752 F2294 THE HEALING CROSS

Further Studies in the Christian Interpretation of Life

by HERBERT H. FARMER

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God"

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INTRODUCTION

T is part of the richness and adequacy of the Christian message—part, indeed, of the evidence for the truth of its claim to bring to mankind the everlasting gospel of God-that it speaks to every new age of history. Yet not by the mere repetition of fixed and ancient formulæ, as though in these high matters what is asked of men is that they should step out of history and be other than their modern selves. Nor on the other hand by being so accommodating that the Gospel ceases to be itself and becomes a mere echo of the contemporary world. The adjustment of the Message to its environment is partly a matter of terminology, but it is even more a matter of adjustment of emphasis, of bringing into the foreground what has hitherto been in the background, of making dominant what for a longer or shorter period has been a hardly noticed, though never wholly absent. overtone. The Christian preacher and teacher is, or should be, like the householder in our Lord's parable, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and

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old. But it is well that he should realize that things which are new to any particular age will grow old and familiar, and things which are now old and familiar to it will one day have to be brought forth again as new. It would perhaps help if some of our contemporary theologians realized this more.

It would seem that the presentation of the Message to mankind to-day, in this so tremendous age, should in one way or another fulfil these conditions:

First, it must be so presented that it appears at once to be not incommensurate with the great forces sweeping through the modern world. The modern man thinks in terms of the world. He can hardly help doing so. He opens his newspaper and reads the world. He goes to the films and sees—the world. He listens to the radio and hears—the world. Almost unconsciously everything is projected on to, and takes its dimension from, that vast background. The Gospel is no exception to this. It too can be dwarfed by the background. A message which, however well intentioned, does not contrive to lift men's eyesnot incidentally but inevitably—beyond the limits of their parish or their denomination, or even of their own individual salvation, crucial as that is, will seem too small to be true. There must be a recovery of the cosmic note, which is assuredly not absent from the

New Testament, the note, that is to say, of the Christian fellowship being called of God to be the organ of His purpose in relation to the whole process of history.

Nor need such a thought seem to belong to the realm of dreams. No doubt to believe it must ever be in large measure a judgement of faith, as everything must be which would engage the allegiance of the whole man; but a cosmic Christianity, if the phrase may be permitted, is at least an object worthy of faith and calculated to evoke it. Yet, even so, it is surely a highly significant and relevant thing, and one which bears the plain imprint of the Providence of God, that the œcumenical movement is a reality to-day, as the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences, leading to the establishment of the World Council of the Churches, amply witness. The Church is the one supernational and world-wide society in a world which appears to be flying to pieces.

Then, again, the Message must be so presented that it has a strongly agnostic note running through it, or, to put it more positively, so that the mystery of God's purpose in the world is emphasized. The Gospel is indeed a message concerning a great revelation, a great Light, but it is a Light which shines out of darkness, not one that banishes it. The modern man, often without knowing it or being able to put it into

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words, is oppressed with the sense of the sheer mystery of things, the dark abysm of ignorance and impotence which surrounds the narrow illuminated patch of his knowledge and his power. He wants light, he wants to believe, sometimes quite desperately; but a message which confesses to no questionings, no hesitations, no nescience, which has not within it the deep tone of awe before the mystery of God, will seem to him, as Job's comforters seemed to Job, too confident to be true. And he will be right. God has indeed spoken in Christ—that is the everlasting Gospel; but it is God who has spoken.

Again, further, the Message must be so presented that the note of austerity is clearly heard. By this we do not in the least mean that the preacher should fall to denouncing judgement upon sinners, hoping to find, if he can, some modern substitute for the terrors of hell. For, indeed, that what is sown in folly and wickedness must be reaped in ruin and disaster is sufficiently clear to-day to make even modern men uneasy. Rather what we have in mind is that the message of deliverance itself—the Gospel—should have the note of severity running through it. It must be a call which demands as well as succours, nay, succours because it demands, and demands because it succours. Too often the Gospel has been presented as merely

consoling, merely a specific for finding peace in a troubled world. Such a message not only plays straight into the hands of the psychologists who would see in all religion merely a way of escape, merely a way of whistling to keep up the courage in the dark, but also it fails to find a response in the better minds of our generation, especially the younger minds. The note of a call to adventure, to danger, to heroic and costing enterprise, must be heard, if the Gospel is to fit the modern scene and to seem any other than a mere twittering of birds over a volcano. The Gospel must indeed bring comfort and peace and joy, otherwise it would not be gospel; but if it brings only that, or rather if it does not bring it in and through challenge and demand, it will not be credible. It will seem too easy to be true.

This is but to say that the Cross must be at the centre of the Message. The Cross is healing, but it does not cease to be—Cross.

Yet, finally, the Message can only be to the individual. The appeal must be for his decision in the deep, inner places of his being, where dwells his personal will and where he must settle issues for himself with God. The vastness and mystery of the world must on no account be allowed to dwarf the significance of the individual soul or the fact that

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God finds in dedicated persons the agents of His purpose in the world. No person can dedicate another person, for otherwise they would not be persons. Wherefore, whatever new emphases need to find place in the Message, it must still consist in large measure in setting forth the Christian way as it is known, and can only be known, in the life of individual discipleship, in the faith and the hope that those who are thus given a new, or renewed, understanding of that way may be moved of the Spirit of God to make, or remake, their choice to walk therein come what may.

It is hoped that the following pages may in some measure help to this end.

NOTE

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PART I CHRIST THE WAY

THE DILEMMA OF GODLESSNESS

"The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth."—JEREMIAH X. II.

COME years ago I lay in the heather high up on a Omountain side overlooking a deep, broad valley. Near by, and jutting out from amongst a tangle of bushes, was a rock, one side of which dropped steeply into the valley. On the edge of the rock there was a large spider. He was letting out filaments from his body in order to construct his web. As he let them forth they were caught by air currents and floated out over the vast deep spaces of the valley, waving hither and thither, catching on nothing, pathetic, futile. Then he seemed to give it up. He turned from the infinite spaces of the valley and went into a crevice of the rock, dark and overhung by the bushes, and began again. Here the filaments soon caught on something, and swiftly he spun his web. It was not long before a fly was entangled in it, its life being sucked away by its enemy.

This little incident from Nature has come back to

my mind many times since. It comes back when I am stung into thinking with less than usual casualness about this strange and awful fact, usually taken for granted, of being alive, being a man, chucked into existence, along with millions of others, God alone knows whence.

I

What is it all about? Walk through a great city and observe man. What a tumult of activity and busy-ness from day to day, month to month, year to swiftly vanishing year. What are these creatures—what am I—rushing up to town in automobiles and swaying railway trains, selling this, buying that, tapping out letters and invoices on writing machines, 'phoning hither and thither, eating, drinking, love-making, money-making?

They are men, you say, with perhaps a touch of dignity in the voice. Yes, but what is a man, and why be so pleased about it? Suppose we were to say that they are only highly organized, intelligent, two-legged spiders, wherein would we be wrong? The spider spun his web in the crevice of the rock and caught his fly. What are these creatures doing, as they move hither and thither, if they are not merely spinning a highly elaborate web, in accordance with their different powers, to catch a fly, fix and hold and enjoy some swiftly passing and always precariously held nourish-

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ment and satisfaction? And are they not all, like the spider, under sentence of ultimate death? One hundred years or so and not one of them will be here, any more than the spider is still on that lakeland hill-side. Ah, but you say, look at man's achievements, his great buildings, his wireless communications, his aero-planes, his science and art. But does that make the least difference? The spider after all has his points, for such a tiny, frail creature. His web is a master-piece of structure and beauty.

Ah, but you say again, there is something else. This creature man has something which no other creature has: he has thoughts of, aspirations after, something transcending and outlasting the immediate necessities of instinctive life; he dreams of ideal things, of beauty and truth and goodness; he has a sense of kinship with the eternal. There are churches and temples as well as factories and offices. Yes, you are right. There is something in the soul of man that makes him feel, at least on occasion, not quite satisfied with this whole business of spreading webs and catching flies, even " cultured and refined flies " like music and art; makes him feel not quite sure that, when all is said and done, there is not a hollow meaninglessness at the heart of it. And there stirs in him the yearning for something more permanent, something that shall escape the universal sentence of death. But does he find it? Did not the spider also stand for a moment on the edge

of the rock and let forth from his being into the infinite vastness of the valley a few filaments, waving pathetically, touching nothing but emptiness? Then gave it up and went into the narrow crevice which he had always known, and built his little, familiar web there and went on catching flies?

II

Here indeed is a picture of the dilemma of the modern man.

On the one hand, there is the business of keeping ordinary human life going from the ordinary human motives of hunger, sex, home-building, money-making, desire for comfort and pleasure and security, and all the rest. It has a certain inherent zest in it, especially if one is young. But it has this fatal flaw: it does not bear thinking about as a whole. Directly you begin to think about it as a whole, in and for it itself with no reference to anything beyond itself, it seems to have no meaning. It all suddenly begins to dwindle and shrink to something chillingly like that spider spinning his web for flies in a crevice of the rock. Or, to change the image, it becomes like the back-cloth of the stage which gives an illusion of reality for an hour or two of excitement, but which subconsciously you know is so thin and flat that you could put your boot through it. And this is true, even if you happen to be amongst those who find their delight in refined and cultured

things, things that are usually counted amongst the higher dignities of human life. What does it matter whether I spin a highly artistic web and catch butterflies or a coarser one and catch house-flies, if in the end nothing has any significance beyond itself and death annuls all, even, as some scientists tell us it will, the whole human race itself? This is one side of the modern man's dilemma. Confine your thought and interest and activity to this present scene and you dare not sit down and think about it as a whole. If you do. man's dignity begins to vanish away. He becomes simply a rather pathetic animal, carried along by instincts and desires whose objects have no more permanence and significance than the honey after which the ants run in accordance with their instincts and desires. With this tragic difference, however, that he knows that that is how things are.

What then is the other side? Well, many modern people feel, dimly or clearly, this hollowness and futility which underlie human activity, however immediately zestful it may be, when it is closed up in itself. One of the most competent minds in Europe once said in my hearing these words: "The most disquieting thing in this modern age is the growing sense of futility which is spreading through all classes. It will have incalculable consequences." He was right. Why then do not men break through this enclosedness of their life, which is the source of its apparent meaninglessness and futility, into

a faith in a High and Holy Purpose above and beyond life yet working through it? Why do they not centre their being in the thought of God and find in Him that which will fill the hollowness, and give meaning to this otherwise unintelligible world?

The reason why they do not do so is that the thought of God carries no conviction to them. If for only a few moments the modern man stands petrified before the apparent meaninglessness of his own existence and begins to yearn after the eternal, after God, behold there is an inhibition resting on his soul. He cannot feel that the object of his yearning is real. Indeed just because it is the object of his yearning he is inclined to think it cannot be real. The spectre of "wish-thinking" haunts his mind. He is like the spider again. He lets out a few filaments into the vast spaces, perhaps at some crisis of life when he is suddenly brought up short and made to think; and they wave about in the emptiness and catch on nothing. What then? Again like the spider, he turns from it, back into the narrow, enclosed crevice, and begins building his web again there, perhaps with redoubled energy.

Well, it may be said, why not? Why not be content to live a life with no meaning beyond itself, not thinking too much about it, and drawing from it such satisfaction as we can, so long as it lasts? Why not, in short, be content to be godless? Alas!—and here is the essentially tragic situation in which we all are—the matter

is not so simple as that. It is in fact a frightfully difficult thing to make anything very satisfactory of our lives, increasingly so in these modern times. It was a simple thing, one may imagine, for the spider, having failed to make anything of the open spaces of the valley, to settle into the crevice and catch flies. But it is not simple for man. Life for him has a way of tangling itself up into really horrible troubles. There was a war a few years ago in which millions of young men were slain by their fellows, children bereaved, women's hearts broken, babies starved, minds sent insane. And the clouds of another and worse horror gathering, as the nations arm again and compete ruthlessly like animals with one another for food and wealth. Or, coming to things more individual and personal, since when has it been easy for a man to manage even his own life in a way that will give him or other people any deep and abiding satisfaction? Since when has it been easy so to rise above the fears and worries and insecurities of life that there is an inward peace of mind which no nervous breakdown—that peculiarly modern trouble—ever threatens, which has no frayed, irritable edges needing to be continually soothed with mental sedatives and diversions and anodynes of various sorts? Since when has it been easy to make a tolerable success of marriage and all the intimate, elbow-rubbing relationships of home-life? The problem of living together, the failure of all of us

in varying degree to solve that problem, runs through every area and level of life, from the difficulties parents have with their children and children with their parents right up to the insane confusion and resultant vast misery of the international situation to-day.

III

This then is the dilemma. On the one hand modern man finds it difficult to believe in the reality of God, to believe that there is any absolute even remotely related to himself above the flux and confusion of this transitory life. On the other hand he finds it increasingly difficult to make anything very satisfactory of this present life in and for itself. Able now as never before, through press, radio, film, to contemplate human history as a whole, he sees it, perhaps as never before, as "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." The thought of God has lost its compelling power. It has no grip, no pungency; it does not stir feeling, it does not engage the will. It is mere idea. Yet the deep need for God remains, and even, as we have said, increases. Hence the familiar substitutedeities of the present age—the Life Process, the Proletarian Class, the Nordic Race, the Nation, the Volk. the Leader. These all bear witness to the aching emptiness of the human spirit. Because of that emptiness man creates, hardly knowing why or how he does it, his own pitiful little "eternal" in a mythological race or nation which shall endure for a thousand years, his own shabby pseudo-absolute or substitute-deity in a strutting dictator, his own artificial and highly theatrical sacraments of banners and parades and salutes, and in and through these he seeks to escape himself and the long littleness of the self-enclosed life. For, as Luther said, if a man has not God he will have an idol.

Is the situation, then, one about which to despair? Not in the least; it is full of promise. For it is assuredly true that God is never so near to men as when they are on the edge of final hopelessness and despair. The pressure which godlessness sooner or later puts upon human nature is the pressure of God. The temple of faith has to be rebuilt again and again and it is only well built when it is built on the very edge of the pit of self-distrust. Indeed, built anywhere else it swiftly becomes a merely decorative embellishment upon life, a place where men worship only a gilded image of themselves. Beyond all question God is speaking in most severe and austere terms to this generation. Yet not in severe and austere terms only, for His final word to humanity is still Christ, the word of Love which is to the uttermost and will not let men go.

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problems underlie everything, even the most simple and obvious and satisfying relationships by which we live from day to day. But it is no use starting with them, and because it is no use starting with them, because also this is not primarily a book on theology but on that which is prior to all theology, namely the religious life itself, we leave them on one side. The more important question is how we may come to share the Christian conviction about Christ, so that, no matter what mysteries may remain, or how far we may range in perplexed reflection on the underlying theoretical problems, we are constrained to say with increasing conviction as the years pass that He is, after all, the Way, the Truth and the Life and that for Him, above all else, we give God thanks.

Ι

The answer we give to this more important question is this: the Christian affirmation about Christ can only become a living and massive conviction within the soul in the course of the life of Christian discipleship itself. Only as a man is prepared to make the experiment at some cost to himself of centring his whole inner life in Him can he increasingly find in Him that which makes him sure that He came forth from God. Now what such an experiment will involve it is the purpose of these chapters in some measure to expound; there is, however, an initial difficulty, not of

II

THE SOUL'S SURMISE

"I am the way, the truth, and the life."—John xiv. 6.

THE Christian message and call to the modern man in his dilemma is a simple one, at least in its general statement and in the kind of response it invites. It affirms that there is an ultimate Holy Purpose above and beyond the world and human life yet at work within the world and human life, and that He has made Himself known to us in a way that is unique, final, completely adequate, and wholly indispensable in the person of Jesus Christ. Let a man build his life on the basis of that affirmation, build it, too, not as an isolated and private experiment but in the light of the long experience of those who have made the same venture all down the ages and in fellowship with those who are prepared to make it now, and it will stand, because, to use Jesus' own image, "it is founded upon a rock."

No doubt this is a tremendous affirmation to make, and if it be true the theoretical problems which it suggests are vast and complicated as the history of Christian theology and philosophy shows. Theoretical

a theoretical but of a practical kind, which many will feel right at the beginning.

It will be said, how is it possible for a man to centre his whole life in Christ at some cost to himself, if he is not first convinced that what the Christian faith says of Him is true? Are you not shutting him up in a circle in saying that he must first be a disciple in order to become convinced about Christ when the truth is that he must first be convinced in order to become a disciple?

The answer is that there are two kinds of conviction. There is what Santayana calls "the soul's invincible surmise," and there is what is no longer surmise but is a solid and tested certainty sustaining the whole life of the soul. The first, if a man can find the courage to commit himself to it and live by it, leads on to the second. Many examples might be given of this, for indeed in all the higher reaches of our experience our minds seem to work in this way. There is an intuitive leap, a surmise, a premonition, a fore-feeling, of something lying ahead and calling to us to have the courage, and to make the effort, to enter in and possess it. Personal relationships of trust and love begin, and can only begin, in that way. To make a man a friend it is necessary to treat him as a friend; yet you can only treat him as a friend if you sense in advance of any experimental justification that he is capable of friendship and will answer trust with trustworthiness. Similarly the power to appreciate the best things in art and music and literature can only be acquired by making the effort to keep company with them, even though at first, despite some deep surmise that they are there to be appreciated, they bore us. As Mr. C. E. M. Joad has put it—

Good taste is born of faith that the kingdom of beauty can neither be purchased with dollars nor taken by storm, but must be approached by a process of trial and error, a willingness to learn, and the humility which is prepared to accept in faith on the judgment of others what it cannot yet dare to reject on its own.

All advance in the things of truth and beauty and goodness and love seems to rest on such a faith—like that of Abraham who "when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed and went out not knowing whither he went." And such faith, be it noted, is not taking a gambler's chance; there is more conviction in it than that; the whole thing grips us with something of the compulsiveness of the real. Yet, paradoxically, it is in another sense not yet real—to us; it awaits our realization. And the realization depends on action.

So it is, only in a much deeper and more critical way, with the Christian experience of, and conviction about, Christ. There must be something of the adventure of faith, yet none of us could make—perhaps none of us ought to make—such an adventure if it were just a blind and despairing leap into the dark. In one way or another, be it in never so small a degree, Christ must

evoke in us the surmise, going beyond anything that past experience or the theoretical reason could justify, that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, that amidst a very chaotic and perplexing world mirrored in the chaos and complexity of our own souls, He is God's word of demand and succour to us. Then as we are prepared to adventure ourselves on this surmise and go out into life on the basis of it—drawing confidence from the witness of others all down the ages who have trod the same way—it ceases to be surmise and becomes increasingly a living conviction, so that in spite of all that challenges it, and sometimes shakes it, we cannot really doubt it any more than we can doubt our own existence.

How then does this surmise arise in the soul? In countless ways, doubtless, corresponding to the infinite differentiation and particularity of individual lives. Nevertheless one quite general, if obvious, thing can be said, namely that a man must bring himself, or must be willing to be brought, in some fashion within range of Christ. He must be willing to look at the fact of Christ with such sincerity as he can muster. And such looking at the fact of Christ should take note of, in one way or another, at least these three things.

II

First, there is the picture of Jesus Christ which is given in the Gospel stories and in the New Testament

generally. It would be foolish, of course, to ask everybody to be a profound student of the New Testament and to have some sort of answer to all the many questions which it raises; but we are entitled to ask anybody who is in the least degree disposed to be serious about life and to seek a high view of it, whether there does not come to him, through such knowledge as he can obtain of these pages, a sense that here is set forth a style and manner of life which is superlatively fine, evoking something of reverence within the deep places of the mind and forbidding any merely casual or flippant judgement of it. It is indeed surprising how often people will debate and argue all kinds of questions about Christ and Christianity and yet never really sit down and read the New Testament with the sort of mind to which alone the New Testament claims to be able to speak, the mind, that is, which is not seeking primarily to raise questions but to find an answer to the urgent, and often desperate, problem of how to manage life itself.

And there is one thing in the New Testament picture of Christ which, above all things else must be looked at, and looked at again and again. It is Calvary. Whatever else the death of Christ may mean, and much that it means can only in the course of the life of discipleship be fully realized, it certainly confronts the serious mind with a final dilemma, that sort of final dilemma which is one of God's ways of challenging the

soul of man and striking through all its evasions to a deeper insight and response. Calvary must mean one of two things; either that such a style of life, dedicated to the proposition that God is Love and that in Love is the secret of existence, is so utterly wide of the truth that it cannot stand up to the actual forces of the world, but must in the end be broken and annihilated by them, or on the other hand, that it is so utterly in harmony with the truth that it can fully afford to accept even such an apparent annihilation, knowing that the victory is in the end with it, knowing indeed that the defeat will itself play a part in victory. The Cross is either a great No written against such a life and the convictions which sustained it or a great Yes? The New Testament triumphantly accepts and affirms the second half of the dilemma and we can only ask those who are prepared to look at the Cross of Christ, and to confront the dilemma for themselves, whether an invincible surmise does not stir in their hearts that the New Testament is right. There is of course no way of demonstrating by argument or by empirical evidence that the New Testament is right; the conviction that it is must in the first instance spring out of something far deeper. Perhaps, indeed, the surmise will at first be hardly more than a profound feeling that one would rather be utterly defeated and annihilated with Christ than succeed with the crooked and callous men who defeated and annihilated Him; yet what is that but

the dim vision of a mind not yet fully to see, the dim vision that the Cross is not really defeat and annihilation at all but essential victory? For no one can really take his stand by what in the nature of things is doomed to utter defeat.

Second, there is not only the picture of Christ in the Gospels and in the New Testament, but also the picture of Him, in some ways much nearer and more challenging, in the person of those whose mind and spirit have been fashioned by Jesus Christ and bear the manifest imprint of His Spirit. In these Christ comes out of the past and becomes part of our contemporary world. Some may say that they have not been fortunate enough to meet such people. Well, it is possible to meet them in indirect ways. It is possible to read the lives of people like Kagawa and Schweitzer and Grenfell; nay it is our duty to read them if we are facing these matters in a way that is not merely casual or flippant. Kagawa is a fact, Schweitzer is a fact in this modern world. They are part of the fact of Christ. They would not be what they are, or where they are, but for the impact of Christ on them reaching them in part, be it noted, through the Church. And yet it is not really necessary to go to such distinguished and world-renowned figures. It is possible to see, if we want to see it, a Christ-style of life, rising out of the life of discipleship, in much more humble people. I can only bear witness that when I see it something

within at once leaps to the thought, surmises, that that sort of thing is the only true strength and dignity and maturity of the human spirit, everything else by contrast being relatively mean and animal and childish.

Sometimes I set alongside one another in imagination a Salvation Army sister, with her inner life centred on Jesus Christ, her outer life working in the filthiest slums of Manchester, and, let us say, one of our present-day dictators, bouncing about in his uniform, rattling the sword, posing in heroic postures, brooking no criticism, consumed with a will for power—power being equated in the last analysis with muscular strength. And one knows that the one is in the line of the true maturity and dignity of life, of the ultimate purpose and victory of God, whereas the other is just fundamentally a fool, a very dangerous fool because a fool with a clever and crooked mind, but still fundamentally a fool.

Or again thirdly, we might ask this question: Does not some surmise that the divine secret of life is in the Christ-style of life arise in your mind when you look out across the hideous confusion and chaos, all the tangle and rupture of personal relationships, of the modern world, not to speak of the tangle and rupture of personal relationships in more domestic situations known to many of us? It would be merely silly and sentimental to say that if we were all to begin discipleship to Jesus, every problem would be instantly solved.

It would not be-there would still have to be hard thinking, difficult planning, and costly experiments. None the less it remains a plain and undeniable fact that if you take any major evil of the present world, you do not have to go far back in the causes that have led up to it, to find this point or that point where most manifestly there was a complete flouting of the kind of thing for which Christ stood. The Treaty of Versailles is but one example. Considered as an instrument for dealing with an enemy, where will you find in it even a faint glimmer of the Christ-style of dealing with men, of those things which according to Christ alone belong unto peace? And now we pay the penalty, for things are what they are, and their consequences will be what they will. In its refusal even to try to follow Christ, the modern world is breaking to pieces.

This then is the first question: Is there anything at all in us which in the least degree responds to the proposition that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, even if it be only by way of an inescapable surmise? If there is not, there is nothing more to be said; if there is, this further question arises: What are we going to do about it? Here three alternatives lie before us.

III

We may ignore this surmise of our spirit and do nothing in the way of actively setting the course of our

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life in accordance with it. That is a very serious decision to take. It is in effect a declaration not only that Christ's way of looking at things was false, but also, what is in a way much more serious in its implications and consequences, that our own best and highest sense of value and truth is false also. To have even a dim sense of what is good and what is evil, what is light and what is darkness, and not to respond to it, is to run fast in the direction either of an ultimate scepticism or an ultimate villainy, or both.

Or we may in effect decide that we will allow the values for which Christ stood to have some dominance over our life as a kind of purifying agent or sweetener or embellishment or lubrication, but no more. This, I suppose, is better than nothing, but it has at the heart of it a fundamental inconsistency and weakness. The inconsistency is this, that when you look into the life and personality of Christ you find that He insists again and again that the secret of life is not vague and occasional sentiment about love and brotherhood, but an absolute surrender to the will of God; there are no half measures. To say that you will follow Christ for the purpose of becoming a nicer person and making life a bit more pleasant for everybody, to take some of His ethic and none of His conviction about God, is not to follow Him at all. It is to betray Him with a kiss. It is to say that the Cross was a mistake and a defeat. The weakness is, that when matters reach a crisis that sort of attitude is already half-defeated. Nobody when the real test comes is going to hold on to mere embroidery; Christian "niceness" will be blown away like mist before more elemental and ancestral passions.

Or finally, we may choose to follow the lead of countless men and women all down the ages, and launch out with seriousness of purpose on the path indicated by this surmise, this deep sense, that Christ is right. This will mean that in a very real and practical way we will set ourselves to make Jesus Christ the master influence in our whole conduct of life, that in a very real and practical way we will accept Him as the Word of God Himself to our spirits. By every means at our disposal we will strive to know His mind and by obedience seek to make it our mind—to walk in the light, as He is in the light.

No one will suppose that such a way of life will be easy going. The whole tenor of Christ's own life forbids it, and who in any case would wish it so? It will need to have within it something of the spirit of a vow, else it will speedily falter and fade away into the low-pitched aspirations of the natural man. Yet it will have its satisfaction and rewards, and in every hardness endured there will be hidden a new revelation of the goodness of God, a new confirmation of that first answering surmise of the soul that Christ is what He claimed to be, The Way, the Truth and the Life for mankind.

III

VOWS

"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people."—PSALM cxvi. 14.

TT is perhaps one of the disquieting features of modern Limes that so many people pass through life without ever being called upon to make a really solemn and serious vow. In earlier times we are told a man's life was full of occasions for vow-taking. At the attainment of manhood, at marriage, at the birth of a child, at each religious festival in the year, at every deliverance from danger or unexpected blessing, at entry into a profession or a trade-guild, a man was expected to acknowledge God and make a vow. To-day that is no longer so, and it is possible for countless people to pass through life without making a serious vow at all. The high and significant occasions pass, the achievement of manhood and citizenship, the birth of children, the great blessings and deliverances, apparently without any calling of the mind to a halt or any dedication or disciplining of the spirit to bigger things. Even marriage has come to be for many the mere acknowledgment of a legal status and contract in an office.

It is a pity, for, rightly understood, in the making and keeping of vows there is focused the central problem of man's inner life and therefore most of the problems of his outer life as well. The making of a vow is a man's serious attempt to govern himself. It is the promulgation of an edict to the kingdom of his soul and to every unruly element that dwells therein. A man's soul, someone has said, "is as full of voices as a forest, and all the settlement and the sane government of his life consists in investing some of those voices with dignity and authority above all the rest." You do that by a vow. There are forces of anarchy and folly asleep within yet ready to break out to-morrow, or the next day. There are those queer, subtle changes of mood and feeling which flow over the soul from day to day and even hour to hour. To-day the vision may be clear, the moral pulse-beat strong, the feelings aglow, but to-morrow this may all be changed. You may feel tired or lazy or unwell, other feelings and interests will arise, something may leap at you unexpectedly out of the world and set every lower instinct and passion in your soul a-moving; other less desirable voices will begin to whisper. You know that, if you know anything about yourself. And so in the midst of all the chaotic, swirling, rising and falling currents of your mind, you drive a solemn vow and to that vow you bind your highest vision and desire. Is not that the real significance of vow-

making? As one looks down the history of mankind and ponders the infinite number of vows which have been registered, some fulfilled, many alas! broken, one realizes with tremendous vividness man's perennial conflict with himself, his perpetual struggle for the empire of his soul, his calling to be a personality and not an animal, to be a child, not of nature, but of God.

Let us grasp the significance of this last phrase. There are in a general way always two alternatives which lie before us in the conduct of life. One is to be carried along, in the main, by our instinctive, natural wants and desires. We want money-of course we want money, who doesn't?-here's a chance to get some without trouble, let's take it, why not? We want some excitement: well, there's the theatre or the dance, let's go this very night. Someone annoys us, we feel angry and "let fly" at him, we are that man's enemy; someone flatters us, we "purr," we seek more of it, we are that man's friend. Or on a higher level, we want a book, we have the money, we buy it; we are minded to take a trip on the Continent, there is enough in the bank balance, we go; we like the preacher, we go to church; we do not like him, so we stay away, and so on. Inclination, inclination, inclination! Now I am not saying that these wants are wrong and should never be satisfied. That is not the question. But I do say that merely to be carried along by them like that, even if they are quite legitimate and even cultured wants, is not to be a personality in the highest sense of that term at all. It is to be a mere sounding-board to your world. Your situation moves you in various ways and you respond. You are a mere vehicle, a mere transmitter of forces, just as the plant is, or the moth which flutters, it knows not why, except that at that moment it wants to, into the flame.

What is the other alternative? The other alternative is to attain a genuine personality. How? Not by escaping from these instinctive wants—we cannot do that, of course—but by being able in principle to say No! to them all, yea, even, if need be, to that most passionate of all instincts which is the instinct to preserve our lives; by being able, in short, to make and to keep a vow, whatever our instinctive wants may say. Only as we learn to do this do we begin to rise out of a state of subservience to our world, to achieve the dignity of personalities worthy of fellowship with God. There is no more tragic spectacle than merely instinctive human beings, human beings whose wills have never been thus released. And God's call to the soul to absolute surrender, to a vowed obedience at any cost, is His first step to save it from that tragedy.

II

"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people." Here are three not unimportant hints about vow-making.

First, vows should be made at the right time. "I will pay my vows now." What then is the right time, the supreme "now" for vow-making? It is surely the time when for one reason or another there comes to you an unusual moment of higher vision and desire: when something in your inner life as it were stirs and lifts you for a little above the routine, above the trivialities and superficialities of things, and you become aware of the greatness and seriousness of the issues of life, and the dignity of personal being that might be achieved by dealing with them in a great-hearted and serious way. Then and there, if you are wise, at that so swiftly passing "now" of high feeling, you will pause, and summoning all that is within you you will seek to harness the mood to the deepest and most central thing in your personal being, which is your will. that is to say you will seek to harness it to what is in essence a vow. The true vow is the attempt to capture the high and serious moment, to take it out of the transiencies and make it one of the permanencies of the soul's life, to condense out of the vapour of feeling a solid mass and momentum of directed will. One of the tragedies of waste in human life is the waste of high and serious feeling, the failure to concentrate and canalize it, now when it comes, into will and obedience.

You will not say that you do not know what all this means, because it has been stated in the vaguest gener-

alities; that you do not have such stirrings in the inner life. We all have them, unless indeed we are so far gone in self-centredness that all capacity for fine and generous feeling has vanished. But though we have them, we do not recognize their importance; a fine feeling, whether it be of indignation or pity or generosity or sympathy or self-condemnation, more often than not falls across our mind like a gleam of sunlight falling across a stream, adding colour and interest but not affecting the course of the stream one jot. This is particularly so in respect of our personal relationships. More often than we care to acknowledge even to ourselves we catch a glimpse of some essential wrongness or some wonderful possibility of better things in the nexus of personal relations of which we are a part and to which we contribute; but it is only a glimpse and it swiftly passes away, leaving things as they were except perhaps that we deceive ourselves that we are better people and the situation not so bad as it might be because we have felt like that. No doubt it is exceedingly difficult sometimes to know how to translate feeling into action in any particular situation; no doubt we are often helpless, hemmed in by social systems and habits over which we have no immediate control. But, true as that may be, it hardly affects the point. For to make a vow now is not necessarily to act externally this way or that now, for external action may not be possible. The essence of the vow is

III

Next, the vow should be made in the right company. "I will pay my vows now in the presence of all his people."

The solitary vow, however earnest, is the weak vow and already half-defeated. It is weak because there is no check upon the vanity and extravagance and selfreference which can creep into even the highest mood. No mood is so high but that it needs a salting of sanity and common sense, such as often can only come from a community experience wider and bigger than our own. It is weak because there is no sustaining atmosphere, no supporting environment, no continuous feeding and nourishing and educating of the whole being in the direction of its highest feelings and insights. It is weak because there is lacking the strengthening and rebuking expectancies of one's fellows. It is a sound instinct in our social life which requires that vows and oaths and affidavits should be sworn in the presence of witnesses. It does not in the least imply necessarily a low view of human nature; it implies only that human nature is-human. Down to the very roots of our being, and therefore up to its highest fruits, we are social beings; we live and move and have our being, far more than we realize, in one another. I would wish to thank God daily for the high-pitched expectancies of my friends, for the way they have of insisting that I am a better person than I know myself actually to be. It is surely no weakness to want them

to act internally; it is to summon together the whole person, to submit it to the criticism of, to set it deliberately in the direction indicated by, this stirring of feeling. It is to make the involuntary voluntary. It is, so to say, to seize the feeling and drawing it from the superficies of the mind into the central places to make it creative there, so that, if not now then later, it will bear fruit in action, as when Lincoln saw a negro woman being sold in the slave-market like a horse and vowed to himself that though he could do nothing then yet as opportunity arose he would help, at whatever cost, to smash that kind of thing. It may perhaps be said, how can we be continually translating our finer feelings into vows? They come and go so swiftly and all our energies are absorbed in running the machinery of life which has to go on anyway. Practical necessity surely requires that feelings should often be ignored. should go to waste. Yet that surely is to take the word "now" too literally. It is enough, and often all that is possible, to find time each day to review one's life, to recover those feelings and valuations which have perturbed or uplifted us and to turn them into a vow. That is the wisdom of daily recollection and prayer and meditation if it be rightly done, if it be done in the full consciousness of this truth, which, in spite of all difficulties, remains: God speaks through feeling, but man answers not with more feeling, but with vow.

to think well of me, to be the sort of person into whose private life they could look without too great a shock. It is surely not something to be wholly ashamed of to say that more than once it has been the thought of my friends, the sense of having made vows in their presence, which has kept my feet from straying. I conceive that God maylay His hand upon us through our fellows, seeing that He has bound us in such close bonds to our fellows.

Here, clearly, is part of the raison d'être of the Church. Not the whole of it doubtless, but an essential part of it. To any whose deepest feelings and highest aspirations have been so stirred by Christ that they would wish with any seriousness of purpose to give themselves to His discipleship, the Christian fellowship is, for all its weakness and failure, utterly indispensable. It is hard indeed to be patient with those who profess some sort of allegiance to Christ, will indeed even come to renew their vows at Easter or at the baptism of their children. and yet sit loosely to the fellowship of His people. Usually such an attitude reveals a life from which the spirit of the vow has already departed, a mind which has lost all sense of the blasphemy of leaving this tremendous Christ at the mercy of occasional and transient feelings. No one who is even beginning to take Christ seriously, and is not altogether devoid of the rudiments of self-knowledge, could neglect, could treat casually, the fellowship of His people and the paying of vows regularly with them and in their presence.

Finally, the vow must be paid to the right person. "I will pay my vows unto the Lord."

In any worthy vow there must be a deep and recollected sense of God. If, as we have said, we need to drive the stake of a vow into the flux of the soul's life in order, as it were, to tether our visions to it, we also need something to enable us to drive that stake firmly in. And that something is the thought of God and His absolute will.

Nothing can alter this fact of human nature as it came forth from the hand of God, that the serious thought of God is the only finally steadying thing to his purposes that a man can have. It introduces a quality of final obstinacy into his soul which nothing else can give in the same degree. That is why it is hopeless to try to solve the problems of humanity by talking morals to it. That is why decay in religion is bound sooner or later to mean decay in moral consistency and power. That is why the dictators sooner or later must fall, for nothing can hold the human spirit permanently in such absolute obedience to such all-too-human figures. And that is why the Church, for all its weakness, stands right at the strategic centre of human affairs in all their chaos and perplexity to-day. It is the only society which cuts across the false absolute of nationality and bears witness to the God whose Will stands above all nations.

Let men make solemn vows to themselves every day, every hour, yet if they make them merely to themselves, even themselves magnified to the dimension of the nation, they cannot permanently rise above the flux of their own instinctive nature. Take away the thought of God, of One above and other than, yet always critical for, man, and no final necessity upon conduct remains. There remains only a disguised expediency ready to absolve itself from its contracts at the first real test, at the first call for sacrifice. That that is so is evidenced by the history of the nations since the War. The world is littered with broken vows, broken treaties. It is not in the least surprising. It is the result of the loss of any sense of there being any absolute, any God, above the natural and historical process. Why after all should anyone keep a treaty, or a vow, if there is nothing above and beyond the natural and historical process? Should we keep it for general security's sake, in other words to save our skins? A vow kept for that reason is no longer a vow, and is no longer security. The whole virtue of the vow is that it has somewhere at the heart of it the intention to abide by certain things, though we be flayed alive. Only thus does it give any mastery of ourselves and of our world. And that is only another way of saying that the whole virtue of a vow is in its being made to God.

IV

CHRIST AT THE DOOR

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another."—JOHN XV. 12.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."—REVELATION iii. 20.

HOW can I possibly keep such a commandment? Shall I on my knees register a solemn vow of obedience, such a vow as must always lie near the heart of genuine dealing with God, and then go forth to fulfil it?

Certainly without some such resolve, some such setting of the soul to a more sincere and loyal obedience to God, nothing can be achieved. Yet when I actually get into the workaday world, what do I find? I find that the thing is not so simple. Why? Because I find that after upwards of forty years of living I am what I am, and no mere waving of a wand of resolution will suddenly and miraculously make me otherwise. I am what I am because I have been what I have been, and because other people in my life have been what they have been. I cannot change the past, and

because I cannot change the past I cannot in the twinkling of an eye change myself, for I carry my past in me. Can I, who have in countless ways, often without knowing it, let my instinctive desires rule me, suddenly improvise the power to leash them in and say them nay? Can I with a mind which has continually acquiesced in and helped to create wrong personal relationships, a mind darkened and confused by all kinds of subtle egotisms and acquisitive desires, even begin to see clearly what love really demands in the tangles of personal relationships, all shot through as they are by the egotisms and acquisitive desires of other people in addition to my own?

It is perfectly obvious, is it not? Whilst nothing can be done without the continually renewed resolve to live in the light of the high imperatives of God, little can be done on that basis alone. Something else is necessary. What is necessary is that our nature and character should be set in some new relationship, given some new interior principle which shall progressively cleanse, illumine, redirect, reorientate, re-create it—call it what you like—from within. I repeat, it is no use my going forth intending to wave the airy wand of a resolution over my nature and my habits. That is the old futile attempt to lift ourselves by our own boot-straps. It never has been done, and never will be done. A new re-creative, educative, continuously cleansing process needs to be set moving in the soul,

if it is to grow out of, and away from, its past into its true stature, if it is to become what Paul called "a freedman of God."

I

It is the Christian faith and experience that such a re-fashioning and cleansing of the inner life are possible. It is the Christian faith and experience that God has made it possible by setting in the midst of our human life the perfect, personal life of Jesus Christ, one in whose spirit were not our weaknesses and blindnesses and egotisms, one who was always perfectly surrendered and obedient to the high imperatives of God in His soul, one who in all His relationships with men saw clearly the requirements of love at its highest and austerest and best and was loyal to them; one in whom there was fully realized in this actual human scene that way, that truth, that life, which it is God's will that all men should follow and know and live.

But, you say, how could a perfect personal life lived so many years ago, of which we have only a few scanty records, enter so significantly into my life? The answer is that that is a mystery which I cannot explain; but it is none the less a fact for being a mystery. If I may say so, I have long since settled it with myself that he who would make room for Christ in his life must be ready at more than one point to make room for bafflement in his mind. It is the mystery of what Christian

thought has always called the Holy Spirit—that Holy Spirit which takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto any who sincerely seeks to walk that way. It is the mystery of the personality of Jesus, the mystery of His significance in the counsels of God for the soul of man. Of any ordinary historical figure the fact that he lived so many years ago, the fact that the records we have are so meagre, would make him irrelevant, and increasingly irrelevant as the years pass, to our modern life. But it is precisely the proof that there is something not ordinary about Jesus, that, all down the ages and just as much in our own age as in any earlier, He has been able to lay hold of those who seek to centre their inner life in Him and gradually lift them—in spite of themselves—to something which we cannot call any other thing but just, in greater or less degree, Christlike. It must be that somehow there is realized and expressed in Him the underlying divine purpose in human history which never changes from age to age; it must be that there is realized and expressed in Him that permanent standard and ideal of human nature which is assuredly in every one of us seeking to realize itself, but which is inhibited and frustrated by all our blindness and disloyalty and sin. Hence He is never really out of date, never remote from the deepest issues of our hearts, never irrelevant. Hence also we do not need a full-length biography of Him, and the scantiness of the records does not matter;

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so long as there is enough for the tremendous purity and power of His personality to shine through, the hidden and hitherto frustrated Christ within us can do the rest. The Christ within begins to break through our inner darkness and weakness, to grasp and be grasped by the Christ without—the Incarnate Word. So the personality, to use John's image, feeds on Christ, is cleansed through Him, grows through Him.

II

The verse from Revelation gives some vivid suggestions, in a beautiful pictorial form, of the way in which Christ thus comes to a man's spirit, and, if he will allow it, takes possession of him and re-creates into light and strength all his inner life. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

First, there is a knocking at the door. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." What does that mean? It means this, that Christ often approaches the soul, and begins His communion with it, through an intimation of His presence which is not at first recognizable as from Him or even as being of much importance. Perhaps it comes to you merely in a vague sense of dissatisfaction with a line of action you are pursuing; or with the sort of thing you are saying, or allowing others to say, in your presence about this, that, or the

other thing or person; or with the kind of ambitions and desires you are indulging; or with the excuses you are making to yourself, or to others, for a slackness here, or an avoidance of costing service there. Perhaps in the mid-career of some calculating egotism, or some passionate self-assertion, the true quality of which you had not realized, something stirs in protest in the soul and you catch a glimpse of yourself, as in a mirror, as someone small and commonplace and mean. Whatever be the situation, and whatever the terms in which you care to express it, you have heard a voice whispering that life is meant for something more dignified, more loving and more lovely, more abiding than all that sort of thing. Or perhaps, more positively, the knock comes in the presence of some callousness or injustice of life, which most men tolerate and you suddenly see to be intolerable and wrong; or in the presence of some Christlike act or temper displayed by another, and you see its utter rightness and desirability and beauty; or in the presence of some new responsibility such as the birth of a little child, and you know the frightful importance of what you do, and what you are, in another's life, and feel weak and inadequate to it; or perhaps in the presence of some piercing beauty of the sunset sky, which makes you look up and wonder what it can mean, that that beauty should be there, and all this ugliness in the world of man. And so we might go on—possible illustrations are infinite.

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According to your temperament, or your situation, the knock comes, clear, or only indistinctly heard. Is it of no consequence? The first step in the cleansing and developing and strengthening of the inner life is to know that it is of greatest possible consequence, that knock, and the response you make to it.

III

So we come to the next stage, which is that you must recognize the knock for what it is, namely, the voice of Christ. "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice." You are to hear in it—His voice. You must call this stirring within, this knock in the outer courts of your mind's business, by the name Christ. That does two things. First it makes your spirit pause when otherwise it would hurry on; it arrests attention, and for a moment shuts out the clamour of other things; it throws the spirit into a deeper solemnity, reminding it once again that it is a very urgent thing not to trifle with these things. A passing feeling is just a passing feeling, but a passing Christ is an altogether different proposition. To call it by the name of Christ is to make it at once a point of critical decision in the soul. And second, to call it by the name of Christ is instantly to carry it over into that fuller and more concrete image of what we ought to be, which Christ has given us, and upon which all that is deepest and best in us is already committed.

One might compare Christ in this connection to a great work of art, say, a symphony by Brahms or Beethoven. A small section of such a symphony might still be, even in isolation, melodious and beautiful, but it would be too slight and incomplete to do more than draw to itself a passing interest. It will be a mere knocking at the door. But set it once again in the context of the whole symphony and it gathers depth and power from the rest; it becomes indeed an altogether different thing.

IV

Yet even this is not enough. To the recognition of Christ there must be added always the act of obedience. "If any man open the door." The disciple must bestir himself and go and open the door, now, when the knock is heard. There must be no postponement, no parleying through the door, no bargaining about terms. The door must be opened, and Christ admitted, at once, as a determining, crucial factor in this actual present situation in respect of which the knock has been heard. If, for example, you become aware that you are, in some personal relationship, pursuing an unfriendly course such as Christ would not tolerate, you must at all costs stop and take another course. To do that you will perhaps need to take a firm hold of yourself and just austerely compel yourself into a new direction. It is impossible to grow ethically and spiritually without such self-activity. There is room

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in the Christian life, as we shall see, for duty and discipline, though never for mere duty and discipline, for the duty and discipline of obedience to Christ soon begin to take on a new quality which makes the words seem almost inappropriate. Yet never wholly inappropriate, for some self-activity there must be and God will not save us without it. This knocking, this waiting at the door, indeed, symbolizes God's unalterable and awful respect for the human soul. The important thing, however, is that there should be no postponement. It is postponement that weakens and in the end kills the soul. For the soul is a living thing. It does not stay where it is. It either goes backward or forward. It is indeed not possible, strictly speaking, to postpone surrendering the self to Christ, for the self changes from day to day, and the act of postponement itself enters formatively into its history. What I refuse to-day I can never offer again. All I shall ever be able to offer later will be a soul weakened and impoverished by that refusal. That is why there breathes throughout all this passage an air of judgement as well as an air of appeal. The knock of invitation is also a knock of doom. Now is the acceptable time, for now is the only time.

v

The last stage is this. Beyond this habit of obedience, increasingly becoming the mind's second nature,

there lies something not to be defined or analysed, but all the evidence goes to show that it is certainly there, awaiting those who care to tread this way. It is that which Christ Himself described by the richest and most intimate of all personal terms—friend and friendship. He spoke, too, of "being in His disciples and they in Him." It is that which Paul described as being "in Christ." It is the mind's communion with Christ. "I will come in and sup with him and he with me."

By such communion and by it alone, there begins to be fashioned from within a character and outlook which is Christlike, not occasionally and incidentally Christlike as circumstances may chance to favour, but always, and most of all in the testing places of life. And when men meet such a style of life, in its selflessness, its strength, its mastery, they revere it and are deeply influenced by it. Through it—as we said in the last chapter—Christ becomes their contemporary. And the man himself has in his inner life a degree of peace and joy and adequacy for life which only those who follow in the same way can know. There is, we repeat, no way of satisfactorily comprising this within an intellectual formula and explanation. It is the profoundest and most ultimate of all spiritual facts: the communion of the soul in its most intimate places with the Spirit of God, through Jesus Christ.

PART II THE SEVERITY WHICH IS GOOD

THE COST

"Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost."—Luke xiv. 28.

ONE of the constantly recurring notes in the teaching of Jesus is the costliness of discipleship to himself and of entry into what He calls the Kingdom of Heaven. Again and again He warns His hearers that if they would follow Him they must be prepared to give things up, to make surrenders. It would inevitably cost them something. "Whosoever will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "If thy foot offend thee cut it off," and, "if thy eye offend thee pluck it out." Perhaps most striking of all are the parables of the hid treasure and the pearl merchant, for in these this note of sacrifice enters almost casually, as though whenever Jesus thought of the kingdom He inevitably and spontaneously thought of that as well. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof

goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field." Even when you have found the treasure and been thrilled by the sight of it, it is not yet yours. You must give something in exchange, indeed, give a lot in exchange, all that you have. Again, "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

This side of the teaching of Jesus, it is needless to say, was not popular with His hearers. Indeed, it seems on occasion to have been deliberately given for the purpose of checking overmuch popularity of a shallow and excitable kind. The Gospel narratives more than once indicate that it was when great multitudes were following Him that He turned and said this kind of subduing thing.

But the teaching has not been any easier for later generations to accept. The natural man instantly becomes restive under it. It seems to make life grey and difficult. The natural men would like a more genial, a less exacting, leader, one who promised as much but asked for less in exchange. Sometimes this criticism of the austerity of Jesus has become vocal, reflective and argumentative. Swinburne said that the world had grown grey at the breath of Jesus, and others have affirmed that the demands of Jesus are not only too high in fact, human nature being

what it is, but wrong in their whole principle and outlook. Why, it is said, all this talk of giving up and of a straight and narrow path? Life is meant to be full and rich and broad, and we are meant to range it in every direction, tasting all we can of its varied experiences, and letting our minds and spirits flow out and grow up freely without the shackles of surrender and prohibition. Some years ago there was a group of thinkers who called themselves "neo-pagans." Their teaching was that a man should accept no limitations, but taste every experience which life has to offer, not excluding those experiences which are usually considered degrading and immoral, if such were his inclination. Don't be guided by the dull and meagre prudences of other generations. Taste and see for yourself. More recently we have had not dissimilar teaching given in some quarters in the name of what is claimed to be psychology.

Don't repress, don't rein in and deny, quieten your surging appetites and desires, not by control and discipline but by satisfying them. Thus shall ye have rest unto your souls! Such exaggerated teaching we could perhaps ignore were it not an extreme expression of something which we have all, in some degree and in some form, felt in our hearts. There is that in all of us which is ready to rebel against this austere note in Christ's call and message.

Let us ask what answer Jesus Himself might make

to this kind of criticism of Him. We may surmise, in the light of His other teaching, that He would say at least three things.

Ι

First He would say: "There is surely behind your restiveness under what you call My austerity an illusion about the conditions under which, in any case, you have to live your lives. Here is a man who wants to build a tower. Does he expect to get it for nothing? Does he shrug his shoulders when you venture to suggest that it will cost a lot of money, and that he had better face up to that annoying and quite inexorable fact first? Does he dare suggest that he is a favoured one who can have his tower and his money, can eat his cake and have it too? Well, let him, but you would mock him and call him a fool. You would know that he is up against inexorable facts which will defeat his dreams. Or does a king go to war without thinking about the losses which he will suffer as the price of victory, seeing that losses there must be? Of course he doesn't. Foolish people! At every point life is driving a bargain with you whether you like it or not. It will not let you have this except at the expense of that —even an elementary worldly wisdom knows that. And do you expect to have the kingdom of Heaven on cheaper terms?"

Is this not so? It is curious indeed, when you come to follow it out, how this principle runs into everything in life, without any exception whatsoever. At every point, as someone has said, it asks for something in exchange. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" cried Jesus. But that is merely the highest form of a question which you must ask about everything. All life is a question, "What are you going to give in exchange?" Why, the scientists tell us that it is so even on the plane of the lowest physical things. You can only get light by exchanging for it some heat, or heat by expending motion, or radiant energy by losing mass, and so on. When you have got one you have lost the other, and you can get back to the other only by giving up the one. Whichever way you turn you are faced with an inexorable alternative "either this or that" but under no circumstances both. You must pay. You must give something in exchange. And the same truth holds in more specifically human things. The amount of energy in a human body and a human soul, and the amount of time in a human life are not unlimited. If you give energy to this thing, you of necessity withdraw it from something else; if you give time to this thing you of necessity withdraw it from something else. If you want to be an expert in mathematics you must give up the idea of being an expert in most other sciences. If you want to play cricket

like a Hobbs you must give up the idea of playing the violin like a Kreisler, even though you may have the talent for it. If you want to win the 100-yards race you must give up smoking and an unrestricted diet and other things. There is nothing wrong with smoking and an unrestricted diet, only life is such that you cannot have them and win the 100 yards at the same time. If you wish to have the joy of home and family life you must give up the freedom and increasing bank-balance of bachelordom, and accept much worry and responsibility in their place.

As for neo-pagans, anything more ludicrously absurd than their attitude would be difficult to imagine. You cannot taste every experience and see what it is like, for every experience you have cuts out the possibility of others. If you live on rich foods you spoil your palate for simple ones. If you read bad books you restrict and starve your capacities for appreciating good. If you indulge in vice you coarsen and vitiate your soul so that it becomes impossible for it to have the full experience and joy of virtue. At every point you have got to pay something, and if you are wise you will count the cost at each step. And as for those who say satisfy every instinct, don't rein and curb and suppress, they, too, are speaking rank impossibilities. For the whole difficulty is that our instincts and desires war against one another and you can only release one by imprisoning another.

You must take sides. You are ambitious to get on, that's one instinct. But you like comfort and ease, and that's another. You like the things of sense, which is a third; and you have a conscience and an admiration for the heroic life, which is a fourth. How on earth can you satisfy all these things? It cannot be done. It is not possible to get out of life all that it seems to offer. Many joys will have to be left untasted, many possible experiences unexperienced, many alluring byways unexplored. There is always something to pay.

II

The second thing Jesus might say is this: "Does there not lurk within your restiveness under my demands an illusion about your own souls and what will satisfy them? Dear human souls," I can hear Him saying, "the way of such surrender as I ask looks far more grey and forbidding than it is ever really discovered to be by anyone who sets out upon it. I grant that it looks, in advance, as though you will be impoverished and narrowed, but that is mere appearance. He that loses his life shall find it. Realize, indeed, that you have to give things up as in every walk of life. Count the cost—you can't avoid cost. But beware lest you count it wrongly. Things are not what they seem. Take the plunge. Do the rigorous thing, the grey thing, the narrowing

thing and, behold, it will not be so rigorous, so grey, so narrowing as you think."

There is something here of the highest importance we need to lay hold of. I have noticed that at each important stage of the soul's growth, at every critical point of decision and choice, there is a tendency for this sort of illusion to possess the soul. You cannot move forward without giving up; but the things you are giving up tend to appear to the best advantage, whereas the things you are to gain hardly appear at all. The things you must surrender are comfortable and familiar, and you know the deep satisfactions which are in them; whereas the things you are going to get in exchange for them are unknown and vague, the joys which may be in them have no warmth and reality to the soul. There is a mist over what lies ahead; it all seems difficult and risky; you may not be equal to it; and the old things are so obvious and near and clear and immediately delightful. And so it is bound to be until you can find the courage to break away from the old and break into the new, and let it, by practical living in it, prove its more durable satisfaction to your soul. Thus every step forward in life requires something in the nature of austerity in our own spirits, but, we are to understand, that is not because the stage ahead has not its own rewards to offer; it is because we are not allowed to see, in advance, what those rewards really are. And this

is true of the life, the apparently austere life, to which Christ invites us. Why this should be so I do not know, unless it be that at every point, and not least at the point where He is meeting us savingly in Christ, God would test our real mettle and draw from us a more vigorous manhood!

III

Finally, Jesus might say this: "There is surely behind your attitude a lack of a true vision of God."

Certainly Jesus' demands upon men can never be made to look reasonable to them except in and through the recovery of a very serious sense of God. If men are merely trifling with the idea of God. there will always be something in Christ's ideals permanently beyond them, permanently baffling both to their minds and their wills. It is only as a man's spirit is accustomed to bow in reverence to One who is utterly holy, One who, being God, must claim the surrender of all to Himself (that being the very heart-centre of the meaning of that awful word which falls so glibly from our lips), that he will find the austerity of Christ's demands a not unreasonable thing. Religion is nothing if it does not bring a demand of the most absolute kind upon our spirits. When men criticize the austerity of Christ's demands they more often than not merely confess the trifling nature of their religion. They have not seen God. To a man

THE SEVERITY WHICH IS GOOD

who has seen God no demand can ever be rejected because it asks too much. He may reject it because it seems to be a wrong demand and therefore not truly of God, but not because it is a high and exacting one.

Yet there is in Christ's vision of God much more than that. He saw God as One who is not merely inexorably holy but also infinitely giving. And perhaps it is only that vision which can finally drive out the last vestige of criticism of His demands from our minds. When we have seen God as Christ saw Him, as One who is infinitely austere in His demands on *Himself* for our sakes, One in whose heart is the final self-surrender which we see in the Cross, then to give all, if necessary, for Him will not merely seem a reasonable demand, which we dare not criticize, but a joy and an opportunity which we would not miss.

Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all!

But if it be love that demands, what becomes of demand?

VI

PEARLS FOR PEARLS

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."—MATTHEW xiii. 45-6.

In this difficult business of being fit for the Kingdom of God nothing is more important than to know when we must surrender things valuable for things more valuable.

We mislead ourselves by thinking of the supreme crises in the moral and spiritual life as though they were always choices between things good and things obviously and definitely evil. But they are not always, they are not even usually, that. The associations of the word temptation lead us astray. The temptations of life!—ah! yes, insincerity, impurity, intemperance, callousness, cowardice, and so on, through the whole catalogue of man's obvious and miserable sins. Such things are real enough, and important enough, in our human life, and the man who could put up a good fight against them all would do

very well indeed. But we should still have to ask of such a man how far he had really got in the achievement of a character fit for the Kingdom; we should still have to ask, indeed, whether he had yet met and overcome his major temptations. And the answer, if we were in a position to give it, might very well be that he had not got so very far after all, and that the most searching tests, as well as those most truly creative of character and insight, if rightly met, were still to come. For to get rid of the intrinsically and obviously nasty things from life is but to clear the ground for building a rich and Christlike positivity of character, and that takes place very largely through temptations of a different order. In the one case a man has to find strength to curb the animal in himself, to give up dirt, even if it be for the moment very attractive dirt, for pearls; in the other case he is often called upon to do something far more difficult, namely to have the austerity and the insight to give up pearls for pearls, things really good for things better.

That there must be this higher and more exacting sense of the word temptation is shown by the experience of Jesus Himself. We know that He was tempted deeply and searchingly and more than once, but it is impossible to think that He was worried by those crude, and obviously wicked, impulses which so often disturb lesser people like ourselves. He swiftly passed out of that sphere of things, if indeed He was ever in

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it, into a sphere where the test is subtler and much more difficult; into a sphere, that is, where the choice is between pearls and pearls. It was the call to surrender things good, things for which there was much to be said, things which He loved and rightly loved, which tested Him, and His greatness is shown in the way He met that test. Thus, to the end He was tempted to turn aside from Calvary, as His fierce rebuke of Peter's suggestion that He should do so clearly shows. To a young man of thirty or so years, with such superlative powers of healing and helpfulness, life must have seemed a very valuable thing, and the case for not surrendering it in premature death must have seemed correspondingly strong. Certainly He knew in His own soul the strain and tension of this choice, always presented to the soul which has any elements of greatness in it, the choice between the things it has grown to know and value and love and live by, and something higher, which, though as yet perhaps only dimly apprehended, has upon it the accent of the Will of God. The picture of the merchant selling all his pearls, gathered at such cost and over so long a period of years, in order to buy one pearl of great price, is a picture of Himself.

Ι

An obvious example of this sort of temptation, but not less important for being obvious, is a man's

relation to his home and family. Home is one of the most precious and enriching things in human life. All that is best in character and conduct is rooted in the family, in the protection it gives to immature years, in the training in loyalty, affection and selfcontrol which it provides, in the trust and understanding which can be found there when they cannot be found anywhere else. Yet just because it is so precious and so rightly commands a man's affection and loyalty, it can easily become a snare, a very deadly snare. There comes, for example, a stage in every young person's life, when if character and mind are to develop, he must in some sense break free from his home, live his own life, and think his own thoughts; and the more his home has been a dear, delightful, protective thing to him, the more costly will the effort be, the more fertile his mind in excuses for not making the effort. And by the same argument parents who have known the joy and interest of having their growing children about them for many years are always under temptation, even unconsciously, to hold on to them too long, with the result that things go often desperately wrong. Despite the fact that the modern young person is supposed to sit loosely to home and family ties and obligations, this sort of thing still remains one of the chief causes of trouble, as every psychologist knows. There is lacking the wisdom and austerity to know when pearls must be surrendered for pearls.

PEARLS FOR PEARLS

But this particular temptation is by no means confined to the psychological ties between parents and children. At any time, to the end of life, a man may find home, by its very intimacy and sweetness and indispensability to much that is good, putting suffocating and strangling arms around his true self, blinding his eyes to the vision, stopping his ears to the voice, of God. Unconsciously his attitude is that he will do nothing, and cannot be expected to do anything, that may entail the least risk of diminution in the values, the real values, which inhere in his home relationships and responsibilities. The reluctance of countless decent-minded folk to support any really drastic policies of social reform, or to commit themselves to a final refusal to take part in the mechanized slaughter of modern war, has one root at least in the instinctive shrinking of their whole being from the thought that thus might be jeopardized all those values of security and order and culture and happiness which they have been seeking, and have in a measure achieved, for those whom they immediately love. We are not here thinking of the so-called "conflict of loyalties," but of something deeper and more unwitting; it is rather an incapacity to realize with sufficient vividness that there is a conflict at all, a tacit assumption that after all nobody could be expected to risk the welfare of wife and family, that there is no pearl of greater value than that. Yet it

may be that there is no way up and out of our present social and international difficulties until more people are ready to take just that sort of risk. Jesus Himself was deeply aware of the peculiarly subtle snare which a man's home and family can be; and this was precisely because He was peculiarly sensitive to the values of home and family. "If any man cometh unto Me, and hateth not his own father and mother and wife, he cannot be My disciple."

H

Another example of the same principle is to be seen in the apprehension of truth. Nowhere are more difficult surrenders asked for than in this sphere. And the cause of the difficulty is not that new ideas are necessarily painful, for they are not, though they are often said to be; it is rather that the old ideas are seldom entirely false, but have truth, even great truth, in them. This is especially so in religion, for in religion the apprehension of truth is apt to be suffused with intense personal feeling and valuation as it is not to the same degree elsewhere. Few lively and serious religious minds escape this recurrent tension between the old and the new. They have lived for many years, perhaps in part unconsciously, on the basis of certain convictions, which have given them strength and comfort and light. Then some new experience shakes them deeply; some new teaching presented with

authority and power begins to grip their mind; some subtle and unnoticed change in their inner life takes place, possibly through the inevitable processes of growth and development, and they wake up one day to the fact that they are not just where they once were, that their old beliefs are losing some of their obviousness and compelling power.

This is a moment of temptation, and it is not the less critical in the personal history, not the less fraught with possibilities of disaster, because it is high and honourable temptation. The temptation is that a man will, in greater or less degree, force himself back on the old affirmations which seem to be slipping away, will refuse to move out into the new world of truth which is breaking upon his soul, the real quality of his act, the possibility that is in it of calamitous treachery to the Spirit of God, being masked by its apparent loyalty to that which has been highest and finest in his past. Doubtless it is difficult enough to know when it is new truth, and not merely error, calling a man, and it is not our purpose here to offer any guidance on that point. All we are concerned to point out is one thing which often leads us astray, and that is the failure to realize that we must be ready at any time to be called upon to give up pearls for pearls, even pearls of truth, or at least what has seemed to be, and indeed has been, real pearls of truth for us. The justification of all conservatism is

its desire to preserve the values of the past; its danger, of which it is seldom aware, is that in preserving the values of the past it may miss the infinitely greater riches which lie hidden in the future. It will take no risks, and that means fundamentally it has no faith in the overshadowing Spirit which will lead the sincere mind, even through its mistakes, into fuller light.

III

Another illustration might be found in a man's attitudes to the frustrations and deprivations of his life. Everything here depends on whether a man will really in his heart surrender the pearls of which life has deprived him, or cling to them in a perpetual bitterness of resentment and regret. I knew a man upon whom came an appalling succession of misfortunes. In a few short years he lost his only child, his business, his health. A home which had been bright, rich, and full, suddenly contracted to something narrow, dark, worrying, bleak. This was a time of supreme temptation, and the temptation was whether or not he would, in the presence of God and with the grace of God, let all these precious pearls go for the sake of one more precious, even though one not as yet very clearly discerned. At first he cried out bitterly. Life, he said, was ruthless, indifferent, unjust. In this he was very near to spiritual perdition. He had lost his pearls in one sense, but in another sense he was refusing to lose them; he was still clinging to them, refusing to give them up. Fortunately he was in touch with an old, wise Christian man who led him to see that precious as were all the things he had lost, there was one thing infinitely more precious lying within reach, and perhaps only lying within reach because these other things were gone, namely to be a man of God, and not merely a man of this world and of the good things it has to offer.

IV

So we come by a natural transition to the final illustration, one in which this principle of life is brought to what is at once its most challenging and revealing expression, namely death. The way of progress from our earliest years is the way of many deaths, the way of continuous surrender of things we have loved and lived by for something higher. Then comes the supreme surrender when every pearl of this life must be given up. What a mystery death is! How can we understand so terrific and radical a change? Surely, in part, in the light of the lesser deaths which all through we have been called upon to die, the surrenders which have marked each stage of the soul's advance. Death is meaningless and inexplicable if it be not the way to something higher, a sort of enforced selling out of all we have in order to acquire a

pearl of higher value. That, at any rate, is the only way of thinking of it which gives real victory over it, so that it ceases to be a negative thing of darkness and deprivation and becomes rather something to be looked forward to with quietness and a great expectancy. But it is only possible thus to think of it, sincerely and without affectation, if in a measure that is the attitude which is increasingly governing all our living, the attitude of faith and adventurous trust, the attitude which is ready at all points to give up things valuable for things more valuable, pearls for pearls.

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul, As the swift seasons roll!

Leave thy low-vaulted past!

Let each new temple, nobler than the last,

Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,

Till thou at length art free,

Leaving thine outworn shell by life's unresting sea!

VII

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"I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither."—DEUTERONOMY XXXIV. 4.

THIS picture of Moses, at the point of death, gazing at the Promised Land, to which through the long, arduous years he had led his beloved people, but into which he himself was never to enter, has always laid hold of the imagination of mankind. The simplicity and reticence of the Scripture words assist the powerful impression which is made. There is no attempt to match tragic words to a tragic happening still less to draw an edifying moral. We are simply led into the presence of the old man as he sits on the mountain-top, conscious that the end is very near, and that the fruit of all his anguish and labour is to be plucked and enjoyed by another, and there we are left. We will not attempt to probe his thoughts, for he has been a giant among men, with the cords of destiny running through his fingers, and we are so small. We can only feel, somewhat inarticulately perhaps, that here is summed up all the tragic element,

all the element of frustration and disappointment in life, which neither the great nor small amongst us ever escapes. There is, indeed, something of great art in the stark simplicity of God's irrevocable word to him: "I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither." For, as in all great art, a universal truth of life is here seized upon, and expressed in a single sublime instance of it.

Ι

Is there a man or woman anywhere over whose life might not be written with at least some degree of truth some such words as these: "He hath seen it with his eyes, but he hath not gone over thither?" There are few for whom in one direction or another, probably in more directions than they care to acknowledge even to themselves, life has not fallen short of what they desired and intended and worked for it to be. There is something permanently stubborn, unresponsive, disillusioning, unsatisfying in this life. It is always dangling the best before our eyes, and then telling us to make do with the second best, and even sometimes with what seems to us to be very nearly the worst. The moment is awaiting every one of us somewhere when we shall realize that in respect of this or that or the other thing, we are not going to receive that which we set our heart upon, we are not going to make out of life what we had once hoped

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to make out of it, we are not going to achieve what both circumstances and our own labours gave us every reason to think we should achieve; and the more the particular hope in question has been the central purpose and passion of our lives, the more bleak the moment is likely to be. This disappointing and frustrating element in life is to be seen even on the lower and least ideal side of it, so that even the most ruthlessly selfish man, the man who bends all his energies without scruple to make life serve him, will find that time and again it will get the better of him, and by some unforeseeable chance bring the edifice he has laboured to erect around himself tumbling to the ground. Not even in respect of the most mundane values of life, success, honour, wealth, comfort, reputation, power, health, do we often get exactly what we want, or exactly as much as we want. We gain our objective in one direction, and find that we have lost it in another, or that once gained it is not in the least as satisfying as we thought it would be. So permanent and obvious is this aspect of life that hardly a philosopher, hardly a poet has failed to comment upon it. It is this that almost more than any other thing makes it difficult for some reflective minds to believe that there is any rational order or Providence behind life at all. It is this that the ancients used to personify in the goddess of chance. It is this that we ourselves characterize in the phrase "the sheer

cussedness of things." It is the surd, the stubborn, the uncontrollable element which lays hold of us inexorably in the end, and says: "Thou shalt not go over thither. Thou shalt only imagine and dream and work, and only partially succeed or altogether fail."

But the matter is plainest of all in respect of the moral and spiritual side of our natures. Everyone past the age of thirty ought to be at least beginning to be deeply disappointed with himself, and to look back with a certain wistful regret upon the dreams he dreamed in his youth of the heroism and nobility and sacrifice which were to be realized in his life and character, raising him in moral stature above his fellows. The dreams have not been realized, of course. Some sudden cowardice, some unsuspected streak of softness, some situation altogether too appealing to our lower nature, and we have realized that we are not of the stuff of which transcendent saints and heroes are made, and do not look as though we ever shall be. We have seen it with our eyes, but it is not for us to go over thither. We are only poor ordinary creatures after all, despite our dreams and fine sentiments, and the energies which we hoped would carry us and others into the Promised Land are used up in getting us to the mere frontiers of it, where nearly everybody has hovered since the world began. Even more tragic and poignant in some ways is the fate of great causes

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in this world. History is full of instances of men and women of passionate idealism and devotion, who have started a crusade for righteousness, and led it perhaps to the very verge of success, only to see it in greater or less degree wrecked, either by some apparently malignant chance, or, more likely, by the moral deadness and unresponsiveness of mankind.

The supreme example of this is Jesus Christ Himself. He took upon Himself the fullness of our humanity, and so He took upon Himself this ineradicable element in it, the more so as He was the greatest idealist who ever drew human breath. He did not have to face failure in Himself, but He did have to face it in respect of the hopes and desires He had formed for mankind. He seems to have begun His ministry not without hope that the whole Jewish people would respond to His call, and become what they were always meant to be, the mediators of God's truth and love to all the world. But it was not to be. He found hardness of heart, resistance, spiritual blindness, such as at the first He had not anticipated. Practically nobody responded, and as that fact was more and more clearly demonstrated to Him, so the shadow of the Cross fell more darkly across His path. I think that one of the chief elements in the agony of Gethsemane was the terrific and final adjustment of His spirit to the fact of the almost total failure of His call to His own beloved people. It is one of the

grandest things in Jesus that He accepted this failure, and went on to the Cross with love and faith undiminished, so turning the failure, as we believe, into ultimate victory. But the point for us here is that we do not understand the life of Jesus, nor the true humanity of it, nor the moral sublimity of it, nor do we understand the Cross, until we see written across it also something of the defeat which life in this world inflicts on our desires, and not least those which are the product of the highest idealism we have. Jesus, too, saw something with His eyes but did not go over thither.

II

What are we to make of this quality of life?

First of all let us note this curious and significant thing. Does not life become a bigger, grander, sublimer thing, an altogether less trivial thing, because of this element of frustration which is in it? To see this, let us come into the presence of Moses as he sits there silent on Mount Nebo, gazing over that fair land which he knows now he will never enter. You will be very silent in his presence, will you not? You will not be able to help yourself. You will be reverent, almost awestruck, as you watch the masterful face, and sense dimly the swell of thought and feeling in the spirit behind. This is no place for flippancy. Is he looking back and bitterly repenting the weakness and dis-

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obedience which brought about this calamity, angrily regretting that he ever put his hand to a task which had cost so much, yet of which the glory of accomplishment would now go to another? Is he looking forward and fighting anew tears of sick disappointment? Or has all that been fought through long ago, so that now without regrets, without self-despisings, without envy, he will resign himself to God? The impassive face does not show. But we know that these things have been at issue in the man's spirit. and what a sublime and awful thing a living spirit is where such issues are fought out! This man has been frustrated into sublimity. We bow our heads before the tragedy, feeling we are on the edge of eternal things. We slip silently away, leaving him alone with God. We feel that life is deep, that it is not trivial.

But now let us come in imagination into the presence of that other Moses, the Moses who never was, the Moses who made no mistake, the Moses who achieved all that he set out to do, and led Israel triumphantly, with trumpets and banners, into the Promised Land. He dies at the end in kingly state, his last years made pleasant with the honour, tribute and service, which are the reward of conspicuous success, a grand old man still, yes, but somehow the whole thing is now shallower, infinitely more trivial, of the quality of musical comedy, shall we say, whereas that other Moses on Mount Nebo has the quality of great tragedy.

Why is it that instinctively, so instinctively that we do not notice it, and it excites no comment, we find the highest expression of art in tragedy, rather than in comedy? We enjoy comedy, but tragedy, even through its sadness, gives us a deeper sense of the worth of our own spirits and of the things which are at issue in them.

And this leads to the main truth, which is that we cannot understand the element of frustration and disappointment in life, except we look upon it from the same standpoint as we look upon great tragedy in literature. What uplifts us and solemnizes us in great tragedy is the feeling it brings to us of the greatness of soul which a man may achieve, or miss, through his battles with an adverse fate. The real stage we are contemplating the whole time in a play like Macbeth or Hamlet is the stage of the human soul. We realize, however dimly, that real success or failure in life does not consist in the accomplishment of the tasks of this world at all, but it consists in the quality of mind and spirit which a man attains in and through his tackling of those tasks, and especially in and through the bleak moments of failure and disappointment.

III

A university student came to me and said, "The terrible thing about life to me is that mistakes and

failures are never forgiven." I asked her what she meant, and she said, "Well, I mean this: if you take a wrong turning in life you can never go back to where you were and take the right one; your life is ever after determined by that false move. If you fail in some task and responsibility you are ever afterwards the person who failed in that task and responsibility, and the opportunity will never come again. You and others must bear the consequences. If you sin, you cannot go back and not sin at that particular point. All your subsequent life has to be determined in some degree by that failure. And," she added, " since we all make mistakes, and take wrong turnings, and do disloyal things, and fail to realize our ambitions, the world for all of us is just a colossal might-have-been, an irredeemable third-rate ruin of a place, a graveyard of dead and unresurrectable desires."

What could be said in reply to this? Many things, doubtless, but this at least: "Are you not taking too external and worldly a view of what constitutes success and failure in life? What is God's view of success and failure? After all, it is God's view which really matters. What really matters to God is whether at the end of your pilgrimage you have a mind and character 'far gone in readiness' for Him, and the actual course of your pilgrimage is quite a secondary thing. You may end up a highly famous and distinguished

individual, or you may end up an insignificant nobody: you may achieve ten, twenty, thirty, forty per cent. of your heart's desires; you may lead Israel into Canaan, or you may die with that glory given to another; but which it is does not finally matter, so long as you have, in and through it all, learnt patience and humility and tenderness, and an utter dependence upon God and His mercy just as you are." Even our sins, those worst and most inexcusable failures, may bring their contribution to a deeper achievement of character than would have otherwise been open to us. Not that that excuses the sins, but it does show that our standards of success and failure are apt to be all wrong. We have no success apart from God's success, and God's success is in the soul, and often He wins there precisely because the rest of our life is in ruins. Moses was kept out of the Promised Land because of a sin, a failure, many years before. There was no going back on that sin, there was no going back on its consequences. The ambition which had been his companion for a score of years was lying dead at his feet. Terrible? Nay, if now he can die with eves uplifted to God in quiet acceptance of it, and quiet surrender of this life and all its poor satisfactions for something higher and more spiritual yet to be, let us say of him the words Milton wrote of another tragic failure, blind Samson perishing in the midst of his enemies,

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt, Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair, And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

What may quiet us!

And this leads us to the last thought, which is this, that if this world, for all its beauty and its joy, for all the great things we can achieve in it, is still so baulking and frustrating and disappointing, even to the best of us, what does that mean but that there is a beyond, for which this life is but a disciplinary preparation; what does it mean but that we are not meant to find and lay up treasures here, but rather there, where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves do not break through and steal? One day we shall thank God that this world was so disappointing, that here we saw so much with our eyes, but were not permitted to go over thither. If we had gained Canaan we might have lost heaven.

VIII

GOD'S WAY OF HIDING HIMSELF

"Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself."—Isaiah xlv. 15.

A VERY puzzling problem to the religious mind is God's way of hiding Himself.

There are many things whose hiddenness from us is not surprising, for they are of no importance to us; certainly life would be quite unmanageable if we were aware of everything. There are, we are told, ranges of colour and of sound which our senses are not capable of apprehending; the ether is full of waves which so far as we are concerned might just as well not be there; there are tracts of truth which only a very few highly specialized brains can know; and on the whole we are thankful that such brains are few. But the hiddenness of God is different, because, after all, God is God.

God, we believe, is the most universal reality with which men have to deal. The whole creation is His vesture, the vehicle of His purpose, the revelation of His presence. He is also, we believe, the most important reality with which men have to deal. Man's well-being is wholly bound up in having a right relation to God. And further, we believe He is the most active reality with which men have to deal. He seeks men. Universal, supremely important, purposeful—you would think that if there were one reality which could not remain hidden, which men could not miss, it would be God. Yet does He not remain hidden, often to our great puzzlement and despair?

Ι

It is indeed strange that it should be possible, apparently, for men to pass through the world and miss God. We can, if we will, explain it by man's wilful turning away from the light; or by the corruption of his spiritual faculties through sin; or by the clouding of his mind through false thinking so that often he confronts God without knowing it and reveres Him under some other name. It is at least possible that we over-estimate the godlessness of men, and fall into the old fallacy of thinking that directly men cease to believe in Him God departs from the world. It is possible that if we could observe the inner life of men and women over its whole course we should find that some sort of apprehension of God is a far more permanent and formative factor in their experience than ever appears on the surface. But, even granting all this, it still remains sufficiently startling that God should be so unreal, so practically unimportant to so many people over such long periods, including often enough men of quite serious mind and high desire.

Yet God's unobtrusiveness is in some ways more challenging and puzzling in respect of those who are not irreligious. There are those who believe in God and want above all things else to know Him and to walk in His light and by His strength; and yet to them also God continually remains elusive and hidden. Many are the expressions in the Bible of this disappointed and frustrated hunger for God, this dismay at His hiddenness and silence. Job cries, "O that I knew where I might find Him," and again, "Lo He goeth by me and I see Him not, He passeth on also, but I perceive Him not." The Psalms are full of the cry of the pious heart for a God who should, so to say, evidence Himself more, not only in the pious man's own experience, but also to the scoffing unbeliever. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God, while they continually say unto me, where is thy God?" "My God. my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me and from the words of my crying? O my God, I cry in the daytime but thou answerest not." And Isaiah cries, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself." And "O that thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!" Why, in short, be so unobtrusive when it is so important for all to know Thee?

Η

Consider, for example, God's reticence in regard to the light and truth for which our hearts cry out. Why doesn't God tell us more about the mysteries of life which weigh so heavily upon us? Indeed, strangely enough, they weigh the more heavily upon us because we believe in God. There is no problem of evil, or none of like magnitude, for the unbeliever. Pain, death, disease, sin—there they are, and we who believe in God cannot but try to fit them to the belief. Believing in light, we cannot help scanning these things for light. Believing in divine love, we cannot help trying to construe them in terms of love. Yet how they continue to baffle us. The darkness remains so obstinately dark, God so persistently silent. I do not mean to suggest that to the truly seeking heart all light is denied. God has given us enough to carry us through, and this supremely in Christ; but He has not given us more than enough and not nearly as much as our hearts cry out for. He is reticent. He answers us, but His words are so laconic. He gives us a lamp for our feet, but only for our feet—the darkness remains round about. The same is true of His overshadowing providence in our lives. We are assuredly guided, but how seldom we have a really intimate and indubitable sense of being guided. What a tiny distance we are permitted to see into the future, what infinitesimal glimpses we are given of the pattern which the divine fingers are weaving. We seek guidance, but instructions are not announced by a voice or written on the sky for us to read. Indeed we have the feeling of still making our own stumbling judgements for ourselves and by ourselves. God remains in the shadows. It is only when we look back that we discern the way in which we have been led. It was Luther who said, "God has led me indeed, but like an old blind horse."

Again, consider God's hiddenness in respect of the gifts of His love to us. We believe that every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father. Yet how strange it is that most of us have to learn and cultivate the habit of giving thanks for them. We have to remind ourselves that these things come from God. There are not many souls, even amongst those who make a sincere practice of religion, to whom these things speak quite directly and spontaneously and obviously of the love and the presence of the Most High. There is a certain effort of mind necessary to become aware of the divine Giver in the good things of life. One becomes sometimes acutely aware of this modesty and anonymity of God when one observes

the streams of men and women who pass along our roads on any bright Sunday morning to enjoy the refreshments and delights of the countryside. It seems odd, if it be true that the beauty of tree and flower and birdsong and sunshine be gifts of the bounty of God, that these people should be so entirely unaware of it, as doubtless most of them are. If only God would, so to say, sign some of His gifts. If only, like the artist, He would put His name at the foot of some masterpiece of colouring in the sky, or like the musician have his name appropriately announced prior to every song of the lark! But He does not. Verily He is a God that hideth Himself. Even when He chose to dwell amongst us as a man, it was as One who had nowhere to lay His head. There was insight in those ancient stories, of which there are so many in classical literature, that when the gods came to earth they came disguised, incognito.

Or, again, consider how God hides Himself under the business of our daily life. He is content to let His eternal purpose be a by-product of the temporal and often trivial purposes of mankind. Most religious people, I imagine, have been struck at one time or another by the disproportion there is between the high destiny which they believe is being worked out in life and the actual business with which they are compelled to fill their days. We go to church on Sundays, contemplate ourselves as immortal spirits and children of God, dedicate ourselves to serve God's eternal kingdom and to cultivate the spiritual life, and for the rest of the week we are absorbed in driving a pen in an office, or washing up dishes and keeping a house clean, or weighing out sugar, or arranging insurances -whatever it may be, so long as it enables us to keep these very mortal and temporary bodies going in food and raiment. Religion says that life is a very serious business, and yet life in its essential nature is such that we are compelled to spend most of it in activities which do not seem, from the religious point of view, to matter very much. We are called to serve God and are sent to serve tables. We are called to have life eternal and are forced to spend most of the time getting the means of life temporal. I believe that what depresses some people's faith and spiritual life almost more than anything else is the sheer triviality of human activity. If life were full of big and noble enterprises they could take the big and noble view of it that religion demands But as it is they have no incitement and often no energy left to do so. Verily God's eternal purposes do hide themselves under extraordinarily trivial things at times.

III

What then are we to make of this Divine elusiveness and reticence? Well, even if we could make nothing of it at all and it were simply another of the mysteries of life, it is a good thing to recognize clearly that it is there, and to settle it with ourselves that it is not to be allowed to overthrow our Christian faith. It is after all no new thing that God does not deal with us as we ourselves would always choose. We must be content that, in various ways and especially through Christ, we get enough light, meet enough beauty and loving in the world, have enough moments of high decision and worthy enterprise to carry us on, and assure us that, back of it all, however elusive and silent and anonymous it may seem at times, there is an eternal and infinite light shining. No man ever yet had a quiet and true and conquering faith who has not accepted once and for all the position of living a day at a time, going a step at a time, and being for most of his days led like an old blind horse, with, if we may extend Luther's metaphor, a cartload of apparently meaningless bricks. Yet it also helps if we can see only a glimmer of a reason behind it; and I think we can.

Job surely put his finger on it when after his poignant cry about the hiddenness of God he said, "but he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." There is something in this unobtrusiveness of God which is essential to this first stage of our spiritual pilgrimage. If God desires us to learn to trust Him as children trust a father, how could He teach us so to do except by leaving scope for

trust and withholding the larger vision for which our hearts cry out? If He desires us to learn to love Him for His own Self, and not simply for what we get from Him, how can He do that save by leaving many of His richest gifts as it were unsigned, so that only the heart in some measure already attuned to His spirit can discern their origin and read their deep underlying meaning? And if He desires to teach us patience and humility and love to one another, how better could He do that than in a world where there is nothing worth while to be achieved save in the midst of much trivial and monotonous service to one another, having no end beyond itself except the love which it expresses? What a tender sacrament of love and humility our Lord made of the washing of a man's feet! Yet what objects could be more humdrum than feet, or what activity more transient and trivial than the washing of them?

Finally, it is well to try to imagine what would happen if God made Himself fully obvious to immature spirits such as we are, so that there were no need to search Him out nor any room whatsoever for doubt. We may ask ourselves how God could do that if not along one of two lines, each of which would be equally disastrous to the end which we believe He has in view. On the one hand He might make Himself so pleasantly familiar that He would cease by that very process to have the status and quality of God to us at all. By

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becoming so obvious He might well cease to be God. Deus cognitus, deus nullus, or, as it might perhaps be rendered, "Known God, no God." Or, on the other hand, He might present Himself in such awful, irresistible, overwhelming Divinity that we should be crushed and our personalities would have no room to grow at all. In that case we might say, "Deus cognitus, homo nullus," or "Known God, no man." In His infinite wisdom God has done neither of these two things. At one and the same time He reveals Himself and hides Himself. At any moment He may challenge or solemnize or search or thrill the heart with a sense of His presence mediated through the finite and familiar objects and relationships of our terrestrial existence, but always He withdraws again into the shadows lest we be blinded with excessive light. He gives only enough glimpses of Himself, and of the pattern He is weaving and the purpose He is working out, to sustain faith and to make us yearn for that nearer presence and larger knowledge which are eternal life.

RECEIVING WITHOUT GIVING

return, not even thanks and glory to God, He was profoundly disturbed by it; it seemed to Him to indicate a kind of spiritual deformity. Most impressive of all, perhaps, are the two parables: the parable of the man who, having received from his master the forgiveness of a debt, refused to grant a similar forgiveness to a fellow-servant, and the parable of the man who, having received richly of the good things of this life, was indifferent to the diseased and hungry beggar who lay at his gate. In both parables the failure freely to give, having so freely received, is represented as bringing with it the direst possible consequences.

If Jesus saw some kind of ultimate trouble overhanging this attitude of mind, it must have been because He had a deep and clear vision of ultimate things at stake in it. What was that vision? What profound insight and conviction of His soul did this receiving without giving attitude affront? That some such profound insight was involved cannot be doubted. Jesus was never in the least degree a sentimentalist about life; nor was He given to reckless and rhetorical exaggeration; nor, certainly, did He merely wish to see selfish people paid back in their own coin. He was never mean-minded. It was in the context of the big sanities of His superbly sane spirit that the receiving without giving man was seen to be spiritually twisted and therefore spiritually doomed. What were these sanities?

RECEIVING WITHOUT GIVING

" Freely ye have received, freely give."—Matthew \mathbf{x} . 8.

TESUS seems to have felt a quite peculiar abhorrence J for the man who can receive a gift into his life without being himself deeply stirred to give. He says, "Freely ye have received, freely give," as though the inference from the fact of receiving to the duty of giving were perfectly obvious to any normal, sincere mind. In the story of the woman who anointed His feet, having bathed them with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. He cites the same principle in order to explain the apparent extravagance of her act, cites it once again as though it were a quite obvious and adequate explanation of what had taken place. She has given so much because she has received so much, He says in effect. Elsewhere His thought and attitude in this regard appear negatively in His intense recoil from those who were flagrantly out of harmony with them. When the nine restored lepers made no sign of wanting to give anything in

First, we may suggest, His reason was involved. Jesus, as any serious mind does, wanted to see life as a reasonable thing, and He was clear-sighted enough to realize that it is not possible to see it as a reasonable thing, unless all its chaotic chances and inequalities be read in terms of responsibility and service and never in terms of privilege and possession. When He contemplated the riches of Dives alongside the poverty of Lazarus, He felt that such a gross inequality was in itself an irrational, meaningless, absurd, fortuitous fact. There was only one way to make it not so and that was for the inequality to be turned into an opportunity and a sacrament of friendship and brotherliness by the rich man sharing his life with the poor. That the richer man should refuse so to do struck Him with something of the force of unreason. It was choosing to dwell in a mad world; it was deliberately to perpetuate an exasperating irrationality at the very heart of life.

Surely any sensible and reflective mind must ask itself this ultimate and inescapable question: why am I just I and not somebody else? Why am I an Englishman and not a naked Hottentot ranging the forests of Africa? Why was I born into a comfortable and gracious home and not, as so many, into a miserably poor and bitter one? Why am I clever, taking

all the rewards of cleverness, while somebody else is stupid: or stupid while someone else is clever? Why am I privileged to go to public school and university, when a lad in Bermondsey must play in the gutter, sleep in a basement, and at fourteen years of age work in a factory? There was a child born of a drunken mother in prison; why was not I born of a drunken mother in prison? These are not absurd questions to ask. They spring from the very heart of reason itself, that faculty within us which must ask for a reason and purpose in things. It seems an absolute affront to reason that the most important things in life should apparently be apportioned with no more principle than the parcels from the bran-tub at a bazaar. And the more a serious view of life is taken, the greater the affront becomes.

Is there any answer to these questions? There is only one answer and that is to stand resolutely, as Jesus did, by that view of life which makes it none other than a vast opportunity for service and for creating that human fellowship which service can alone create. The rich man in the parable was refusing to do the one thing which could justify and make beautiful such absurd and irrational inequality, and that was to seize it as an opportunity for friendship. Whatever else may be said about the inequalities of life, it remains always true that they can always be so used. To anyone who has been dowered with gifts and oppor-

tunities we must say, and say again and again: there is no reason why you should have these things and not somebody else. You must make a reason for it. There is no justifying it to reason until you justify it by making it yield the fruits of brotherhood and love. Freely ye have received, freely give.

II

Second, we may perhaps see behind Jesus' recoil from the receiving without giving attitude something which He knew about human nature.

To Jesus the question of man's ultimate fate in the Universe was simply the question whether he could be brought out of the darkness of egotism and selfcentredness into the light and the joy of love and service. To be saved, the life must be given, must be lost. But how could a man be thus lifted out of himself? Jesus, I conceive, saw that in the end there is only one way in which that can be done and that is for a man to be broken and humbled and cleansed by love; that is to say, by some utterly undeserved gift coming freely and gratuitously into his life. If that does not get under the hard shell of a man's spirit nothing ever will. We are here down on one of the ultimates of the spiritual and personal order. Nothing can stir the human heart so deeply to humility and generosity as to be benefited and enriched for no reason of its own deserving, but just freely and

gratuitously out of love. On the other hand, if love does not have this effect, if egotism and self-centredness are too hard even to respond to love's utmost giving, then it may have the opposite effect and confirm the soul in that sponging, grasping attitude which is the ultimate sin. The last state is worse than the first. Selfishness finds a new opportunity in the grace of man and of God. Wherefore, to receive a great gift into the life is always something of a crisis in the soul's history. It is a situation of judgement force. It may bring a man to his knees and release the springs of love in his own soul; or it may thrust him deeper into spiritual darkness. No wonder, therefore, that Jesus spoke of the rich man and the churlish servant as being tormented. It is one way of saying that both these people had missed the supreme opportunity of their lives, had been in the presence of the final sanctities of life and had trampled them under foot.

Plainly we are here in touch with the central things of the Christian gospel of forgiveness, the source of its power to cleanse and re-create the soul. At the heart of the Christian life is the sense of an infinite indebtedness. There is no hope for any man until he discovers that he is infinitely in debt, and that deep insight of the Christian faith goes right back to the Master Himself. Freely ye have received, freely give.

III

So we come to the last thing, that which, as always, underlies everything else. Behind this strong and instant recoil of Jesus' spirit from the man who could receive without giving there lay His vision of God—His vision of God as Love.

Some seem to think that to say "God is love" is to say something soft and sentimental. Nothing, indeed, could be farther from the truth. It is from one point of view a very terrible thing to say—if we understand what the word God means and what the word love means. People sometimes say, look at the state of the world to-day and then tell us that God is love. Part of the reply to that, not the whole reply but a very essential part of it, must be this: the state of the world does not disprove the love of God, but verifies it, verifies it too as a very awful truth with which we cannot trifle without penalty. For whatever else the word God means, it means the last reality with which we men have to deal and with which we must be in harmony or suffer. Loveless men must be tormented, for God is God and God is love; and that the innocent must suffer too is but another, if awful, aspect of the same truth. For because God is Love He has made men for one another and lovelessness in any must mean loss for all.

It was this unclouded awareness of God that lay

behind Christ's recoil from the man who will receive but will not give. He saw in such an attitude as flagrant and absolute a defiance and contradiction of God's nature and purpose as it was possible to conceive. Shaw said once that the man who takes more out of life than he puts into it is not a gentleman. To Jesus that would have seemed a foolish and even flippant way to put it. Such an attitude struck Him rather with something of the force of blasphemy. It was trying conclusions with the Universe, with God, and of that, if persisted in, there could only be one result.

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be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach. They were to pray to their Father in secret, but they were to be as lights in the world, that men might see their good works and glorify that same Father to whom they prayed. They were to be light and salt and leaven. Always at every point there is to be observed in Jesus' mind an immense anxiety that His followers should make themselves felt, should be in the eyes of men indisputably, recognizably, what they professed to be.

1

And nowhere is this more manifest than in His thought of His disciples as peacemakers. Again and again He returns to the subject of human estrangement, to the obligation laid upon every child of God to find a way to overcome it, thus demonstrating that he is a child of God, as others are not. It is, indeed, a most rebuking thing to note how burdensome to the soul of Christ human discord was. There is nothing of which, directly or indirectly, He speaks more often. On one occasion, when probably His disciples had been quarrelling, He told them, in effect, that to act like that was instantly to lose their savour as the salt of the earth. "Have salt in yourselves", He said, "and be at peace one with another". In the prayer which He prayed just before the end, He asked that His disciples might be one, "that the world may

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"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."—Matthew v. 9.

IN all His teaching Jesus pictures His disciples in La dual relationship. On the one hand they are to be people who are in specially close touch with God. and on the other hand they are to be people who have a mission in the world, who make an impression on men, who introduce something of the divine power and life into the midst of their fellows, so that they cannot fail to be aware of it. They are to be like a river, which at one and the same time reflects heaven and fertilizes the fields. Jesus had no use for the man whose religious life, however intense, leaves him a negligible, or even a merely average, quantity in the workaday world of men and affairs; nor, on the other hand, for the man who is so absorbed in the workaday world of men and affairs that he has no time for thought about or communion with God. The one He called savourless salt, the other a fool. He chose His disciples in order, as Mark says, that they might

know that thou hast sent Me." The same thought appears in this sixth Beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." By peacemaking they will not only in fact be constituted children of God, but they will also be recognized as such, called such, by men.

Yet there is a problem here of which thoughtful readers of the Gospel can hardly fail to be aware. Blessed are the peacemakers indeed! Is it of the same people, thus called blessed, that Jesus is thinking in the very next verse, when He says, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely "? That doesn't sound like successful peacemaking; still less like being called children of God for your pains! Then again, did not Jesus say, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on the earth? I tell you nay, but rather division?" Matthew reports it, "not peace, but a sword." And in what sense was Jesus a peacemaker? They slew Him in the end because they hated Him so. He drove the money-changers from the Temple. "Woe unto you scribes and pharisees," He cried, "hypocrites." Would any of us make peace like that?

Yet there it stands, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Sometimes at Christmas-time, when we sing our carols, such questions insistently rise up and challenge the soul.

We sing:

Still the night, holy the night! Sleeps the world; hid from sight, Mary and Joseph in stable bare Watch o'er the Child, beloved and fair, Sleeping in heavenly rest.

How idyllically beautiful! How appropriate to the birth of the Prince of Peace! What then of that other night, not so very far removed, when there was such agony that there was perspiration as blood, and they came out to Him with swords and staves? How are you going to relate in a single consistency of divine living and divine truth such a beginning and such an end?

The answer to the question has been suggested by Dr. Oman. It is that we must never confuse true peacemaking with having a merely peaceable temperament. The former is active, fighting resistances; the latter is passive, merely avoiding them. The true peacemaker has a flaming vision; even over the manger he has heard, as someone has said, "the clash and thunder" of God's messengers in the sky, he has seen the "incredible star" and intends at any cost to follow it. The merely peaceable temperament, on the other hand, is merely a temperament and no one was ever constituted the child of God and the agent of His purposes by mere temperament; he has no vision, he has seen no star.

4

II

Who then is the merely peaceable person? He is the person who dislikes discord not because it is discord. but because it is unpleasant. He is the "peace at any price" person; so long as differences are composed it doesn't matter much how, or whether their real causes have been dealt with. Peace may come through any number of reasons, any of which will satisfy the merely peaceable soul. It may come merely because the warring parties have grown weary and lack the energy to contend any longer; never mind, it is peace, and God be thanked! Or it may be that both parties have learnt that strife doesn't pay, and that the same self-seeking which thrust them apart is now seen to require them to come together; never mind, it is peace, and the peaceable man is glad. Or there may be peace because people are too dense to sense a wrong, or too callous to heed it, or too downtrodden to rise up against it, yet after all it is peace, and who would wish for upheaval and revolution in its place? There may, after all, be peace because men are asleep, or dead, or drugged. A graveyard is a quiet spot. I once heard a wealthy woman arguing against the extension of the school age, lest it should tend to make the so-called lower-classes discontented; better that they should remain ignorant than disturb the even tenor of her comfortable ways. There are those

who hold up their hands in horror at the idea of anything approaching a class-war, but not for the right reason, not with an earnest desire to win class-peace in the only way it can be won and made secure, namely, by righting the wrongs which infallibly disturb it. Needless to say, that kind of peacemaker never does make peace in any sense that could really matter to God or to mankind. He is a mere botcher. He leaves the causes of strife untouched, and sooner or later they produce strife again, often enough with redoubled power for being ignored.

No, the true peacemaker, in the sense that the Master uses the term, is the man who knows that he is called to warfare—warfare with all the lies, the injustices, the slacknesses, the disloyalties, which lie behind all discords. He "hates the hate that hinders loving." Wherever there is strife he knows there is something wrong, calling for another sort of strife, calling upon him to join with God to put it right, calling, if need be, for Calvary. Yet—and this is his distinctive witness and strength as a child of God—he takes no leaf out of the book of the evil thing he is fighting. He lets neither bitterness nor brutality nor violence nor untruth creep into his warfare. He is ready to be apparently defeated for the time being rather than fail in his vocation of witness to the things that belong unto peace. He is consumed with a great hunger and thirst for righteousness, carried by a great faith in the

rule of God. In short, the peacemaker is a true peacemaker precisely in so far as he shares the mind of Christ as this is revealed in the whole course of His life from Bethlehem to Calvary. There is, in fact, a deep underlying harmony between Bethlehem and Calvary, between the Manger and the Cross. Calvary is simply Bethlehem become mature and carried into the heart of the eternal conflict between good and evil. The Babe symbolizes the weakness of divine love as it were in repose, the Cross is the weakness of divine love in action, in fiercest possible wrestling with the evil of men's hearts, refusing to run away from it or to think of it as other than it is, winning its victory because it remains unchangeably true to itself. Its seeming weakness is its unconquerable strength.

III

To some this may seem a somewhat severe note to introduce into the thought of the Christian's vocation as peacemaker. But the one question is, is it a true note? If we are to sing our carols, and pray our prayers for peace, if we are in any real sense to dedicate ourselves to the cause of peacemaking in this grim modern world, let us above all things else avoid getting merely sentimental about it. Peacemaking in any sense that really matters will be, for those who dedicate themselves to it, a costing thing. If the life and death of Christ show anything, they show that. The

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result of setting out to tread that way may well be that men will at first fiercely hate and persecute and say all manner of evil. It will be only later that they will recognize in such strange peacemaking the authentic children of God. It is well to face this possibility—nay, certainty—and accept it. It is well always to take care to look through the idyll of Bethlehem to the agony of the Garden and the Cross.

Yet it is a great help to know that Jesus Himself faced this certainty, faced it not only on behalf of Himself but also on behalf of His disciples. One returns again and again in this connexion to one of those poignant passages, of which there are but one or two in the reticent Gospel pages, wherein we see for an instant the deep interior fires of feeling which burned within His Spirit. "I am come," He cries, "to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division." Does not this mean that part of this so fierce baptism with which He was called to be baptized, part indeed of the agony of that Cross which was with Him long before Calvary, was that He came to see with such realistic clarity that one result of His call to men would be inevitably to sunder them from their fellows? Tragic irony, that any who would faithfully tread the way of love must

be prepared to be hated and persecuted and spoken evil of falsely—tragic, indeed, beyond words for Him in whose heart there burned not only love for the whole human race, but a very special love for these men whom He had called from quiet places by the lakeside in Galilee to this so stressful adventure of discipleship to Himself. It was not with equanimity that He contemplated this division, conflict, turmoil, death into which He was plunging them. It was part of the baptism He was called to be baptized with. Yet He faced it and accepted it.

It is strengthening to know this. In this so divisive peacemaking to which the child of God is called, he can draw confidence from the Master's certainty—consummated on Calvary—that there is no other way. He can draw confidence too from the Master's anguish of spirit; for it makes clear once again that this necessity and this call come forth, not from a merely austere and demanding and distant righteousness, but from a very near and understanding and sustaining love.

PART III THE GOODNESS WHICH IS SEVERE

XI

JUSTICE AND GOSPEL

"A just God and a Saviour."—ISAIAH xlv. 21.

It is possible to stand at certain points in the city of London and, looking up, to see two gilt figures on the background of the sky. The one is the great cross on the dome of St. Paul's, the other is the figure of Justice surmounting the Central Criminal Court in High Holborn.

More than once I have looked up at these two symbols as they rise out of the busiest city in the world, its warehouses and offices, the ceaseless roar of its traffic. What has struck me is their separation and aloofness from one another. On sunny days they seem almost to flash defiance at one another. They surmount different buildings, they represent two distinct activities and professions, they evoke two entirely different and even incompatible emotions in the human heart, yet they both take their rise in, and deal with, the same class of human facts. Asked to explain the figure of the Cross, the first, or very nearly the first, word would be sin; asked to explain

T

This separation and aloofness go right back into history. Think, for example, of the ancient right of sanctuary, which lasted right down to recent centuries. A religious temple or shrine gave a fugitive from justice protection against his pursuers. The jurisdiction of justice, in other words, was not unlimited; there was a point where it met with opposition and arrest, and that not from the natural lawlessness of man, but from something within the established and recognized requirements of social life. And that something had to do with religion. The Hebrews had their cities of refuge to which the manslayer might flee for protection. The Greeks had their famous shrines, most of them carrying the right of asylum to fugitive criminals and other hunted and harried men. There was the world-famous sanctuary of Artemis near Antioch, to which even a Jewish High Priest was once glad to flee for protection. The Romans too granted

rights of asylum. The same thing appears in the Christian Church throughout the Middle Ages and later. The Church gave sanctuary. There is a sanctuary knocker still on the door of Durham Cathedral.

To-day the custom of sanctuary has gone, but something of the mood and thought behind it appears to linger on. People still feel that the place of the Church, if it has a place at all in such things, is not on the bench beside the magistrate so much as in the dock beside the criminal, pleading for and seeking to save him. There is none who would not feel the shock of contrariety, and even contradiction, if a picture, say, of the Good Shepherd adorned the walls of the Central Criminal Court and looked down upon those scenes of ruthless prosecution and punishment of men's sins.

But the separation between what we may call for short "justice" and "Gospel," is to be observed not only in the historical manifestations just referred to, but also in their intrinsic mood and outlook and temper as these may be observed in our own experience. Thus there is contrariety between what each conceives its essential function to be. The function of criminal justice is to detect and punish; the function of Gospel is to absolve and forgive. There is contrariety in the mood in which each works. The mood of criminal justice is necessarily cold, rigid, formal, almost pitiless. The mood of Gospel is warm,

personal, merciful, understanding. There is contrariety in the direction in which each looks. Criminal justice looks to the past; that is all it is concerned with—a wrong has been done, it must be duly compensated by the wrongdoer's punishment, and there the matter ends. Gospel looks to the future. It does not concern itself primarily with what a man has been, but with what he may yet be inspired and uplifted to be. There is contrariety in the agents which each uses. Criminal justice is coercive, dictatorial, compulsive, and tends to use men of that temperament. Gospel is persuasive, inviting, and needs for its effective presentation men whose strength is of a more supple and understanding type. The full force of these contrasts might be felt if one were to pass immediately from a Salvation Army meeting, where some strong, tender woman is dealing with sinners in the name of Christ, to a court where criminal justice is dealing with them. In the one you might sing, "sinners Jesus will receive." In the other you might say, "sinners justice will receive," but you would not feel like singing about it. There is song in Gospel, there is only tragedy and heartbreak in criminal justice. Perhaps the most powerful and poignant expression in literature of this contrast is to be found in Hugo's Les Misérables.

Now, there must, of course, be some differentiation of the function and outlook of law in relation to

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wickedness from the function and outlook of Gospel in relation to it. But if the separation is too wide, the cleavage too deep, both suffer. It is bad for justice and it is bad for our presentation and understanding of Gospel.

II

First, it is bad for justice.

The fact is that justice, precisely because of its aloofness from the spirit of Gospel, often fails to be just. Thus it nearly always isolates the sinner from his fellows too much. Lacking the spirit of love and sympathy, it lacks the central principle of our solidarity with one another, and sees the sinner in false isolation from his fellows. He stands in the dock by himself. Society falls away from him; he is already something of an outcast. The judge sits above him. There must be no deflection of sympathy as the sinner is placed in the scales and the result read according to the standard of the law. Yet it is obviously quite unreal thus to isolate a sinner from his society. In his wrong act there were a thousand influences which poured into him from his earliest days. In his responsibility there are a thousand responsibilities. The result is that in this false detachment the sinner is not really seen as he is, and justice is not done. And in nine cases out of ten the sinner knows that justice is not done.

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In the same way that justice tends falsely to isolate the sinner from society, it tends falsely to isolate his act from himself, from the struggles, hopes, aspirations with which perhaps he has kept company throughout the years and which indicate perhaps the true bent of his inner life. For the most part criminal justice must take note only of the act; it is no part of its task to try to get sympathetically inside a man's whole inner life and judge that. The result is that true justice is again not done, and the sinner often knows with a profound feeling of resentment that it is not really being done. That the administration of justice in the nature of the case cannot avoid the limitations just indicated is obvious; but that does not absolve us from the responsibility of avoiding them as much as possible. Justice cannot become Gospel, but the more the spirit of Gospel can be introduced into it without destroying its true function in the social life, the more really just it will be. This has been to some extent recognized in the introduction of children's courts. There seems no reason why a principle admitted in dealing with children should not be admitted in dealing with adults, even if it means a much more lengthy and costly process.

Indeed it ought to be, if the Christian revelation really lays bare, as we believe it does, the foundations of all well-being in human life. There is no surer index of the degree to which a nation's life has been

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Christianized than the spirit and temper of its administration of criminal justice.

III

On the other hand the separation is bad for Gospel. Even as justice in its aloofness from the spirit of Gospel often fails to be really just, so Gospel in its aloofness from the spirit of justice often fails to be really Gospel. It is very easy to think and to speak, for example, of the divine love, or indeed of any sort of love, as something which merely overlooks and ignores sin. Yet we do not see the love of God for what it is, nor have we a valid and healthy experience of its forgiveness, until we realize that it searches and pursues and tears out and exposes all the evil in us every bit as ruthlessly as the detectives and prosecuting counsel of the Central Criminal Court. Chesterton once put the point in criticizing Jerome's Passing of the Third Floor Back. It is not necessary to agree with the criticism to see the point. "I differ vitally from the story," he says, "because it is not a detective story. There is none of this great Christian idea of tearing their evil out of men. Things must be faced, even in order to be forgiven. But in the play the redeemer is not a divine detective, pitiless in his resolve to know and pardon. Rather he is a sort of divine dupe, who does not pardon at all, because he does not see anything that is going on. There is nothing very heroic in loving after you have been deceived. The heroic business is to love after you have been undeceived."

Somewhere here surely is the very heart of the Gospel. Somewhere here lies the power of Christ, and supremely of His Cross, to cleanse and redeem the souls of men. Certainly no presentation of the Christian message to-day is likely to be of the least avail which does not hold firmly together both the goodness and the severity of God. A Gospel without the goodness of God, the utterly gracious and undeserved goodness of God to us, would, it is superfluous to say, be no Gospel; but a Gospel without the severity of God, "tearing their evil out of men," would not in these days be credible, if it has ever been. "Behold then the goodness and the severity of God"—severe because it is good, good because it is severe.

XII

FORGIVENESS

"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven."—Luke vii. 47.

No doubt other religions than Christianity teach that God forgives sin, but none makes this truth so basic and central in its message. Indeed it may be said that everything distinctive of the Christian life is indissolubly bound up at some point with the experience of God's forgiveness mediated through His revelation of Himself in Christ. Nothing therefore is more important than that the forgiveness of sins should cease to be to us merely the traditional Christian Gospel, or merely an article in the Creed, and become a living experience of the sort that stirs and cleanses feeling, re-directs the will, and irradiates the whole life with light and peace.

Can we say anything to point the way to such a living experience? The idea of giving, or taking, advice as to how we may hear God's word of forgiveness to the soul sounds, indeed, somewhat repellent at first hearing. For it suggests approaching God in the mood of having fulfilled the conditions of for-

giveness, of expecting it, whereas in fact a genuine penitence never could expect forgiveness in advance; rather is it surprised and overwhelmed when forgiveness comes, and in the surprise is its re-creating and cleansing power. Yet, even so, perhaps something may be said to prepare the way for God's own approach to the soul.

Ι

There is certainly one fundamental truth which is often overlooked and which it is not unimportant to grasp, especially if we come to the life of discipleship in our earlier years, with something of the zest and hopefulness and courage of youth still upon us. It is this. The deeper and livelier experiences of God's forgiveness, of the need for it, of the wonder of it, come in the course of the life of genuine discipleship and not necessarily, or usually, at its beginning. The same is true, as we saw earlier, of the conviction that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life; indeed, these are not two truths, but one, for it is supremely as the mediator of forgiveness that Christ authenticates Himself to us as in some way God Himself dealing with our spirits. The idea is not uncommon that the proper order of events is that a man should first awaken to the fact that he is a sinner desperately needing divine forgiveness, that then he should have a transfiguring experience of that forgiveness as never perhaps again, and that thereafter on the basis of this initial transaction his distinctively Christian life should begin. But the truth is that whatever may come at the beginning—and it would be folly to insist that the order must be the same for all, whatever their age or background or experience—the felt need for forgiveness does undoubtedly grow deeper and broader, and the experience of it therefore more living and thankful, the more the Christian way of life is seriously pursued. It is a familiar fact that the people who are most poignantly aware of the deep-inrootedness, the endless ramification, of evil in their own and others' lives, are precisely the people who to all appearance have progressed farthest in Christian character and discipleship. And this is not so strange as it sounds. For nothing is so calculated to keep the spirit cleansed and humble and free of those disabling egotisms which are ever springing up within it like weeds as to be continually made conscious of sin and at the same time to have the heart continually set at peace about it by the forgiveness of God; nothing, too, is so calculated to release in a man's heart an eager desire to serve both God and his fellows. For, as Chesterton says, it is the highest and holiest of the paradoxes that a man who knows he cannot repay his debt will always be seeking to repay it.

In a general way we may say that Christ takes His disciples into an ever deeper experience of God's forgiveness by making them aware of an ever deeper need for that forgiveness. How, then, does He make them aware of such an ever deeper need?

We will answer this question by three truths, all of which can be illustrated from the story in the Gospels which, more than any other, shows us Christ dealing with the human spirit in just this sphere of things, the story, that is, of the woman who wept at His feet and wiped them with the hairs of her head. The contrast which Jesus Himself draws in the story between the woman with her deep experience of forgiveness, and Simon the Pharisee with his relatively shallow one, helps to throw into sharper relief the truths we have in mind.

II

The first truth is this: Christ deepens the sense of need for forgiveness in those who keep company with His spirit by bringing them increasingly *out* of falsehood and illusion *into* an ever clearer insight into the true divine order and uses of their lives.

It is because we do not see the moral and spiritual order in the midst of which we are set for what it really is that our confessions of sin and our awareness of the forgiveness of God are so casual and shallow. Christ teaches us more and more to see. Thus the woman in the story is different from the Pharisee in that she is obviously at the moment seeing much more

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clearly what her spiritual situation is. She has been brought to that bleak moment of vision when, for one reason or another, are blown away all those selfsufficiencies and self-deceivings which, even in the best of us, rise continuously like a mist between us and that real world wherein we must meet God if we are to be saved. Only the truth can make us free. Maybe her forlorn and outcast manner of life made it easier for her than for Simon to come to this point of disillusionment. Perhaps that is why Jesus said that the publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom before the Scribes and Pharisees; it is not so difficult for them to see their woeful situation for what it is. But, however that may be, she had come to this point, whereas Simon apparently had not; moreover, she had come to it through Christ, and that is for us the important thing. Christ's work is not merely to satisfy need, but also to show us what our needs really are. Wherefore, if the Christian's is a life of increasing insight, as it ought to be, then it must also be for that reason a life of increasingly felt need of God's forgiving mercy to all the sinful race of man, and to himself not least.

III

The second truth is difficult to express. It is that Christ deepens the sense of need for forgiveness by increasing for us the amount of our total life situation to which the forgiveness is felt to be relevant.

This is clumsily put, but perhaps the Gospel story may help to make it clear. Jesus Himself said that the difference between the woman and Simon was that she had been forgiven much, whereas Simon had only been forgiven little, and behind that difference is surely a difference in felt need. The woman, we may surmise, had come to a point where she realized quite definitely, even if she could not put it into terms, that if there were no such thing as forgiveness, then there was little left in life worth living for. The need for forgiveness was not now one amongst many other needs and so more or less incidental and peripheral. It had suddenly expanded until it was felt as underlying and determining everything else. It now filled the horizon. Life was unsatisfactory down to its very roots, and the choice was between getting a fresh start on a new basis or a wilderness of unrelieved weariness and despair.

Not so Simon. Doubtless he confessed his sins to God not altogether without sincerity, and was glad to be assured of their forgiveness; but, after all, there were plenty of other satisfactions in life besides that to keep him going, such as, for example, giving feasts to notables like Jesus. To find forgiveness or not to find it was not to him what it was to this woman —a choice between the promise of dawn and an ever-thickening night.

So it is within the Christian life. Not until we begin 118

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to see that on the forgiveness of God depends the total significance of our existence both here and hereafter are we likely to share the most living and transfiguring experience of that forgiveness. And Christ, as He leads us in the way He would have us go, does enable us to see this with increasing clarity. He makes us so deeply, so painfully sensitive to all the sin and heartache of the human life in which we share, that only the divine word of forgiveness can save us from total despair. And to that situation the divine word always comes.

IV

The third truth is this: Christ does these two things of which we have been speaking by taking us ever more deeply into the world of personal relations, and making ever more poignantly clear to us what the infinite demands of love are.

We have no knowledge of what in the woman's previous experience lay behind the climax depicted in the Gospel story, but if historical imagination can ever tell us anything, it can assuredly do so here. If we know anything of human nature at all, we know beyond a peradventure that the woman in her sense of sin was in a far more *personal* world than Simon the Pharisee. Simon was seeing God through a system of legal formulas and requirements, and such sense of sin as he had was entirely within that framework; but the

woman had come to a point where she was aware of God in and through her dealings with men and women, and not least with the person of Jesus Himself. The words, "for she loved much," with their implied contrast with Simon, show the intensely personal realm, the only realm where feelings are deeply stirred, in which the whole transaction was taking place. So it is with the Christian life. The deeper experiences of forgiveness are reserved for those who are seeking to follow Christ with utter loyalty in their personal relations with the men and women who, in actual flesh and blood, daily cross their path.

v

Let us illustrate these points thus stated in such dull, abstract terms.

Here are some words from a letter I once received from a friend:

Without the forgiveness of God, life, to one who is being cleansed and sensitized by Christ and his eyes opened to the true values of life, becomes even more a burden than it would otherwise be. Thus when I look back and see how much of evil I have put into human relations and how now it is beyond recall, utterly beyond recall, I feel pretty bad. Some years ago a half-blind woman with thick-lensed glasses, selling cottons, and led by a thin pasty-faced little lad, came to the door. I can make many excuses for myself. I was tired, and it was late, and there had been a stream of such people. I cut short a tale of domestic woe with a very sharp No. The lad

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said, "Come away, Mum," and led her away, and I saw her thin round back and the wisps of lank grey hair hanging untidily over her faded, threadbare coat. At the gate she paused while the boy opened it, and gave a deep sigh, and the boy turned and gave me a look which was as near hatred as anything I have ever seen. And then they went away and I have never seen them since. I have often thought of that woman, and whenever I think of her and her weary sigh, and venom being distilled into that lad's soul through wrong and loveless relationships to which I had thus contributed my part; when I recall that I can do nothing to amend what I did, I feel I can only cry, "Undo what I have done, O God, God in His manifold wisdom and love forgive and be merciful to us all, to me, to that woman and the boy, whom I shall never see again and to whom I can never make amends, to all men tied up in this jangled bundle of life. Yes, I think I understand why Christianity talks so much about forgiveness. Once Christ begins to make sensitive the soul most of the things we thought were quite tolerable begin to be intolerable and shocking.

And then, further, does not Christ expand for us this need of forgiveness to the dimensions of the whole human race. How can anyone whose soul has even begun to be sensitized by the mind of Christ look out across the wider scene of human life and not feel it an agony too great to be endured? The horror of the things men do to one another! Slums, for example, and little being done about it; unemployment, children grossly under-nourished in a world of plenty; persecution of Jews in Germany; airmen bombing Shanghai or Barcelona and turning little

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children into muttering imbeciles among the ruins; society shooting down, strangling, electrocuting criminals whom by its own rottenness it has helped to create. These things are our world. There are other things, but there are these things. We can if we like avert our eyes from them, but that is cowardice. Certainly if we begin to live close to Christ we cannot avert our eyes, for it is precisely His influence that insists that we shall be increasingly sensitive to the heart-break of it all. Yet I would say that Christ has no business to make us sensitive to these things, if that is all He does! But He does something more, and He does it most of all through that awful consummation of His life on the Cross.

Through that, I know not how, God speaks. As the Cross of His perfect love stands in the midst of human hatred and cruelty and stupidity, so (it is given to the soul to see) in the midst thereof is the eternal love, the bearing, suffering forgiveness of God. The burden of it is only on you because it is first on the eternal wisdom and love and forgiveness, which will not let men go. In all the affliction of men there is a deeper underlying affliction, the affliction of God. To see that in the Cross of Christ, and thus to find yourself at peace about human life, yet under the call of God yourself to seek to redeem it, that is forgiveness. That is the peace of God which passes understanding. It is this paradox of peace in the midst of poignant

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repentance for sin—your own and others—which is forgiveness. But to hear the word of forgiveness to the soul through the Cross of Christ, it is necessary to feel something of the burden of the world's lovelessness and sin, and how insupportable it is; yet to feel that you must walk with Christ day by day in your own personal relations, until the hard anæsthetic places of the spirit become sensitive, and a woman's sigh and a boy's wince will suddenly open up to you the very heart of the eternal, and bring you to your knees before the Cross that is there.

GOING ASTRAY

which a man must say, and must ever come back and say again, about God's Law of Holiness, is that he has not kept it.

1

But even more noteworthy, and even more indicative of the sincerity of the Psalmist, are the words in which this concluding confession is expressed. This man, whoever he is, if he is not going to be betrayed into forgetfulness of his real spiritual state, is also not going to be betrayed into exaggerated and untruthful words about it. He is not going to make the common mistake of thinking that you best magnify God by minimizing yourself, that you honour the law of holiness by despising man's poor faltering efforts to keep it. There is a restraint, a refusal to make himself out to be worse than he really is, in this confession and prayer, which impresses you at once with a sense of reality and truth. The man is in a real world. He has gone astray, but there are different ways of going astray, and certain ways have not been his way. There are wickednesses so headstrong, so violent, that it would be grotesque to the point of humour to describe them as going astray like a lost sheep. He has disobeyed, but he has never got to the point of deliberately shutting his eyes to his disobediences; he has not forgotten God's law, he has not lost the sense of the will of God dealing with him in life.

XIII

GOING ASTRAY

"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."—Psalm cxix. 176.

THE 119th Psalm is not one of the Psalms to which ▲ we instinctively turn for help and inspiration. Its length, its artificial divisions, and even its theme the Law of God-we find somewhat forbidding. Much of the content, too, is dull and uninspiring. Yet it repays study, for again and again there breaks forth a phrase which arrests the ear, a piece of insight which stirs and comforts the soul, showing that here speaks a deeply spiritual mind from whom we can learn. And of this not the least evidence is the last verse of all. One might have expected that after 175 verses of meditation on so high a theme the writer would have sought to mount to a climax, to some clear and ringing note of worship and exhortation. But he does not do so. He ends on a note of wistful confession and prayer: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." As though, after all else is said, the last thing

I very much like this quiet realism, this refusal either to extenuate or to exaggerate the moral facts about himself. It is very easy to think that provided our untruths and insincerities are not calculated to bring us any personal profit or honour, they do not matter and we shall not be called to account for them. A man who should go about uttering eulogiums of his own holiness we should heartily despise; but a man who goes about uttering exaggerated condemnations of his own wickedness we are inclined to regard with more toleration. It seems to be more in the right direction as it is certainly more in the accepted tradition of Christian piety. Yet it is not in reality a whit more preferable. A lie in the soul and on the lips, whatever it be, is poison. The soul needs truth as the body needs air. And as a matter of fact, of course, to condemn yourself overmuch is in nine cases out of ten merely a subtle and perverted form of self-praise. Are you not saying to yourself: Behold at last a deeply humble man, behold one who is so sensitive to God's holiness that no superlative can express his sense of sin, behold the completely successful failure? Let us confess our sins, but let us first pray that we may see them for what they really are. The fundamental

II

And how true this metaphor of going astray like a lost sheep is. It so perfectly describes the moral and spiritual state of most of us. There are indeed, as I have already suggested, other ways of going astray. Some go astray like ravening wolves, some like sly foxes, some like obstinate donkeys, some like young horses for the first time let loose on the heath and rioting in their freedom. Jesus said of Herod, "Go and tell that fox!" Yet of the commonplace multitudes He said that they were as sheep not having a shepherd. And that is the appropriate metaphor for so many of us. For why are we just where we are in our inner life and outward relationships? Why have we not become by this time much finer people than we are? Why are so many of our highest dreams about ourselves still unrealized? Why do so many of our personal relationships still go wrong, as though, after ten, twenty, thirty years of aspiring after fine and tactful Christian living, we were still clumsy, unperceptive, coarse fumblers at the business? The answer is that we have gone astray and that our going astray has been like that of lost sheep.

How so? Well, looking back over our spiritual history we cannot honestly put our finger on many conscious and deliberate turnings aside from the true path. There have been such; but just because they

thing, the utterly indispensable thing, we repeat, is

truth.

were so manifestly what they were, God was able very quickly to have speech with us about them. Certainly we have not been amongst those who have wrecked and disabled themselves by some plunging and headstrong folly. Perhaps we should have fared better if we had. Did not Jesus say that publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom first? No, we have just somehow gone astray like—how else could it be put?—like lost

sheep.

For the most part we have not been aware of what was happening. We have again and again done things without seeing the true meaning and implication of what we were doing; we have not seen whither our acts were tending; we have been morally dense and stupid. We have been controlled, too, by all sorts of unconscious impulsions in the soul. We have imitated unconsciously, following the sheep in front. We have kept in with the flock, taking the line of least resistance and thinking we were prudent when we were merely being cowardly. We have gravitated towards comfort unconsciously and measured the richness of our life by the abundance of the things we possess, like the sheep who does not realize that the greenest grass is usually on the edge of the bog. If we have been conscious of getting off the road, we have persuaded ourselves that at least we are not far off and can easily get back again at any moment. So little by little, partly drawn by the thought of better pastures, partly

impelled by the unnoticed bias of our own weight, partly deflected by this or that boulder in the path, but never very conscious of the direction either of the proper path or of our own, we have all gone astray like lost sheep, and now we are where we are! We are not radically bad people, we are not people who plan frightful wickednesses, yet when we stand before the Law of Holiness we know that somehow we have gone wrong, really seriously wrong.

Now, sincere men and women who awaken to this situation are very prone to despair about it. The very fact that it has all come about in this lost-sheep kind of way makes the whole business seem so hopeless. A more or less conscious and deliberate turning on one side, serious as it is, seems a different matter; there is at least no mystery about it. There is something clear-cut and definite to repent of and to hold in the soul as a warning memory. But this straying business is so impalpable, so unintended, and yet so very definite in its result. Again and again in your journeying you lifted your eyes to the horizon and to the hills, again and again you tried to orientate your steps by the great landmarks of Christian faith and experience; nevertheless this is where you are, strayed into these flats of spiritual mediocrity and ineffectiveness. Have then all your aspirations and desires and prayers counted for nothing, and will they never count for anything? Suppose you make a fresh start, who, or what, is to guarantee that you will not stray again when both within and without are all these complex, hidden, uncontrollable factors which deflect the steps and entangle the feet?

III

The answer to this is twofold. We give it on the strength of what we know of God through Christ. Yet even the Psalmist, we may surmise, glimpsed it; for, you observe, the confession becomes a prayer, a prayer of self-commitment to a higher and stronger and more stable purpose than his own.

First, we must realize that, no matter how much a man may stray, if he keep the love of, and the desire for, higher things alive in his soul he must in the end reach his proper goal in God. He may take a long time to reach it; he may take anything but a direct course; he may wander about in some foggy, tangled place and never in this life escape completely from it, but he will assuredly reach the goal in the end. Unless, indeed, the love of God is an empty phrase. There are some beautiful first paragraphs in Stephen Graham's story of his journey to Jerusalem with the Russian pilgrims.

Whoever has wished to go [he says] has already started on the pilgrimage. And once you have started, every step on the road is a step towards Jerusalem. Even steps which seem to have no meaning are taking you by by-ways and lanes to the high road. For the heart guides the steps, and has intentions too deep for the mind to grasp. The true Christian is he who has the wishing heart . . . in whose heart is a little compass box where an arrow always points steadily to Jerusalem.

Perhaps in these matters we confine our thought too exclusively to this life, forgetting what lies beyond. We assume that the task is laid upon us of achieving everything before we die, so that when Death taps at our door he will find a complete saint ready to answer him. But this is an unwarrantable foreshortening of the scope of the Christian life. It is also a complete misunderstanding of the Christian Gospel. The daring paradox of the Gospel is that our title to enter a higher world is not our achievement at all, but our consciousness of failure, our humble acknowledgment of much weak straying, and our trust in God's infinite patience and mercy and love. If a man can take to God at the end a humble, repentant, but still aspiring spirit, he will have done much, very much; or rather let us say, Christ will have done much, very much, for him. If the compass of the heart is still sensitive and unbroken, God will in the end bring him to Jerusalem.

Secondly, we must realize that to become aware of our straying is itself to become aware of God's own presence, God's own seeking love, in the heart and life. "Seek Thy servant, for I have not forgotten thy commandments." The prayer presupposes the belief

in the answer. Out of the depths of the man's soul rises the assurance that no matter how far he may stray he cannot stray outside the seeking love of God; no matter into what boggy place he may wander, he is never, and can never be, God-forsaken. The fact that something within him makes him aware of failure, and refuses to let him acquiesce in it, shows that he is still held by One who will not let him go.

Yes, far more important than our seeking of God is His seeking of us. Amidst all the forces which draw us from the true path, and send us astray, there is a force which is deeper and more powerful than them all, and that is the manifold wisdom of Eternal Love. Indeed, it is just because His love and wisdom are so deep and sure that He is willing to let us wander in such barren places, and to wait so long. A love less sure of itself would never dare to give us so much liberty. Do give up measuring things by your grasp of God; think daily of God's mighty grasp of you and be at peace. Only you must keep the compass of your heart intact. You must still measure yourself by the highest, direct your feet to the highest, as you are able. The rest be with God.

Let me no more my comfort draw From my frail hold of Thee, In this alone rejoice with awe, Thy mighty grasp of me!

XIV

COMFORT

"The God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."—2 Corinthians i. 3–5.

THIS is perhaps the most impressive statement in the New Testament of the Christian view of suffering and of the way of victory over it. It is the more impressive, because in a sense it is incidental and unintended. The Apostle is not deliberately trying to think out as from a study chair a theory about suffering which may, or may not, satisfy the questionings of the mind; he is merely transcribing into grateful words a living experience, which has in actual fact already satisfied far more than his mind; it has satisfied his whole spirit.

Ι

The first thing that impresses you is the profound awareness of God which pervades the whole passage.

THE GOODNESS WHICH IS SEVERE

Paul has triumphed, is triumphing over his sufferings and distresses through God. The words glow with a sense of fellowship with God, the wonder of it, the indispensability of it, the complete adequacy of it. I like especially the trenchant universality of the phrase "The God of all comfort." He is the God of all comfort, positively, in the sense that He can reach Paul with His succouring fellowship and give him the victory in all situations whatsoever. But also He is the God of all comfort negatively in the sense that He is the only source of comfort and strength of which this can be said. There is thus no substitute for God in this matter. From Him, and from Him alone in the end, all adequate and abiding comfort comes.

Now thus to insist that God and the soul's fellowship with God are fundamental in victory over suffering may sound a very obvious homiletic platitude. So it may be, but it is very far from being a platitude in our thoughts about, and reactions to, the concrete situations of ordinary everyday life. I am impressed with the worldly and even atheistic way we have of comforting ourselves and others in the midst of some distress. It is worldly and atheistic because it does not put God, and the soul's relationship to, and ultimate destiny in, God right at the centre of the picture. We try to draw strength and comfort from other thoughts, other sources, and even when God is mentioned it is more as an external power or disposer of events than

as an intimate purpose of Holy Love, cleansing, teaching, equipping, strengthening the soul from within.

Perhaps we try to mitigate our distress by thoughts of the many happinesses we have been privileged to enjoy at other times; or even by contemplating the worse fate which might have overtaken us, or has in fact overtaken other people. Or we set out to distract the suffering mind with all kinds of absorbing activities and exciting plans. Or we take refuge in a sort of gambler's hope that fortune's wheel must turn sooner or later in our favour. Or we rest in a kind of primitive, muddled faith that nothing can be so bad but what we can get through it somehow. Or perhaps we talk vaguely about another life where things will be put right, and the restless spirits of men find peace, without any consideration whether a soul which has not at least begun to find the way of its victory here, will be likely to find it instantly somewhere else. Or perhaps, becoming faintly religious, we talk about the will of God in a mood which is hardly distinguishable from fatalism, without any reminding of ourselves, or others, that much of human suffering is not due to the will of God at all, but to human negligence and sin, and that in the nature of the case there can be no true comfort until those facts are faced. All this is hardly more than the worldly wisdom of comfort. It is to be found in all the pagan moralists and writers. No doubt such thoughts are not without

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value. It is good at times to consider how much after all we have to be thankful for; to distract the mind by any legitimate expedient from brooding on its own troubles; to remind ourselves, if we can, that this life is not everything and that there is a beyond. Worldly wisdom is not to be despised, but its limitations had better be faced, and certainly it must not be confused with Christian wisdom. Not in these thoughts, however temporarily alleviating, is to be found the soul's true victory, least of all when it is confronted with some really devastating trouble. There are troubles in life before which twittering thoughts like these falter into silence, so pitifully inadequate do they seem.

II

What then is the Christian wisdom of the matter? It is, that in the first instance every suffering and deprivation must be regarded as an opportunity to come into deeper fellowship with God; only thus can they be overcome, for only thus can they be turned into a permanent enrichment for the whole life. The first thing that Christian wisdom says is not think about other things, other blessings, good fortune yet to come, a future life, but think about God now, and think about Him in connexion with this very trouble you are in. Put it to yourself, for it is true, that this suffering has within it a new pressure of the divine spirit,

the divine light, the divine love, the divine demand, upon the entrances of your inner life. Understand too that the greatest gift of life is not this or that external blessing, this or that success or comfort, this or that betterment or relief of circumstance, but rather the gift of God's own presence in the soul, cleansing, enlarging, filling it with that spirit of Christ which turned even the Cross into a glory to God and a blessing to man. If that inner gift can become yours then nothing henceforth will be able to defeat or overwhelm or impoverish your soul. Your troubles and sufferings may still seem a dark and terrible mystery to others, but to you they will be a mystery no longer wholly dark, no longer wholly terrible, for you will be discovering through them new depths in the love, new ranges in the adequacy, of God. That the worst assaults of the world are opportunities for gaining inner victories in God, that without such inner victory the soul, no matter how many temporary alleviations it may find, is essentially defeated—this is the first and most fundamental affirmation of the Christian philosophy of suffering.

But it may be said, how is the spirit to be thus inwardly opened to the presence of God in the midst of its need? To a man who is in the midst of some dire sorrow it seems just a piece of sanctimonious glibness to tell him to realize the presence of God within his own soul and win an inner victory. How is

it to be done? Part of the answer, perhaps indeed the whole of it, is suggested by Paul's words here.

III

First, we must put it to ourselves that the sorrow and need which have entered our life can equip us for helping and strengthening others. "God comforteth us that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

This is a very simple thought, but it is very deepgoing. We said in an earlier chapter that it is only in the light of the ideal of brotherhood and service that the gifts which come to us and are denied to others can be rightly understood; the same is true of the sorrows that come to us and are withheld from others. The secret of human nature is always, somehow, love. He who loves not, lives not. The source of all bitterness is lovelessness. Self-centred thoughts, even though they be religious thoughts, even though they be thoughts of God's presence within the soul, are always sterile. It is possible, indeed, to desire God's presence and comfort in the soul, and even to achieve a temporary exaltation of spirit which looks like real victory, in a thoroughly egotistic way. There is the greater danger of this in that all suffering tends to turn the mind in upon itself. Somehow the windows of the soul must be pushed open, however stiffly they may

move at first, to wider horizons. Only as that is done can God's real presence and power be known. For He Himself is Love and not any other thing. He can redeem self-centredness, but He cannot comfort it.

I was once asked by a medical man this question: What would you say to a young person who, coming to maturity, realizes that he is handicapped through some evil heredity or some culpable neglect of others, or even through his own folly, with some terrible and disabling weakness and suffering? Is there a way of victory for such a one? How can the years that the locusts have eaten be restored? I have thought much about that question. No one would wish to speak glibly about it. Yet in the end one is bound to say that there is only one way in which such a maimed life can be put in the way of winning its victory and that is that it should come to see its suffering, however falteringly, as part of that deep and awful divine purpose which springs from the divine nature as love. the purpose that men should at all costs be a fellowship with one another and with God, and be redeemed in the end through suffering for and with one another in love. Let the sufferer offer his suffering to the great cause of human redemption. Let him see in it an equipment to sympathize, to love, to bear witness, let him in other words class it, however humbly, with the sufferings of Christ on the Cross and he has taken the first step to victory, to knowing the comforts of God

within his spirit, to becoming a great soul. Suffering must first be a vocation before it can be a victory.

IV

Yet, second, the vocation, needless to say, must be practically fulfilled to the farthest limit that circumstances permit; and the limit is as a rule much farther than we realize. To the burdens which seem so peculiarly, and even unjustly, ours, we must seek deliberately to add those of others. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ." Yes, but what are the sufferings of Christ? Surely we only dare call those sufferings the sufferings of Christ which have in some degree as their cause that same attitude of mind which took Him to the Cross, namely, an active entering into the deep, deep need of mankind and a carrying of its burden in prayer and in uttermost self-giving? We have indeed a most blasphemous way of speaking of some privation which has come to us as "my cross," when there has not entered into our relation to it even the faintest suggestion of what brought the Lord to Calvary.

Here indeed is the deep, astonishing wisdom of the Christian philosophy of comfort. By deliberately adding to your burden you diminish it! The natural man does not understand that. He does not understand that the only way to be lastingly comforted is to be a better man; the only way to be properly refreshed is

to have the deeper nature released and not the shallower nature satisfied. And the only way to have the deeper nature released is to have some greater demand addressed to it. On the surface of our spirits there lie such things as ambition and pride and vanity and self-pity, and all the cruder instincts of our unredeemed nature, and our human friends when we are in distress often try to comfort us by ministering to them. It is well enough meant, but it achieves nothing. Far wiser was, for example, that great Christian soul, Cobden, who, when his friend Bright was prostrated by the death of his wife so that it seemed his mind would break, bade him take upon himself even more costingly than he had yet done the burden of the poor people of England and devote himself to their emancipation.

Yes, this is the only true anodyne, the only way of victory. The worldly wisdom of comfort would seek to provide distractions, excitements, compensatory pleasures for one whom life has harshly treated. The wisdom of Christianity provides only another burden and grief—that of someone else.

Thus always when we touch the ultimate secrets of personal life we again discern the Cross.

DUTY AND REWARD

through love; joy in the love of God here and now—these surely are the authentic notes of the redeemed and reconciled life; notes which not merely transcend, but seem definitely to forbid, the least suggestion of enduring crosses here in order to enter into joy hereafter.

T

No doubt there is truth in this, but is it the whole truth? Surely not—for two reasons. First, because if it were the whole truth, it would be a very depressing and discouraging truth to the vast majority of sincere Christian people. Miserable failures that we are in our discipleship, we had thought that we had at least on occasion won a victory, through Christ indeed, but not without a struggle on our part. Only last Sunday, perhaps, we did not feel in the least like attending worship, but we reminded ourselves of our duty and went: and during the week we managed to fight off a temptation to gain our own ends in business by a policy which struck us as not being Christian, even though permissible according to usual standards; we fought it off by telling ourselves, amongst other things, that after all the immediate rewards of this life are little in comparison with the rewards of heaven—the things that God has prepared for them that love Him. Were, then, such supposed victories, according to true Christian standards, merely another and subtler form

XV

DUTY AND REWARD

"Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God."—Hebrews xii. 2.

THIS is one of the great New Testament sayings about Christ. Yet apart from its context, and to superficial thought, it might well seem to raise question and difficulty; it might be taken to suggest something not quite in harmony with the highest ideal of Christian living.

Thus the word "endure" might suggest doing God's will, not out of a willing and joyful surrender, but with a sort of grim determination, a gritting of the teeth, a mere sense of duty. And the phrase "for the joy that was set before Him" might suggest doing God's will, not so much for its own sake as for the sake of some sort of reward. Surely, it might be said, the highest Christian living, as indeed it finds expression in the whole spirit of the New Testament, transcends such ideas. The constraining of a man to newness of life by the love of Christ; the fulfilling of the law

of defeat? Was the fact that we had to struggle and steady ourselves with thoughts of duty and reward merely evidence of an underlying weakness; or, if evidence of strength, then not a specifically Christian strength? Were we still only in the realm of law, not of grace; of Seneca, not of Christ?

And then, in the second place, it cannot be the whole truth, because the New Testament itself quite plainly does not regard it as the whole truth. The New Testament writers are by no means averse to asking Christian people to fight and endure and to be doggedly loyal to duty and to keep their eyes lifted to the rewards of heaven, even though at the same time they seek to lift their readers to a plane where love, and love alone, is the fulfilling of the law. This picture of Christ as enduring the Cross for the joy that was set before Him is, indeed, quite in character with the rest of the New Testament. Christ Himself is reported as bidding His disciples to rejoice even in the midst of persecution, for "great is their reward in heaven." The fact is, the New Testament, in its rich and realistic way, holds the two thoughts together-duty and the transcending of duty in love, joy in the will of God now and a looking for reward hereafter—and it holds them together in such a way that they co-operate with one another in the formation of distinctively Christian character.

II

Take, first, the place in the reconciled Christian life of doing and enduring things from a sense of duty.

As Christian men and women we must expect to be called upon again and again to do and to endure from a sheer sense of duty. The reason for this is that God has no interest whatever in saving us apart from our own self-direction—apart from the exercise of the most precious faculty we have, which is the will. You, my friend, who have so frequently to take hold of yourself and force yourself against inclination to do what as a professing Christian you ought to do, are probably right in seeing in that necessity a sign that you are still far from being what you ought to be; a bigger soul doubtless would do more spontaneously what you have to do with so much effort. But you are wrong if you do not see also in that necessity the evidence that God has greatly honoured you, that He has given you the dignity of being in a measure in charge of your own destiny—a builder of the mansion of your own soul. If Christ's saving of your spirit were merely a matter of releasing such tides of feeling in you that instantly and infallibly you were swept to the performance of every duty without any necessity of self-control or self-effort, it would be pleasant doubtless for you, but it would be a degradation of you from your true status and destiny as a moral being. The Kingdom of God is love, but it is not gush.

Yet, on the other hand, and qualifying this, this doing and enduring ought in the Christian life to have a quite different "feel"—a quite different relationship to the inner life—from what it would otherwise have. It ought to be set all the time in the larger context of reconciliation to, and trust in, God, of all that vision of God which Christ has given us, and to which we can again and again, if we will, lift our eyes. A friend once told me that during the War he was set to hoe and keep clean a vast field of turnips. For months he worked alone in that one field at that one infinitely dull task. He knew drudgery as never before or since. But on the horizon there lay a line of hills; at any moment he could lift his eyes from the turnips and let them rest on those long, rolling contours, so strong, so peaceful, so full of distance. He did not realize, he said, how much those hills were doing to make the drudgery, if not pleasant, then at least possible and unembittered, until for a period they were veiled in mist and he could no see them. So Christ does not release us from the necessity of holding ourselves at times austerely to the path of duty; He does not lift us out of the turnip fields; but He does set the whole thing within a new context, a new horizon, of confidence in God and reconciliation to all His appointments as the appointments of a wholly trustworthy and wise love. Every

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situation is now girdled with the everlasting hills of God. Within that context the austerest resolutions and endurances of the soul becomes possible; but they do not cease to be necessary. The victory is given, but the need for fighting a good fight, without which indeed the idea of victory is without meaning, is not taken away.

III

Which brings us to the second point—the place of the thought of reward in the reconciled Christian life.

The thought of reward, of the joy that is set before us, is right and proper for the steadying of the Christian life if it enters in the right and proper way. It must enter as part of that same larger context in which Christ has set all our tasks, as part of the hills to which we lift our eyes. To affirm that reward in heaven awaits all faithful discipleship to Christ is simply one way of affirming that in Christ there has been given in very truth the final revelation of the eternal, unchanging, finally victorious purpose of the Most High. If it be said that I ought to seek the good for its own sake, and its own sake alone, the reply is: How can I seek the good for its own sake if at the end, for all I know, it may prove to be only a will-of-the-wisp dipping and dancing prettily over the bog? Before it can command my utmost allegiance I must know that it transcends myself; that it has within it the promise of something even more lovely and worth while; that it is not subject to this corroding tooth of time, but is of the eternal. I must know, in short, that the faithful pursuit of the things of Christ runs out into what is not illegitimately called "reward." It is surely part of Christ's work for us that He is able continually to renew in us the assurance that there is ultimate victory for that divine love and holiness which He now asks us to serve at whatever cost in this sinful and shadowed world; that in that victory we ourselves shall have part. So far from it being selfishness to look for future reward in this sense, it is the only thing that can lift us above selfishness, and enable us to give ourselves without reservation and without calculation to following Him come what may.

IV

This indeed is precisely the theme of this whole passage from which the verse from which we started is taken; broadly speaking it is the theme of the whole Epistle to the Hebrews. The writer is desperately anxious that these Christians to whom he is writing should in a time of tremendous testing remain faithful to Christ. He summons them again and again to an utter and renewed dedication to Him, to a new acceptance of the costingness of it, to a new girding up of their loins in disciplined duty. There is almost a grim note at times. He wants them to hold on come

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what may, to endure; even, he says, "to resist unto blood." And yet he never supposes that a mere demand of that kind is enough. It could not be enough because mere demand, even demand in the name of Christ, is not Gospel. So he bids them, even as the worker in the drudgery of the fields lifted up his eyes to the horizon hills, lift up their eyes to Jesus, who Himself endured because of His unclouded vision of God and of God's victory, and who has now become part of the vision of God for them. The image he uses is the familiar one of the race-course. How can a man hope to win the race if because of the bleakness of the air he will not strip himself, or if he will not again and again summon from within himself by sheer will, in spite of throbbing heart and cracking muscles and an infinite desire to stop and be again at ease, every last pulse of energy in his being? Yet also how can he do that if he is not deep down convinced that the race is worth winning and capable of being won, that the track is not a moving ribbon for ever slipping back and leaving him just where he was? So it is with the Christian life, save that here the race-track crosses the limits of time and runs away into the heart of eternity. And at the far end of it there is Christ set down at the right hand of God.

PART IV THE HEALING CROSS

XVI

JUDGING IN THE LIGHT OF THE CROSS

"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh."—2 CORINTHIANS V. 16.

It is often supposed that the power of Christ to fashion men and women into likeness to Himself is mediated primarily through the feelings and the emotions. This is a mistake. Far more than we commonly realize, the first step to the transforming of our inner motives and outward relationships in any situation is something which Christ does, if we will let Him, in the sphere of thought and judgement.

The necessity of setting a first emphasis on judgement is shown by some considerations concerning feeling and emotion.

Ι

Thus, in the first place, emotion, if it be healthy and not merely the outcome of some obscure neurotic state, always springs from, and remains dependent on, our apprehensions of the world about us. Feeling needs a concrete stimulus to bring it into being. It is impossible to sit down, close the eyes, think of a person, and "will" ourselves into kind feelings towards him—

least of all if he happens to be a person whom we have reason to dislike. Feeling of any sort, being rooted in our instinctive nature, is not thus within our immediate control. To change a man's feelings it is necessary to change his world, to present him with a new fact or a new understanding of facts. A mere exhortation is certainly not enough. If this be so, it follows that if Christ is going to evoke in us a love for men which we would not otherwise feel, He must introduce into our perception of men a new factor which would not otherwise be there. He must bring it about that we first of all *judge* our fellows differently.

Again, emotion is far too intermittent, unpredictable, unreliable, to be by itself the basis of Christian character and conduct. Being so dependent upon impressions, it is always apt to be determined by the coarser and stronger impression of the moment. Before we are aware of it almost, our finer feelings are swept away by primitive instinct, stimulated by some pungent fact in our immediate environment. Even St. Francis found himself instinctively moving away from the leper whom he suddenly encountered. What can save us from such weakness and instability? The only thing to do is to pause and think ourselves and the people we are dealing with into a totally new light, so that the old feeling begins to die away and a new one to take its place in response to what is now, in effect, a totally new situation. This is, we may conceive, what St.

Francis did. He thought Christ into relation with that leper, and so altered the total situation to which he was reacting. Then he went back and kissed the leper. His first feeling sprang from an incomplete apprehension of the facts, from, in short, a wrong judgement; and the work of Christ was to correct that judgement and so correct the feeling attached to it. And this, we believe, Christ can do in relation to any situation, thus giving our higher impulses a permanence and a reliability which they would otherwise lack. By dealing thus with our judgement, He deals with something which is at our disposal and in our control in a way that emotion never is.

Finally, emotion is, in its very nature, peculiarly liable to self-deception. When we are possessed by any strong impulse, its very strength predisposes the mind to make judgements in favour of it. A powerful emotion, even of a manifestly undesirable kind, can very swiftly corrupt the conscience, and drag the judgement at its own smoking chariot-wheels. Or-to change the metaphor—like a hot sun it quickly draws from the corrupt soil of our nature a mighty crop of plausible excuses, and before long we are doing or saying unworthy things almost with an air of virtue. Wherefore it is a great and necessary work which Christ does for us, that He contrives to introduce into our minds a new principle of judgement of such force that if we but turn our minds to it—our ultimate freedom lies in the power we have to turn attention this way or that

—it begins to dispel even the most plausible and subtle sophistications of our lower nature. The older I get, the more fundamental and indispensable I see this to be. Christ must do many things, doubtless, to lift this poverty-stricken affair I call my soul to something higher, but one thing He must do, and that is get inside my mind, and protect me from this miserable business of excuse-making and self-deception. He must put salt in my judgement and so keep it pure.

II

How?

The Apostle Paul himself gives the answer in these verses. Speaking of the change which Christ can make in the character and conduct of men, whereby they become a new creature in Christ, no longer living unto themselves, he relates it to Christ's death on the Cross. and proceeds: "wherefore henceforth we know no man after the flesh," or, as Moffatt translates: "I estimate no man by what is external." Does not this mean that if we set men alongside the Cross, instantly they are seen in a different light, they are judged differently, and the whole of our emotional response to them begins to change as a result? Nor, in the nature of the case, can any individual, whatever his character or whatever our relationship to him, prove an exception to this. In the presence of the Cross all men are reduced to a level. A piercing X-ray strikes down from the

Cross through all the external wrappings, all those surface qualities to which our feelings so quickly respond, and lays bare the one essential thing—namely, that this man, any man, every man, is just a poor sinner needing desperately, and being offered, the forgiving love of God.

The only way rightly to change feeling is to change judgement, to put things in a new light; and the only way rightly to change judgement in the sphere of personal relations is to see every man sub specie crucis—in the light of the Cross.

There has indeed been enough talk about brotherhood since the time of the Stoics to have transformed the world a thousand times over-if talk could ever do it. It is the easiest of all idealisms to preach, the hardest of all to practise. So long as it remains mere talk, mere idea, it is powerless. The imagination must be fired. The mind must be given a concrete, living, irresistible illuminating fact to set alongside every situation and every person in it, so that their real quality in relation to the mind and purpose of God can be seen. We have all of us long since learnt that it is no use setting an individual, to whom we are finding it desperately hard to have even the rudiments of Christian feeling, alongside the bare idea of brotherly love. But pause for a moment; visualize the Cross of Christ—those outstretched arms and pierced hands, grasping, as it were, the crowd of men and women at its foot-set the man, hateful as he is to you, in the midst

of that crowd and he begins to look different. Is he great and powerful? Why, sub specie crucis, even a Cæsar looks miserable and poor and blind and naked like the rest—a sinner for whom Christ died. Is he mean and degraded—a poisoner, perhaps, whom society has cast out like some foul impurity and intends in a few days to strangle in a pit? He is still, none the less, a living spirit, rich enough in promise and destiny for One at least to die for him.

It may be objected that such a picture of the Cross of Christ is hardly less "bare idea" than the thought of brotherly love. It is only a thought, at best an imagination, in the mind. The answer is that that is not so. It is part of the uniqueness of Christ that that is not so, as was insisted on in an earlier chapter. But the only proof that it is not so is experimental. Only those who humbly keep company with Christ in their minds know that thought of Him is never bare thought, but always carries some of the piercing light of God Himself.

III

But there is something even more to be said. It is impossible to take the other man with any sincerity into the presence of the Cross without taking oneself there also. It is impossible to see him in a new light without seeing oneself in a new light. You must stand there with him. Then not only does he begin to look

different, but your own shabby and paltry egotism and vanity, your own hot, instinctive, and usually childish, emotions, look different also. They begin to look what they are—shabby and paltry and childish. And by way of contrast the way of love, so clearly and piercingly exemplified on Calvary, is seen as the only thing in human life that has any final worth or dignity in it at all. Something deep within the soul stirs, begins to break through the crust of all its evil and egocentric feelings and desires, and says, there beyond question is the fulfilment of every finer movement and stirring of my spirit towards God; there is the ultimate, divine meaning of being a man; there is the only thing that really matters—everything else, however immediately attractive and stimulating, being, apart from it, but tinsel and tawdry nothingness. Paul was surely standing right at the foot of the Cross when he wrote I Corinthians xiii., when he cried, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am nothing."

Beyond question this is so, though the proof of it, we repeat, is only to be found in making experiment of it, patient experiment, for our whole personal world is in far greater and more obstinate darkness than we realize. Let a man keep alongside Jesus Christ in the innermost places of the heart and the miracle of re-creation must go on. He, and above all His Cross, is assuredly Light, for Light is at one and the same time the principle of Exposure and the principle of Life.

THE LAST JUDGEMENT

nent than nature or society, something eternal, something outlasting this temporal sphere altogether. The effect of these beliefs is inevitably to make more searching and solemn this principle of judgement, which everybody must admit to be present in life in some sense or other.

For if God judges, then He judges everything, even those things which might elude any serious consequences in nature or society. He judges the innermost motions of the heart, the trend of the whole character, and He judges by the standard of His own austere holiness. And if man has something eternal in him, if he is destined for something outlasting this world, then what he does with his life becomes correspondingly important. A human spirit becoming good, or becoming bad, is not merely a transient and casual phenomenon in time, which in due course vanishes, leaving things pretty much as they were. It is something of the most serious and overwhelming significance, touching eternity. It is such thoughts as these which have always found expression in, and sustained, the picture of the Last Judgement in the religious man's mind. It is a symbol, a picture, expressing as only a picture can a whole constellation of religious insights. God's Last Judgement! Inasmuch as it is affirmed to be God's, it is affirmed to be inescapable and searchingly complete. Inasmuch as it is affirmed to be last, it is affirmed to be of the most critical importance. Inasmuch as it is affirmed to lie beyond this life, it is

XVII

THE LAST JUDGEMENT

"Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Verily I say unto you Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."—MATTHEW XXV. 44-5.

TOWEVER we choose to express it, and whatever **L** emphasis in relation to other things we choose to give it, some thought of judgement, God's judgement, must enter into any complete and seriously held Christian view of life. There is a sense, of course, in which anybody who looks at facts frankly must believe that there is a principle of judgement at work in life. It is not necessary to be a Christian, it is not even necessary to believe in God, to see that. Nature punishes sin, society punishes it; not always justly, immediately, or exhaustively, but they do punish it, in some degree and in one way or another. The Christian, however, goes far beyond this in his thought of judgement. For he believes that man is not merely related to nature and society, but also to God. He believes that man is destined to something more perma1

In this familiar passage Christ Himself has given us a picture of the Last Judgement. Being a picture, created to express as well as may be some of the deepest insights of His spirit, all the detail need not be taken in strict literality. Quite plainly Jesus endorses in it all those thoughts of judgement of which we have spoken. There *is* a divine judgement, inescapable, complete. It concerns eternal things. It is critical for the soul to a degree which cannot be exaggerated. But more than that, Jesus here answers the all-important question: What is the standard of judgement by which God judges? This is, after all, what we most need to know.

What strikes us at once is the simplicity of the standard. It is helpfulness and kindness to one another, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick. One question only God asks: To what extent have you been a helper, a burden-bearer, a centre of active sympathy and service and love in the midst of your fellows? God's interest, in other words, is not in men's social rank, or mental gifts, or the orthodoxy or unorthodoxy of their beliefs, or their race, or sex, or any other thing. Every ordinary human title to honour and reward is completely brushed on one side. The question is simply: did

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you, or did you not, lend a helping hand in every case of need that came your way? According as the life answers that question, so it is divinely and eternally judged. You may bring forward as many other considerations as you like; you may point to all sorts of useful by-products for the benefit of mankind which may have sprung from your so notable career; yet if there was not in your heart in its immediate personal relationships a genuine spirit of helpfulness and love, it will count for nothing. Let Dives make out a case, if he will, for the beneficial consequences of having wealthy men like himself in the State; do not they provide capital, run government, foster culture? Yet the fact remains, and it is the decisive and damning fact, that Lazarus lay at his gate full of sores and he took no heed.

Now there is something in us that responds instantly to this. We feel the essential truth of it. After all, we say, what does anything matter, except helping one another along the way? We like the simplification it brings to the issues of life. No need to worry about our brains, our income, our creeds, about anything except giving the cup of water to the thirsty. We like the democratic flavour of it; rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief—the only thing that matters is being a good "pal." We like, finally, and are much comforted by, the apparent easiness of the standard. Surely we can all make up our minds to

be a little more brotherly, to seize every opportunity of lending a helping hand, and so to approve ourselves for all eternity in the sight of God. How wonderful Jesus is, reducing all the issues of time, judgement and eternity to such a simple basis, and how the Church has misrepresented Him, with its creeds, its sacraments, its priesthood, its vast ecclesiastical arrangements, and all the rest!

Yet that surely is to run on much too fast, to succumb to the most shallow and superficial impressions. Christ's picture of judgement is anything but easy and comforting. On the contrary it is, when it is taken seriously and related to things as they are, almost terrifying. It opens up the whole terrible problem of human sinfulness, and it has at the very heart of it the Cross.

II

Consider, first, the absolute universality of the divine imperative and standard of love as set forth in Christ's picture. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the *least*..." Least—in what sense? Least, of course, according to human classification. In that little word our obstinate tendency to label and classify people, and to make exceptions accordingly to the imperative of love, is set entirely on one side. There is, indeed, no need to malign ourselves in this matter. In most of us there is not a radical deficiency in kindheartedness and helpfulness. That is why this picture

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appeals to us. But the trouble is that such kindly instincts are hemmed in and deflected by all kinds of other things—fear, greed, private ambition, personal likes and dislikes, class distinctions, national hysterias, social and political machinery, and so on. Never has it been a simple and easy thing to love, in a way that might even begin to pass the scrutiny of God, the man whom we dislike, the man who has done us injury, the man with a black skin, the man whom society has condemned and cast out, the man whose political opinions we detest. These are familiar enough thoughts, but they go right to the heart of our perpetual helplessness to make anything really worthy of our human relationships, and they show that it is the sheerest sentimental self-deception to suppose that Christ's picture of Judgement is on the whole a genial and encouraging one.

Then consider something even more searching and disturbing. According to Christ's picture, it is not merely those relationships with others of which we are aware, but also those of which we are not aware which determine the judgement passed. The element of surprise in the question, "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred?" taken strictly refers only to the fact that these people were unaware that in their acts of helpfulness or unhelpfulness they were doing something to the King Himself, but there is surely more in it than that. The thought surely springs in part from Jesus' whole

conception of human goodness or badness as something which flows spontaneously and inevitably, almost unwittingly, out of the deep, inner attitudes of the heart. There is in fact implied in this apparently so simple picture that whole doctrine of human sinfulness, surely the only true one, which sees in it something most deeply inrooted in human nature, affecting the innermost sources of all its active life and blinding it again and again to the real significance of what it does.

This blinding effect of human sinfulness is further implied in the last and most disturbing thing of all—the suggestion, namely, that in all our dealings with men and women we are dealing with the Lord Himself, though we know it not. This is a thought the daringness and challenge of which are masked by its familiarity. Incidentally it might be taken to throw some light, the more impressive for being indirect, on Jesus' view of the unique significance of His own Person. Be that as it may, it is a most troubling thought. Unless Jesus is dwelling in a world of pure fantasy then I have to face the fact that more than once, though I have not known it, I have in very truth, not metaphorically, not in a mere façon de parler, smitten Christ, smitten God. I have crucified the Lord.

III

No, this is certainly not an easy-going, simplifying picture of judgement, one to make us all feel a bit more

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cheery about things. It is austere and searching, and few of us could stand up to it. Few could go into such an examination with jaunty hearts, or come out of it without a cry for mercy and pardon. Why, out of this whole understanding of God there springs Calvary itself! It was because Jesus saw how high and searching the divine standard is, and how incurably blind and impotent men are to understand and achieve it, that He was forced to the necessity of a supreme act of surrender and suffering in Himself in order to tear the veil from men's eyes and to lay bare to them what every cruelty and wrong does to the very heart of God. In the words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," is revealed one of the deepest and most awful motives of the Cross. The essential, the revealing, the atoning anguish of Calvary is not in the physical agony. Others have suffered physically as much. It is that in and through what they did to Him, His mighty heart of love gathered to itself all that men do to one another, and doing to one another, do to God. He felt as His "the starving of the poor, the shadow of curse on all, hard words, hard looks and savage misery, and struggling deaths unpitied and unwept, rich brothers' sad satieties, the weary manner of their lives and deaths that want in love, and lacking love lack all, the heavy sorrow of the world, the horror of the things our brothers bear, the woe of things

we make our brothers bear, our brothers and our sisters." 1

Yet, finally, this must be said. There is an element of comfort in this vision of the judgement of God when it is thus set in the whole context of the revelation of Christ, albeit a comfort far enough from that shallow and easy-going sort to which our minds so swiftly fly. If it speaks of a Holy Love which judges and condemns, it speaks also of a Holy Love which suffers and bears. Here we glimpse the ultimate paradox of the Cross and that which makes it a true and not a spurious and make-believe gospel—that it unites the most damning judgement upon man with the most overwhelming concern for him in the weakness and blindness of his loveless heart. To those to whom it is given to see, it is at once a condemnation and a hope, a disturbance and a giving of peace such as nothing else in the world can give. To realize that what men do to one another they do to the Lord, that the Crucifixion is still going on, as for example in Spain and China, not to speak of other places, is to sensitize the heart even more to all its unspeakable wickedness and horror; yet also it is to introduce a ray of hope into the almost unrelieved darkness. Somehow, though let it never be said glibly and without the most searching penitence, the wickedness of man rests upon God. What men do to one another they do to Him.

XVIII

THE PASSION NOT PASSIVE

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."—Colossians ii. 14–15.

THIS is an aspect of the Cross which is often overlooked, namely, that whatever else it was, it was victory, a manifestation of power. In the Cross Christ is, according to the Apostle, blotting things out, nailing things down into impotence and ineffectiveness, spoiling, making a show of and triumphing over, principalities and powers.

That this aspect of the Cross can easily be over-looked will be evident if we observe our own minds. When we contemplate the crucifixion of the Master our tendency is to think of Him primarily as passive, as bowing His head in meek submission to this storm which the wickedness of man and the inscrutable permissions of God had let loose upon Him. Yet clearly the Apostle's words do not fit such a picture at all. They imply that He was active, resistant, on the

¹ From The Death of St. Francis, by H. S. Cripps. 168

offensive, not receiving blows but giving them, not having the floods go over Him but breasting them like a strong swimmer. We think of Him as being nailed to the Cross by cunning injustice and brutal force. No, says the Apostle in effect, that is not so, or rather it is only the outward appearance of things; get down to the underlying reality and behold it is Jesus who is doing the nailing all the time.

T

This New Testament apprehension of the note of vigorous activity and victory in the passion of Christ was apparently only gradually lost from the thought of the Church. Early pictorial representations of the Cross, we are told, all endeavoured to convey the impression of kingly triumph. The figure was usually crowned and anything which might suggest a drooping and pathetic passivity was absent. The Lord of life reigned even in the midst of death. Doctrines of the atonement usually circled around the idea of a splendid victory won over the evil one. It was in mediæval times that the crucifix as we know it, giving unconsciously a wrong trend to our thoughts, became common—the crucifix which shows a limp, pain-drenched, pathetic figure.

Nor can there be any question which of the two representations is the more true to the facts. If we look at the Gospel story of the Passion as a whole

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and do not isolate the Cross from its context, one of the most impressive and revealing things in it is the air of strong deliberation and mastery which characterizes Jesus throughout those last days. He is so manifestly not in the least a straw on the stream of events; He is controlling the stream of events. His enemies are not manipulating Him so much as He is manipulating them, not in any wrong way, but in the way in which God does lay hold of the wrath and sin of man and make them subserve His infinite purpose of love. To the end He could have escaped the Cross by the simple expedient of going somewhere else; but He did not do so. He deliberately directs His steps to it. There is an atmosphere of mastery all about Him as He steadfastly sets His face towards Jerusalem. Standing before the council, or before Pilate, there is no suggestion of fumbling or hesitancy. Nor on the other hand is there any suggestion of a merely excited and fanatical confidence. It is the other people who are excited, not He. And it is always the excited people who are the weak people. He says almost regally, "No man taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself." He says-very plainly, quietly, with the direct steadiness of clear-sighted conviction— "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power." The hereafter refers to their seeing. He Himself sees now. He is conscious of being in a very real sense at the right hand of power now, He is with God now, the victory is His now.

The same masterful attitude of mind is revealed in His refusal to take the drug which was offered to Him. That surely gives us a glimpse of the innermost places of His mind. He has no intention of being carried through this thing on an anæsthetic. He will not swoon through it. He will not have His "eyes bandaged" and "creep past." So when they offer Him wine mingled with myrrh He receives it not. There is again something almost regal in the refusal. And we may be thankful that He did refuse. Had we to believe that His spirit was clouded by a drug, the Cross would lose something of its power to reveal the very heart of God, for there is no drug, no anodyne, for God in respect of the burden sin lays upon Him. And yet we may be thankful that the drug was offered even if it was refused. The refusal shows that we are not reading significances into the Cross, but that Christ was deliberately and consciously intending significances to be read. The Passion is not passive; there is in it an active purpose which has no intention of losing at any point its grip of the situation.

What then of the cry of dereliction?—" My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Where is the note of victory in that? One hesitates to speak of this so solemn and tragic moment, yet the more one ponders it, the more one feels that that cry, so far from minimiz-

ing the impression of active power and victory, contributes to it. For it gives us a measure of the frightful force of the challenge which met Him and therefore also of the spiritual power in Him which overcame it. For surely those are right who see infinite significance in the fact that the cry was still to "My God." God was still the great overshadowing Reality, the great Reality moreover from whom He would permit no other reality, however momentarily overwhelming, to separate Him. This cry was surely not one of defeat, but was rather the deepest activity of faith thrusting through the final darkness to God.

II

Has this anything to say to us? Much in every way, for whatever is shown to us in the Cross must lie at the very centre of the life of faith. We choose two things.

First, it makes a very great difference indeed to the whole temper and tone of the spiritual life to have at the heart of it the awareness, continually renewed, of God as active Holy Will dealing with us. Far more than we realize our minds are controlled, indeed blinded, by another kind of thought concerning God, the thought of Him, that is, as a sort of reservoir of spiritual force, a repository of what we vaguely call values or ideals, a more or less quiescent overworld, which we have to seek out, and explore, and draw strength from, in the

cultivation of ourselves as Christian people. The thought of Him as an active insistency of will, of love, of holy purpose seeking us before ever we seek Him, knocking at our door, searching our being, challenging the will with His will, is absent, with the result that the whole religious life, which theoretically is concerned with the most important things in the world, wears a most curious air of unconcern and tranquillity. Few would get the impression that it is in any sense whatever a critical thing, still less a fearful thing, to fall into the hands of the living God. Yet a moment's quiet experimental meditation is enough to show that it is one thing thus to direct the mind to God with a predominant sense of your own activity, you doing a bit of spiritual self-culture, and another thing to direct it to God with a predominant sense of His activity, as of one who is on the highway coming to meet you and to speak with you.

And the matter can be best tested and verified precisely in relation to the Cross. How great the difference between contemplating the Cross of our Lord, being a spectator of it, even though it be a very earnest spectator anxious to learn from it, and apprehending in it the activity of His mighty spirit of holiness and love towards mankind and therefore towards you. Apprehending that, you cease to be a spectator and become involved in a tremendous and most critical personal relationship. From being a merely solemnizing and

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subduing spectacle it becomes a crisis, an inescapable challenge from the Christ to you. In the one case you see only the limp pain-drenched victim of the traditional crucifix; you may even begin to sentimentalize about it, to speak of the pity and pathos of it, as some of our hymns and cantatas do. In the other case you see, as the New Testament sees, not a victim but One who in the midst of crucifixion is King, the Wisdom and the Power of God. In like manner there is great difference between coming to that central rite of the Church which celebrates the death of the Lord with the thought that thus we symbolically express certain noble and final truths concerning God and the real values of life, and coming to it with the thought that in some real sense we are to be present, as in the body itself, at that first supper-table and to hear as though it were directly said to our own ears, as though also He were looking into our eyes as He did into the eyes of Peter and James and John, "Take eat, this is my Body which is broken for you."

III

The second thing is this. We are to think, not only of the activity of the Crucified towards us, but also of His activity through us towards all mankind. We are to think, that is to say, of His Church, the Fellowship of His people, for all its weakness and imperfection, as part of His masterful and victorious

assault, culminating in Calvary, upon the evil of the world. This is certainly the New Testament thought of the Church, daring as it is. According to the New Testament, the Kingdom of God, by which is meant the victorious rule of God, broke into human history in an entirely new and decisive way in the advent of Christ; it established itself, we might even use the modern jargon and say it "dug itself in," through His life and supremely through His Cross; and it is still working undefeated and undefeatable in the midst of all the chaos of human life, towards some final and as yet unimaginable consummation. Part of this realized, though in another sense not yet fully realized, this already victorious yet still conquering, saving purpose of God in history through Christ is the existence of the Church.

No doubt this is a very high view of the Church. No doubt it strikes us at first as almost wildly discordant with the facts of the Church's life as we know it. Yet there is no denying that it is the New Testament view of the Church, and that any other view is incompatible with the faith that its Crucified Lord was and is the Power and Wisdom of God. Nor is there any denying that in these days any other view of the Church, any other faith than one which is thus able to rest quietly on the confidence that the victory is with the Crucified—because in Him God Himself began masterfully to take the whole situation in hand

—is not adequate to the facts. In this modern world of vast and uncontrollable forces sweeping like a great tide through the seas of human history we must above all else recover the sense of the Church's cosmic significance and dimension, and, on the same cosmic scale, of the certain victory of the Christ who called it into being. We are compelled in these days to think in world terms, whether we like or not. It does not suffice any longer, if it ever sufficed, merely to think of Christ as winning the victory in my life, as having loved me, though it is always quite indispensable to be able so to think; it is indispensable, but not sufficient. We must think also of His overcoming of the world and of His love to the world. "God so loved the world."

To think thus of the Church which we know is to make upon it a judgement of faith. Yet faith is not merely a polite name for believing what we want to believe, for refusing to face plain facts. Faith is the power to see through the appearances to the deeper underlying realities, the realities which nothing can finally shake or defeat. Yet the power so to see is not one which we with our confused and evil natures, in this most confused and evil world, can command at will. The deeper vision is given us, and continually renewed in us, I know not how, by Christ and above all by those tremendous last days of His life. In the presence of Calvary we are confronted by an inescapable alternative: either this was defeat, defeat final and

absolute, or it was victory. And the answer rises unbidden from the depths of the soul, given by that Spirit which it was promised should take of the things of Christ and show them unto us,—this was, this is, this will be victory. This Man is Master.

IV

I have on my wall a picture of what has always seemed to me to be the right sort of crucifix. The head has not fallen forward; it is regally upright and strong. The eyes are not closed, but look down with an almost terrible steadiness and penetration as though piercing through, and challenging, every sham. Physically the figure is passive—Christ crucified; but in the face and above all in the eyes there is concentrated the inner spirit of the Son of God. It is the spirit of active, searching, victorious purpose. He reigns even on the Cross.

XIX

CRUCIFIED UNTO THE WORLD

"The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world."—GALATIANS vi. 14 (R.V.).

THESE are exceedingly strong words, and I suppose they could only be uttered with sincerity by one who, like the Apostle, has reached a superlatively high level of Christian character and discipleship. Yet that only makes them the more worthy of our consideration. In our spiritual journeying, as in other forms of journeying, we have to set our direction by the mountain tops or by the stars. It is precisely because they are above our heads that they are qualified to direct our feet.

Ι

What does the Apostle mean by the world? It is not unimportant to ask this question, for the word is often misinterpreted and misused by religious people. Deep and central in the Christian outlook is something which we call the renunciation of the world,

something which is irreconcilably opposed to a spirit which we call worldliness. But what is this world which must be renounced, this worldliness which must be opposed? Quite certainly it is not a matter of not permitting ourselves to be interested in, to delight in, this world considered as a work of the Creator. Nothing could be farther from the mind of Paul than that. To be crucified to the world did not mean for Paul to cease to delight in all the order and beauty of natural things, the light of setting suns, and the round ocean, and the living air, and the blue sky, and the green earth. Writing to the Romans Paul said, using the word "world" in this other and more genial sense, "the invisible things of God since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity." There is no thought in these words of being crucified to the world, any more than there was in the mind of the Master when He delighted in the beauty of the flowers of the field.

Nor again is the world, or the spirit of worldliness, to be identified with the genial pleasures of human life and society. That there is a danger in the more immediately and superficially pleasurable things of life is, of course, a commonplace. Pleasures so swiftly become ends in themselves. But it is certainly not the Christian view to lump all delights, even the shallower and more frivolous delights, together, and label them

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as being "of the world." This is only worth saying because such misconceived notions of worldliness still linger on in many of our consciences, or what we think to be such, even though we repudiate them in our minds and by our deeds. When Paul speaks of being crucified to the world, it is all too easy for the mind to be clouded to the searching thing he is saying by a vague picture of an emaciated anchorite fleeing on his spindle legs from all the dear delights of life and calling others to do the same. Such ideas of the Christian spirit are utterly remote from, are indeed gross caricatures of what the Apostle is thinking of—utterly remote from the mind of Christ.

What then is meant by the world? John has given in his first epistle a definition which is assuredly not far from the mind of Paul. He says it is "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life." What exactly John meant by these phrases, and what illustrations he would have given from the life of his own time, it is impossible to say. But in a general way the matter is clear. It is a question of the inner motives and desires which actually dominate and set the direction of the life whatever may be its merely external poses and professions.

II

The desire of the flesh: what is that but the continuous, subtle pull of the body on a man's conduct, 181

swerving again and again, without his knowing it, the whole direction of the life—all the body's instinct after comfort and self-maintenance, and away from pain and hardness and self-denial? A man has not conquered the body merely because he is not troubled by its grosser appetites, or because now that his income is less he cannot pamper it so much. Even to loll in an arm-chair when one ought to be somewhere else is, when all is said and done by way of excuse, the lust of the flesh. The body, like the devil, is a past-master in the art of disguise. He is not the ass St. Francis declared him to be. He is subtle. And in these days, perhaps even more than in the days of the Apostle, he rules the lives of men. One of the keywords of our modern civilization is comfort. Another is "Keeping fit." We speak of a rise in the standard of living. But what is the standard? Do we mean a rise in men's capacity for high thinking, noble giving and austere self-control? Not at all. We mean almost wholly and exclusively a rise in the standard of comfort. The word is symptomatic of

And then the lust of the eyes: what is that but the deep-seated impulse of acquisitiveness, covetousness—the desire to grasp as much as possible of the good things which this life immediately offers, and which we can see other people striving after all around

our whole attitude. It is the pull of the body. It is

active all the time.

us? It is the lure of the immediate, the subtle thought, which we hardly ever put into explicit terms, but which is not the less operative for that, that after all we pass this way but once and unless we grasp all we can of what is now visible and within our reach we shall miss so much. The attitude can be observed in a crude form in children. A bright and glittering object is presented to the eyes and the hand instantly goes out to grasp. Countless adult folk have never really got beyond such an infantile attitude, though they may exercise it in a more refined way. There comes an opportunity to acquire some glittering object, and without more ado it is seized, with little or no thought of any moral and spiritual implications. One of the troubles of our time is the way in which people, directly they get money, will spend it on whatever they may desire, without any consideration of the economic and social consequences of what they do in the lives of others. They just see a glittering thing and go after it. It is the lust of the eye.

And then there is the vainglory of life—the self-conceit, the desire for praise and deference, the delight of being thought an important and significant person, of wielding power over others, of being in the limelight; all the empty vanities of fashion and custom and title and office and uniform and status, the little snobbish impostures into which men tumble before ever they are aware of it. It matters not that our

circumstances are narrow, the stage on which we play our part small and hidden. It matters not that we know in our heart of hearts that when we come before God it will all avail us nothing. The mean little ego will still have us out on our stage, prancing and strutting and posturing, even though he be the only spectator.

Why then does the Apostle call all this sort of thing —the lure of the body, the covetousness of the eye, the pride of life—the "world"? The word "world" conveys the idea of organized power, something larger than the individual in which the individual is, and by which he is continually influenced and shaped. This is important. We have not seen the real problem of the moral and spiritual emancipation of men, until we realize that the desire of the body, the desire of the eye, and the vainglory of life are a world in this sense. These distorted visions, false ambitions, wrong ideals, impostures and unrealities, have constructed a social organism in harmony with themselves which begins at once to bind and shape every new life which is born into it. That is what makes the problem of our regeneration so difficult. All the time we are being subjected to the influences, so subtle and unnoticed many of them, of a society, a world, built up on these perverted values of comfort and acquisition and vainglorious reputation. You thrust it out of your being at one point, and it has crept in at another. Quite

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plainly, to get a man out of this world or system, to emancipate him from all these false values, is going to be a tremendous operation. It will need to be drastic, violent, decisive. We have only to look into our own hearts to know that.

III

The greatness of the problem, the drastic vigour of the emancipating act, if it is to break through such systematized and ingrained illusions, is reflected in the word Paul uses-crucified! I am crucified to the world and the world unto me. We have not in our modern English a word with something of the grim and crashing absoluteness of this word "crucified." "Crucified" signifies the last and most irrevocable degree of mutual separation and repugnancy. It signifies, too, something of the violence required to bring about that separation. To pass from the fundamental spirit of the world to the spirit of Christ is not a matter of easy growth, gentle transition, natural evolution. It is not a matter of polite and mutual tolerance, an agreement to differ, as gentlemen should, on one or two more or less important points. It is an uprooting, rending, tearing, splitting and breaking, surgical-operation kind of thing, a mutual crucifixion, with nails and spears and agony and death. We do not easily think in these days in such violent metaphors, but there is truth in them. There is nobody who knows his own heart, and the kind of values which rule the whole structure of our civilized life, who does not also know that we shall never be saved into anything like the mind of Christ by gentle and beautiful exhortations, eloquent appeals to our better nature, church services however glorious, courses of moral exercise however cunningly devised. Something more violent is necessary—more shaking, more surgical, more calculated to make a man start away in a sort of recoil from himself; something which he can come back to again and again.

That something—the Apostle's tremendous words suggest—is given in the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

I set the Cross with its physical agony alongside the desire of the body—my love of comfort, my continuous excuses for avoiding anything which may spoil that comfort. I set the Cross with all the naked and outcast poverty of it, the running out of a glorious life in premature death for the sake of a distant vision, beside my desire of the eye, my instant, childish itch to grasp any visible good thing, to enlarge and expand my present state, my fear to let the immediate delight go for a remoter and uncertain ideal, my subtle and permeating acquisitiveness. I set the Cross with its loneliness and shame alongside the empty vanities with which my beloved ego decks me out, even if it be only on the little stage my situation allows me. I remind myself that this is He whom

I call Lord and for a moment, at least, I see myself as I am. I despise myself.

And this also I see with overwhelming clearness, that it was the desire of the body, all the subtle lure and pull of it towards comfort and self-preservation, the desire of the eye, the grasping, greedy, thoughtless acquisitiveness of men for the goods of this life, the vainglory of life, which crucified Him. Many years ago there was a picture in the Academy entitled, "Were you there when they crucified the Lord?" In the centre was the Cross, and all around it was a crowd of modern folk symbolizing in various ways the perverted values which rule our modern life. I was there when they crucified the Lord. I helped to do it.

Every man should carry, if only in the pocket of his mind, a crucifix, and should train himself when need arises to take it out and look at it. When the lure of the body, the desire of the eye, the vain ambitions of the heart are stirring within him, let him take it out and read written under it, "So you were there when they crucified the Lord."

IV

Yet that is not all. Our emancipation from the world, our cleansing from its false values, is not complete, touching the deeps of our being, if we are forced merely to a detestation of ourselves. When we have

faced the question, when we have been constrained to answer in a bleak moment of sincerity, "I was there when they crucified the Lord, I am there when they crucify the Lord," what then? Well, if we are hearing God's word to us in the Cross of Christ, it would be well to hear the whole of it. We are not meant to ignore the prayer that rose out of His mighty spirit for those that crucified Him—" Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Was that prayer unanswered? Is it not rather the divine spirit of forgiveness itself, which in its very condemnation, by its very condemnation, is seeking to heal? And dare we not think that there was another prayer, prayed later even for Judas when he cried, "I have betrayed innocent blood,"--" Father, forgive him, for he now knows what he has done."

XX

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

"And they all forsook him, and fled."—MARK xiv. 50.

THERE is no aspect of the Master's life more ▲ impressive and more solemnizing than its increasing loneliness. The supporting companionships of men are withdrawn one by one from him. As the end approaches a wider and wider space seems to clear about Him until there is left only the gaunt and dreadful isolation of the Cross. There is a certain symbolism in the fact that they left Him to die on the summit of a hill so that our last vision of Him is against the background of the empty sky. It represents physically the climax of spiritual isolation. There was no one at that stage who understood. Quite early His own mother and brethren had judged that He was mad. The common folk had first flocked to Him, and then, as He steadfastly refused to fulfil their low-pitched expectations, they had dissolved away. One of His chosen disciples betrayed Him; the rest, we are told in a single phrase, epitomizing so much, "all forsook him, and fled." He stands at

the end before the high-priest, before Pilate, in the midst of the coarse, brutal, jeering soldiery, silent, solitary, in a crowd, yet in that most appalling of all solitudes, the solitude of human ostracism and human hate. Nor had it happened suddenly as by an unexpected turn of events. Even in the most intimate circle of His own disciples He was deeply and austerely conscious of it. "Behold the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, and shall leave me alone."

It is well to think for a little about this loneliness of Jesus.

1

And the first thing to be said is that we must be careful not to misinterpret or minimize it, pulling it down to our level.

It would be easy, for example, especially if we are of a certain temperament, to allow ourselves to grow a trifle pathetic and pitiful about Christ's loneliness. We might draw a most moving picture of a spirit hungry for love, for companionship, for human sympathy and appreciation and support, and yet receiving nothing but misunderstanding and treachery and hate; we might even succeed in working ourselves up to the point almost of tearfulness about it. How pathetic, how pitiful, this lonely *via dolorosa* of the Man of Sorrows! One becomes uncomfortably aware of such

an attitude in certain hymns. We are so manifestly asked to pity Christ. I read these words recently in a religious book: "In all the pathos of the Gospel story there is nothing so infinitely touching as the everincreasing loneliness of Christ." Pathos! Touching! I do not like the words. I set against them F. W. Robertson's protest in his famous sermon on this same subject:

There is a feeble and sentimental way in which we speak of Christ. We turn to the Cross, the agony, and the loneliness, to touch the softer feelings, to arouse compassion. You degrade that loneliness by your compassion. Compassion, compassion for Him! Adore if you will, but no pity.

The danger is that when we pity Christ in His loneliness we merely project into Him something of our own disordered feelings. Our pity for Him, if we are not very careful, is simply a disguised pity for ourselves. It is ourselves over whom we are growing tearful; down in the subtle, subconscious places of the mind we have presumed to see in this tremendous Christ a companion in distress with ourselves. We too have never been properly understood, never properly appreciated as we deserve, never even had justice! The pathos of it, the pitifulness of it, to ourselves! And here is Christ suffering the same thing. We will weep for Him too. He joins us in the great class of the unappreciated. Is that

all too harsh? If it is, let it pass. But I do know that whatever the sublime personality of Christ was meant for, it was not meant for pity. If you pity Christ you are not seeing Him. And if you are not seeing Him, what is standing in the way but your own clouded and self-projective mind? No, we must not call Christ's loneliness pathetic. We must not call it touching. F. W. Robertson is absolutely right there.

But again, if we must not pity Jesus in His loneliness, equally much we must not go to the other extreme and read it in terms of an unnaturally hard and iron strength. To do that is also to project into Him the fundamental weakness and stupidity of our own characters. The old Stoic idea that the soul becomes strong in proportion as it becomes aloof, proud, indifferent both to the loves and the hates of men, in proportion as it learns to despise the opinions of its fellows, still lingers on in many minds. The strong, silent man, who asks no counsel and craves no sympathy, who in stern self-reliance can endure without flinching the loss of every tender joy of human love and human companionship, is a pure fantasy creation of our weak and cringing and dependent minds, and finds his most appropriate place in the penny novelette. He could not exist. Or if he did exist, he would be utterly inhuman, and therefore in the end, despite his appearance of strength, utterly weak. Let us not picture the loneliness of Christ in such terms. It

would be easy indeed to draw a picture of Him standing up amidst this ever-increasing loneliness and misunderstanding with a certain stoic indifference and pride, a regal superiority, of the curling lip variety, to the plaudits or curses of men, a superb confidence in the resources of his own soul needing to draw nothing from the souls of others. Such a picture might thrill us and might even have a certain grandeur, but it would not be Jesus and there would not be in it either the depth or the real strength of Him. There would be absent from it what from beginning to end is the most amazing and distinctive thing in Jesus, His piercing and profound love for men.

There is still another way in which we might minimize the loneliness of Jesus. There is a sense, of course, in which loneliness is an essential element in every deep and developing spiritual and religious life. God's voice in the soul is always a profoundly personal and individual thing and it always in some measure detaches and isolates a man from his fellows. It is one condition of hearing God speak that you must stop listening to men, you must be willing in some sense to be by yourself and act for yourself. God can do nothing for you so long as you intend to have at all costs the warmth and protection of a crowd. In the solitary places of the human heart is to be found the meeting-place of God and man. The deeper a man's spiritual life, the more lonely, secret, incalculable

and independent it becomes; it draws its life from secret divine sources so that it is lifted up above the mere conformities and conventions of ordinary social life and human conduct. That there was this kind of deep, essential loneliness in the experience of the Master is certain. He who was nearest of all to the heart of God must again and again, in prayer and thought and moral choice, have passed into remote and holy solitudes where He was alone with God and whither we cannot follow. One thinks of those long nights spent in prayer on the hill-tops. What happened in them? We can never know. Yet though Jesus knew solitariness, as every deeply religious mind must know it, plainly there is more than that in this isolation of which we speak and which reached its climax in the Cross. We must not thus merely subsume it under a quite general law of religious experience. To do that is to minimize it, for there is something unique in it, utterly unique, as unique as Jesus Himself.

II

We have not understood the loneliness of Christ until we see in it an essential part of the deepest agony of His Cross, until we see therefore in His acceptance of it a dazzling and overwhelming revelation of the depth and purity and austerity of His love.

But if we are to see that, it is necessary to have

purer ideas of love. It is necessary to ask what is the really central and essential impulse and desire of love at its deepest and truest and best? The answer is, that it is the impulse towards, the desire for, fellowship, for community of life and mind and purpose, for mutual sympathy and understanding and affection and co-operation without any shadow of estrangement or dislike or distrust or self-seeking coming between. In other words, it is towards the direct and polar opposite of loneliness and isolation. This is often overlooked. People sometimes speak as though the chief impulse in love is merely to give, to bestow; it is not. Just as deep is the impulse to receive, to share, the impulse towards mutuality, fellowship. It wants to be given to as well as to give. It wants to feel the barriers down. You only begin truly to love a person when you hunger for love in return.

Now if this be so and if there was in Jesus the purest spirit of love to men, then it follows that the increasing loneliness and isolation of His life was an increasing sorrow and agony all the time. Being what He was, He could not take refuge in merely stoical indifference. He could not shrug His shoulders and say of those who ringed Him round with malignancy and meanness and hate, "let them do their worst, I've done with them." His love, being pure, never could endure the thought of them doing their worst, never could be done with them. McLeod Campbell

was assuredly right when he said many years ago that the chief element in the sufferings of Christ was not physical, but was intimately bound up with the attitudes of men to Himself. Our Lord, he says, being a true brother of every man, desired the response of brotherliness from the heart of every man, and the refusal of it, the giving of contempt instead of favour, and scorn and misunderstanding instead of appreciation and accord was as death to Him. It was like a moral and spiritual and emotional suffocation.

And yet it was all endured. Why? Here from another angle appears the amazing strength and purity of Christ's love, its Godlikeness. It is clear even from our poor and thin experience, that love meets its most searching test when it is faced with the necessity of deeply estranging the one loved in order to bless him. And the more the love is pure and intense, the severer the test is, the more fierce the temptation to keep friendship at the cost of truth. When love is crying out for fellowship it is the hardest thing in the world deliberately to pursue a course which you know will for the time being destroy it Yet sometimes it is necessary. For a love which is not loyal to the truth, which is not rooted and grounded in the ultimate reality of things, is a perverted and horribly insecure thing. Jesus wanted these men's fellowship with Himself, wanted it more than our egotistic natures can ever conceive, but He knew that there was one thing He must not do to purchase it and that was to tamper with the truth.

As I see Jesus in those lonely, lonely last days, as I watch the venomous dislike of the Sadducees darting at Him, the coarse brutality of the soldiers scourging Him, the feeble treachery of the crowds shouting "Crucify Him," the arms outstretched, the nails being driven in, and as I try to realize what it means to say that He loved all these people with perfect brotherly love, I am amazed and humbled again by His strength and austerity. I am amazed—it is so utterly beyond my own soul—that He could still so austerely hold to the course which provoked it all, in order to open their eyes to themselves and to God. For, I repeat, it is so abundantly manifest where the temptation is, and therefore where the divine strength is shown. The temptation for a love so intense as this, hungry for fellowship, hungry for mutuality, is to say, let us make a compromise, let us concede something for the sake of fellowship, let us at any price be friends. He might have said: "I can do nothing for them unless I keep their love and friendship; let me therefore at any cost keep that." But He did not. And I bow my head as in the presence of the Love of God itself.

III

We speak often, it is right to speak often, of the austerity of the Love of God. But when we thus

speak, we think first, and perhaps all the time, of His austerity with us. Yet there is another side to that austerity and without some vision of it the specifically Christian revelation and gospel are not complete. It is God's frightful austerity with Himself. It is a difficult thought, and the phrase seems all too human to express it, yet if God be indeed perfect love and if that love be shown us in Christ and in His Cross, there is no avoiding it: God's awful austerity with Himself, God's awful loneliness in relation to this sinful and estranged race of men.

XXI

THE HORIZON OF FAITH

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true. One soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."—John iv. 35-8.

THERE are few stories in the Gospels which exhibit more clearly the uniqueness of Jesus than this story of the Samaritan woman at the well, and of the conversation with the disciples to which it led. You feel at every point that here speaks and acts One who in the depth of His spiritual life, in His insight into the underlying meaning of things, in His power to disturb the souls of men and lift them above themselves, stands utterly apart. You are in the presence of the Master-Spirit. "I that speak unto thee am he."

Never, we may surmise, had this woman met anyone who had in the least degree affected her in this way. Looking back afterwards she could hardly tell what had happened, or how it happened. The con-

versation had proceeded naturally enough, apparently, and yet, before long, she was laying bare to Him all the tragedy of her life. What was even more important and strange, He had laid it bare to her. She had not realized before what a tragedy it was, what a wreck of a human being she had permitted herself, with her looseness and infidelity, to become. Yet He had not said much. It was just that getting alongside of Him was like getting into a circle of concentrated light. You saw yourself, and you knew He saw you too. Yet the light was not pitiless. In a curious way you were ashamed and yet glad to be there. Something of strain fell away from the soul now that you had at last been brought to the point of being honest. You were cleansed by being led to realize how much you needed cleansing.

But if the conversation deeply affected the woman it also in another way deeply affected Jesus Himself. It seems to have aroused far-reaching thoughts in Him, thoughts about God and the working out of His purposes, and the need and folly, and yet the infinite promise, of man. It stirred in Him a new conviction of what might be done, if only some men, if only His own disciples, could be given a new spirit, a new faith, could be got to see the facts as they really are. But they all seemed so blind, and what there was of good in them was paralysed with unbelief in God and in themselves. When the disciples came back they found

Him in a rapt mood. They knew at once something had happened. They offered Him food. It was well enough meant, but it seemed to Him at that moment somewhat of an irrelevance. "I have meat to eat that ye know not," He said. Yet He deeply wanted them to share what He had. He had called them to work with and for Him, and it was most necessary that they should see at least some of the truth, and catch at least some of the inspiration, which had come to Him, or at least been renewed in Him, through this talk with the Samaritan woman. So later, we may suppose, He gave them some of the thoughts He had been thinking; He gave them those that more particularly concerned themselves and their attitude to the work He had called them to do.

T

The first thought was this: they must confront their tasks with the assumption, with the faith, that there is at any time, in any situation, in respect of any life, a harvest to be reaped NOW.

Jesus seems to say this: "You have a proverb, 'there are yet four months and then cometh the harvest.' You use it when you want to recommend delay, and discourage premature despair, or fussy haste, in your human affairs. All the worry in the world, you say, will not bring the harvest before the autumn. That is all very well and wise in its own

place, but you must not let it mislead you. You must not carry it over into a sphere where it does not really apply, and where its wisdom can easily turn to blindness and folly. Above all you must not load on to it your own indolence and cowardice and lack of faith in God. I tell you, in the sphere of spiritual things there is always a harvest ready to be reaped, the fields are white already unto harvest." And the proof of that, or rather an example of it, was this Samaritan woman—sordid, sensual, bitter, but instantly and most unexpectedly responsive to the touch of God in Him.

Now there was perhaps a special reason why these particular men should require just this particular warning. They were Jews, and the temper of contemporary Judaism was almost entirely one of deferred hope and postponed desire. The kingdom of God, that glorious harvest of Israel's destiny, was assuredly coming—yes, but in the far-distant future. That was the popular attitude and thought of the time, and Jesus knows that it is, and tells His disciples they must escape from it, if they are to do His work in the world. They must see that there is a harvest of spiritual fruits to be reaped Now, in the hearts and lives of men and women all about them, otherwise they would achieve little or nothing for God.

Yet though there were special reasons why these Jews needed the warning then, we need it still. It is easy, as we said from another angle in an earlier

chapter, to lose the belief in the power of God here and now to act effectively for the redemption of human life; yet unless we retain or recover that belief our work and witness are bound to be hesitant and ineffective. Bring this Samaritan woman, or her modern equivalent, in imagination into your own sphere. There is hardly one of us who meeting such a one would not in greater or less degree react with the thought that nobody after all could do much with "the likes of her." Our whole relationship to her would be determined far more than we realize by an underlying and chilling scepticism whether she were not really too far gone to be lifted to better things. We would be willing to concede, for the sake of remaining consistent to our religious professions, that God might do something for her over a long period and at some distant and indeterminate date; there are yet four months and then cometh harvest. But that He is a living and operative factor here and now in this very relationship into which we are entering with her would hardly enter our minds. And the woman in the deep subconscious places of her mind would sense the scepticism which lurks in the deep subconscious places of ours, no matter what we said.

This question of God's active presence in the here and the now is far from being a merely theoretical point. It concerns the whole tone and temper of our lives, as Jesus Himself saw, and subtly alters the whole quality of our personal relationships. Love, said Ritschl, is the identification of ourselves with God's purpose in others. "Purpose" is an active word. It signifies something to be reckoned with. Do we really believe that in all our personal dealings there is another active purpose to be reckoned with, namely the Love of God? Certainly there is no sense in speaking of the love of God if it be not active here and now. A love which proposed to act four months hence would simply not be love. Such an idea is self-contradictory. Either God is active in the here and now, a factor to be reckoned with, or He is not Love.

But, it may be said, the important thing is surely God's activity in and through our personal relationships, not our belief in His activity, our consciousness of it. Surely He is active whether we believe or not. The answer is that to speak thus is to misunderstand one of the peculiarities of personal relationships. In the world of self-conscious personal dealings with one another a relationship becomes an entirely different thing, has entirely different effects, directly we become conscious of it. For example: I am jealous of youthat is one sort of personal relationship affecting all my dealings with you. I am jealous of you, and you know that I am jealous of you—that is quite a different sort of relationship having different results. I am jealous of you and you know that I am jealous of you and I know that you know that I am jealous of you—that again is an entirely different thing. So it is in the whole realm of personal relations. Knowledge of a situation alters the situation. And so it is with the Love of God as it operates within our personal world. The Love of God is certainly active in any case. My disbelief does not annihilate it. But my personal situation becomes different both for me and for God when I know that it is active, and different again when you know that I know that it is active.

II

The second thing comes as a necessary supplement to the first. Jesus was anxious that His disciples should realize not only the immediacies of God's rule but also its distances, not only its present fruits but also its ultimate consummations. He wants them to realize that no piece of service for God ever runs to waste, that the fruits of it are garnered in the eternal kingdom of God. "He that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal."

Perhaps in His pondering over the Samaritan woman He had been for a moment perturbed by the thought that the chances were very high that He would never see her again. So much had been done in that brief conversation. So much more might be done if only there were opportunity. Would the woman's newfound mood last? Would she slip back into the old ways so soon as she got back among her friends and

the memory of Him faded away? To Jesus such a thought was cruel. But it had to be faced. It had to be faced more than once in His life. He had to face it supremely when the Cross came, and He was called to go hence after only three short years of ministry in men's midst. He had done much, He knew, in those three years; there were immediate harvests, but how much more He could have done with longer time. And would all that He had done be lost, engulfed in the black pit of men's sin and blindness, as He himself was about to be engulfed in the black pit of the Cross? It could not be. Out of the tension of thought there came, as always, a deeper vision, a solemn and comforting assurance. He saw at once that all that kind of thinking was to express an ultimate unbelief in God; it was pure "this-worldliness." No work of men that was really and truly God's work. done in His spirit and for His Kingdom, ever could run to waste and be lost. A God who could not preserve the harvest of His own sowing would be no God at all. Somewhere at the heart of all life's evil and confusion there is a silent, hidden, eternal power. which attaches even the humblest labour and loyalty to itself, and stores the fruit of it in eternity.

Nothing is so paralysing and destructive to the human spirit as the thought of ultimate waste. Yet that is just the appearance which much in human life seems inevitably to take on. And the more a man loves and seeks higher things the more likely is the grim spectre of such a thought to jostle the elbow, peer grinningly into the face, and freeze the very marrow of the soul. What if things are after all exactly as they seem so often to be and there is at the heart of the universe only a great hole through which all the sacrifice, all the loving and loyalty, all the yearning of the race pours age after age and is lost? What if whatever we do, it all comes to the same thing in the end? That is the sort of thought that the state of mankind to-day is apt to excite in the soul. Many gave their lives in the Great War in the hope and with the faith that thus they would help to end war; and now the earth is shaking as never before in its history with the tramp of armed men.

It does not meet the point to say that such a method of ending war was bound to fail, though that is true; nor that there were many other motives, evil motives, at work, though that is also true. The chilling question still remains, did all that yearning and aspiration and sacrifice, so far as it was there, count for nothing? Has it all poured through the hole and been lost? The question is even more insistent for those who, however falteringly and weakly, would seek to enthrone Jesus in the hearts and lives of men. The modern world is a pagan world and seems to be becoming increasingly so. What then has become of all the prayers, not to speak of anything else, which have risen from Christian hearts since the Church at

Antioch first sent forth Barnabas and Paul to the Gentile world? Have they too poured through the hole at the heart of things, and been lost?

Well, Jesus knew that there is not a great hole at the heart of things, but GOD, and He calls His disciples to share that knowledge, calls them to have that steadiness which comes from knowing not only that there are harvests but also that despite all appearances they are eternally preserved. "He that reapeth gathereth fruit unto life eternal."

No doubt we have here at first to commit ourselves to a faith and a vision which transcend our own. But we must do that or surrender to an ultimate despair. If Christ has grappled our hearts to Himself at all, then it were surely wise to trust His certainties and not our own doubts, however persistent. I for one have decided to take my stand by Him and to believe that whensoever or howsoever God's kingdom is consummated, it will be abundantly clear that nothing, despite all the appearances, has been lost. So we come to the last thought.

III

Jesus desires His disciples to enter upon their calling as His fellow-workers with a sense of fellowship with all the great prophetic souls who have gone before and prepared the way for His coming, as with all those who would come afterwards and carry on their work, until God should see fit to consummate the Kingdom.

He quotes another popular saying, "One soweth and another reapeth." It was a saying which in popular speech had more than a suggestion of bitterness in it. It was what you said when you felt that you had not got what you deserved, when the reward of your labours went to someone else. Ah! you say, that is the way of life, that is the injustice of it—one soweth and another reapeth. Well, says the Master in effect, you must go deeper than that. The saying is perfectly true in these high matters of God's purpose in the world, and your service of it, but you must rejoice in, build on, the truth of it. In the work I am sending you to do you will only have success because of all those who under God have gone before you to prepare the way, and you have got to prepare the way for others yet to come and to commit your labour into their hands. "I send you to reap that whereon ye have not laboured; others have laboured, and ye have entered into the fruit of their labours. He that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together."

Perhaps this thought also was not unrelated in His mind to the Samaritan woman. If she had in any measure responded to Him it was in part because of the long Hebrew history and tradition which lay behind even the Samaritan people. But however that may be, there is no question that it is a thought that any who would devotedly and patiently serve Him in the world must share. To realize that we are at this

present time the successors of a long line of prophets and martyrs, that in some measure the fruit of their labours is in our hands, and asks our loyal harvesting; to realize that our labour in turn must be committed in quiet faith to others yet unborn; to realize that those who have gone before, and we who are here now, and those who must come hereafter will one day rejoice with one another in the common fruit of our labours when God shall consummate His kingdom—that surely is to be at one and the same time deeply humbled and highly uplifted. It is humbling to know that you are only one among so many; it is uplifting to know that even so you are one not without significance in the eternal counsels of God.

Nothing, indeed, is more necessary in these days than to recover the New Testament sense of the bigness of our calling in Christ. Nothing is more necessary than to see that calling on a big enough background—the background of the long past and the long future and that which lies beyond both past and future, beyond time altogether, the realized Kingdom of the Eternal God. Nothing is more necessary than to search the horizons of our Christian calling and faith. We need to go back, and go back again and again, to the first word which Jesus spoke in this same teaching we are here considering: Lift up your eyes! And again,

LIFT UP YOUR EYES!