right, who cannot undertake responsibility? He certainly is not the follower of Jesus Christ. Nor will he ever be effective in life either for his own spirit or for aid to other men. Account of ourselves we must. And the meek do not account of themselves least, for they do not account of themselves as from themselves.

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Their sufficiency is of God. The more anyone can be conscious that he has emptied himself of mere self-reliance and sought only the divine guidance and aid, the more bravely and quietly he can set his face forward.

The meek seek to accomplish nothing less than God's victory in the earth. Like Jonathan, they work with God. Nothing less is worthy to absorb any man's whole attention. The victory he seeks to accomplish in the earth thus becomes the same thing as salvation. As he triumphs over evil so his soul enters into peace. That is God's method. It is the part of meekness to accept God's method. And are not the meek beautified with salvation? Their energies are not wasted in fretting, they are not engaged in the hopeless fight against God, their triumphs cannot be ended in a moment by the assassin's knife or the bursting of a vessel in the brain. When we think seriously of these things, on the frailty of this thin-spun thread of life, we wonder that any man should think it worth his while to hang all his hopes and endeavours upon it. The meek in submission to the Father's will have learned a better security. Their hopes rest not in life but in the ever living One who gave life, and in the love from which nothing can separate them. The salvation they seek is not of the flesh but of the spirit. Thus along with all the earnestness of conflict, the meek ever display a large patience and forbearance in earthly concerns, in matters which only touch the sentiments of profit and temporal honour. Hence that combination of strength and gentleness which is the supreme endowment of character, the supreme beauty of character.

How fitly the word in our text is chosen? He will beautify the meek with salvation, or with victory. There is, rightly considered, only one beautiful face in the world, the face of the meek who have won their victory over the world, the devil and the flesh. Some of the old painters knew that. Raphael the supreme master possibly knew it best. Usually he paints beautiful faces. Like the true artist he was he loved all things beautiful, and not least the beauty of the human face. But what a difference between him and let us say Rubens. Someone, if my memory serves me rightly Heine, speaks of the sense of mortality created by all Rubens's work. You ask what has become of all those full fed beauties. In their very fullness of vitality you feel that they are under the bondage of corruption. An oppressive feeling of the evanescence of all things is the chief effect of the tremendous power of this painter of flesh and blood. But Raphael has caught another beauty which has immortalized those virgin mothers of his who look out of his canvasses upon a world which they have conquered by the omnipotent power of meekness. Their eyes look beyond the earthly
veil, and so accept what God has appointed here in quiet acceptance of what wisdom has decreed and love will bless. They are immortals. God has beautified the meek with salvation.

Would we turn the corruption of all things into a beauty which never can decay, we also must seek our victories in the might of meekness. Have you failed? You rebel against the tasks of life, the limitations, the poor prospects. Your spirit is not beautified with anything. On the contrary, it is all disfigured with peevishness. You are weary and heavy laden, your spirit and perhaps your face marked with lines of care. And you only need one thing. You need to go to Him who is meek and lowly of spirit to be also yourself made meek and lowly of spirit, that you may be enabled to accept your lot in the spirit of that submission which is the secret of all strength, and to live through the same circumstances with an altered mind. Then God will also beautify you, soul and even body, with salvation. The difficulties will be turned to necessary discipline, to battles to be fought and blessing to be won. How much fret and worry and depression and weariness will be removed. What so much as these things scar the face and the heart? Even to our blind eyes and limited observation, surely no truth is more certain than that the Lord “will beautify the meek with salvation”.

II

TO ERR IS HUMAN

O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself.
Jer. x, 23

It is easy to speak and not unpleasant to talk at large about “thirty million bipeds, mostly fools”. The general truth takes on a different air when you are in a storm and you have a particular and individual example at the helm. This was Jeremiah’s painful position. He saw the ship of state driving on the breakers with the storm clouds massed to windward and the tornado ready to break. Rumour, the newspaper war correspondent of those days, told of great armies assembling and of impending invasion. Everyone knew of the might of Babylon and everyone ought to have known the weakness of Judah. If ever a country needed wise, strong, skilful guidance, Judah needed it now.

We are accustomed to say that, whenever a crisis comes, the right man will be found to meet it. That saying has almost become a proverb. But no greater crisis could arise than this, yet nothing in the shape of the right man was found. There were plenty of politicians, plenty of scheming tricksters who made leagues with Egypt in which was no deliverance and who regarded patriotism as approval of their schemes. But, if there were many politicians, there was no statesman. No man looked the situation straight in the face, and no man suggested any way of meeting it. Enough, if it could for the time be forgotten. Enough, if their own places were meantime secure. The prophets were told to mind their own business, and anyone who questioned whether everything was not as right as possible in the best possible country, was treated as a traitor to the government and an enemy to the state.

As in another case, the prophet looked, and behold there was no man. No one took warning, no one made preparation. While the sun shone the rulers amused themselves, and when the night descended they would flee in panic.

The man who had lived through this experience, could say with some depth of meaning, that it was not in man that walketh to direct
his steps. To err is human, was no copybook reading for him after seeing such awful consequences from human errors. Commonplaces have a way of thus starting up in our path and taking the mask of custom off and showing us the real faces they wear beneath it, faces so haggard as to chill to the marrow of our bones. All men are mortal may seem for half a lifetime the most harmless commonplace. But some day it strips off the mask of familiarity, and you smell the earth and see the worm. To err is human, in the same way, ceases to be a mere generality about mankind and becomes a particular folly blighting a human life, wrecking all its securities and hopes, or even as Jeremiah saw it, the source of a whole people's degeneracy and the cause of annihilating calamity. Then to err is human is no longer a comfortable ancient commonplace but starts up as a new and appalling discovery. The fresh shock of it you can hear ringing in these words of Jeremiah: “O Lord, I know, I know now, I know with deadly certainty that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Nor do any of the acquirements which may equip him for other tasks help him in this. Place and privilege confer no immunity. Wealth is only a blind and deceptive trust, and even education is not wisdom. Cleverness may be only ingenuity in going astray, astuteness skill in over-reaching oneself and worldly wisdom blindness to every high and vital interest. And this erring of individuals may mean the wrecking of the whole people. This was Jeremiah's bitter conclusion from life’s experience.

In the first place, he made no attempt to shut his eyes to the fact. He did not go pretending to himself that the rulers, because they were rulers, must be very wise men. He did not consider that kind of shutting his eyes any part of his duty of loyalty to his country. Nor did he find it any part of his duty to the Church to throw a veil over the errors of the priests. On the contrary, he spoke very plainly about the king himself and his folly in building palaces when the people were homeless and starving. “Shalt thou prosper”, he said of this folly, “because thou strivest to excel in cedar?” Of the leaders generally he said: “For the shepherds have become brutish and have not inquired of the Lord, therefore they have not prospered and all their flocks are scattered.” He was himself both a priest and a prophet, but that did not hinder him from saying very plainly that priest and prophet both misled the people, and that the people were anxious to be misled. Everyone else did their best to forget. The Lord had laid it upon him to keep them always in remembrance. The plan of saying the business of the religious teacher is not with politics, he must not criticize the government, he must always be on the side of law and order, was not his plan. It seemed to him that the present order was bringing certain calamity and to be silent about it was to have lot and part in his country's ruin. Nor did he say, the great thing is to maintain the authority of the Church. That was not his idea of keeping men from scepticism and confusion. Of the idea of keeping the people amused with candles and banners and millinery and processions and telling their faults like naughty children to the priest, to keep them from discovering that there is no infallibility in man, he would merely have said, the pastors have become brutish and have not inquired of the Lord. He blinked nothing of the truth. The whole hopeless incapacity of man came home to him with all its force. He looked at the people, he looked at the priests, he looked at the rulers, he set them in front of the awful things that were coming and all he could say was to cry from the bottom of his heart: “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”

In the second place, he never tried to cheer himself by making light of the fact.

To many people the universal folly of mankind seems quite a subject for self-congratulation. It makes them proud and happy to think that they are so very clever as to be able to see that there is such a mass of fools in the world. At some period of our lives, experience is apt to bring some such thought. We all start with a great notion of what wise people there are in the world. Other people’s parents may be foolish enough, but there is an infallibility about our own. Our teachers share in the same confidence, and we have great faith in what is written in a book. As our interests enlarge, we set our own political party and our own particular Church on a pinnacle of wisdom and goodness.

There are some people who can throw the whole over gaily and walk the world in another infallibility—their own. Their fathers and mothers are decent old people, but ignorant of life and behind the times. Politicians, magistrates, rulers, masters, leaders, teachers of all descriptions they think are stupid and behind the times. But no past failure impresses them with the difficulty and darkness of life. They do not feel what a perplexing thing life must be if those who have had the largest opportunity of learning, the longest experience, the most conspicuous parts to fill, have done so little and made so many mistakes. They merely think all this failure a foil to their own wisdom. With such gay confidence Jeremiah could not consider human folly. It amazed him, staggered him; but for the grace of God, it would have crushed him.

For all serious people this discovery of man’s universal liability to error is the gravest crisis of their lives. You see sometimes a boy in one year become a man, with a man’s sorrows written on his brow,
It has come upon him that he has to go his own way. He finds it very different from his father’s way, so that, however much store he may set by experience, he can no longer accept an opinion formed in other times and under other circumstances. With the utmost modesty, he cannot but feel that man is after all only man, be he parent or teacher or writer of books, or leader of a party. The best of them, he finds, are only seekers after truth and toilers after righteousness, and they all err at times and act selfishly at times, and even with education and position and influence make but little out of life. Then the whole perplexity of his own little striving comes home to him. Those questions keep increasing on him as life advances. Is anything wise? Is anything so certain as to be worth the toil and the danger? Was there ever any real opportunity? May it not be passed and gone long ago? These questions seldom get settled. They are usually only shelved. Then men blunder on from one error to another, with the cold comfort that nobody is much better or wiser than themselves.

Not after that fashion was the prophet content to solve the sad problem of man’s error. He could not be satisfied with a round of business and social duties and forget the dark shadow of death and disaster that hangs continually over this erring race. To its solemnity, its sadness, its nearness, its certainty, he could not turn a blind or a laughing eye. Life was a great dark, immensely important, immensely uncertain, terribly solemn business from which he never averted his steadfast gaze.

In the third place, Jeremiah was, nevertheless, not paralysed by the thought of man’s universal liability to error.

Those who will not blink the facts of life are apt to fall into hopelessness and despair. The grim shadow behind every life, the failure of the highest and richest to do much with their lives, the thin ice on which man always lives and his sinning and blundering through it all, leave them staggered and dismayed. Life seems to be a mere series of unpredictable accidents with nothing certain in it except that it will end in the grave. Neither wisdom nor riches affords respite. In the end it all comes to nothing, the very greatness of one’s possessions only emphasizing the tragedy of the disaster. Then think of most human lives—not of the sin of them but of the utter folly of them. In face of such things, what is to be said? Is it not, O my heart, I know, I know as a bitter, crushing, annihilating fact, that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps? Who am I that I should suppose my aims more sensible than the other foolish aims of mankind? Is it not all vanity and vexation of spirit?

Until a man has thus companied with despair, he can hardly be conscious of his deepest spiritual needs. While you think you can find your way in yourself, or feel able to direct your own steps, you can hardly have an overwhelming sense of a word of God to guide you and a grace of God to sustain you. Until a man is shut up to the conclusion that life is no way to anything else, he is apt to fail to see that he needs to find in it the way to the Father. For this reason many able men, men who have had qualities of goodness as well as greatness, have not felt a need for a Christ of God, and have thought His Cross foolishness. If life was not very happy it was very busy. Their ambitions and their intellectual pride kept them self-sufficient. In this spirit men do not seek God. Not till they know man’s folly, their own first of all, are they ready to consider whether the way of man which is not in himself, may not be in God, and whether in leaving us so ignorant of our way He has not meant us to discover that the only wisdom is: Nevertheless, “not my will but thine be done”.

You see a magnificent example of that confidence resting on this trust in higher wisdom in Jeremiah. With the conviction deep rooted in his heart of the liability of all men, himself included, to disastrous, calamitous error, he had to take his stand. The policy the rulers despised, he defended; the warnings the priest mocked at, he proclaimed. This message was a sad one to offer, a disastrous one if by any chance it should be wrong. Yet there he stood alone, sure of his message, certain of the result. What all the world of wise men did not know, he proclaimed. That it was true he was prepared to witness with his life. Was it not an absurdly self-confident position, to proclaim that all men err, and then to go on his own way, blind to obstacles, deaf to warnings, one single man against a whole nation? He never asked himself, can it be possible that I am right and all the rest of the world mistaken? Though it was not in himself any more than any other man that walks to direct his steps, he held right on amid dangers which would have appalled the stoutest hearts, and threatenings manifest enough to impress the blindest. No presumption, no obstinacy, no callousness could have carried him through. Though a sensitive and humble man, he bore a conspicuous position, and maintained his singular opinion and stood for it with a courage that would have tried a heart of iron and a front of brass. All the anointed heads in the world might think differently and regard his message as an impertinence, it never made him hesitate.

Not by any claim of official rank, not because he was either a prophet or a priest, did Jeremiah dare to face priest and ruler, but because he was a man, and having only a man’s wisdom and strength and soon coming to the end of it, he turned to God. Then, by hearing God’s message and learning God’s wisdom and feeling God’s power, he was enabled to think very little of man or of man’s opposition.
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Out of the very depth of his humility which could not be swayed by man's judgment or diverted from its course by any threatening of events, through his very unbelief in man, he turned so utterly to God that he had no concern save with God's message and no anxiety save to face all that God's spirit might appoint.

Man errs, the greatest and the best, and none of us in our own wisdom can hope to escape. The man who thinks his knowledge will suffice for his mortal life and his own aims satisfy the needs of his immortal soul, walks in pride which is only another word for blindness. This way only leads to disaster. Yet in some way we must walk in confidence, able to face calmly all human judgments and all time's events. We ought to be able to see and maintain truth and righteousness though the wealth, the position, the learning, even the professed piety of the whole land were against us, even as Jeremiah did. This we can do only if like One greater than Jeremiah, we leave aside all human devices, most of all what is swayed by our own desires, and take God's will simply and utterly as our guide. This kind of fear of the Lord must be for us the beginning of wisdom if we are ever to stand serene amid all life's follies and evil in the perfect love which casts out fear. Even with this guidance we may not be immune from error, but we shall have escaped the worst folly of trusting human astuteness and expediency. But while we must ever be ready to be taught of man, we must never be overruled by him if we would truly be directed of God, and realize with more peaceful and blessed assurance that the promise is being fulfilled in our experience: "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life".

III

THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD

They measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise. 2 Cor. x, 12

The apostle is not afraid to run counter to this universal opinion that wisdom means agreement with the opinion of the majority, for he bluntly declares that to make other people our standard is to be without wisdom. That is very far from being our working opinion, but for all that it is something fundamental in Christianity. The man who seeks to walk in wisdom because he walks in Christ, will never be found satisfied with himself because his conduct compares favourably with the doings of other people.

The faith of Christ in one sense sets the very highest value upon every man. It regards him as a child of God, with echoes of God in his heart and with the possibilities of holiness in his life. Yet it esteems him not for what he is, but for what he may become. With all its esteem for him as a possible heir of God, it never forgets the follies which lead him astray and the baseness which corrupts his motives. So much is man in the mass said to be led by what is false that the father of lies is called the prince of this world. To fall back therefore upon the common opinion and to justify our actions by that is to fall back upon what is most superficial, most selfish, most thoughtless in our humanity. We are to honour man as man, but it is man as he walks by truth and righteousness and not as he follows the multitude.

The common conscience and the common heart of humanity are the greatest things on earth and he is the greatest man who can appeal to them, who can make men feel that in them God is speaking, but the common conscience and heart of humanity are to be found in those who exercise them, not in those who can no longer hear their voices because of the voices of their associates. As Christ sees men they are as sheep without a shepherd in which case surely the first element of wisdom is to learn not to follow them.

But the faith of Christ does not leave us in this merely negative position. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged
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by no man.” You cannot be spiritual and judge things according to the current opinion. You cannot measure yourselves by yourselves and compare yourselves among yourselves, for the simplest reason that you have found something so much higher to measure yourselves by. Consider for a moment, how can you possibly have faith if you are content to measure yourselves by those about you? Whatever else faith may be, it is a sense of God. Now no one can have a sense of God and think that anyone could be put beside Him. When a man looks upon God, he looks upon the absolute law of his life, the absolute standard of all judgment. To be right, he must seek to be one with God, it being a matter entirely insignificant and irrelevant that, in being so, he differs from the common opinion. And whatever we may mean by faith in Christ, it must mean that we see God in Him, which means we see what is unchangeably, eternally, absolutely true. We have the standard by which we can judge ourselves and everything connected with us as God will finally judge them. If that be true it must be an act of stupendous folly to fall back upon the common opinion around us.

You will sometimes see a whole class of English boys making game of the pronunciation of the French Master, whom they call Moosley. They all have a kind of maltreated nasal performance which they catch from one another and which they fondly imagine to be the French accent. Can you imagine the Frenchman, for the sake of peace, measuring himself by them? Instead he is quite content to wait till they grow up to sense, or perhaps go abroad and get laughed at in turn. A Christian who sees God in Christ and then measures himself with the people around him, is not acting one whit more wisely than that Frenchman would if he modelled his pronunciation on his boys. We look upon the Son of God’s love, we look into the perfect law of liberty, we look upon what will not pass though heaven and earth pass, we look upon that with which God will be eternally well pleased, we look upon what will never in time or eternity make us ashamed, and then we turn to what is at best only the fashion of a day.

Faith in Christ, moreover, must be faith in a God who deals with you individually. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is infinite in thought and care for the needs of each person. He singles us each one out of the crowd. He asks after our individual need. He calls us to repent for our own sins, He sends the sense of pardon into our hearts, appoints the special discipline needed for our own progress and asks for service of our particular lives. This personal dealing of God with him is man’s true safeguard and his only abiding glory, wherefore it is the folly of departing from our security

and despising our glory to turn from God as the measure of our lives, to turn from comparing ourselves with the perfection of our Father in heaven, to compare ourselves with any man, much less with the fashion which is built on what is most superficial in man. To do so is not the wisdom of the faith which sees God in all, as the end of all, as the light of those who trust him, the strength of all who obey him, the joy of all who love him. It is the folly of this world, the fashion of which passeth away.

If this be so, I am surely right in saying that we are dealing here with something that is fundamental in the Christian faith. We are dealing with something that goes to the roots of our relation with God, with something that is essential to Christ’s right place in our own lives and His right place in the world. The Christian is essentially a person who does not conform to the common opinion. In so far as he is a Christian, he seeks to judge himself and everything in Christ’s spirit and by his standard.

That any of us does this day by day as we ought, none will be bold enough to affirm. In a great many unimportant matters of course we are not called upon to have opinions. We are not to be always striving to be different from other people. We are not to be Ishmaelites in the land with our hands against every man and every man’s hand against us. But just as certainly we are not to measure ourselves by those about us and not to be satisfied because we compare favourably with our neighbours. We are continually to go to God for light, we are continually to seek His mind in Christ, we are continually to take our whole life and set it in the light of His judgment.

Take your life and all your actions out of the twilight of common opinion, and set them in the full light of God’s truth. Recognize that it is no defence that this is the way of the world. Recognize that the prevalence of an evil is the very reason why you must keep far away from it. Set custom on one side and God’s absolute righteousness on the other, and look straight at yourself. That is wisdom, because that alone is the way to truth. It is the narrow way. A man walks in it alone and never two abreast. But it is the way that leads to life, it is the way also in which a man never walks alone but walks with God. Let us all pray, Lord remove all veils of custom, and let us ever see as Thou seest. Clearer than the face of man show us Thy face. Guide us with Thine eye, then shall we be led into all truth, and never follow the multitude to do evil.
IV

FAITH

When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy:
"Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."
St. Mark ii, 1-12

We often say: "It is easy to talk. The difficulty is to act." But it is generally far easier to show how anything is done just by doing it than by explaining. And this is very specially true of faith. I have faith that I can lift a sledge hammer, and right away it is done, but if I tried to explain how I do it, I might think that I could not lift a finger. If I tried to explain how faith is our own insight yet is the gift of God, how Jesus is the beginner and finisher of faith, yet we often find it wanting and then can do nothing, how unbelief is a sin, yet we ought not to believe anything except as we are convinced it is true, how we should not believe because other people do, yet we can all be helpers of one another's faith, how we are saved by faith, yet faith without works is dead—I might have you so puzzled that you would think faith the most perplexing thing in the world instead of the simplest. The gain of seeing it in action, as in this story, is not merely that "Truth embodied in a tale may enter in at lowly doors", but that we see it more completely as well as more simply in life than in any explanation; more particularly how it is at once our own conviction and God's gift, how it is not in word only but in power and demonstration of the spirit and how it is at once between our own soul and God, yet comes through our fellow-men and passes on to them. This last we will take as our first point.

1. Faith is our own trust in God, yet it comes through other people and passes on to them.

It is the more faith the more it is our own, yet it is also the more faith the more it is received and given away.

In one sense the power of the paralytic's faith was just that it was his own and not dependent on anyone else's faith. He did not live in what we call an age of faith. So far as he knew, not a soul, except himself and his friends so far as he had convinced them, believed in

Jesus as the power of God for man's deliverance. The Scribes, the recognized authoritative teachers, were seated prominently between him and Jesus, reasoning in their hearts, which meant doubting and questioning and raising all kinds of objections. The multitude were a mere unsympathetic press of idle curiosity, through which he could not pass. Had he not had his own inward faith in Jesus as the manifestation of the goodness and mercy of God, but been dependent on what others thought, his case would have been hopeless. Unless your conviction is your own insight, it is not faith.

In the end it came from Jesus himself, because it was justified by what Jesus really was. Yet the paralytic knew this only through what he had heard of Jesus through other people as he had probably never seen Jesus any more than we have: and it was effective because this faith was communicated to the friends who bore him in his helplessness.

Columbus set out on his voyage of discovery because of his own faith. It showed itself to be faith because he went on believing, though everyone doubted. Yet it was a right and true faith because it rested on the discovery made by other people that the earth was round, and, if the earth had not been round, it would have been folly not faith. And it also showed itself to be faith by convincing a sceptical king and doubting sailors and so made his enterprise possible.

In the same way the faith of the paralytic was a true faith because it was his own conviction, which no doubt or indifference around could cloud. Yet it would not have been faith in the truth, unless the impression he had gathered from others, of Jesus as clothed with the mercy and power of God, had been right. The other people may not themselves have seen it, yet he was dependent on them for seeing it, just as the astronomers did not see that their discovery meant one could sail round the world, yet Columbus was dependent on them for seeing it.

So we, too, are dependent on what we have heard through other people, yet they help us, even if they be writers of the Bible, only as they show us what Jesus actually was and showed God to be. Faith is the assurance that God is wholly to be trusted, and Jesus is the beginner and finisher of faith because he shows the Father who is wholly to be trusted, and from whose love neither life nor death can separate us. That God in Jesus Christ shows Himself to be a person who can be so trusted is what is meant by saying that faith is the gift of God, just as I give you faith in me if I am trustworthy. It is given as revelation for ourselves to see, not as an impulse put into our passive souls.

Because faith is at once so given that it is our own, given because
God gives himself in Jesus Christ to be seen, and our own because we so see Him as worthy of all trust, we can communicate it to others and work together in God’s household of faith.

The paralytic could not have reached Jesus alone, any more than Columbus could have reached the West Indies without his sailors. And, in the same way, the paralytic proved the unconquerable reality of his own conviction by inspiring his friends to overcome all difficulties in reaching his goal.

This fellowship of faith Jesus at once recognized. Seeing their faith, seeing his faith more fully reflected in theirs, He said to the sick of the palsy: “Son, thy sins be forgiven.” He looked not merely at the pathetic imploring face of the paralytic, but He looked through the broken roof and saw also the anxious, sympathetic, hopeful, beseeching faces of his four friends. All five He saw as a fellowship of inspired and inspiring faith, each inspiring the other, yet each having his own inspiration.

Only this common possession of truth by each person’s own insight and conviction is a fellowship. All other combinations are mere associations. This alone is a communion, and only a communion can work God’s eternal work in the earth. This fellowship, through each one’s individual faith in God, and not any kind of organization, is what the apostle understands by the Church which is the ground of the truth. And if we are ever to win God’s victory in the earth and say to men in Christ’s name, “Ye are the sons of God, your sins be forgiven and your paralysis turned to power”, it will be by this Church with its harmony from within of individual but inspiring faith, and not by the mightiest combination organized from without. It is for all of you to make your churches this fellowship.

The second point is that faith turns hindrances into helps.

This is how faith works by the love to God and our neighbour which applies its mind and its strength as well as its heart.

To have faith in God is sometimes taken to mean that we should accept every hindrance as of His appointment and should wait till He sees good to remove it and do nothing ourselves to surmount it. To seek the aid of human skill is taken to be distrust in God’s power to heal disease, to try to make a better world is spoken of as man’s faith in man’s rule which denies God’s. On this view, when the paralytic and his bearers saw the impassable crowd, they should have said: “This is evidently not God’s time, or, if it is, He will clear a way for us. This obstruction God permits, and it is not for us to be devising ways and means of getting past it. Let us lay down our burden and betake ourselves to prayer.” But their faith wrought in exactly the opposite way. They said: “Here is a human hindrance, but by the power
or it is not faith. But even in Jesus Christ God speaks in many ways, in scripture, in preaching, in His children, and as of old in nature and human life, and joy and sorrow. Our call is in all ways to hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, saying to each of us: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."
V

THE PURPOSE OF CALAMITY

That I may know the fellowship of his sufferings.
Phil. iii, 10

When one has visited a Roman Catholic country, one can understand the feelings of bitterness with which such a person as the poet Heine regarded the Cross. The delightful things of life to him were bright eyes and golden tresses and mysterious fancies and old-world tales. Over this glad earth the Cross seemed to him to have cast a dark shadow. Men could not be light-hearted for that emaciated, scorned figure, rent with nails and crowned with thorns. The crucifix casting a sombre shadow on many a sunny landscape of the south seems a strange object of reverence for the light-hearted and the gay. Nor are we perhaps ourselves without understanding of an opposition to all thought of Christ crucified, or even without resentment against the shadow it seems to cast over our hearts. But when we see Heine with his gay youth spent, lying for years stretched in helplessness on the bed he called his living grave, we have another thought of the Cross of Christ. There he lay fiercely resenting his lot, a soul at strife with the universe which could crush him like a gnat. Then it is plain that to have known the fellowship of Christ’s suffering would have meant all the blessedness of peace and victory, all the sense of a gracious love watching over him and a gracious purpose in all his affliction. Nor may we end there and say it is good that Christ has built on Calvary “for all the wretched a sanctuary of sorrow”. We ought to see that we need it also in the day of our strength, in the day of our rejoicing. Looking back from Heine’s “living grave” upon his gay youth, we can see that for his soul’s well-being, he as much needed a sobering sense of the vicissitudes of things to teach him to see more in life than enjoyment, quite as much as he needed an encouraging sense of the blessed purpose in all calamities to teach him to see more in suffering than mere sorrow. To him as to all the rest of us the Cross is needed to be both a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Because men have felt it to be so, they have felt God in it as in nothing else, for they have seen God’s meaning in their lives by it as

by nothing else. The more they have turned towards it, the more they have felt it would be a worthy end to their whole experience, if they could fully know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.

1. To know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings means first of all that we know the way our sufferings come.

This text has too often been read with the accent on the wrong word. The apostle is thought to place the accent on sufferings, whereas he places it on fellowship. Misled by this mistake, men have thought they could come nearer to Christ by any suffering, even that which they inflicted on themselves.

Surely the first thing we know about Christ’s sufferings is that they were not self-inflicted. He bore them in accordance with the Father’s will, because they were the cup given to Him to drink, because they were a necessary part of His vocation as the Saviour of the world, because as the captain of our salvation He needed to be made perfect through suffering.

It is in these sufferings that we are to know the sufferings of Christ. Wherefore the very first thing we are to know about them is that they meet Him simply in the fulfillment of His vocation. To know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings is to know that in some sense by His permission, all our trials come from our Father in heaven, from His wisdom and from His love, and the first step in knowing the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings is to sit at the foot of His Cross and say with Him: “Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.” The true fellowship in His sufferings is what meets us in the tasks and hazards of our vocation.

If Christ’s sufferings were the Father’s doing, from the Father’s love and in the Father’s wisdom, nothing can come to us of which we cannot say the same thing, for have we not fellowship with Him as also through Him with the children of God?

Thus we know that the way in which all our sufferings come is never by mere hard chance, never even by mere stern punishment, but always, when we go far enough back, by the wise love of a Father who knows our whole need in time and in eternity, for His eternal purpose and our eternal good.

2. To know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings means to know the blessings all sufferings are designed to produce.

Sarcely any task is a burden when one knows what it is for and feels that the object is worth all the trouble. Take, for example, the explorers who have gone to seek the North-West passage. Consciously and deliberately they faced terrible cold, weary toil, constant danger, probable death. We should pity a slave who had to endure one-quarter of what they willingly undertook, yet we don’t pity them,
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for we know that a purpose which they held worthy of their lives sustained them and carried them on.

What pains us so much misery to-day is the utter absence of any sense of purpose in human life, the mere brute-like submission to the yoke and the whip. That is what makes suffering mere misery.

But to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is to know the fellowship of sufferings in fulfilment of the one great vocation the world knows. Christ suffered to bring us unto God. His sufferings stand between us and sin. By His sufferings He triumphed over the world, the flesh and the evil one. All spiritual victories are contained in His death. When we suffer, we suffer with Christ who was made perfect through suffering, who was made like His brethren in all things by the sufferings of death, thus making death encircle us with God's great spiritual purpose. In it we read all the triumph of the Kingdom of God when we have all with Christ died to sin that we might live unto righteousness.

By the fellowship of Christ's sufferings therefore we can trace the purpose of our own. We find it a spiritual purpose, a purpose of perfecting our immortal souls; we find it a purpose of love, a purpose of bringing us into all true fellowship both with God and man; we find it a purpose of delivering us from blindness, ignorance, slavery to sense, slavery to time, to give us victory over the world and to keep alive in us the hope of eternity.

To know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is to know the glory of the holy, loving, forgiving, patient, beautiful life and to know that to grow to the stature of the perfect man in Him is the great and blessed purpose of all our discipline, a purpose for which no suffering would be too great to undergo. That is the great purpose all sufferings are designed to produce, and to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is to know that it is a purpose great enough and blessed enough to silence all our complaints.

3. To know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings means to know how sufferings should be borne in order that they should be blessings.

Many might say with the psalmist: "It was good for me that I was afflicted, for before I was afflicted I went astray"; but many also might say that before they were afflicted they seemed to keep right and their affliction brought out all the evil that was in them. Yet all that is tender and gracious and strong and sympathetic is nourished not by our health and our prosperity but by our sufferings and our trials. What turns sorrow into blessing is the spirit in which it is borne. For that more is required than submission. Submission is much, but acquiescence is more. To attain that is to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

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He knew that every pang that came to Him was necessary for accomplishing the work the Father had given Him to do. Wherefore in His worst agony He could think of others, He could think of His enemies, He could pray for forgiveness for them, He could rejoice that His work was finished. The sense of the Father's purpose of love in His life was so perfect and blessed that when for a moment it was obscured, it was like a moment of midnight darkness at noontide.

To all of us the sufferings of Christ have meant the possibility of some such spirit of trust in a Father's love, some such deliverance from rebellion and distrust and fear. To know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is to remain through the worst that life can bring to us one with the Father, to be of those who in practical acquiescence and obedience love God, for whom all things work together for good. Thus to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is to know how sufferings should be born so that they may all be turned into blessings.

4. To know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is to know the power by which, in the face of all suffering, we may be sustained.

There is a portrait of Napoleon at St. Helena called the "Last Stage" or the "Last Phase", I forget which. It shows a very strong and impressive face, with deep, searching eyes and the lines which great experiences alone can write. But it is not the face of a conqueror any more. It is the face of a man from whom armies could not ward off the calamities of life, the face of a man steeled to endure, but not the face of a man victorious in endurance. Now to that destiny of forced submission the highest and the mightiest who has only place and power at his command must sooner or later arrive. Thrones and empires are nothing as a power to help any man to face the real trials and vicissitudes of life, to face the great mystery of pain and the still greater mystery of death. Human power can cause death, but it cannot shed a single ray into its darkness.

That alone which has power over suffering is love. Even our human affection smooths the pillow of the sick, cheers the fainting heart of the discouraged and refuses to let go the bonds which unite us even at the gates of death. Think how strong and great a thing love is compared with all else. Think of the calamities it can endure, the evils in which it can give comfort, the mysteries through which it holds to a guiding thread of hope.

But love was never all-prevailing until it descended with all power from heaven and took our form, was among us as one that serves and was touched with all the feeling of our infirmity, was made like its brethren even to the sufferings of death, commended itself by dying for us while we were yet sinners. To know the fellowship of that
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suffering is surely to know a love that should sustain us in every trial that could be appointed for us.

For that reason above all, men have ever turned towards the Cross of Christ. It is the symbol of an infinite love. It is something which says we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. It is power, and what we lack above all else is power. We are so weak in face of life, so utterly at the mercy of every accident, so much exposed not only in ourselves but in every tie that binds us to others. We are so weak, and fellowship in the sufferings of Christ makes us so strong because it places us so securely on the bosom of the Omnipotent Love.

In all our affliction we need to know this fellowship. It will tell us that our trial comes from a Father’s wisdom, that it works out a Father’s high purpose, that it should be met by a child’s glad obedience, that it is all gathered up in the arms of a Father’s love. Suffering will thereby be transfigured, so that what we feared as our enemy will be our friend.

But perhaps we are less in danger of forgetting our need of this fellowship of Christ’s sufferings the day of our trial than when we are in the day of our prosperity. We need it as much as a pillar of cloud by day, as we need it as a pillar of fire by night. We need it to remind us that we live amid suffering and that we should live with Christ’s pity and His helpfulness and that we live amid sin and that we can therefore never live far from the discipline of trial. If it has been well with us, let us remember how He who was blessed forever suffered the just for the unjust, to bring us all to God, and then surely no prosperity could ever lift us up with foolish pride and no ease ever corrupt us with base self-love.

VI

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

*Show me I pray thee thy glory... I will make all my goodness pass before thee.*

Ex. xxxiii, 18, 19

There are some very singular descriptions of the intercourse of Moses with God in this chapter. Some of it seems almost contradictory. The Lord, it is said, spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. Presently, it is said, that the Lord told Moses: “Thou canst not see My face for man shall not see Me and live.” Then we find that God was manifested in symbol, a pillar of cloud at the door of the tent. Then there is a strange account of how God put Moses in the cleft of a rock and covered him with His hand and only removed it to allow him to see His back. Yet if we read this narrative with a desire to see the spiritual meaning in it, we shall find something that agrees with our own experience. There is a talking face to face with God and at the same time we only see as it were the hem of His garment. God is at once nearest and farthest away, more real and we might almost say more tangible than His creation, and also known only vaguely by the things which He has made. In one sense God is the only absolute certainty. The material world is but a shadow of His thought, and man upon the earth but the shadow of His creative mind. In another way, God is the supreme object of search, and to the end is the terror and perplexity of our thought. Our text affords some explanation and seeming contradiction. It marks a distinction in man’s knowledge of God true to the spiritual experience of mankind and necessary to a discernment between the things to be known and the things after which we but vaguely aspire. Moses said: “Show me Thy glory.” God said: “I will make all My goodness pass before thee.” On the side of God’s glory we know little, on the side of His goodness we may know much. We see but the hem of the garment of His glory, we are laid upon the heart of His goodness.

Yet the question which Moses asked is the natural human question. We all expect and desire to see the glory of God, and in a sense we are all disappointed. We seem to think we need it for strength and
for success and for hope and joy, until we find God does sustain us and bless us and lead us out to light and peace by entirely different means, of smaller outward splendour indeed but of far more inward value.

Moses had a great work to do. He had to turn a horde of slaves into a great nation, into a strong and self-respecting nation. He prayed the Lord to manifest His presence among them by making them a people separated from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. They were to be separated by character and purity of worship, a far greater distinction than power or material glory, from all the peoples. No man realizing the difficulty and responsibility of this task could face it without some assurance of the presence of God. He might well pray: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." In a task so great, man is but at best a very humble instrument in the hands of the Most High. His success can never be in his self-assurance but in the confidence which comes from trust in the almighty power.

But what is to be the manifestation of that presence? "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory," Moses asked. That is what we all naturally ask. It is the old story, the Jews seek a sign and the Greeks wisdom. There is something both of the Jew and of the Greek in us all. We wish a conspicuous instance of God's power and presence, or we wish some original, some striking proof of His existence. Is it not His glory that we consider the grand proof of His existence, the grand manifestation of His presence? Because God is great we imagine He must be manifested by something unusual, something striking. We use scientific proof of the being of God. Nothing is conducted in such long words, and few arguments lead to less conviction. It has its place, teaching men what they can do and what they cannot. It is also in its way a prayer for divine light. But when it is over, we are apt to ask in greater perplexity than before: "Where is our God?" Arguments from history are apt to be equally perplexing. History has been called the true revelation, the only infallible Bible. Much of the Bible is history. The revelation of God is largely the history of God's dealings with man. We do see many striking events in which we surely trace the tokens of a divine providence. But how often are we sorely perplexed? There are so many incidents the divine purpose in which we can by no means fathom. We are not sure what the sign may mean. Is it simply of power or does it display justice, or is there behind all a Father of mercy?

By any way we seek it, we see traces of the divine glory. Who has thought of this vast creation, of the mighty laws which govern with the same certainty a world or an atom, who has pondered on the task of sustaining the mighty fabric of this universe, or who has cast his eye back over history and seen how nations rise and fall and the great purposes still go on, and has not seen something of the glory of the Lord? Some vision of that kind Moses asked for. He knew he had a purpose of God to fulfil with Israel, and he knew he could only accomplish it in the divine might. God he knew ruled over all nations. He alone was mighty. To be with Him was to have the guarantee of all success, to be against Him was to guarantee failure and dire disaster. But the success of a conviction in our own lives is very much in our way of seeing the truth. Consequently he prayed, show me this supreme power and wisdom by which all things are sustained. He hoped to see it in the same tokens of God's presence that had already been vouchsafed to him, he hoped perhaps to see it in the uniform success of his friends and the uniform failure of his enemies. Are not those the proofs of God's presence we still ask for? Why does not God do something unusual and striking? Why is there so much mixed good and ill?

You have seen the sun shine over the sea on a summer day. Even in nature there are few things more beautiful than what a Greek poet has called the countless rippling laughter of the sea. You turn your face away from the glorious vision and look at your feet. Crawling on a black stone is a fly. Even supposing it was interested, from its position it could only take in a few inches of the glassy mirror. Probably from its standpoint it sees more shadow than light. And why? For the very same reason as we see so little of the divine glory and the little we do see is so much blurred. We stand too low and have too circumscribed a view. The work Moses was taking part in is even now only beginning. How then should he in his few years be able to see the wisdom and the power which directed it. What can we see of the infinite glory? If only we reflected, surely we should speak more reverently and soberly. So often we speak in haste. We imagine we have taken in the whole vision, and we are only flies seeing the shadows on a tiny pool. Only think of what is meant by that one word the Infinite. And the Infinite One is from eternity to eternity. The vast ocean of the divine splendour lies somewhere spread out, seen, it may be, by the eyes of the angels and the saints in glory, or seen, it may be, only in pale reflection even by them. For our limitation, no figure can afford any parallel. "Lord, show us thy glory," we may well ask. It says much for us that we have the thought of it. Here in our circumscribed, our finite sphere, we have some consciousness of the Infinite, something that we cannot let go and which will not let us go. Flies on the little pool, so low down it may be that the shadows of the splendour bulk more largely in our eyes than the light, but with some consciousness of the ocean, strange, awe-inspiring, yet a reflection
of that same divine glory, a something which will not let us rest, something which abides in us a perpetual struggle and aspiration.

The fly does not see the vision of the sunlit sea. That is beyond it. We cannot see the full splendour of the divine glory. That is beyond us. But even the fly feels the joy of the warm sun. And man may know the goodness of God. God does not say I will make all My glory pass before thee. That was a vision too high even for Moses. Nor is it God’s way of revealing Himself. But He says: “I will make all my goodness pass before thee.” God’s revelation of Himself is as it were a procession, not a panorama. The God who hides Himself in thick darkness when we seek to fathom the mystery of His being, speaks to us face to face in the countless blessings of our lives, in all direction of duty and in all inspiration and grace.

We see how the promise was fulfilled in Moses’ own life. Many a time he went forward in great doubt. He saw the people who were to be a peculiar people in their holiness, accept greedily the vices of the nations around them and keep to the end the base spirit of their days of slavery. Year passed after year and the goal seemed no nearer and it does not appear that Moses had any clear vision of the great work he was doing in educating the people for their future destiny. All those years a weight of terror lay upon their spirits and the words of complaint were ever upon their lips and the old man must often have grown weary and the glorious vision often have faded.

But day by day God’s goodness passed before him. Direction was given him for the present duty, strength for the present burden. As grace was needed grace came. The Infinite and the Eternal he could no more fathom than we can, but he was daily conscious of a watchfulness which was unending and of an aid which had no limits. It was in such ways that God talked with Moses face to face. In respect of His glory Moses saw but the hem of His raiment like the rest of us, yet he lived in the presence of the unseen God in perpetual childlike confidence and ever found the response of a father’s heart, as we all may do. The inward vision, the certain vision, the unfailing vision of God is the vision of His goodness.

God in argument avails little. It will gladden no heart, renew no will, enlighten no conscience. But God in Christ avails for all. And God is revealed in Christ not in glory but in goodness. The apostles indeed often speak of our Lord’s divine glory. But in doing so they mean to say that His goodness—His humility, His lowly service, His suffering are the true divine glory when men see as God would have them see. It is not the broad splendour that lights up large horizons our Lord came to reveal, but the warm breath which breathes life into every pool and brings gladness to every living creature. The express image of God’s person, is Jesus of Nazareth, the man, the peasant, the sufferer. We cannot say He is the express image of His infinity here in His lowly estate, or the express image of the omnipotent power in His meek submission. But He is the express image of the Father. He reveals the Father’s glory which is not in His majesty but in the Father’s heart. To each one He comes and says, I will make all the goodness of God pass before thee. The revelation the Father desires to bring home to His children is not His greatness. That may come in its own time. Coming too soon it might rather awe than reveal, rather terrify than uphold. But what He does desire to reveal to every child of His is the heart which beats for all with an infinite affection. This He will reveal now. He will make it the foundation of all future revelation, till finally we see that the highest glory even of God is His goodness.

Amid the complex and far-reaching laws of God’s government we may not be able to see the glory of the divine wisdom, amid all the large purposes of the divine providence we may not be able to see the glory of the divine power. The vision may have to wait till such time as we are able to receive it and God sees good to grant it. But what we need to know now, what we need for the immediate direction and support of our lives is the assurance behind it all, behind all perplexity, of the goodness of our Father. That is faith and we must walk by faith. And this faith is wrought effectively in us only by Jesus Christ. He laid aside His glory in order that He might reveal the Father. Putting away from Himself everything that men count splendid, everything they in their error might imagine the chief revelation of the Godhead, not only all outward renown and splendour but also all inward glorying, He brought into the heart of men this one supreme thought that God loves the world. He went into the workshop, He went out upon the lake or the mountain, He went finally to Golgotha and Calvary and through it all He fulfils the divine promise, “I will make all my goodness pass before thee.” In Christ, who lived for men and died for men, lived for the ungrateful, died for the rebellious, we see the heart of God.

I do not know if I have made the distinction clear, I do not know if I have shown you that man cannot see the panorama of God’s glory but he can live in the procession of His goodness. Whether I have succeeded or failed, no distinction is more important in our knowledge of God. It runs throughout the whole of revelation. Here it is the divine word to Moses and it is set forth in its fullness and power in Jesus Christ. We might put it in many ways. It is not the size of the revelation, if I might say so, but the kind. It is not the vastness of the glory, which even Moses and all the sages only see departing as the
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hem of the garment of one who vanishes, but it is the nearness of the goodness, which Moses, not the sage but the humble man of God, sees face to face with many another, neither wise nor great, who knows the footsteps of One who was meek and lowly of spirit beyond even Moses. For the knowledge of God a greater than Moses is here.

A better prayer, too, may be ours, not what Moses asked but what Moses received. “Thy glory we may wait to see, Lord, show us thy goodness. Make it day by day pass before us, make us live in the abiding vision of it, in sickness and in health, in wealth and in poverty, in every lot of life it may be Thy good pleasure to appoint us. Let us feel at every moment, let us see it face to face, that above all is our Father the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

VII

JUSTICE AND PIETY

Water from the well of Bethlehem.

2 Sam. xxiii, 13

In the National Gallery there is a great picture by Tintoretto of the murder of the Innocents. Other men have tried to paint it by all kinds of violent displays of swords and wounds and human rage. He suggests the murder mainly by a little rivulet of blood flowing across the floor. That little suggestion tells more than a canvas full of raging figures. This incident in David’s life is just such an eloquent, suggestive, symbolical incident. All his battles cannot tell us as much of his love for his country. It shows us how that love was fed by the tender sentiments of childhood and home and dear associations. Every feeling in it was real and vital. It had a local habitation. It touched the life of men. Actual responsibilities must flow from it; duties of kindness to living men, helpful and practical activities of all kinds. It rooted his life in the soil and made it fruitful in good.

One of the evils of the continual movement of our times, one of the supreme evils of great cities, is the decay of all these sentiments of home and birthplace. Men have no sphere as it were, no place of special attachments and special duties. Patriotism becomes mere vague talk about the Empire, mere glorification and expansion of human vanity. It has no special centre, no place the actual dust of which is dear and the waters sweet. Thence it has no footing upon the solid earth and finds no sphere in which to work.

The only sentiment people now have about the well they drink of is fear of infection. In the light of common sense one tap is as good as another, if it is clean. And all life is regarded in the same way. Everything is ruled by common sense and calculation and a due regard to whether or not it pays. And what is the result? A poor, starved life. All the highest and holiest duties call to men in vain. Wrapped up in their own selfishness, they are deaf and blind. The sphere in which God has placed them to see all that is beautiful and love all that is good and serve all that is holy, the sphere in which they might fulfil themselves, serves no divine end. To find our life in God we must not go far afield. It lies all around us in the village.
of our birth, the friends of our youth, the place and the people where our lot is placed.

Like all men of warm feelings David draws forth strong attachment from his followers. The three men of might who heard his longing straightforwardly resolved to satisfy it. Theirs was a bold adventure. Twelve exposed miles lay between them and Bethlehem. Foraging parties had to be encountered by the way. In Bethlehem itself a regular garrison lay. A detachment would always lie at the gate. But the men who came in dejected from their stripped cornfields, took heart again from the love they had to their captain and broke through the Philistine host and in the teeth of the foe drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and took it and brought it to David.

But now David will not drink the water he has recently so hotly desired. It seems to him not water but blood. “Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?” he cries. The warm sentiment of love for his native village was very beautiful in this outlaw chief, this man who was so strongly tempted not to concern himself about any part of the country which had cast him out; but this regard for the lives of men in one who was compelled every day to set the lives of men at hazard, is still finer. You must remember this man and you must remember his life. Every temptation to make light of men’s lives beset him. Daring of this kind he might easily have been led to approve and when it served his own ends, even to call for. But it is just our temptations which prove our virtue. Because he lived where lives of men are held so cheap, this respect for them proves David a man of the finest feeling.

Why, after all, did he not drink the water? After the men had risked their lives, he might surely without incurring any guilt have indulged his hot desire by drinking it. Should he not have done it to gratify the men who had risked so much? What tribute could be paid him higher than this hazarding of their lives? How then could he think of putting it aside?

Did he not put it aside simply because it was a service which he, a fellow mortal, had no right to accept; because it was at a cost which none but God could require and which to none but God should be offered? And is not that the essence of all true morality, the foundation of all duty, the law in all our dealings with our fellow men? Is it not a form of our Lord’s own standard: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them?” Justice, after all, is the foundation of all virtue and this regard for the safety, the life of our fellow men is the basis of all justice. The supreme injustice is to accept the work and so the lives of our fellow men as if we had a right to them. There is no virtue of which we take a shallower view than justice. A man has wealth, let us say, he has tastes, he spends his life gratifying them. He absorbs the labour, the lives of many men. They are poorly paid, shall we say, they follow an unhealthy, dangerous occupation. Though he may never have seen one of them, has he not in pursuit of a quite laudible sentiment been drinking the blood of men? Or let us suppose it is only a question of growing rich by regarding men as mere working machines. Or suppose it is just the kind of relation we all have to those poorer than ourselves, a relation of great regard to the gratification of our own tastes and pleasures and wealth and happiness and our entire thoughtlessness about those who forward these ends. The rebuke of David’s action applies to any hardness and indifference to our fellow men. It warns us that the true justice between man and man is not in fine sentiments but in regard for the people around us, in treating them as fellow men whose lives are as precious as our own and who feel as we do, and joy and sorrow as we do. Just as true patriotism is not in broad sentiments of empire but in loving and serving the place to which we are knit by birth or other tie, so justice is not in fine sentiments of morality but in loving and serving and showing consideration to the people who are about us.

Many years ago I read the Journal of John Woolman the Quaker. I do not know that I ever read a book so hastily which impressed me so deeply. This thought of refusing to drink the blood of men who go in jeopardy of their lives was ever uppermost in his thoughts. Perhaps he carried the idea to extravagant lengths. For example, he would wear no article that was dyed, because of the unhealthiness of the trade and the unnecessary nature of the labour. Compelled by this regard for his fellow men, he made his life very simple. And if you read the Journal you will also be forced to admit that it was very beautiful. His example in such details as the use of dyed clothes I am not setting up. But his regard for his fellow men, his determination not to be blinded by usage, his sense of responsibility for his whole life and not merely for what he saw of it, is surely not more than Christ requires of us. At all events let us remember that merely by refraining from theft and murder and adultery we do not fulfil His law. The heart that is full of consideration but through stormy passions has, like David, committed gross sins, better fulfils His law than the cold calculation of one’s own profit which saves us from any flagrant breach of any moral law but also hinders us from a real fulfilment of any. His law is only fulfilled in this, that we love our neighbour as ourselves.

The water which David cannot drink, he pours out on the ground. Was not that worse than if he had gratified the men by drinking it? Ay, but he poured it out as an offering to God. For himself he may
not accept the hazard of men's lives but for God's honour in the smallest measure he may. There you have the piety of the man, the genuine, unaffected, practical piety which was the deepest feeling in his heart, and the strongest motive in his life. You have an indication of its simplicity and sincerity. It is not a piety that spends itself in exalted sentiments, a fine, abstract, distant, unreal piety. On the contrary, it is practical, genuine, part of his actual life and his everyday thoughts. That sacrifice which he may not accept for himself to gratify his deepest longing, he at once pours out as a drink offering in God's honour. The blood of men who went in jeopardy of their lives is not too sacred, not too costly for His service and praise.

Men may have very imperfect ideas of God and may worship Him in very imperfect ways. I suppose David's own idea of God was very rudimentary and his service far short of the simplicity of the worship in spirit and truth God desires. But the essential, radical, fundamental element of all piety was there. God was worshipped in deed and truth. Not by words but deeds He was praised as God above all. David said in that symbolical act, the lives of men are Thine, all is Thine. Command Thou and let men obey. In spite of great faults you have in that act the ruling thought of his life. It consecrated his ability, his prowess, his gift of song. From mean ambitions it preserved him, and from his worst sin it led him back. This particular incident shows you how it consecrated his life. Had he accepted the sacrifice for his own gratification, it would have been a mere foolhardy adventure, but poured out before the Lord it was an example to inspire the hearts of down-trodden people. For God he could command men's service, he could ask the hazard of their lives, he could pour out their blood like water.

The same distinction abides as the supreme element in all piety. God's requirement is infinite. Life itself may not be weighed against it. In a matter of right and wrong, blood may be poured out like water and the more love we have to men, the more we shall perceive this necessity for utter devotion to truth or holiness or freedom or any divine cause.

Here, then, is the grand lesson of this incident. Patriotism and morality and piety are not in fine large sentiments. They are near us. Our sphere is near, our fellow man is near and above all God is near. Let me ask in conclusion just one question. What is there in your life which is too precious to be used for your own gratification, which you are pouring out as an offering to God? What is there that says your own claims are finite, if circumscribed by your desert very finite indeed, but God's claims are infinite? The lesson is the lesson of Christ's life and death, of His service of men and surrender to God.

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VIII

TURFING THE GRAVE

For now we look through a mirror in an enigma, then face to face: now I know in part, then shall I perfectly know as I have been perfectly known.

1 Cor. xiii, 12

Religion is often resented because it disturbs with deeper thoughts the enjoyment of life's passing show. But it is possible to use religion itself as a pageant painted on the surface of life's mirror to distract us from looking into its depths.

I once attended what I suppose most of the older people have at some time attended, a ceremony of dedication of a monument to the men who had fallen in the war. Being in Cambridge, it was made impressive with the red gowns and maces of the university authorities, as well as with the stripes and medals of the military. The speaking was purged, as it had not always been during the war, from all unchristian feeling, and the glory of the sacrifice of the men was related to the self-forgetfulness, courage and fidelity necessary for the still higher and more difficult warfare of the Spirit required of us all. In short, everything was right and fitting for the occasion. Yet, as it proceeded, a saying of Montaigne's kept recurring to me, the saying that he had written his essays "to turf the grave": and I began to wonder how much, not only of our religious services, but of all we take to be life's serious business, is just turfing the grave, just distraction to keep us from thinking of the bones and the worms below.

Then I suddenly seemed to see beneath this surface picture on the mirror of the war into its depths. I was in a street in Boulogne. A young lad stood before me, from whom I had parted a few weeks before. Then his face was full of the joy of life. Now, a few days before, he had left three hundred of his comrades behind him at Neuve Chapelle, and his face had the haggard, dazed look of a child that had lost all its bearings in the dark. Then I was with another lad from Hill 60, dying slowly, not in pain but in terrible tension, of a bullet through the spine, in a little hospital at the Forward Base, beseeching me to write his mother assuring her that he was all right. The service
ended with the sounding of the Last Post. But to me it was the real
Last Post, and I was in the cemetery in Rouen after the Somme, amid
the rows of graves to which the young and strong were being gathered
to the dust. The rest was all painting on the surface: this was the true
vision to be seen in the mirror of the war.

And, when you think of it, is it not what is truly seen in the mirror
of all life? In our ordinary days, the process is slower and we are more
blinded by custom than in war, but it is not less certain and, in the
end, far more complete. Must it not be a very poor religion which
helps us to forget?

Even the Cross of Christ can be used to this end, by turning it into
a mere ecclesiastical symbol and connecting it with magical cere-
monies. But the real crucifixion was not a religious ceremony to turf
the grave. It was no ecclesiastical occasion at all, but a brutal mur-
der, the innocent done to death by the machinery of justice, the good
rewarded with ignominy and torture. It was the naked, unjust, human
agonize which is life’s supreme mystery. And unless we understand
Christ and Him crucified in that way, we do not penetrate to the
human victory achieved over evil or find deliverance through it.

The Cross is a mystery and the actual deliverance it works is not to
remove mystery but to give a new attitude towards it. Our religion,
we are often told, has failed to remove the darkness and perplexity of
experience. And even good people expect that nothing should happen
of which we are not shown the purpose or that there should be any
question to which we do not know the answer. But the apostle, even
though he had seen things not lawful to be uttered, and though he
is speaking at the height of his spiritual inspiration finds life as much
of a mystery asever. Much as he glories in the Cross, it still leaves the
burden of mystery in face of suffering and still more of sin.

People often speak of life as an enigma, or riddle, without realizing
that they are using the description of the apostle. And it was not a
new figure even then, but was already familiar to his readers. The
Greeks had the tale of the sphinx who sat by the wayside and set
a riddle to the passers-by, and if they were unable to answer it she
devoured them. The sphinx is life, and failure to find any deeper
meaning in it is still to find death the end of the story. Our text is the
apostle’s answer.

It is part of the great lyric on love, as life’s highest meaning, and
with faith and hope, its sole enduring possession. Like everyone who
considers life with insight and imagination and sympathy, he realized
deeply “the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible
world”. He had learned that the knowledge which grows most cer-
tainly is the knowledge of our own ignorance, and that, if it is mere
knowledge it will vanish with all earthly things. He does not profess
that life has ceased to be for him mysterious, but in its depths, blurred
and broken as in a rusty mirror, he sees what he can at least guess at as
its meaning. He is speaking of love, and what he sees dimly, partially,
enigmatically is that love gives life its ultimate significance, and that
it is just because the purpose of love is so high that life’s way is so
mysterious. Life would cease to be a place for faith and hope if it
cess ed to be mysterious, but his religion enabled him to transfer the
mystery from his own understanding and purpose to the love of God
which knows him and is working out its own end in him.

All mankind, and himself among them, had laboured together to
paint false imagery on the surface of life’s mirror, so as not to see
what is reflected in its depths. We all do the same with our many
idolatries of pleasure and possessions and worldly reputation, till we
cannot see even its most obvious fact, what the apostle calls “the
bondage of corruption”, and still less that the wages of sin is a yet
more sorrowful desolation.

But in Christ, the apostle had won as we all may, courage to blot
out these illusions and look into reality, and find even in life’s
darkest trials, glimpses of life’s divine meaning of love.

Mysteries they are still. The Cross itself is life’s darkest mystery. It
is of such supreme human significance, because it was so for our
Lord Himself. It was the cup that did not pass, scorn and agony and
the shadow of unspeakable loneliness. But in trust though not in
understanding, it was accepted as the will of the Father, and so by
forgiveness of enemies, by a life given as a ransom for many, by dying
to sin once for all, it manifested a life lived forever unto God. Thus
all human ills were turned into a mystery of God’s love. This for us,
as for the apostle, is the true unblurred mirror of life in which we see
all that is dark and distressing in life, transforming itself however
partially and brokenly and dimly, into a face of divine love which
knows us perfectly, however imperfectly we know it.

This is the heart of Christian faith. It does not turn all our darkness
into light, or make all our paths smooth, or deliver from all sense of
blindness and weariness and distress, but it enables us to trust that
God’s love is in them. It does not alter the facts, but it changes our
relation to them, and not least to the worst, by teaching us that the
limitation of our vision is only because of the height and blessedness
of God’s loving purpose. Life is so dark a mystery just because God
is love and His love is infinite and can be manifested to us blind,
sinful, finite mortals only in broken glimpses. In short, life is so dark
and difficult because love must have its perfect work, which is not
temporal and finite, but eternal and infinite.
A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

Paul's hope is that some day we shall know God's love as perfectly as all along it has known us. He does not mean that in another life we shall understand all mysteries and all knowledge. Faith and hope need to continue as well as love. But what he sees now as the guidance of love in his life only as a blurred reflection, he hopes to see directly. What he now sees in part is that love knows and directs his life wholly. And immortality is for him to know it as it knows him.

Like Shakespeare, Paul thought often of the evanescence of the proud circle of the globe and all that it inherit. Its greatness, too, he thought a mockery. Like the empty pageant of a vision its cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces would dissolve. But he had found what was eternal and would not vanish away. Faith and hope and love remain, and the greatest of these is love. As mere earthly beings, we may be such things as dreams are made of, but, if we have that love which suffers long and is kind, which seeks not its own, which thinks no evil, which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, we have what never fails, and what shows that our little life is rounded into an awakening, not a sleep, and that the twilight of our present world is of the dawn and not of the sunset.

It is not what we can know about another life that matters. That is never more than an uncertain perhaps. It is what we have now that is eternal and that depends on whether we live by love or by self-regard, because, if we love as the apostle describes love, we know that it is because God first loved us and can only be the God of the living and never of the dead. But if now we have eternal life, the change will not merely be a waking to a new life. It will be a waking also to the true meaning of this, so that the next life will not be an awakening after sleep but a passing from the dim twilight dream of God's purpose into the full wakfulness and daylight of its reality.

Most of our ideas of another life are themselves mere fancies painted on the surface of life, often in the mere colours of earthly enjoyment. What would change life into blessedness would be just to know the love which directs it. Did we always know that it fashions all our discipline and directs all our tasks, there is no life that would not be blessed. This is what should be meant by seeing God, as in some not wholly inadequate way the pure in heart see him in life's darkest ways even now. Strictly we should not speak of another life, but of the perfect fulfilment of this, of the realization of the eternal life we now possess in the love of God which He commends to us by Jesus Christ who died while we were yet sinners.

IX

INCARNATE MAJESTY

But we were eye-witnesses of His majesty. 2 Peter 1, 16

In the cathedral of Louvain there is a wooden crucifix. It is a life-size painted figure clothed in an actual red shirt of humble cotton. It is a very rude piece of carving and yet the artist has made it say what he apparently wished it to say. It tells of a soul not merely suffering but overwhelmed by its agony, a soul over whom all the billows of calamity had rolled and left him broken and stranded on the shores of time. Why, one asks, should anyone ever come to be helped by one who so manifestly was unable to help himself? Yet, hung up before this image there are wax patterns of all parts of the human frame, thank offerings for cures which are supposed to have been wrought at this shrine. One can only suppose that, in spite of their superstition, the people had a better understanding of their Master's suffering than the artist. They knew at all events that His suffering overcomes suffering. They saw His rent flesh, but they saw His divine majesty gleaming through it. Christ's sorrow for them did not ultimately mean suffering and defeat, but joy and victory.

Have we not seen something like the same presentation of the suffering Saviour among ourselves, as appears in the Louvain crucifix? Most of all it has marked our communion seasons, when we showed forth the Lord's death only in its agony and in its bitter sense of being forsaken. It has not been to us a feast of thanksgiving, but rather that saddest function on earth, a funeral meal. We forget that a supper has always been a social and, in spite of the sad memories which cluster round our feasts, a glad observance. When, on the night on which He was betrayed our Lord appointed this ordinance, did He not point His disciples beyond the sadness, beyond the parting, to the triumph, the glory, the transcendent efficacy of it all? Did He not say plainer than words could utter, this is not weakness, not defeat, not the triumph of mortality, not the day of wickedness, but this is the death that brings joy into all sorrow, life into all death, God's success into man's worst failure.

That is the note you always hear in the apostles. The Cross of Christ is a symbol of triumph, of strength, of glory. They never see
His sufferings but they are also eye-witnesses of His majesty. They always see His glory, through His sufferings indeed, just as you can only see the splendour of the stars through the darkness of the night, but they never fail to see His glory. Their sky is never without its glorious shining host of stars.

For beholding Christ’s majesty, even the apostles were indebted to moments of inspiration. The writer of this epistle is no doubt speaking in particular of the vision granted to Peter and the other two disciples on the mount of transfiguration. There they had seen the fashion of His countenance altered and His raiment become white and glistening. The difference would be less in Christ than in themselves. The veil was lifted from their mortal eyes, and no doubt what is told us of His appearance only bodies forth a splendour which flashed upon their inward sight. That vision of His majesty they saw ever after, and they saw the fashion of His countenance altered even under the crown of thorns and Moses and Elias beside Him even on the Cross. It enabled them to say of this suffering, this is of God’s compassion and of God’s mighty working, this submission is the truly majestic thing, this patience the truly omnipotent thing. Men saw only the poor preacher of Galilee, the wayfaring man, the prisoner at the bar, the criminal on the Cross. But the apostles who saw this as others saw it, saw it as men see clouds, seeing them no longer as clouds, but as the gold and purple of the sunset. “I whose eyes were so dim,” Peter means to say, “that I saw only my despised fellow countryman in the High Priest’s Hall, who was so beclouded in my mind by the base passion of fear that I denied even that slight connection of belonging to the same place as He did, I who stood so far off at the Cross and could only see the death pallor gather on His rent brow, I who felt only that I was assisting to lay mere pierced mortal flesh in Joseph’s tomb, I who was so blinded by sin and weakness, nevertheless did not altogether fail to see in it all His majesty. The glory we had seen on the mount never faded altogether from His face”. As the events passed before Peter they had all the commonness and the painful detail which blind us to the greatness of all things that are happening under our eyes, yet in sorrow, in hope, in wonder, the sense of Christ’s majesty made itself felt to Peter. It lay in his heart hidden damp and cold, dying, apparently dead, like corn in the ground till the resurrection morn shone upon it and made it spring forth, vigorous, fresh and gloriously full of life. Yet all the time it was there only waiting to be called forth. Hence Peter does not say we were eyewitnesses of His majesty on the morning when He rose from the grave, but he goes far farther back and says, we were eye-witnesses of His majesty all through His life and His death from the day when His glory shone upon us, startling, amazing, confounding us. The resurrection was therefore to them a mere confirmation, a mere seal of what Peter already knew. It showed that the meek and lowly spirit, the spirit that spoke all truth and endured all opposition, that ever said to God “Thy will be done,” and ever said to man “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” was the thing man could not subdue and the grave could not retain and the powers of darkness could not conquer. As he thought of all the mighty impression of that life and death and of the resurrection which crowned it and interpreted it, the writer of this epistle could only sum it up and say we were eye-witnesses of His majesty.

Whencever we think of our Lord, especially wherewithsoever we think of His sufferings, we also ought in our own degree to be eye-witnesses of His majesty. It is not weakness we behold, but strength made perfect in weakness; it is not suffering even we behold but the love that conquers all suffering; it is not even the triumph of wicked men we behold but the sacrifice which triumphs over all sin. It is power, it is victory, it is life, it is love. There we must see is the one thing that cannot be mistaken, that cannot be slain and buried away; the one thing before which all human thrones and armies and judgment seats, and crowns and possessions are mere dust and ashes, mere food for time and forgetfulness and the all-devouring tomb. Of suffering we see plenty, and to see much suffering in which we see no good and which we cannot help is only apt to harden our hearts. We are all weak enough and every man is the victim of a decay and death he cannot control. If the Cross of Christ meant that and only that it would be no salvation for us. Salvation it can only be when we read in it divine power, and will, and victory, and life, and love. It is victory we celebrate and not defeat, the death of sin not the death of goodness, the interference of God not the riot of man. It is not the sad memorial of the burial of our hopes we observe, but the feast of thanksgiving because sin and sorrow, death and the grave are put under our feet.

But, if we are in danger of not seeing the majesty through the suffering we are on the other hand in danger of trying to see the majesty without looking through the suffering. We see Jesus, let us remember, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. It is not, as we sometimes think it should be, in spite of the sufferings of death, but it is because of the suffering of death. The suffering of death is like the clouds for the rest of us. They make the leaden winter weather. They hang over us like a pall and wall us in with battlements of mud. But in Christ the suffering of death bears the gold and purple of the sunset and remember you cannot have these without the cloud. Life with no death would be a very different thing from life
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with death transfigured to be the vehicle of God's saving love and the promise of God's gift of eternal life.

The Church has often removed Christ's crown of thorns and tried to put Caesar's crown in its place. She has sought to be an eyewitness of His majesty without His humiliation. There is a statue of the Virgin and the child Jesus in the cathedral at Antwerp. The Virgin is decked with immensely valuable jewels and the child Jesus wears a crown larger than His head. You see how the Cross has been an offence there. Jesus is to reign with earthly power from His cradle. His majesty has swallowed up all else. He is no longer the one mediator between God and man. We need on the contrary mediators between us and Him. The Virgin requires to become almost a fourth person in the Trinity to stand between our sin, our weakness, our poverty and this overpowering figure. Saints must be introduced to form a ladder by which to climb to such heights of majesty. In the great procession of the Virgin when this bejewelled and becrowned statue is carried round the town, there is an incident which seemed to me to speak of the true instincts of the human heart. At a spot on the way a simple figure of the Virgin, plain white stucco, unadorned, a plain, human, compassionate, sorrow-tried figure stands. Before it and not before the regal figure the priest goes up and elevates the host, and, in a flash, the great multitude fall upon their knees. They have only gazed at splendour, but they render their homage to humanity and the experience of sorrow. That is the instinct which Jesus being rightly understood Himself meets. He needs no saint and no Virgin to embody it. We must be eye-witnesses of His majesty apart from what He was, not as a thing above what He was. We must be eye-witnesses of the majesty of the Carpenter of Nazareth, of the preacher of Galilee, of the wearied traveller talking to the fallen woman at the well of Samaria, of the bent figure agonizing in prayer under the trees of Gethsemane, of the prisoner too weak before His judges for His own disciples to own Him, of the condemned criminal suffering between two thieves.

Has it ever occurred to you to consider how strange it is that Jesus should only take three, the smallest number He ever took with Him to the mount of transfiguration, only the three who were strongest and had learned most from Him, while He always took them all to see His humiliations? They were all with Him at Nazareth when His fellow townspeople rejected Him, they were all with Him in Gethsemane when He was betrayed, they were all with Him on Calvary when He hung on His cross of shame. Apparently there was greater danger for them in seeing His glory than in seeing His humiliation. Peter himself blundered and thought for a time he had seen a glory like human
greatness that would be content to remain and exhibit itself, that would be the majesty of power only and be oblivious of the majesty of love and sacrifice. That vision of Christ's glory was necessary to put the rest of us in the way of seeing Christ's majesty, but it was not the way itself. The way itself is by the Cross, by the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God in Him who is found neither by signs nor by wisdom but is the power of God to salvation to all that believe.

Sometimes we are impressed by the disadvantage of our position compared with the opportunity enjoyed by the apostles of being actual eye-witnesses of Christ's life and death. We forget that we have seen a glory they never saw. Great works have been accomplished in Christ's name; we see a church accomplishing great things by His power, we see a new civilization created by His influence. But we forget still more that we are in danger of misinterpreting this glory just as the disciples were and that all this like the vision on the mount of transfiguration is only a hint of a majesty we must see in other ways. We have seen Christ rise again as it were in His church. But we must never forget that the only right way to come to the resurrection is by way of the Cross, by way of seeing Christ's majesty in His humanity, in His shame, in His anguish, in His self-surrender. From all the success of Christianity we can get nothing more than a hint of a majesty which is not revealed by crushing man, but by dying for man.

Have we not here the reason why so much we desire has been denied us? We all hanker after signs and wisdom. We all wish to see Christ's glory flashing out in great works of power. We all wish to see mighty actions that will at once and forever silence the scoffers and convince the doubting. But what is it we are really wanting? Is it not to be saved the necessity of seeing Christ's true majesty, which being of love and not of might, must come through service not through display, through self-surrender and not through self-exaltation.

After His resurrection Jesus said to Mary "Touch me not," but to Thomas He said: "Put thy finger into the print of the nails". In the words of Pascal: "We may not unite ourselves to Christ except through His sufferings." It is in that way we seek to unite ourselves to Him in this memorial. Let us not forget either His sorrows or His majesty, but let us know that it is by service that He reigns, by suffering that He saves, by death He brings life and immortality to light. Then as we are partakers of His fellowship, we shall not feel far away from Him, and we shall not feel we are dependent upon what others have told us of Him, but we shall feel that we ourselves also have been eye-witnesses of His majesty.
When our Lord assures us that we shall receive whatsoever we ask in His name, we can only inquire what He means. That any extravagance would be granted us if only we name the name of Christ, is a view repugnant to our experience, to our common sense and to the teaching of Christ Himself. Who taught so constantly the need for submission to the Father’s will, the need for the humility which would not readily interfere, the faith which would not readily question? But just in this very thing we find the explanation. To name the name of Christ is not merely to repeat a word, but it is to speak as He would speak, to have Him speak by us, to ask what He would ask for us. In that case we know that we have our petition.

If our aim be to pray truly in the Master’s name, the first thing to impress us must be the entire absence of prayers for His own temporal good, the entire absence of prayers interfering with the general providence of God, except where the glory and goodness of God was to be displayed by a great and marvellous work. For Himself, He accepted without question the appointment of God for Him, and turned no stones into bread and cast Himself down from no pinnacles, but walked this lowly earth with a meek and quiet spirit.

The great prayer contained in this chapter confirms this impression. It is not for Himself but for His disciples. He sought their good even more than His own, and though He might be freer to ask for them than for Himself, He interferes no more here than elsewhere with the appointment of God. That He would have shielded them from every pang had that been wise, we cannot doubt. He also was sensitive to insult, His body was parched in the heat and shivered in the cold. And no pain could touch His disciples without touching Him. Yet He does not mention heat or cold or danger or trial, and He does not ask that they should be saved one sorrow. He asked nothing that God was unwilling to give, nothing that had to be wrung from the unwilling consent of the Omnipotent, nothing contrary to the divine purpose with man and the divine arrangement for man’s training, nothing indeed about the details of this outward life at all. In considering what our Lord asked for His disciples, we must not forget the many things for which He did not ask.

In our perverse thoughts of God and our ignorance of our own lives, we sometimes think that prayer would have no efficacy at all, that it would be a thing entirely superfluous, unless it did seek something contrary to God’s will. Prayer pleads and wrestles and resists. With this conception of prayer in men’s minds, the futility of it has often been urged. How can man change the purposes of God, how would it be wise for the God who sees from eternity to eternity to alter His decree at the request of a short-sighted, self-seeking mortal? Is not such prayer like a straw attempting to resist the tide, like a man attempting to push down with his hands a mountain? If prayer is regarded only as a means of altering the divine purpose it can be nothing else.

The inability of man to trace the consequences of events and his utter incapacity either for criticizing them or interfering with them has been very cleverly illustrated by an American. He dreamt that he had gone to a better world and there he saw the whole page of history unrolled and his guardian angel was by his side to point him out the lessons. He saw a tent in a wadi on the edge of the desert. An Arab stood watch outside, and inside through the door he could just see a boy struggling on the floor. As the night advanced sleep laid a heavy hand upon the watchman and finally the boy struggled out of his bonds. The writer rejoiced to see the brave lad escape out of the hands of such villainous looking men. But a small dog began to bark. The writer was so excited that he put forth his hand to destroy the dog. But his guardian angel held his hand and turned him to the other side and said here you can do as you please, for this is a spectacle which the Father has arranged for the instruction of his children. There, accordingly, the dog was slain. The boy escaped. He returned home to the comfort of his father, but to the dismay of his brothers! There was a very unhappy household which fell into still further trouble when a severe famine came. The whole land suffered and there was no corn in Egypt. The civilization of that great land suffered, many people died. The people known as Jews were rooted out, fierce Hittite tribes came in from the north. Then Egypt was invaded and overthrown. Onward events moved till the age when the Persians invaded Greece. Then Persia supported by all the tribes of Hittites overthrew
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Greece. Finally, Carthage, supported by a mighty Phoenician power, overthrew Rome. Thus barbarism triumphed over civilization, till all ended in one man holding up a dripping sword. And all this from the life of one small cur. Surely the first of all lessons is submission to the divine purpose and, if prayer is nothing but opposition to it, prayer can be no part of religion.

With our Lord it never was any such thing. Here He says: “Father, that which Thou hast given me, I will.” Prayer with Him was ever part of His life’s task of showing and forwarding the will of God. Its first word was submission, but it was a submission which rested with confidence in the assurance that everything any wise man would desire was God’s will, a submission which knew that the progress of good was never hindered by God’s will but only by man’s. Yet here prayer finds a large place. God’s work is slow and man’s life short, God’s vision is wide and man’s vision narrow, but there is a great task to be done between them, and God admits us all to aid in this task both by active service and by prayer. It is the task of bringing human wills, our own and others, into complete harmony with the divine will. We should all be able to say with the Master, “Father that which Thou hast given me, I will.”

We might say that the first word in every prayer is submission, but if we mean by submission only resignation, a downcast surrender to a will too strong for us to resist, submission was a thing unknown to our Lord. The vision in His prayer is not divine power, but divine omniscient love. And that is the vision we all need. What the highest, wisest human affection would ask for us, God is ever waiting to grant, and the obstacle against which we struggle in our prayers is never the divine will. Not submission but joyous recognition that God is with us, is the true attitude of prayer.

Here also we see the true object of prayer and we cannot have the right confidence towards God unless we are first seeking what God seeks for us. If He has set a high aim before us, and we are satisfied with a low, we cannot but be in conflict with God. We are dazzled by the casket of this life and God will have us obtain the jewel, so we fall into the hopeless rebellion against God’s purposes which makes life bitter and futile. For a moment let us set aside all our anxieties and worldly ambitions, all the smaller aims of life, and let us ask ourselves whether there may be behind them all, and it may be embracing them all, one great and final end of life. If none exists life is a strange fragmentary affair, and the more seriously we take it, the more utterly disappointing it will be. We can also ask someone higher than ourselves. What did Jesus ask for His disciples and for all who should believe through their word? What was it He asked with such implicit confidence that it was in accord with God’s will? That we should “behold His glory.”

Is it not a strange word for our Lord to use? Who ever cared less for His own glory? He used no worldly splendour, He claimed no worldly dignity, He sought no applause of men, He feared no degradation, He shunned no service. The only offence the disciples had hitherto found in Him, was His unwillingness to show His glory. They had waited with anxious longing, they had hinted and even fled, but they saw no king in royal robes, no monarch on any throne. Now, when all was over and they had assembled round the throne of God and He was commending them like orphan children to the Father’s care, they heard Him beseech God to grant the very thing their hearts had so long desired. On earth they were to see Him no more, and yet amid the ignominy of a felon’s death they were to begin to see His glory.

Is our prayer for ourselves anything like our Lord’s prayer for us? Let us remember that this prayer was for us as much as for the twelve. Are our wills in any way in accordance with that purpose? Can we feel that God’s purpose and our purpose here unite? Have we any glimpse of a glory in Jesus Christ which would repay all the toils and sorrows and disappointments and failures of life, could we but behold it? Has the absence of all outward glory a meaning? Was it meant to turn away our attention from this visible painted world to direct it to an invisible glorious world? Is our Lord’s life something like a telescope? You look into it and see nothing, except it be the reflection of your own eye. Not until it is adjusted to your vision do you find out its true purpose. Then the great world beyond lies clear to the view. So it is with our Lord. We look into His life and we see only the reflection of our own thoughts and desires and we see nothing beyond. But in this case the adjustment needed is in the eye which sees. Looking with the eye of faith and patience and love, we begin to see a vision which is meant to unroll itself before our eyes, not merely throughout all time, but throughout all eternity; a vision of an expanse so great and splendid it would be folly to attempt to depict, but something of the nature of it we can perceive from the narrowest glimpse, some hint as if we estimated a country from a field.

What is this glory then as we may know it in this present life? It is not the glory of renown, of high place, of large possession, of dominating power, not any outward visible temporal glory. All these are fading laurels. Some vanish in a day, some last for centuries, but the time of oblivion comes for all, for Alexander as for the last lieutenant whose fame lived for one week in the Graphic because he had been
shot in battle, for Shakespeare as for the writer who is enshrined for one month in a magazine. The greatest wealth ends in the absurdest of all spectacles on which the sun shines, corruption upon which no man may look with pleasure carried to feast the worms amid the pomp and vanity of the world. But our Lord’s was no fading glory, because it did not rest on the foundation of might and self-love as all other glory rests, but upon love and self-surrender. There is the portal to this vision. The supernal glory is a glory of self-surrender. At no moment was it so fully displayed on earth as in the moment of His supreme weakness and deepest ignominy when our Lord, submitting to the cruelty of men as well as to His Father’s will, commended His spirit into His Father’s hands. At the moment of death which levels all other glory His shone brightest, and the grand task of life is but to perceive a glory which death cannot dim, a glory which is eternal, in which death is but a trifling incident.

There life’s task lies before you, rendered difficult by your ignorance, your false conceptions of life, your perverse aims, the foolishness of men around you, the tinsel of worldly place and power. Misled by our own evil hearts and evil associations, we can hardly imagine any glory which does not rest on self-love and which does not encourage and foster pride in ourselves. Hence, it is supremely difficult for us to behold the glory of the Master. Yet it is there. The true glory we all can see must be in helping others, in giving the life not in keeping it, in displaying the love as well as the righteousness of God, in making it plain that the grand end of all God’s work is not power but love.

The vision any man has of this glory is small and dim, but two things we can see. We can see in it the supreme glory of man’s spirit and the supreme end of God’s government. Both are large subjects and I cannot enter upon them with any fullness, but you all know that no man finds himself till he finds Christ. He does not know what capacities are in him, till he beholds as in a mirror the glory of the Lord and is being changed from glory to glory. For while our Lord only speaks of beholding His glory, He knows that we cannot behold unless we also reflect. I greatly fear to become abstract and unpractical as if this were not a concern of daily life. And it is the most important of all practical concerns, for you have no sense of what your soul is, no sense of what your life is meant to accomplish, no sense of God’s image in your own heart, unless you are in some measure beholding the glory of Christ, turning away from the fading outward glories of self-love, to the eternal glories of His love.

In speaking of the other side, of the manifestation of God’s supreme purpose in it, there is a still greater danger of being distant from our present life of work and waiting. But no man can do the simplest task well, without some vision of the eternal work of God behind it, without some sense that it contributes in its measure to this divine work. Science has insisted on the uniformity of law. It has almost paralysed our prayer by showing us to ourselves helpless in the great web of an eternal necessity as flies in a spider’s web. No man as a mere creature of flesh and blood is of much account. It sweeps away kings as cheaply as beggars. And then we learn that the whole system is marching on to its destruction. We see a great mechanical toy, boundless tracts of dust whirling in space, fiery impact of collisions, burning balls cooling as they whirl round each other, then living creatures tear their way into existence, survival of the strongest the only law. The great giddy spectacle only leaves on our minds the impression of being an immense and awful toy, but only a toy, and if there be a God behind all he is not a God strictly speaking with a world, but a God with a plaything. But put this purpose of showing the glory of Christ into the midst of this great world and it becomes a world, a work worthy of an eternal being, righteous, wise and good. Say with the Master: “That which Thou hast given me I will.” That which is the final goal, the explanation of all things, that which will remain when all this physical world has vanished away, is to behold a glory not of power but of love. We begin now to see a purpose in this creation, we see order rise out of chaos; we see instincts of association rise out of this fierce struggle for existence, we see care of the young, we find family affections resting on the very stress of life, we see order rising in society, we see the whole struggle reaching up to the final vision of the glory of Him who came not for His own sake, who humbled Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant, of Him who gave His life to be victorious over death and sin. As the lesson is one, God’s method is one and events march evenly forward, and there is a uniform reign of law, and life is one continuous miracle. But miracle itself is not an interference with this supreme law, only a bursting for a moment as it were of the supreme glory which life is meant to serve through the material veil which seems at times to hide it from our dull vision. To understand, in any measure, that the end of life is not physical but spiritual, is to be delivered from the load that now lies upon so many spirits, of an awful necessity against which we cannot struggle and need not pray, is to be led to cast ourselves on our knees again with renewed trust and confidence, in the assurance that uniformity of law is but uniformity of instruction and that God’s supreme purpose is to reveal the glory of love not power, and that the true confidence in prayer
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Is in knowing that the highest thing we ask for is the thing God has already granted to us.

But the strangest thing and the thing most contrary to His habits, is not merely that He asked for something but He prescribed the way in which it was to be granted. It was His glory and He was to continue to be their teacher.

XI

CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Phil. iv, 12

In this assurance there is no boasting. In the prison-house God had filled the apostle's heart with a marvellous content. This whole epistle breathes the spirit of it. Though confined and fettered, feeling the burden of failing health and advancing years, contentment is too cold a word to express his mood. The epistle is full of exhortations to joy and in spite of the sober note of age and the plaintive note of captivity, its prevailing mood is joy.

Could anything rebuke more our impatience, our vanity, our high and peevish estimate of our own desert than the gladness and gratitude of Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ? If unequalled ability and application entitle a man to success, he might have risen to the highest eminence in any walk of life, and in early life distinction and easy circumstances were already within his grasp. But the life he had chosen led him to prison and left him in such poverty that the humble gifts of a few poor people seemed to him riches. Even as men count ability and genius, it may be that no man was ever greater and no man served his age with a higher aim or a purer motive, and the world paid him not with a palace but a prison, not with a chain of state but with the chain of the captive, not with all the choicest gifts but with barely enough to keep soul and body together. Yet neither envy at the success of smaller men nor disappointment at the issue of his service ever casts a shadow on his mind. He had known how to be full, for when the prospect of wealth and honour interfered with the higher purpose of his life he cast it aside. He knew also how to be empty. When life ended as it did, he had nothing to regret of all his renunciation, of all his service, of all his fidelity. Instead he is full of gratitude for the opportunities and blessings of his life and for any little kindness from his fellow men. Some small gift it might be which other men would have regarded as utterly inadequate for the service which had been rendered, gives him occasion to rejoice in the Lord greatly.
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Which of us does not feel himself rebuked? Compared with the standard of a truly great man like the apostle, are we not rather ordinary commonplace people of whom the world has a great many, and who leave the world and their place is not difficult to supply? Compared with a truly devoted life how poor has been our application, how worthless our service! Yet we have all been clothed well enough and fed as well as was good for us, and we have had comfortable homes and kind friends and freedom and countless other benefits. Yet even in that state, surely fully equal to our desert, it is to be feared we have not learned in all things to be content.

Paul knows that the spirit of universal contentment and gladness is not natural to man. It was something he had required to learn. Here he says: “I have been instructed”. The word he uses means even more. Its original meaning is to be instructed in the mysteries. It is one of the great secrets of divine knowledge open to all, but discovered by few, which are more important for life than all learning. “I have learned the secret, both to be full and to be hungry”, and I am not sure which lesson is more difficult or more necessary.

Most men have some faint sense that they have not fully learned how to be empty. It is very difficult to be poor without suffering from poverty. Custom as well as actual physical need has created in us many wants, and when one of them is left craving, our whole nature is apt to be discontented, and it is miserable to be the slave of a hungry appetite. Perhaps none of us is ever known in our days what actual want means. We have never been hungry but we knew that food would soon be ready for us; we have never lacked sufficient covering for warmth and decency; we have never needed sleep but we could find some sort of resting-place, and we have never been sick but some hand has ministered to us. All the imperative wants of our bodies, nay all the really necessary wants, all that is really helpful not for life only but for vigour have been regularly supplied and yet we have not always been maintained in a wise and grateful contentment. There is so much else makes us discontent with penury besides actual want. Like poor Burns who after all was richly endowed had he himself better known how to “wait”, to use it that is with economy and wisdom, you may occasionally have felt:

It’s hardly in a body’s power
To keep at times frae being sour
To see how things are shared:
How best o’ chieft are whiles in want
While coofs on countless thousands rant
And kenna how to wair’t.
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others, we have so little of a genuine estimate of what is really valuable in life for ourselves, that it is impossible to tell where a man's vanity will be touched or his feelings hurt.

Just as little can we tell what will puff him up. A man may grow rich unharmed and then the snobbery break out in him on a little contact with society. There is no gift so valuable but someone will cherish it not merely with humility but almost without any sense of its value, and there is none so paltry but some man will parade his vanity over it. What principle, what power can guard us on every side and be sufficient in every respect and in all things to keep us calm and cheerful and humble and faithful in prosperity and adversity, in fullness and in want? If life has such a secret is there anything else as much worth learning?

It can be learned only where Paul learned it, with One who surrendered more than Paul, with One who though He was rich yet for our sakes became poor and endured such a humble estate that He had not even the refuge of the birds of the air, not any place of His own where to lay His head. Would we be instructed in the right use of our own lives, we must be instructed in the meaning and power and dignity of His. The lesson is of a threefold nature. It is a lesson in what our Lord taught, a lesson in what our Lord was, and a lesson in what our Lord does.

It is a lesson in what our Lord taught. The fundamental truth, the centre from which all else must be seen, is that the kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation. The true blessedness of our life, the true end of our being is not in anything seen, not in what we have or where we are, not in being full or being hungry. The kingdom of heaven is within not without:

It's no in titles nor in rank;
It's no in wealth like London bank,
To purchase peace and rest;
It's no in makin muckle mair:
It's no in books, it's no in lear,
To make us truly blest:
If happiness have not her seat
And centre in the breast,
We may be wise or rich, or great
But never can be blessed:
Nae treasures nor pleasures
Could make us happy lang
The heart's aye the part aye
That makes us right or wrang.

CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

That truly enough represents the lesson our Lord teaches, only He lifts man to such a conception of the soul in him, made in God's image and redeemed by God's love, to such a conception of what the pure soul may attain even here of the vision of God and of what it is destined for in a better world that material conditions necessarily sink into insignificance for all who have learned what He has taught. We only need to have His view of life and of God's purpose with us in life, and of what is most important to be sought, most essential to the soul of man, to have too lofty thoughts to be dragged down by poverty and too humble thoughts to be puffed up with riches. To be instructed by Jesus Christ is to be taught so to estimate all things, so to subordinate the things seen and temporal to the things unseen and eternal that we are instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer want. And His instruction applies to all things in all respects. Many feel the want of riches less than the want of health, the want of friends, the want of interests, the want of means to cultivate the mind. The Master has taught us that the kingdom of heaven may be within, without any of those things. He has even taught us that such poverty may be our eternal riches. This is the great, the divine secret He teaches. It needs to flash upon our inward sight. Then we can learn the great secret both of contentment and of humility.

Again, to be instructed to be full and to be hungry is a lesson in what our Lord was. Riches and poverty are largely a matter of the imagination. A Chinese would be opulent on an Englishman's penury. We esteem our estate largely as our neighbours esteem it. We lack nothing for genuine comfort or usefulness, nothing for all that is really important in life, but we know our neighbours think us poor, therefore we feel miserably poor. Or, on the other hand, we have gathered a little together and have a better house and keep an extra servant and our neighbours don't. Consequently, although our fortunes may be nothing remarkable we hold our heads high. Almost all our notions are comparative, depending less on our state than on the company we keep. It is our friends more than our estate which make us unable to be full or to be hungry, which make us craving or envious, pompous or purse proud. But there is a secret which enables a man to keep an even mind in prosperity and in adversity, which is to have our fellowship with Jesus Christ. What others may think of us is of small consequence. The end of life is to have our praise of Him and not of men. Now this Jesus who should be our nearest friend, who should be remembered oftener than all our other friends together, whose estimate of us is just and valid not for time only but for eternity as well, was so poor that none of us have ever
touched the lowliness of His fortunes and is so rich that no wealth of ours is a drop in that ocean. Do we abound? Let us not compare ourselves among ourselves, but let us remember the God from whence all our gifts have come, by whom are all things and from whom are all things, and let us know that our true abundance is in His favour. Do we suffer want? Let us recall how poor He became for our sakes and then instead of our poverty causing us shame it will cover us with the glory of Jesus Christ. Could we but live in the light of His eyes, in the joy of His presence, in the dignity of His esteem, should we not be able to be like Him, poor without feeling poverty, and rich without the cankering pride of wealth? We should have learned the secret both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer want. Learn this secret that Christ is nearer than any neighbour and that not in time only but in eternity we shall have pride or shame in ourselves only as we appear in His sight.

Last of all, to be instructed both to be full and to be hungry is a lesson in what our Lord does. Man's face is a strange mixture of the flush of pride and the blush of shame. Even to be taught by Jesus and to have a right estimate of the value of all things in life, even to be assured of His presence and to value His judgment of us above all praise or blame of men, would not always mean such calmness, such humility as would enable us in all things and in all circumstances both to abound and to suffer want. Sometimes we are deceived by our own hearts, perhaps just where we were surest of ourselves, or we may be taken unawares, or there may be some vanity or paltry shame not eradicated. Life is too complex, too difficult for us. But the secret of secrets is the Master's promise to be with us to the end of the world, a pillar of fire in the night of our adversity and a pillar of cloud in the day of our prosperity. We need to know nothing so much as our own weakness and the Lord's strength. And what will teach us it, if it be not the way in which we are moved by any little change in our outward estate which may befal us, esteeming even our own selves, not by what we are but by what we have. So frail are we, so earthly, so changeable, so flexible to every wind that blows. Instruct us, Lord, in the might of the divine grace, in all things and in all respects both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need, till all life's lessons are ended for us and we are filled with all the fullness of God through all His eternal ages.

XII

THE SINFUL HEART

Who resist the truth in unrighteousness.

Rom. 1, 18

Too frequently the Bible is treated as a gay-hearted person might treat his doctor. He is looked on as a dear old man and very careful, but a terrible alarmist. "The good old soul insists that I have consumption and it is nothing more than a slight cold. The way he puts me about is terrible and if I really heeded him he would drive me out of my senses. But he is greatly concerned for me and means well and the family have always employed him." Our Lord speaks of Himself as a physician and the Bible is a book of spiritual medicine, but if we disagree at the very beginning about the nature of the malady, we shall never be able to give our complete trust or our perfect obedience. The Bible always assumes that the disease it diagnoses and prescribes for is deadly and in that point no one speaks more decidedly than our Lord, and man for the most part takes it to be slight and in no wise fatal. Before we can go any further with profit we must settle which view is right. Is sin a deadly consumption, certain to make progress if not checked, more dangerous every day it is suffered to continue, and absolutely certain, unless cured, to have a fatal ending? Or is that all a mistake, a kind of nightmare and is it simply a cold, nothing to be alarmed about and likely to give least trouble to him who concerns himself least about it?

Mankind regards it as a very trivial ailment indeed, only needing to be forgotten to be harmless, a thing about which only foolish and excitable persons make any trouble. From Genesis to Revelation the Scriptures speak of it as of all maladies the most insidious in its progress, the most certain and the most destructive in its result. It drives man out of innocence and bliss, it rends the dear ties of kindred by hatred and murder, it exposes nations to the just vengeance of God, it even casts out the chosen people from the land specially granted them, it slays the righteous man who rebukes it, and finally it crucifies "the righteous one and the just" and is thereby proclaimed forever as a thing which would subvert the whole fair creation of God, dethrone
If this be the true account of the manifestation of sin, of sin as it appears in the life, it is plain how our text, giving an account of the operation of sin in the heart, agrees with it. The sinful state is not a state of conscious rejection of God's law, but it goes behind that altogether and avoids the sense of guilt by rejecting God's method of revealing His law. He has given us the sense of truth, a sense which, like every other sense, comes to power by practice, and by its means we come to fuller knowledge. The sinful heart instead of putting its power into the task of discovering the truth and walking in it, puts its energy into the wrong task of resisting the discovery and rejecting the application of God's demands. Actual transgression is thus avoided by ignorance, but it is an ignorance which will not know, and for which there is therefore the heaviest of all responsibilities. The lack of conformity thus goes back to the sinful bias of the heart, to resisting the truth in unrighteousness. The sinful mind does not commence with resistance to duty but it commences much further back with resistance to conviction. There you have the fountain-head of all opposition to the divine will and of all deficiency in obeying it. And to that view of the human heart and its subtlety, I am very sure you have the testimony of your own experience as well as of the word of God.

Of sin the Scriptures make a further statement which may seem to step beyond the bounds of all moderation. He that offends in one, it declares, offends in all. At first sight this seems a most unreasonable extension of man's already burdensome guilt. Does a man steal because he lies, is he a murderer because he dishonours his father, is he necessarily impure because he does not worship God, is he necessarily profane because he is covetous? Though one man inclines to one sin more than another, even this outward distinction of iniquities is hard to maintain. For a time and under favourable circumstances a man doubtless may continue to offend in one and not in all. But when does any man indulge in one sin without exposing himself to the temptation of others? The boundary line between one vice and another is sometimes very hard to draw. What is the connection between drunkenness and falsehood, yet you hardly ever find a vigorous sense of truth with persistent inebriety. Impiety and impurity are seldom divided, and indeed all the deadly sins are but meshes in one vast net which sweeps the human race to destruction. And the reason is not hard to find. The same frame of mind which permits one sin, permits all. Every sin has behind it absence of reverence, weakness of will and submission to the tyranny of desire. Thus in every sin there are all the causes of every sin. In each offence too there is the same ingratitude, the same rebellion, the same cor-

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1 Westminster Shorter Catechism.
ruption, the same weakness. And these, not the mere outward offence, are the true elements of sin, the true offence against God, the true offence against our own souls. This is really what the Scripture means when it says, he that offendeth in one offendeth in all: that in each sin are the evil dispositions of all offences. In every sin, in every lack of conformity the law is held indifferent and the authority behind the law despised and so the essence of all offence is committed.

By this view of sin we are again brought back to the account of the operation of the sinful mind given in our text. The tap root is resistance to the truth in unrighteousness. Sin is not merely an act, and when the Bible declares that all men are sinful it is not speaking of our acts, but of the attitude of mind behind the acts. It is the state described in our text, resistance to the truth in unrighteousness.

As we are all finite creatures and liable in all things to error, our text distinguishes between resisting the truth in unrighteousness, and resisting it in ignorance or mistake. The apostle takes care not to speak as if sin were simply the natural result of our limited powers. The finite mind might resist the truth by mistake, but only the sinful bias can resist it in unrighteousness. The truth is not weighed as the law of the God who made us and whose we are, as the law between us and our fellow men who have with ourselves the equal rights of brethren; it is not weighed as the rule of direction for our own souls, the way of peace and of immortal hope. There is an unrighteous bias, an undue influence accorded to our desires, to our interests as measured by time or even by the present occasion, to our prejudices and prepossessions. A slow but persistent and effective pressure is brought to bear steadily against the truth. Little by little the conscience is twisted so that, as it were by a slight overstrain every day, all accuracy is lost, all power of weighing and discriminating.

The apostle no doubt learned this truth, as every man must learn any truth that is to be of value to him in life, in his own experience. In his early days he acted in a way we should all call conscientious. His zeal was undoubted, his devotion to what he took to be the truth sincere. Birth, education, the bias of his own mind all tended to make him a sincere and ardent Pharisee. Yet Paul did not regard his early life as blameless. He was injurious and a persecutor. Under all his outward conviction, he had been resisting conviction. Deep down in his heart the words of Stephen and the example of the Christians he persecuted had been arguing with him. But his prejudices and his interests were both against the truth. Hence the vigour of his opposition was not the proof of the sincerity of his conviction, but of the eagerness with which he argued down the voice of truth. Had God suffered him to persist long enough in this struggle, he would have succeeded in silencing the truth and would to the end have been a Pharisee and have gloried in his error and been what men call a sincere persecutor.

This word sincere has been greatly abused. What do we mean by it? Do we mean convinced by the truth, or only convinced in spite of the truth? You will acknowledge that there is a difference, a fundamental difference. A man of obstinate prejudice is not sincere, a man of timid acquiescence is not sincere, a man of hasty and uninquiring soul is not sincere. He is not acquitted of unrighteousness. On the contrary, his unrighteousness has been able to triumph over his convictions. Sincerity must maintain a mind ever open to the truth and ever in pursuit of the truth, and the worst insincerity of all is that which has silenced truth.

This is a very practical matter for the life and conduct of every one of us. What weighs with you? Is it principle or is it self-interest? What are you seeking to know? Is it the right thing to do, or the expedient and profitable thing? Are you in pursuit of the highest, the highest knowledge of God, the noblest conception of man, the most spiritual ideal for our own hearts? To say that you have come to your present position, to your present view of truth and duty without ever distinctly and consciously deciding against right and truth, is but a poor answer. The trouble is that men are so utterly unconscious of their errors and so entirely satisfied with themselves. Slowly, steadily, irresistibly a man's interests are put against the truth. Little changes of mental attitude and habit and the thing that pained you seem quite natural, the lower view grows familiar. You know how it goes on. To-day, to-morrow, the day after, nothing much any day, but the death of an immortal soul when the days are done. Little by little a man undoes in himself the capacity to receive and follow truth and slowly sets up a lie as his god, until he may be able to hold the basest views of life and quite conscientiously, in the shallow meaning we have given to conscientious, believe that all men are fools who hold any higher doctrine and may finally come to be able to break every commandment in the decalogue, careless of the wrong or even glorying in the shame.

The history of the worst life upon earth is summed up in our text. Never in the whole life may there be any positive rejection of truth. Truth was always suppressed before it reached that stage. There may never have been any positive decision between right and wrong. But the steady pressure of resolve goes day by day against conviction. The desire is not to know what is true, what is the absolute reality before the eye of omniscience, or what is the absolute duty before the eye of the righteous Ruler of the world, but only what is
pleasant and profitable. The false judge accords praise to the abstract name of truth, but the practical decision is always in favour of personal advantage or pleasure. By minute acts and thoughts the work of resisting truth goes on. The man and his judgments are perverted together and so the bias in action gives ever less pain because the bias in heart has become ever more pronounced.

By openness to the truth rather than by any one decision of our lives we shall be judged, nay, we are judging ourselves every day. The silence of our conscience is not by any means our acquittal unless there is behind it also an abiding love of the truth. If its silence is the result of a long course of resistance to the truth, instead of being our acquittal, it is our condemnation.

Nor must we give too narrow a meaning to what we understand by truth. Truth cannot be resisted in any department of knowledge, in any relation of life, without perverting our minds and limiting the scope of our moral judgments. Every limitation of our nature is a limitation of our power to obey God and serve our fellow men. And this applies in a very special degree to that which is specially called the truth in the Scriptures, to the revelation of God. Anything that lowers our conception of God, anything that weakens our relation to Him, lowers our conception of life and life's duties. The sinful tendency is not concerned simply with what we call moral questions, but is concerned with the whole nature and the whole life. Our judgments and actions depend upon the kind of men we are, and that ultimately depends upon our openness to the truth and our loyalty to its commands.

If this is a true account of the sinful tendency you will see how it has in it that terrible quality of a deadly disease which we call action and reaction, which makes its pace increasingly rapid and its cure increasingly hopeless. As the disease increases the patient grows weaker. He is less able to resist the disease, more open to its attacks. The disease and the weakness thus increase together, and the one increases the other. Sin in the same way is moral blindness as well as moral weakness. The judgment is perverted and the sinful act and evil desire are easier. The sinful act and evil desire again make it easier to hold the lie for the truth, the sin for the virtue. Thus they act and react, the heart and the head growing corrupt together.

Judged in this way we should also see the need for a deeper estimate of the evil of sin. We often speak as if a man could be hard and impatient and intolerant and yet be a perfectly upright man. We surely forget how sin operates in the heart, how the root of all sin is resistance to the truth in unrighteousness, or what rightly understood is the same thing, the evil heart of unbelief.
XIII

FREEDOM AND OBLIGATION

Necessity is laid upon me.
1 Cor. ix, 16

Nothing in history interests us like the cry for freedom. What is more interesting than the marvellous story of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt? Brave little Switzerland is never so attractive as when struggling for her liberty against the tyrant, and what is there in our own history like the times of Bruce and Wallace?

Let a people be never so degraded or corrupt, if it is struggling for its freedom it has our sympathy, and the heroes of liberty must be very base indeed if they fail to claim from us some little admiration.

It is the same with individuals as with nations. To be free, to be independent is a high and worthy aim. To be a slave is the worst kind of degradation, to be a free man is the first of necessities.

Freedom all solace to man gives
He lives at ease that freely lives.

And yet freedom alone never made a good or even a happy man, a useful society or a prosperous country. The mere cry for liberty, for freedom to do as one chooses, often only the vague restless selfishness, is not in itself a high and noble thing. When liberty means license, it is the road to ruin and complete disaster, the means for destroying all that is exalted in character and in life.

1. The first great lesson for progress is not freedom but necessity, the first lesson for life is to learn to obey.

It is not when a man looks abroad upon the world and sees nothing that binds him that he is in a true way of progress; the truest and best souls most easily and most thoroughly recognize the ties that bind them. If we were perfect and omniscient beings we would not then be free to go any way or do anything we like, we would on the contrary see clearly the one way we had to go and be fixed more rigidly to it than we could ever be by an Arab slave-driver.

Did you ever know anyone who impressed you as a thorough scoundrel, as one who neither feared God nor regarded man? You know at all events what the creature would be like. His mother weeps over him and he does not care, his employers distrust him, but so long as his wages come regularly it matters not. His reputation becomes shady but how does that affect him? What would you say is the peculiarity about this individual? Is it not just his freedom from restraints? A chain that would fasten us hand and foot is as Samson’s withes to him. When society lifts up its voice against us, when suspicion rests upon us we are more controlled by them than we would be by a slave-driver’s whip; our friend’s tears pain us more than boiling drops on our exposed skin. But what does he care? If weeping and grumbling at him afford anybody any satisfaction he has no objection. He is free, free to please himself. Why do you not admire him if freedom is such an all-important question? He has far fewer restraints than ever we shall have either in this world or the next, and yet he is a contemptible, a miserable creature.

The truth is that when we speak wisely of liberty we do not mean mere freedom from restraints, mere permission to do what we like, we mean liberty to obey. The planets move round the sun from year to year obeying the rule God has laid down for them. The earth revolves day by day and thus the great sun rises according to God’s appointment; the whole world obeys, working in harmony with the will of God.

Disobedience would be destruction. And self-pleasing in man, as in the other works of God is the certain means of disaster and ruin. No country was ever founded except by vast masses of men giving up their wills to another. There could be no commerce, no manufactures, no industry of any kind without it. For any great object we must work together and to work together we must obey. Obedience not liberty, necessity not freedom is the rule of life, and he that thinks otherwise is not a great man or even a lofty-minded and independent man, but is generally a bad, selfish, cruel person who has failed to see his duty and his work and sphere in the world.

2. Liberty is only true when it is regarded as a necessity laid upon us, not as a mere right and privilege. Indeed no right or privilege should be carelessly given up because a duty of wisely using them is ours. Liberty is a right, is a privilege, is something that should add to our happiness, to our usefulness, to our growth of character. But if you regard it merely as a privilege and defend it simply as something which allows you to please yourself, liberty becomes merely a means of injuring yourself and ruining others. Liberty to the true man is not liberty to do what he likes, is not the same thing as license, but is freedom from lower necessities that he may obey higher ones.
The child ought to obey its parents, because their authority is the highest he can recognize. He not simply may obey them but must obey them, and the parent knowing that there is no other necessity laid upon the child opposed to his present will insists on obedience and does not consider that he is encroaching on the liberty of his fellow men. But as the child grows this authority becomes weaker, not because of a greater right to freedom, but because with increasing wisdom there should come the sense of a higher necessity, a sense of duty not to his parent but to some higher power. Against this power no parents' voice has aught to say. It is not a sense of freedom then that emancipates us but the sense of a necessity laid upon us from a higher source. Hence one man may not make another a slave, because he has no right to lay such a necessity upon his brother as shall come between him and the necessity which is from above. As every man may look up to God and there find the rule of his life, he should never be forced to look no higher than man to find it there. Wherefore when we defend our liberty we do not defend it merely as a pleasant or profitable thing but because we must be free from man in order to obey God; not because we feel that to do as we please is pleasant, but because of the necessity that is laid upon us from above.

3. Christian liberty is nothing else than a sense of higher obligation. Christ has set us free not to please ourselves, not to sin or do right as suits our convenience, but He has set us free by giving us a deeper sense of our obligation to God. Christ came to be the revelation of God, hence God stands nearer us. The necessity which he lays upon us is not shut off by the thick darkness in which we dwell; we know Him in Christ and hence we know our duty to Him. Christ came above all to reveal God as our Father, as Him who claims us as children by His care and love. Hence we now know our duty to God as His children, and to men as His family upon earth; Christ has laid a necessity upon us to obey God as His dear children. But Christ has put us, too, in a new position. We have been purchased by His blood. The demands of gratitude and loving return for grace are now upon us. Above all, Christ is the bread of life, the bread that came down from heaven, new faith and grace, new strength for us to run the race; and new power is a new necessity and higher obligation. The necessity which is laid upon all men lies heaviest upon a Christian. He is not his own, he has no will of his own, no room for self-pleasing and will worship, for he is Christ's and Christ is God's. But with this highest of all obligations comes the necessity for freedom. We must be rid of all the laws and customs which men have laid down, and we are even freed from special laws which God Himself may have laid down for us. The early Christians not only freed themselves of the vast mass of man's tradition, hand-washing and fringes and sabbath journeys, but they gradually rid themselves of all the old ceremonial, of circumcision, of temple worship, of feasting and of fasts. These things had been appointed by Him not for His grown-up children, but for those who were still under the letter. In the infancy of man, God merely said, do this, do it as you are told and when you are told; but when we attain to the stature of the perfect man in Christ we are set free from this literal obligation, because we have a higher obligation. When a man or a woman has arrived at years of discretion you do not wisely say do this or do that, consider not the reason why, you cannot, in fact, make their lives a series of unthinking duties. To a wise and good person you simply say: "I commit to you this matter"; and he will know that you add, "to your heart and conscience I appeal to do it well and faithfully." So God does with us. Life lies before us, a perfect network of Christian duties. Thy way is before thee, He says, there is no hedge or barricade, no law you may not cross, nothing you may do or not do, if your one single intent and purpose is to serve me. It is a very great liberty. No one is to judge you; meats and drinks and new moons and sabbaths, fast days and feast days, church services, all life's duties are at your disposal, if only your sense of obligation is strong enough to set you free. If not you are still under the law. But if it is stronger than death itself then you must trust yourself without one single law for which you fear punishment, for you have the whole law in this one single determination to obey God and follow Christ. This is the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free, and as it is very great, it must be based on a very great obligation.

4. This necessity which is laid upon us demands a far deeper obedience than any other.

It is assumed that if we are set free we must be more at liberty to go our own way than hitherto. Whereas we are only freed from the lower kind of obedience that we may more thoroughly put ourselves under the higher. When God trained the Jews by special commandments beginning always "thou shalt not" (and we repeat the same method with children), He was only doing as gardeners do with shoots. They plant a stick upright and say along this shalt thou grow, and by cords wisely adjusted they make their will felt. But when the tree grows strong and the sap rises rich and full within, stem and branch all turn upwards and stand straight and not through compulsion from without, but through the power of upward growth from within. We all need to be stayed by outside laws, compelled by outside forces, till we grow strong within and till the sun of God's own favour shine upon us, when through inward movement and aspirations we
stretched out our arms to Him and grow straight towards the light which is our strength.

This is a far more thorough-going compulsion than any external law can give, for it comes through heart and conscience and is the training of our whole being. The necessity which the Christian man feels to be laid upon him cannot be satisfied by any merely external obedience. A duty may be done completely satisfactorily as far as man can see and it may still fail to satisfy this higher demand. We may have done it unwillingly, grudgingly, from fear of men, from desire of praise. There may have been no shadow of determination to obey God, no willingness to do and suffer for Him, no will to sacrifice ourselves for His glory. This obligation which is laid upon us from above, is satisfied with nothing but the service of the heart, and the whole being. Indeed, it demands first the service of the heart and only through it the service of the hands. External obedience is all that the hardest tyrant can demand, but external obedience alone cannot meet the necessity which is laid upon the Christian. We must not only do what Christ did but do it as Christ did it; we must not only have Christ’s life but we must also have His spirit. The demand of the obligation which frees us from men’s laws and ceremonial laws and all special laws is not less but is vastly deeper than any other obligation can be.

5. Nor is it merely deeper, it is also broader.

At first this necessity would seem to limit our duties. We Christians do not require to obey the whole ceremonial law as the Jews did. But let us look a little closer. Necessity is laid upon me, it is not something that I may take up and lay down as I choose; all day long and in every relation of life it is there; necessity is upon us not to do as we will but as God wills. How then is it possible that our duties should be fewer or lighter than if we were under the law which could at most demand of us certain special duties?

The question of the sabbath will afford us an example. Suppose the fourth commandment were given us as to the Jews. Suppose we were told what we might do and what we might not, and that the curses which fell on those who break this law were spoken over us. On the other hand, let us suppose that it were given us simply as it was given to Paul, that if we regard the day unto the Lord we do so regard it and if not, then not, and that no man is to judge us in respect of the sabbath. Would the sabbath be less binding on one who was solely governed by this obligation laid on him from above? As there is still a little of the ceremonial Jew in us, and as there is still a huge gap in our sense of this higher necessity we still believe that the sabbath is safer as a Jewish commandment, with penalties attached. But if one felt as every good man must feel, that in this work-a-day world the sabbath rest and meditation is an absolute necessity for his spiritual life, then this necessity which is laid upon him from above would not be weaker but infinitely more irresistible. Thus too it is with our religious services. We have no fixed commandment to tell us how often we are to go to the temple services. That is a matter between God and your conscience. But if you feel, as you ought to feel if you think rightly, that regularly to worship God in the assembly of His people is a means of grace, a means of making His presence felt, a means of honouring God, a means of showing a good example to your friends and neighbours and children, a means of bringing them within reach of a higher influence, surely the necessity will be immensely heavier for you than if it were a matter of absolute and fixed law with penalties attached. If you do not feel this you do not feel that necessity which is from God and which alone can give us that liberty wherewith Christ has set his people free, and you should again put yourself under the letter of the law that it may be a schoolmaster to bring you unto Christ.

6. But not only does this necessity which is upon us give us a deeper and broader notion of duty. It also reaches much higher.

There is a Jewish–Romish–Scottish notion that all duties above a certain level are optional. You must unconditionally refrain from murder, but when it comes, say, to speaking for the truth we have the right to please ourselves. Now let us listen to Paul. What do you think is the special case concerning which necessity lies upon Paul? It is to preach the gospel. If Paul had committed murder it would have been a very horrible thing, but surely, you say, he had a right to please himself about preaching the gospel. Yet Paul himself is of a different mind. “Woe is me”, he says, “if I preach not the gospel.” Necessity is laid upon me; it is no case of I may or I may not. If there is something that you can do for Christ or, to go still further, something which you can prepare yourself for doing, there is no may in the case; that is your duty as much as to obey the sixth commandment. It is not always easy to convince ourselves of this. Many people, for example, refrain from joining the church because they say they wish to be free. That is to say that while you are willing to meet the obligations of common honesty and the more ordinary Christian duties, you do not wish to undertake the more special duties which are connected with church membership. But, my friends, you are not free, necessity is laid upon you by God, necessity to do all that is in you lies for His glory and the spread of His kingdom, and free from this obligation you never are and never can be. To refuse to take it up publicly before men is not to free yourself, it is to refuse God, to
refuse to obey that necessity which alone can make a man free. To join the church is but to acknowledge this higher obligation, and to fulfil faithfully your duty as a member of the church, of the body of Christ, is but to put yourself under the necessity which is already laid upon you by God. It is not bondage, it is freedom wherewith Christ has set His people free, the freedom to obey God only, to make His glory your one end in life, to do His will not your own. That is true freedom, for freedom is not license but obedience to the highest. It may be losing our life but it is only to find it. This is the true, the noble, the everlasting liberty. In the end of the days it will be found to be the true freedom that all solace to man gives, and when heart and conscience have become moulded to the divine will we shall find that he lives at ease who thus and only thus freely lives.

XIV

ACCOUNTING OF ONESELF

Our sufficiency is of God.  2 Cor. iii, 5

At this period of his life the apostle Paul found himself continually in the very unpleasant position of having to speak of himself. His opponents had so mixed up misrepresentation of himself with misrepresentation of his gospel, that he was compelled to make a personal defence. This necessity was a great grief and pain, and in this passage he speaks in a tone which shows how much he was hurt. To any right thinking modest person it is always a very unhappy thing to have to make a personal defence. He wishes his work to be seen and not himself, and one of the greatest attainments in life is to be able to be silent and allow our work to speak for us. The great work of art does not make us say, what a wonderfully clever artist. It rather makes us forget everything but its own perfection. With regard to Christian work this should be pre-eminently the case. Paul is manifestly in the right line of things when he says we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord. In our life, too, as well as in our words we should walk humbly with our God. Modesty is not a virtue very highly appreciated, but it is an essential of all good work, and when we become prominent and our work obscure we are face to face with failure.

There is nevertheless a personal aspect of our work which we cannot avoid. We see it exemplified in Paul in a very high degree. There never was a man whose own personal qualities and personal experience meant so much for his work as Paul’s. He was so great a power precisely because he put so much of himself into his task. You see something similar in all great work. In poetry, for example, while the great writer seldom speaks of himself, the qualities which make his work great are all personal. The greatness of his style derives its splendour from an individuality which cannot be effaced. Every accent says: “This is my own message.” The poet accounts of himself. Is it not the mark of genius that without affectation and without
vanity, it can account of itself. Shakespeare speaks of this very sense of confidence mingled with self-distrust. He says he envies this man's style and that man's scope, "with what I most enjoy contented least". You see there that he knew his gifts and was not afraid to use them, while his sense of yet greater attainments kept him from all pride in them. Even more marked is the combination in Paul. He is not worthy to be called an apostle, yet he plans to cover the whole Roman world with his work. He always speaks humbly as to his brethren, yet there is always a personal grandeur which comes from confidence in his mission.

What could be more characteristic and individual, for example, than his style? The person who writes with such unconventional splendour accounts of himself. No mortal indeed ever accounted of himself more than Paul, and it was the secret of his success. Was it teaching or suffering, succouring a slave-girl or bearding a Roman governor, dealing with a terrified gaoler or addressing the learned on Mars Hill, you have always the same, unhesitating, intrepid, confident bearing. Somehow he was able to account himself sufficient for all that came, and no element in his life is more amazing or more admirable. How did Paul account of himself as fit to meet paganism in all its glory in the seats of its culture as Athens, of its wealth like Corinth, of its power like Philippi, of its magnificence like Rome, or as fit to dare the prejudices of Judaism, strengthened by the temple priesthood in Jerusalem and all the bigotry of the synagogue in the Dispersion? Think of him as he passes through life, now addressing an excited crowd, now addressing a Senate, now facing the Jewish Sanhedrin or flashing out at the High Priest, now dealing faithfully with a Roman governor, now taking opportunity to stand with his cause before the Emperor himself. Is he not always the same intrepid, undismayed, humble, yet confident person? You cannot help wondering and admiring. You cannot help seeing that no life could fail to be great, were there just such accounting of oneself in it.

How much more could we all accomplish, were we better able to account of ourselves. Nothing in the world worth doing can be done without accounting of ourselves. Many people, for example, hesitate even to join the church, because it seems to be an accounting of themselves as able to be better than other people. This hesitation then appears in rejecting every responsibility by which alone they could, like David, serve their generation. Joining the church is an accounting of ourselves, and if it meant all it ought to mean, it would be a very great accounting of ourselves—not less than as sufficient to be what Paul calls bond servants of Jesus Christ. You profess to live a life free from the domination of worldly lusts, to follow after holiness, and to serve the Kingdom of God. If you could account yourself sufficient for those things, you could do it for anything. Yet you may not put these calls away from you on the ground that you are too modest to undertake them. The whole value and power of your life is in being able to account yourself sufficient for them, in calmly, quietly, confidently entering upon your responsibilities. Your life will then be full of service and blessing and you yourself will be blessed with the only real good, the blessing of having employed such talents as have been committed to your care.

Whatever modesty may be, if it is a good thing, it is not underestimating these talents, or rejecting our opportunities on the ground that we are not able to take advantage of them, or any kind of shirking our responsibilities on the ground of our self-distrust. The Christian life is a life of large undertakings, of doing great things with small means, of high responsibilities, of accounting of ourselves as sufficient to be equal to all the requirements of Christ's love.

But while all power in life requires us to account of ourselves, the source of all weakness is to do it as from ourselves. There lies the real difference between the pride which goes before a fall and the humility which with equal trust does willingly the meanest or the most exalted duty. To be humble is to be conscious that both are from some higher source than one's own determination, and that we shall be surrounded by some other power than our own will.

To account of ourselves is not strength. Proud self-confidence gives no one except the performer any confidence in the performance. The chief source of it is usually ignorance of the difficulties, and when it is not that, it is ignorance of oneself. When a person takes a pair of reins with an air which says "I am a born driver", I am always prepared to find myself full length on the road. A Sunday School teacher who starts as if a class had never been taught before, will either throw it up after the first spurt or be an unqualified failure. No task in life is easy, and we are all so abundantly weak in purpose, and easily discouraged, and erring in judgment, that the man who enters on any task with his head high in the air, has never realized the difficulties before him. In particular the man who faces the Christian life confident in himself, is sure to issue in miserable inconsistencies and sad failures. Let his life be passed in the quietest scenes, in the commonest tasks, it is nevertheless an overwhelming responsibility. Every day he has to be faithful in his daily work, kind and considerate in his home, truthful and sincere in his intercourse. He has the reputations of men and women in his care. He can help to mould the rising generation to good or ill. The Spirit of Jesus or the Spirit of the Enemy of souls may shine through him. Who is sufficient for these
things, for the humblest, quietest life ever lived? What folly for a little man, weak, unwise, variable, limited, to sun himself in his own favour, esteem his own excellence, and offer himself in the sight of God and man as superior by natural gift and acquirement to all his responsibilities! That man has not realized what poor creatures we all are, with our wills corrupted by sin, our hearts shaken by past transgression, and death and the grave waiting to turn all our endeavours to dust and ashes. Had Paul's sufficiency been in himself, how much would it have been worth when he sat in a dungeon with his feet in the stocks, when the very people who ought to have been his chief helpers turned against him, and above all when at the very crisis of his work he waited in a prison for the sentence of death?

Look even at our own lives! What misleads us more than our self-sufficiency? It lands us into trouble and then deserts us. That is its regular way, and yet we never learn any more wisdom but go on confidently admiring ourselves, till suddenly we find what poor creatures we are in the hands of adversity, opposition and death.

The nerve and sinew of all enterprise is just to be free from this self-confidence, and for that we must have our sufficiency from God. Let us be quite simple and straightforward with ourselves, for it must be acknowledged that much talk about going on in God's strength is utterly lacking in reality. Pious phrases will not succour us in the day of trouble. What do we truly mean when we say, our sufficiency is of God?

On what ground first of all do we rest this confidence? How could we say with Paul, And such confidence have we through Christ to God-ward? Is that what Jesus Christ really means for us that, like Paul, we can say we know in Christ God's mercy and wise care so completely that we are sure He will never call us to any duty and leave us dismayed before it? As for Paul's meaning, it shines through all his life. Jesus Christ meant for him such a deep unwavering sense of God's love that every opportunity and every call of duty came to him as God's own word, and when he rose up to meet it, he never thought of himself at all save as a servant honoured to be used of God.

Hence he was able so humbly to trust in God to carry him through a high and difficult task as he would have been to serve in the humblest had it been so appointed. He was thereby enabled to combine a spirit of the lowliest self-distrust with a spirit of the highest assurance, and he could maintain it in a life of vast undertakings, constant opposition, incessant toil and danger, a life of going where no one had cut any path before him, a life of a great pioneer in the greatest of all causes. God, he said, had made him sufficient as a minister of a new covenant not of the letter which can always be observed by following other people, but of the spirit which ever requires an open ear for our own personal message and our own personal call.

Is that what faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ means for us? Is it something which has not merely to do with another life, but which has first of all to do with this? Does it truly bring God into our lives, so that our vanities and our hesitations both vanish before it? Does it enable us to face life's responsibilities and bear life's burdens not thinking of ourselves in either way as able for it or not able for it, but thinking only of God and aware that without his succour we are full of inconsistency and exposed to disgraceful failure, and knowing that His call of duty and His assurance of succour are never apart.

There lies true humility. Humility rightly understood does not mean self-depreciation, but appreciation of ourselves only through God in Jesus Christ as persons who have needed and have obtained great mercy, who are unworthy of being entrusted with any talent but who are nevertheless honoured as fellow workers with God.

A faith in God which is at once an entire absence of self-sufficiency and a sufficiency for all the claims of life, an entire absence of vanity and an entire devotion to the call of duty is the deepest and greatest of all the tests of the reality of our religion; and if Jesus Christ is the source of such a faith, nothing can alter His position as the revelation of the Father and the hope of mankind. Let us only be sincere and say what we mean, and live what we say, and no kind of disturbance can affect our faith. Life has for us all great trials and great responsibilities, but while we are not sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves, our sufficiency for all is of God.
AMBASSADORS OF PEACE

We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ.
2 Cor. v, 20, 21

The apostle often speaks of himself very humbly, but no one more greatly than he magnified his office. This is nothing strange if only we remember that he always thought of himself as an ambassador, for is not this the very essence, the very virtue of an ambassador that he does not represent himself and that his weight depends not on his own merit but on the fact that he represents a power so great that no mortal man could worthily represent it? He always comes forward and says: "Don't judge by what I am but regard the power behind me." Embassies are not a matter of court robes and magnificent men to wear them, but of empires and loyal men to represent them.

But there are many embassies and many of them are far from pleasant, so that the representative of the greatest power would often rather stay at home. Think of the very unhappy position our own ambassadors have been in of late years, how they have had to weigh their words, as a word less or more might mean peace or war. Think how often they have had to hear threats and how frequently even when they did their best, they were suspected of seeking war. I am afraid we have not sympathized with the unpleasant work many of them have had to do for us, we have not reflected on the sleepless nights they have spent revolving in their thoughts how they were to convey the unpleasant message entrusted to them and how they may have wished to be the humblest private citizens, if only they could have shunned the disagreeable task.

But Christ's ambassador has the mightiest power behind him, and he has also a message which it should ever be a delight to convey. He is ever an ambassador of peace. There have been times when we, as a nation, were tired of peace, but we have learned our lesson, and would to-day welcome, like no other earthly good, an ambassador of peace. It is enough to-day to say the message of the gospel is an embassy of peace. Nor is the deliverance of it confined to the preacher. Every Christian man and woman is an ambassador of peace.

1. He represents the Prince of Peace.

We are ambassadors for Christ, that is on behalf of Christ, as it were in His stead. There you have the first thing to realize. Do not forget for whom you stand, for whom you speak, for whom you live.

As a preacher, I would not forget that there is a special application to the office of the ministry. To think we stand for Christ, speak instead of Him, deliver His message, is enough to humble any man. Yet the thought is fitted also to lighten the burden of one's responsibilities. Otherwise it would be a terrible matter to have to do with the souls of men. But the poorest sermon that has any note of sincerity is a word on behalf of Christ, not merely a word to recommend Him, but a word said in place of Him. If you would only think of that sometimes, you would give a more attentive and prayerful hearing and would forget the man who stands here and see the ambassador of the Prince of Peace. It would then be a very little thing to demand that you be regularly in your place to hear reverently the humblest, nay the feeblest ambassador who speaks on behalf of the Prince of Peace. The less he is conscious of his own merit the more he is justified in asking a diligent and patient hearing for his Master's sake. Remember he speaks in the name of the only one who has ever brought to this earth anything resembling the gift of peace.

But the preacher is not the only ambassador for Christ. It would be an evil day for the church and for the world if it came to be thought that the pulpit was the only or the chief place in which His message was delivered and the minister the only or even the chief ambassador for Christ. It is a dignity to which every man who is a follower of the Prince of Peace is called.

I met the ambassador of the Prince of Peace yesterday in his working clothes. I judged him to be a carpenter. He was a man not much given to speech, a man of very few words. I did not know him by his clothes, however, though they were what Christ Himself wore, and I did not know him by his speech though it had much which reminded one of what Christ said; there was only one way in which I could know him. It was nothing less than a certain unmistakable resemblance to his Master. You knew the nationality of the king as it were. He possessed something and its name is peace, so that all his life spoke for the Prince of Peace.

And I will tell you what struck me most about him. He had not misrepresented his Master. The people who speak for Christ in the church, preachers and Sunday School teachers and others too, have somehow taken to speaking of Christ as if He were quite different now from what He was while on earth. Do we not sometimes speak
as if His humiliation were only a kind of experiment, as if He just tried this way of working out the peace of the world for a little time and then ascended up on high and became quite different. Have we not sometimes presented Him as a great potentate who will break what He cannot bend, who will do by power what He has failed to do by love? We forget that He is still the Prince of Peace in the old way, the way of sacrifice and love, and that He knows no other way. We forget that a love so great can have no other way, we forget that a love so great cannot stand in need of any other way.

You must know that the ambassador comes from the Prince of Peace who gives His own peace of service and of love and nothing less. And would you be His ambassadors you only need to be like Him who was among us, not as one that sitteth at meat, but as one that serveth.

2. Christ’s ambassador comes in the garb of Peace.

In one sense every ambassador goes in the garb of peace. But that is only in a superficial sense. He really goes at times with more arms than a general. He has nothing to convey but threats of vengeance if His words are not obeyed. Instead of bearing peace, he bears war, and if he succeeds without war, he leaves such bitter feelings rankling in the hearts of other nations that they only wait for more power to have their revenge.

But think for a moment of how the apostle speaks of his embassy: “As though God by us did beseech you” or “intreat you.” You had no expectation that it would be put in that way. You might not have been very much astonished if Paul had continued using the name of Christ. You are familiar with the thought of Christ beseeching. But He says God and then you expect command, or at the very least, exhort. That is not the word, however, but it is a tender, longing, loving word. “As if God did beseech you, intreat you by us.” As representing Christ we beg, we beseech. There, if you only knew it, you have arrived at the centre of things, you have found the grand truth that explains all experience, all God’s patience with sin, all His endurance of man’s misery. The law of gravitation is an elementary and a parochial thing, a mere bond for a passing material world in one corner of the universe. But this is a revelation of God Himself. He beseeches, He will not, cannot compel. That is what the revelation of God in Christ says. God will do everything for man, suffer everything for him, give everything for him, but He will not override his will. If He cannot have free service He cares for no other. Just because He would do so much for man to draw him, it is clear that He could not compel him. Peace must be of the heart and will or it is nothing. The reason why the Cross of

Christ means so much is just that God beseeches us in it by every sacrifice love can offer, and tells us that He can only beseech, He cannot compel.

And now I must ask you to pause and think a little. Have you quite understood that Christ has sent you into the world in the garb of peace? Have you quite clearly understood that there is no peace of God that rests on anything but freedom? God has not sent you to threaten, still less has He sent you to compel. Even in a good cause and to gain a good end you must not seek to override the judgment or the will of another. Even though it only be by the fear of the judgment of other people.

Personally it seems to me increasingly that the Church must take some more thought about the matter and free herself from all influences which seek to direct men without the hearty concurrence of their own judgment, heart and will. God, I am sure, seeks no other reconciliation. If He does, revelation is a mockery, Christ’s death is a mockery. Why appeal thus if He could amend any soul by compulsion? And experience is a mockery, for if He could correct any soul by might why then does He tolerate so much wrong? But the humiliation of Christ says this is the very essence of God’s dealing with man, that He will do everything for us to make us free, to have us restored to Himself as sons with the glorious liberty of the children of God.

You are ambassadors for Christ, but be not forgetful of how you are to deliver your message. As if God by you did beseech! Is it not very beautiful? Did we but give it a chance, would it not be very powerful? Is it not really the way to peace? Were we but patient, considerate of difference, aye, even tolerant of error, not in the sense of agreeing with it but in the sense of acknowledging the absolute right of private judgment, aye, even tolerant of sin, not in the sense of condoning it, but in the sense of acknowledging that every soul must be guided and be judged by his own judgment, how much greater would be our success as ambassadors of peace! How often have we, by our very manner, our peremptoriness, our haste, our intolerance, been, when we most desired peace, opponents not ambassadors of its gentle reign! Let us ever remember that the servant of the Lord should not strive, but be gentle towards all men, apt to teach, not to dogmatize or dispute.

3. Christ’s ambassador seeks only the real peace.

Peace we all know is a much deeper thing than absence of war. If to-morrow war could be brought to an end, peace might still be far to seek. It is even possible that peace would be farther away than ever.
It would only be the kind of peace which dogs on the chain show. You have seen it, I dare say, what rattling of the chains, what straining and growling! Their feelings in a good fight were friendliness in comparison. And is not much of our armoured peace only the peace of dogs on the chain? Peace must enter deeper into the heart and the lives of the peoples than that, if it is to be a blessed and honourable possession. The selfish ambition, greed of gain and worldly glory, envy and suspicion, indeed all the passions, the nature of which is to war against one another, are not removed. Where there is no reconciliation of interests and of friendships there cannot be any true peace.

I have said the true cause of strife is selfish passion. That, in other words, is alienation from God, or as the apostle puts it, enmity against God. Consider for a minute what it means. What is really meant by being alienated from God? Does it mean having a heart at war, first with conscience and second with life? Is it not to be at war with God’s voice within and God’s government without? You are precisely like your own boy who hates what you told him for his good and resists what you appointed for his good. He resists you, but it comes to be resistance to his own peace.

Wherefore God sends His messengers, His ambassadors, beseeching you to discover your own peace, to know that it lies in willing obedience to Him. We shall take these two points in order. Peace with God is a real peace because it is peace within us. I know I have only to say that and you will accept it. But I am not quite sure all the same whether you altogether believe it. Do you really believe that the hardest duty done as God requires will be blessed and work peace? Do you really believe that the pleasantest sin most carefully done will work strife? It is not a question of words, this, but of reality. To be reconciled to God is really to feel that God’s will is all good and blessed. And you cannot feel that and be opposing it at the same time. You may not feel it is easy, but you can feel it has love behind it, if you have the secret of true peace within. Willing obedience is peace. Remember, not obedience only, but willing obedience.

But peace with God is a real peace, because it is also peace without us. Do you believe that? Believe me it is not a question of words, it is a reality. Ask sincerely what it means. “Be reconciled to God” means more than willingly obey God. It also means gladly, submissively accept His discipline. Now we are not talking about abstractions. God disappointed your ambition. You were sure of a better place, but there was a hitch in the arrangements; well, what did you see behind it? The thing you had been working for was just within your grasp, when health mysteriously failed. How did you take it? You had earned a competence and were preparing to take life more easily,

when the company most of it was in, failed. What kind of thoughts were in your mind then? You had a hard struggle keeping on with your dearest by your side, but the grave has yawned and closed on them. What were your prayers as the sod woke the saddest sound on earth? Were you reconciled to God then? Did you hear Him in Christ beseeching you to be reconciled? Did He say: “My love is sufficient for thee, I will perfect my strength in thy weakness?” When the blinded eyes began to see the glimmerings of light, was there His sun rising in the heavens, the glorious and perfect arrangement whereby all things work together for good to them that love God? Is not that peace and was not He who gave it justified in saying that the world can neither give it nor take it away?

Would you be an ambassador of true peace, you must thus present its uses both in the heart and in the life. What embassy can any man have equal to this? Brethren, be ye reconciled to God, cease to think his way with you is force, learn to know that it is love. And know that all the way is love, nothing omitted, nothing amiss. I care not what sphere in life a man fills, if that is the burden of his life, he does for the world what all the dignitaries of the world only touch the fringe of.

4. The Ambassador of Christ possesses the only Guarantee of Peace.

Peace that rests on compulsion is always insecure. But who is able to give us any better peace? Reconciliation to God may be the only real peace, but who can reconcile us? God may be waiting, but who can touch our hearts and make the reconciliation a reality? How are men to be convinced that they have no cause to fight against God, no cause to think any part of His will hard? How are they to be shown, as the Old Testament puts it, that every appointment of His is “for our good alway”. There is so much both in man’s heart and in his life that opposes this explanation of life. Listen to your desires, and I am sure they do not say God’s way is best; think of your trials and you will hardly be able to feel God’s way is best. Men rather feel that God’s way is only indifferently good, and not at all as wise and considerate and benevolent as might be wished. What guarantee then have you to offer? When you pray men to be reconciled as though God did beseech, how can you show that all wisdom and all right plead for it? Not by a man’s own life! He finds that too perplexing. Not even by your life! You see as in a glass darkly that love has ruled from first to last, but it is too dim to offer to another.

The guarantee you offer is far better. Christ Himself has been made sin for us, though He knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. That includes more than I can dwell on
A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

to-day. I would merely touch on the point that bears on His work as a guarantee to man of all the graciousness of God’s ways. Elsewhere the apostle deals with Christ’s work as removing obstacles created in God’s government by man’s sin, but here He is only dealing with the great obstacle sin has created which is in man’s heart. To be made sin cannot mean a sin-offering. The word in the original does not mean trespass but the sinful bias within and the sinful disturbance without. Wherefore the apostle simply means to say, we have the highest guarantee of God’s purpose, its gracious, its utter goodness by being put in a position to see it. Were we not in a sinful state, a state of inward and outward conflict we could see it. Well, we are removed from that state. There is little use telling a man there is shelter for him over the hill when he is below perishing of fatigue and hunger. The only way is to go down and help him on to the brow of the hill where he can see for himself. And that is precisely what Christ did. He became sin, not sinful, but He whose life was in another sphere lived in ours where sin has made life a continual conflict with temptation within and without. He was made in all parts like to His brethren, even to the sufferings of death, the last agony which might most cloud our vision. It is in this conflict man doubts God’s love and hates His demands. Christ came down and lived all through it and taught man and helped man and stood for man. And now we may be the righteousness of God in Him. Not that we are now righteous, any more than Christ was sinful. But as Christ took the human standpoint we are enabled to take the divine, to see our lives as God sees them, to know the love that appoints our life, to have faith in the things unseen and eternal, to turn our hearts to the obedience of God.

When that happens nothing but peace can follow. Wherefore the greatest part of the work of the ambassador of Peace is to present the Prince of Peace Himself. The righteousness of God in Him is the only perfect guarantee. You can see on the heights what no persuasion would convince you of in the valleys. Live your lives in Christ. Be in a sinful world as He was in a sinful world. By His grace be in it, not of it, and your reconciliation to God will be a great and blessed reality, no mere profession but a peace embracing every desire and thought and every task and incident, harmony within and harmony without alike.

That is the guarantee, the divine guarantee which as ambassadors of peace you have to offer. It would be much if all here had received peace, much not for ourselves only but for the world. Then this assembly would be an assembly of ambassadors, Christ’s own ambassadors, speaking for Him, speaking in His name, speaking in His power.

XVI

A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

Him with whom we have to do. Heb. iv, 13

These words as they stand might seem to mean: “To whom we must give account”. But the literal translation is: “Unto whom there is to us the word”. And, if we look at the connection we see that this means our word unto God. God’s word unto us is living and active and sharp to discern the thoughts and intents of our heart so that we are naked and open before Him. And our word is with one whose word is thus heart searching. Thus we reply to God just by what we are. It is not that God will one day judge us, but that at this moment we are carrying on a dialogue with Him, by which we are judging ourselves. Life is just one unending dialogue with God in which none of us can escape in the end from saying exactly what is in our hearts. Emerson says: “I cannot hear what you say, what you are speaks so loud.” In this dialogue with God, nothing speaks at all except what we are.

Is that your notion of God’s relation to us? Is speech an appropriate description of what any of us imagines takes place between us and God? You have perhaps some kind of a belief that God once spoke with men, and that at some time of judgment He may speak again. But in the present, for many people at least, if they think that they have to do with Him, it is as some kind of vague, undefined influence, a diffused force immanent in the world, a sort of sap as it were moving in its branches. They do not dream of life being a dialogue which depends upon what we say as well as on what God says, a dialogue which makes it as plain as daylight what we actually are, bringing the very depths of our souls to the light of day. Our speech with man has been described as a device for concealing thought, and so it is, a device for saying what we want to have said and no more. But speech with God is a dialogue by the naked realities.

This is in the present, but it also concerns the past and the future.

1. If God has any word for us from the past it is because He uses it
to speak to us in the present, and we know it only as we answer aright.

The present perplexities about revelation arise almost entirely from thinking only of God's side of the dialogue. Thus it seems to be concerned only with the past, a pure tradition which would be secure only if given by infallible inspiration. But the prophet was not merely a man with whom God had to do. He was first and last a man who had to do with God, and his word has meaning for us just as we are such persons.

People in Isaiah's time thought as we do, that they had mainly to do with themselves and with other people. A specially formidable person they had to do with was the King of Assyria. They were so busy speaking about him and answering his threats that they had no time to hear and answer God. But Isaiah said God is a far more formidable person to have to do with, and what He is saying is far more important than what the politicians and potentates are saying. It is not about military strength but about moral sincerity; and He is waiting for His answer. The awful thing about the situation is the way God speaks and then waits for the answer. Whether it was a revelation which led to fuller understanding depended on what the answer was. And whether it revealed God or not, it revealed men—their vain trusts, their hypocrisies, their vanities. So it continues. You can talk with bated breath about the Bible as the Word of God, you can believe it literally inspired in every syllable. But that kind of reply is not of any consequence, if it lay bare a heart to which no word carries weight save your own and your fellow men's and which takes the whole business of life to be getting on in it.

The question is not what you say about scripture, but what you say in reply to it. That is what lays bare your soul in God's sight and shows whether eternal things abide there or only temporal, whether faith is in things unseen and eternal, or only faith in outward might and gain and influence.

God stands back and waits for the answer. He uses this means because He will give you a chance of reply and not overwhelm you with a blare of trumpets announcing His will. He speaks through men of like passions with ourselves just because as they replied, He answered, and as we reply, their word can still be His answer to us.

Nor is it different with God's supreme revelation in Jesus Christ. He is specially called God's word or speech. We think of this as wholly on God's side, and as merely the perfect presentation of the truth on His part. We think the whole explanation is that God had specially to do with Jesus. But we go to the gospels and we see that it was quite as much that Jesus had specially to do with God. Humanly, Jesus reveals God because the will of the Father was the breath of life to Him, so that to every word of God He gave the right answer. God's part of the dialogue is always right, but in this case man's was right also. That we must take part in this dialogue, if we are to learn from it is the first thing made manifest on every page of the gospels. In this nature of it as dialogue, we find its evidence, what it is. It lays us naked and stripped to our inmost hearts before God, and that, whatsoever it may be is our answer. If the right thoughts and intents are there, we know that Jesus is God's word. If the intents and thoughts of our hearts are meekness, humility, love, faith in things unseen and eternal, His answer of assurance and peace and blessedness cannot be questioned. But, if they are pride and self-will and worldliness, we may have all the orthodox views of Him and say "Lord, Lord," and it is all a tradition which makes void every living word of God, so that here too, God simply stands back and waits.

If God has any word for us for the future, it is because He has been saying the same thing to us all the time, and again we know it as we answer right.

When we do not put God far away back in the past, we put Him far away forward in the future. Just as we separate His revelation from the things He is saying to us now, and so find in it only things which seem to have no relation to us, so we separate His judgment from what He is doing with us now, and connect it with things which do not seem very much related to us. In a vague way you understand that your future has some dependence on your faith in Jesus Christ, though you don't see the connection, and that it may somewhat depend on how you have lived and the kind of person you are. With regard to Jesus Christ you are interested in Him and in a way loyal to Him, and for the rest you hope it is all right, because, if you have not done much good, you have not done anything very bad. As for ideas about being desperately wicked, and about a judgment and hell, "we have changed all that".

That men do not trouble so much about the day of judgment is not altogether bad. Religion is not just a business of putting yourselves right with God on the last day, but is concerned with being right with the God with whom we are speaking this day. God will not spring anything on you at the day of judgment. You can keep your minds quite easy on that point. It will be a day of terrible discoveries, but it will not be anything new, for it will be merely the end of the dialogue you have carried on with God all your life. It will consist still of the eternal realities God has insisted on, and the self-deception about fleeting goods you have insisted on. God says, This is how
things are and forever will be, and if you say, "I don't believe that that is how things are, and the future will not show it," God answers, and while His end is still peace, the immediate reply is vanity and vexation of spirit. Jesus Christ is just the supreme word by which God keeps speaking to you of what is eternal, but even to that you can reply by all kinds of self-deceptions about the continuance of what you prefer; that is what the Bible means by saying that man's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. It does not mean that you are not quite decent and reputable people. But it does mean that God, in the realities of life, which His revelation only interprets and which again you only interpret aright as you apply it honestly to the interpretation of life, has been speaking to you, and that you keep on wilfully giving Him the wrong answers. God, as it were, has not forced the conversation.

He says that privileges are responsibilities and that it is not for you to have more of them than you can use well. Your answer is sometimes discontent that you have received so few and sometimes pride that you have received so many, and not a sense that you have nothing you have not received, or of unworthiness in your use of them. If your answer is merely to push your way in this fleeting time, you naturally cannot hear what God is saying by them about eternity. When He says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, the peace-makers, the persecuted," and you reply, "These are very good pious sayings. I have always thought them beautiful, and I have believed them—in church." But in the world obviously the really blessed are the strong, the successful, the people who can fight for their own hand, the popular. Naturally, the conversation goes off the track and instead of having God's kingdom, seeing Him, being His sons, having eternal riches, life has nothing to say to Him except about the fashion of this world that passeth away, the lusts of the flesh, and the lusts of the eye and the pride of life. Then God's word is merely physical decay, failing powers and the indignity of turning to dust added to them. The business is most decently covered up. We rely upon our outward clothing to cover our nakedness, actual silk and broadcloth and houses and reputation and worldly esteem, and even learning can be mere clothes to cover up realities. You yourself and the people about you may fail altogether to get down to reality because of these trappings. But all the time the word of God to you is stripping you bare, showing that underneath you are not a living soul animated by the breath of the eternal, but a fleeting creature dependent on the breath in its lungs, essentially dust and ashes and fruit for worms. It is in this laying bare of the thoughts and intents of the heart that God speaks about what is eternal, and when you reply by a life which says that you don't care what is in your soul but only about what is provided for your body, you show which world you live in and no final judgment can show more. Not a doctrine of immortality, but the present power of an endless life is the hope of the future.

To awake to this folly is repentance and peace with God. It is simply the recognition that your replies to God are all wrong and that your dialogue with Him in life is getting quite perverted by your own answers, and a great cry in your heart to know reality at all costs and be taught by God what you are to reply to Him. It is to desire to be open and naked with God with whom you have to do, which is only possible by being naked and open to your own eyes as well. Then God's word to you each time will be new light and peace and joy, all things in this way working for your eternal good, though it be defeat and loss and pain, and in the end death. Then in a very true sense it will not be your righteousness but God's you will manifest, and you will have a right to desire to be manifested before Him at His coming. Your one cry will be, "Search me and try my thoughts, and lead me in the way everlasting"; and you will not wish to live by any deception, but you will know the truth and the truth will set you free, and you will not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

2. But you may ask, How are you to know that it is God you are dealing with? If it is God whom we have to answer here and now, how are we to know it? Just because God's word to us is a present dialogue with our own souls. You know it by the answer you give, and the reply which comes back. You know it as it were by the way the dialogue proceeds! It is known as much by what we answer as by what God says.

For a time men talked of God as a stream of tendencies and as a power not ourselves which makes for righteousness. To-day the favourite phrase is the immanence of God. No doubt the phrase could be used for what is right and true, but it is mainly used at present to give us the comfortable feeling that however we may be rowing our own boat, the current is carrying us in the right direction. Extreme statements of the doctrine stagger us a little, as when we are told that a debauchee is only taking a slightly more roundabout way to heaven than a devotee. But it is a very pleasant thing to believe that God is putting things right, however much we are putting them wrong. A vague impersonal stream in the right direction is really a very satisfactory kind of God, if you are more intent on having a good time than on making harbour. That is the attraction of all pantheistic feeling about God, and a great deal of the feeling about God to-day is pantheistic.
A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

But it is not the God of truly religious people, it is not the God of the prophets, it is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is not the God of Life, it is not the God of actual events. He is a God with whom we have to do now, a God who speaks and we answer, and who speaks again according as we have answered; a God who is continually showing what we are and not merely what we appear to be, what we actually are in our deepest faith and heart’s desire. He is a pilot, not a tide, and you get the directions right only as you steer by them.

It is a word of life or a word of death. It is a word of life when it speaks to our souls made in His image, not merely when it is written in the Bible or anywhere else. Very often it speaks as a call of duty, and our reply is a deep sense of how utterly we are unfit for it. But when it insists and we accept, it is an assurance of help and the victory which overcomes the world. It is always a word which shows us in some way our poverty and weakness, and makes us ask God, What next? Have you ever noticed how continually the saints speak as if they had carried on a dialogue with God? Isaiah sees God, and says: “I am a man of unclean lips”, and only then he hears a voice: “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” Then He says: “Here am I, send me.” Then, and only then he gets his message, terrible and yet with promise in it.

God calls Jeremiah and he says, “I cannot speak, for I am a child.” Then God says: “Whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.” He accepts and God says he will be invincible as a brazen tower and an iron wall.

It is the same with Paul. There is the challenge about living down his record as a fierce persecutor of the church.

His vision ends with “I will send thee far hence to the Gentiles”, and all the rest of the grace and guidance that came to him followed his answer, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” That for all of us is the sum and substance of a right answer.

What we are all anxious for is to be saved the trouble of this dialogue. We wish God to do all the speaking. We should like him to do all the steering as well as the navigation. God does not speak to any man otherwise than He did to Job, “Gird up now thy loins like a man.” That is the first thing. You will hear from God even though you are a publican and a sinner, but you will hear nothing with ungirt loins, nothing without earnestness of purpose, nothing with Pharisaic illusions about yourself, and determination that even God shall not search your heart. Then the voice goes on: “For I will demand of thee and declare thou unto Me.” That is how God speaks. He will not speak alone. He demands your answer, and what He says next will depend on what your answer is. Then it goes on, with trouble and sorrow, but also with peace and joy, and as it continues you discover the deep thoughts and intents of your heart. You know it can only be God who so deals with your soul, and teaches you to answer Him, and answers with strange new things again, which say: “Take up this burden and go down into the darkness with it, and it is your strength, and as you go on you come out into light, which says: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for this is God working in you the willing and the doing.” You may answer with a sense of bitter loss, but you are answered by inheriting the earth. When it says poverty of spirit you may bow as one crushed, but if you rise and go you are answered by the Kingdom of God, which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Then you know it is just because God is your Father that He cannot speak to you in any monologue, but asks your response before He can speak further. He cannot speak without demands, but when you answer them they turn out to be not burdens but strength and victory, and joy and peace.
PAUL THE APOSTLE

Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.
1 Cor. 1, 1

Study can never be too careful but it may be swallowed up in details. As we cannot see the town for houses, so we cannot see a man for his words. And of no man is this truer than the apostle Paul. With what diligence has he been read by the ordinary reader and by the learned alike. Every phrase has been pondered, and every phrase has proved itself worthy of being pondered. Letters he dictated to meet some urgent necessity prove to be so laden with thought that we cannot miss a word if we would understand. Yet in this minute study we may fail to see the mountainous mass of him, fail to see how the great intellect of him is obedient to the childlike heart, fail to see how both are made effectual by the strenuous will, fail to see the consistency of the life, a consistency based on large plans, on patient enterprise, on openness to the teachings of experience, and on subordination of his own opinion to the divine wisdom. I therefore propose to-day to make a very large sketch. In the time at my disposal it can only be slight. Justice to the great apostle it cannot do. And even if I had the time I lack something even more necessary, the ability. Nay, who among us has it? Paul on every side is so great, so much the man of the world as well as the Christian teacher, so much the gentleman as well as the scholar that one can hardly over-praise him and the best qualification may simply be reverence. There is a hard crust, a crust so hard that even able and pious men speak of him as little better than a Rabin. But once penetrate this crust and you find a man whose thought is all alive, and all trembling with strong emotion, a man to attract as well as to impress. Here is a man who comes out of the midst of the extremest Judaism, whose open mind yet sees the hindrance Judaism has become to Christianity, here is a man who lays down a plan for evangelizing the civilized world and apparently carries it out, here is a man who paces a cell and dictates a letter like the Epistle to the Philippians, who dashes off a glorious lyric like that on charity in the thirteenth of Corinthians,

here is a man who draws all eyes upon him wherever he appears, whether they belong to Jew or Gentile, to rabble or ruler, here is a man who was as bitterly hated as he was ardently loved.

Most painfully Paul felt the wickedness of his opposition to the truth. He was injurious and a persecutor, therefore less than the least of the apostles. Yet we must not suppose that Paul was one of those people who ascribed all good to the years succeeding his conversion and all iniquity to his early years. The passion which brought him to Christ was the passion for righteousness. We see his intense struggle to keep the law, successful with all the commandments except the tenth. He had, as he says of the Jews, zeal but not according to knowledge. No man left more of his past behind him when he accepted Christ. He counted all things but dung that he might win Christ. Yet he says he was called to be an apostle, consecrated from his mother's womb. He does not speak of being called by the word of Jesus. That only marked the incident. Behind that call was a call by the will of God. There you have the true and liberal doctrine of election. It calls us to tasks and then we see that all our lives have been preparing for them. God sent him into a Jewish home in Tarsus. He was proud of Tarsus. He speaks of himself as a citizen of no mean city. All his youth appears to me to have been spent in Cilicia. My reason for this opinion is slight but if you think of it, I feel sure you will admit it is convincing. A man's figures and illustrations almost all find lodging in his mind before he is twenty. Now the apostle's figures are all drawn from life in a Greek town, and there is nothing which suggests Jerusalem or even Palestine. That is why I think he only went to Palestine, as indeed it was the custom of the youths of his nation to go, at the earliest, late in his teens, as one might now go to the university. The earliest impressions and therefore the most vivid impressions were derived from Tarsus, not from Jerusalem, and this influence is almost always underestimated. When first we hear of him, his Phariseism is so intense that we imagine nothing else exists in his mind. We forget that this very intensity proved how deeply he felt the influences to which Phariseism was opposed. His active responsive mind, his intense love of light must always have been the same. Before he came in contact with the narrow Phariseism of Jerusalem his natural bent would have freer scope. Like Newman, he did not throw himself passionately into the arms of the ancient church with its elaborate tradition, because he was ignorant of the scientific and literary and social tendencies of the age, but because he knew them, felt attracted by them and at the same time feared them.

He was a Jew first. The deep affection with which he ever speaks of his brethren according to the flesh, tells of the influence of that strict
Jewish home where the father was the priest and the teacher of his household, of Jewish school and synagogue, of that strong feeling of race which has ever characterized the Jew and which was strong enough to create in Tarsus a system of Jewish rulers as well as Jewish teachers. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews and the Old Testament was to him the supreme writing known to that age of much reading.

Yet his very use of the scriptures points clearly to another and potent influence. Though able to address a multitude in the Aramaic dialect of Judea, and though beyond any doubt able to quote the Bible in the ancient Hebrew if necessary, the influence of early training again appears, for he almost invariably quotes the Greek translation. Greek was the language of his early years, his native tongue, as far as a man so cosmopolitan could have a native tongue, the language in which he spoke and thought and wrote most easily.

Probably Paul's family had been among the early settlers in Tarsus and thus had acquired the right of citizenship, for he speaks of himself as a citizen of no mean city which he would not have done if he had had no other rights in it than birth. He could then only have said he was a native. We are apt to forget the rights and privileges conferred by citizenship in a Greek town, especially in a large centre of education as well as commerce, like Tarsus. In all the peculiarities of Greek life which afterwards met the apostle we see him acting with the easy familiarity which no man acquires save in his youth. He might not frequent the circus and the theatre, but he would know well the nature of the spectacles, the famous philosophers would be known to him by sight and a man of Paul's quick insight readily understands by hints and glimpses. He was a diligent reader, for a Roman governor would not speak of his great learning, if he had known nothing but the Old Testament, and the Rabbinical lore. Besides, no man can use a language as the apostle uses Greek without very extensive reading. Only very seldom did he need in his later ministry to appeal to secular literature, but when he does, he has no difficulty in finding the quotation he needs. The ordinary Jew no doubt spoke Greek with many peculiarities, but Paul was no ordinary Jew and besides his position and education fitted him for using the language with power, with freedom, with distinction. Consequently he gains a hearing as readily from a Greek audience as from a Jewish and they are just as ready either to hate him or to love him, both alike, a proof of respect.

A third citizenship, much esteemed at that time, he also enjoyed, the citizenship of the Roman Empire. For his work as an apostle this was not the least important part of his equipment. As a citizen of the Empire he would know something of Latin, he often gained a hearing where another would have been forced to be dumb, he had security from many local persecutions, he was able finally to bring the cause of Christ before the Emperor and to claim for his fellow Christians the liberty of loyal citizens. Moreover, no man could be a Roman citizen at that time without having his ideas of the world enlarged, and the grandeur of Paul's scheme of evangelization was largely the fruit of his knowledge of the Imperial Government with its great cities and its traffic, its roads and sea passages.

Under no other circumstances could he as fully have come under all the influences of his time. No wonder that behind the Master's call he recognized a preparation from his infancy, a call by the will of God.

With these thoughts seething in him, he goes up to Jerusalem. He becomes the rising hope of the Pharisee party. In character, in intellect, in force, he has no equal. We are apt to misjudge Phariseism as if it were nothing else but an elaborate system of hypocrisy. It was narrow, but we must remember it had to maintain the purity of the worship of Jehovah against the most attractive form of Paganism. The righteousness which was in the law was very inadequate to govern the heart but Paul could only know the defects of the method by sparing no effort in practising it.

A new sect threatens the fundamental principles of the party. By common consent Paul is put forward to suppress it, either by logic or by law. News comes one day which causes consternation. The hope of the party has become a Christian. Nothing but murder would satisfy the hatred of his late friends, a hatred which grew as Paul's power as a Christian teacher increased. Apparently Paul's own friends disown him. Hitherto he has lived as a scholar and a gentleman, now he earns his living with his hands. Yet he does not hesitate to go back to work in the place of his birth, and for many years he labours in the region of Cilicia. Beyond the single fact that he preached in those regions we know nothing, but that they were fruitful years, we see by the result. Before we meet him again, the main outlines of his teaching have been drawn, his attitude towards the great questions which divided the church determined, and his methods of appeal to a Jewish audience at least, discovered.

Those years of quiet preparation over, the occasion arrived. Barnabas needed a man to help him at Antioch. He went down to Cilicia for Paul. Already the question of admitting Gentiles to the Christian church without circumcision and the observance of Jewish rites was a burning question at Antioch. From the very beginning Paul appears to have been the leader of the party who demanded liberty. Going up to Jerusalem by revelation, apparently the prophecy
recorded in Acts concerning the famine, he took Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, with him as a protest more undeniable than words.

On the return of Paul and Barnabas who had been with him, their attitude was approved by the definite call of the Holy Spirit to a larger work, to a work which Paul must have recognized as leading to the fulfilment of the prophecy delivered to him at his conversion that he would be sent far hence to the Gentiles.

The original idea of this first journey seems to have been to pass through Cyprus, the country of Barnabas, and then to return through Cilicia, the country of Paul. But they were led, without any planning of their own, into contact with the Roman governor and as soon as they had crossed the channel, their work again enlarged, probably again independently of their own planning. The door of opportunity being opened, they entered in. They were led to turn aside to the Highlands of Asia Minor, they preached in the great centres of population, and their labours were followed by tremendous excitement, but only by moderate results. The same story is repeated in each town till they arrive at Lystra. From adoration which would have ended in worship, the populace turn round and stone Paul and drag him out of the city, thinking him dead. The old method of preaching is no longer possible. Public debates are impossible, and the return, probably intended, through the mountain pass known as the Cilician Gates with an invalid also impossible. Wherefore they go back the way they came, teaching the few converts, organizing the church and finding their ministry more fruitful than ever before.

On returning to Antioch the news of their success stirred up the opposition of the Jewish party in the Christian church. The matter is referred to the apostles at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas go up as a deputation. Mainly by the good sense of Peter, harmony prevailed, and it was determined to send a decree to the churches that nothing more was required than to refrain from marriage within the forbidden decrees and from things offered to idols and from blood. But such questions are never settled by decrees or by the wisest compromises. The Jewish party would have no compromises. Peter went down to Antioch, doubtless to promote the cause of peace, and like many another man who out of the kindness of his heart attempts to please both parties, he fell into such grave inconsistency that Paul had to speak of it in public. Even Barnabas wavered. When the controversy was at the height Paul and Barnabas resolved to go another journey. Barnabas would take Mark, doubtless as a kind of hostage to the Jewish party, of which it is clear that he was a prominent member. Paul saw that the whole future of Christianity as a religion for the world was at stake. The hour for compromise had not come. He refused and even parted from the friend of whom he never speaks except with the deepest affection and reverence. Still, he was loyal to the agreement he had come to with the apostles at Jerusalem, and as he passed through the churches in Asia Minor which had been founded on the last journey, he gave them the decree of the apostles to keep. By the finger of Providence he is led on into Macedonia and finally to Greece, where he founded churches, especially at Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth, for which he ever entertained a deep affection and to which he wrote some of his greatest letters. From Corinth where he continued a year and a half, he wrote the earliest epistle which has come down to us. The first would seem to be the epistles to the Thessalonians. His ministry had been interrupted in Thessalonica. Consequently these letters are much simpler than the later letters and probably show us the kind of teaching through which he was accustomed to put his converts at the beginning.

Contrary to the usual opinion, I think that he also wrote the epistle to the Galatians from Corinth at this time. From Galatia which is beyond much doubt, as Professor Ramsay seems to have proved, simply the Roman name for the churches of the centre of Asia Minor which Paul had passed through immediately before entering Europe, he would easily obtain news by the short sea passage from Ephesus to Corinth. Perhaps he learned it at the close of the sailing season. He would send the letter by the land route, involving only the crossing of a narrow strait which could be accomplished even in winter, and he would instruct his messenger to meet him at Ephesus. As soon as the sailing season opened in spring accordingly we find him taking ship, landing at Ephesus, waiting impatiently and then hurrying up to Jerusalem, and without delay journeying back to Antioch and finally going through the churches to which he had written his epistle.

Looked at in this way, his action has all the skill of a great general. The letter is sharp. No other letter is written in the same tone. Like every other man who uses his energies to their utmost limit, he was quick tempered, and he had not yet become seasoned to the misrepresentations of his opponents. But there was another justification for his sharpness. If any man was circumcised Christ did profit him nothing. Christian liberty was being surrendered by weak concessions. The very decree had been made to appear a mere concession to weaker brethren who were unable to rise to the whole height of accepting the complete Jewish ceremonial. The new zeal of the converts was thus being turned to base uses. Surely in the circumstances Paul did well to be angry. But his anger did not make him act with precipitation. Instead of rushing to Galatia at once, he gives them time for reflection and when he heard bad news, as he evidently did,
from his messenger at Ephesus, like a wise general he resolved to be sure of what was in the rear before he advanced. Wherefore he went up to Jerusalem and settled matters with the apostles and then he returned to Antioch in Syria and settled matters there and then he was in a position to deal with the false brethren who had dogged his steps in Galatia.

Having completed his work, he passed on to Ephesus. Bad news reached him there of the state of things in Corinth. At once he wrote the letter known to us as the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the noblest of all moral treatises, wherein the apostle lifts all those vexing questions which ever beset a church surrounded by Paganism, questions of impurity, of mixed marriages, of meat offered to idols, of litigation, to the highest plane of thought and duty, appealing finally to the spirit of love as the final solution of all the problems of duty.

After the riot in Ephesus, being anxious about Corinth, he set out by the land route for Europe. On the way he heard that the grave moral questions had been settled, but that the Jewish party had sent their emissaries who by accusing the apostle of inconsistency and of base motives, and by contrasting his authority with the authority of the apostles at Jerusalem, the original disciples of Christ, had made a deep impression. All these months Paul had been living under a terrible strain, he had been ill, the conflict was telling upon him. In the second epistle to the Corinthians which he writes at this time, there is accordingly a great deal more of himself than in any other of his letters. He is touched to the quick by the slanders and still more by the ready ear which his own converts had given to them. None of his epistles are more tender, yet none are so full of a gentle but strong irony. The bitterness of his opponents we can see has increased, but already so many Gentiles had entered the church that the danger of turning Christianity into a mere Jewish sect was passing and the apostle not having regard to himself but to his cause, could afford to adopt a quite different tone.

On arriving at Corinth he wrote his letter to the church at Rome. In it the tone of conciliation is still more marked. To appreciate it you must read it as an epistle of peace, an attempt by calm reasoning to show this church in whose hands, he already saw, lay the destinies of the West, his reasonable and necessary relation to the old law and his conception of a religion fitted for the world. Rome was the great world city, the representative of law and therefore the fitting church to which such a letter should be directed.

Already his thoughts were directed to Rome, and already he proposes going thither. The Roman citizen naturally thought of the capital of the empire, but beyond Rome he had his eye on Spain.
precent mind of the apostle discerned the root of the great errors which were to trouble the church, and though he does not seem himself to have visited Colosse, he responds to the call of Epaphras, who had journeyed to Rome in his trouble, and wrote the letter which we know as the Epistle to the Colossians, wherein he insists that asceticism is of no value against indulgence of the flesh, and that the only higher thought is to think like Christ and the only higher life, is amid the common duties and relationships of life, to live like Christ.

At the same time he sent a kind of circular letter to the churches of Asia Minor, sending it by the same messenger. It is known to us as the Epistle to the Ephesians, though so far as we can discover it was not sent, at least not specially to Ephesus. It is different from all the other writings of Paul, being less a letter than a written sermon.

The Philippians had sent one of their number with a gift to the apostle. The letter he wrote in reply is the only letter we have, which was called forth by anything but division and difficulty in the churches. Even here all was not peace, yet the division is only mentioned and in consequence this most beautiful letter is full of tenderness, and serenity, and the mellow wisdom of age. Labour and age and imprisonment had worn him out, and he would fain lay down his task and depart and be with Christ. Yet in no other letter does he speak as often of joy and he knows that the Master has still work for him to do in the earth and he is still willing to undertake it.

About the same time, probably, he wrote the beautiful letter to Philemon about the slave, Onesimus, wherein he looks forward to the prospect of returning to Asia Minor. According to an early and probably reliable tradition, he was acquitted and did return as he had promised. Afterwards he is said to have carried out his intention of visiting Spain, and then in the first general persecution of the Christians to have been brought a prisoner to Rome where he was beheaded.

The two letters to Timothy and the one to Titus present questions of grave difficulty, but they were apparently written towards the end of his life, and the close of the Second Epistle to Timothy, written from prison, as the end drew nigh, affords a magnificent close to such a life: "For I am ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only but also to all them that love His appearing." He died as he had lived, his prevailing passion being the passion for righteousness. Only Luke is with him. Yet in the midst of this danger and nearness to the end, his practical wisdom and his care for the churches never forsake him. The winter approaches and he may need his cloke, he may have enforced leisure and he may need his books, and if he may not speak he may still have an opportunity of writing, so he asks specially for the parchments. "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will save me into His heavenly kingdom: to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen." Thus he ends, save that with characteristic friendliness he adds a few salutations and invokes the blessing of God upon his correspondent. Thus the greatest follower the Master ever had, passes out of sight.

Yet even his greatness was only in imitation of the Master. Paul the Pharisee in spite of all his genius would never have moved the world. Well might he say: "Be ye imitators of me as I also am of Christ Jesus." The imitation is of amazing originality. All the imitation of Christ is original. What could be more different than the gospels and the epistles and yet what could be more in harmony? The doctrines of election and the sovereignty of God, of justification and the method of God's grace, of salvation and the discipline of life, of faith and hope and love, though so different in expression from our Lord's teaching, yet are all derived from meditation on our Lord's life and teaching. It is true that they have not our Lord's simplicity, not his absolute freedom from all human bias, and that therefore they never can replace our Lord's own words. But it is scarcely less important for us to know what our Lord was to those who followed Him, what He was to the church He founded than what He actually Himself said and did. Christianity is not merely a belief in what Jesus said and did while upon the earth, but is a belief in a Christ who has intimate relations here and now with His people. Of that relation of the Christian to his Lord and Saviour, Paul is beyond all rivals the greatest exponent. We cannot have the same heaven scaling intellect, the same learning, the same practical talent, we cannot perhaps as he did bind men to him with such ardent love and service, we cannot argue with such force or speak with such eloquence, we cannot perhaps have even the same courage in thinking and acting. Nevertheless, we may be imitators of him, even as he was of Christ Jesus, not following the letter but the spirit, fighting the same good fight of faith, having the same openness to conviction, the same readiness to enter in at the open door of opportunity, the same gentleness of spirit united to firmness, the same assurance that all things work together for good, the same confidence that we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. Above all these things we can put on love which is the bond of perfectness.

Being a mortal man he had imperfections, but they are of a kind which endear him to us, such as his struggles with his quick temper
and his sensitiveness and we seem to see him as tradition pictures him insignificant at the first glance, with prominent nose and bald head, like the other great conqueror of that period, the great Caesar, but with an eye that flashed fire, a quick gesture of the hand when he spoke, and a face which, once looked at closely, was as the face of an angel. He, too, travelled the weary road of death, and the Lord he looked for did not come and has not yet come, but meantime he being dead yet speaks.

XVIII

TENDERNESS AND JUDGMENT

_O Jerusalem, Jerusalem._

Matt. xxiii. 34

In order to arouse the attention of careless men and meet the many needs of their sinful natures, our Lord speaks in many different tones. All the great notes of sublime appeal are sounded by him, and there is no familiar strain of common human feeling which he neglects. As no denunciation is so terrible as His, no tenderness is so gracious. He gives the hardened sinner every warning against the evil of his ways, and the timid wanderer lacks no encouragement to return. These things we all know. We are all familiar with His denunciation of the hypocrite and His appeal to the weary and heavy laden, with His pictures of the judgment and of the Father waiting for His returning prodigal children. But while we know these extremes of judgment and tenderness, denunciation and pity, are we not sometimes forgetful of the close, the inseparable alliance between these seeming opposites? Do we always feel, as we ought, that His denunciation is as much the utterance of His love as His greatest appeal? And still less have we felt that the tenderest utterance of His love may be the most awful of all utterances of judgment. Both truths are very conspicuous in the passage before us and we shall try for a little to present them more clearly before our minds and hearts.

Christ's most terrible denunciation is as much the utterance of His love as His gentlest appeal.

To see this truth, we only need to remember the circumstances in which this lament over Jerusalem was uttered. The Master had made His great speech against the hypocrisy of the rulers of His people. No utterance was ever more terrible. Language could not be more scathing: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because ye build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous... Fill ye up the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?" Compared with that, the most scathing human invective is mild. The closer we study it, the more terrible it appears. It is the most awful
woe ever uttered upon earth. Nor is it in any way softened by any want of personal directness, but is sent straight home to those who heard Him. "Verily, I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation." With this trumpet note of judgment the speech closes. From first to last it is severe. No word of consolation sheds a ray through the cloud. It is all woe, woe, unbroken denunciation, lamentation and woe.

As He closes, men draw together in fear. They hear the tramp of the Roman legions approaching the doomed city, starvation is waiting in the streets, pestilence and murder and conspiracy and self-murder are enclosed in the city walls, a conflagration is roaring in the temple and the only mercy is the swiftness of the sword. As the people gaze on the face of Jesus, it is as though the judgment of God flamed forth from His eyes and the cloud of God's destruction had gathered on His brow.

But then—strange and moving sight—a swift change passes over Him. They catch it in His face as He swiftly hides it in His robe. It appears in every line of His stooping and relaxed figure. Then they hear Him cry: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

There you have the close of our Lord's denunciation, there you have the spirit underneath it. Uttering woes against Scribes and Pharisees, 'hypocrites', He is as compassionate, as ready to pardon and to help, as anxious to save a soul from death, as when He says: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden", or: "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not." We may even see that denunciation and warning lie with a heavier burden upon His love, demand greater sacrifices from it than compassionate pleading and tender succour.

This burden of warning is often imposed upon love. Even men cannot escape the weight of it. Faithful are the wounds of a friend and love that is not mere sentiment and liking must sometimes prove its higher qualities of self-sacrifice by injuring them. And God is God and proves that He is love by warning and by pity alike and the revelation of all His dealings with us is that woe of the Master's which is interrupted by sorrow and tears. Let us never forget that behind all our trials, all our conflicts, behind the punishment of our sins, the evils we ourselves have inflicted on ourselves, this compassion abides, and the last word to us never is of threatening but always of pity. To the worst and the most hardened, the appeal of love always sounds in quiet clear voice above the loudest trumpet blast of judgment and the Master always stands with arms outstretched and eyes suffused with tears, saying still, In spite of all rejection and hardening of heart and wickedness of action, how often would I have taken thee to me as tenderly as a hen takes her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

It is a commonplace figure, one few of us could use without utter failure. But it is its commonplace that gives it power in the connection. After the sublimity of warning comes this homely appeal, this simple touch of nature and everyday life. This familiarity to speak of something which ought to be familiar also, this illustration from God's humble creation to display the heart of the Creator Himself. The sad cry still is: "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life." Nothing can alter that. No sin can silence it, no obscurity weary it. Hear it when sin has been most victorious over you and punishment most calamitous. God is love even in judgment. In judgment He remembers mercy.

This truth that Christ's denunciation is as much the utterance of His love as His gentlest appeal, is very evident in our text. But there is another side of the truth which is equally prominent and which in our own time at least is even more neglected. It is this. The tenderest utterance of Christ's love may be the most awful of all denunciations of judgment. This truth is not less evident in our text than the other.

Throughout His speech, which is very stern, He did not hide from His hearers the consequences of their sins. Nothing could be plainer or more emphatic. By their deeds, He told them, they should bring upon themselves all the guilt of their sinful city, nay all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from Abel to the present time. But the real woe was not in those words of fire, but was in the cry of sorrow, in that strange thrilling, pitying cry: "Behold your house is left unto you desolate!"

Throughout the Gospels we have often cause to be impressed by the great claims made by our Lord, following in close succession some special manifestation of His lowliness and meekness. But is there any passage in which this unique claim is more apparent than here? Where else does he set Himself as the highest of God's ambassadors more emphatically than here? Jerusalem had killed the prophets and stoned God's messengers. A very long and sad record dishonoured her name. The tombs of these martyrs were cherished, but alas the spirit of impatience which resented their message and hated and murdered them for delivering it was not dead. Was ever city so honoured? Did ever city have such privileges and opportunities? And did ever any city so guiltily reject the opportunity and prove herself more unworthy of the honour? In that great roll of the prophets of Jerusalem
were to be found the names of many of the greatest of God's servants, Zechariah mentioned here, Haggai, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and greatest of the prophets, Isaiah himself. If merely human dignity contented our Lord, it would have been enough surely to regard Himself as one of that great race. The rejection of His message, He could not have regarded in any way as different from the rejection of the message, say, of Jeremiah. But how very different it is! In rejecting Him, she has not merely added another stone to the heap of her guilt, but she has made her guilt reach up to heaven. Jesus does not merely deliver a message. He is not an ambassador merely. In Him God's love is clearly displayed. He is God's love itself calling to them. It is not, how often would I have warned you and instructed you, but how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings! From the tempests that are massing on the horizon from God's approaching judgments He could have been their protection if they had but hardened to Him. And in refusing Him they refuse their place, their house is left to them desolate and no more shall they see Him till judgment has purified their vision and they see Him as the Blessed of Jehovah, the representative of Him that rules in earth and heaven. That majesty is never diminished by Christ's humiliation of Himself, by His lowly station and meek suffering. To the eyes that see it is intensified, for there is no majesty ultimately but love, nothing that will reign eternally but love. Ay, and ultimately there will be nothing in the world but love which will be a calamity to reject and disobey.

That is the truth which is forced home upon us here. Love is not mercy only, but is also, is inevitably, judgment as well. You see Jesus set Himself before Jerusalem. You see Him rejected. You see His love become an offence to them. Now, just because it was love and not mere opposition to their iniquities, their rejection is a calamity. It cannot be otherwise. We need not speak of any special punishment directly inflicted by God. The punishment which flows from their action is stated here by our Lord. It is the punishment which follows all rejection of good. The good we will not love and follow we must hate. The Christ we will not accept, we cannot but desire to crucify. The real word of judgment, because it is our own judgment upon ourselves, is always, "But ye would not." God's love can set aside all other obstacles but that. Just because it is love and can have no response but an answering love, it cannot alter that obstacle of the hardened will. By it and by it alone a man's house is left to him desolate, a soul shut in by itself, shut in upon itself, friendless, helpless and alone.

Some illustration of this state you find any day among men. Who is the really solitary soul in life? It is not the man who has been bereaved, but is it not the man whose heart is hard? The loving soul cannot be so poor as not to have some ray of love shining upon him. It is in his heart anyhow, if it is not in his life. But the hard hearted may have many relatives and troops of acquaintances, yet have their houses left to them desolate. Still less can God's love appear before any soul, in all its perfection, in all its compassionate desire for its good, and be rejected, without leaving as it passes away God's world covered by a great funeral pall.

You all have your choice. God is waiting to be gracious. Christ still would gather you to Him with tenderness. But He does not pass out of your life and leave you as you are. He goes and with Him goes all that love could do to enrich and fill and satisfy your life and you are left in the dark poverty of being alone with your own hardened and narrow and solitary heart. That is judgment worse than the calamity which can be seen and known and measured. What the other calamity may mean in all its fulness I do not know, perhaps no man knows. "For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth till ye say 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.'" It seems perplexingly composed of opposites. Plainly it involves a calamity, as plainly it seems to have some good at the end even for those who rejected and crucified the Christ of God. It is not perhaps easy to be quite sure of what is meant by coming in the name of the Lord. This however is clear. It means to tell of the day when love shall have triumphed, when the Cross has vanquished the world, when Christ has put all things under His feet. Whatever loss there may be behind, whatever judgment on that day, whatever final rejection of a love which never can cease to pity, which can never cease to utter itself as it once did over Jerusalem, there will be this sure and great calamity that in the interval all love's service is rejected and all love's glory obscured from our eyes. That result is very sure and we can see it every day of our lives. We see Christ rejected and so far as this life is concerned, so far as His present manifestation as a man of sorrows is concerned, rejected finally and utterly. For what we may find beyond of fixed destiny or further opportunity, we have no warrant in this text, but there can never be any further opportunity that can alter the fact that the heart turned from God when He came among us as one that serveth, meek and lowly of heart, bearing our sins and carrying our sorrows. What He may be or what appeal He may make when He comes in the name of the Lord cannot alter the fact, cannot make good the loss, cannot avert the judgment which must follow of itself this rejection of our highest good. Henceforth Jerusalem went forward her dreary, lonely way, her heart hardened, her hope dead,
with no consolation in her tribulations, fallen out of the line of God’s purpose. And henceforth the soul that finally rejects Christ’s appeal, the soul He would love and help and save and which would not, goes onward into the unknown future in all time at least, without God and without hope, his house left in the end to him desolate, and no vision of a Christ who is love and to whom his love answers. That, after all, is the only judgment that can matter much, the only condemnation from which love itself cannot save us, that we have seen the light and reject it because we are not of it, that we hear the appeal of love and answer it with hatred.

XIX

THE EASTER VICTORY

_Death is swallowed up in victory._

1 Cor. xv, 54

Death is swallowed up in—what? Why death is the one thing that is everywhere victorious. It is death which swallows up everything. If it were death swallows up everything in victory, it would be the simple truth. The gates of death prevail against all the living and all beneath the sun, and the sun itself and all the material world are hastening to dissolution. The strongest in its clutches are as the lark in the claw of the hawk. It stops the merry heart of childhood as easily as the heavy pulse of age, it breaks the young man’s strength and blanches the bronzed face of the hardiest, and before its onslaught the proudest bearing stoops and totters. Rank gives no immunity, wealth cannot purchase one day’s exemption, genius has often fallen an early prey. It is the conqueror of all the conquerors, and to it all monarchs resign their sceptres. Death is the victor of victors and the sovereign potentate of all realms, swallowing all in victory. And it is a victory that none dispute and none reverse. His place knows the man no more, his value is nothing accounted of, his plans scattered to the wind, and it is only as if a breath had passed and a handful of dust been scattered in the air.

But here the apostle says is a victory which swallows up this victor of victors, this conqueror of all the conquerors, this great irresistible monster that swallows up all mankind and all material things. Is that true? Is it a reality that has any meaning for us? Can we really believe that this victory is swallowed up in victory? In that case we have something to live for. Our state can only be described in the apostle’s own words, We are more than conquerors. What is this victory? Had a man only dreamed of it, it would be wonderful. If it is a reality nothing can be compared with it. Making a million of money is nothing in comparison. Why the million only goes in the end to feed the maw of death. This is what it is like. There are people who live on a narrow strip of land along the margin of the sea. They make a hard living. Hunger drives most of them to work day by day on the sea-
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shore. It is a barren strip and few grow rich on it. Day by day, sometimes with warning, sometimes without, a monster comes out of the deep and carries them off one by one, here an old man, there a child. Partly custom has dulled their acuter feelings, but a heavy dread lies upon them at all times. And one day there comes a man who undertakes to slay that monster. People are dull and indifferent. But he slays him. Yet many, even most, go on as usual, exposing themselves as of old, yet with the heavy dread upon their spirits. Or rather it is better than this. Through the cleft in the hills someone comes and tells them that the monster has all these years been appointed to warn them that they were not to live on this barren stretch of shore, but to pass through the gorge into a country all fair and rich and good. He leads them to the crown of the road whence they look into this country, and then they look back and see, that, had they known it, this monster was all the time their friend and helper.

In Christ there is this double victory, which we distinguish as a victory of Expectation and a victory of Transformation.

First it is a victory of expectation.

Death no longer closes the vista of our hopes. Christ has risen. He could not be holden of death. Death came to destroy Him and His work. It assailed Him with every horror and indignity and anguish. It cut Him down in the midst of His years, in the midst of His work. The grave closed on Him and men said: “The promise is blighted, His life and His teaching have perished together.” For three days death reigned—its victory undisputed. Even His disciples could only say: “We thought it had been He who was to redeem Israel.” But the morning of the third day saw Him, the furrows of mortal agony smoothed out of His face, with the radiant light of heaven on His calm forehead, ascend out of the tomb. He burst the gates of death and came forth conqueror over death and over sin which is the sting of death. On this Easter morning we would go with Mary and hear Him say: “Touch me not, till thy earthly touch is refined by this same passage through darkness into light.” We would know that He is the one Victor, and that in His victory is the promise of the triumph of all who have faith in Him.

By Christ’s victory we, too, have the victory of expectation, of hope. Death is swallowed up for us in the victorious expectation of a life beyond it. Death is no longer a dark cave into the depths of the earth. It is only an overshadowed pass through the mountains. Christ has appeared to us as one who has passed through and who has again shown Himself to us upon the sunny mountain-top to signal to us that all is peace and glory beyond.

I remember a good man once saying: I have come to have a contempt for death. He meant that he had come to regard all the ghastly associations of it, the struggle of the deathbed and the corruption of the grave as only a sort of bugbear to frighten children. He meant that through Christ he had so utterly come to know that it made no really important difference to any soul whose life was lived in Him, that the apparent change was a mere pretence and mockery. Having seen through the vista into the life beyond with God, death was only a kind of chained dog to bark at him as he passed.

Very far we may be from this confidence. Even at the end we may have to hurry past with shaking limbs and quivering heart. In this terror we are not alone. The very best have not escaped. Paul said he desired not to be unclothed but to be clothed upon. And who was it said: If it be possible let this cup pass from me? Nevertheless, we shall triumph. Death is swallowed up in the victory of hope. We shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord. We still shudder at the awful mask of death, but we have seen it removed for a little and behind was the beautiful face of life. The day will come when we must draw nigh to receive the kiss from those cold lips which shall chase the red from ours forever, but we shall feel behind them the warm kiss of life, by which the flood of bliss shall fill our souls and the new life of glory burst upon us in its first power.

Second it is a victory of Transformation.

Christ and the power of His resurrection have done more than make death cease to be the final end; they have done more than show us the hope of life beyond death, more than merely abolish death.

Christ did more than submit to the destroyer like the rest of us. We are often found speaking of His death as if He suffered and died in weakness only. Sometimes His death is set forth as the supreme tragedy of human suffering and woe, only the more pathetic that he was so good, only the greater evidence of the power of death that it overcame Him in the midst of the most beneficent career. Then the glory of the resurrection stands in glaring contrast to the gloom of the crucifixion, and death still continues to be the dark flood through which we pass in storm and night to the heavenly shore. Purpose in it we recognize none, need for it in God’s gracious dealings with us none, blessing and glory in mortality itself none.

By the resurrection nevertheless a new light is shed upon the death of Christ and so upon the death of all who receive His grace. By death Christ has abolished death, but that is the smallest part of His work. By death He has also abolished sin. Let us consider for a moment what He made death. He did more than make it an incident of three days to be ended like a bad dream by the morning of the resur-
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reaction. In a greater sense than that it was swallowed up in victory. He transmuted this supreme evidence of man's weakness into two supreme acts of triumph. First, he transmuted it into the supreme act of fulfilling the will of the Father. What but death, death in its darkest, most forbidding form, could proclaim the depth and reality of His words: "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." It says how awful is the bondage of sin, what chaos and ruin it works in God's world, and it says that the heart of the Eternal will spare nothing to save His world from its power, from its pollution, from its disorder, from its attraction, from its guilt. Had there been no death, what expression, what vehicle, what instrument could God have found to utter and convey the entire, the absolute devotion of His love, to maintain the majesty of His injured law and redeem the guilt of His erring children?

Second, He makes death the supreme appeal by which He reconciles His sinful brethren to the Father. Had there been no death, in what language could He have spoken to us of the guilt and folly of sin, and of the love of God, and of the supreme iniquity of sinning against infinite love, of the evil we are cherishing and the good we are resisting? When He rose death for us was not abolished. It was transfigured, and God's holiness and love shone through it, and our own highest good, our own supreme strength, shone through it. How except by being made like unto His brethren for the sufferings of death could He have accomplished either this revelation of the Father or this reconciliation of His brethren?

Nothing differs more among men than their religions. Yet in the lowest as the highest there is one feature, a kind of family likeness about which no mistake can be made. Every religion is the recognition by man that all his conquests are nothing unless he can conquer death. As long as death is swallowing him and all his works in victory, he accomplishes nothing with all his strivings, he is only as a child building sand castles to be levelled by the certain flood. All religions in some way set up a mark beyond life, and in some faint degree vanquish death by hope. But Jesus stands alone in having wrought for man a nobler victory over death, swallowing it up in a victory which has brought man peace and the knowledge of God. Christ alone has added it to the all things which are working together for man's good.

In us also as in Him it prepared for a better resurrection, a resurrection which shall not be the mere resumption of this sinful selfish life, but be an entrance into a life where sin has been vanished and sorrow is no longer needed for the discipline of our wayward hearts. And what is there that works more truly for us that glorious end?

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How otherwise may we enter if not by being conformed to His death that we may attain the purity and triumph of His resurrection? Then truly death is swallowed up in victory. Death aids the victory which destroys itself, death is its chief ally and not, as we have so long feared, its chief foe.

With every thoughtful man and woman before many years have passed over their heads, it is as it was with Wordsworth. The brightest things, "even the clouds that gather round the setting sun, do take a sober colouring from the eye that hath kept watch o'er man's mortality". We realize that but a thin partition divides any of us from the unseen world. And upon some of us the paraphernalia of death, the struggles and corruption of this mortal flesh, and all our poor efforts to shed some glamour and self-delusion over them, press with heaviness and give them a sense that all life is a mockery and a grief.

But Christ has risen. Let us salute one another this Easter morning at the Lord's table, as the early Christians used. When they met, even casual friends meeting in the street, would say: "The Lord has risen." Let it shed the same glory along our mortal years, as it shed along theirs. Let us see on the one hand that life with nothing at the end but death, is a poor mockery and futility, a thing of delusions and disappointments; and on the other, that life without death would be a dull certainty without urgency, without discipline, a call to pleasure and an encouragement of self-love. What else can swallow it up for us in victory than the victory which makes it our chief ally in overcoming the world, which makes it God's supreme discipline for conforming us to the likeness of Christ's death, for helping us to all the self-surrender and the love of it, that we may attain to His resurrection, to all the perfection and triumph of it. So shall it demand from us strenuousness in the labours that are so short, love and pity for the fellow mortals who may so soon pass out of reach of our service, a just use of the material blessings which serve us with such uncertainty for so short a time, a devotion to the spiritual gifts and grace which alone endure, a loyal obedience to God's law which is the only guidance which will not fail us when this life shall end, a growing trust in God himself as the one confidence that does not change with changing scenes, and a growing love to Christ who will take us to be with Him where He is.
XXX

THE REVELATION IN CHRIST

Neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.

Matt. xi, 27

The author of Mark Rutherford has at various times spoken of the discoveries of astronomy as a deliverance from the foolish idea that we either mean much or can do much in so vast a world. You fret it is true for a little day and you return to dust and the calm skies roll round in revolutions of countless years, and you stretch out your puny hands a yard’s length, and the immeasurable vastness, the countless millions of miles into endless space is around you. No one who thinks of it, can fail to feel how great and awe-inspiring and even overwhelming it all is. But what Mark Rutherford means is, that in so great a universe, nothing is of very much consequence. The quiet that comes upon man is the sense that nothing matters. Reform! Everywhere reform is wanted. Power is largely place-seeking, wealth wasteful luxury, poverty misery and degradation. It is all very terrible and very sad. But who is to mend it? The advantage of knowing how many millions of years have passed and how many millions of miles are around, is that it teaches you how little a poor mortal can do and breeds in you a forbearing calm, or in other words it paralyses you.

Let us recognize that it always is a good thing to look the worst in the face. That which sends most men to perdition is the kind of easy belief that won’t face any dark problem or any moral difficulty. Men come to believe in that way in an easy-going Deity who, like themselves, is not too precise about things and is pleased to see people about Him enjoying themselves. That kind of faith has seemed to stand us in good stead for a long time. Men talked about belief in God’s providence being a truth of Natural Religion. A man who believed anything was supposed to be able to accept it without difficulty. This was said to be a highly satisfactory world, in spite of its drawbacks. There was a fine optimistic, comfortable, well-fed feeling abroad. The old grim Calvinism seemed the most foolish, most uncomfortable thing in the world. Men thought they had all religion could provide, and that the rest could be thrown away as husk, for here was the true kernel. Christianity was only a roundabout way of arriving at the belief that God looked after things and made it easy for sensible people.

Then this terrible death’s head appeared at the feast. Great worlds roll on in space. Endless ages come and go. Men are born like gnats. They suffer much and enjoy little. When they set their heart on enjoyment they meet only disappointment. All die and are forgotten. What is it when it is past? A tragedy were it not so small as rather to be a farce. Now it is coming to be rather a fashion among a certain class of writers to show that everything is in such a horrible muddle, what with some people living in slums in which every healthy instinct is repressed, and with some people inheriting the diseases bred by their fathers’ sins, and inequalities all round and the inability of anybody to get what he wants, that any kind of belief in Providence is said to be hopelessly out of the question. A good deal of this is just as little serious as the easy belief that everything is all that it should be, and is only another kind of can. But one must acknowledge that it is more directly on the way to seriousness. A belief in Providence simply because we are able to shut our eyes to the sorrows of the world, is not religion. Religion is not something to cushion our heads on merely. To be of any worth it must enable us first to look every evil straight in the face and then to find a way beyond it. The ground of our faith must ever lie on the other side of Gethsemane and Calvary.

It is a good thing therefore that we are getting done with this idea that belief in God’s goodness and care is an easy truth to be picked up anywhere and retained by any kind of sensible action in the world. It is good because the kind of belief men did pick up was both indifferent to the sufferings of others and of very little service in bearing their own. It was a belief of the healthy and the well-fed, a belief attained not by mastering, but by ignoring the problems of life. The only belief in Providence which is worth having is one which knows what a flicker of a moment our life is amid the endless ages, what a speck we are upon the face of the infinite spaces, what sorrows and sins mar even what is granted to us of life and movement, what an unsatisfactory, dreary, wretched business life is for countless thousands. Only when it faces all that, does the assurance that God besets us behind and before and lays His hand upon us become true faith.

That faith in a God who makes all things work together for good, is no mere natural religion, the Old Testament itself is an ample witness. Was it not the great trial of the faithful Jew that the wicked prospered and the righteous were poor and despised? The prophets
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did not talk in a glib way of the Father, meaning only a kind of easy-going benevolence over all. The facts of life were terrible and difficult and they could not always see far through the smoke and the darkness. God, they were always able to say, is in all and above all, but they were seldom able to go much further and say what He was seeking to accomplish through the trials He appointed. And what they did understand was not from life, but from the revelation of God's purpose, from looking to issues far beyond this life where the heathen rage and pride encompasses the wicked as a chain. Nor can we find our way by means of the mere facts of life any more now than men could then. Those who try it, find they are on a wrong way. They are attempting to measure the value of life by what is pleasant and outwardly profitable. Now that way has no hope in it. What we must ask after is what lies behind and beyond life. Is God in it? Has He a purpose in it? Can He unwin all this tangled skein? Does He think it worth while for me to take my task and carry it through, to bear patiently my own trial and to help others with theirs? If life has any lasting worth, the answer must be in that direction. God, not the world, must explain it, and reconciliation to God, not to the world, be our succour. Nay, if we could only be sure of God, we might in the meantime do without the explanation of the world.

People are now being brought face to face with this fact. The world does not bear its meaning on its face. On the contrary, what we need is a meaning stretching far beyond it.

The question for us is whether we have such an answer in Christ Jesus. Does the Son reveal the Father? Can we in Him take up our life's task, and bear our burden and face the darkest miseries and be sure of a Father's wisdom and a Father's love, of a purpose above and beyond sufficient to explain it and justify it? One thing at all events we can be pretty sure of to-day. When men lose their faith in the Son, they lose their faith sooner or later in the Father. The loss of Christian hope is manifestly becoming the loss of faith in a wise and loving Providence with a return either to Stoic hardness or Epicurean pleasure-seeking. More and more it is evident that the absence of Christ will mean the absence of a serious purpose, of a high hope, of a calm sense of peace, and the revival of the old pagan struggle for abundance and pleasure and feverish enjoyment of the present day. Hitherto men have lived on the faith of their fathers even where they had none of their own, but now it becomes apparent what belief and unbelief will mean. In the one case life is the work of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be lived by faith, and in the other it is a huge accident to be lived by our wits.

In looking at this response to our needs we must not apply to it a standard of size. A legal document does not need to be big in proportion to the size of the property of which it is the title-deed. It does not require a treatise to unfold the passion of a lifetime. In the same way it does not require a writing on the skies to reveal God. This idea that because the world is very big God could not speak in a humble man, takes for granted not only God's indifference, but His limitation. It is just because the world is so big that we can believe in a God who can attend to the little. This notion of God's infinity as mere extent is hasty and superficial. The other infinity meets us everywhere. The little world of the microscope is at least as wonderful as the big world of the telescope. Truly, God is great, but it is most of all in condensation, in consideration. If love is the measure of infinity its deepest word would be as of old, not the thunder and the tempest, but the still, small voice. Wherefore it is surely a right condition of the case that the revelation of God does not attempt any kind of magnitude, that it is not the revelation of God's size and majesty. That is always what men want to add to Christ. They always want to take Him and make Him a king. The Church as well as the world is always at that task. Meantime, what we want to know is God's thought about what is poor and small and insignificant, about ourselves. To do this for us, Christ was humble, and poor, and without any worldly greatness, so that His revelation was, as we might say, of quality and not of quantity, for in respect of quantity all earthly things put together are of no significance. But what He does reveal is God's other infinity. He reveals the Father who loves meekness and patience and who sees the greatest of all things in a heart receptive of His truth and responsive to His will. When we go to Christ we are forced to apply quite a different standard from bigness and to feel that this other standard of obedience and love and a heart set free and made victorious over its temptations and its trials is a greater thing in God's sight than all the worlds. With Jesus of Nazareth a man can be sure he is estimating things as God estimates them when He says, that worlds are not to be weighed against a soul. He knows it is so, for out of the endless years and the infinite spaces a Father's face has looked out upon him.

Even with this revelation a man might, with some confidence, face this great world. He could say the eternities are not too long to prepare for a soul, the infinites not too vast for his education and his progress. But the revelation of the Father in the Son does not end there. Everyone must admit that the revelation of God in Christ does not shirk or slur over any difficulty. The whole problem is faced in all its blackness. First of all Christ was very poor. I am not sure whether anything dismays us so much at present as the fear of poverty.
were we to count God our Father we should like to be sure at least of a moderate competency. But the Son of God was not merely pretty hard put to it, as some of us may have been. He was actually without a place to lay His head. Secondly, Christ had all kinds of privations and sufferings, and endured scorn and opposition. We are all sure that God is our Father when men think well of us, but the Son was despised and rejected of men. Thirdly, Christ faced death in every form that could give it terror. It met him with the disgrace of the criminal's death, with the hostile derisive cries of the men He loved, with agony and long torture of mind and body. Some say He died, actually, physically of a broken heart. You can't say any part of the problem of this dark world is shirked there. You can't say He sat down comfortably and taught that God is good while all conceivable iniquities and miseries went on unheeded around Him. The great word is the Cross, for it goes beyond everything, it penetrates to the heart of all sorrow. If God's loving purpose was in the Cross, when injustice and hypocrisy and bigotry triumphed and holiness and patience and love suffered and were crushed, where may it not be? Where can the heart of the Father be obscured, if it was there revealed? If the Son of God was fulfilling His task on the Cross, where may we not be fulfilling ours? If God has a purpose in store to justify the crucifixion, what evil may He not be able to justify?

You must acknowledge, therefore, that the revelation of the Father in the Cross of His Son faces the problem. It ignores nothing and goes around nothing. It is not a revelation of a God who is kind in a way that will not fit at all into this vast, uncertain, sinful, suffering world. When we speak of God as good, we too often speak as if we could ignore the struggle around us. But we see no Father in that easy-going way or at least we lose sight of Him the moment the stress comes upon us.

Only when the Son reveals the Father can we know Him to any profit, and the crown, the summary and consummation of all His revelation is the Cross. After that we can say neither life, nor death nor any created thing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. . . .

We argue about Christ and about God and about the Scriptures and about the Church and we are very little farther forward. But here is the practical issue for us. Is there light in the Cross of Christ to let us see that in all that is worst in life, in misery and defeat and death itself God can continue to be our Father, and strength enough to enable us to take up our tasks in the confidence that it is our Father's demand and we shall not fail of our Father's aid? Does it practically reconcile us to God day by day, reconcile us to His discipline of us,
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Saw no man save Jesus only with themselves.
Mark ix, 8

All our esteem for the great because of their associations is not mere vulgar love of rank. They may have names which connect them with great events in the past. Around them is a robe woven of history. The law-giver and the sage are by their side. Nor is the borrowed glory confined to the fortunate possessor. Its radiance is shed on every person who comes near him. And this feeling may have nothing of toadyism, or mere love for claiming acquaintance with rank and wealth. The fact is that it is very difficult for us to see men except through the greatness associated with them. Hence it is very difficult for us to find greatness at all until the centuries have clothed the great man with great influences. Homer, the wandering minstrel, poor and blind and old is a very different person from the glory of the Greeks, the envy of poets, the subject of the scholars’ diligence, the centre of an ancient and unbroken admiration. The wisest and greatest no doubt had difficulty in discerning his quality then, now it is plain to anyone who can bungle through a line of Greek.

For one single night during the lifetime of their Master, the disciples stood on this king’s highway of understanding. They saw His greatness by seeing Him in company with the great. All that was most renowned in the history of their nation stood by His side and claimed Him and owned Him. Instead of the companion of their toilsome journeys and their scantly board, they saw the companion of Moses and Elias, in whom were embodied all the law and the prophets. That was, as it were, a signpost on the highway to understanding of His greatness which all could understand.

Nor was the blessedness of that moment due to a new and easier understanding of the greatness of their Master alone. A ray of this borrowed glory lay also upon themselves. When they saw themselves companions of the Lord of glory, associated with Moses and Elias in recognition of Him, how could they help feeling a greatness in themselves, unsuspected while they were only companions of the despised Nazarene? A Master transfigured on the mount, the centre of adoration of the highest of the sons of man, could not but seem different from the despised and rejected of men, and His followers could not but seem of a higher race. In that exalted society, they would realize their high calling, discern in themselves qualities to fit them for it, hitherto unsuspected, and reach a nobler level of consecration. In this society of the truly great, they could not fail to discover in themselves elements of true greatness. No wonder then that Peter, charmed with the change in their estate, cried, Let us build three tabernacles, and here let us abide and return no more to the evil influence of a secular and unadoring world.

What then of the contrast when the grey dawn shed its pitiless cold light upon them and showed them Jesus only with themselves? They stood after all only on a common hill. It was not so high now but what they could see the dusty roads along which men toiled, the poor villages where they lived and the stony fields they dug in. In a moment they must return again to dwell with ignorant, sinful, hard, unsympathetic, unspiritual men. And on that hill stood Jesus. He was in homespun, the stains of travel, perhaps the rents of poverty were on His dress, the marks of labour on His hands, the furrows of sorrow on His brow. And what were they themselves now, but poor ignorant men, horned-handed sons of toil, men more at home rowing in a tempest than companying with the great? What but disillusionment and disappointment could have been their portion when, instead of Moses and Elias and Christ in His glory, they saw no man save Jesus only with themselves and both without a rag of splendour to cover their poor humanity? Was it not a wise and considerate thought in the Master that He exposed none but the three wisest and strongest of the disciples to such a shock of loss and disappointment?

Have you ever realized that we have in this incident an instance and type of an oft-repeated experience? The great struggle of the Church throughout the ages has been to rear a tabernacle for the glorified Christ and to build beside it tabernacles for Moses and Elias. The law-giver and the prophet have stood beside him. The Church has ruled in the policies and in the thoughts of mankind. Then belief has been easy. Men stood as it were on the king's highway to the understanding of His glory. At times there have been true moments of transfiguration when the laws of society were inspired and moulded by the spirit of Christ, and when some great poet like Dante or Milton wrote manifestly to the glory of God in Christ. We have all been proud to claim any of the great scientists or great thinkers as followers of Christ and we have all felt that Christ derived a borrowed glory from their renown.
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All defence of Christianity is apt to follow this line of argument. It seeks to show that only beside Christ has the law-giver rightly discerned justice and mercy, or the thinker reached his true kingdom when heart and imagination were borne up by Christ's influence. It is a right enough argument and may give us a moment on the mount with Moses and Elias and the Christ of the Transfiguration. But it is not an enduring argument, and Christianity, to abide a power, must prove itself in more personal and practical ways. We wish to say: "See how all that is great in the world brings homage!" The object of all this adoration must be one to adore and to obey. In the allegiance of the great we would discover our proof, and after all we find no abiding ground of trust except in our own allegiance.

Some day the grey dawn will look in upon us with cold, clear light and we shall see no man save Jesus-only with ourselves, and He will be the way-worn peasant of Galilee and we ordinary, disappointing, perhaps disappointed, mankind.

At this particular time many of us are very specially in that class. How many things we once thought essential have vanished? How much has the outward proof of Christianity shrunk and disappeared, with how much less confidence we take up our faith as a thing accepted, proved by all the wise and great whose responsibility it was, by all the good that has felt it as its inspiration, by a Church which has not departed from the faith and a Bible which is inspired in every word. Nothing exists upon which doubts have not been cast. The Bible we shall recover again as a greater, more human book, but we shall never base the same external unproved authority upon it; the Church may be seen to have a greater heritage than was ever suspected of old, but a Church with right to command our opinion is a delusion and apt to be a snare. Many of the practical and even of the benevolent schemes of our time do not stand beside Christ. A great deal of our literature is non-religious, if not positively anti-Christian. Sadly we acknowledge that much of the outward glory and pomp to which we have so long and so proudly appealed, has shrunk away from us.

Added to all this, you may have personal experience of the loss of evidence and outside help on which you were long accustomed to rely. Both things and persons we have in our day thought essential to our belief in Christ. Lord, we say, above all things, remove not this person from me and shake not my trust in him. Lord, we say, let me not lose this conviction, let me not doubt this to be truth. But we fail in building tabernacles for Moses and Elias and the dawn breaks on us with none but Jesus and our poor, dull and doubting selves. We may have believed in the Church, believed in the Bible, believed in our fathers, believed in our teachers, believed in anything and everything and been left in the end with Jesus only and ourselves.

But let us remember, when we are downcast, how it fared with the disciples, how, when they were left utterly alone with their Master, how when, not only Moses and Elias vanished, but when all the world fell away, they found in Him another and a greater glory and through Him found another and a greater glory in themselves. When was it that they discerned His glory as the only begotten of the Father? Not while on the mount with Moses and Elias but on another mount with cruelities, mockeries and blasphemies, when in the eyes of an unsympathetic and hostile world they manifestly were utterly alone. Jesus and themselves, Jesus and in that awful hour hardly themselves. Those latter days when all outward esteem and popular applause had fallen away, were the fruitful days in their lives, the fruitful days of Christian assurance. To them we all turn back when the battle of life goes strong against us. We, too, see Him in His real and true humanity, the lines deepening in His brow, the light shining more sadly in His eye. Nothing of that human life could be taken away without loss, nothing of its common dress and common speech and its weariness and suffering and tremblings and resolves and prayers and rebukes and pleadings. Nor could we miss anything of the life amid which He lived, the hypocrisy, the greed, the crooked policies, the suspicions, the perjuries, the changing passions of the mob. We must see Jesus alone with us in the midst of it. Out of that time grew the conviction of the disciples that the glory of God, the ineffable glory, was shining. In the discipline of a life spent with Him they learned it, not in any moment of exalted, ecstatic vision. A night on the mount of Transfiguration, a glimpse of splendour sufficed, but their discipline required a lifetime and it was in that discipline that they learned Christ and discerned the glory of their own souls.

All through the ages the Church has had experience of the same truth. Her real faith has not been mightiest when all was in her favour, when she had control of all laws and all knowledge, when the outward proof of the faith was so strong that she felt no need of seeking anything further. Too often her Christ has been very unlike the Son of Man who was made in all points like His brethren but knew no sin. But when she felt herself despoiled, she discovered her true riches. When driven back upon man's need and Christ's grace, when forced to contemplate them and them only, she has reached a faith which stood, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Who knows, nay, who should doubt, that out of the present diffi-
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culties of faith we shall have a new understanding of what the Master really was as He lived among men and what He really is to the soul that trusts Him, which shall be its own high and sufficient evidence?

For you also the real certainties may only be found in the seasons when you feel most that nothing remains but Christ and yourselves, and when you realize most clearly His perfect and your imperfect humanity. None of us are fit for much revelation of the divine splendour. None of us can take much else with this highest gift. We must begin by being brought face to face with life in its hardness, its sternness, its commonplaces, its temptations, its solitaryness, its uncertainties. Till that is well realized we shall discern no great need of a Saviour. Then, however, we may understand and answer the appeal of the meek and lowly to seek with him rest. We shall discover ourselves in Him and we shall learn Christ by learning ourselves and that, not by hearing or seeing with the ears and eyes of others, but by living our own life and attaining our own salvation. The difference is something like this. You have gone to a public meeting where medals were given to some mighty swimmer who had saved many lives. You see him in the midst of his fullest recognition and highest renown. But you are in the shipwreck in darkness and tempest. The might of the black waters is upon you like fierce hands dragging you down. A hand and a face come through the breaking waves. The rescuer and you are alone. A reality not to be witnessed to by medals and applause, makes itself known to your heart as you are borne up with steady hand and carried forward with a mighty stroke. To that experience all men are driven back when the celestial vision disappears and the conflict and temptation of life begins. It is for that assurance we are deprived of the celestial visions, of the calm repose on Christ’s renown; it is for that reason we must go down alone with him to business with its many unworthy customs, to man with his many base compliances, to our common, everyday, dull, trying, uninspiring life.

This, however, we must also remember: we are only deprived meantime to be richer after. All things are yours. But you must first learn that your title to possess them is that you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s. For that end, you may need long and hard training. Being worldly and blind it may be necessary to remove all else from us and set us to contemplate Christ alone. But when that lesson is learned you will see again Moses and Elias, not beside Him indeed but adding their tribute of worship and of service. Christ will be found all and in all. The world as well as Cephas shall be ours, things temporal as well as things spiritual. As soon as we have set Him high enough all things and all men shall bring their tribute. Meantime,

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it is our task to live with Him, and here is our place, here our task, here our discipline and here and not elsewhere shall we discern the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth, and here and not elsewhere shall we also learn in the end that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.
XXII

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

And the glory which Thou hast given me I have given them.
John xvii, 22

For the most part the word glory has meant for men what Shakespeare calls "the bubble reputation" and Milton "the fame which in broad rumour lies". The more eagerly it is pursued, the baser the ideal of it becomes. In reading the life of Napoleon one notes the steady debasing of this word in all his appeals to the soldiers. Patriotism sinks into private ambition; ambition is degraded to noise and greed. Glory, glory is the keynote of every harangue and it becomes increasingly the glory of the mere fighter, the glory of strength and rapine. At the other extreme you find this text: The glory which Thou hast given me I have given them.

Of the baser article we have had sufficient of late, and it takes no very profound reflection to see that it is singularly poor and fleeting. What is the value of even the greatest reputation? No conquests have altered the world like Alexander's, yet he is better known for a myth about sitting and weeping like a naughty child because there were no more worlds to conquer, than for all his victories. The game of conquest, Pascal has said, may be excused on account of the youth of Alexander, but was too frivolous an amusement for a man of the mature age of Caesar. In view of the narrow space one ultimately occupies in the earth, the conquest of its whole surface is only a heart-break and a futility.

If there is any fame one would desire to have, it is the fame of writing a good book. That would be no mere repetition of an empty name. Generations to come would hold converse with one who, though dead, still spoke. Yet even this, were glory the aim, would end in disappointment. With each generation the range of readers is necessarily limited. Thought and language alter slowly but surely. After a few generations, only the scholar really understands, and soon even he reads with labour and hesitation. Finally, oblivion swallows all, and if the world lasts long enough, Homer and Dante and Shakespeare himself will be remembered no more. At all events, in

the wreck of worlds, the strongest reputation will be as brittle as the weakest and amid the myriad years of time, bounded on either side by eternity, a reputation of a thousand days or ten thousand years scarce admits of distinction.

What then of the small glories with which men seek to display themselves? There never was a time when so many celebrities claimed the attention of the public, and there never was a time when every form of merit was more speedily forgotten. Millionaires grow common, the ordinary book is legion, the newspapers have found countless heroes. What then of the small issues of your lives, when the memory of the richest, the wisest, the bravest is cherished for scarce one day? "Then said I in my heart, that also is vanity. For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no remembrance for ever; seeing that in the days to come all will have been forgotten."

Christ's life more than any other awakens questions in us. His life scarce exceeded the span of one generation. He struggled hard and what did He gain? He became conspicuous, what did it profit? Were His reward earthly glory, few lives were more futile. No riches had He and no ease; no place on earth to call His own. Humble was His origin and by no office or dignity was it ever exalted. Persistent misunderstanding dogged His steps. In the agony of a cruel and shameful death He ended His days a victim of the triumphant malice of His foes.

Few things in that life looked like glory. What claims attention would by all men be very willingly avoided. Yet all men have felt the worth, the distinction, the glory of that life. Everything else has been doubted, but no variety of creed has made that at all dubious. There was a glory which Jesus had and which He conferred, which stands alone among the possessions of mankind.

For two things Christ's glory is distinguished: (1) It is received from God; (2) It is imparted to man.

1. It is received from God.

The glory of Christ was entirely divine. In no degree had it any dependence upon man's aid or man's opinion. In no life is there an absence so utter of aught that depends upon man. He had no glory of station and none of possession. He belonged to the class who earn their living with their own hands and He did nothing to lift Himself out of it. Very conspicuously He fulfilled His own injunctions not to seek the honour that comes from man or the first seats among men.

For that very reason Christ's glory is unfading. It passes not with the wealth which takes wings and flies away, with the reputation which a breath of slander withers, with the generation of our own
contemporaries who may have valued our toils and admired our success. Nothing fades with the mortal life, because nothing depends on it. So long as man’s honour is from man it is fleeting, and must be, but our Lord makes no use of any such fading glory, and desires His glory from God alone.

The glory of Jesus is entirely from God and therefore is the glory of all permanent possessions.

First, it is the glory of truth.

No man impresses you for a moment as more secure because he is rich. Rather one feels the strange contrast. He may possess as much as may endow a thousand families and it cannot retard by one day the call to surrender His trust. Oak and silver may encase His remains and marble overlay his tomb but he is none richer than the poorest who repose in the dust. It is otherwise, however, with any man who has discovered a truth. Though it be only a law of gravitation one feels that something of God’s wise thought has been understood and a possession gained for all eternity. When Plato arrived at the thought which Paul expresses in almost similar words that the seen is temporal and the unseen eternal, he surely reached something of which time could not rob him. All knowledge of reality, all thinking of God’s thoughts, all accurate knowledge of God’s ways make a glory which raises man to a great and noble distinction amid God’s creatures. To have thought God’s thoughts, fathomed in some measure His creation, predicted His ways, penetrated in some measure into His working, sets man, even in this fleeting life, amid God’s creatures with a radiance upon His brow which we may believe even death will not destroy.

But the glory God gave Jesus was to know the secrets of His heart, not merely the secrets of His methods; the supreme purpose of all His working, not merely the details of its operation. Christ’s life was the light of men, because He and the Father were one in thought and one in desire.

Elsewhere we have much speculation regarding God. Only here have we perfect revelation. In Christ you have the glory which a full understanding of God’s purpose with His world alone can bestow. God gave Jesus the truth concerning Himself. It shone in Him not in abstract description or in reasoned argument, but in every word and deed, in every expression of His thought and in every action of power or endurance. A life which was the light, a life shining with the undimmed radiance of God’s unchanging truth has a glory by itself in this dark world, a permanence of its own amid this fleeting race of men, and even death which dims all other glory only made His fully manifest.

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Second, it is the glory of righteousness.

All the true glory of man is rooted in his obedience. As long as he merely says, I want, he belongs to the perishing things of earth, but when he says, I obey, he belongs to the permanent things of heaven. By obedience, of course, is not meant the submission of slavish fear but the willing recognition of right. When man said ‘this is God’s will, this is right, this has a claim beyond pleasure and beyond profit’, he stepped out of the brute creation with the glory of God’s image on His upturned face.

But the fullness of this glory is only seen in the face of Jesus Christ. In all things He did the Father’s will. Never for a moment was His purpose contrary to the purpose of the power who makes and governs all things. No weakness hindered His attainment, no bias swayed Him from the goal. He could say: “I and the Father are one in purpose, one in working. My life is as all men’s lives should be to be perfect in God’s eyes.” Hence in the moment of His weakness the moment when human glory is crumbling in the dust, His glory of knowing and doing perfectly all righteousness was being most displayed.

Last, it is the glory of love.

All that is fleeting and all that is base in man’s life is of self-love and all that is permanent and all that is high is of love. Fortunately for the world, greed ever stands on its own tomb, digging its own grave. The more man grasps, he only has the more to surrender. The more entirely his life is for himself, the more utterly it vanishes into nothingness. Self is of the essence of decay and all its glories are wreaths that perish. But love in all its forms rises to a higher glory. In everything done unselfishly, done for another, done for mankind, some glory of immortality exists. Man ever attempts to found his glory on his self-love, and he is ever being defeated in his endeavour. How many have tried to show their glory as Ahasuerus did in whose gates none might enter clothed in sackcloth. They keep apart from the thorny troubled ways of life and hold afar off life’s struggles and sorrows. But it cannot hinder their own destiny of disease or decay.

Christ’s glory was displayed in the midst of man’s woes. “Blessed”, He said, “are those who mourn.” It was the glory God gave, the glory of the highest stooping to the lowest, the glory of the Father who sorrows most for His erring children, the glory of a love which gave birth to the world, and has never failed to guide it, the glory of a love which is the highest in God and therefore the highest in man. Truth and obedience and love combine in the Cross where all other glories fade.

All this glory God gave Jesus. Man could not alter it or diminish.
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It has always the permanence, the beauty, the perfection of God. Man's fleeting glories only display this divine glory. It abides in life the one thing that cannot fade and cannot be destroyed, and is the continuous witness of the glory eternal, the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away.

2. It is imparted to men.

When Oliver Cromwell became Protector, he was not unmindful of the need to mark the dignity of his office by considerable display. It may not have been specially consistent with his professions, but it showed great knowledge of human nature. Mankind have no belief in a greatness which is easily accessible and too much at their own disposal. Most men have a very simple estimate of greatness. It consists in being superior to others and having what many want and few get. This measure of glory is foolish enough. Why should I honour a man who has a million when his real service to the world may never have deserved a thousand? Why should I honour a man because he enjoys a position from which he can command the services of other men? Why should I honour a man for possessing great abilities which he uses solely for his own advancement? Why should I honour any selfish possession, or distinction or power in any man? Yet the honour that is of man is of that kind. Men do not honour men when they do well to others. On the contrary they have generally hated them, often despised them and frequently slain them. That wise word of scripture says, men will honour thee when thou doest well to thyself.

But the word our Lord says is equally true: "He that loveth his life shall lose it and he that hateth it shall keep it unto life eternal," "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." True glory can never be in what a man keeps but only in the final issue, in what he gives. And the glory of Christ is the highest because what God gave Him, He gave to men.

Nothing Jesus had was incapable of being given to others. He sought no other proof of His divinity than the men God had given Him out of the world, and what He made of them abides as the supreme witness to His glory to this day. He sanctified them by the truth and He endued them with power by His love and then He sent them into the world to communicate the gifts they had received. His glory was not measured by man's standard of glory. It was not what one has and another must want. On the contrary, it was greatest when most widely bestowed. It has all the abundant liberality of its source. Freely it is received and freely it is bestowed. It is rich in making many rich, powerful in making many strong and high in raising

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

many to divine heights. The demonstration of this glory was first the disciples. They were unlearned and ignorant men, who by their great wisdom made men take knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. Poor they were yet they were endowed with the unsearchable riches. Erring and wayward and feeble they had been, but their reception of power from on high was manifest in their victory over the mightiest opponents. After everything possible has been done to diminish Christ's glory the witness of the apostles remains, not the testimony of words but of deeds. The change which took place in the fishermen of Galilee after they had received the glory which Christ had received from the Father cannot be obliterated and cannot be forgotten. Who among the great ones of the world became so wise or rich or strong as those men who were taught to be last and so became first?

With them the testimony only began. It will never end. How many have received that glory since? How many receive it every day? To His humble followers He still gives the glory which He receives from the Father, a divine gift of truth and holiness and love which transforms the ignorance and sin and selfishness of mortal men into the divine image, into a permanent glory of wisdom and strength and service. That is the glory, the only glory that can never alter and never decay. It carries with it all-enduring possession, all-exalting dignity, all-unfailing power. It is the only supreme gift for this life, making rich and adding no sorrow, and the only thing that carries with it the assurance of the life eternal. The man that wears that glory on his brow looks to the East, to all rising suns, the man who wants it looks to the West and to the darkness which comes down upon all earthly possessions and human renown.

May we, this day, as we sit around the table of the Lord, be enabled to realize the glory which is from God and only increases as it is more widely bestowed, that we may make it our first desire, that the symbols of Christ's death may be the title deeds of our possessions that even now something of its radiance may be in every heart.
XXIII

PRESBYTERIANISM

The Elder to the Elect Lady.

2 John v, 1

As a general rule, one’s system both in Church and State ought to speak for itself. To dwell much on our Presbyterianism and exalt it simply as a system, would be to lay ourselves open to Pope’s charge of folly:

For forms of government let fools contest,
The form that’s best administered is best.

For the most part we are content to follow our system quietly and use it, we trust, humbly, believing that the best defence we can make of it is shown in our congregational life that it makes for harmony and effective service.

If it creates peace and loyalty, if it safeguards the rights of all without encroaching upon the freedom of any, if it unites also reverence with simplicity, we might very well be prepared to keep silence and allow it to justify itself in the face of the world.

It is not in the last issue for Presbyterianism that we stand but for Christianity, and we would be far from any assertion of our system in such a way as to unchurch others. Our main task is to preach Christ and to make manifest our fellowship with all them who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. We believe in the holy Catholic Church, in the deep and true sense of recognizing all the faithful followers of Christ by whatever name they be called and it would be our constant endeavour ever to enlarge our charity.

One may nevertheless have some special pride in his own regiment and some special confidence in its organization without being in any way disloyal to the great army and there may be times and seasons for showing our special regard. Such an occasion as the present is of that special kind. We are here to ordain and induct the brethren chosen by the congregation to the office which gives Presbyterianism its name and its special character, and we can hardly escape

the necessity of giving ourselves some account of our own position as a Church.

I have taken as my text these words with which John introduces his second Epistle, because it seems to me to set forth both sides of our contention. The highest person in the Church is the Elder and the humble private woman is the Elect Lady. These two things go together because if the member should be no less than the Elect Lady, the office-bearer can be no more than the Elder. We have in this text therefore our contention both in respect of scripture and of principle.

1. Our contention in respect of scripture.

Who is it that calls himself the Elder? No less a person than the apostle, John. Moreover, it is possibly John in his old age, John as the only surviving apostle of the Lord. You see him standing far out on the great promontory of time, you expect him to be a solitary figure, you think he will be unique in power and authority. He will be the vicar of Christ, the head of the church, the sovereign appeal in point of doctrine and practice. Instead, he is simply one of the great body of the Eldership, speaking not down to the Christian people but out of their very midst.

That is the real point which is so systematically ignored in this discussion. We are perfectly prepared to argue the matter in detail. If it is claimed that the Bishop in the Roman or Anglican Church is the true successor of the apostles, and that what is called the three orders are essential to the existence of any true Church, we are quite prepared to show that the apostles never exercised such functions, that they were in the main missionaries and therefore no part of the regular organization of any part of the Church and that in so far as they were a fixed part, they were Elders. It is no boasting to say that the results of inquiry have all been on our side. The Elder and the Bishop were in the Early Church two names for one office, both being names previously in use for representatives of the synagogue and of the civil community. Elder stood for the dignity of the office and bishop or overseer for its function. Not for centuries was there such a thing as a bishop in our modern sense of the word.

In face of these facts, the old contention that the modern bishop is the direct successor of a person who stepped into the shoes of the apostles as heads and rulers of the Church is not very easy to defend. But it is said the apostles had the effective power of the bishop and though, owing to circumstances that power may have lapsed for a time, it was always a necessity and became divine as soon as the circumstances became favourable for reviving it.

All we can say is that if John regarded the position of the apostles
as hierarchical and considered its continuance essential to the Church, he surely would have taken some other means of expressing his conviction than by mixing himself, the last of the apostles, so deliberately in the great crowds of the Elders.

But the scriptural position is not a question of such details at all. It is broader and deeper. It is a question of the whole attitude of the apostles, not of particular actions. The essential difference between the Elder and the Bishop is that the Elder speaks out of the midst of the people, the Bishop speaks from above the people. That is the essential point. This is most marked in Roman Catholicism, but it is the real contention of Catholicism in all its phases. The Church proper is the clergy. They teach the faith and decree the action of the Church. The rest are the laity who humbly learn and meekly obey. The bishops speak from his chair of state, he issues decrees and injunctions.

The council at Jerusalem, we find, did issue a decree, but the prominent thing about all the apostolic writings is just the utter absence of this tone of authority. They write themselves as members of the Church, themselves needing the same truth and grace they urge others to seek, themselves running the same race as they urge others to run.

This has always two sides, one their own humility which magnifies their office not for its dignity but for its usefulness, and the other the high estimate of the dignity of the Christian people so that they cannot be served too humbly. This part is essential. The assumption in every hierarchical system is the ignorance or weakness of the great mass. But the apostles start with the assumption that only the faith of Christ truly makes anyone a member of the Church of Christ and that this faith transforms and ennobles all who come under its power. Within such a society, authority in the outside sense of the word is a misnomer. The leader is a bishop, an overseer of the Church’s work, an Elder, a chosen representative of the Church’s interests. Granting only the true spirit of the true Church, the spirit of God’s Elect people, of those ennobled by God’s grace, the Church needs no more than such representatives, and with such loyalty behind him no man, not an apostle himself, should require a higher dignity.

These two things, therefore, go together, the apostle as only the Elder, and the humble woman in the congregation as the Elect Lady. That is our scriptural position, and it would be hard to prove that it was wrong. Would that we accepted it with more utter and whole-hearted esteem for every man and woman in the Christian Church and for every office in it as an opportunity for giving us the high privilege of serving them!

2. With this goes our contention in point of principle.

The office of bishop, it is urged, may not directly come from the apostle, it may not have existed in the earlier and simpler days of the Church, but it grew up naturally with the development of the Church and it has been an essential part of her life ever since. The office may not be commended in the scriptures, but the scriptures draw up no hard and fast rules for Church government. That was one of the things the Spirit was to teach the Church when the time arrived.

This, of course, is a change of ground, and it cannot maintain the contention that the bishop is essential to the existence of the Church. It makes him merely a useful superintendent. Quite plainly, if circumstances come to the Church which make his services divinely necessary, circumstances might also come to the Church which would make his services divinely superfluous. But the real point is again the old one. What is the relation of the bishop to the belief and life of the Church? Does he speak from the midst of the Church or does he speak from above it? If he speaks only from the midst of the Church then he is merely a kind of chief elder and his existence is merely a matter of expediency. But if he speaks from above the life and faith of the Church as a special channel of that life and faith, as an authority to appoint what is to be done and declare what is to be believed, then we say his position is not only unscriptural; it is wholly away from the whole attitude of the New Testament and antagonistic to what we understand to be the essential principles of the Gospel of Christ.

Nothing, we hold, has done more to mislead men about Christ than this notion that His Church can consist of officials and that His faith can be taught from the outside, and a man’s conduct directed by any other authority than God’s spirit in his heart. The position that the apostle is not more than the elder and the humble worshipper is not less than the Elect Lady is, in our view, an absolutely essential matter in Christianity. The man who looks at the body of Christians in the mass and regards them as an ignorant and misdirected multitude, mere receptacles of what is poured into them, is utterly alien to Christ’s thought of man and what His grace can do for them. Moreover, we believe this position of making a clerical and a lay division in life has debased the whole idea of Christian life, making it a life of ritual and performances on the one hand and having one’s goodness done by proxy on the other. Those of us who are Elders magnify our office because we magnify the first great office, which is to be a brother of Jesus Christ, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, because we magnify the priesthood of all believers—as a royal
priesthood. There is no dignity that can be higher than theirs, no way of knowing truth that is surer than their gift of God's Spirit, no way of approaching nearer the throne of grace than their way of united intercession.

Wherefore those of us who are Elders do not set our office lower, we are only setting the Christian people higher. It is enough for us to be their representatives, to have their call, with which we ought to be assured of their loyalty, to be their ministers not their masters, to be last in dignity that we may be first in service. We magnify our office, however, simply because the office to which our brethren have called us is we know essential to the order and harmony and effectiveness of the congregation, and because we know that the highest authority earth can confer is the authority which comes from sympathy and support given in Christ's spirit and for His sake. If such authority is within our reach, the authority of brethren one in the order of love and one in sympathy and purpose, it would surely be only a poor foolish vanity of weak human hearts to have it based on any external dignity or claim of merely official power. Hence in this office of the eldership, with the glory of Christian order and Christian freedom around it, this office that has been the fountain of much of the highest ordered freedom in this nation and in many others, we ought, if we have the inward eye that sees not the trappings but the meanings of things, to see a far higher dignity than chairs of state and robes of office and symbols of power can convey. They all belong to the order of greatness Christ came to abolish: to the mighty Christ came to put down from their seats, while this belongs to the order of greatness which consists in the sense of God's call, and His people's loyalty, and the opportunity of service and all the other things that pertain to the fellowship of the saints.

XXIV

THE EXPOSITION OF THE WORD
ITS PLACE AND METHOD

There are two kinds of audiences to be dreaded, one that has no opinion on the subject in hand at all, and the other that has all its opinions fixed. This audience, I fear, will belong to the latter class. We have all, preachers and hearers alike, made up our minds long ago about the place exposition of the Word should occupy in our Church services and how it ought to be gone about. There is one method, however, of dealing with such an audience which is unfailing and I hope I may attain it, which is not to vary from the opinions already formed.

To begin with we are all agreed about the supreme importance of understanding the Scriptures. We still find it "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness". Whatever our view of the Bible we are all agreed that it cannot be too much before our minds. Nor have we any variety of opinion about the need for exposition. Perhaps even more than is necessary, we are conscious of the many difficulties in understanding what we read. Much is utterly beyond comprehension without some help and even what seems easiest may receive new meaning and force by a little explanation. That the right time and place for such exposition is our public service on the Sabbath will be seen if we ask ourselves what is the true end of such a service. When we as Christians meet together Sabbath after Sabbath what do we seek? If the answer must be put in one word we may say it is the spirit of worship. It is understood that all the outward surroundings of our service should tend to that end, there should be such quiet and solemnity as helps us to forget the distractions of the world, such a union of voices in our praise as helps us to forget ourselves and ensure that the inner meaning of the service does not come short of its outward expression; we should be brought before such thoughts as lift us by their own greatness above our little world and such feelings as overwhelm by their sublimity the pettiness of our own self-love. And he would be a very bold preacher indeed who could believe that he has at his disposal any better means of accomplishing this end than just to bring his people in contact with
the great preachers and teachers whom God has sanctified and sent into the world and who not only by great words but by the living experience of great lives set forth great truths.

For the preacher the exposition of the Word has many advantages. Every man who is a true teacher and not a mechanic has his message to deliver as much as any prophet or apostle. And let him deliver his message and unburden his soul as he will with a text or without it, when the inspiration is upon him. But there are fifty-two sabbaths in the year, some forty of which he preaches twice in his own pulpit and inspiration is not periodic every seven days like the quarters of the moon. Until you can select preachers like poultry on the principle of laying all the year round you can hardly expect them to produce out of their own inward experience a perpetual stream of sermons with the gems of life in them. The true idea of a settled ministry is not to be preachers except in so far as each receives special inspiration at special times, but to be teachers. The reason why they are expected to be able to meet regularly a regular demand is that they are dealing with abiding truth which is not affected by their varying states of feeling and by which their own souls are fed and as a matter of experience it will usually be found that a preacher who is largely expository will not feel this strain while a preacher whose texts are merely mottoes for his own ideas and experiences will. If this latter is a very highly gifted man he may continue to exist intellectually and spiritually but a common mortal is a spectacle for pity. His enthusiasm is apt to die with his freshness, his feeling becoming stereotyped with his ideas. Then his preaching becomes like pumping water into a boiler with the fire out, the easier the colder.

The careful study of scripture is for the preacher an endless source of new thoughts and impulses. Truth is seen not merely at his own angle but on its many sides, not merely as it touches his life but as it has illumined the large experience of the saints. And while his own inspiration is quickened he discovers an elevation he could never attain to and an authority he could never assume. Knowledge of the scriptures is the true qualification of the minister. He no longer presumes to absolve sin; he only dispenses the sacraments because it is convenient; he cannot claim superior piety, or superior gifts, or experience of men and of life, but he ought to be able to claim such a knowledge of the scriptures as his people have neither the learning nor the leisure to attain, he ought to be able to say as none of his hearers can: “Thus said Isaiah” and “Thus said Paul” and “Thus said our Lord Himself”, and if he wants a better commission he is hard indeed to please.

What is good for the preacher will ultimately be good for the hearer

and there is also direct gain not only to the person who expounds but to the person who suffers the exposition. There are two ways of drawing a man, either by his strength or his weaknesses. You may pull him either by the hand because it is strong or by the ear because it is tender. The ear is most effective, the hand is most helpful. Appeal to men through their weaknesses and you are sure of success. Prejudices, false sentiments, self-conceit, terror can be kindled to fierce energy while judgment, conscience and will are untouched. But it is seldom done to profit. Much of our religious teaching fails for the very reason that it succeeds at the beginning, it appeals to men by their weaknesses not by their strengths, by what is hysterical in their emotions, unthinking in their imitation, and selfish in their aspirations. If you only want effect, leave exposition in the commentary and do get you a phrase for a peg and hang as many pretty and pithy things on it as you can, but if you desire the right and abiding effect it may be otherwise. What do you wish to make out of the man when you have got him? What do you understand by “the furnishing him for every good work”? Suppose you had the re-making of him, what thoughts would you put in his head; what would he love and what would he hate; how would he form his opinions and how would he arrange his life? Is not the distinguishing mark of the highest type of man’s character, that the man thinks for himself and acts for himself, the individuality of him coming straight from God and being perpetually sustained by God’s truth and drawn by himself from the source and not carried to him in some other person’s pitcher? Should not every preacher say, I would not have this man an imitation of me, I would not have him like what I like merely because I do so, nor do what I do nor swallow my opinions whole, but I would have him ground his life on a personal grasp of truth and a personal sense of duty even though he should oppose every conviction I hold dear! In doing so we are imitators of God who ever waits for man till the mind is ripe to give him His truth, and till the heart chooses it, to enable him to embrace it. Probably the preacher who takes this view of his mission will resort more and more to exposition. At all times when he has no immediate message needing to be spoken out, instead of attempting to indoctrinate his hearers with his own little system he will try perhaps without much system to declare what the scriptures say. Then everyone who hears will have something to meet his own experience between the primitive simplicity of the patriarchs and the spiritual mysticism of John. Nor will one part of the nature only be satisfied but all, the very difficulties of the Bible being no mean part of its usefulness, and its very height above us the best discipline of our souls. If the Bible were honestly dealt with it is surely not too
much to say that men would be drawn by the only right attraction, the feeling that their better natures were being really educated and that their present wants were being replaced by deeper needs, which in itself is a kind of satisfaction. Much nonsense is talked about the duty of the church to be attractive. Formerly she was Mother Church which implies a certain duty and unalterable affection, but now it would rather seem as if she were to be our sweetheart and woo us by her pretty face and her winning ways. We ought to attract men but it should be by appealing rather to what men feel they ought to be than to men merely as they are, and it is better to fail by aiming too high than too low. Yet high as the Bible is there is no fear that it will not appeal to man, being as intensely human as it is divine if only it is expounded in the right way. But that is the question, and a large one, which leads us to the second part of our subject. The method of expounding the word. On what principle the committee chose me to deal with this subject I do not know unless it be that I have not yet studied so long as to be quite put to silence by its vastness. In which case they have not altogether judged wrongly for on this matter, I fear, boldness of speech will not be in proportion to knowledge of the subject. There is one ground of comfort, however. The wise man will not pay much heed to any method, for strategy should be infinitely varied, almost every passage demanding its own plan of campaign.

And first of all how much of our exposition ought to be systematic and how systematic ought the system to be? The answer will depend not only on the advantages of a systematic and varied teaching but also on the powers of the person who expounds and the endurance of his audience. The advantages of a systematic study are that the preacher does not spend his strength hunting for a subject, and that the audience can come in some degree prepared for what they are to receive. The preacher, moreover, has subjects presented to him which the natural attraction of his own mind would not lead him to, or which from delicacy or fear of giving offence he would not venture to select, which again means for his audience a broader, more impersonal, more authoritative message. Some satisfaction, moreover, will be felt in the visible progress; the unity of the various writings so much obscured by disconnected reading and quotation will have some justice done to it; while the scripture itself will help to recall the teaching. The advantages of varied subjects again are that the preacher’s mind is free to follow its impulse, and his audience have their interest sustained by uncertainty. Greater variety may be maintained and circumstances and times may be taken into account. Were there nothing more to be considered the obvious conclusion would be to use both methods, be systematic one service and be as varied as possible the other. One man, however, finds it a strain to keep, week after week, at one subject, and to require to treat matters on which his interest is not awake, while another delights to pursue trains of thought but is driven to despair in the search for fresh texts. One man, moreover, can sustain the interest of an audience for many weeks together in a course; with another they flag after the second lecture. Audiences, moreover, themselves vary; some giving an interest that would have stuck to Kant had he been an expounder and some refusing as much as would keep sight of R. L. Stevenson. Even at the worst, however, to abandon systematic exposition of all kinds is to be untrue to the discipline of the mind which is all the more needed if it is not natural, and to be unfaithful to the few earnest souls which are to be found in every congregation.

Another question is whether we should expound short passages or long, whether we should be detailed and exhaustive or rapid and general. There is room for both methods but for myself I must confess to a taste for rapidity, perhaps a reaction from an exposition of Luke which lasted most of my student days and may not be done yet for ought I know. That is the nearest approach I have met to the German professor who had been twenty years at the first verse of the gospel of John and was still only at the introduction. But we often hear such detailed slowness as would be much more fitted to instruct Methuselah in the Bible than the present short-lived generation. Nor is it often real fullness but as Leighton puts it “minute dissection of words—the trite phrases of the schools as barren and useless as it is easy and puerile”. “And indeed”, as he concludes, “I cannot but form the same judgment of the common way of catching at a multitude of observations from any scripture, and of pressing it with violence, as if remarks were to be estimated by number rather than weight, propriety and use. But here let everyone follow his own genius and taste; for we are willing to give the liberty we take.” Whether the audience that endures the liberty taken and has no chance to take it in return will rise to the same height of charity is another matter.

But while expositions may be systematic or unsystematic, detailed or rapid according to the gifts of the expounder and the tastes of his audience, all expositions of whatsoever complexion should possess four virtues. Accuracy, truthfulness, honesty, edification.

And first of all, concerning accuracy. This quality is often treated cavalierly as a mere question of grammar and dictionary and dry as dust research, the letter which is in deadly hostility to the spirit. Everyone, of course, must speak according to his own experience,
but some find it otherwise. For them nothing is so helpful as grammar and dictionary knowledge of the original, while a scholarly commentary has always more suggestion than a preaching exposition. Lightfoot has more, even, of inspiration than Maclaren and even such handbooks as Davidson’s *Job* or Driver’s *Isaiah* than G. A. Smith’s of the People’s Bible. There is no better mental discipline than a hard, accurate study of the subject and no better spiritual preparation than just humbly to put the results in your pocket. The advantages of saying exactly what the Bible does say are manifold. You are faithful to the trust of your audience; though on the immediate occasion hampered in your range, you will ultimately secure much greater variety; you will give more scope to truth and less to your individual prejudices and peculiarities. In short, to believe that it is better to be inaccurate than accurate in your interpretation of scripture is to believe that you could have improved the Bible if you had had the writing of it. Mere accuracy it is true is only a negative quality and will never make an exposition. A man of full mind and large soul entirely destitute of all knowledge of the original will make more out of the scriptures than the finest scholar if he is only a scholar and nothing more. But even the ablest man who only knows the English text will feel that he treads with uncertain feet and that many of the finest shades of meaning escape him. I have known two men who were entirely ignorant of Hebrew lecture on Job. Now of all books in the Bible, Job loses most in translation. They were both men of remarkable gifts, however, and attained no contemptible success; but one required three months’ holiday in the middle and the other did not live to see the close.

The next quality, truthfulness, is something over and above accuracy. A truthful exposition is one that gives the feeling and colour of the passage as well as the meaning. Much lecturing might rather be described as laceration than exposition. After the process the dry bones of the thought stand there, but the flesh that clothed it and the spirit that animated it are alike gone. Each part being taken separate is joined as you see skeletons in museums with very evident wires by such chilling phrases as “now to pass on to another line of remark”. It is sometimes necessary to be very simple, mere talking expositions setting forth the main outlines and employing many of the simpler conjunctions may be useful, but even then something of the soul should abide, something of the imagery and movement of the original. To rise to the sublimity of the prophetic language, or maintain the sweet simplicity of the gospels may not be in our power, but if we are earnestly following on, we would not so utterly fail as entirely to falsify the truth we mean to set forth. Yet how often is the

very thing which is so beautifully true in the language of the scripture utterly false in the version of the expounder.

On the other hand truth may be just as much lost by importing into the passage matters entirely foreign to it. The causes may be many, barreness, or zeal to find our own scheme set forth, or desire to edify. But the result is one. General truth takes the place of the particular truth actually set forth, and fine sentiments of living experience. Seeing that the Bible is large enough there is less excuse for this overloading, for when you have exhausted one part you can go on to the rest. About the best professor of exegesis I ever heard was an old German who used to expound whole passages by saying, if any of you are able to discover any difficulty here you can let me know.

Akin to this quality is honesty. Here a very large question indeed opens: Which subjects is it your duty to take up and what should you say about them? Should we treat such questions as the two Isaiahs, the date of the Pentateuch and the Psalter and the origin of the synoptics, and what should we say about the first chapter of Genesis, or the cursing psalms, or difficulties of dates or the differences between Acts and Galatians or, to go to the root of the matter, of inspiration itself? For myself I must confess I do not seek difficulties, though I trust I do not avoid them, and in dealing with them I strive to be as honest as possible. If there is any limit I trust it is the needs of my audience and not my own timidity. Whether that is enough I am not sure. For does not the confidence of your people largely depend upon the belief that they are aware of all the difficulties and are not young men especially, constantly being brought face to face with difficulties they have not been prepared to meet? Many critical questions are only scholarly, many cannot be made clear to untrained minds, much apologetic or argumentative preaching, moreover, does not profit, for the true apology is to present the word so that it is its own apology. Still the time is coming when the present view of the Bible as an infallible statute book will give place to something else, and it is time we prepared for it not only by telling people, but by making them feel that this historical view of the Bible, while it may mean less certain inspiration of the parts, has made even more evident the inspiration of the whole. A change of standpoint always means danger to some and loss to others, but if we are true men both preachers and hearers will not hesitate to bear their share that in the end the Church of Christ may be as it always has been on such occasions, enriched not impoverished by this time of doubt and inquiry.

Finally, all exposition should be edifying. All accurate, truthful, honest exposition must be edifying but in addition there should be
regard both to the capacities and to the needs of the audience directly calculated to help their faith. While no true preacher will consent to have his teaching measured by the fancies of his audience, the sooner we make up our minds that we have not an ideal humanity to deal with the better. On the Sabbath morning some are weary, some are drowsy, some are careless, some are ignorant, and they are just the people who most need help. If there is any picturesqueness, any vividness of representation, any memorable division or striking illustration it is not to be despised. In a warm room, seated comfortably, with a smooth flow, even of good ideas, overhead, human nature at its very best tends to somnolence, and without attention there is no edification. The despairing, moreover, need to be encouraged, the sad comforted, the indifferent roused, and all built up in faith and knowledge and zeal. Thereby your choice of subjects and the relative place you will give to each will be largely decided.

And yet it may be, though all our preaching is finally tested by its power to edify, we should less seldom aim directly at edification than we do for it only leads us to say the correct thing which will never edify. Our eyes should more directly be upon God’s truth and we should believe that if only we could convey it in its simplicity and in its fullness, it would help men more than all our preaching about it. Of all foes, good exposition has none so hostile, as the conviction that to be hortatory and to be edifying are the same thing.

XXV

THE TEMPER OF NONCONFORMITY

It may be well to begin by defining my purpose. Otherwise you might think I am about to bring a railing accusation against you. No doubt your temper in the ordinary sense is as sweet as it ought to be, and if that were the subject I should be entirely without matter for discourse. By temper here I mean a prevailing mood, a general feeling towards things, an attitude of the soul. It is near akin, if not identical, with our fundamental faith.

Though it is the last thing we can formulate, it is the first thing we feel. What ultimately separates Christian men is far less their differences of opinion than their differences of temper, and there lies too for the most part the real separation between Christian societies.

The grand distinction is between Conformity and Nonconformity. It tends to divide us not merely into two Churches but into two nations. Not content with separating between us in life, it puts between us that evil symbol, a broad road, when we are dead. It is only because there is some question whether the other side will have need of one, that there is not a demand for two heavens.

Some good would be gained, if we could see that this difference springs primarily from a difference of temper, and that this temper is not so much a matter of doctrine or opinion as of emphasis. Still more would be gained, if we could determine what the exact nature of that emphasis is.

Let us take the greatest of all expositions of Conformity—Hooker’s Ecclesiastical Polity. Its gravity, calmness and freedom from passion have gained for its author the title of the Judicious Hooker. Its temper, in the common meaning of the word, is admirable. But its temper in the sense I am giving the word is another matter. Its fundamental conviction, disguise it as the author may in the stateliest language, is that the safe way in life is to conform to the powers that be. It may not be the right way, but if a man is wrong with the state behind him, God must treat him pretty leniently, whereas if he is wrong on his own account, he is in for a bad time.
Next let us take Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as an exposition of Nonconformity. The whole stress lies upon the pilgrim himself; sanctioned evil is precisely his greatest temptation and a man who has God for his help has no excuse to offer for being led by the powers that be. There is also here a fine temper in the ordinary sense, bright and sunny and humorous, but behind is this intense emphasis on the individual's sole responsibility to God.

The difference, then, I take to be that the temper of Conformity is to have a large faith in human regulation, and a relatively small faith in the self-direction of the human soul; while the temper of Nonconformity is to have a large faith in the self-direction of the human soul, and a relatively small faith in human regulations. It is not a question of exclusive belief, but of where we place the stress of life and action. It is not that one despises conscience and the other institutions, but that when it really comes to a pinch, the one instinctively says: It is a very dangerous thing to quarrel with the institution, and the other that it is a very dangerous thing to quarrel with conscience.

Let us grant then, if for no better reason, for the sake of argument, that the temper of Nonconformity springs from the belief that the self-direction of the human soul is the end, surer and safer, more divine and reliable in every way, than the directions of human regulation. We must not, however, forthwith assume either that it is right or that we are right with it, but proceed to ask two questions:

1. Is this temper true to reality?
2. Are we in reality true to it?

First, then, is this temper true to reality?

The matter is by no means to be taken for granted. In his book called *Leviathan*, Hobbes maintains that all civilization depends on the individual surrendering his freedom, on condition of not being robbed and spoiled by other people's freedom. In that position there is a certain amount of important truth. Individualism in the sense of individual self-assertion is anarchy. If men are a set of separate entities nothing can be so essential as the eternal bond which holds them together. With that individualism Christianity has no affinity. In honour preferring one another, not causing your brother to offend, and in fact everything connected with Christ is connected with a brotherhood by the strongest ties.

Nor is it content with an individualism tempered by the ballot box. The New Testament says a good many unkind things about majorities. Many are called and few are chosen; the road to destruction is broad and found by many, the way to life is narrow and found by few. It rather suggests that to be in a majority is in itself a cause for self-examination, and that when the vote is unanimous the case is desperate. On the basis of mere individual rights, Nonconformity is probably a perverse thing, and it is certainly a weak thing.

In his *Early Church History*, Professor Gwatkin speaks of the early and intense opposition to what he describes as "the 'inwardness' of Christianity, with its ultra-democratic appeal to the image of God in all men". To some of us that is the very essence of Christianity, and certainly, whether it is or not, it is the only justification for Nonconformity. We must always remember that Nonconformity needs justification, for we have no right to quarrel either with Church or State except on good grounds. Unity and order are necessities of public and private well-being, and we must have a strong justification before we disturb them.

In the last issue the only justification possible is that we have a still more secure foundation for them. For security and progress three things are necessary. The first is unity. In some way we must have our aim, and be bound in one fellowship. The Kingdom of God is one and can only be sought in unity, and if we stop at the point of insisting on our right to be as different from everyone else as we have a mind to, we are not seeking it. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.

Second, no other guidance will avail except wisdom. Folly is not made wisdom by having on its side a majority of votes. The people in the most danger are precisely the people who vote solidly for folly.

Third, there is no victory but in heroism. A nation or a church cannot live by regulations or constitutions. In the last issue it is perceived by the few to whom righteousness and liberty are dearer than life. In one way or another all real gains in life are at the price of blood. The things of compliance and ease are the things which destroy men and nations.

The question is whether we have a power which can enable us to have these requirements better fulfilled than by mere submission to the institution.

We now turn to the New Testament and we find there that when division arises the sole appeal is to God's love, when perplexity the sole hope is the guidance of the spirit, when difficulty threatens the demand is for self-denial, taking up the Cross and following Christ. Men are the children of God and brethren of each other; spiritual and fitted to judge all things, good soldiers of Jesus Christ who look for victory but never dream of ease. They are earthen vessels, yet chosen of God before the foundation of the world and inseparable from His love by the forces of time or eternity. The appeal was unreservedly to the individual, but it was to the individual in whom the
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unmerited sense of God’s grace had crushed self-assertion, pride and insistence upon personal rights.

The Reformation was the recovery of that New Testament position. The chief expression it found for itself at that time was in the doctrine of election. The new doctrine begins with Wiclif, who says the true Church is the congregation of the elect. Through Huss it reached Zwingli and Luther who were just as strong on this doctrine as Calvin, and from Luther and Calvin it took possession of the minds of all the English Reformers.

This is not, however, to be straightway identified with the doctrine of the seventeenth century. The doctrine of the Reformers was fundamentally a religious doctrine, the doctrine of the seventeenth century creeds was fundamentally theological. No doubt there were religion and theology in both but as I have said the question of temper is a question of emphasis, and this was a question of temper. The reformers after a great experience which took them out of themselves, and set them on new and perilous paths, felt nothing of it as it was their own doing. They were chosen vessels for a great purpose. They are not elect for themselves but for the glory of God. They only felt that the love which laid this stress upon them had known them from the beginning and would hold them to the end. Wherefore pope or prelate or prince counted for little. Their belief was not the basis but the crown of their faith. It meant for them humility and power, and the sure sense that what came to them as duty was God’s end and even for the final unity of God’s people.

On that the Reformation rested. In the seventeenth century the theologians at least started from election. They sat down and argued. They reached it not by the assurance of God’s love but by ideas of His omnipotence and omniscience. The belief no longer emptied them of pride and self-will. Moreover, let us remember that most of our divisions came not from the sixteenth but from the seventeenth century.

The evangelical movement of the eighteenth century, finding evangelical religion fettered by this theology and rejecting it, treated faith not like the reformers as something which emptied a man of all merit but as something which was either meritorious or could be counted as merit for what it would grow to. The aim of the evangelicals was the old one of reaching the conscience and heart behind what a man’s outward character might happen to be. They had the old ultra-democratic belief in the image of God in all men.

Nevertheless, the weakness of the movement lay in a reaction to which the old theological attitude still clung. Consequently, it rested too much on individual emotion. It was immensely fruitful, but often in opposite directions. It did not, somehow, get back to the temper of the men who felt that in Christ they were chosen vessels of God’s purpose, guided by the divine wisdom, and sure of final unity in the divine end. Hence evangelicalism has often been divisive, sometimes other worldly and occasionally feeble and even effeminate. Because it did not always drive men back on conscience as the true way because it was God’s way.

At the present time we find ourselves in the position the evangelical movement left us in, with the impulse wanting which led men to God, and so corrected for them largely the defects of the movement. And now we are mainly conscious that our emotions are dull, our aims divided and our spirits dwelling apart. If we are to get back again to the sense of serving God’s purpose in the fellowship of his own people, guided by the wisdom which will teach us in every practical way to choose the things that excel, and if we are to have as Seeley expresses it “the manhood and moderation which can do without heroes because it is itself heroic”, which alone can deal with the many evils which afflict the Church and the State, we need somehow to get back to the old ground which though it is man, individual man, turns out to be God. The name we shall give it will not, I think, be election. That has been too long interpreted by the ideas of omnipotence and omniscience, whereas we must interpret by the ideas of wisdom and love, but it must somehow put the stress on God not man. Anyhow, it must be something which at once empties us of pride and enables us to trust ourselves, which silences self-will and awakes conscience, which makes faith the manifestation of an ideal world, yet a business proposition, something to which we can commit the voyage of our lives for time and eternity. Then we shall not be afraid to say when any division arises or any breach is to be healed, that the only worthy appeal of any Christian man is to the heart of his brethren which I take it is what should be understood by Nonconformity.

So much for the question whether this temper is true to reality. Now for the second question: Are we in reality true to it?

Here at length is the practical question and probably you think I have taken a long and weary way to reach it. Let us ask these questions:

(a) Do we make light of union, because we have in God the assurance of unity, of being perfected into one?

(b) Do we make light of human rule, because we have wholly committed ourselves to the guidance of the divine wisdom?

(c) Do we make light of office and order, because we expect from God’s grace the heroism and consecration which can serve the Kingdom of God better than they?
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If not, then why not? For the quite simple reason that our faith is not what we take it to be. We imagine that, like God, we look not upon the outward appearance but upon the heart, and there see the image of God in all. Whereas the plain fact is that we do nothing of the kind. We are impressed by size, wealth, outward dignity, power. At bottom we expect that if we are to succeed at all it can only be by having these forces on our side. We are all labouring to make our churches outwardly impressive rather than inwardly persuasive. We imagine the two aims are quite consistent, but I have been insisting that this whole question is a matter of emphasis. Now you can't lay the stress, say, on having your deacons prosperous and also on having them saints, you can't lay stress on nourishing well-to-do congregations and also in caring for the souls of men.

The Nonconformist who expects to succeed by outward impressiveness has no justification. He really trusts the institution and not the image of God in each man, and he has no more business to weaken the force of the Church by dividing from it than he has to weaken the force of the State by setting up a state of his own.

On the question of who is responsible for our present, divided state, we are no more likely to agree than Ahab and Elijah as to who was the trouble of Israel. But to us at least it is pretty much the same question, that between authority and conscience. There is no dubiety about which should be our way.

A union which is gained merely by authority just because it cannot be unity will not appear to one whose only idea of unity is agreement with God, of any value. On that basis he can believe in the utmost unity of purpose with the utmost individuality of method. Great keenness on the other hand about union arises from the belief that our methods ought to be united because our purposes are sure to be different. This lack of faith unfortunately most of us justify every day. Our people regularly assume that our congregations are common arrangements for their private good, not associations for personal consecration to the common end. Our congregations join with others mainly to help themselves forward. Our denominations are too frequently satisfied to think of their own good without any notion that it must be subordinated to the kingdom of God. All this common action for individual ends, instead of individual action for common ends, and all this striving and crying over it belongs in no way to what I have spoken of as the only justifiable basis of Nonconformity.

Unity ought to be a longer and yet more concentrated endeavour with us. It must be unity not union. It is unity of the spirit in the bonds of love.

Whatever may be said or argued to the contrary, we should make our view clear. Our view is that the only serious breach of it is just attempting to force other people's consciences. In short every appeal for unity must be not an appeal for submission but for conscience and love's sake. If this could be our temper and not merely our theory, do you think a large section of our brethren could continue to divide from us on such a trivial and external thing as episcopal succession, or such a material security as the patronage of the State?

This brings us to the question of guidance by the divine wisdom. It is almost the same as the other. The only unity worth anything is unity in seeing God's purpose and the only guidance worth anything is the divine wisdom. That means the power to discern the things that excel, to choose continually not merely the good but the best way humbly and yet steadfastly. To this end we must be the spiritual who judge all things. Now that does not mean people who have pious feelings, much less pious expression of them, but the people who do practically act on the belief that the one matter of importance in man is his soul. The people in short who can in the spirit and power of Jesus Christ make this ultra-democratic appeal to the image of God in man.

Instead, it is about as true of Nonconformist churches as of Rome that they have no intention of leaving anything to the divine guidance that they can help. Fussy ecclesiastical and often small-minded persons direct our ways and that wholly on grounds of common worldly prudence with a pretty lively regard for worldly distinctions. The result is often that what might be a powerful Christian society is turned into a feeble kind of religious club.

Along with this goes a great deal of fury and denunciation against people opposed to us. I don't mean we are not to be angry at wrong, but we are never to have the impotent fury of persons fighting a losing battle. If we were spiritual and really believed that the unseen things alone are eternal, and if we knew we had the mind of Christ, we should not be angry but grieved at the misuse of power. And so avoid that kind of Ishmaelite spirit which is not only unhappy but is a source of weakness, we should not even worry about social disabilities. The person who believes that the final guidance is the divine wisdom will always find himself requiring to go out to God beyond the camp. In short, it will necessarily involve some heroic element. This leads up to our third point.

This all means that we can only stand on what, for want of a better expression, I must call a heroic basis. In view of the extremely well-upholstered nature of a great deal of our modern Nonconformity that lofty phrase may seem a little conceited. Perhaps it is. Perhaps there are pretensions among us which ought to be mocked at. But
faith is fundamentally a heroic quality. It does not fear them who can kill the body but only Him who can destroy the soul. This does, no doubt at all, sound a bit of a mockery, and to our comfortable, middle-class commercial Nonconformity, it is pure nonsense.

In consequence we have got all mixed up on the question of the relation of our Christianity to society. We seem to be driven to the choice between turning the Church into a political society or ignoring the appalling evils of our social state. One man assures us that the Church has nothing to do with social questions, but only with the souls of men, that the Church has nothing to do with anything but preaching the Gospel. It sounds specious, but do you think that to the man who talks in that way the soul is really the first consideration? When you find that he always takes care to belong to a prosperous congregation, that he adorns its uppermost seats, and that his duty to his poorer neighbour is discharged by a subscription to the congregational mission, which itself is a visible denial of spiritual equality, you begin to have doubts. A man cannot trust in impressiveness and outward means and organizations and doubt the efficacy of the state or the duty of every Christian society to influence it to the utmost.

Yet all this striving and crying over politicians, if not over politics, is also wrong, and our Christian societies are unquestionably being turned aside from their true aims and methods, and above all from the true Christian temper. The temper of Nonconformity is not really a political temper, though circumstances may force upon it political action. Are we not perhaps in both ways trying to lift the burden without putting our own shoulders under it?

What we need for the solution of our social difficulties is precisely the man to whom they are a secondary consideration. The man, for example, to whom money is the most important thing in the world will never be of any use in dealing with poverty. The driving force in really effective social effort must just be that ultra-democratic sense of the image of God in all men. Such a sense would not relieve us of the need to give material help any more than the dominating sense, superior to all questions of wealth and success and even character, that a man is our brother according to the flesh would make it a matter of indifference to us whether he was naked and starved. The real failure in all our efforts is precisely that we estimate material well-being so highly that we do not start with a poor man as our brother but as a naturally inferior order of creation.

The result is that most of our aggressive Christian work is the task so gratifying to the natural man of taking the mote out of our brother’s eye without the previous painful operation of removing the beam from our own eye. That beam is the deep hypocrisy of regarding our privileges as our merit not as our burden and our call. That again comes to the old question of sin, which we have first confused with the question of sins, and then have identified that with sins of the flesh instead of, as we ought, with pride. Our real sinful state is just this that our blessings have exalted not humbled us, and that thereby we are started on a wrong relation to God and to our fellows. Till we can speak to our fellow men in genuine sincerity as fellow sinners and heirs of the same unmerited grace we cannot speak to any good purpose at all. We have talked about it, but has it been our prevailing, dominating temper?

That is the old religious basis of Nonconformity, and on any other it is simply a source of weakness and confusion to the community.